


2014

# Teachers' Expectations and Reading Achievement of African American Middle School Students

Gloria Denise King Lewis  
*Walden University*

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Gloria Denise King Lewis

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Walden University  
2014

Abstract

Teachers' Expectations and Reading Achievement of

African American Middle School Students

by

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MEd, Kennesaw State University, 2002

BA, Queens College (City University of New York), 1984

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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## Abstract

A local and national concern in education is the persistent achievement gap between African American and Caucasian middle school students. Despite numerous reforms, the gap continues to show African American middle school students performing lower in reading. The purpose of this mixed methods study, framed in the theoretical perspective of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, was to examine teachers' expectations and the relationship between those expectations and the educational outcomes of African American middle school children. Data were collected to identify pedagogical practices, examine teacher expectations, and determine the relationship between those expectations and student Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) scores. Nineteen middle school teachers volunteered to take the Regalla Adaptive Teachers' Expectation Survey, which quantified teachers' expectations for student achievement using items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = *strongly agree* with high expectation statement). Pedagogy was examined through 12 classroom observations and archival data provided CRCT scores for 650 African American students. Based on survey results, the mean score for teacher expectations was 4.47 out of 5.00. Observations established that 8 out of 12 teachers were rated proficient in terms of instructional plans. Correlational analysis determined a significant and direct relationship between teachers' expectation scores and middle school students' scores on the CRCT ( $p < .05$ ). The results highlight the importance of teacher expectations for student achievement. The implications for social change include using the findings at the local site to communicate to teachers the importance of having high expectations for all students to improve the achievement levels of all middle school students and close the achievement gap.

The Achievement Gap: Teachers' Expectations and Reading Achievement of  
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## Dedication

To my parents and brother in heaven Wilson, Annie, and Larry

To my sister Juanita and my brother Jerome

To my children Janean and Jason.

## Acknowledgements

First, I acknowledge my Lord, who brought me a very long way.

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## Section 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I sought to examine and better understand factors that influence the achievement of African American middle school students and to enhance instruction and the level of achievement for all students. Specifically, the focus was on factors that may influence the achievement of the students, such as the school culture, pedagogical assumptions, and teachers' expectations, as well as the type, quality, and duration of professional development opportunities that are available to teachers. The goal was to understand the social and psychological dynamics of pedagogy that influence the academic performance of African American middle school students.

By itself, middle school is a tumultuous time for children. Their bodies experience physical, physiological, and mental changes, and they become socially challenged by their peers and surroundings (Shaffer, 2009). The transition from elementary to middle school can pose problems for children such as loss of interest in school, lower self-esteem, declining grades, and an increase in problem behaviors. Shaffer (2009) concluded that young adolescents from any type of social background could lose interest in school if they experience a disconnection between their changing developmental needs and the school environment. Moreover, the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE, 2010), in a position paper for school improvement, stated:

An education for young adolescents must be

Developmentally responsive: Using the distinctive nature of young adolescents as the foundation upon which all decisions about school organization, policies, curriculum, instruction, and assessments are made.

Challenging: Ensuring that every student learns and every member of the learning community is held to high expectations.

Empowering: Providing all students with the knowledge and skills, they need to take responsibility for their lives, to address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge.

Equitable: Advocating for and ensuring every student's right to learn and providing appropriately challenging and relevant learning opportunities for every student. (p. 1)

The implication was that if middle schools were able to accomplish the job effectively, then adolescents should be able to navigate their way to academic and personal success.

Information from this research provides information that educators can use to help African American students in middle school. Other students can also benefit from the knowledge and experiences of teachers as teachers learn to incorporate culturally responsive strategies into their instructional practices. I present the problem the study addresses in Section 1 along with the rationale for the investigation, the purpose of the study, research questions and hypothesis, definition of terms used in the context of this study, and assumptions made regarding the study. The scope of the study presented, along with the delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and a summary of the information, are discussed at the end of this section.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem is that despite the federal mandate of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), research, and numerous school reforms, the achievement gap continues to persist

between African American and European American students in the nation's schools. After 40 plus years of school reform, the disparity in achievement among African American and European American students can still be seen in the differences of performance levels between students of color (e.g., African American, Latino) and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Frye & Vogt, 2010; Warren, 2013b). According to researchers, school reform has not erased the disparity of achievement for many reasons (Flowers et al, 2008; Milner, 2013). Gay (2010), Frye & Vogt (2010), and Warren (2013b) believed important factors have not been investigated thoroughly (e.g., the impact of society's economic class system, cultural beliefs, and the powerful relationships that maintain the structures of equity and the status quo within the schools) and there is a need for diverse and sustained research and reform.

Researchers have studied many of the factors related to the underachievement of African American middle school students: economic status, parent's level of education, societal beliefs, teacher expectations and perceptions, teacher qualifications, school-related factors, and students' values (Frye & Vog, 2010; Gay, 2013; Warren, 2013b). Germane to this study was the belief that teachers' expectations influence their attitudes and behaviors, as well as the attitudes and behaviors of the students, which in turn are expected to influence the achievement levels of the students (Gay, 2013; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013). Simply stated, an individual's expectations (i.e., perceptions) influence his or her behavior (Baron, Branscombe, & Byrne, 2012). The classic investigation by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), approximately 45 years ago, showed how this specu-

lation could occur. In order to have a positive influence on achievement, school reform initiatives must take into account the expectations of the teachers (Gay, 2012).

The only legislation for equity in education for African American students was that of the 1954 Supreme Court Decision of *Brown vs. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* (Tushnet, 2008). In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the complainants in the case of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (Tushnet, 2008). The court ruled that educational opportunities for students of color were indeed inequitable and demanded immediate actions by states to provide equal educational opportunities for these students. The decision was the only piece of legislation that addressed the issue of equity in education (Tushnet, 2008). That decision set the precedent that states must provide equal educational opportunities for African American students. Yet, in spite of the ruling, many states reluctantly adhered to the law and others refused to fund public schools (Tushnet, 2008).

Many factors have been used to explain the problem that this study was designed to address. As stated earlier, despite federal legislation, research, and numerous school reforms, the achievement gap continues to persist between African American and European American students in the nation's schools. Some researchers argued that the achievement gap is the product of social inequities placed on people of color (Gay, 2010; Kunjufu, 2008; Natesan, Webb-Hasan, Carter, & Walter, 2011; Schmeichel, 2012). Moreover, Ladson-Billings (2006) referred to the achievement gap as the educational debt and concluded that nothing had prepared teachers to work and learn in the diverse



cultural communities where the majority of students were of color and/or came from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The common themes expressed in the aforementioned research suggested there was the need for professional development that was culturally relevant. More importantly, researchers stated that in order for students of color and diverse cultures to be successful, teachers needed to develop a culturally relevant pedagogy in a classroom environment that was supportive of all students (Gay, 2013; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Sparks, 2009; Strand, 2010; Warren, 2013). One researcher, Gay (2000), an authority on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT; not to be confused with critical race theory), defined Culturally Relevant Pedagogy “as teaching that incorporates the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for [students]” (p. 29). Based on the definition of CRT and the persistent disparity of achievement scores, particularly in reading, there is a need for additional research that focuses on school culture and pedagogy that is used in the classroom.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues of teachers’ expectations and the academic achievement levels of African American middle school students. There were two major characteristics of a school’s culture of interest to this study: (a) expectations of the teachers and (b) pedagogy observed in the classroom. Researchers (Gay, 2010; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013) indicated that these two elements influenced professional development opportunities provided to the teachers. The goal of this study was to

raise awareness about the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement in reading and a framework to encourage dialogue and the implementation of reforms at the local level to form culturally proficient schools that will incorporate professional development for culturally responsive teaching. This research, like other research on the subject (Gay, 2013; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Warren, 2013), serves as a call to action for the collaborative efforts of the academic and legislative communities, as well as, the implementation and incorporation of professional development programs that incorporate students' needs in the subject of the programs. Moreover, the objective of the collaboration is to provide a positive influence on the performance outcomes of students on the standardized tests in reading at the site of this study and other sites with similar populations.

### **Nature of the Study**

To conduct this study, I used a mixed methods approach and the traditions of ethnographic study to examine the relationship of teachers' expectations and the relationship to students' academic abilities and potential. The pedagogy used in the classroom also was observed. This study was designed to determine if teachers' expectations and behaviors in the classroom influence the educational achievements of African American middle school students. It is important to examine these factors from various angles to add to the literature.

As explained by Creswell (2009), the mixed methods approach presents the best of both worlds of research (i.e., qualitative and quantitative research). Using this approach allowed me to make an in-depth examination of teachers' expectations as they

relate to the achievement of African American middle school students in reading, and enabled appropriate comparisons between favorable and unfavorable expectations. I used surveys, observations, and archival data (i.e., Reading/Lexile scores from Criterion Referenced Competency Test, CRCT) to assess the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement. Although there were five content areas measured by the CRCT, only the reading scores of African American middle school students were examined. In addition, for purposes of anonymity, Caldwell Middle School is a pseudonym for the site.

## **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

### **Research Questions**

I examined the influences of teachers' expectations regarding the achievement of African American middle school students. The relationship of teachers' expectations as they influence the pedagogy of the teachers in the classroom and the reading achievement of African American students in middle school was determined. Therefore, data collected were in response to the following research questions:

1. What were teachers' expectations about the academic ability of African American middle school students in reading?
2. What were the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of African American middle school students in reading?
3. What pedagogy do teachers use in the classroom for their African American middle school students in regards to reading/lexile achievement?

4. What professional development opportunities have teachers had in regards to teaching reading in a diverse classroom?
5. Is there a relationship between teacher expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American middle school students in reading/lexile on the CRCT?

### **Hypothesis**

Because this study was designed to obtain information to respond to one quantitative research question, only one hypothesis was tested. This hypothesis is subsequently stated in the null and then the alternative.

$H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT.

$H_1$ : There is a significant relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of (Natesan et al., 2011) African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT.

The next section presents the conceptual framework, which guided the development of this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Dewey's (1938) theory on democratic conceptions in education stated that the "culture of a given school has many subgroups (cultures and societies) which dominate, influence, and affect the perceptions of its members" (p. 1). The research concerning the achievement gap has been thorough, but additional research of the cultural tenets as related to the expectations of the stakeholders in the school was necessary (Gay, 2010; Lorri,

2009). Five characteristics of school culture were identified. First, culture is dynamic; it follows the constructionist theory of change and transformation, as culture is ever changing and the influences of culture are many, for instance, social, political, economic, gender, and racial (Flowers, 2008). Secondly, culture is multifaceted. Culture was not just ethnicity; culture was the influence of social, race, political, gender, and economic status, as well as those individuals who interacted within a given community (Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Warren, 2013). Nieto (1999), a pioneer in Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), explained that embedded culture was in the context of the given environment, for example, the school's culture. The fourth characteristic of culture was that culture was a combination of social, political, and economic factors. The fifth characteristic of culture was the interaction among members who also shared common goals and physical environment. If educators were to affect student achievement then they must take into account the present social atmosphere in order to sustain positive school reform (Fryge & Vogt, 2010; Gay, 2013; Warren, 2013a).

In the same way, I viewed the culture of a school as the primary factor in the achievement of African American middle school students. The culture of the school was interpreted and internalized by the teachers and other stakeholders in the school and was a contributing factor to the pedagogical assumptions and expectations of the teachers (Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Schmeichel, 2012). The combination of a school's culture, along with pedagogical assumptions and expectations and professional development, optimally contributes to and makes up culturally responsive teaching. Moreover, culturally responsive teachers should be able to engage in specific behaviors to make

learning encounters more relevant and effective for the ethnically diverse student (Au, 2009; Lorri, 2009; Natesan et al, 2011; Sheets, 2009; Warren, 2013a). A more detailed discussion of these specific behaviors of culturally responsive teaching follows in the literature review.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following definitions were used in this study:

*Culturally proficient professional development:* Refers to instances when teachers have participated in long-term system wide diversity training. This type of training for teachers focuses on the content of instruction that was embedded in the teaching practices; that acknowledges the culture, intellectual experiences, and perspectives of students in a collaborative nature; and employs a reflective inquiry-oriented approach (Sheets, 2009; Warren, 2013a).

*Culturally responsive teaching:* Makes learning encounters more relevant and effective for the students using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students (Sheets, 2009).

*Pedagogical assumptions:* These types of assumptions were those made about the potential of the students to learn by teachers regarding their family background, economic status, ethnicity, and/or race (Sheets, 2009).

*Pedagogical expectations:* Refers to the desired performance goals for students in the learning situation (Sheets, 2009). It includes the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies to reach those desired goals.

*Reading achievement:* According to the State Department of Education (2010), reading achievement was defined as the passing score of 800 on the CRCT.

*School culture:* Gay (2013) defined school culture as the accumulation of norms and values of the stakeholders in the school. Gay indicated that the school's culture is the personality of the school. The composition of the school's culture includes unspoken expectations, traditions experienced in the school, and unwritten rules. The individual stakeholders' patterns of behavior, beliefs, and values combine to form an expression of the beliefs, experiences, and values (i.e., culture) of the whole school.

*Teachers' expectations:* Natesan and Kieftenbeld (2013) defined teachers' expectations as unconscious racial biases and beliefs teachers have in regards to their students' ability or potential. Researchers, (Castro-Atwater, 2008; Regalla, 2013; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013), contend that factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), culture, and/or race influence teacher's expectations of students.

### **Assumptions**

As previous research indicated, there were factors that affect the achievement of African American middle school students. The achievement gap exists regardless of factors such as gender, inequality, racism, parents' background, socioeconomic status, and attitudes of students (Walker nee Haynes, 2011). I acknowledged those findings and used the following assumptions.

1. This study is an examination of school culture in context of professional development of teachers' expectations and pedagogy.

2. I recognized that there were other variables that affect teaching and learning at the site.
3. Teachers surveyed supplied accurate information. Data on the achievement of students, obtained by using official reports, were accurate.

### **Scope**

The goal of this study was to provide a framework for discussions that would lead to a positive impact on the long-standing disparity of achievement of African American middle school students in the content area of reading. Although the population of this research focused on African American middle school students, generalizations can be made to students of diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultures and to those students of low socioeconomic backgrounds. This study is also a call to action for teachers to view CRT as a reflective practice. I served in the role of participant observer. The role of participant observer allowed me to employ a concurrent transformative strategy that used a mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, research supports the belief that a mixed method approach to research is superior to a single method approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In turn, I used both quantitative and qualitative data to give dimension to the problem, to serve as an advocate for students and teachers, and to understand better the phenomenon of the achievement gap, as well as the underachievement of African American middle school students.

### **Delimitations**

This study was conducted at a middle school located in the suburbs of a large southern city. The demographics of the school have changed over the past 12 years; the



school and community were once 90% working class European Americans, but they have since changed to approximately 80% African American. Presently, approximately 40% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. In the past four years, 35 teachers have transferred to other schools within the district (XYZ County School District, 2012). This study was limited to schools, teachers, and students who have similar characteristics as those included in the sample of this study.

### **Limitations**

All research has limitations (Creswell, 2009). Limitations for this study were:

1. The need for longitudinal research in the field, and the collection of data over a 60-day period.
2. The recent elimination of reading as a separate academic class may have an impact on the students' reading/lexile scores on the CRCT.
3. The findings can be generalized to schools with similar student and staff demographics.
4. The population was small ( $n = 6$ ), including six classroom teachers who were observed.

### **Significance of the Study**

At Caldwell Middle School, Language Arts and Reading scores have increased from 8% to 10% per year for the past 3 years, yet the school has not met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP; State Department of Education, 2010). The school failed to meet AYP in two subgroups: math special needs and student attendance. Due to NCLB legislation (2002), the state labeled the school as “needs improvement” and the school was under

corrective action by the State Department of Education. Information collected from this research could not only affect educational practices in terms of professional development and pedagogical assumptions, but also serve as an agent of change for teachers. The data can be used to help improve the quality of education afforded to all students, especially African American middle school students. If handled appropriately, information obtained from this study can be a first step towards the identification of a systematic approach to help improve the achievement levels of the students and can go beyond the local site level. It is my hope that information and experience derived from this study will not only improve educational practices, but will also act as an agent of change for school districts to improve the quality of education afforded to all students in diverse classrooms across the nation. Concerns for student achievement and school improvement go beyond the local site level.

### **Summary**

This research examined elements of school culture such as teachers' expectations about the academic ability and potential of their students and the pedagogy used in the classroom. Moreover, how these elements related to the achievement of African American middle school students in reading was the primary focus. In Section 2, I compare, contrast, and examine research related to these topics. Section 3 presents the research design and methodology, and the procedures for the collection of data. Section 4 presents the findings from the study. Lastly, Section 5 develops conclusions based on the findings and presents the implications and significance of the research as it relates to social change

of educational practices to lessen the differences of achievement in reading between African American and European American students.

## Section 2: Review of the Literature

### **Research Strategy**

In order to identify relevant and recent literature (2009 to the present) related to the research questions and hypothesis, I used concepts and key words such as *achievement gap, African Americans, minority middle school students, teacher perceptions, teacher expectations, and professional development*. Because of these keyword searches, I found additional keywords in the abstracts of articles: *teacher expectations, school culture, and culturally responsive teaching*. I used several databases: Google Scholar, ProQuest, Sage publications, ERIC, and EDhost. I then scanned each article for discussions relevant to the four key concepts of this research study: achievement gap of African American middle school students, school culture, teacher assumptions and expectations, and professional development. It was not until late into my inquiry that more literature became available on culturally responsive teaching (CRT), and at that time, CRT became a prominent key word and source of information.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine and better understand the issues of school culture as related to teachers' expectations and academic achievement levels, particularly for African American middle school students. According to Eccles and Roeser (2011), there are two major characteristics of a school's culture, the pedagogical assumptions, and teachers' expectations of students' performance outcomes. Eccles and Roeser (2011) concluded that these two elements influenced the professional development op-

portunities provided to the teachers. In this review, the academic achievement gap between African American and European American students is discussed. Next, I present studies that investigated the achievement gap, school culture, later culturally responsive teaching, pedagogical assumptions, and teachers' expectations. A summary of research is presented discussing the importance of continuous professional development for teachers, and the last part of this section is a summary of the information presented.

### **Persistence of the Achievement Gap**

There is no argument that an achievement gap exists between African American and European American students, nor are there arguments with the observation that the number of minorities in the United States has increased while the number of European Americans has decreased (Crouch, 2007; United States Census Bureau [USCB], 2010). The two largest groups of minorities in the United States are African Americans and Hispanics (United States Census Bureau, 2010). According to the USCB (2010), minorities accounted for about a third of the population in the United States, with 102.5 million people categorized as minorities. By the year 2050, the number of minorities in the United States will be higher than the number of European Americans (USCB, 2010). For instance, in 2008, 66% (or 228.2 million) of America's population was European American, 15.4% (or 46.9 million) Hispanic, and 12.4% (or 37.6 million) African American. By the year 2050, this pattern is expected to change, that is, the United States population will be composed of 46% European Americans, 30% Hispanics, 15% African Americans, and approximately 9% other ethnic groups (USCB, 2010). In the state where this study took place, 65.4% of the population was European American, 30% African American, and 8%

Hispanic. The school district in which this study was conducted had a total enrollment of 108,262 students and 6,465 teachers and paraprofessionals. As of September 2013, European American students made up 43.7 %, African American students 31.2%, Hispanic students 16.9%, Asian students 4.8%, and Multi-racial students 2.7% of the district's enrollment (XYZ County School District, 2014). Based on the school's Title I school-wide plan the enrollment in 2012 was 826 students, of which European American students made up 13%, African American 73%, Hispanic 12%, Multiracial 9%, and Asian 1%. A total of 16% of the enrollment received special education service, 11% received instruction through the Advanced Content (AC) program, and 63% of the student enrollment received free or reduced lunch.

The changes in the demographics of the population in the United States present challenges for the public school system (Crouch, 2007). As a result of changing demographics, Crouch (2007) suggested school systems: (a) hire more bilingual teachers, (b) hire more teachers who are certified to teach English as a Second Language (ESOL), (c) hire more teachers who are able to instruct students from diverse backgrounds, (d) use effective strategies to address the gaps among students in terms of test scores, high school completion rates, dropout rates and college admission rates; and (e) have schools develop outreach programs for parents and families in the community. According to Crouch (2007)

Achievement gaps between student groups will have ever-more-serious economic implications. Minorities have historically been under-represented in such professions as science, medicine, and engineering. With the non-Hispanic European

American population shrinking and the entry-level workforce increasingly made up of minorities, the nation could face serious shortages in many critical professions. (p. 25)

Similarly, researchers (Flowers, 2008; Ford, 2008; Gardner, 2007; Kunjufu, 2008) have concluded that the past and present educational reforms were not working to solve the persistent problem of the achievement gap, specifically for students of color. Chudowsky, Chudowsky, and Dietz (2010) argued that all students have an opportunity to maximize their potential in the schools. The investigation focused on the academic achievement of African American middle school students. Results from a study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009, 2013) showed that there was a persistent achievement gap between African American and European American students.

Levels of educational attainment continue to plague the nation. While there was an increase in the graduation rates of African Americans in the years 2004 and 2009 (see Table 1), it is still apparent that the graduation rates for African American students continued to lag behind European American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013; Georgia Department of Education, 2009). The impact of these findings is far reaching. For instance, President Obama (2006) linked the improvement of high school graduation rates to the restoration of America's political and economic standing in the world.

Table 1

*Graduation Rates in Georgia in 2004, 2009, and 2011 by Race/Ethnicity*

	2004	2009	2011
African American	56.6%	72.6%	37%
European American	71.8%	83.1%	51%
Hispanic American	49.6%	69.0%	8%

Note. Statistics from the (United States Department of Education, 2013).

The achievement gap has been a longstanding and complex education problem in the nation. For instance, national progress in narrowing the achievement gap separating African American and European American students stalled from the late 1980s' until 2004 (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2008). Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2009) reported no significant change in the reading achievement gap between European American and African American students or between European American and Hispanic students from 2004 to 2008 (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). Additionally, Lee (2006) predicted that less than 25% of students who were poor or African American would achieve proficiency in reading by the year 2014. This prediction was supported by data, which showed that in the 2008 academic year, the state still struggled with the achievement gap, where 84% of African American students were proficient in reading, compared with 93% of European American students (State Department of Education, 2008). At the district level, 91% of African American students met or exceeded standards in Reading on the CRCT, compared with 98% of European American students.



These statistics are both alarming and challenging because achievement gaps are important measures of educational and social progress of the nation and schools (Au, 2009).

Despite more than 45 years of major education reforms and multiple state and local initiatives, the achievement gap remains one of the nation's most challenging problems for educators and policymakers (ESEA, 1965, 2010; State Department of Education, 2010; NCLB, 2002; United States Department of Education, 2007). Even though some gains had been made, these legislative responses had not served to resolve the discrepancy in achievement between students of color (e.g., African American, Hispanic, Native American) and European American students, as well as between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students from affluent backgrounds (State Department of Education, 2010; United States Department of Education, 2007).

Designed to improve the academic outcomes of economically disadvantaged and students of color, President Johnson signed into law the ESEA in April 1965. This federal statute is reauthorized every 5 years. The legislation "targeted resources to help ensure that disadvantaged students had access to a quality public education" (ESEA, 1965, Section 201). Among other resources, the act provided funds for educators' professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and promotion of parent involvement (ESEA, 1965, 2010; NCLB, 2002).

In comparison to ESEA, the focus of NCLB is accountability, teacher qualifications, and testing to measure progress (Karwasinski & Shek, 2006; NCLB, 2002). It specifically required states to set standards, develop assessments, and establish annual measurable benchmarks, and school districts were held responsible for its implementation

(State Department of Education, 2010; NCLB, 2002). NCLB redefined the federal role in K–12 education by requiring states and districts to take specific actions. While these actions may or may not have demonstrated how well students were achieving, school districts were accountable to demonstrate AYP in closing the achievement gap (State Department of Education, 2009). The state of Georgia replaced AYP indexes with College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI).

Achievement scores of student sub-groups and benchmarks of standardized testing determined AYP (State Department of Education, 2010). Although, NCLB(2002) has challenged schools to closely examine test results in terms of race, socioeconomic status and gender, NCLB was considered a theory developed without any theoretical framework or background specific (Lee, 2006). Essentially, there was little evidence that NCLB reform had made a difference. As reported by The Civil Rights Project, there were no academic outcomes that were significantly related to NCLB, and there were no changes in the achievement gap between African Americans and Hispanics as well as the poor and their counterparts (Lee, 2006). The reforms have failed. The race, socioeconomic status, and gender continue to plague the suppression of achievement among students of color and students. While these issues have been addressed, the findings were mixed and debatable. Researchers Gay (2013), Natesan & Kieftenbeld (2013), and Warren(2013), suggested the need for policies to improve the quality of education that African American children received once they were at school, through reducing class sizes, improving teacher quality, reducing school segregation, and increasing accountability. Ironically, at the same time research indicated that students did better in smaller schools with student-

teacher ratios, students of color attend larger schools with higher student/teacher ratios than European American students. Magnuson & Waldfogel (2009) contend that other factors influence the achievement gap include poverty, health, early-childhood learning, teacher quality, and strength of curriculum. Darling-Hammond (2006) suggested that stereotypes suppressed student achievement, and educators should consider social psychological factors that might affect students' perceptions regarding their ability to perform well. Darling-Hammond (2006) suggested that additional studies be conducted on the impact of stereotypes regarding students' perceptions of their ability to perform within the context of Teachers' expectations and assumptions about students of color.

Researchers asserted that understanding the influence stereotypes had on the achievement of students of color, had the potential to help educators and narrow the achievement gap. These researchers also suggested that the instructional practices used by teachers in middle school could improve the achievement of African American middle school students. (Bleicher, 2011; Flowers, 2008; Gay 2013; Nateasan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Payne, 2008; Walker nee Haynes, 2011) Furthermore, there was a need for additional research on the relationship of school culture and achievement outcomes of African American students in middle school (Gay, 2013; Warren, 2013b; Sheets, 2009).

### **School Culture**

In the United States, and the state in which this study was conducted, educational reform measures had influenced the priorities of the schools to the point where the focus of education was on standardized tests (State Department of Education, 2010). All across the United States, public schools were concerned about the overall achievement of the

students, as well as the achievement level of subgroups of students (e.g., males versus females, students with special needs, English Language Learners, racial/ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged) as measured by state mandated tests (Lee, 2006). Researchers Flowers (2013), Ford (2008), Nateasan & Kiefetnbeld (2013), and Sheets (2009), concluded that teachers and school districts were giving in to the pressures of standardized testing and scripted curriculum. McGuire (2008) and Flowers (2008) both argued that there were five key elements necessary to achieve positive, long-lasting school reform. These five elements were school context, leadership, school culture, change effort, and external factors.

Schoen and Teddlie (2008) concluded that teachers' understanding of a school's culture provided solutions to achievement outcomes. Therefore, the focus of this study was the culture of the schools. Throughout the literature, there were many definitions of school culture. I acknowledge the differences and similarities of the definitions, and agree with the research of Schoen and Teddlie (2008) that school culture is different from climate. Schoen and Teddlie (2008) summarized that school culture was four-dimensional: (1) Professional orientation, (2) Organizational structure, (3) Quality of the learning environment, and (4) Student-centered focus. Renschler (2008) defined school culture as the accumulation of norms and values of the stakeholders in the school, and a school's culture was the personality of the school. Renschler (2008) also contended that a school's culture was composed of unspoken expectations, traditions experienced in the school, and unwritten rules. The individual stakeholders' patterns of behavior, beliefs, and values combined to form an expression of the beliefs, experiences, and values (i.e., culture) of

the whole school. The culture of a school was critical for the personal, social, and academic/intellectual development of the students and staff (e.g., teachers, administrations) at the school. Busch, MacNeil, and Prater (2009) defined the culture of a school as the school's internal characteristics that distinguished it from other schools, as well as influenced the behavior of the stakeholders in the school.

Researchers for many years had discussed the issues surrounding the achievement of African American middle school students in a problematic format (Milner, 2013; Sleeter, 2010; State Department of Education, 2010; Warren 2013). The discussion usually focused on the comparison of achievement between African American students and European American students, and concluded that there was an achievement gap between the two groups of students (Sleeter, 2010; Warren, 2013a). There was a great deal of statistical data on the achievement of African American students. However, there was not a lot of information available that specifically looks at the impact of culture on the achievement of the African American middle school students, and even less on the teaching expectations as they relate to the achievement gap. Therefore, additional research will be necessary.

Researchers had identified several properties regarding the relationships between school culture and the achievement level of students. The literature suggested a positive relationship between school culture and achievement outcome (Bleicher, 2011; Gay, 2013; Warren, 2013a). The discussions of the importance of school culture and academic performance began in the 1930s, but researchers claimed that it was not until the 1970s that interest in the relationship of student outcomes and school culture increased. Re-

searchers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have reported that the culture of the school influences student learning and the behavior of students in the schools (Chen, 2007; Gay, 2012; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Ross & Horner, 2007; Sleeter, 2011; Warren, 2013a). Schools had begun to use school culture as the paradigm to help students and teachers obtain positive outcomes. For example, Ross and Horner (2007) reported that some schools had used school culture to help improve the behavior and academic performance of the students, improve teachers' perceptions about their level of self-efficacy in the classroom, and to decrease levels of teachers' stress.

There were many operational definitions for school culture. Chen (2007) indicated that school culture could be measured by the degree of stability (e.g., employee and student absences, attrition rates for teachers and students) found in the school, as well as the structure of the school (i.e., class size, number of students enrolled). Renschler's (2008) work led him to conclude that the leaders in the school shaped the school's culture. Renschler (2008) found several methods that helped promote a positive learning environment in the school: no discrepancy or conflict between the actions of teachers and the mission of the school; communications that were effective; ceremonies; rituals; cultural networks; and shared values. Renschler asserted that effective schools were the ones that established and maintained a culture that used effective communications to set goals that all stakeholders in the school value and promote. Collaboration among teachers, students, and staff at schools is a part of school culture. Researchers Reibman, Hansen, and Vickman, (2006) concluded:

collaborations [in the school] created a school culture that supported a student body with global awareness, financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy, civic literacy, and health and wellness awareness. These emerging content areas are critical to the future success of students at the workplace and in their communities. (p.74)

A school's culture that promoted excellence could also create an environment that reinforced lifelong learning, increased the probability of the students learning how to overcome challenges and attain success in their chosen careers (Reibman, et al., 2006).

Chen's (2007) research in the field has led him to conclude, "more comprehensive studies that address the mechanism through which school climate, school safety, and student academic achievement interact, in the large context of diverse student racial and socioeconomic background is still wanting" (p. 29).

Sleeter (2011) explained how the focus of educational reform in the United States had changed over the years, from focusing totally on the teachers in the 1960s to a shift to effective schools in the 1980s, and a continued focus on the schools in the 1990s. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these educational researchers showed that the interest was on improving the schools as measured by students' performance on standardized tests. However, others (Milner, 2012; Sleeter, 2011; Warren, 2013b) had indicated that research had begun to focus on the perceptions teachers have of students and efficacy to teach students. Similarly, Baron, Branscombe, and Byrne (2009) found that collective efficacy influenced what individuals decided to do as a group, the degree of effort they put into it, and their willingness to persist even when the group had not produced the desired results. Sleeter

(2010) argued that these nonstructural factors of the school could help students improve academically and teachers attain greater effectiveness in the classroom.

Researchers Gay (2010) and Milner (2012) identified and focused on the elements of school culture, pedagogical assumptions, teachers' expectations, and professional development. These researchers called for more research in the area of professional development of a teacher's perceptions and efficacy in relation to school reform and student achievement. There were two characteristics of school culture assessed in this study: pedagogical assumptions and teachers' expectations. According to O'Day and Quick (2009), these two aspects influence the professional development provided to teachers.

### **Pedagogical Assumptions and Teachers' Expectations**

Pedagogy, the study (or art or science) of being a teacher, is generally used to refer to strategies of instruction or style of instruction, and in Greek it literally translates to lead the child (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1998). It was involved in this study because any instructional strategy would involve a human being in some way, and there were inherent assumptions in design or uses. For example, Flowers, (2008) and McGuire (2008) stated that many acts of school reform were based on the assumption that there was no discrimination, bias, or prejudices within the community or the educational community. However, these researchers concluded that these beliefs were at odds with society. Based on an extensive review of research, Rogers and Oakes (2005) contended that reform statutes such as NCLB failed to recognize the biases of educators, values, and beliefs of society, and certainly the impact on student achievement.



Dewey's (1938) classic theory on democratic conception in education spoke to the existence of society and culture. He suggested that the culture and society of a given school had many subgroups (cultures and societies) which dominated, influenced, and affected the perceptions of its members. An individual's perceptions influenced his or her words, thoughts, and deeds; for instance, what was said and thought of others, as well as behaviors (Baron, et al., 2009). In order to have positive school reform, school leadership and student achievement needed to be connected and understood by the larger community outside of the school. Rogers and Oakes (2005) argued that school reform that was expected to make a difference would include the impact of "broader social conditions, cultural norms, and power relations that sustained structures of segregation and inequality and resisted change, both in and outside schools" ( p. 220). Consequently, more examination and research is necessary in order to have meaningful and effective school reform.

In response to society's social ills (e.g., racial indifference, intolerance, hatred, discrimination), Dickinson, (2003) called for a new type of learning to occur. She recognized that this was an arduous task. Dickinson advocated for a type of learning that required what she described as an emotional rebirth grounded in patience, collaboration on a deeper level, and concern for others. Payne (2008) stated that research historically argued the need for insistence of higher expectations of students and teachers. Payne (2008) concluded, "as we adapt and flex our instruction to meet the needs of these students, cognitive strategies, and support need to be integrated with insistence and expectations" (p. 49).

In the same way, through discussions with colleagues and students, teachers can build an understanding of the discipline and facilitate acquisition of the relationships, by using relationship-building activities between teachers and students (Payne, 2008; Vagle, 2008). In addition, researchers suggested that high expectations that were communicated consistently and regularly to students will had a positive effect on the achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Cho & Lee, 2006; Payne, 2008). I contend that because of the changing demographics of the student population, teachers remained unprepared to teach students of increasingly diverse backgrounds.

Research suggested that teachers needed training in the uses of multicultural instructional strategies (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2011). Some researchers believed that if teachers used a multicultural curriculum, then students would be able to excel equally, their personal lives enriched, and they would be in a better position to improve the quality of life for themselves and others (Fink, 2006; Flowers, 2013; Gay, 2011; Gardner, 2007; Landsman & Lewis, 2006). Fink (2006) believed it was necessary for the United States to put money behind its need for change. For example, Fink indicated that money be reallocated to help attract and retain the best candidates for teaching in the schools, as well as the need for education to come out of the hands of the judicial branch of government. Fink (2006) also contended that there were incentives for state and local governments to integrate schools and foster mediocrity. “We as a nation have muddled too long over the issues of the achievement gap. Undo the hardwiring of our educational system, recognize, and address the inequities”

(p.23). Subsequently, Gardner (2007) suggested that schools and teachers needed to understand and value a student's culture.

### **Teacher Expectations**

In general, research supported the statement that teachers had low expectations for minority students (Kunjufu, 2008). A cogent example comes from the literature related to the under representation of African American students in gifted programs across the United States (Vigil, 2006). One contention was the design of assessment and identification instruments of gifted programs largely did not identify students of diverse backgrounds (Lohman, 2006; Vigil, 2006). Because of cultural, social, and political communities in a school district, a large number of minority students, particularly African American middle school students, were not identified as gifted due to cultural, social, and political communities in the school district (Ford, 2008, Vigil, 2006). As a result, more often than not, teachers used the term underachiever (underachievement) to describe African American and Spanish-speaking students (Vigil, 2006).

Another prediction made was that the future population of America would be approximately 30% Spanish speaking by the year 2050 (USCB, 2010). Spanish is expected to continue to become a majority language in the United States. Yet, few elementary school systems required students to take instruction in Spanish (Kober, Chudowsky, Chudowsky, & Dietz, 2010). Hispanic students were labeled as underachievers, minorities, disadvantaged or at risk students and in most instances, these negative labels placed students at a disadvantage (Kober, et al., 2010; McGraner & Saenz, 2009)

Students with special talents and gifts come from various ethnic and diverse backgrounds. Both Gardner (2007) and Vigil (2006) contended that many minority language children had special talents that were valued within their own cultures. Unfortunately, teachers often than not ignored those talents. The lack of identification of African American students in gifted programs has long been an issue. However, little progress was made to identify and teach gifted students of culturally diverse backgrounds or to encourage educators to accept that the traditional program and identification did not work. Vigil (2006) pointed out that the proportion of culturally diverse students in classes for those with mental disability exceeded the proportion placed in gifted classrooms or programs. In addition, there was an overrepresentation of African Americans in special education programs and encouraged the use prevention and early intervention strategies.

Other speculations have been made regarding the under representation of African Americans and other minorities in gifted programs in the schools. For instance personal and social factors such as peer pressure, the need to affiliate with friends being greater than the need of academic achievement, feelings of hopelessness and the lack of parental support have been shown to influence the achievement levels of African American students (Schmeichel, 2012). Researchers argued that situational factors also have shown to have an impact of the achievement of these students (e.g., identification practice, expectations of teachers, poor resources in the school, ineffective teachers, and poor relationships with teachers). These researchers also found that students expressed concerns regarding the lack of relevancy of the curriculum to culture of African American student (Ford, 2008; Gay, 2010; Warren, 2011).

Jackson (2005) conducted research that identified factors that influenced the motivation and competence of African American middle school students.

Those factors were:

- Lack of focus in schools on the learning process and the strategies that motivate and accelerate learning,
- The distance many teachers feel from African American middle school students because of cultural differences,
- The misconceptions educators have about the impact of race on the ability of African Americans, and
- The impact of culture on the achievement of African American middle school students, by connecting to the student, by making instruction meaningful and relevant to learning and achievement (p. 2).

Gay (2010) explained that these critical factors influenced the perceptions of many teachers about their students. She noted that it was the lack of understanding and knowledge of culture that affected instruction and the achievement of students. Gay (2010) believed this was important because teachers who received appropriate training were more likely to help all of their students maximize their potential through nurturance, understanding learning, and the interrelationship of culture and learning, than were teachers who had not received training in culturally responsive instructional strategies.

Vigil (2006) reviewed the literature and made some conclusions regarding why there were under representation of minorities in the gifted program in public schools from a teacher's perspective. Vigil (2006) stated that "Asians are often selected based on stere-

otypes , Caucasians are selected by the middle class behaviors [often] associated with high intelligence, as well as African American-Americans' lack of middle class behaviors that teachers often associate with higher intelligence” (p. 20). The social implications of this were enormous. Perceptions and attitudes of American society have contributed to the lack of positive student outcomes for all students, even with well-meaning educational reform statutes (Flowers, 2013). Educators and policy makers can exert control and apply the knowledge obtained from research to real world problems, and teachers can learn how to use instructional strategies that were culturally responsive to their students.

### **Professional Development**

Several researchers (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Flowers, 2013; Sleeter, 2013) agreed that the most important predictor for student success was the quality of the teacher. These researchers also found that highly effective teachers taught low achieving students and levels of student achievement increased by as much as 53%. The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (1999) conducted extensive research and identified the characteristics of high quality teachers. High quality teachers:

- were committed to students and their learning
- knew the subjects they taught and how to teach those subjects to students
- were responsible for managing and monitoring student learning
- thought systematically about their practice and learned from experience
- were members of learning communities

Most school districts provided some type of professional development opportunities for the staff (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010; Flowers, 2013; National Dropout Preven-

tion Center/Network, 2009). However, research suggested that few of these opportunities were effective in helping to change teaching practices. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N),

Often times, professional development is fragmented and short-term, and rarely focused on curriculum content or teaching practices. Only 30% of teachers participated in professional development activities that required in-depth study of a specific field. Content and duration are very important for effective professional development (p. 1).

Work conducted by the NDPC/N (2009) also enabled the identification of key elements of successful professional development programs. Effective professional development had a positive impact on student outcomes. Four key elements of successful professional programs were identified : (a) support from the administration for continuing collaboration to improve learning and teaching, (b) long term professional development programs that are embedded within the school , (c) collaborative study of student learning, and (d) active learning activities that can be used in the classroom (e.g., practice, feedback, and practice (NDPC/N, 2009). This study supports my belief that effective professional development programs must also be culturally responsive to the needs of the students.

Inherent in the discussions of the achievement of African American middle school students was the subject of equity, pedagogical assumptions, and teacher expectations (Milner, 2012; Payne, 2008). According to the National Staff Development Council, these factors appeared to be directly related to staff development, how teachers collabo-

rate, learn, and think (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010; Sleeter, 2011; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). These researchers shared similar views that called for more opportunities for systematic staff development that was reflective of a school's population, well informed on the cultural differences, and assumed high expectations for all students. Research suggested that it was important that novice teachers become involved in professional development activities early in their careers. In addition, individual schools, not districts, should provide relationship building, culture awareness and education of the student population (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Sleeter, 2011; National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2009; Warren, 2013a). One school district created a monetary incentive for teachers to stay in priority schools (e.g., schools with low standardized test scores). Contrary to what Fink (2006) suggested, teachers rejected the opportunities of monetary incentives. Thus after five years, the district dismantled the incentive program because the incentive was ineffective; did not work; and teachers fled priority schools despite the monetary incentives. Professional development opportunities are needed to provide teachers with the tools to develop an understanding and demonstrate their appreciation for students who were different (Gay, 2013; Sleeter, 2011; Warren 2013; Sleeter, 2011). If schools were to provide seminars and learning opportunities early in the teachers' career, they would be less likely to leave the school or the profession (National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2009).

Researchers concluded that continued studies in school culture and the cultural backgrounds of students had a positive effect on academic outcomes. These researchers also suggested that an increase in student outcomes occurred when teachers made choices



for instruction (Warren, 2013b; Schemeichel, 2012, Gay, 2013; Schoen and Teddlie, 2009). Others suggested that teachers: (a) focus on the identification of strategies which motivated and supported learning; (b) create bridges between the cultural experiences of the students and the skills and content for which they needed to become proficient; (c) teach for understanding across all content areas; (d) guide students through the self-discovery process; and (e) design performance tasks that demonstrated and assessed student learning (Gay, 2012; Sleeter, 2011; Warren, 2013a).

### **Summary**

Although researchers suggested the need to recognize the cultural differences of students, many schools have ignored or unknowingly have not considered culture as a factor in the performance outcomes of students. For example, researchers discussed the perception that African American (and other minority) students were not gifted; thereby, excluding these students from the club of rigor, exploration and achievement that gifted programs. In spite of the suggestions of researchers that effective teachers should use instructional strategies (i.e., pedagogy) and plan the content to enable students to make connections with the knowledge of school and their lives, too many school leaders have ignored these data.

It is clear from the review of literature that culture does play an important role in the achievement of students. One theme emerged from the research: assumptions teachers made about the instructional strategies they selected and used in the classroom (e.g., any instructional technique could be effective for all students) and the expectations they held

about their students (e.g., all minority students were at risk for academic failure) have shown to influence student outcomes.

## Section 3: Methods

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine and better understand the issues of teachers' expectations and the academic achievement levels of African American middle school students. There were two major characteristics of a school's culture that were of interest to me: (a) expectations of the teachers, and (b) pedagogy observed in the classroom. Flowers (2008) indicated that these two elements influenced professional development opportunities provided to the teachers. The goals of this study were to provide (a) awareness about the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement in reading and (b) a framework to encourage dialogue and the implementation of reforms at the local level to form culturally proficient schools that will incorporate professional development for culturally responsive teaching. This research serves as a call to action for the collaborative efforts of the academic and legislative communities for the implementation and incorporation of professional development that mirrors the needs of the students at this site and other sites with similar student and teacher demographics.

After approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the first step for me was to collect data that yielded a measure of the teachers' expectations about their students' academic ability. The second step was to identify the teachers' expectations about their students' academic potential. The third step focused on the instruction of African American middle school students, that is, to identify and understand the pedagogy used in

the classroom for these students. The final step determined the relationship between the teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the reading scores of African American middle school students on the CRCT. In this section, I explain the specific methods used to fulfill the purpose of the study. First, a description and explanation of the research design is presented. The section also includes a description of the population along with the sample. The remaining text of this section is a description of the instruments used and the data collection procedures, along with data analysis, and a summary of information discussed in this section.

### **Research Design**

I used a mixed methods research design to conduct the investigation. This method captured the best of the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The goal was to obtain findings that could be generalized to the population and at the same time develop an in-depth understanding about the impact of teachers' expectations on the academic achievement levels of African American middle school students. The plan was to use a sequential implementation strategy. In this regard, the initial data collection included quantitative data followed by qualitative data. For instance, initially, all applicable teachers received the appropriate survey and six teachers were randomly selected to participate in the observation phase of the study that occurred in the classroom. Specific details about the procedures to collect and analyze data are discussed in the Data Collection section.

## **Research Questions**

I examined the influences of teachers' expectations regarding the achievement of African American middle school students. The relationship of teachers' expectations as it influences the pedagogy of the teachers in the classroom and the reading achievement of African American students in middle school was determined. Therefore, data collected centered around the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' expectations about the academic ability of African American middle school students in reading?
2. What are the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of African American middle school students in reading?
3. What pedagogy do teachers use in the classroom for their African American middle school students in regards to reading achievement?
4. What professional development opportunities have teachers had in regards to teaching reading in a diverse classroom?
5. Is there a relationship between teacher expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT?

## **Hypothesis**

This study was designed to obtain information to respond to one quantitative research question; only one hypothesis was tested. This hypothesis is subsequently stated in the null and then the alternative.

$H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the reading/Lexile scores of African American middle school students on the CRCT.

$H_1$ : There is a significant relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT.

The conceptual framework that guided the development of this study is explained in the next section.

## **Population**

Selection of participants occurred at Caldwell Middle School. The population for this study was the teachers of African American middle school students. The school is located in an area that has experienced marked demographic changes. For instance, the surrounding community was once predominantly (90%) working class (i.e., not middle class) European American and has changed to approximately 70% African American working class (State Department of Education, 2010). Over the past three years, approximately 45 European American teachers and 22 African Americans teachers have transferred from the school to go to other schools where the population is majority middle-class Caucasians. The district ranks high in Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores

and on the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (State Department of Education, 2010). Although the school's Language Arts and reading scores have increased approximately 8% to 10% per year for the past 5 years, the school has still failed to meet AYP requirements in two particular subgroups. Specifically, students who were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and a number of students with special needs have not met the standards on the CRCT. As a result, Caldwell Middle School had failed to meet AYP and received needs improvement status by the state (State Department of Education, 2010). Subsequently, the state has replaced and renamed AYP index with CCPRI College and Career Readiness Performance Index, but has not changed the criteria for students to meet standards via the CRCT. Caldwell Middle School had not met performance goals for the year 2012.

Although, I am no longer employed at the site, I have maintained a professional relationship with the faculty. For this reason and for the purpose of transparency my relationship in this setting was an observer-participant.

### **Sample**

The school serves a diverse and rapidly changing demographic population due to the gentrification of the greater metropolitan area and the spread of suburbia. Approximately 45% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. There were 60 faculty members in the school: 44 academic classroom teachers, of which 18 were European American and 20 were African American, and six of Latin descent. In the connections (i.e., art, music, physical education, technology) there were six teachers; four were European American and two were African American. As of August 2013, eleven teachers held gift-

ed endorsements. Each of these teachers taught at least one advance content class. The school had three administrators, the principal, who was African American, and the two assistant principals, one was European American, and the other was African American. The two counselors were African American. The school has five support staff members: attendance clerk, bookkeeper, nurse, secretary, and campus police; three of these staff members were African American and two were European American. The school provides instruction to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. There were approximately 900 students in the school.

### **Instrumentation**

#### **Teachers' Expectation Survey**

All of the teachers who taught reading in the middle school ( $n = 12$ ) were given an opportunity to complete the teachers' expectation survey. The questionnaire used for this study was an adaption of the teachers' expectation survey used by Regalla (2013). The adaptation of this survey was the instrument of choice to assess teachers' expectations about the academic abilities and academic potential of the students (see Appendix A). Regalla used a version of this instrument to assess teachers' expectations about students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who attended school in Costa Rica. The instrument yielded information about the expectations teachers hold about the academic ability and potential of their students. As indicated by Regalla this instrument had acceptable levels of reliability and validity. This questionnaire consists of nine items. The first eight items asked the participants to respond to each item via a Likert-type response scale with responses ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). All of these



items were worded in the same direction, except *Item 7* (“I expect that many of these students will quit school in high school”; Regalla, 2013). That is to say, with *item number 7* scoring would be done in the reverse. For instance, with this item, the range of the responses would be 5 (*strongly agree*), which would be rated as 1 (*strongly disagree*), which would be rated as five. In this manner, the results would show that the higher the rating, the more positive the expectation (Regalla, 2013). The ninth statement was an open-ended item added to give participants an opportunity to expound upon their responses or add any other information that they wanted to provide.

### **Observations**

The six randomly selected middle school teachers (i.e., two per grade level) were given an opportunity to participate in two 30-minute classroom observations. The purpose of the observations was to identify the pedagogy used in the classroom. Specifically, the ways in which teachers promoted student growth and learning were observed. The aspects of the teachers’ behaviors that were observed: (a) curriculum planning and delivery (b) differentiated teaching behaviors, and (c) accommodations for individual differences. According to VanTassel-Baska (2010), “Effective teachers thoroughly plan and organize for instruction. In planning and structuring instruction and activities, teachers have an explicit set of high expectations for student performance and communicate the importance of learning” (p. 5). Students differ in terms of their readiness to learn, learning styles, abilities, and interests. Therefore, it would be important for teachers to utilize different instructional strategies that responded to the needs of the students.

Each teacher who volunteered to participate in observations signed a letter of consent (see Appendix B). At that time, teachers were assigned a numerical code and referred to as such to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Then the teachers received a copy for their records and I kept a copy. These research procedures are consistent with ethical practices, and no information was revealed about the identity of the teachers (American Psychological Association, 2009).

I randomly selected six teachers to participate in the observation section of the study. Teachers designated a time that was convenient for them and told me what time was convenient to come to their classroom without interfering with their work schedule or instruction. At the time of the observation, I again asked the teacher for permission to observe him or her in the classroom with the students for 30 minutes. In the event a teacher decided not to participate in the observational phase of the study, I thanked the teacher and then randomly selected another teacher for an opportunity to participate in the study. Only one teacher opted out of the observational part of this study (for health reasons).

Teachers who agreed to participate in the study signed a consent form. Teachers were briefed in regards to the study and assured of its confidential nature, along with an explanation of how the study adheres to ethical practices and the rights of participants. For instance, the teachers received information pertaining to their opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The consent form explicitly stated specific details as required by the university IRB. Each participant received an assigned number to place on their questionnaire and referred to as such during the observation phase of the study so that their individual identities remained confidential. Those mem-

bers of the faculty participating in the study received a copy of the consent form for their records. After the study, a copy of the consent forms was placed in a secure file cabinet at the home office of the researcher. After five years, data from this study will be shredded and properly destroyed.

### **Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT)**

Information collected from the school about the students' performance came from the state's portal of student assessments (CRCT in the subject area of reading). The CRCT measures how well students acquired the skills and knowledge as related to the State Performance Standards (State Department of Education, 2009; 2013). Educators in the state can also obtain information on the performance outcomes of students through the state portal. Performance on the CRCT is assessed from scale scores that range from 650 to 900 (GPS) in each content area and grade level. Students' level of performance described from their scores on the CRCT will include one of the following: (a) 1 indicates does not meet the standard, (b) 2 indicates meets the standard, and (c) 3 indicates exceeds standard, and Lexile scores. In order to maintain the highest level of confidentiality, CRCT data for reading was collected for all students at the site, regardless if the teacher participated in the study. No attempt was made to identify which teacher taught which student. The relationship between teachers' expectations and CRCT scores in reading were assessed. The independent variable was the teachers' expectations and the dependent variable was the student' level of performance of the CRCT score in reading.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection occurred in three ways, which permitted the triangulation of data. These procedures also helped to verify the accuracy of the information that enabled appropriate comparisons to be made. As such, the study occurred in four phases: (1) preparation phase, (2) questionnaire phase, (3) observation phase, and (4) data analysis and close out phase. First, permission by the IRB of Walden University was obtained, along with permission of the school district, principal of the school, and members of the faculty who participated in this study. The research site granted approval for the study after approval was obtained from IRB and the formal application process was completed. A letter of agreement was obtained from the school district as well as the principal. I then met with the teachers of the school on a day designated by the principal. At the same time, teachers were given information regarding the study during regularly scheduled department meetings at the school in an effort to solicit volunteers to participate in the proposed study.

The approximate time needed to complete the questionnaire was ten minutes. Upon completion of the questionnaire, teacher questionnaires were returned to a mailbox at the site designated for surveys and consent forms. Then, I was able to collect and store the documents in a secured file cabinet in my home office. Data will remain secured until the requisite five-year period has lapsed. At that time, all of the information pertaining to the study will be shredded and properly discarded. Upon completion of the questionnaires, six teachers were selected using a Random Numbers Table to participate in the observational phase of the study. In order to participate in any phase of the research, all

participants had to show agreement by signing the consent form (see Appendix B). I met the teacher in his/her classroom to conduct the observation.

At the time that participants completed the questionnaire, they also completed a short demographic sheet to collect background information to describe the sample (see Appendix A). Data collected did not contain information that would reveal the individual identities of participants. The same assigned numbers process used for the questionnaires was also used to code the data sheets for the observations of the teachers in the classroom to protect confidentiality. All information is kept in a secure file cabinet in my home.

I then polled and visited teachers who agreed to participate in the observation phase of the study on one of the three days provided by the teacher. This process helped me to identify an optimal time to visit the classrooms. A list of three preferred dates also enabled me to visit the teachers' classrooms without his or her knowing exactly when I would visit. In this manner, my intentions were to observe the teachers' behaviors as it naturally occurs. I observed participants in order to collect data in three categories: (1) curriculum planning and delivery, (2) differentiated teaching behaviors, and (3) accommodations for individual differences (VanTassel-Baska, et al., 2007; Van Tassel-Baska & Wood, 2010).

### **Data Analyses**

In accordance with protocol of a sequential mixed method research, qualitative data was collected after the quantitative data analysis. This process consisted of inputting Reading scores of African American middle school students (only the scores of students in a de-identified database) and teachers' responses to the survey into a computer soft-

ware program (i.e., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS). Correlational analysis (i.e., Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient) were performed to determine if there was a relationship between the expectations teachers hold about their students' academic ability, academic potential and their CRCT scores in reading. A description, summary, and data analysis were prepared and conducted for the Teachers' Expectations Survey (Regalla, 2013). The probability level of .05 (i.e.,  $p < .05$ ) was used to determine if a relationship is significant or not.

Secondly, all qualitative data was analyzed based on acceptable research practices (Creswell, 2009; Creswell et al., 2011). For instance:

1. Transcribed data and typed field notes from the observations
2. Reviewed data to identify a general feel for the type of information provided from the participants. A determination concerning the impression, tone, depth, and meaning of the information was made
3. Conducted analysis with the organization of the data into chunks to identify the substance of the information obtained. Coded and labelled information with concepts used by the participant
4. Began the analyses by organizing the information into chunks to discover the substance of the data collected. The categories and themes reported served as the major findings of the study.
5. Constructed a narrative that reflected the information obtained from the teachers

6. The significance of the data or interpretation of the data was included in the results to validate the teachers' responses to each question asked in the survey

7. Verified (i.e., validated) the accuracy of the data collected through member checking (i.e., asked the teachers at post observations meetings if the major points recorded were an accurate reflection). I analyzed all qualitative data (i.e., item number nine on the Teachers' Expectation Survey, and information obtained during the observation) in this manner.

As indicated previously, observational data was analyzed through the same qualitative techniques. There were three categories regarding for collection of data and report findings. Observations consisted of three aspects of the teachers' behaviors: (a) curriculum planning and delivery, (b) differentiated teaching behaviors, and (c) accommodations for individual differences. I reported descriptions of the themes, patterns, and essence of the participants' responses as related to these areas. All data were stored in a secure file cabinet in my home. It is my plan to keep data secured for the requisite period of five years; all data will then be shredded and appropriately discarded.

### **Specific Research Questions and Data Analyses**

The procedures to analyze and review data related to the research questions are subsequently presented.

*Research Question 1.* What are teachers' expectations about the academic ability of African American middle school students in reading? As previously stated, data analysis were performed using best practices for qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Creswell et al., 2011). The goal was to describe and explain teachers' expectations about the aca-

ademic ability of the students. Information for this research question was collected from the Teachers' Expectation Survey (Appendix A) as well as from the observations of the teachers in the classroom.

*Research Question 2.* What are the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of African American middle school students in reading? Information for this research question was obtained from the Teachers' Expectations Survey and in the observations of the teachers in the classroom. The focus was to describe and explain the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their African American middle school students. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses were performed (e.g., respectively, descriptive statistics and correlational, and identification of patterns, themes, etc.).

*Research Question 3.* What pedagogy do teachers use in the classroom for their African American middle school students in regards to reading achievement? Information for this research question was collected from the observations made in the classroom. As stated previously, I collected information as related to the behavior of the teachers in three areas: (a) curriculum planning and delivery, (b) differentiated teaching behaviors, and (c) accommodations for individual differences (Van Tassel-Baska, 2009; Van Tassel-Baska & Wood, 2010).

*Research Question 4.* What professional development opportunities have teachers had in regards to teaching reading in a diverse classroom? When participants completed the demographic portion of the data sheet they were asked to indicate the number and type of professional development opportunities they had engaged as related to teaching reading and with diverse groups of students. I performed qualitative analysis and identified the



patterns, themes, and the essence of the participants' responses. This information was reviewed, summarized, and used to prepare a response to this research question.

*Research Question 5.* Is there a relationship between teacher expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT? To respond to this research question, correlational analysis were performed to determine if a relationship (i.e., positive or negative) existed between teachers' expectations, pedagogy observed in the classroom, and the scores of the African American middle school students in reading as measured by the CRCT. These analyses were used to identify the existence of a significant positive or negative relationship. The probability level of .05 was used to determine if the relationship was significant or not. In this manner, the hypothesis was tested to determine whether the null hypothesis should be rejected or accepted.

### **Summary**

The reasons I conducted this study was to examine and gain insight into the issues surrounding teachers' expectations and the achievement levels in reading of African American middle school students. Four objectives were identified that helped achieve the purpose of the study. The first objective was to collect data that would yield a measure of teacher expectations about the academic abilities and expectations of their students. Secondly, the objective was to observed pedagogy used by the teachers in the classroom. Thirdly, professional development activities in which teachers have participated related to culturally responsive teaching that may affect the achievement in reading scores of African American middle school students were identified. Lastly, the relationship between the variables of interest (i.e., teachers' expectations, demographics of the teachers) and

the reading scores of African American middle school students on the CRCT was determined.

This study used a sequential, mixed methods research design that involved teachers who work at a middle school where the majority of the students were African American. Data collection consisted of three different data collection procedures:

1. Teachers' Expectation Survey (Regalla, 2013)
2. Observations in the classrooms
3. Reading scores of students on the CRCT.

These three different methods enabled a triangulation approach to confirm, corroborate, and cross-validate the findings obtained from this study (Creswell, 2009). I performed qualitative and quantitative analyses of information collected for each research question and tested the hypothesis as indicated. The next section presents the findings from the data collection.

## Section 4: Findings

A sequential, mixed methods research design is one that; (a) focuses on the type of research questions that necessitates an understanding in the real-world context that presents multilevel and cultural perspectives, (b) employs rigorous quantitative research that looks at the frequency and magnitude of a construct and rigorous qualitative research that examines both the meaning and understanding of the constructs, (c) utilizes multiple data collection techniques, (d) integrates the different methods so that they can draw upon the strengths of each other, and (e) frames the study within a theoretical or philosophical perspective (Creswell et al, 2011). As such, it was determined that this design would be the best method to ensure that the purpose of the study was fulfilled. Recall that the purpose of this study was to examine the issues of teachers' expectations and the academic achievement levels in reading of African American middle school students.

Therefore, the study was developed to address five research questions and test one hypothesis. Findings from the study are presented in detail in this section. First, the demographics obtained to describe the sample are presented. Next, the analyses and results for each research question are presented. Then the data that was used to test the hypothesis are discussed. Finally, the results are summarized, and conclusions and recommendations are given in Section 5.

### **Demographics**

Caldwell Middle School had 44 academic teachers; 19 teachers agreed to participate in the study. These teachers represent 44% of the academic staff. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the participants were females (78.9%) and African American (63.2%).

Table 2 also shows that the average age of the teachers was 42.2 years of age with a range from 28-55. Participants were also asked the: (1) number of years they had been teaching, (2) number of years teaching in the current school, (3) number of schools they worked prior to teaching at the current school, (4) highest degree obtained, (5) grade that they currently teach, and (6) content area that they teach. Results from these data are subsequently presented.

Table 2

*Frequency and Percentages of Participants' Sex, Race, and Age*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (percentage)</i>
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	4	21.1
Female	<u>15</u>	<u>78.9</u>
Total	19	100
<i>Race</i>		
African American	12	63.2
European American	4	21.2
Multiracial	1	5.2
Hispanic	1	5.2
Other	<u>1</u>	<u>5.2</u>
Total	19	100
<i>Age</i>		
	<u>M</u>	<i>Range</i>
	42.2	28-55

As shown in Table 3, the average number of years the teachers taught was 13.68, and the average number of years they had taught in the current school was 7.63. Most of the teachers had taught in at least one other school prior to teaching in the current school (see Table 3). Figure 1 shows the highest degree the teachers had obtained.

Figure 2 depicts the grades that they teach in the school, and Figure 3 depicts the specific content areas that these teachers teach. As can be seen, most of the teachers had earned a master's degree (36.8%); more teachers (36.8%) teach eighth grade than any other grade.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Teaching Experiences and Level of Education*

<i>Number of Years:</i>	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Teaching	19	2	23	13.6	7.18470
Teaching in Current School	19	1	17	7.63	4.12594
Teaching in Other Schools	17	1	5	2.23	1.34766

Results showed that most of the teachers had earned a master's degree and two of the teachers (20.5%) had earned doctorate degrees (see Figure 1).

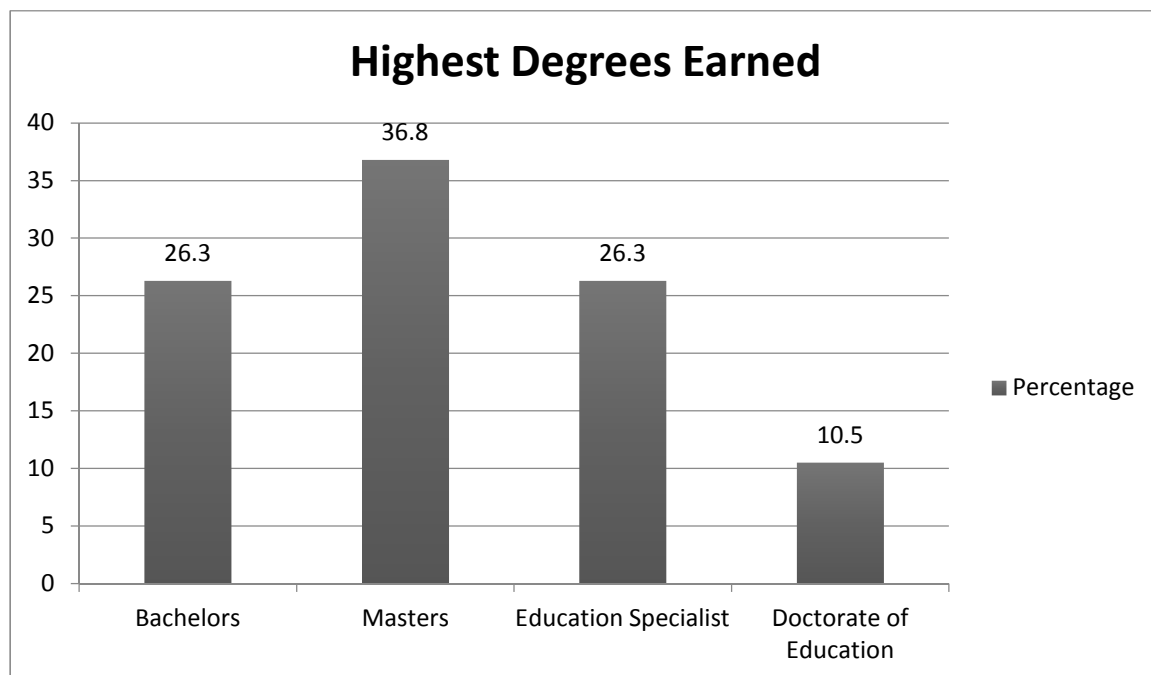


Figure 1. The percentage of teachers who have earned higher education degrees,  $n = 19$ .

Figure 2 depicts the grade levels that the teachers teach in the school that served as the setting for this study. As can be seen, 10.6% (or  $n = 2$ ) of the teachers teach two grades and 21.1% teach all three grade levels (i.e., 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>). The majority of the teachers (36.8%) teach 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In terms of the grades teachers teach, as shown in Figure 2, some faculty teach two grades and four (21.2%) teach all three middle grades (i.e., 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>).

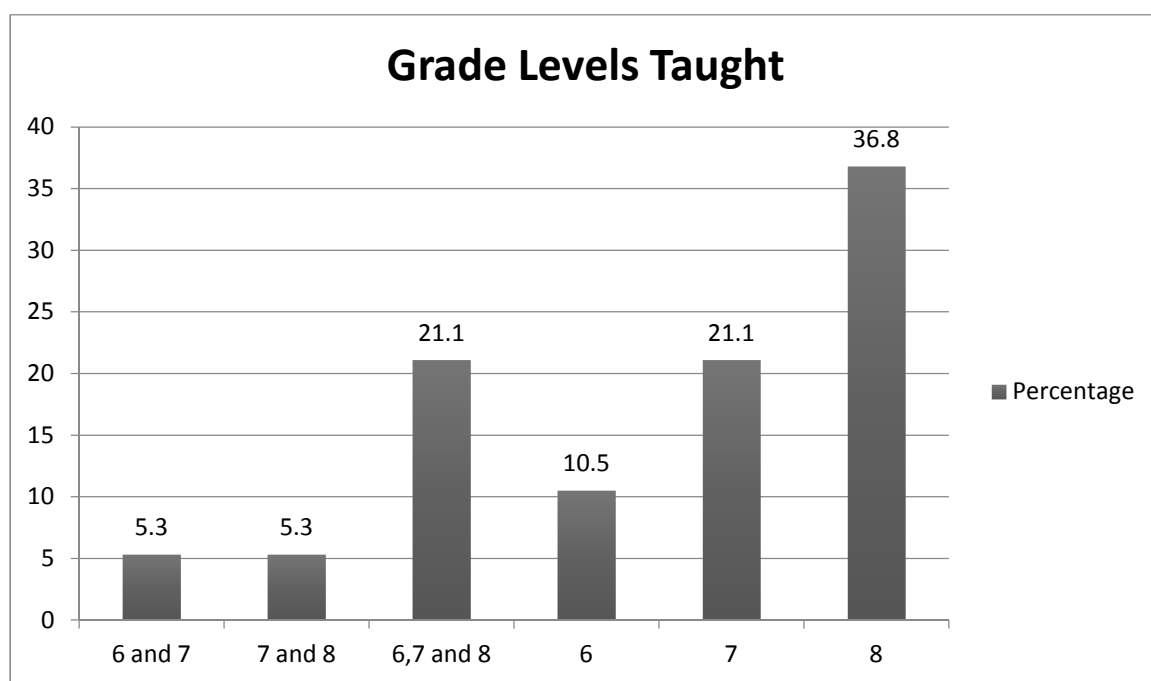
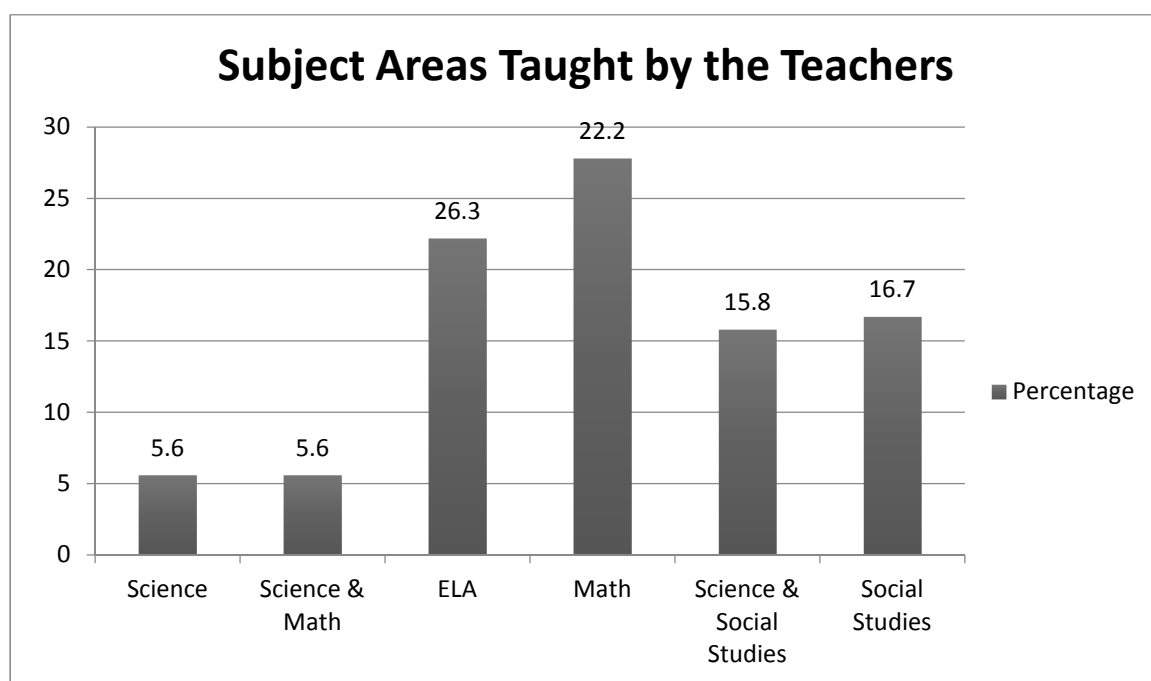


Figure 2. Percentage of teachers who teach the middle school grades,  $n = 19$ .

All teachers at the site were required to teach reading in the content area. Each participant teaches a specific content area (subject) and reading. The focus of this study is on the subject area of reading. Five teachers (26.3%) taught English and Language Arts.

*Figure 3.* Depicts the specific content areas that teachers in the sample taught. In sum it can be said that the typical participant in this study was female, African American, average age of 42 years, and had taught an average of 13.6 years. Most of the teachers had varied experiences teaching at other schools prior to coming to the current school. Participants' patterns of responses for the subject area suggest that most of the teachers in this sample are most likely to teach English and Language Arts (26.3%) or Mathematics (22.2%).



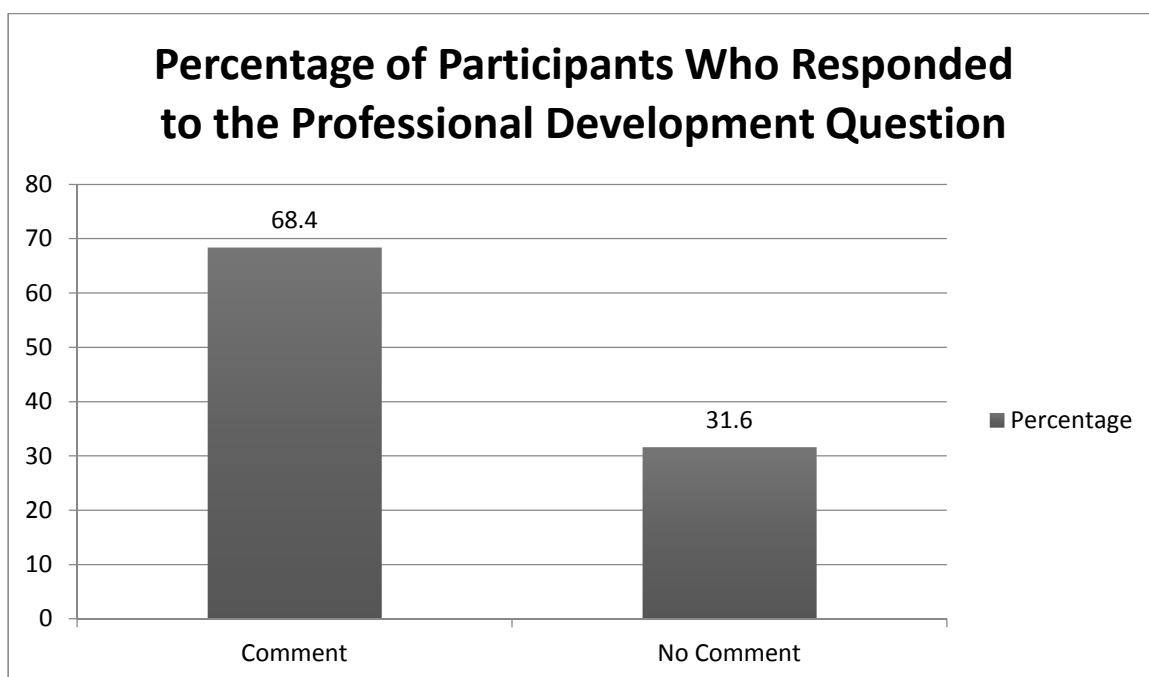
*Figure 3.* Percentage of teachers who teach the specified subject areas in the school that served as the setting for the study.

### **Professional Development**

This study also needed information from the participants about their professional development activities. Of particular relevance were the professional development activities that they engaged as related to culturally responsive teaching and/or teaching reading.

As such, participants were asked to respond to the item: Please list how many and the type of professional development activities that you have engaged regarding culturally responsive teaching and/or teaching reading.

The majority of the participants (68.4% or  $n = 13$ ) provided comments; 31.6% (or  $n = 6$ ) of the participants did not provide a comment (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Percentage of the sample who either made comments to the professional development question or did not make a comment to the professional development question.

When participants were asked to list the number and type of professional development activities that they engaged as related to culturally responsive teaching and/or teaching reading, their responses were varied. For instance, 13 (or 68.4%) of the 19 teachers responded to the item.



Table 4 presents the results obtained from the participants' responses in the words of the participants. As shown in Table 4, three (or 23.1%) of the teachers who provided comments ( $n = 13$ ) admitted that they had not engaged in any professional development activities that involved culturally responsive teaching or teaching reading. One participant (or 7.6%) listed the number of professional development activities, but did not specify the type. The majority of the teachers who responded (61.5% or  $n = 8$ ) indicated that they had engaged in culturally responsive professional development activities. Four teachers (30.7%) reported that they had engaged in professional development activities that involved teaching reading. It should be noted that three of the teachers indicated that they had engaged in professional development activities that focused on both culturally responsive teaching and teaching reading (see Table 4 Participant Number 7, Participant Number 5, and Participant Number 15).

Table 4

*Number and/or Type of Professional Development Experiences with Culturally Responsive Teaching or Teaching Reading as Reported by the Participants*

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*Professional Development Activities*

*Culturally Responsive*

1. Teaching culturally diverse students (Participant #15)
2. Anti-defamation league trainer; Cultural proficiency trainer in the county (Participant #2)
3. Helping Black boys succeed in academics (Participant #12)
4. Within the school-Gifted certification within the last year (Participant #8)
5. Attended a middle school conference session on cultural diversity (Participant #7)
6. Two Teaching children in poverty; 2 multicultural issues in education (Participant #5)
7. Two multicultural classes in undergrad and graduate programs (Participant #4)

*Professional development activities cont.*

8. I mentored underrepresented males at the high school and middle school levels. I have also presented at several workshops relating to classroom management strategies for urban classrooms (Participant #3)

*Reading*

1. Teaching Reading to Black adolescent males (Participant #7)
2. Three Series of RISS workshops (Participant #5)
3. Read 180 (Participant #15)
4. Reading ESL (Participant #11)

*Miscellaneous*

1. One participant simply indicated “None” (Participant #19)
  2. None in \_\_\_ County, I did have some professional development activities in \_\_\_ county (Participant #14)
  3. None here in Georgia but one in Florida (Participant #13)
  4. Approximately 3-5 (Participant #10)
- 

In sum, it can be said that the majority of the teachers ( $n = 9$  or 69.2%) reported that they had engaged in professional development activities that involved being culturally responsive to their students or teaching reading. Out of the nine teachers who indicated that they had engaged in professional development activities in cultural diversity or teaching reading, three teachers (33.3%) reported that they had engaged in professional development activities that involved both cultural diversity and teaching reading. Data and results were obtained to address the research questions and test the hypothesis for this study are subsequently presented.

### **Teachers’ Expectations**

Teachers’ expectations were assessed with the Teachers’ Expectation Survey (Regalla, 2013). This instrument was used because it provided information about teachers’ expectations as related to the students’ academic abilities and academic potential (see

Appendix A). This questionnaire consists of nine items. The first eight items ask the participants to respond to each item via a Likert-type response scale with responses ranging from 5 (i.e., “strongly agree”) to 1 (i.e., “strongly disagree”). All of these items are worded in the same direction, except item number seven (“I expect that many of these students will quit school in high school” Regalla, 2013). That is to say, item number seven was scored in the reverse. The results were designed to show that the higher the rating, the more positive the expectation (Regalla, 2013). The ninth statement was an open-ended item added to give participants an opportunity to expound upon their responses or add any other information that they wanted to provide.

### **Academic Ability**

*Items 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8* are those, which assess teachers’ expectations about their students’ academic ability (see Table 5). Teachers’ expectations about their students’ academic potential was assessed through *items 1, 4, and 7*. Results showed that teachers’ expectations about their students’ academic ability ranged from ratings of 14 to 24 with a mean level of 18.94. Teachers’ responses showed that teachers believed that their students were capable of at least average academic performance in reading (*question 2*),  $M = 4.47$  and capable of learning the material presented in class (i.e., *question #3*),  $M = 4.47$ ; that is, relatively high expectations in these two areas; see Table 5.

However, as seen in Table 5, the teachers' responses suggested that they do not believe (i.e., relatively low expectations) their students: (a) were motivated to do their best in class (i.e., question #5),  $M = 3.21$ , (b) work very hard to do their best in class (i.e., question #6),  $M = 3.26$ , and (c) think that education is important (i.e., question #8),  $M = 3.5$ . Overall, patterns from the participants' responses suggest that the teachers have moderate expectations for their students ( $M = 18.9$ ).

Table 5

*Teachers' Expectations about Their Students' Academic Ability*

<i>Question Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.</i>
I believe that these students are capable of at least average academic performance in reading.	19	4.00	5.00	4.47	.51299
Most of these students are capable of learning the material presented in class.	19	4.00	5.00	4.47	.51299
I believe that the students are motivated to do their best in class.	19	2.00	5.00	3.21	.97633
I believe that most of these students work very hard to do their best in class.	19	2.00	5.00	3.26	.99119
I believe that these students think that education is very important.	19	2.00	5.00	3.52	.96427
Group	19	14.00	24.00	18.94	2.79829

### **Academic Potential**

Three questions were used to assess the teachers' expectations about their students' academic potential. As seen in Table 6, overall, teachers held slightly lower expectations about their students' academic potential ( $M = 11.89$ ) than they did about their students' academic ability ( $M = 18.94$ ; see Table 5). However, it seems that the majority of the teachers tend to agree (53% or  $n = 10$ ) or strongly agree (37% or  $n = 7$ ) with the statement that their students would perform academically as well as their European American students; 10% ( $n = 2$ ) disagreed with this statement. Most of the teachers strongly agreed (26.3% or  $n = 5$ ) or agreed (47.4% or  $n = 9$ ) with the statement about their belief that their students have the skills necessary to attain success in the school. When teachers were asked to respond to the statement: "I expect that many of these students will quit school in high school", the majority of the teachers disagreed (68.4% or  $n = 13$ ) or strongly disagreed 15.8% or  $n = 3$ ); 15.8% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

Table 6

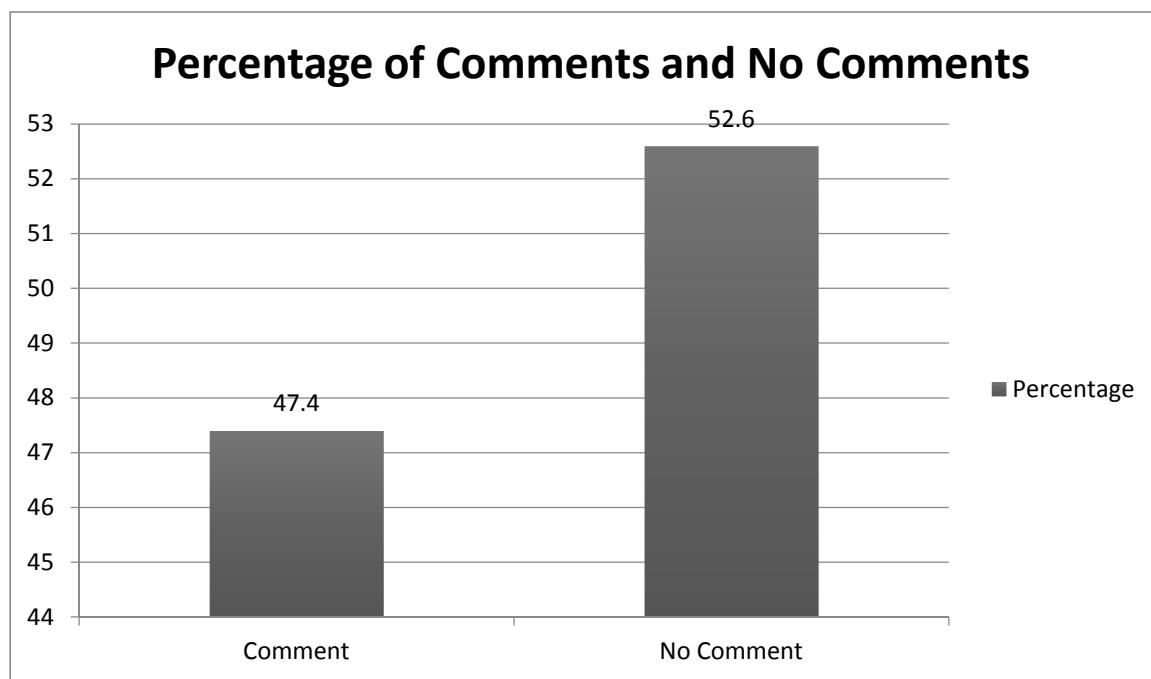
*Teachers' Expectations About Their Students' Academic Potential*

<i>Question Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.</i>
I believe that the students will perform academically as well as their Caucasian American peers.	19	2.00	5.00	4.15	.89834
I believe these students have the skills necessary to be successful in school.	19	2.00	5.00	3.73	1.14708
I expect that many of these students will quit school in high school.	19	3.00	5.00	4.00	1.00000
Group	19	8.00	14.00	11.89	1.91180

**Open-Ended Item**

Item *Number 9* asked participants to add any other comments that they would like to make or further explain any of their responses. Results showed that 47.4% (or  $n = 9$ ) of the participants added comments (see Figure 5). When the open-ended items were analyzed, three themes were revealed which explained factors this sample believed influenced student outcomes: (a) importance of cultural relevancy, (b) individual differences, and (c) importance of a supportive environment. These findings are consistent with past research and will be discussed further in the next section. For example, Van Tassel-Baska et al (2007) found that there are individual differences in terms of their readiness to learn,

learning styles, abilities, and interests. Therefore, it would be important for teachers to utilize different instructional strategies that would respond to the needs of the students.



*Figure 5.* Percentage of participants who added comments and did not add comments for the open-ended item, which asked for additional information.

Results showed that participants in this sample expressed the views that positive student outcomes were dependent upon students being in a supportive environment (see Table 6). As seen in Table 6, 55.5% of the participants shared statements, which expressed a need for students to have a supportive environment. One teacher stated that African American students could do just as well as any other students “if they are positively encouraged, pushed, and motivated,” (Participant #15). Other types of support teachers mentioned was support for the students in general, parental support, motivators in their

lives, and effective teaching. Furthermore, one participant believed that cultural relevance was important for positive student outcomes, and three others acknowledged that there were individual differences that would influence student outcomes.

Table 7

*Participants' Responses to the Open-ended Item Asking teachers to Add Comments: Identified Themes*

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*Importance of Cultural Relevance*

It is very important that all faculty members should go through cultural proficiency training. Being culturally responsive is vital in meeting the needs of various ethnicities' cultures. (Participant #2)

*Individual Differences*

When teaching I do not see color, I see a student with a need to learn and it is my job to provide that to them. When I teach if you ask me to describe my students I would use adjectives that describe their behavior. For example, my current group is talkative, slow in completing assignments, and do not use my blog. (Participant Number #6)

My responses were more focused on students in the last two years. This group has the sense of entitlement and would rather be given the answers than search and learn about it. Their parents are also great enablers. Prior to these years, I've taught some challenging students who could perform and wanted to succeed. (Participants #4)

All answers do not consider poverty as this issue alters the outcomes. (Participant #5)

*Importance of a Supportive Environment*

I believe African American students can do just as well as any other student if they are positively encouraged, pushed, and motivated. (Participant #15)

I believe these students are capable of equal or higher but lack the support from outside sources. (Participant #9)

There are some students that are motivated because they have parents that encourage them to aspire for success. (Participant #13)



Table 7 cont.

*Importance of a Supportive Environment*

I believe that all students can be successful if they want to be, if they are willing to do the work. Some students don't have the academic skills at the moment but they can be successful with the right influences and motivators. (Participants 14)

If students are given the opportunity to increase their skills, they will have more confidence to succeed. Kids need to be taught academic skills to be successful in school. (Participant #12)

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### **Classroom Observations**

Six teachers were randomly selected and given an opportunity to participate in two 30-minute classroom observations. I am certified by the state as a Teacher Support Specialist. Having this endorsement means, that one is qualified to assess, coach and evaluate teachers. I also served as a lead teacher and member of the School Improvement team at the site for eight years. Having observed teachers many times in the past, I was primarily interested in the identification of the pedagogy teachers used in the classroom. Specifically, the ways that the teachers promote student growth and learning was observed. Three aspects of the teachers' behaviors were observed:

1. Curriculum planning and delivery,
2. Differentiated teaching behaviors, and
3. Accommodations for individual differences.

As seen in Table 8, teachers were rated in three ways: (a) “*emerging*” (i.e., very little evidence demonstrated, rated on a scale of 1-3), (b) “*operational*” (i.e., evidence demonstrated two or more examples, rated on a scale of 4-6), and (c) “*proficient*” (i.e., evidence demonstrated and integration showing significant evidence four or more examples, rated

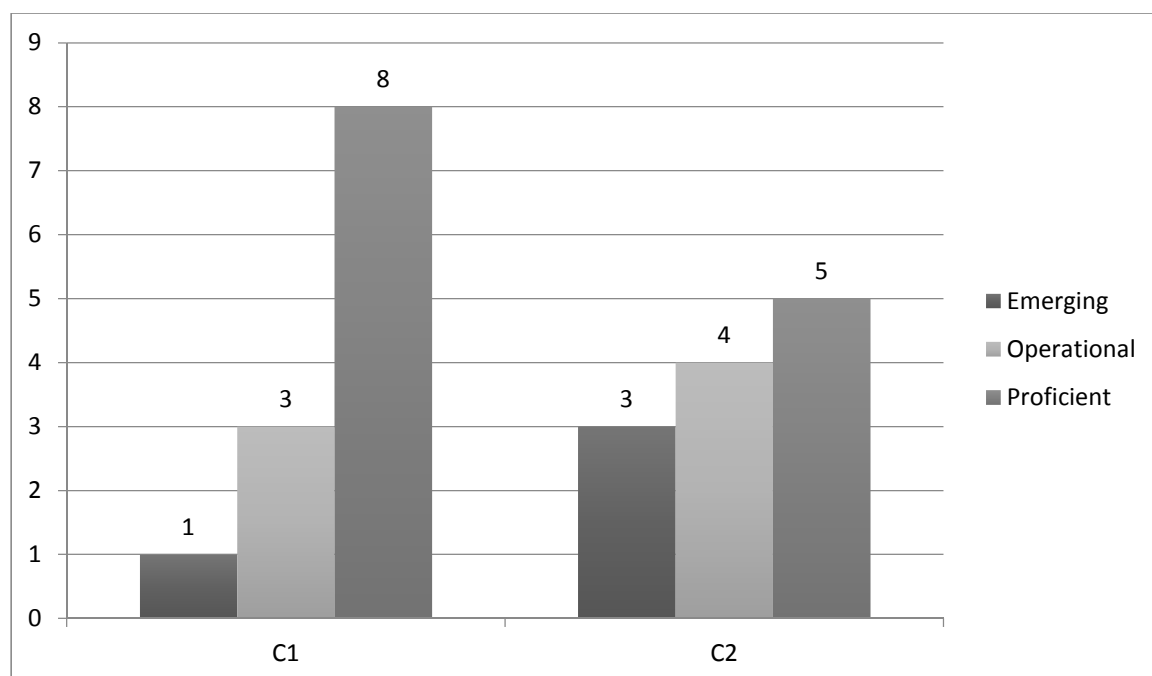
on a *scale of 6-8*). As seen in Table 8, the higher the rating, the more proficient the teacher is considered. See Appendix C Teacher Observation Form.

Table 8

*Assessment Components on the Teacher Observation Form*

	Emerging			Operational			Proficient		
Curriculum Planning and Delivery	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8
Differentiated Teaching Behaviors	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8
Accommodation for Individual Differences	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8

*Curriculum planning and delivery.* I rated the observation of two aspects of curriculum planning and delivery: (1) organization/implementation of instructional plans, and (2) use of technology resources.

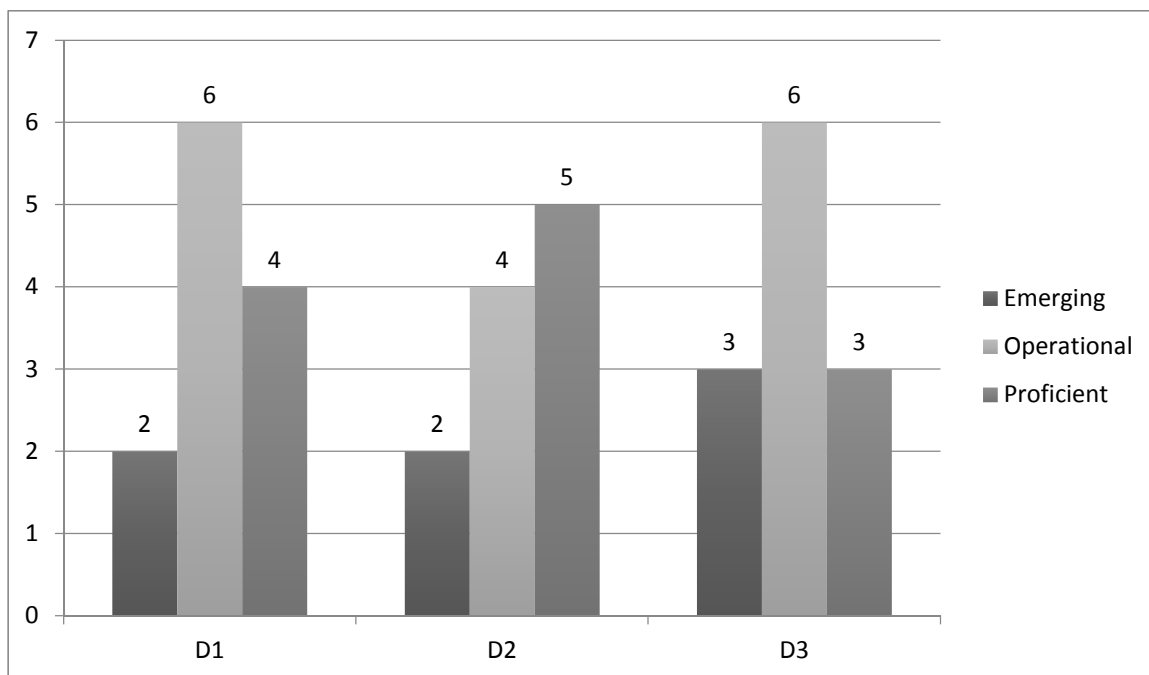


*Figure 6.* Number of teachers who were observed to be in the emerging, operational, and proficient stages of development in the curriculum planning and delivery areas: Organi-

zation/implementation of instructional plans (coded as C1) and Use technology resources (coded as C2).

As can be seen, the majority (66.6% or  $n = 8$ ) of the teachers were rated as proficient in terms of organization/implementation of instructional plans. This means that when I observed the teachers they showed significant evidence of four or more examples of organization and instructional planning. Finally, I rated most (41.7% or  $n = 5$ ) of the teachers as proficient in the use of technology resources, some were rated as operational (33.3% or  $n = 4$ ), and a few were rated as emerging (25% or  $n = 3$ ).

*Differentiated teaching behaviors (strategies).* The second observation was made in the area of differentiated teaching behaviors (or strategies). Teachers were rated in three categories, namely: (a) differentiation evident by process, (b) differentiation evident by content, and (c) differentiation evident by assessment. Figure 6 shows the pattern of the observations made in these areas. As can be seen, the majority of the teachers (50% or  $n = 6$ ) were rated as operational in the differentiation evident by process category (coded as D1), with 33.3% (or  $n = 4$ ) rated as proficient, and 16.7% (or  $n = 2$ ) rated as emerging.

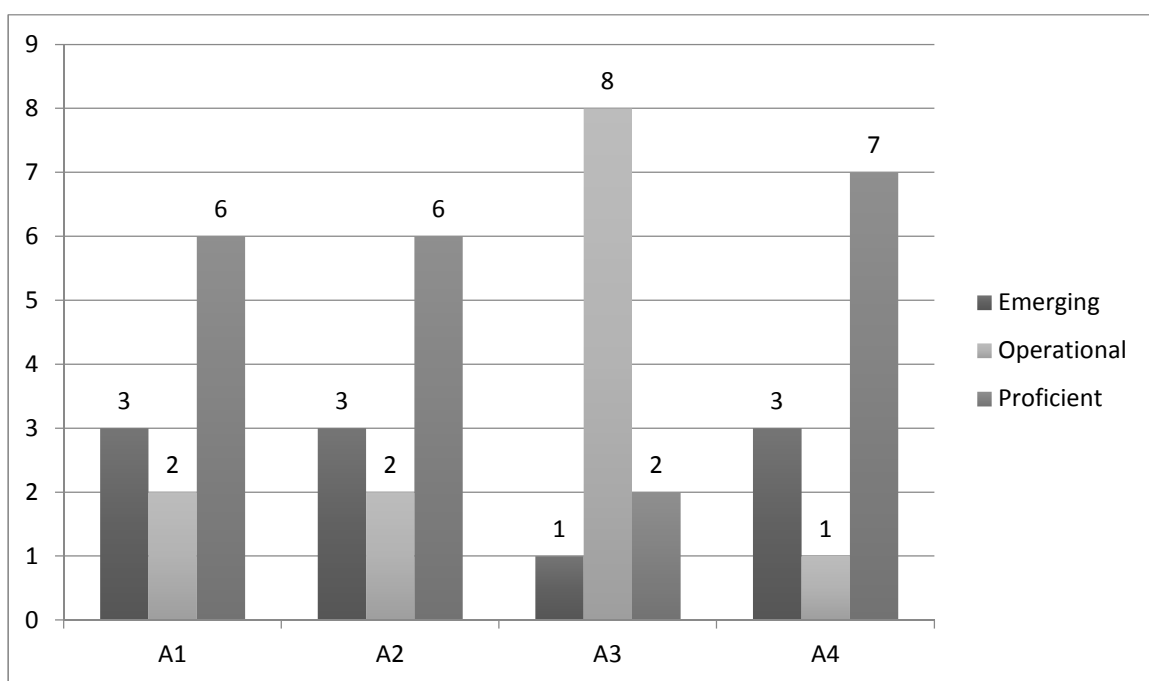


*Figure 7.* Number of teachers who were observed to be in the emerging, operational, and proficient stages of development in differentiated teaching behaviors (strategies): Differentiation evident by process (coded as D1), Differentiation evident by content (coded as D2), and Differentiation evident by assessment (coded as D3).

In the category of differentiation evident by content (coded as D2), the majority of the teachers (45.4% or  $n = 5$ ) were rated as proficient, with 36.4% ( $n = 4$ ) rated as operational and 18.2% ( $n = 2$ ) rated as emerging. Finally, in the category of differentiation evident by assessment, (coded as D3), the majority of the teachers were rated as operational (50% or  $n = 6$ ), with 25% ( $n = 3$ ) rated as proficient and 25% ( $n = 3$ ) rated as emerging.

*Accommodation for individual differences.* The third category used to assess teachers' pedagogy in the classroom was evidence of accommodation for individual differences. Teachers were rated in four categories for this component: (1) evidence of learning modalities (coded as A1), (2) evidence of learning (coded as A2), (3) evidence of knowledge

of cultural/ethnic backgrounds (coded as A3), and (4) evidence of global awareness (coded as A4). Figure 8 is used to depict the results from this measure. The majority of the teachers were rated as proficient in the categories of: (A1) evidence of learning modalities (54.5% or n = 6), (b) evidence of learning styles (54.5% or n = 6), and (c) evidence of global awareness (63.6% or n = 7). In the category of evidence of knowledge of cultural/ethnic backgrounds (coded A3), the majority of the participants (72.7% or n = 8) were rated as operational; see Figure 8.



*Figure 8.* Number of teachers who were observed to be in the emerging, operational, and proficient stages of development in accommodation for individual differences: Evidence of learning modalities (coded as A1), Evidence of learning styles (coded as A2), evidence of knowledge of cultural/ethnic backgrounds (coded as A3), and Evidence of global awareness (coded as A4).

Three major findings were revealed as related to the pedagogy in the teachers' classrooms. First, the pedagogy observed in the teachers' classrooms as related to curriculum planning and delivery was proficient. Secondly, in terms of differentiated teach-

ing behaviors, some teachers are more proficient than others are. For example, in two areas (i.e., differentiation evident by process and differentiation evident by assessment) the teachers were rated as operational, and in the third area they were rated as proficient (i.e., differentiation evident by content, coded as D2). Finally, the accommodation for individual differences results indicated that the teachers were proficient in three areas (i.e., evidence of learning modalities (coded as A1), evidence of learning styles (A2), and evidence of global awareness, coded as A4). Based on the observations made, it appears that there is room for growth in the evidence of knowledge of cultural/ethnic backgrounds (coded as A3).

### **Data Analyses: Responses to the Research Questions**

Four qualitative research questions and one quantitative research question guided the design and implementation of this research. Information was obtained so that each question could be addressed. Since there was one quantitative research question, one hypothesis was tested. Results pertaining to these research questions and hypothesis are presented next.

#### **Research Question 1**

This question asked: What are teachers' expectations about the academic ability of African American middle school students in reading? The Teachers' Expectation Survey (Regalla, 2013) was used to obtain information about the sample's academic ability and potential.

Teachers' responses showed that teachers believed that their students were capable of at least average academic performance in reading, and that most of their students

are capable of learning the material presented in class. However, the teachers' responses showed that they tend to disagree or feel neutral toward the statements that said their students: (1) were motivated to do their best in class, (2) work very hard to do their best in class, (3) think that education is important. It was determined that the overall patterns from the participants' responses suggested that the teachers have both favorable and unfavorable expectations for their students (see Table 5).

### **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 asked: What are the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of African American middle school students in reading? Three questions from the Teachers' Expectation Survey (Regalla, 2013) were used to assess the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their students. Findings showed that the majority of the teachers tended to agree or strongly agree with the statement that their students would perform academically as well as their European American students. Similarly, most of the teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the statement about their belief that their students have the skills necessary to attain success in the school. Finally, it was noted that the majority of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement: I expect that many of these students will quit school in high school (see Table 6). Therefore, the response to this statement is that the teachers had relatively high expectations about their students' academic potential.

Additionally, teachers were also given an opportunity to add any comments that they wanted to share on the topics being discussed. Their responses indicated that they believed there were other factors that could influence student outcomes. For instance,

they stated that it was important for information in the classroom to be culturally relevant for the students. Teachers also reported that there were individual differences that needed to be acknowledged. Finally, the third factor teachers indicated was important for positive student outcomes was a supportive environment (see Table 6).

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question was: What pedagogy do teachers use in the classroom of their African American middle school students? Data for this research question was obtained from the classroom observations. Specifically, observations were made in three categories: (1) curriculum planning and delivery, (2) differentiated teaching behaviors (strategies), and (3) accommodation for individual differences. In terms of the pedagogy used in the classroom, I made three major observations. Using the Teacher Observation Rubric (Appendix D), it was determined that the pedagogy observed in the teachers' classrooms as related to curriculum planning and delivery was proficient.

Another observation was that, in terms of differentiated teaching behaviors, some teachers are more proficient than others are. For example, in two areas (i.e., differentiation evident by both process and assessment) the teachers were rated as operational, and in the third area they were rated as proficient (i.e., differentiation evident by content, coded as D2). The accommodation for individual differences results indicated that the teachers were proficient in three areas (i.e., evidence of learning modalities, evidence of learning styles, and evidence of global awareness). Based on the observations, it seems that there is room for growth in the evidence of knowledge of cultural/ethnic backgrounds. This finding was supported from the open-ended comments made by the teachers. The



participants reported that there were individual differences and other factors that would influence student outcomes. The implication is that teachers would need to know about the differences and at the same time become knowledgeable about various strategies that would serve to address the needs of all of their students. In essence, the sample admits there is no one method that would fit the needs for all of the students.

#### **Research Question 4**

This question asked: What professional development opportunities have teachers had in regards to teaching reading in a diverse classroom? Participants were asked to list the number and type of professional development activities they had engaged as related to culturally responsive teaching and/or teaching reading. Results showed that more teachers (61.5%) had engaged in professional development activities related to cultural responsiveness than in teaching reading (30.7%); see Table 4. Three teachers admitted that they had not engaged in any professional development activities that involved culturally responsive teaching or teaching reading. It is not known if these teachers did not want to participate in professional development of this nature or no courses were available or convenient for these teachers to participate. Only three teachers indicated that they had engaged in professional development activities that focused on both culturally responsive teaching and teaching reading.

### Research Question 5 and the Hypothesis

This question asked: Is there a relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT? In order to respond to this research question, correlational analysis was needed. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients were calculated using the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS). The probability level of .05 was used to determine if a relationship was significant or not. As previously stated, teachers' expectations were measured with the Teachers' Expectations Survey (Regalla, 2013), pedagogy was measured by classroom observations, and the scores of the students in reading were obtained from the State Department of Education (2013).

The only significant relationships that were revealed that were relevant to research question five were:

1. Teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their students and the percentage of middle school students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who met the standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $r = .86$ ,  $p = .02$ . Results showed that 52% of the 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 66.1% of the 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and 52.1% of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders met the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading. As teachers' expectations about their students' academic potential increased, so did the percentage of students who met the state standards on the CRCT in Reading; see Table 9.
2. Teachers expectations about the academic potential of their students and the percentage of middle school students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who exceeded the standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $r = .797$ ,  $p = .05$ . Results

showed that 46.2% of the 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 27.7% of the 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and 43.7% of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders exceeded the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading; see Table 8.

3. Teacher expectations about the academic ability of their students and the percentage of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who exceeded the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $r = -.926$ ,  $p < .01$  (see Table 9).

Table 9

*Significant Correlations Revealed for Teachers' Expectations and Middle School Students' CRCT Scores in Reading*

		Correlations
Students Met		Expectations about Academic Potential
	Pearson Correlation	.868
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.02
	N	6
Students Exceeded		Expectations about Academic Potential
	Pearson Correlation	.797
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.05
	N	6
Students Exceeded		Expectations about Academic Ability
	Pearson Correlation	-.926
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.01
	N	6

The only significant relationships observed were those between teachers' expectations and middle school students' scores on the CRCT in Reading. There was no significant correlation revealed between pedagogy (as measured by classroom observations made by me). Since there was only one significant correlation between the three variables

(i.e., expectations, pedagogy, and CRCT scores in Reading) the null hypothesis was not rejected. It was determined that there was only partial support for the hypothesis.

### Supplemental Analysis

Given the importance this study places on professional development opportunities, it was determined that there was a need to see if there was an effect of professional development opportunities and any of the key variables. As seen in Table 10, there was a significant relationship between professional development opportunities (i.e., independent variable) and the percentage of students who did not meet the standards for their grade on the CRCT in Reading,  $F(1,3) = 63.00, p < .02$ .

Table 10

*The Relationship between Teachers' Professional Development Opportunities and Students' Scores on the CRCT in Reading*

		ANOVA			
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Sig Students Did Not Meet Standards .01	Between Group	52.920	1	52.920	63.000
	Within Groups	1.680	2	.840	
	Total	54.6000	3		

The next section of this research will present a summary of the study, conclusions made as a result of the findings obtained from the investigation, and offer recommendations based on the findings obtained from the research.

## Section 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study was designed to address a persistent problem in education. The problem is that despite the federal mandate of NCLB, state requirements, research, and numerous school reforms, the achievement gap continues to persist between African American and European American students (NCLB, 2002). There is a difference in student outcomes for students of color (e.g., African American, Latino) and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Frye & Vogt, 2010; Warren, 2013b). Therefore, the purpose of the research was to examine the relationship between teachers' expectations and the academic achievement levels of African American middle school students. In addition, there were two major characteristics of a school's culture of interest to this study: (a) expectations of the teachers, and (b) pedagogy observed in the classroom. Researchers (Gay, 2010; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013) indicated that these two elements influenced professional development opportunities provided to the teachers.

The goals of this study were to provide (a) awareness about the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement in reading, and (b) a framework to encourage dialogue and the implementation of reforms at the local level to form culturally proficient schools that will incorporate professional development for culturally responsive teaching. This research, like other research on the subject (Gay, 2013; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Warren, 2013a), is a call to action for the collaborative efforts of the academic and legislative communities. There may be a need for the implementation and incorporation of professional development that mirrors the needs of the students at

this site, and other sites with similar student and teacher demographics, while positively affecting student achievement on the standardized tests in reading.

I used a mixed methods approach to examine the expectations of the teachers, pedagogical behaviors, and the academic achievement of the students in the subject area of reading at the research site. The mixed methods approach presents the best of both worlds of research. As such, the design enabled the researcher to make an in-depth examination of teachers' expectations as it relates to the achievement of African American middle school students in reading, and enabled appropriate comparisons between favorable and unfavorable expectations. I used surveys, observations, and archival data (i.e., reading scores from the CRCT) to assess the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement.

Four qualitative research questions and one quantitative research question guided the development and implementation of the current research. There was also one hypothesis tested as related to the fifth research questions. These research questions were: (1) What are teachers' expectations about the academic ability of African American middle school students in reading? (2) What are the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of African American middle school students in reading? (3) What pedagogy do teachers use in the classroom for their African American middle school students in regards to reading achievement as measured by the CRCT? (4) What professional development opportunities have teachers had in regards to teaching reading in a diverse classroom? And (5) Is there a relationship between teacher expectations, pedagogy, and the

scores of African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT? The hypotheses (i.e., null and alternative) that were tested were:

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no significant relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American, middle school students in reading on the CRCT.

*H<sub>1</sub>*: There is a significant relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American, middle school students in reading on the CRCT.

Data were collected in three ways. First, all of the teachers who taught reading in the middle school ( $n = 12$ ) were given an opportunity to complete the teachers' expectation survey. The questionnaire used for this study was an adaption of the teachers' expectation survey used by Regalla (2013). This questionnaire consisted of nine items. Secondly, the researcher also randomly selected middle school teachers (i.e., two per grade level) to give them an opportunity to participate in two thirty-minute classroom observations. This data collection technique was used to identify the pedagogy used in the classrooms. Specifically, the strategies teachers' used to promote student growth and learning were observed (Van Tassel-Baska, 2009; Van Tassel-Baska & Wood, 2010; VanTassel-Baska, Quek, & Feng, 2007). Data were recorded as related to three aspects of the teachers' behaviors: (1) curriculum planning and delivery, (2) differentiated teaching behaviors, and (3) accommodations for individual differences. The third data collection technique used for this study was archival data that provided student outcomes from the state mandated Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) in the subject area of Reading.

The CRCT measures how well students acquire the skills and knowledge as related to the State Performance Standards (State Department of Education, 2009, 2013). The focus here was with the determination of whether or not there was a relationship between teachers' expectations and CRCT scores in reading. The independent variable was the teachers' expectations and the dependent variable was the student' level of performance of the CRCT score in reading.

Background information was collected from the sample. The sample can be described as 19 teachers, the majority of whom were female (78.9%) and African American (63.2%). The mean age of the teachers in this sample was 42.2 years, the youngest being 28 and the oldest was 55 years of age. Furthermore, the average number of years teachers had taught was 13.68 years and the average number of years they had taught in the school that served as the setting for this study was 7.63 years. Finally, most of the teachers had a master's degree (36.8%) or above (i.e., educational specialist, 26.3%, EdD 10.5%). These teachers taught sixth through eighth grade students.

A summary of the results from three key variables is needed here. Information about the type and number of professional development activities teachers had engaged was also an important variable for this study. Patterns from the findings showed that the majority of the teachers ( $n = 9$  or 69.2%) reported that they had engaged in professional development activities that involved being culturally responsive to their students or teaching reading. Out of the nine teachers who indicated that they had engaged in professional development activities in cultural diversity or teaching reading, three teachers



(33.3%) reported that they had engaged in professional development activities that involved both cultural diversity and teaching reading.

In terms of teachers' expectations about their students' academic ability, results showed that teachers' expectations about their students' academic ability ranged from ratings of 14 to 24 with a mean level of 18.94. Teachers' responses showed that teachers believed that their students were capable of at least average academic performance in reading (question #2),  $M = 4.47$  on a five point scale, and capable of learning the material presented in class (i.e., question #3),  $M = 4.47$ ; that is, relatively high expectations in these two areas; see Table 4. However, teachers' responses indicated that they do not believe (i.e., relatively low expectations) their students: (a) were motivated to do their best in class (i.e., question #5),  $M = 3.21$ , (b) work very hard to do their best in class (i.e., question #6),  $M = 3.26$ , and (c) think that education is important (i.e., question #8),  $M = 3.5$ . Overall, patterns from the participants' responses suggest that the teachers hold both favorable and unfavorable expectations about their students.

Observations in the classroom showed that the majority (66.6% or  $n = 8$ ) of the teachers were rated as proficient in terms of organization/implementation of instructional plans. This means when I observed the teachers they showed evidence demonstrated and integration showing significant evidence of four or more examples. Finally, the researcher observed most (41.7% or  $n = 5$ ) of the teachers as proficient in the use of technology resources, some were observed to be operational (33.3% or  $n = 4$ ), and a few were observed to be emerging (25% or  $n = 3$ ). Overall, there were three major findings from the data collected as related to the pedagogy in the teachers' classrooms. First, the pedagogy

I observed in the teachers' classrooms as related to curriculum planning and delivery was proficient. Secondly, in terms of differentiated teaching behaviors, it seems that some teachers are more proficient than others are. For example, in two areas (i.e., differentiation evident by process and differentiation evident by assessment), the teachers were rated as operational, and in the third area they were rated as proficient (i.e., differentiation evident by content). Finally, the accommodation for individual differences results indicated that the teachers were proficient in three areas (i.e., evidence of learning modalities, evidence of learning styles, and evidence of global awareness). Based on the observations, it appears that there is room for growth in the evidence of knowledge of cultural/ethnic backgrounds.

Specific responses to each research question and hypothesis were constructed based on the results from the study. The first research question asked; What are teacher's expectations about the academic ability of African American middle school students in reading? Teachers' responses showed that teachers believed that their students were capable of at least average academic performance in reading, and that most of their students are capable of learning the material presented in class. Conversely, the teachers' tended to disagree or feel neutral toward the statements that said their students: (a) were motivated to do their best in class, (b) work very hard to do their best in class, and (c) think that education is important. Findings revealed that the teachers' expectations about their students' academic ability were both favorable and unfavorable expectations.

The second research question was: What are the teachers' expectations about the academic potential of African American middle school students in reading? Results indi-

cated that the majority of the teachers tended to agree or strongly agree with the statement that their students would perform academically as well as their European American students. Similarly, most of the teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the statement about their belief that their students have the skills necessary to attain success in the school. Finally, it was noted that the majority of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement: I expect that many of these students will quit school in high school (see Table 5). Therefore, the response to this statement is that the teachers had relatively high (i.e., favorable) expectations about their students' academic potential. When teachers were given an opportunity to provide additional comments, they expressed their beliefs about factors that would have a positive impact on student outcomes: (1) information in the classroom should be culturally relevant for the students, (2) individual differences need to be acknowledged, and (3) a supportive learning environment. Teachers also reported that there were individual differences of students needed to be acknowledged.

The third research question was: What pedagogy do teachers use in the classroom of their African American middle school students? In terms of the pedagogy used in the classroom, I made three major observations. It was determined that the pedagogy observed in the teachers' classrooms as related to curriculum planning and delivery was proficient. Observations of differentiated teaching behaviors revealed that some teachers were more proficient than others were. For example, in two areas (i.e., differentiation evident by both process and assessment), the teachers were rated as operational, and in the third area they were rated as proficient (i.e., differentiation evident by content). Teachers

were observed to be proficient in accommodation for individual differences (i.e., evidence of learning modalities, evidence of learning styles, and evidence of global awareness). However, based on the observations, there appears to be room for growth in the evidence of knowledge of cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Support for these findings was obtained from the open-ended comments made by the teachers. As previously indicated, the teachers reported that there were individual differences and other factors that would influence student outcomes. The implication here is that teachers would need to know about the differences and at the same time become knowledgeable about various strategies that would serve to address the needs of all of their students.

Research question four asked: What professional development opportunities have teachers had in regards to teaching reading in a diverse classroom? Findings showed that more teachers (61.5%) had engaged in professional development activities related to cultural responsiveness than in teaching reading (30.7%). Three teachers admitted that they had not engaged in any professional development activities that involved culturally responsive teaching or teaching reading. Only three teachers indicated that they had engaged in professional development activities that focused on both culturally responsive teaching and teaching reading.

Finally, the fifth research question asked: Is there a relationship between teachers' expectations, pedagogy, and the scores of African American middle school students in reading on the CRCT? In order to respond to this research question, correlational analyses were performed. Significant relationships revealed that were related to this research question were as follows: (a) Teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their

students and the percentage of middle school students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who met the standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $r = .86, p = .02$ . Results showed that 52% of the 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 66.1% of the 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and 52.1% of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders met the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading. The relationship was positive; that is, as teachers' expectations about their students' academic potential increased, so did the percentage of students who met the state standards on the CRCT in Reading. (b) Teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their students and the percentage of middle school students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who exceeded the standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $r = .797, p = .05$ . Results showed that 46.2% of the 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 27.7% of the 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and 43.7% of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders exceeded the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading. And, (c) Teacher expectations about the academic ability of their students and the percentage of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who exceeded the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $r = -.926, p < .01$ . Patterns from the findings showed that as the teachers' expectations about the academic ability of their students increased, so did the percentage of students who exceeded the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading.

The significant relationships observed were those between teachers' expectations and middle school students' scores on the CRCT in Reading. There was no significant correlation revealed between pedagogy (as measured by classroom observations made by the researcher) and students' performance on the CRCT in Reading. Since there was only one significant correlation between the three variables (i.e., expectations, pedagogy, and

CRCT scores in Reading) the null hypothesis was not rejected. It was determined that there was only partial support for the hypothesis.

Engagement in professional development activities was viewed as important for the positive student outcomes. As such, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed with professional development opportunities as the independent variable and students' scores on the CRCT in reading. The goal was to determine if professional development opportunities affected any of the key variables. There was a significant relationship between professional development opportunities and the percentage of students who did not meet the standards for their grade on the CRCT in reading. The more exposure teachers had in professional development activities, the fewer the number of students who did not meet the standards on the CRCT in reading ( $p < .02$ ).

### **Conclusions**

There are two aspects of a school's culture of interest to this study: (a) expectations of the teachers, and (b) pedagogy observed in the classroom. Some researchers have indicated that these two elements influenced professional development opportunities provided to the teachers (Gay, 2010; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013). The goal of this study was to provide: (a) awareness about the relationship between teachers' expectations and academic achievement in reading, and (b) a framework to encourage dialogue and the implementation of reforms at the local level to form culturally proficient schools that will incorporate professional development for culturally responsive teaching. This research and other related investigations (e.g. Gay, 2013; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Warren, 2013a) support a call to action for the collaborative efforts of the academic and legislative

communities for the implementation and incorporation of professional development that mirrors the needs of the students in schools across the nation. The ultimate goal would be to affect positive change in student achievement, particularly in the subject area of reading.

Results obtained from this study were supportive of conclusions made in previous research. For example, according to VanTassel-Baska et al (2007), teachers who are effective in the classroom are able to thoroughly organize and plan for classroom instruction. Furthermore, these researchers stated that when teachers are well organized and structure their instruction activities, they are most likely guided by high expectations for their students. At the same time VanTassel-Baska and colleagues stated that teachers are then able to communicate to their students about the “importance of learning” (p. 5).

Similarly, past research has also provided evidence that students do not learn the same way, nor are all students ready or able to learn (Van Tassel-Baska & Wood, 2010; VanTassel-Baska, Quek, & Feng, 2007). Findings from this study showed that teachers themselves reported that there were individual differences that they needed to be aware of and become knowledgeable in strategies that would help all of their students learn. It was concluded that, it is important for teachers to utilize different instructional strategies that would respond to the needs of the students.

Findings from this study also led to the conclusion, consistent with past research, that teachers’ expectations about their students are critical for the success of the students. Just as classic and current research has shown, if teachers believe that their students have the ability and the potential needed to succeed academically, then the students are more

likely to attain positive student outcomes (Baron, Branscombe, & Byrne, 2013; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1967). While teachers in this study had both favorable expectations about their students' ability to attain at least average academic performance, they were more likely to disagree, or feel neutral about statements that asked about their motivation to achieve and about their students' belief that education was important. Teachers had relatively high (i.e., favorable) expectations about their students' academic potential. When teachers were given an opportunity to provide additional comments, they expressed their beliefs about other factors that would influence student learning: (a) information in the classroom should be culturally relevant for the students, (b) individual differences need to be acknowledged, and (c) a supportive learning environment. Teachers also reported that there were individual differences that needed to be acknowledged.

Conclusions made about the teachers' pedagogy observed in the classroom by the researcher were: (a) as related to curriculum planning and delivery, teachers were proficient, (b) observations of differentiated teaching behaviors revealed that some teachers were more proficient than others, and (c) teachers were observed to be proficient in accommodation for individual differences (i.e., evidence of learning modalities, evidence of learning styles, and evidence of global awareness). However, based on my observations, there appears to be room for growth in the evidence of knowledge of cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Support for these findings obtained from the open-ended comments made by the teachers. Teachers reported that there were individual differences and other factors that would influence student outcomes. The implication here is that teachers would need



to know about the differences and at the same time become knowledgeable about various instructional strategies that would respond to the needs of all of their students.

Teachers in this sample had engaged in more professional development activities related to cultural responsiveness than in teaching reading (30.7%). Three teachers admitted that they had not engaged in any professional development activities that involved culturally responsive teaching or teaching reading. Three teachers indicated that they had engaged in professional development activities that focused on both culturally responsive teaching and teaching reading. Finally, it was concluded that there was a significant relationship between teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their students and the percentage of middle school students in the 2012-2013 Academic Year. Significant relationships revealed that were related to this research question were as follows:

1. Teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their students and the percentage of middle school students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who met the standards on the CRCT in reading,  $p = .02$ . As teachers' expectations about their students' academic potential increased, so did the percentage of students who met the state standards on the CRCT in reading

2. Teachers' expectations about the academic potential of their students and the percentage of middle school students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who exceeded the standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $p = .05$ ;

3. Teacher expectations about the academic ability of their students and the percentage of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the school for the 2012-2013 academic year who exceeded the state's standards on the CRCT in Reading,  $p < .01$ .

Since there was, only one significant relationship observed between teachers' expectations and middle school students' scores on the CRCT in Reading, and no significant correlations revealed between pedagogy and students' performance on the CRCT in Reading, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The specific hypothesis asked if there were significant relationships between three variables (i.e., expectations, pedagogy, and CRCT scores in Reading). The conclusion was there was only partial support for the hypothesis. The next part of this section will present and discuss the recommendations that were made because of the findings obtained in this study.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations related to implications for social change, future studies, and pedagogy is presented in this section. First, Mandela (1994) stated, "Judge me by my intentions, not my circumstances" (p.23). Another relevant conclusion Mandela made was that "Education is the most powerful weapon on which you can use to change the world" (p. 32). Mandela, along with other educators and policy makers, recognized well over 50 years ago that all students deserved an opportunity to attain a quality education. For example, over 45 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in April 1965.

The ESEA law was designed to improve the academic outcomes of economically disadvantaged students and students of color. Today this piece of legislation is known as NCLB. The legislation had originally allocated resources to help ensure that disadvantaged students and students of color had access to a quality public education (ESEA, 1965 section 201.) Even though some gains have been made legislative initiatives have

not served to resolve the discrepancy in achievement between students of color and White students. This study was designed to obtain information from teachers about factors that would lead to improved student outcomes for American students. I recommend more collaboration between educators, researchers, and educational policy makers that would perpetuate success for all schools (i.e., students and teachers) across the United States.

Research supports the theory of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and that high expectations bring about positive academic outcomes (Gay, 2010). I recommend that schools implement ongoing opportunities for discussion and collaboration on the subject of culturally responsive teaching. The Southern Poverty Law Center (2014) has designed programs to address these issues. The Center develops leadership teams to participate in reviews of information and research findings. Discussions and resolutions are developed and shared with all who care to listen. In addition, it is recommended that the schools participate in this process and those teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in the community are included in these discussions. To help facilitate the process of collaboration and participation, I have included a suggested reading list in the appendices (see Appendix D).

High expectations from teachers and significant others in the lives of the children have been shown to have a positive effect on the educational outcomes of students. Therefore, it is necessary that we ensure that all educators become aware of their expectations, which they do communicate to the students. Teachers should hold high expectations for all students. Not all students are excellent students (i.e., students who earn A's),

however all students should be expected to perform at their highest level (i.e., maximize their potential). My hope is that information from this study would serve as an agent for change in school districts to expand and improve the quality of education afforded to all students in today's diverse classrooms. Similar to the quote Mr. Mandela made earlier was one made by Dr. Martin Luther King "[people should]...not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (p. 53). Let our expectations be bound by our belief in our expectations for excellence. Let us become culturally responsive in all we do, so that we encourage the learners to dream and build dreams for the future.

Moreover, findings from this study are important to all stakeholders in the schools in order to meet the global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Individual teachers, administrators, principals, district leaders, professional organizations, school boards, colleges, and universities may use these data to implement and support systematic pre-service and professional development opportunities and conferences based on the perception and expectations we, as educators, have for children in our schools. It is important that we pay attention to the data that reflects the significant relationship between teachers' expectations and the performance outcome of students. It is recommended that the information and results from this study be presented to the entire faculty and staff at the school. Attendees should be divided into small groups (perhaps by departments) in an open forum for discussion. To facilitate discussions, I suggest a guiding question, such as, "How can this information increase student outcomes in my (teacher's) individual classes?" Other actions that should be taken and questions that may be asked include, but are not limited to:

1. Review your own cultural beliefs and behaviors so you can broaden your cultural responsiveness to other students' cultures.
2. Understand the impact of culture on individuals and systems and discuss why it matters.
3. Develop a diversity perspective, that is, understand the developmental process of becoming a culturally responsive educator.
4. Understand the importance of a culturally responsive perspective and pedagogy.
5. Understand what happens when we are NOT culturally responsive.

In addition, the Southern Poverty Law Center has curricula, literature, and videos for schools to utilize for anti-bias curriculum where teachers integrate the knowledge into individual classrooms. The center also offers professional development in the do's and don'ts of teaching Black history, as well as about the school climate, classroom strategies and reflective teaching (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014). In order to meet the growing global challenges, as a nation, continue to have the highest expectations for all of our students.

In terms of recommendations for future studies, it is recommended that researchers continue to do longitudinal studies on the performance outcomes of students and the expectations teachers have for students on the local site levels and districts. Additionally, studies are needed to examine teacher expectations so that they become cognizant of the expectations they hold for their students. As I reflect upon the findings from this study, I re-examined my own personal ideas and values. I believed that many teachers had low expectations of their students. However, after this study I find that it is not just the low

expectations of outcomes, but expectations concerning potential, self-efficacy of students held by teachers that are critical to the success of students. These additional concerns about the expectations of the students need to be addressed. If students do not believe that they can achieve, then they will not do so (Baron et al., 2013).

Additional research is also needed on the expectations teachers hold for other ethnic groups as well as gender. This would lead to the need for more research on cultural and social values that could influence the education of the students. I question whether teachers were effectively teaching reading in the subject areas. However, I found that teachers were effectively teaching reading and that they should continue to incorporate reading skills with content area instructional strategies. My beliefs have changed because of this study about the expectations of teachers who do have an impact on the performance outcome of students, but not about the expectations students hold. As an educator, I believe I have an impact on individual performance outcomes, and that the persistent achievement gap may be impacted by self-esteem or self-efficacy of both students and teachers.

Because of these deliberations, my message to all stakeholders in the schools (i.e., parents, students, teachers, administrators, school boards, officials in the state and federal departments of education) is we need to look at the individual needs of the students we teach. In order to teach effectively, we need to continue to gather data on performance outcomes of both teachers and students as well as the district to analyze the achievement gap. Attention should be given to race or ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic levels. We cannot continue to ignore these variables nor should we silence the conversations that

may be difficult to hold because the status of education in the United States is in jeopardy. Conversations are needed to foster the courage that will be needed to bring about positive change, and the education for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic levels. As mentioned previously, there also a need to discuss issues related to self-esteem and self-efficacy. Educators need to use the information that has been garnered from research. There has to be a connection between what we know and what we do. We are not using all of the knowledge that is available. If earnest efforts are made, the nation we will once again be a nation where students are prepared to attain success, and that their futures, and the future of the nation, will be unlimited.

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## Appendix A:

## Teachers' Data Sheet: Demographics and Survey

**Part A**

Before you begin, would you please provide the following information? This information will be used to describe the sample of the study. Please do not sign your name.

Sex: Male \_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Race/Ethnicity

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of years teaching \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years teaching in this school

\_\_\_\_\_

How many schools have you worked prior to teaching at this school?

\_\_\_\_\_

Highest degree obtained \_\_\_\_\_ What grade do you

teach? \_\_\_\_\_

What content area do you teach?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please list how many and the type of professional development activities that you have engaged regarding culturally responsive teaching and/or Reading.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part B**

Please answer the following questions about African-American students you have taught. Please refer only to this group of students when answering the questions.

**Please use the scale below to respond to each of the following items. You can place an X in the appropriate space to indicate your response.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

- I believe that the students will perform academically as well as their Caucasian American peers.  
Strongly Agree\_\_ Agree\_\_ Neither Agree nor Disagree\_\_ Disagree\_\_  
Strongly Disagree\_\_
- I believe that these students are capable of at least average academic performance in reading.  
Strongly Agree\_\_ Agree\_\_ Neither Agree nor Disagree\_\_ Disagree\_\_  
Strongly Disagree\_\_
- Most of these students are capable of learning the material presented in class.  
Strongly Agree\_\_ Agree\_\_ Neither Agree nor Disagree\_\_ Disagree\_\_  
Strongly Disagree\_\_
- I believe that these students have the skills necessary to be successful in school.  
Strongly Agree\_\_ Agree\_\_ Neither Agree nor Disagree\_\_ Disagree\_\_  
Strongly Disagree\_\_
- I believe that the students are motivated to do their best in class.  
Strongly Agree\_\_ Agree\_\_ Neither Agree nor Disagree\_\_ Disagree\_\_  
Strongly Disagree\_\_
- I believe that most of these students work very hard to do their best in class.  
Strongly Agree\_\_ Agree\_\_ Neither Agree nor Disagree\_\_ Disagree\_\_  
Strongly Disagree\_\_
- I expect that many of these students will quit school in high school.  
Strongly Agree\_\_ Agree\_\_ Neither Agree nor Disagree\_\_ Disagree\_\_  
Strongly Disagree\_\_
- I believe that these students think that education is very important.



## Appendix B: Teachers' Consent Form

Dear Teachers:

Your presence indicates your interest and agreement to participate in this study that was explained to you in a recent staff meeting. You are being asked to participate in the study because you teach in this middle school. The study that will be conducted to obtain information about teachers' expectations, professional development, and student achievement of African American Middle School Students. The purpose of this study will be to examine and better understand the issues surrounding the academic performance of African American middle school students.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. You will be free to opt out of the study or withdraw from this study at any time without any penalties. Information collected in this study will be confidential and no information will be collected that could be used to identify you as an individual. You will be assigned a numerical code and will be referred to by that number throughout the duration of the study (RP 001). As required by ethical practices in research for human participants, no information will be revealed about you as an individual unless required by law.

You will be asked to complete a data sheet (i.e., demographics and survey) that will not require more than 15 minutes of your time. After you have completed the data sheet you will be able to anonymously return them to me in a secure envelope. You may also be asked to participate in two classroom observations. The researcher will record information about the pedagogy you use in the classroom. Observations are scheduled for 30 minutes each. Again, you are not obligated to participate in any aspect of this study if you do not wish to do so.

No risks are anticipated as a result of your participation in this research beyond any that you may experience as you complete your work in a regular business day. Information gathered during the course of the project will become part of the data analysis and may contribute to published research reports and presentations. This study will be important because it enables information to be collected from teachers that could be used to help identify effective strategies and professional development to bridge the achieve-

ment gap of African American middle school students. If you would like to hear about the findings of this study please let me know and I will schedule a time to meet with you.

The information you will share will be valued, just like your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me, Gloria King Lewis, if you have any questions regarding the study. My telephone number is xxx.xxxx.xxxx. Email address is XXXXXXXXX@WALDENU. Your signature on this form indicates that you understand the nature of the study, potential risks to you as a participant and how I plan to keep your identity confidential. Additional concerns can be addressed by Walden University at [IRB@waldenu.edu](mailto:IRB@waldenu.edu) or 612.312.1210. Your signature will also signify that you are 18 years or older and that you have agreed to voluntarily participate in the research that will be described to you. No compensation will be received for your participation in this study. If you would like to hear about the findings from this study, please let me know and I will schedule a meeting with you.

Please keep a copy of this consent for your records and return one to me in the envelope provided.

Walden University Approval #08-27-13-0053002 Expires 08/26/2014.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C: Suggested Bibliography

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## Appendix D: Teacher Observation Form

<b>Teacher Observation:</b> Researcher Gloria D. King Lewis									
Identification #:									
Date:			Time:						
Observation Number 1 2 3									
<b>I. Curriculum Planning and delivery</b>	<b>Emerging:</b> very little evidence demonstrated			<b>Operational:</b> evidence demonstrated two or more examples			<b>Proficient:</b> evidence demonstrated and integration showing significant evidence four or more examples:		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Circle the numerical value with 1 being the lowest</b>									
Organization/implementation of instructional plans	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
Use of technology resources	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total of I</b>									
<b>II. Differentiated Teaching Behaviors(Strategies)</b>									
Differentiation evident by process	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
Differentiation evident by content	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
Differentiation evident by assessment	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total of II</b>									
<b>III. Accommodations for Individual Differences</b>									
Evidence of learning modalities	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>



