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Case Study of an African American Community's Perspectives on Closing the Achievement Gap

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2012

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The disparity in test scores, known as the achievement gap, between African American and European American students has persisted despite research and reforms. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what African American community members in a North Carolina school district perceived as the causes of the local achievement gap and what support they believed they could offer to close the gap. The theories of cultural-historical psychology, social cognition, learned helplessness, social disorganization, and the funds of knowledge concept, guided the data collection from the 3 focus groups from the local community. Each focus group contained 6 to 7 people who were below, at, or above median income. They included members of the local African American community such as business people, parents, educators, and clergy. Open and selective data coding procedures organized data into major themes. The major themes were past school experience, parental role, and community involvement. All focus groups identified the lack of support from the African American community as the primary cause of the achievement gap. They suggested that the local African American community would develop an academic community support system. These findings informed the design of The Village Builder's Project to establish a collaborative community mentoring system that offers a team of business people mentors, academic supervisors, and elderly advisors for each student. When assigned to low performing K-12 African American students, this network of mentors has the potential to reduce the achievement gap and produce positive social change in terms of improved academic achievement of African American students in a local community.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the late Cornelius and Thelma McCall. Even though you are not here to witness this milestone, I acknowledge and appreciate all the life values that you taught me. Thank you for teaching me how to care for others by sacrificing your time and talent. With your teachings and this degree, I am equipped to serve others in order to build better tomorrows for our youth. .

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The achievement gap within public school districts across the United States is defined as a disparity of test scores between European American and African American students (Butchart, 2010; Li & Hasan, 2010; Linwood, 2010). According to the Kettering Foundation (2014), schools receive funds and resources from the public to provide a quality education for all students. However, according to standardized tests, an academic disparity exists in that European American students academically outperform African American students nationwide, regardless of the amount of financial capital a school system possesses (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Financial capital is the monetary contributions given to support education (Education Testing Services, 2004). Financial capital alone has not closed the achievement gap. This disparity is evident in the 17th largest school district in the United States and the second largest school district in North Carolina (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). North Carolina (NC) has a budget of over 7 billion dollars allocated for education to support Wake County along with all of its other districts (Department of Public Instruction, 2014). Even with a budget this large, the majority of the 2,424 schools have an achievement gap between European American and African American students (Department of Public Instruction, 2014). At the local level, in Wake County, Burney Elementary School in Garner, NC has been challenged with the achievement gap for years (Wake County Public School, 2013).

The achievement gap has been an ongoing national issue for several decades. In 2014, according to The Nation's Report Card, the achievement gap has existed since the

1970s (NCES, 2013). Since the detection of the achievement gap in the 1970s, several national efforts to promote educational equality for all students were implemented, but they have been unsuccessful in closing the gap (Educational Testing Services, 2010). These attempts derived from federal governmental officials whose role in education was minimal on state and local levels (U.S Department of Education, 2016). It is the state and the local entities' responsibilities to ensure a quality education for all students. The state and local entities' role must be clear in order to be effective in closing the gap.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act known as The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) bill was signed in 2001 by President Bush. This law was designed to hold schools more accountable for student achievement on the local level with the premise that schools were the primary source of the achievement gap (NCLB, 2002). However, if this assumption was accurate, then the nation's data report card should have reflected a decline in the gap from 2001 to 2013 (National Assessment of Education, 2014). Even though the achievement gap narrowed during the 1970s and 1980s, the inconsistency of the improvements in reading and math scores indicates that other factors are contributing to the performance deficiencies of African American students (Educational Testing Service, 2010; Leithwood, 2010). While short- term improvement took place to close the achievement gap, a consistent strategy must be explored to close the achievement gap other than federal initiatives alone.

The My Brother's Keeper initiative (2014) was designed to petition the U.S. people to take an active role in providing support to help African American boys succeed academically (White House, 2014). Whenever society does not become involved in

providing academic tools, youth struggle to attain success in life, and early indicators of their struggle may be evident in the academic realm. One group that appears to struggle because of a lack of societal tools is African American students. The struggle in their academic achievement is manifested in their poor performance on standardized tests. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2009), European American students' average scores in reading and math are at least 26 points higher than African American students. With the scores reflecting a 26-point difference, African American students are at a high risk of low academic performance, which will impact their self-worth.

In this project study, I examined the achievement gap from the local and national level through the perspective of educators, parents, and community leaders. On the local level, according to Wake County Public Schools (2013), the achievement gap is affecting students within their school district. On a national level, the Annie Casey Foundation (2014) indicated a need for greater resources to support African American students in order to close the achievement gap. This study added to the literature on what the African American community perceived as the causes of the achievement gap and what support they can offer to close the gap.

Definition of the Problem

Many U. S. schools are attempting to address the achievement gap. In this study, I examined the achievement gap in the Burney School, which is a small part of the 16th largest school district in the United States in the largest school district in North Carolina (NCES, 2012). The North Carolina End-of-Grade standardized test scores from 2001 to

2013 showed that European American students performed at a 21% higher rate than African American students in reading and math at Burney Elementary School (Wake County Public School, 2013). African American children who perform at these lower levels may experience personal issues that eventually impact their communities and society at large (Donnor & Shockley, 2010; Madyun, 2011). These issues include low self-esteem, higher dropout rates, unwanted pregnancies, and higher incidences of criminal activity (Donnor & Shockley, 2010; Madyun, 2011).

The Burney School was a local elementary Title I school that served 539 students in the 2012-2013 school year (Wake County Public School, 2013). The student population consisted of 7% American Indian, 2.0% Asian American, 16.3% African American, 14.3 % Hispanic American, 0.2 % multiracial, and 62.4 % European Americans (Wake County Public School, 2013). Within the student population, 34.4% of the students received free or reduced lunch, and 3.3% were English as a second language students (Wake County Public School, 2013). By federal government guidelines, a school can be classified and receive Title I funds by serving a high percentage of students with a low socioeconomic status in their school (Public School of North Carolina, 2016). Because of the high percentage of students with a low socioeconomic background, this elementary school received funds to provide services to serve the low performing students in an attempt to close the achievement gap and to provide educational equality for all students (Wake County Public Schools, n.d.). In addition to these funds, throughout the past 12 school years, Burney Elementary School attempted to provide intervention services such as reading and mentoring programs to close the achievement

gap between African American and European American students. From their efforts, African American students' scores improved as well as the European American students, which reflect that the gap still exists (R. Jones, personal communication, 2014).

At Burney Elementary, as illustrated below in Figure 1, on average, African American students scored 21 % points lower than their European American counterparts during the review period between 2001 to 2013 (Wake County Public School, 2013). While this is an average over a 12-year period, it demonstrates a consistent inability to achieve and maintain a reduction in the gap because the gap has been in a range from 10 to 33% (Wake County Public School, 2013). Over the last few years (08' to 12'), this trend shows a steady increase in the gap from 19% in 08' up to almost 30% in 2012 as illustrated in Figure 1 with a dotted trend line.
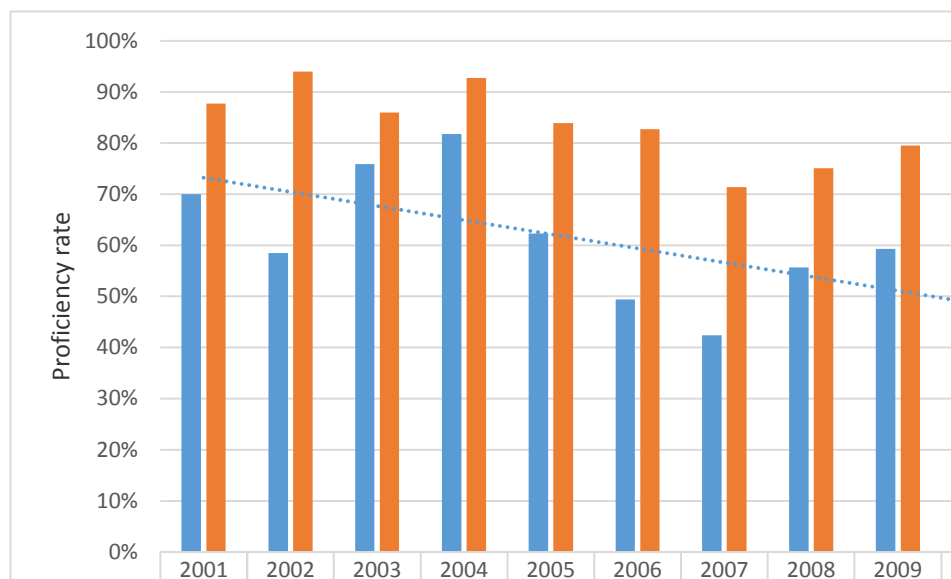
Figure 1. NC end of grade test scores for Burney Elementary.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Local level achievement gap. The achievement gap between African American students and European American students in reading proficiency can be traced back to 2001 when the state of NC started to use the North Carolina End-of-Grade testing. The NC policymakers, which consisted of a representative from the governor's office, NC Research Council, and Public School of North Carolina, developed the NC report card as a systematic method to track student and school performance (Department of Public Instruction, 2001). This report was mandated by the governor and was used in conjunction with the assessment tool of the North Carolina End-of-Grade testing (B. Bell, personal communication, 2013). The NC Report Card scores demonstrated that between 2001 and 2005, scores were increasing for European American and African American students. However in 2002, the gap was decreasing. During the 2001-02 school year, European American students at Burney Elementary performed at an 87% proficiency rate, whereas African American students performed at a 70% proficiency rate with the gap at 17% (Wake County Public Schools, 2013). During the 2002-03 school year, European American students performed at a 92% proficiency rate, and African American students performed at a 58%; thus, the gap increased to a high of 34%. The gap narrowed during the 2003-04 school year when European American students' proficiency rate was 86% and African American students' proficient rate was 75%. The gap remained the same at 11% in the school year 2004-05. However, this was because all students improved. African American students performed at an 81% proficient rate, the highest in

the past years. Meanwhile, European American students' proficient rate was a 92%; thus, the gap remained at 11%.

The disparity widened in the years of 2005 to 2013. In the 2005-06 school years, 83% of European American students performed at proficiency rate, while African American students fell to 62%, reflecting a gap of 21% in reading and math (Wake County Public Schools, 2013). In the school years of 2006-2007, European American students performed at 82.7% compared to African American students performing at 49%-revealing a 33% gap (Wake County Public School, 2013). While the NC standardized test scores continued to fall for both groups in the 2007-08 school year with European American student performance at 71%, African American student reading proficiency fell to 42%, showing the gap to be 29 % (Wake County Public School, 2013). This gap was also revealed in the 2008-2009 school years as European American students' proficiency scores were 75 % compared to African American students' reading proficiency scores at 55% (Wake County Public School, 2013). The 2010 and 2011 school year scores revealed the gap to be 18 % with African American students scoring at a level of 66% and European American students scoring at 84% (Wake County Public School, 2013). In the 2011-12 school years, European American students scored 83% on the test, while their African American counterparts scored 55% (Wake County Public School, 2013). The disparity grew by double digits to 28% (Wake County Public School, 2013).The latest data available for the 2012-2013 school year indicates that the gap continues to widen with the difference in scores increasing to approximately 30 % with African American students performing at a 20% proficiency rate compared to 49.7 % for

European American students (Wake County Public School, 2013). This issue of the achievement gap is evident in the low proficiency rate among African American students in other area local elementary schools *(*see Figure 2).

   District level achievement gap. While there are disparities in scores between European American and African American students at Burney Elementary, there are larger disparities concerning African American students' academic performance on a district level (Department of Public Instruction, 2013). According to the Raleigh Public Record (2012), in 2001, 69% of African American students in Wake County School district in Grades 3 and 8 were not proficient in reading and math (Huntsberry, 2012; Wake County Public Schools, n.d.; Figure 3). The district acknowledged the achievement gap by stating that the "Academic achievement gaps can and will be eliminated" (Strategic Plan Vision, 2012, p. 17). The District Strategic Plan for 2017 forecasted a continuing achievement gap between European Americans and African Americans on math scores (Wake County Public Schools, 2012). Within their vision, the district developed a goal that addressed "eliminating the Achievement Gap by challenging all 150,000 students at all levels" (Strategic Plan Vision, 2012, p. 25). The achievement gap was addressed within the entire district.
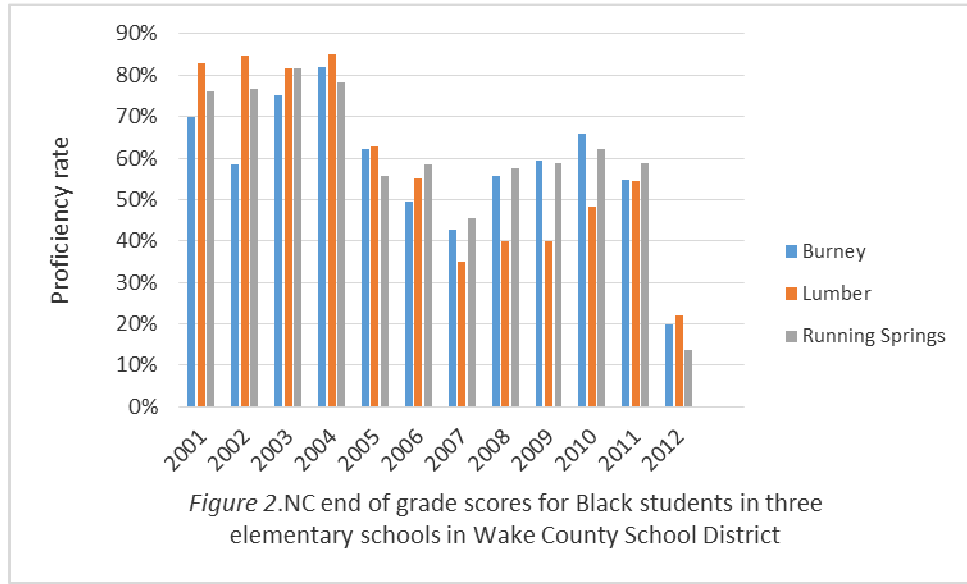
Figure 2.NC end of grade scores for Black students in three
elementary schools in Wake County School District

Figure 2. NC end of grade scores for Black students in three elementary schools

in Wake County School District.

Figure 3. NC End of Grade Testing Scores for WCPS District
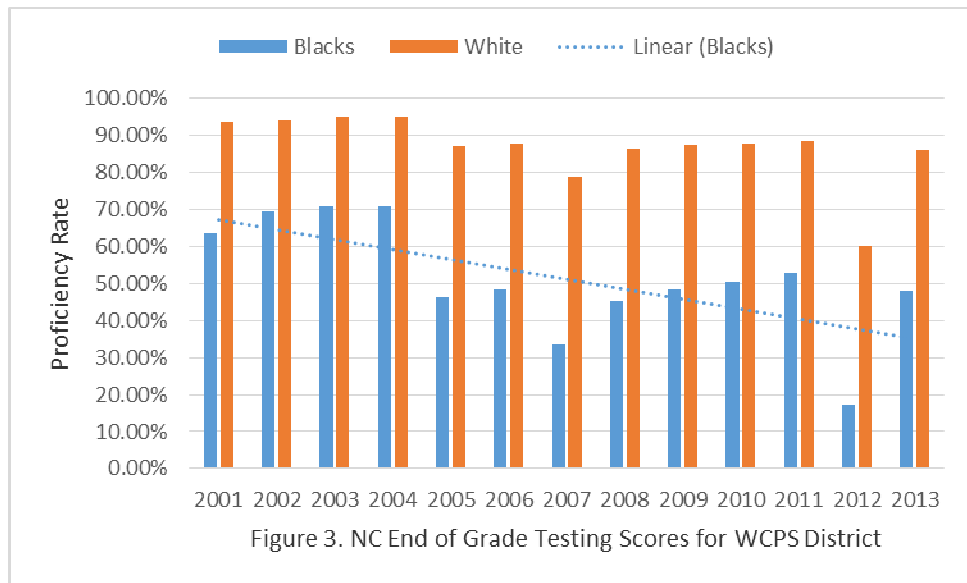
Figure 3. NC end of grade testing scores for WCPS District.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

  Historical achievement gap. Historically, the achievement gap was an unobserved problem back in the 1800s during the Reconstruction Era when unequal education existed. Butchart (2010) reported that racism and segregation between European American and African American students attributed to unequal education. Before and after the Emancipation, many African Americans attempted to set up schools for students, but violent assaults occurred that hindered African Americans from obtaining an education (Butchart, 2010). Despite their situation, African Americans did well during the 1860s and 1870s. Their performance in formal education excelled despite the conditions of racism and landlessness, which were causes of poverty and not having the necessary tools needed for academic success (Butchart, 2010). During this time, unequal education was more prevalent in the South during the 1890s under the Jim Crow legislative actions when European American schools received more funding for their students compared to African American schools. The existence of unequal education in the South was vital to this study because it provided a historical background of the region where the local problem was identified.

  In the 1900s, scholars continued to reveal the achievement gap despite historical governmental rulings and actions from the African American community (Armor, n.d.; Baker, 2002). The Supreme Court declared segregated schools to be unconstitutional and promoted equal educational opportunities for all students (B*rown v. Board of Education,* 1954; Ogbonna-Mcgruder, Armstrong, & Martin, 2011). This ruling provided necessary funds for schools to raise achievement for all students. However, the actions did not lead

to the close of the achievement gap through desegregation. Armor (n.d.) claimed that segregated schools are the cause for the achievement gap. Even though it is difficult to pinpoint one factor for the achievement gap, in this study, I sought to identify solutions to address the achievement gap from the African American community.

Gaines (2010) explored the Civil Rights Era through the collective efforts of the African American church leaders who worked to fix social injustices. Morris described the African American community as a "mighty army" during the Civil Rights Movement (as cited in Gaines, 2010). The Black church was viewed as the nucleus for Blacks to gain political, social, and financial knowledge to combat social injustices as a group (Gaines, 2010). Despite the efforts of the African American community, the Civil Rights Movement was unable to close the achievement gap. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s when scholars reported that the achievement gap had narrowed significantly (Barton & Coley, 2010). Nonetheless, the achievement gap continued into the 1990s, and in some schools, it increased during this time (Educational Testing Service, 2010). The need for further research to understand what contributed to the narrowing of the gap is essential. The purpose of this study was to explore the community involvement that was evident in the African American community during the era when the achievement gap had narrowed (Educational Testing Service, 2010).

The achievement gap is a nationally pervasive issue that former President George Bush was determined to address when he signed into law NCLB. NCLB (2001) was implemented in order to hold schools accountable for meeting the academic needs of all students on a national and local level. This act brought national awareness to the low

academic performance of African American students. Awareness about the achievement gap continues to be reflected through national reports (Annie Casey Foundation, 2014; NAEP, 2009). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) compared national data on various ethnic groups in which they developed predictors that identified causes for children of colors' low academic performances. Within this data analysis, there were 12 indicators that were examined. These 12 indicators were grouped into four areas: early childhood, education, early work experience, family resources factors, and neighborhood context. These areas are so wide ranging that it will take a concentrated group effort to tackle them (Annie Casey Foundation, 2014).

Barton (as cited in Ford, 2006) discussed 14 influences associated with closing the achievement gap. These influences included rigorous curriculum, quality of teacher performance, experience and attendance, amount of students in a classroom, technology-assisted instruction, safety of school, weight of children at birth, nutrition, parent availability and participation, reading to young children, amount of TV watching, and student mobility (Barton, as cited in Ford, 2006). These influences are useful in creating strategies to combat the achievement gap.

In this study, I focused on key causes that the African American community members can address to improve the academic performance of African American students. I examined the achievement gap at the local level through the perspective of educators, parents, and clergy. This study added to the educational field on what the African American community perceived the causes of the achievement gap to be and what support they can offer to close the gap in their local context.

Definitions

Collective efficacy: A group's shared beliefs (Bandura, 2002).

Funds of knowledge: The practical knowledge and skills learned from the family and cultural environment (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Lay knowledge: Lay knowledge is often used in the health field, which allows medical professionals to gain insight from nonprofessional (patients) experiences in order to improve health care services and to improve instructional teaching for medical students (Towle & Godolphin, 2011).

Learned helplessness: The behavior people exhibit when they have faced aversive situations that leave individuals feeling hopeless. They overlook instances to pursue change (Seligman, 1975).

Significance

This study provided a deeper understanding of how the African American community perceived the achievement gap. The results from the study can be used to develop potential solutions on how to reduce the academic performance gap that exists between African American and European American students. The African American community can establish a practical action plan using the results of this study. From the establishment of a plan, several community partners can develop into teams that can provide support to the students, their families, and the schools. This community collaboration can be dedicated to improving the academic performance of African American students. Educators and school administrators will be supported through this study by using the children's culture and community support to improve academic

performance among African American students. The results of this study can be used to validate the use of funds of knowledge and cultural relevancy teaching to close the achievement gap (Molls, 1992).

The African American community as a whole benefits from the findings of this study. After the findings are recorded and interpreted, the first of many African American Learning Expos will be held to inform the community on the findings. At the Learning Expo, African American businesses can collaborate on ways to support African American students. The students and their families will be made aware of these partnerships and how the community can be involved with their education. Having community involvement will give the African American students the support and confidence that they need to improve their academic performance.

There is societal concern for the next generation of African American students as well as the effects that the achievement gap will have on African American families. According to U.S. Commerce Department (2012), African American children will be the majority by 2018. If the achievement gap is not closed, African American youth will not be able to become valuable members of society due to increased socioeconomic problems such as unemployment rates, crime, and a high school dropout.

In this project study, I presented the local voice of the African American community in which the problem is evident. I ventured out to local businesses, community centers, and churches to conduct this study in order to gain lay knowledge about the achievement gap from the community (Peppard, 2009, p. 8). Obtaining lay knowledge from the community on educating African American children may provide

society with the tools to provide the best practices for instruction (Greenwalt, 2010).

Locally, these tools can be useful in the classroom settings, homes, communities, and the

work field. The tools would also give students time to interact with positive adults who

would support them academically.

Research Questions

Scholars have examined the causative factors for student achievement (Mandara

et al., 2010; Yeung & Conley, 2008). However, few researchers have explored the

perspectives from the African American population in which the achievement gap has the

biggest impact. Therefore, this research study provided information about the

achievement gap through the use of the qualitative approach on the ways that the African

American community wants to contribute to closing the achievement gap. As with any

qualitative study, the initial research questions allow "the researcher to focus on data

collection and allow the data collection to proceed in a systematic way" (Lodico,

Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006, p. 266). The two research questions listed below were

designed to guide the study into a reliable data collection procedure.

1. How do the African American business leaders, parents, educators, and clergy in the district study site view the causes of the achievement gap?

2. What role do African American community members want to play in closing the achievement gap?

The overarching purpose of this research was to explore the role of African American

parents who represented different socioeconomic backgrounds in the district study site

closing the achievement gap, examine their perspectives on how to close the gap, and investigate cultural-specific strategies for closing the achievement gap.

Review of the Literature

The review of literature is divided into two sections: the theoretical framework and the current research literature. In this project study, I drew from several theories and concepts to establish a theoretical framework, including the cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) of Vygotsky (1980), Bronfenbrenner's (1986) three environmental models, and Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. I also built from Steven and Martin's learned helplessness theory (Maier & Seligman, 1976), Shaw and McKay's (1969) social disorganization theory, and Moll's (1992) funds of knowledge concept.

Theoretical Foundations

Vygotsky's (1980) CHAT and Bronfenbrenner's (1986) environmental models provided the foundational pillar of the theoretical framework. Vygotsky (1980) explored the role of culture and social interaction in learning (Gredler, 2009, 2012; Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2006). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner (1986) examined three environmental models that focus on social interaction: mesosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem. The mesosystem refers to the impact that different environmental settings have on the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The exosystem focuses on the impact that the environment has on the child through the different settings that the parents are involved in, even if the child has not been exposed to that environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In addition to the other two models, the chronosystem is an examination of the impact that the environment has on a child's development over a period of time (Bronfenbrenner,

1986). These systems relate to my study because I explored the importance of the environment in the development of African American children.

Bronfenbrenner claimed that the external environment impacts learning and that there is no division between society and the individual (as cited in Hedegarrd, 2012; as cited in Roth, Radford, & LaCroix, 2012). Vygotsky argued that students learn psychological tools as signs and symbols, which are culturally specific (as cited in Kozulin, Gindis, Agelsv, & Miller, 2003). However, it is through the assistance of experience of adults as mediators where students learn how to use the psychological tools skillfully within a cultural context (Gredler, 2012). If the purpose of the tools is poorly communicated, then the learner will not get the proper understanding of the tools, and the function of the tools will be missed (Kozulin et al., 2003).

African Americans' community of parents, community leaders, ministers, elective officials, and school administrators can create meaningful societal relationships through the use of the tools in order to improve student performance (Roth et al., 2012). The African American community would have to be aware of their importance of establishing social relationships that will enhance the students' learning. In the theory of sociocultural theory, Vygotsky (1980) emphasized the importance of the role of the African American community and the cultural practices needed to close the achievement gap.

Vygotsky's CHAT shares similar beliefs with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which focuses on the social context and culture of an individual (Gauvain & Cole, 2004). Similar to Vygotsky, in the social cognitive theory, Bandura focuses on how culture plays a role in learning and child development (Bandura, 1977; Santrock, 2009). The

establishment of culture comes from being exposed to previous generational values, and its role can have an impact on how children view the world and the importance of education (Santrock, 2009). Although Vygotsky took a social constructivism psychological approach, Bandura (1976) considered a behavioral and cognitive constructs approach by stating that behavior and attitude can affect the environment.

Social cognitive theorists focus on the three human agency modes of thinking: personal, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2002). It is through the collective mode (collective efficacy) that groups such as the African American community have common beliefs that influence their future (Bandura, 2002). People who share the same collective beliefs demonstrate their beliefs by the way in which they seek to accomplish their goals collectively and how well they access their resources when actions appear to be failing (Yoon, 2011). Collective efficacy is a foundational element needed to identify the belief system of the local African American community in order to understand their response to the achievement gap and to encourage their involvement in closing the gap. The collective efficacy theory, which is the shared value within a community, and learned helplessness theory, which is a sense of powerlessness, were used to explore why African Americans have difficulties in collectively improving their environment (Ohmer, 2010; Yoon, 2011).

Focused Theoretical Frameworks

Theory of learned helplessness. In addition to understanding how African Americans value education and the achievement gap, it is important to identify if there is high or low collective efficacy within the African American community. In conjunction

with Bandura's theory of collective efficacy, in the theory of learned helplessness,

Seligman (1976) stated that when a group experiences an uncontrollable traumatic event,

they tend to experience learned helplessness. This phenomenon leaves the group feeling

hopeless and reluctant to move toward a solution because they feel incapable of making

progress (Sutherland & Singh, 2004; Yoon, 2011). Exploring the results of events such as

involuntary slavery, discrimination, or any social injustices will allow society to

understand the feelings of helplessness that African Americans feel.

In this study, I incorporated sociocultural factors of poverty and unemployment to

determine if these factors contributed to African Americans feelings of helplessness. In

most cases, the effects of learned helplessness affect the African American community;

but, the effects can be exhibited by African American students in school failures

(Sutherland et al., 2004). Ulusoy and Duy (2013) attempted to address learned

helplessness within elementary students through psycho education programs. Ulusoy and

Duy found that psycho educational teachings and optimism does not alleviate learned

helplessness. Even so, Ulusoy and Duy recommended identifying students who are

experiencing a high level of learned helplessness and to provide intervention to overcome

this phenomenon. With regards to this key theory of learned helplessness, I identified

areas within the African American community that produce helplessness and developed

strategies to overcome them.

Theory of social disorganization. Similar to learned helplessness, Shaw and

McKay (1969) claimed in their theory of social disorganization that factors of poverty

and unemployment contribute to community problems resulting in negative outcomes

that impact student performance, such as crime, a lack of societal ties, and cultural division within the community. Social disorganization theorists identify areas that plague the African American community. Shaw and McKay discussed four interconnecting factors that contribute to social disorganization theory, which are family structure, high domestic movement, cultural diversity, and financial delinquency. Three out of the four interconnected factors are also listed in the Race for Results (2014) report as part of their 12 factors that influence the success of students and which also contribute to the achievement gap. The examiners' findings indicates community has the potential to influences academic outcomes (Madyun, 2011). The social disorganization theory is one tool that was used to analyze the achievement gap from the African American parents' perspective of the issue.

Concept: Funds of knowledge. In the fund of knowledge, Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) explored cultural practices within the home in regards to learning. Moll et al. recommended applying cultural teaching into the school setting to improve academics for minority students. Moll et al. argued that funds of knowledge are practical cultural knowledge and skills developed from household or community environment.

In a study using the funds of knowledge research conducted within the Hispanic American population in Arizona, Moll et al. (1992) was able to bridge the gap between parents and teachers on how to incorporate cultural household strategies in order to teach "role-like instruction" (p. 132). This concept, or the lack of it, along with the other four theories, support the need to investigate the role that the African American community plays in closing the achievement gap. This concept of the funds of knowledge can be

instrumental in developing methods that the African American community can incorporate as practical strategies to improve academic performance.

Summary. Funds of knowledge, learned helplessness, and social disorganization all shaped the questions of this study, and of the project that was shaped by it. When combining the three theories that focus on the involvement of external environments, the African American community can understand how valuable their beliefs and actions can be in working together to close the achievement gap.

Thematic Literature Review

The literature section is an exploration of past research on the problem of closing the achievement gap. The exploration on the topic of the achievement gap was conducted through accessing the Walden's library database. Key terms such *achievement gap, African American students, causes,* and *factors* were used to identify literature through using the Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Research Complete, ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, SAGE and Thoreau databases on the achievement gap. Race for Results mentioned 12 factors that are needed to influence a child's success (as cited in Annie Casey Foundation, 2014). Out of the 12 factors, six factors are based on external environmental factors. There have been many studies on the achievement gap that have explored these factors, but they have offered limited results or no results at all. Within this literature review, I explored and categorized studies pertaining to four external influences to the achievement gap: finances, parental support/involvement, parental beliefs, and parental level of education.

Financial Factors

Yeung and Conley (2008) examined the socioeconomic status of the parents and its effect on student achievement. While looking at the variation of wealth that African American families possess as compared to European American families, they discovered that the first 3 years of a child's schooling can be affected by a lack of wealth. Roy and Raver (2014) discovered similar findings on the effects of exposure to financial delinquent risks, such as single parent home, domestic crowding, and life stressors. However, Roy and Raver concluded that parents with more money were less likely to have financial stress, which can affect the parenting behaviors of preschool families.

Other researchers also explored the parental factor pertaining to wealth. Mandara, Varner, Greene, and Richman (2009) discovered that African American families who achieved higher education, wealth, and prestigious jobs coupled with school-oriented parenting tended to have children who scored just as high academically as their European American counterparts. In order to improve academic achievement within the African American, certain improvements must be made in their culture (Mandara et al., 2009). These improvements consist of more quality education, a decrease in poverty, and more school-oriented parenting within the African American community.

The Race for Results report indicated that many African American families live in poverty, which leads to limited social and economic resources (as cited in Annie Casey Foundation, 2014). For instance, there are over 900 African Americans living below the poverty level in the southeast area of the county who do not have the additional funds to provide outside, enriched programs, which leaves the African American families at a

disadvantage in attempting to improve their children's academic success (Annie Casey Foundation, 2014). Not having these resources makes the lives of African American parents challenging and stressful. The parental stress is a factor in the academic achievement of African American students because it can affect parental self-image. Respler-Herman, Mowder, Yasik, and Shamah (2012) discovered that a reduced amount of parenting stress was related to more optimistic parenting perceptions, and extra parenting stress was related to fewer positive parenting perceptions. Respler-Herman et al. also claimed that the more parents had positive beliefs about bonding, education, and four other positive domains, the less parental stress that they experienced. This type of stress has an association with negative parental behaviors, which impact the home environment. Ways to strengthen African American family dynamics should be investigated (Mandara et al., 2009). There is a correlation between parental behavior and student achievement (Brody et al., 2004; Learning Point Associates, 2009). If parental behavior is a key factor in the academic performance of a student, it must be addressed before any other issues can be tackled. Parental involvement should be the foundation of any plan. For this reason, I provided the African American community with an opportunity to develop traditions in which the African American family can be strengthened.

Parental Support

In addition to the impact that finances and parental stress have on student academic performance, scholars identified a lack of parental support as being a factor of the achievement gap. Harris and Graves (2010) investigated the impact that transmission

of cultural resources had on reading achievement for African American elementary boys. Harris and Graves revealed a direct correlation between parental support and achievement. Harris and Graves also revealed that adults other than parents who participated in related activities did not make a positive impact on reading. The two characteristics attributed to the results encompassed a parent's ability to communicate and the time spent with the child in an educational setting. The African American community can empower parents to communicate more with their children. At the same time, the African American community will learn that their role is not a parental role, but is a supportive external influence to the child and their family. Another form of parental support is exposing a child to various educational environments or just listening to them discuss their studies on a weekly basis (Noble & Morton, 2013). Noble and Morton (2013) found that African American boys who discussed their studies two to three times a week with their parents scored higher than African American females who discussed them daily. Any amount of parental support in the African American home produces student achievement. The results from this study will inform the African American community on implementing strategies that will ignite closing the achievement gap.

While Crowe (2013) addressed the importance of parental involvement, not all scholars agree with the claim that parental association has an impact on student academic performances. Rowley and Wright (2011) conducted a quantitative study with 753 participants who completed a survey concerning school experience, parent's awareness of the child's education status, and teachers' focus on quality and the diversity of educational opportunity. Rowley and Wright concluded that the family structure had no

significance in predicting test scores. Parental academic expectations for children may only be effective for European American students (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). This qualitative study was needed to examine how culture plays a part in a student's achievement and to find out what factors the African American community believes are needed to close the achievement gap.

Parental Beliefs

Scholars revealed how parental beliefs impact the achievement gap. Joe and Davis (2009) stated that parents of African American boys have a lower expectation, which impacts their performance academically. Parental factors and academic beliefs influence the way in which African American boys perform. On the other hand, Mensah and Kiernan (2010) discovered that boys who come from mothers who had limited education, lived in poverty, and whose parents were young when having children were more disadvantaged than girls. When parents had ethnic heritage discussions with their sons, it made a significant impact on all three cognitive measures: reading, math, and general knowledge (Mensah & Kiernan, 2010). Cultural heritage can influence African American students, and it identifies where the African American community can offer support. Wood, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, and Okeke-Adeyanju (2010) showed the importance of parental attitudes on academic achievement. In their study, 67 % of African American mothers had endorsed the idea that boys were less competent academically than girls (Wood et al., 2010). Wood et al. suggested that "social stereotypes about African American boys led to biased perceptions on the part of the mother" (p. 527). It is important to conduct further investigations on whether African American parental

academic views about their children mirror parenting behaviors that produce academic achievement. A similar trait of parental behaviors would be parenting styles in which previous scholars have discovered that African American mothers also have an impact on student academic performance (Rivers, Mullis, Fortner, & Mullis, 2012). It is through positive parenting that children from poor families in the United Kingdom who had limited resources were more likely to do well in school (Kiernan & Mensah, 2011).

Parental Level of Education

The level of education that the parents have attained can be another factor that contributes to the achievement gap (Shiller, 2013). Geoffroy et al. (2010) studied children whose mother had low levels of education and found that they are at a greater risk for poor academic achievement unless they are exposed to "formal childcare" (p. 1,366). Similarly, Kirk, Lewis-Moss, Nilsen, and Colvin (2011) linked the parental education and parental expectation as factors for educational goal with African American and Hispanic American youth. Hucks (2011) conducted a qualitative study on this factor and the school experience of African American male. Huck recommended that schools establish relationships within the community where the students reside to develop a collective achievement that will improve student academic performance. In my project study, I sparked discussion in the African American community and encouraged them to take the initiative for establishing relationship with African American students. When reviewing the father educational background, Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) stated that the educational background of the father and the family structure had an impact on the academic achievement of African American boys. This finding can be valid for maternal

educational background as well. Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, and Chen (2012) concluded

that small parental level of education reduces the chances of linking to social networks in

regards to occupation and education. This can have adverse effects on parent relations to

the community, as well as parent/child relationships (Fantuzzo et al., 2012). However,

despite the level of education of the father and mother, African American parents want

their children to achieve higher level of education (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009).

African American parents with low levels of education may have challenges in

supporting and encouraging their child to a higher level of education at home. In this

study, parents get a chance to face their challenges by voicing their thoughts on how they

can contribute to their child's educational experiences at home.

Implications

The results from this study can help scholars gain some leverage that can help

close the achievement gap by examining all of the contributing issues and then gathering

community support to counteract them. Closing the gap will take a collaborative effort. In

order for any plan to work, African American community members will need to commit

to becoming involved with an action plan that will provide evidence-based strategies for

African American families. Before the problem of the achievement gap can be combated

directly, researchers first need to see if the African American community feels as though

the problems are too numerous for them to conquer. If this is the case, then additional

research should be conducted to combat the learned helplessness that appears to be

prevalent within the African American community. With regards to garnering support

from the African American participants, the initial efforts to gain this support will consist

of creating an African American Learning Expo to bring awareness to the entire community on various effective strategies for helping African American students. This expo would lead to the development of scheduled monthly sessions to ensure community commitment and to provide knowledge on how to close the achievement gap within the district study site.

Summary

The achievement gap has been an on-going problem throughout U.S. history. Despite many national efforts intended to close the achievement gap between African American and European American students, closure of the gap has not occurred. Many studies were conducted to find the cause and solution to this nationwide issue. Annie Casey Foundation (2014) reported that European American students outperform African American students at a 25% proficiency rate in reading and math scores. Researchers also revealed indicators that are needed for a child's wellbeing in which nine indicators are based upon external influences. This project study is vital for the field of education to be informed about methods that the African American community deem as solution to close the achievement gap.

In Section 1, background information on the achievement gap was presented. The problem and data were explored on a local and national level. The history of the achievement gap was also discussed in this section. The external factors contributing to the problem were examined. Finally, literature was explored to identify past attempts on closing the achievement gap, which reveals a gap in literature on what the African American community believes is the reason for the gap. Section 2 is an explanation of the

methodology in which the study was conducted in order to gain a better understanding of

the achievement gap and solutions from the African American community.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The achievement gap is the academic disparity between African American and European American students. Previous governmental actions were implemented to close the achievement gap; but, the gap still exists. In this study, the African American community vocalized their perceptions on the causes of the achievement gap and the ways that the community can close it. The research design for this project study was a qualitative case study design. The following research questions guided the selection of the qualitative case study approach:

1.   How do African American business leaders, parents, educators and clergy view the causes of the achievement gap?

2.   What role does the African American community want to play in closing the achievement gap?

These research questions were explored by using the qualitative case study research design.

Methodology and Rationale

The disparity in test scores between European American and African American students, known as the achievement gap, has been around for generations (Butchart, 2010). Federal initiatives, such NCLB, were created to work toward closing the gap (White House, 2001, 2014). However, none of the initiatives have been completely successful. The involvement of the African American community had not been investigated as a means of a solution to close the achievement gap. Because the African

American community has overcome many civil issues in the past (Gaines, 2010), I decided to gather the voices of the African American community in order to find ways to overcome the achievement gap. If the achievement gap is going to be closed, then potential resolutions from the African American community should be explored to understand how they interpret the problem and how they can be involved in reducing the gap. The best strategy for incorporating all of these different factors was to use a qualitative research design.

Qualitative research has distinct characteristics that can be used to investigate and understand a problem from the perspective of individuals or groups (Creswell, 2009). This research method is focused on how people interpret their world and their life experiences (Merriam, 2009). Using this method, researchers can observe individuals or groups in their natural environment where they feel most comfortable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The objective of this study was to understand the African American view of the achievement gap by conducting focus groups within the community. This method of gathering descriptive data allows the participants to express their feelings on the topic, which in turns allowed me to get an account of the issue from the participants' perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).These perspective were evaluated in the form of the case study design.

Rationale for Methodology and Design

Case Study Design

A qualitative case study design was selected in order to gain an accurate perception from the African American community on the achievement gap. I wished to understand the issue from their viewpoint, and case studies are the most commonly used qualitative design for researchers striving to understand the experiences of individuals or groups (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition, case studies incorporate methods that are culturally sensitive that were useful when working with the unique cultural differences within the African American community. By using culturally sensitive methods, the participants felt comfortable enough to discuss a topic that has impacted their community for years. The rationale behind discussing this topic collectively was to bring any evidence of learned helplessness and collective efficacy to the surface so that strategies to combat these issues could be developed.

A part of the process of developing these strategies was trust building. In order to establish roles and establish credibility for this study, it was necessary to begin with a foundation of trust. Sue and Sue (2009) stated that effective strategies are needed to build trust, and this can be accomplished through interpersonal methods, such as interviews and group dialogues with other African Americans. These strategies are consistent with the case study design that was selected for this study, and they were more beneficial than conducting quantitative research in addressing the research question.

Quantitative researchers rely on impersonal methods of data collection. Quantitative researchers use surveys as their primary data collection method, which are

impersonal methods. Because surveys are impersonal, they were not the best method to use in answering the research questions. To get a deeper understanding of the community view on the issue, the use of qualitative methods was the more appropriate method because qualitative case studies gather an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" as the primary focus of the design (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). The in-depth description and analysis of the problem was needed to answer the research questions, and it was obtained by the data collection from focus group interviews. These groups were pulled from several different socioeconomic levels of the study environment.

Another benefit of using qualitative case studies instead of the quantitative method is the ability that case studies give a researcher to build a rapport with the participants that is not possible with a quantitative method. This rapport is a key factor in the effectiveness of the case study design. This design was also the most compatible with my skill set. I had 7 years of professional experience in doing one-on-one and group interviews, and I also have a master's degree in mental health counseling. This research design was not only best suited to answer the research question, but it also increased the creditability and validity of me as the researcher because of the fore mentioned credentials.

Because I wished to understand what the African American community interprets as the causes for the achievement gap, implementing the qualitative case study design was needed to address the problem effectively. Even though other qualitative research designs such as ethnography and phenomenological could also be effective, they were not

chosen due to the length of time and financial resources that would be needed to conduct these types of studies.

Participants

Participants in the study were selected through the method of purposeful sampling. Merriam (2009) described the use of purposeful sampling as being instrumental to qualitative researchers who want to investigate, understand, or discover insight from selected participants from whom valuable knowledge can be acquired. The participants who were chosen for the sampling in this study were members of the African American community. They were selected by using one or more criteria within the research question. These research participants were chosen from groups that consisted of business leaders, public officials, educators, or parents. They were also selected based upon their socioeconomic level, which is a contributing factor to the achievement gap. In this study, there were three focus groups that had three different socioeconomic levels (low, middle, or high). Choosing to divide the focus groups into three socioeconomic levels gave the African American community the ability to voice their opinion from different perspectives. Other elements important to the study and highlighted in the literature review were a lack of finances, parental support, parental beliefs, and parental levels of education. All of these factors were used to create questions for the focus groups.

The three factors required to be a part of the study consisted of (a) being an African American parent who now or in the past had children in the designated school district, (b) living or working in a community where the local problem was identified, and

(c) meeting the income requirements for each focus group. Once these fundamental criteria were met, the participants were placed into subsets for group discussions. There were six participants in the first two focus groups and seven in the last group for a total of 19 participants. The number of participants was based on the recommendation of Bogdan and Biklen (2007). Bogdan and Biklen recommended that effective focus groups consist of seven to 10 participants per group. Recruiting efforts accomplished the target goal of 30 eligible participants, making it 10 per group. However, due to scheduling conflicts, the actual number of participants was 19. A group this size was ideal for building the short-term interpersonal relationships necessary for the free, uninhibited sharing of information. Corey, Corey, and Corey (2010) concluded that a small group size allows the participants to interact with each other freely and to develop a sense of group while discussing the achievement gap. The focus groups participants were recruited from two different community sites: a community center and a church.

The process of gaining access to the participants was conducted in three phases. In the initial phase, I contacted each site via e-mail about the project study. The sites chosen consisted of the town's park and recreation community center (Site 1) and a local church (Site 2). The e-mail communication provided the directors and business owner with the proposal, consent form, and a flyer for the recruiting of participants for their review. The e-mail to the church also requested permission for me to be allowed to make a brief announcement to the congregation concerning the study and to recruit participants. Once the sites agreed to participate with the recruitment and the hosting of focus groups, then a letter of cooperation was given to me from these sites.

The second phase was conducted after receiving approval from the review boards. I contacted the sites to inform them of the approval and to arrange a time and date for the beginning of the recruitment process. Once the times and dates were confirmed for each site, I commenced with the recruitment process by distributing flyers at the sites and making three announcements at the church. I went to the community center (Site 1) and handed out flyers to the parents. Recruitment was conducted at the church (Site 2) by making announcements there for 3 consecutive Sundays. Once the participants contacted me to participate in the study, then the third phase began.

During the third phase, I contacted the interested participants by phone or in person to complete the survey. The purpose of the survey was to identify potential participants who met the requirements for one of the three focus groups (Appendix A). At both sites, all interested participants went into a room to complete a written survey. While there, they were given copies of the consent and survey forms and an explanation of each of the forms. Once the survey and consent forms were completed, they were placed in a locked box for safe keeping until it was time for them to be reviewed. After all of the forms were reviewed, the selected participants were notified via phone about the date and time for their focus group. Two of the 19 participants were recruited by word of mouth and expressed an interested in participating in the study.

The selected participants were broken into three focus groups consisting of 19 people. After collecting the surveys, they were sorted by socioeconomic level (low, middle, and high). After sorting, I used a lottery system to select the ten participants for each of the three groups. Once the participants were selected, I contacted the selected

members via a phone call. In the phone call, I informed them that they were selected for the study and confirmed the date scheduled for their participation.

If the selected members were unable to attend their scheduled time, then I went back to the lottery system and selected another qualified person. If the recruiting efforts did not generate the necessary number of participants who met the study requirements, then contacting the senior pastor to acquire contact information of additional local community groups would have been executed. However, for this study the initial recruiting efforts was successful and did not warrant any additional local community groups.

Once the group members were chosen, then an effort was made to create a good researcher-subject relationship. Establishing a good researcher and participant relationship is a key component when conducting a case study. This relationship was established through the use of my counseling skills that consisted of actively listening and communicating. By establishing a relationship with the subjects at the outset of the study, I was able to use some of these same participants in the member check process at the end of the study.

It is also important to establish and maintain a researcher-participant working relationship throughout the study in order to preserve the ethical boundaries erected for the protection of the rights of the research subjects, as well as the researcher. It is vital to implement these boundaries during the infancy of the study. Ethical boundaries, such as confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm, were the foundation upon which the study was built. Each member received a verbal and written overview of the

project study that detailed the purpose and plan for the study. This written notice, known as an informed consent, also explained any risk that may occur as a result of this study. It also let them know that this study was a voluntary commitment. This informed the participants that they could cease participation at any time.

Another step that was taken to ensure that these individuals were informed of their rights was a statement concerning the importance of protecting the privacy of their responses. The protection of privacy was ensured by not using the group member's real names. Once all information was gathered, it was stored in a secure location. This information was discarded in an ethical manner after the completion of the study. These two steps were highlighted during the data collection process to ensure that the participants were aware of their rights and understood the ethical boundaries that were put in place to protect their rights.

Data Collection

The data collection process began using the qualitative method. Qualitative data by design are descriptive data, which gives vivid descriptions of the participants' responses (Merriam, 2009). The descriptive data collection process allowed me to record the personal opinions of the participants in their own words in the form of field notes, which were then transferred into workable data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This data accumulating procedure allowed for the gathering of multiple perspectives from the African American community through focus group interviews. The use of focus groups was the best approach for obtaining descriptive data in the environment. These groups allowed the African American community to voice their perceptive on the achievement

gap in a group environment. The focus groups were based on different socioeconomic levels within the African American community. One group consisted of six participants who were below the poverty level, the second group consisted of another six participants who were at the median level of income for the target area, and the last group consisted of seven participants who were above the median income level.

These focus groups not only allowed data to be collected from the African American community, but it also allowed the topic to be viewed from the different socioeconomic perspectives within that group. This new insight was an asset to the field of education because of the descriptive data collected from the various socioeconomics levels within the African American community. It allowed for the development of programs directly geared to the concerns of each segment.

Instruments

The data collected from these focus groups were in four different forms. They included the following: focus group protocol, audio taped, semi structured interview questions, and field/reflective notes. Each of the instruments that were used for collection had a unique qualifier that made it important to the efficient gathering of pertinent information. These data collection instruments were also the most appropriate methods to use because they were consistent with the qualitative tradition and assisted me in understanding the problem from the African American community perspective.

Focus group protocol. The use of the focus group protocol determined how the interview sessions were implemented and recorded (Lodico et al., 2010). The development of this group protocol was based upon a previous study from Mid-Continent

Research for Education and Learning (2008). This focus group protocol included key

instructions and was given to the participants verbally. It included information such as the

introduction and the purpose of the study. In addition to the instructions, the confidential

disclosure statement, along with their right to discontinue their participation at any time,

was discussed.

Audio taping. The session was audio taped, which was the second data collection

instrument. Taping each focus group was a vital part of obtaining and retaining the data

for reliability and validity purposes. As a novice researcher, I purchased two audio

devices that were used to record each session so that no information or insights will be

lost. An experienced media person, who previously worked in the media ministry at my

church, set up the audio recording devices for each sessions. The recording devices also

served as a mechanism to confirm that what I had recorded in my field notes was correct.

Capturing the verbal cues from the participants via this equipment was a good way to

document the participants' responses, and the information was put on a hand-out for their

review during the follow up sessions.

The participants were asked to verify the accuracy of the session on the hand-outs

to assist in the data analysis process. Transcription of the audio was conducted after the

completion of all three sessions. It was accomplished through the use of qualitative data

analysis software (Dragon Naturally Speaking) to transcribe the audio of each focus

group. Qualitative research software was initially considered to assist in the data analysis.

However, thorough transcribing the raw data myself allowed me to become more familiar

with the data.

Semi structured questions. The third data collection method consisted of nine semi structured, open-ended questions that were used during the focus group interview. These nine questions were comprised of the research question along with causes of the issue referred to in previous literature. In the event that the initial questions did not stimulate enough responses, probing questions were asked. Merriam (2009) discussed the benefits of using probing questions to help draw out additional knowledge to be learned. These semi structured questions were developed by me in order to focus on the research questions and the four contributing factors that caused the gap. These questions were revised after conducting a pilot study with four participants via e-mail. The pilot study was sent out to 10 participants; however, only four responded back. This data collection instrument was used to gather verbatim responses from each participant on his or her perceived causes of the achievement gap and to solicit his or her recommendations on how to close this gap as a community.

Field notes. The final data collection method that was used was field notes. Taking these notes during the session and writing up reflective notes immediately after the session allowed me to catalog my thoughts and impressions of everything that transpired during the group meetings. This type of data collection instrument is vital in reducing the researcher's biases and improving the validity of the study. Lodico et al. (2010) pointed out the level of awareness that reflective notes provide to a researcher. These notes reveal how researchers think and feel during the time of data collection. This instrument also assisted in ensuring accuracy in the analysis of the data (Merriam, 2009).

The overall selection of the various qualitative data collection methods allowed me to address the research questions in an effective and efficient process.

Process

The process of collecting data was comprised of three 1-hour focus groups and three 60-minute follow-up sessions with the participants. It encompassed the transcribing of every focus group session from the audio recordings. This was conducted in conjunction with transcribing the reflective notes of my thoughts and feelings during each focus group.

The focus groups were conducted in a large room within one of the largest African American church in the southeast part of the county. The room set up consisted of chairs in a circular formation in order to facilitate ease of communication for the participants and to allow me to have the ability to observe nonverbal cues. The audio equipment was set up on the table for the dual purposes of capturing the entire group and to reduce any level of intimidation that might keep those assembled from speaking freely. Sound checks were conducted on the equipment prior to the start of each focus group to ensure for the best audio quality.

Data were tracked using a method of journal and research logs. I developed a data collection journal/notebook that was used to record the demographics of the attendees (gender, age, and income level), the time the session began and ended, along with the date and the location of each session. This journal served as a method to track when, where, and who participated in each session. Merriam (2009) encouraged researchers to develop a system that will manage and track data immediately in order to avoid missing

or forgetting data. Within the journal, the data logged were included important resources that were given within the focus group. The journal also held any contact information pertaining to resources for the study. This was beneficial when analyzing the specific roles of actions that each focus group had devised. Each session had its separate data collection journal that included the interview protocol sheet, focus group interview questions, reflective field notes, coding list, and transcription from the audio tapes.

I felt confident in my ability to conduct a focus group because of past professional experience with recruiting, interviewing, and training volunteers for 5 years. I also had an educational background that includes a master's in mental health counseling. This equipped me with interviewing, observational, and field note writing skills. These skills allowed me to feel competent in working with a group and also understanding the group dynamic and process. Because a researcher is a vital instrument in a qualitative study, it was imperative that I executed these skills in an ethical manner.

Ethical consideration was implemented when selecting the candidates for the study. I was a member of the church where the study was conducted. Because I was a member of the church, selecting candidates who did not have a professional relationship with me was important because it reduced the feeling of the participants being coerced. To ensure that none of the participants felt coerced because of previous relationships, no participants were selected with whom I had a professional relationship. By doing this, I eliminated all preconceive notions that I had from professional relationships going into the study.

Data Analysis Process

The simultaneous process of collecting and analyzing data that occurs in qualitative studies is beneficial in obtaining creditable results (Creswell, 2009). Effective researchers begin the actual data analysis process after the first data collection occurs (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I incorporated four steps in the preliminary stages of data analysis.

The first step was transcribing the focus group interview audio along with field notes. This was done in order to organize the data. In analyzing the data accurately, I used DragonSpeaks, a software that assisted me with transcribing the data. This software did not take the place of handwriting and organizing data but it was used in conjunction with it. Secondly, I reviewed the interview protocol sheet and the audio-tape with the research questions to make electronic notes concerning themes, reflections, and patterns from that interview. By reviewing the first focus group then I was able to make the necessary adjustments in order to gather feedback that was geared toward answering the research questions. Thirdly, when the other two focus groups were completely transcribed, I compared the data with the first focus group data collections to the second, and a continuous comparison took place after each method of data collection. This process allowed me to identify the themes or categories and it was great way to start organizing the data simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 2009). The final preliminary step in the data analysis process was coding the information. Coding the information included organizing all the data into segments and placing them categories that are labeled in the language used by the participant. I asked myself key questions

pertaining to the data and made a list of topics into columns, and then I began the coding process (Creswell, 2009). Descriptive words were used but evolved into categories. The categories were reduced by grouping topics together that related to each other. A good way to do this was to draw lines between categories to show the inter-relationships (Creswell, 2009). The type of coding that was incorporated was the settings codes, participants' way of thinking about the achievement gap codes, process codes, strategy codes, and social structure codes.

The data were edited and sorted through to note redundancies when codes were established. The last two steps consisted of signifying the themes and codes into a narrative passage and interpreting the meaning of the data. Putting the themes into narrative passage revealed a detailed discussion of themes, direct quotes, and multiple perspectives from the interviews and from the group. Descriptive information can be displayed in a table that will convey the participant's response to the research questions. Based on the information gathered and all steps taken to analyze the data, lessons from this study can be presented as well as comparison of findings with previous literature or theories during the interpretation phase (Creswell, 2009). While interpretation is the last step in the data analysis process, it is a vital component that presents the findings in accurate and credible manner.

To ensure accurate and creditable findings in this study, I triangulated my data. The collecting of three different sources of data collection gave the study multiple ways to verify my conclusion (Lodico et al., 2010). Lodico et al. (2010) suggested using multiple data collection methods when conducting qualitative research as a means of

validating the data, known as triangulation. Historically, triangulation has been based to compare three different data collection methods for the same topic (Merriam, 2009). This study took the unique approach of triangulation by using the same data collection method from three different points of view (Guion, 2002).

The other method that was used to ensure accuracy and creditable was member checking, which is designed to recognize the discrepancies from what was actually said and what was reported from the participants' ability to review the data. The data review, also known as members check, with the participants occurred during the follow-up focus group sessions. These sessions allowed the participants to come together to review the interpretation of each session for accuracy purposes only. Each session lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the responses from the participants. During this time, the participants were given a copy of my interpretation of their responses so that they could make comments to ensure accuracy. If the interpretations were inconsistent with their actual intentions, I made the necessary changes. This form of member checking allows the participants to take part in the credibility of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2009). One of the benefits in using the member checks method was if any inconsistencies were detected, I went back to the raw data and the comments made by the participants in order to make the necessary adjustments.

Data Analysis Results

In this study, I found that the community believed that the community was not supporting students as well as they could, and that the community had a desire to provide support. To rectify this deficiency, I recommend implementing a strategic collaborative

support system. Various methods have been used to socially strengthen and motive individuals to improve their conditions (Curry & Holter, 2015; Leahy-Warren et al., 2011). However, these studies lacked input from the African American community on ways they can collaboratively support students in order improve academic performance (Washington et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015). I reviewed literature on the types of supports and created a strategic collaborative support system, the Village Builder Project (VBP). Within this literature review, several concepts were reviewed including social network, social support, motivational theory of role modeling, and social cognitive career theories. These themes were related to the findings of the study and the development of the project.

In addressing the problem of the academic disparities between European American and African American students, the case study method was selected and implemented. Merriam (2009) recommended using case studies to get an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. The phenomenon of the achievement gap was investigated by conducting three focus groups from the African American community. Responses from these focus groups were transcribed from interview data on to electronic recording devices. These data were then analyzed to identify codes, patterns, and overarching themes. Codes were established and manually processed by me in order to become more familiar with the data. Once the codes were identified, patterns were visible and themes emerged. To instill credibility, the follow-up member sessions allowed the participants to review the transcribed focus groups data for accuracy.

This case study consisted of three unique focus groups. The groups were composed of members of the local African American community and consisted of parents, educators, and/or the clergy. These participants were divided into three socioeconomic groups: Group # 20 (20K and below), Group #40 (40k to 70k), and Group # 70 (70k and above). Thirty participants were initially deemed eligible and invited (10 for each subgroup); however, everyone that was invited did not participate. There were only six individuals who attended the 20K and 40K groups respectively and seven individuals in the 70K group.

The group interviews lasted 1 hour for each group session. During each session, field notes were taken that reflected the participants' reactions as well as any biased experiences during that time. Each session was recorded using two digital audio devices that were approved by IRB. The two devices were used in an effort to avoid any loss of data due to technical difficulties. After each session, the digital devices were placed in a locked box in a secure location to ensure confidentiality.

The data on the two recorders were transcribed through the use of Dragon Speaks software. They were reviewed several times during the process for accuracy and also in an effort to become more familiar with the data. This process helped to identify themes, patterns, and relationships between the groups, as well as in the establishing of codes. The transcribing process occurred after taking a brief break in order to avoid being overwhelmed with the data. One of the advantages of using the Dragon Speaks software was the fact that it enabled me to become more familiar with the data. Hearing and repeating each participant's responses allowed for the recognition of key words and

frequent phrases. The transcription process included a numerical time code of each of the participant's responses. This code assisted in the finding of key responses faster within the raw data. After completion of the transcription process, the participants were notified and arrangements were made for the follow-up sessions.

Addressing the Problem and Research Questions

The rationale for conducting this study stemmed from addressing the disparity in test scores between African American students and their European American counterparts in Garner, North Carolina. These academic disparities, which are referred to as the achievement gap, are not only demonstrated locally in North Carolina, but are also evident nationally. To address this problem, many researchers have examined the efforts of school personnel in order to find ways to close the achievement gap (Hines & Kristsonis, 2010; Webb & Thomas, 2015). However, in this study, I explored the opinions and experiences from the perspective of the African American community. They were asked through in-depth research questions about practical solutions to this on-going problem.

Two research questions were the following:

1. How do the African American business leaders, parents, educators and clergy in the district study school site view the causes of the achievement gap?

2. What role does the African American community members want to play in closing the achievement gap?

The research questions were answered by facilitating a group discussion that allowed the group participants to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings concerning the academic performance of the African American student. Initiating discussion through open-ended questions produced insight on the causes of the achievement gap from individuals who consistently interacted with African American students. Personal experiences and cultural knowledge from the selected African American community members produced the following themes and patterns that were analyzed using qualitative data analysis methods.

Themes and Patterns

The qualitative data analysis process consists of concurrently viewing the raw data and developing codes that explain significant characteristics within the document's content (Merriam, 2009). In this process, themes emerged from the codes that allowed for the answering of the research questions and for the formation of a thorough understanding of the central phenomenon through narrative and thematic development (Creswell, 2012). The raw data were viewed several times during the transcription process from the viewpoint of qualitative research. While reviewing the data, it was noticed that several terms and phrases appeared to be important in the answering of the research questions. Terms such as "cycle that parents not knowing what to do reflects on the kids not knowing what to do" and "parents need to invest in their children" were used. These original terms and phrases were used as codes. As each transcript was reviewed, I recognized that the different groups frequently expressed the same codes. A spreadsheet was created that listed these codes and each group's frequency of use. The

research questions were used as a means to distinguish which codes addressed the

research questions. After identifying the occurrence of each code from all three groups,

several codes stood out as perceived causes that they identified as needing to be worked

on in order to close the achievement gap (Table 1).

Table 1

Common Codes

Common Codes Used Codes	Group 20	Group 40	Group 70
Parents need to invest in their children	DBG, LL(1),JB	GW(1),KH (1),MC,KD	PC,SG (2),TT
Cycle of parents not knowing what to do	JB, JB2, SJ	GW	SG
Not taking the time to take kids to program	JB2	KD,CC,MC	SG
Low school expectation	LL,RT (1)	KD	KH
Gap between the way parents learned years ago Vs. the way kids learn today	JB,JB2	GW	PC,RL
Not taking the opportunities	*DBG*	KD	PJ
Providing tools/resources	LL	CC(1)	RL,KH
Finances are not an issue	SJ,DBG	GW,CC (2)	RL,NP,SG
Environment	RT	KD	SG(1)
Parent teach children at home	LL	CC	PC
Back then	JB2,DBG(1),LL (1)	GW,KD,FP	RL(2),NP,PJ(1), TT, SG
Village characteristics			NP,PC,SG,RL
	DBG,JB2	FP	

When identifying the codes from all three groups, I discovered issues that impacted the participants' responses to the research questions through their frequency of occurrence. These responses were grouped together, and categories were developed. From the responses that were given, content analysis was also developed that allowed for the formation of categories such as parents, schools, students, and community. These categories identified causes and roles from the perspective of the African American community. In addition to content analysis, conceptual analysis was also used. The conceptual analysis was used to reveal what the African Americans members valued as an entire group as well as within their individual social class (each group). As a result, the two most recurring phrases throughout all three groups were the themes of "back then" and "parents need to invest in their children."

Theme 1: Back then. The most prominent and recurring theme of "back then" addressed the research question of how the African American community views the causes of the achievement gap. This was achieved by comparing a previous period in which they felt that African Americans had better achievements. "Back then" was the most frequent code used by all three focus groups. This popular term "back then" or "back in the day" referred to the way in which things were done in an earlier period within the African American community. When questioned about the academic performance of African American children today as compared to their counterparts from the 50s, 60s and 70s, participants in Group #70 viewed them as not doing as well. One participant stated that during integration, student performance was based upon the grouping of students. He stated that "it happened in the mid-60s early 70s when they

started integrating schools the achievement gap was closing up until the mid-80s." When children are grouped, he explained that "they always gravitate towards the middle so if you group a bunch of smart kids together then you will get a lot of smart kids." However, another participant attributed the previous academic performance of African American students to how the African American teachers took time to mold them. African American leaders also were viewed as "strong leaders who 'back then' went above and beyond to prove that they were better." This gives the children people to look up to and something to strive towards.

The groups also discussed how the African American family's involvement as it relates to education was different than it is today. One participant described her mother as taking an active role in helping her daughter with reading. She shared that "when my daughter got off the bus, she went home and my mother was there. My mother also was a retired teacher, who made them read, made them do their homework." In her statement of "everyone needs a grandmother," she highlighted how the older African American family members supported their families. This statement showed how elderly people can have an impact in the academic performance of African American children.

Another participant reflected on the support that was given to her in spite of the lack of opportunities afforded to her family members.

I think of all my aunts and uncles a lot of them didn't even finish middle school. They had children young they you know whatever the situation was they did not have the opportunities afforded them that we have now.

She brought attention to the fact that even though the older generation did not have an opportunity for higher education, they saw the need and motivated the younger generation to pursue a higher education. She recalled

> When I was young my dad told us you got one of two choices it was four of us. You are going to college or you are going in the military…we were motivated granted they did not really help us during the school year but we were motivated.
>
> Another participant shared his thoughts that "even though the opportunity is now available the white students are far more advanced due to being exposed to things earlier in life." The participant went on to mention that "African American kids are being exposed now to things that white kids were exposed to in the 70's". The way in which parents learned "back in the day" is different, which affects the way in which parents can assist their child. Group #20 commented on the how schoolwork has gotten so hard that "college graduate parents need to go back to school just so that they can assist their kid with homework." Parents may lack the ability to help their child succeed academically. Even though the African American parent could be well educated or if they are uneducated, the inability to support their child was a factor that contributed to the achievement gap.

Having their priorities in the right place was viewed by one group as something that took place "back in their day" when it came to allocating money for education compared to the current generation. This participant stated that "a child can be struggling in school and this same child could be dressed to a't' with a $100 pair of sneakers on and can't read. We need to allocate our money in the right places instead of trying to dress

them." Another group, one participant expressed the belief that misplaced priorities are displayed in the African American community that date back to their African heritage. She based this belief upon her knowledge of African American people during the Renaissance period. She (DBG) stated that

> You know that they were raised up poor and now because when they saw the master's house and the master had nice stuff that's what they're dreams and ambitions was to have nice stuff. They wanted to leave the South from the cotton stuff to go out there to Harlem to have nice things to be flashy and that's all they thought about. They did not think about paying no bills. They thought about buying a brand new pair of shoes. That's still instinct in everybody when we get paid on Friday what we gonna do? Buy something new before we pay the man.

> This same thought was conferred by another participant within the same group (Group #20) that this learned trait of wanting to look a certain way went back to period of slavery. She commented that

> I would also think it is a learned trait that goes way, way, way back it goes deeper than when we were young and our parents were goes back to where DBG said about slavery and the master and it is literally embedded in our brains that the more of the material stuff you have the better you are as far as the gap between the African American and Caucasian that is a huge difference.

> Group#20 identified this learned behavior as a cycle in which parents do not really know what to do and so they pass not knowing what to do down to their children. This cycle can be classified as a pattern that explains why African American families

exemplify misplaced priorities when it comes to education. When African American parents observe others in society succeeding, they aspire to do the same thing, but without knowing how to achieve this success, they pursue materialistic things. These materialistic things, according to the findings of this study, are not necessary to close the gap. Some African American families have misplaced priorities, and this can be perceived as not placing a high value on education (Nunnally & Carter, 2011; Price, 2009). This same viewpoint was expressed by an African American icon, Bill Cosby, who spoke at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) 50th Anniversary Commemoration of *Brown vs the Board of Education* decision. In his speech, Cosby discussed societal issues within the African American community that he felt were community-inflicted issues, issues such as misplaced or misguided moral values that have also been referred to as the "culture of poverty" debate (Coward, Feagin, & Williams, 1974). Cosby's comments alluded to the need for African Americans to rise above the culture of poverty mentality that appears to permeate the culture. Nunnally and Carter (2011) conducted a study to see if public opinion, especially among African Americans, coincided with the same attitudes as expressed by Cosby. Nunnally and Carter survey consisted of 1,021 participants of which 517 were African Americans. Nunnally and Carter concluded that the majority of African Americans agreed with Cosby's position that "black parents and black people need to be cognizant of negative black group behavior." This would include misplaced priorities when supporting their children.

Theme 2: Parental role. The theme of the "parental role" emerged from the data. In this theme, participants questioned what role parents should have in closing the achievement gap. All three groups identified the need for parents to be more accountable for the achievements, or lack thereof, of their children. They viewed this lack of accountability as one of the reasons why African American students are experiencing the gap in achievement. Participants cited the fact of "parents not attending Open House to learn about tools to help their child." Many examples were given of parents not putting in the time to help their children. One participant, who was an educator, expressed her experience with an African American parent who did not want to take the time to help her son with a school project. She stated that the mother's response to her concerning assisting her son was "I don't have time to do your project…I don't have time for this…I got this going on, I'm living here…I don't have enough money for this." Another participant who was a retired teacher and previously a nanny shared that "parents are working and they don't have the time to take them (to places like the library)." These examples illustrated a consensus among all the groups that "parental support is not as good as it could be" and also a need for parents to put forth more effort to support their children.

Theme 3: Community involvement. The theme of community involvement emerged from the idea that the community is defined as "anyone you surround your child with" category. Several codes were listed under this theme such as networking, volunteering, community liaison, speaking up on their behalf, apprentice-master type relationships, village concept, and business involvement. Examples of networking were

mentioned often within Group #20. One participant described how, in the past, the community would come together and share their food resources. "We use to share with one another because that was all we had if you had the greens, I had the ham hock, we shared that with the community and we made sure that the whole community was taken care of." Group #20 discussed the positive impact that sharing resources had on their personal lives.

One participant reflected on the educational resources that she found out about and then shared with her girlfriends so that her children could also do well in school. Even though this group recommended networking, participants also realized that within the African American community many people are "selfish." They based this statement on the observation that "We have every kind of resource that we need to get the word to wherever we want to get the word to but we don't utilize it….so therefore what is stopping us from the knowledge a lot of time is our selfishness and our lack of community or sense of community."

The term community was defined by a participant as "anyone who you surround your child with." The groups also mentioned the village as the community when referring to African American people. However one participant in Group #40 shared his view that

> Community is so diverse now where in 40 and 50 years ago we grew up in a community where everyone in the community was of the same race basically and everyone went to the same school there were maybe one high school, maybe one or two middle schools and a couple of elementary schools and the people that you

saw in these schools were African American teachers which took a great interest in our children.

His point concluded with the statement "everyone pitched in to make that school system work, regardless of the lack of resources that they possessed." He felt that this community involvement motivated students to achieve and also helped to minimize bullying. Future studies would be beneficial to explore the correlation of community support and bullying.

One participant reflected on the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" and how this community lost that concept when the discussion was on the causes of the achievement gap. He stated that "a lot of the responsibility falls on the community. The African American proverb says it takes a village to raise a child so we all can't blame the school system." The village concept was expressed in all three groups as being an important element that needs to be in place in order for African American students to improve academically. One participant felt that previous learning took place "from our parents and the village elders"; however, the current learning model is just not enough. This participant's point might seem dated based upon Moll et al.'s (1992) funds of knowledge, which is based predicated upon using cultural practices as a form of teaching minority youth.

The various ways that the community can help were discussed throughout all of the groups. These responses addressed the research question of what role do the African American community want to play in closing the gap. Being *the voice* for African American students and their families was one of the roles considered within the groups.

They declared that someone needs to be this voice to speak up on issues concerning who is in positions of power that affect African American children. Participants in Group #40 paid particular attention to this voice as it concerns the school system. They stated that the African American community should

> Speak up on things that matter and what matters is whose in the system in the school system whose on the Board of Education whose in the classroom whose the principal at the school are the resources being directed to the particular.

Along the same avenues as being the voice of the student, the role of becoming advocates for the children was expressed in Group # 40 and Group #70. One participant from Group #70 made a case for advocates when she stated "people who are already intimidated; they need advocates." She made this statement in reference to parents who did not understand the educational system or who were unable to be involved due to work schedule conflicts.

The advocate's role was also mentioned as someone who acts as a "community liaison." The participants in Group #20 described this role as a person (s)

> In the community that is willing to challenge those children…I will pour back into them if you make X number of A's. You might not have the resources, but I've got money…that person realizes that the community grows when those children do be...

These participants thought that by helping the children, they are helping themselves.

Groups #20 and #40 expressed that being the voice of the community as essential to closing the achievement gap. However, all three groups deemed taking demonstrative

action just as important. Group#70 emphasized and gave examples of the community

taking action. They saw the need for people to take direct action in helping the children in

the form of role models. The positions of role models would have two primary functions.

One would be "somebody just to talk to or to go out with that the parents can trust" as

well as "someone that can relate to the child" and help them through any issues that they

are facing. A participant in Group # 20 referred to this person as

> Not someone who is their parents' age but a little bit 5-10 years outside of their
>
> age that have been through and can relate to them walk them through how to
>
> address different situations that they would encounter or what they're actually
>
> living at the time.

Another type of mentor relationship would be business mentoring. A participant

in Group #70 expressed this need when he stated that "we need more coaches, we need

more apprentice-master type relationships." He stated that they needed to have businesses

involved with the African American students to help them understand how businesses

work. He suggested "taking this child and putting this child in a mechanic shop." This

would give the child the opportunity to have hands-on learning from the business

community. Another suggestion given by participants in Group #70 was for people to

take a child to work. They stated that "a lot of parents that work and have good jobs

could bring them in like show-n-tell." The thought was that by showing the students the

various careers options that are available within their community that their parents are

actually involved in, the African American students would be able to visualize their own

career options. Another participant within Group #70 as a "Community Week" described

this type of exposure. She worked at a school district that had various parents who own

business to come in and talk to the students about their occupation.

Another role suggested by the groups, to help the children, was parent

volunteering. Parents who do not have a current occupation can still be invested in their

child's education through volunteering at their school. One of the Group #70 participants

suggested "requiring parents to volunteer in the school." Several preschool programs

have implemented this requirement to increase parental participation. Another participant

in Group #20 commented that the African American community should "help kids

regardless if you have kids in the system…vigilant in volunteering." Through the use of

speaking up, advocacy, mentoring, and volunteering, the African American community

can play an active role in the improvement of the African American students.

Theme 4: The school factor. While discussing the performance of African

American students, school accountability was mentioned as a cause for the achievement

gap. Participants expressed beliefs that assessments given to students were biased and

unfair to African American students. Group #70 shared examples of the ways in which

they felt that the assessments were biased. One participant recalled that

> Several years ago, they did the coverage about standardized test that was given up
>
> north to students who lived up North in the inner-city and one of the words on the
>
> test was foyer. Well a lot of those kids there did not live in a home with a foyer
>
> and didn't know that it was an opening to your home or like a large hallway. They
>
> thought it was a foreign language so again, it goes back to exposure and if the

kids are unfamiliar with certain vocabulary then they would be kind of confused

with some of the questions on standardized test.

Another participant concurred with that statement by using an example from her

professional experience. She stated that

On some of those tests you look at some of those test there are vocabulary there

are things that children have never even heard of before you know…a lot of

things come into play culture comes into play, your environment where you are.

We took a kindergarten assessment test and it had the word bouquet on it. Well if

the children have never been taught the word *bouquet* they don't know it's a

bunch of flowers. But it is on a test.

Other areas that the participants felt showed a lack of school responsibility was

poor communication with the African American students, their parents, and expectations

of the students themselves. Group #70 also mentioned the impact school budgets have

had on school systems.

Other areas of concern seen as preventing closure of the achievement gap were

overcrowding, quality of teachers, and teaching styles. Groups #40 and #70 in particular

focused on teaching styles as a hindrance to African American students not being able to

perform well. They felt that the teachers not being able to relate to this portion of the

student body led to the use of teaching styles that were not best for their learning. "If you

don't understand the student you don't know how to reach the student." There were also

members in Group #20 and Group #70 who were in direct opposition to the participants

who looked to the school system for reasons for failure. They felt that dependence on

educating African American students should not fall solely on the school system. The diversity of these comments and opinions reflects on the many factors that the group expressed throughout the group sessions.

Comparison Analysis Between Groups

Once the dynamics of each group was broken down into a quantifiable code, some philosophical differences begin to emerge. The socioeconomic Group #20 appeared to focus on the nostalgia of the past: A "back in day" when everything seemed to be better. The middle socioeconomic Group # 40 appeared to have a sense of greater empowerment. Group #40's primary focus was on the role of parents and the difference that they could make in the child's development. This parent-centric concept for Group #40 was not unexpected because the group was comprised of three educators, two clergy, and one parent. The Group #70 participants, who were the highest on the socioeconomic ladder, approached the issue from a business inclusive/village builder concept.

All three groups approached the problem of the achievement gap with a help mentality. They all saw a need for individuals or groups to come in and work with the children on the issues keeping them from achieving, but it is also important to note that their socioeconomic backgrounds may have informed their approaches. Participants in Group #20 looked at the power of pooling a few resources to reach the greater good of the many. The participants in the middle Group #40 approached the problem as being solvable by more time and energy being expended by parents or role models. Finally, the individuals in Group #70 included business leaders and managers so they naturally looked for answers to the problem to come from the world of businesses or institutions. It

is so important to have diverse representation when making decisions on a problem with multiple contributing factors because, in the final analysis, they are all correct. Closing the achievement gap will take several approaches on multiple fronts with using a diversity of resources.

<div align="center">**Discrepant Cases**</div>

Data on the topic of the achievement gap were collected such as political and societal factors. The political factors included such subsets as legislative decisions, voting, and getting the right representatives in place to make the students' concerns known. The societal factors were advancements in technology, environment, and exposure to the wrong influences. However because content analysis was used, these topics were not discussed enough to emerge into a theme (Merriam, 2009). In laymen's terminology, political and societal factors were mentioned as possible causes for the achievement gap, but were not mentioned enough to warrant rising to the level of a theme. The political factors included such subsets and representatives to make the students' concerns known influences.

Another statement was made by some individuals in the group that "finances are not an issue" when identifying causes of the achievement gap. This contradicts previous researchers who indicated a correlation between socioeconomics and school performance (Kiernan & Mensah, 2011; Ready, 2010). Kiernan and Mensah (2011) concluded that students who come from poverty and who are also deficient in family resources are not performing as well as their advantaged peers in the first years of schooling. Even though researchers have proven contrary to their statements, all three groups expressed the idea

that educational resources can be obtained without finances. One participant stated that

"don't let it (money) be the determining factor why you cannot because there are always

a way." This comment was in response to the question of how much money is needed for

each African American home in order for the children to succeed academically. She

reflected on her past experience: "Money does make the world go around, but it is not a

deterrent factor because I was a single parent who was married to a man who had

money." Another participant in Group #40 gave an example of a person who was below

the poverty level who had kids in college who were doing well. He stated,

> A man owns a farm his children during the summer work that farm. One works
>
> tobacco some work in cucumbers they work that area and the money they get
>
> that's what they use to go to school and I'm talking about college. You got about
>
> five of them in college at the same time how can he do that? But by the standards
>
> they are below poverty level but, they are exceeding academically because there
>
> is another motivating factor that has nothing to do with money, but you use
>
> money because you figure it has something to do with academic performance of a
>
> person.

Even though some members of the groups had commented that money was not a

factor, not everyone agreed. Some did see that money was needed for the academic

success of African American students. One participant stated that "money makes it a little

easier, you don't want to say that, but it does make it easier if you make a $ 15,000 a year

you are struggling you don't really care about a lot of stuff" Another participant stated,

I have noticed that a lot of people with a certain level of money their kids seem to go to the better schools and they have money for tutors, they have money…one of the issues that I have is if you don't have enough, you don't have the resources you kind of get left you and your kids, get left behind.

All of these statements revealed two distinct viewpoints on financial resources, but the findings also revealed that the majority of the participants agreed that money was not a factor in the achievement gap. A few participants felt that money was a factor in the widening of the achievement gap; however, the majority of the people in the study felt that it was not a factor. Researchers documented evidence that money is a factor in achievement, but further studies may be needed (Mandara et al., 2009).

Even though the participants discussed external environmental factors such as parents, communities, schools, politics, and societal issues as causes for the achievement gap, there was minimal dialogue on the accountability of the African American students. Group #20 expressed feelings that kids are embarrassed that they do not know the work. However, educators who were in both Groups #40 and #70 stated that some African American students struggle in the classroom even though they have a good family support system. However, all three groups believed that the African American children are not taking advantage of their opportunities.

Findings

The causes of the achievement gap, from the African American community's perspective, relate to the lack of support primarily within their homes and communities. To address the achievement gap, the participants from within the African American

community recommended including a diversity of mentors such as grandparent-like figures, people from the business community, and parent liaisons in order to equip the students with the support they need.

To investigate the problem of the achievement gap as it exists between European American and African American students, the voice of the African American community was sought. The African American community shared their experiences and knowledge of the problem, and they also collectively gave their thoughts on how to improve the academic performances of African American students. As a researcher, I aligned the findings with the theoretical framework of this study to provide a logical and systematic answer to the research questions.

1. How do the African American community members view the causes of the achievement gap?

The overall cause for the achievement gap stemmed from the lack of support that the African American student received from their family and community. This conclusion emerged from the findings of "the cycle of parents not knowing what to do which reflects on the kids not knowing what to do." In CHAT, Vygotsky, identified the need to have an experienced adult to assist in the child's development. In order for African American students to learn strategies to succeed academically, the learning environment needs to have an adult who takes the time to show them how to use psychological tools within a cultural context. If this component is missing, then the African American child may not know the importance of obtaining an education.

The ripple effect of not knowing how to promote education will cause the reduction of parental involvement with regards to education. The primary theme from Group #40 was a description of the lack of parental involvement. Throughout all of the groups, generational values were seen as something that was passed down through involvement with their children. Group #40 concluded that a youth's home lives, as well as parental investment in a child's academic performance, were key factors that affect African American children's learning.

A good example of a theory that supports Group #40K conclusion is Bronfenbrenner's ecological environment theory. This theory explored the external systems of a child's environment and the impact that it has on their development. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) chronosystem model examines the "influences on the person's development of changes over time in the environments in which the person is living" (p.724). Scholars have revealed the negative impact of lack of parental involvement on a child's development (Harris & Graves, 2010) According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), the environment is not limited to home only. It is extended to the community, school, and places that the parents have been exposed to as well. Based upon this broader definition of environment, I discovered that the social environment of African Americans is the key to enhancing the learning experience of the African American student.

2.   What role does the African American community want to play in closing the achievement gap?

The phrase village concept is a term that all three groups referred to as the community working together to raise a child. According to the findings, the function of

the village entails networking, involvement of experienced adults (i.e., a coach, grandmother), and someone who can provide tools/ resources pertaining to education. These people would be considered role models or coaches. The village members would also include businesses. These businesses would provide an apprentice-type relationship to the student by exposing them to various careers. One key element that the group expressed was "someone that really cares about the child." This characteristic should be displayed within every role in the village.

"Speaking up on their behalf," "voting," and "getting the right people in place" are roles that demonstrate the power of togetherness within the African American community. These advocacy roles endorse a sense of togetherness within the African American community. The manner in which the African American community believes in its efforts as a group reflects the meaning of Bandura's social cognition theory of collective efficacy. Collective efficacy theory is "an emergent group-level property that embodies the coordinative and interactive dynamics of group functioning" (Bandura, 2002, p. 271). Bandura supported the idea that groups that work together and who share the same beliefs "influences the type of futures they seek to achieve through collective efforts, how well they use their resources; how much effort they put into their group endeavors; their staying power when collective efforts fail to produce quick results" (p. 271). Consequently, this study's findings supported this theoretical claim. It takes a collective effort, such as the village, to build up the African American students' academic performance to close the achievement gap.

Project Deliverable

External support from the African American community is needed to help improve the academic performance of the African American students. Currently, there are a limited number of organized volunteers that can provide resources, support, and time for the African American student. There are even fewer resources available to teach parents how to advocate and to connect the family to local businesses for apprenticeships. The project that I recommend consists of creating a volunteer taskforce village of various community members. According to the data, the village members need to include an elder (grandmother or grandfather), a parent liaison, a community business leader, and an educational coordinator. This village (task force) will reach out to the identified families to provide support, resources, and time to the students and their families. The goal of the village would be to help the family establish their own natural villages in order to provide a long lasting effect. Another goal of the village is to make a bridge between the community, the family, and the school. However, the most important component of the village would be to educate the family on how to provide educational support for the child. The village participants will make weekly and monthly contact. The school will help with identifying families that want to participate in the Village Building Project.

Conclusion

Examining the research questions of how the African American community views the causes of the achievement gap and what role they want to play in closing this gap was the main focus of this study. For the purpose of gaining insight from the African American community on how to close the gap, a qualitative case study design was

selected. In this case study, three focus groups were established based on socioeconomic

levels. Each group consisted of six participants with the exception of one group having

seven participants. In Section 3, I will outline the project of the study.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The term achievement gap defines how European American students outperform African American students on standardized tests. In attempting to find a solution to this local and national problem, the African American community's opinion was sought to gain an in-depth understanding on how to improve the academic performances of the African American students. A qualitative study was conducted, and I found that African American students need additional support from their environment in order to improve the learning experience for low performing African American students. From these results, the development of the Village Builders Project (VBP) was initiated. In this section, I describe the VBP's goals, and I justify the project as being an answer to the identified problem. Also within this section, previous research and theories that support the VBP are discussed in the literature review. Lastly, the Village Builders implementation plan and implication of a social change is presented to reveal the potential impact that it can have on the society at large.

Description and Goals

The VBP will be an organized volunteer task force of African American community members who work together in mentoring low performing African American students. The goals of the VBP are to motivate, empower, and expose African American students and their families to various educational environments. The candidates for the program will be chosen from students who have been identified by the school as being low performing in reading or at risk of low academic performance. The VBP will consist

of three mentors who have agreed to contact the identified students and their families on a weekly basis for 24 weeks. These three mentors, along with the student and their parents, are considered the village or village members. The roles in the village are those of elders, chief, and career informers in addition to the parent (lead advocate) and the student (scholar). The community mentors will be trained on their roles within the village through participation in group activities and role playing exercises.

The 4-day training will occur at the requested school site (Appendix H). All potential volunteers will have to clear a criminal background check prior to attending the training. During training, village builder mentors will learn how to motivate the student to read, how to empower the parent to be involved, and how to expose the student to various career options. Village builder mentors will also learn the purpose, goals, target audience, operation of the village, evaluation, and other pertinent information concerning the project. Upon completion of training, village builder mentors will receive a certificate of completion that allows them to serve (when selected by trainer) for 1 year. After training, the trainer is responsible for contacting the school to inform them of the village builders' availability.

The VBP will address the problem of test score disparities between African American students and their European American counterparts by providing additional educational support to African American students and their parents. In addition to addressing the achievement gap problem, the VBP will also seek to establish strong bonds within African American families as well as the African American community.

Through their strategic role, the village mentors will work one-on-one with the African American student on increasing his or her motivation for education.

The village mentor roles are vital in promoting the educational success of the African American students. The role of the elder, chief, and career informer will be designed to work with the student and their parents (lead advocate) to motivate, model, and guide them to pursue their goals of improving their academic performance while establishing self-efficacy. By following the examples of the VBP role models, the scholars can learn different strategies to help combat the feeling of being educationally inadequate.

Each role addresses the problem in a nontraditional method while building up the self-efficacy of the student. For example, the elder role motivates the student to read daily through weekly contacts. The elder also inspires the student to take pride in reading, to learn about their heritage, and how they can overcome obstacles in order to be successful. To assist them in reaching their reading goals, and to also give them a sense of cultural pride, a culturally relevant book list will be provided to the entire village. This will make everyone aware of the reading materials that the elder and the scholar will be reading. The elder's role will be a good way to addresses the problem of not having an adult to spend time and encourage them to read. The role of the elder will be used to address the findings of this study that the African American students are lacking support and motivation to read.

The second role within the village builders is the chief, which is similar to an educational coordinator. This person's primary responsibility is to oversee the progress of

the village by empowering the parent/guardian with resources and strategies to assist the student. This role addresses the achievement gap by equipping the parent with methods to establish a purposeful educational environment for his or her child. For instance, in the home, the parent can set a power hour for reading on the weekends. In the case of school involvement, the parent could be involved in planning classroom events with the teacher or quarterly visits to the classroom. The lack of parental support, in various capacities, was one of the causes of the achievement gap stressed as a contributor by the focus groups. Through the chief's role, parents will learn ways to promote the educational success of their own children.

The last role is the career informer/guide. This career informer/guide will expose and educate the students on various careers. The career informer/guide should be an African American community member who has a management position or is the owner of a business. The mentor role will address the lack of exposure to careers and the business community. By having this role, the student can learn and see future job/business opportunities.

The goals of the VBP are to motivate, empower, and expose the African American students and their families to practice academic achievement. Academic success will be achieved using weekly goal setting. Once the students accomplish these small short-term goals, their self-confidence will increase, and they will be able to establish their own academic goals. Upon completion of the project, the village builders hope to help the student identify and work with his or her own natural support system.

Rationale

The term village builder originated from the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." This ancient proverb was echoed frequently through all three of the focus groups, so much so that the theme of the village concept emerged during the data analysis process. The village concept is not unique; Washington (2005) explored a three-level, structured, culturally centered group mentoring approach known as "pyramid mentoring." This multilevel group mentoring program was designed to work with African American youth to reduce the negative outcomes of unhealthy behaviors. In like manner, the participants from this study indicated the need to have more than one mentor for the youth. I also recognized the need to empower the parent to be more informed and involved with their child's academics. By designing and modeling a village, the student can obtain the motivation to read, the parent can be empowered to enhance the environment for educational progress, and the student can be exposed to various career options. Because the VBP will be a temporary support system, the village builders will teach the students and their families to identify existing community support members who are their own natural support system for a long lasting effect.

The VBP coincides with responses given during the focus groups. These responses reflected the feelings and experiences of the African American community members on the causes of and the roles that they felt should be implemented to improve the academic performance of the African American students. For instance, when describing the key people needed to close the achievement gap, many of the participants characterized the volunteers as needing to be "caring, knowledgeable, passionate, and

resourceful." While the major theme focused on "back then" (the way in which things were done better by African Americans in the past), the participants viewed the African American community as being more actively involved with their children's educational development in past decades.

Many of the participants shared testimonies of how community members, along with family members, worked together to enhance the academic success of their students. The participants stated that they need to work together and to be more involved in the academic process. All of the participants highlighted the need to have additional support from the family. This additional support would be manifested in the form of community mentoring that would be made available to students in order to enhance their learning. Based on the various roles of community mentorship, the concept of the village builders was selected.

The VBP's effectiveness depends on how well the African American community understands the nature of the problem as well as their responsibilities within the village. Conducting a training curriculum for the different roles and responsibilities of potential village members is the most appropriate strategy to use to address this concern. Thus one concentration of this literature review will be on providing exceptional training. The purpose of developing a training curriculum is to focus on providing learning activities that are designed to master the objectives of the particular training program (Rycus, 2006). Information on mentoring and other effective strategies are transmitted through designated activities within the village builder's training curriculum.

The training curriculum process would be the best method to teach and develop new skills that the African American community volunteers could use when working to improve the academic performance of African American students. These types of training programs have proven to be effective in the past. Washington (2014) also developed a training curriculum to prepare African American community elders to mentor youth in a similar culturally innovative group intervention referred to as pyramid mentoring. Developing a training curriculum allows the African American community members to practice hands-on mentoring techniques that are needed to be successful in the implementation of strategies that improve academic performance. Whereas the other types of genres can be effective in working with other populations, it may not equip the mentors in working with the students. But for this project, which consists of the help of volunteers, it is necessary to teach them the skills that they need to be effective in the lives of the African American student.

The village builders training curriculum and materials are the most appropriate method for this project. Obtaining the necessary skills to mentor African American students and their families in a collaborative effort will require training in order to equip the volunteers with nontraditional strategies that will increase his or her interest for learning. The training curriculum will allow the volunteers to understand their role in the village as well as the goal and mission of the project (Appendix H).

The VBP will address the problem of the disparities between African American students and European American student test scores. It will provide additional external support in the form of three roles within the village: elder, chief, and career informer.

These roughly correspond to the results from the three different SES groups: #20 elder who talked about "back then," #40 chief who talked about more time and energy spent with students, and #70 career informer who talked about exposing students to potential careers.

The elder is responsible for motivating the student to read through weekly contacts via phone. The person in this role can either have the youth read stories over the phone or in person. These approaches are based on a study by a family literacy program that found that there are two key reading strategies that are effective in working with African American families: reading aloud and seeing images of themselves in books (Green, 2014). One of the studies participants stated, "I never knew there were so many books about us (African Americans)" (McNair, 2014, p. 64). In McNair's (2014) study, workshops were provided for parents and children so that they could learn reading strategies. After implementing these strategies, parents reported that the amount of reading time increased in the home (McNair, 2014). The elder's role will build on the strategies learned from this study by modeling the read aloud skill as well as reading books that are culturally relevant. The elder will work to close the cause of this portion of the achievement gap.

Another member of the village is the tribal chief. The person in this role will be responsible for informing the parent of the various resources available and of ways that they can be empowered to be more involved with their child academically. This person educates the parent to be more involved with their child's needs. Participating in village builders will serve a twofold purpose. Parents will receive information to help their

children, and they will also receive social support that reduces stress levels (Hurd &
Zimmerman, 2010; Shaya et al., 2013). According to this study's data, parental stress is
one of the causes of the achievement gap.

The career informer's role will be to expose the student to various career
opportunities. In exposing the African American students to their career options, they can
learn different trades as well as relate classroom instruction to occupational activities.
The career informer activities reflect the concept in which the funds of knowledge are
based on. By combining the three village roles into a team of mentors, the students and
their families will be exposed to external environmental supports that can improve their
academic performance by investing their time and knowledge.

The training curriculum would be the best method to teach and develop new skills
for the volunteers within the village. The African American community volunteers could
use these strategies, when volunteering, to improve the academic performance of African
American students. Other types of strategies can be effective for other populations. For
instance, I could develop an evaluation plan for individuals who would review the actual
effects of VBP in which they could improve the VBP based on the evaluation. Another
example would be the implementation of a curriculum plan, which would work best for
teachers preparing to incorporate the VBP as classroom instruction. Lastly, the policy
recommendations would be more beneficial for policymakers in improving existing
policies that entail community support. But for this project, which consists of the help of
volunteers, it is necessary to teach them the skills that they need to be effective in the
lives of the African American student.

To begin with the training, curriculum content will provide knowledge and guidance on the effective methods of support. Training is crucial for the projects that bring change. Brock et al. (2011) conducted a study using a training curriculum on school crisis prevention to increase the knowledge of school crisis methods and to improve attitudes about being involved in crisis prevention of school personnel. Some participants within this study who had prior knowledge of school crisis prevention reported that the PREPaRE training curriculum provided them with new skills and that the material covered was applicable to the nature of crisis prevention (Brock et al., 2011).

In relation to the topic of mentoring, a study on a mentoring training curriculum for researchers was evaluated on its effectiveness of engaging research mentors to improve their mentoring practices (Pfund et al., 2013). Pfund et al. (2013) concluded that "mentoring skills can be learned and improved upon using a formal structured curriculum" (p. 30). A similar result occurred within a study on educating African Americans on controlling hypertension (Shaya et al., 2013). The implementation of the training curriculum pertaining to a "cluster of patients" in managing hypertension yielded a positive impact within the African American community. This also addressed health disparities through the use of social networks (Fadia et al., 2013).

Researchers revealed the positive impact that collaborative support within the African American community has on the academic success of African American students (Ebanks, Toldson, Richards, & Lemmons, 2012). The training curriculum will include the purpose and goals of the VBP that will bring awareness to the African American community of the seriousness of the achievement gap. It will also make them aware of

the need for their participation in order to close the gap. The VBP emerged from the data, and its creation was guided by past research and theories that validate the need for collaborative community support, which can be taught through a training curriculum for the African American community.

Review of Literature

The literature search was conducted through accessing the Walden University library and Google scholar. Several key terms and phrases were used but not limited to *social career cognitive*, *social exchange*, *social function of social cognitive*, *social network*, *social support*, *support groups*, *African American community*, *group mentoring*, *role identities of volunteers*, *parent social network*, *ethnic community theory*, *community support*, *community mentors*, *cluster mentoring*, *mentoring*, *natural mentors*, *pyramid mentoring*, *community investment theory*, *community involvement*, *emancipatory African centered model*, *self-efficacy*, *social learning theory*, *role modeling theories*, and *role models*. At the beginning of the literature review, I established a theoretical framework that aligned previous theories to the findings of this study and the development of VBP .

Theoretical Framework

Theories that endorse collaborative support from the community support were used as foundation for the project: the social network theory, social support theory, motivational theory of role modeling, and social cognitive career theory, as well as the social learning theory. These theories help provide the explanation of the VBP and why it will be effective. Overall, the main idea of these theories aligns with the objective of the project, which is to use a group of individuals within the community (social network) to

provide support (social support) to African American students and their families who have been identified as low performing academically. By spending quality one-on-one time (motivational theory of role modeling), the village builder's goal is to motivate the students to read, to empower the parents to be involved, and to expose the student to career options (social cognitive career theory). Through this support system, the village builders will identify the student's natural support system in order to establish a long lasting educational support system. It is by these theories that the structure of the VBP will be validated.

Social network theory. Social networks are defined as a socially defined group of linked individuals who provide support in various forms (George, Abstemarco, Yonas, Butler, & Akers, 2013; House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988). Coleman (1998) explored the role of a social network and defined it as a group working together for a cause. Through exploration, Colman gave an illustration of three entities that, when interconnected, becomes more beneficial than three entities who have no relationship. Coleman examined the organizational structure of the U.S. school system and offered some advice to improve low academic performances for students. Coleman pointed out that the deficiency is caused by the "lack of well-publicized external criteria of performance from which meaningful consequence flow" (p. 534). There needs to be expectations/standards set from a person's environment (which includes parents, community members, and/or religious groups) on educational performance. Coleman proposed a school design that included distributing educational responsibilities to groups of parents, teachers, and students. With this responsibility, the groups would develop social capital (informal

social relations/networks) in order to establish familiar standards that support educational goals. Students, parents and the community (social network) would have some influence on the educational standards. In my study, this point was expressed under Theme 3 community involvement. One participant felt that this type of support would motive students and help to minimize bullying. Similarly, Curry and Holter (2015) conducted a qualitative study on the impact that social networks have on parental perceptions and motivation for involvement. Participants within this study described the interconnection within their social network as "lifesaver or lifeline" when dealing with stress and finding out what to do from other parents. This study resonates with the village builders from the perspective of the chief's position and his or her need to be available to provide guidance on parental involvement.

Williams and Bryan (2013) explored the experiences of eight African American youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds and the affect that it had upon their educational success. Within their experiences, they identified social networks within the community who provided "encouragement, support and advice at critical points in their lives" (Williams & Bryan, 2013, p. 295). Other researchers also revealed the use of social networks as being a platform for gaining knowledge, influencing spirituality, and bringing awareness on health issues (Blackstock, Jonas, & Scajiu, 2010; Pickard & Ingersoll, 2015). Blackstock et al. (2010) examined the use of contraception by low-income African American women in an urban environment. These women used social networks as a natural resource to obtain information on various contraception methods which impacted their family planning and decision making. The participants felt more

comfortable with getting knowledge from their family or friends than from medical professionals (Blackstock et al., 2010). In this study, women obtained knowledge about a particular contraceptive for the first time through their social networks, which shows the importance of the role of social networks. Diffusing medical information through the use of a social network is effective; in the same manner, the VBP can use the social network concept to distribute education to the African American student and his or her family.

The importance of social networks can also be seen in the lives of parents who have children with disabilities. These parents tend to have a social network that helps in identifying resources to improve the quality of life for their special needs children (Kreider, et.al, 2016; Pickard &Ingersoll, 2015).

Another study relevant to the VBP was focused on social networks in regards to the influence of religious socialization in African Americans. Gutierrez et al. (2014) surveyed 319 African American community members to discover the influence that grandparents, parents, and siblings have on family member religious practices. Gutierrez et al. revealed that the grandparent's (elderly family members) role is key within the social network. Through the use of African American elders' involvement, it validates the mentoring aspect that intertwines with social network theory in regards to share group membership (Bullock, 2007). This supports the village builder concept of shared group membership demonstrated in two forms: when a student is involved with more than one group and when the members of a group are the same race as the student. In the study, I also recognized the positive impact that shared members had on African American students from the community. The community involvement produced a feeling of pride

for African American students. This confidence gave the African American student an indirect form of community support.

Green (2014) investigated the dynamics of community cultural wealth model in the Freedom Schools. Historically, in 1964, Freedom Schools originated during the Jim Crow era when African Americans had to rely on the community members (extended family members, teachers, churches) to work together to educate African American children (Green, 2014). Green explored the benefits of using the community participants as mentors within the school model who have the same ethnic background. Intergenerational bonds are formed and passed down by experience, and they can be identified and accepted within. In my study, many participants recalled personal experiences of an elder member reinforcing the need for education. One participant from Group 20 expounded on the academic impact her mother made on her daughter. For this reason, I decided to use only African Americans as village members in the development of VBP. By establishing a social network, village builders can effectively and collectively meet the educational needs of the African American students.

Social support theory. Social support theory demonstrates how the involvement of others can impact the performance of students as well as parents (House, 1987). Mahatmya and Lohman (2012) revealed that when adolescents intensify their involvement with their neighborhoods, families, and schools, it increases positive development in civic engagement during their adult years. Several researchers examined the positive impact that social support improved grade point average (GPA), reduced delinquent behaviors, and prepared African American students for postsecondary

education (Ghazarian &Roche, 2010; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008; Ward, Strambler, & Linke, 2013).

Another way to view the importance of social support is from the observation of improved health. House, Umberson, and Landis (1988) explored social support from the perspective that social associations have an impact on improving a person's health. This theory originated in the exploration of social and medical sciences. It is relevant to the VBP because it shows that social support can be used to reduce depression and stress, which have a direct impact on students and their parents in negative way. Leahy-Warren, McCarthy, and Corcoran (2011) highlighted the significant relationship between social support and depression in first-time mothers. Leahy-Warren et al. revealed that a high level of support from family and friends could be associated with lower levels of depression. Mothers who independently received informational, influential, emotional and evaluation support reduced the experience of postnatal depressive symptoms within 6 weeks post-delivery (Leahy-Warren et al., 2010). Mothers who just feel the perception of social support have a safeguard from stressors, and their self-efficacy as a parent increases (Ghazarian & Roche, 2010). In building up the self-efficacy of parents, they become more confident in their parental role and they remain more engaged with their children (Leahy et al., 2011). Village builders will build on this concept in the training process. Village builders will work to build the self-efficacy of the student's parent to increase their confidence in the hope that they will become more engaged with their child's education. An engaged parent is one of the cornerstones of the VBP to close the achievement gap.

The VBP will provide social support in the form of motivation, empowerment, and exposure to the African American students and their parents. This study builds on earlier research that African American support systems are more apparent and effective in the community (Green, 2014; Rife, 2010). When there is a lack of support within the community as well as the home, the African American student's academic performance suffers. The remedy to the lack of community involvement is a social support system that produces a sense of significance and determination in their lives by developing a set of constraints and controls on individual behavior (House et al., 1988). The collective efforts of community partnerships have been a factor in improving academic success for African American students. One of the participants in the study informally developed a community partnership with her friends by accessing educational resources to improve her daughter's reading skills while taking the time to share and encourage her daughter's peers as well. Ward et al. (2013) concluded that the effectiveness of the GEAR UP program with low-income and minority youth stemmed from the programs connection with "multiple stakeholders committed to a common vision" of getting students ready for college (p. 323). Ward et al. recommended and encouraged postgraduates to establish a connection with urban minority youth and to become mentors to increase educational attainment. This recommendation of using mentors to improve educational achievement is another key component within the VBP.

Motivational theory of role modeling. The main function of the VBP is to provide one-on-one support from three different community members who will function as a village within the social network of the African American students and their

families. Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters (2015) established a new theoretical framework

known as the motivational theory of role modeling (MTRM), which describes the one-

on-one support that is needed and its relevance within the project. MTRM theory

emerged from the definition of the three functions of a role model: demonstrate how to

perform skills, exhibit that goals are attainable, and inspire others to achieve goals.

Similarly, the participants in the study encouraged role model activity among the African

American community. The participants frequently reflected on the impact that informal

role models had "back in the day" within the community. Role models are behavioral

models by showing others how to perform a skill and how to achieve a goal. This

function coincides with Bandura's social learning theory as well as the impact that career

models have on African American youth (Bandura, 1977; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004).

The participant recommended using someone as a role model who can relate to students

and guide them how to address different situations. Watson, Washington, and Stepteau-

Watson (2015) explored mentoring using Umoja, a culturally specific mentoring

intervention that assigned behavioral role models to African American juvenile

delinquent youth in order to reduce criminal behavior. Just like VBP, the Umoja

mentoring program consists of a group style mentoring, which also included the role of

an elder from the community (Washington et al., 2014). At the end of the study, teachers

and program officials reported that the youth did not engage in any new offenses and

demonstrated a better way to deal with conflict (Washington et al., 2014). Cultural

specific strategies, such as Spir-rhythm drumming, provided a means to incorporate goal

setting, conflict resolution, and establishment of positive relationships in a nontraditional

manner (Watson et al., 2015). Goal setting is an instrumental component for a role model to (a) demonstrate that goals are reachable-the representations of possibility, and (b) make goals desirable-the inspirations of fulfillment. In overview of the motivational theory, the focus is the same as the VBP philosophy of building up the student self-efficacy through implementation of setting goals.

Conceptual Framework: Self-Efficacy

The structure that the motivational theory is built upon is the expectancy value model. Morgenroth et al. (2015) described expectancy value model as the perceived possibility of success in certain area and value as a person's desirability of achieving a goal. This model is a key factor in the VBP as a means of building up the student's self-efficacy. Just from the presence of the village members, the African American students can see the external expectancy based on the village member's active involvement, which can be also used as motivation. This is similar to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory which by witnessing someone effectively engaging in an undertaking will promote one's confidence in being able to successfully complete the task independently. Increasing academic confidence (self-efficacy) is important when developing successful students, especially in reading (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, & Doyle, 2013). It is through engagement and motivation from the village that confidence will be promoted, which Afflerbach et al. (2013) referred to as an effective reading strategies needed in classrooms. For example, if a student has low self-belief, he or she tends to avoid academic demands based on his or her perception of his or her ability. Study participants addressed this same point. For example, if a student has low self-efficacy, he or she tends

to avoid academic demands based on his or her perception of his or her ability. However, through weekly contact and by developing a reading goal, the village members encourage the students to read on a daily basis. They will also read with them. The students can build on this support to develop confidence in their reading ability. Once the students have confidence in their reading ability, they will develop a high self-efficacy that will enable them to feel confident in pursing and attaining their goals (Bandura, 1993). Having a high self-efficacy is a needed component that African American students should obtain that will help them reach their future goals with or without support. Based on a study conducted with 10 African American high school, students voiced their perception on barriers faced when striving for achievement (Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015). Within this study, the participants stated that they relied on themselves for educational guidance and could not trust school administration to assist them (Vega et al., 2015).

Bandura (1993) discussed the impact that self-efficacy has on cognitive development for students and their parents. Bandura acknowledged that parents play a role in the cognitive growth of their child. When a parent has uncertainty in helping their child academically, they tend to rely entirely on the school to provide a learning environment. This point is consistent with the data from the study as well as Bandura's concept. Bandura also suggested that efforts should be made at "reestablishing connectedness between home, school and the larger community" in order to increase the effectiveness of student performance (p. 144). The VBP will reunite the connection between the African American families and the community in the hopes of working

collectively to build up student self-efficacy in order to improve their academic performance.

Role models do not have to be an outstanding individual to make impact on youth life. The ultimate goal of VBP is to identify natural mentoring support system for lasting educational effects for African American students. Hurd and Zimmerman (2010) conducted a study with 93 African American teen mothers who reported having a natural mentor such as extended family and community members. By having a natural mentor involved in their lives, they experienced a reduction of stress and anxiety symptoms. I recommended creating an environment or development of target culturally sensitive intervention that natural mentoring can develop would lead to more lasting meaningful relationship (George et al., 2013; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). The four themes that reflect the village builder concept are shared responsibility for educational outcome (student involvement within the VB), parental involvement by any means (parents learning how to be more involved), natural support systems, and community collaboration to raise a scholar (the entire theme of the Village Builder including the village name for the student).

These themes are vital to include when developing a project that attempts to improve the academic performance of low performing African American students. However, Vega et al. (2015) conducted a study to identify perceived barriers to achievement from African American and Latino students and found that the African American students within the study focused more on relationships with the school administrators, and little was mentioned about the community involvement.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

The VBP's main objective is to facilitate a learning environment that will improve the African American student's academic performance. The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) shares similar viewpoints as Bandura's social cognitive theory in that the focus is on the interaction between the person, environment, and behavioral influences on development with respects to vocation development (Jiang & Zhang, 2012; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Both Bandura's social cognitive and Lent et al.'s (1994) social cognitive career explored the same function as social network when exploring the interaction between the person and environment. The SCCT focuses on the career development function that the participants from this study recommended for the African American community to establish apprentice relationships between the student and the community. Within this apprentice relationship (mentoring), business leaders (social network) would expose the student to career options (social support) in the hope that the African American student's persistence in academic goals prevail. Jiang and Zhang (2012) demonstrated the use of SCCT to predict academic interest and goals of Chinese Middle Vocational Technical School Students. In this quantitative study of 578 Chinese middle school schoolers, Jiang and Zhang concluded that academic goals interconnected with interest and social support. Jiang and Zhang's findings were consistent with previous studies on the impact that academic interest had on student's self-efficacy (Byars-Winston, Yannine, & Howard, 2010; Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin, & Lucas, 2012). In my study, the respondents also stated that hands-on learning will occur from "apprentice-master type relationships." Therefore, if the student's academic interest

is increased by hands-on experiences from an apprentice/master type of relationship, then the student's self-confidence will increase. The overall goal of the VBP is to provide community support to low-performing African American students in an effort to improve their academic performance while building up their self-confidence.

Previously, social learning theory was mentioned in Section 1 to present the foundation for conducting the study; however, Bandura's social learning theory expounds on how social network, social support, and motivational theory of role modeling intertwines with each other to justify the function of the project.

Summary

This literature review included four sections that each relate to the project description in this paper. The first is social network, which is the involvement of a group of people who provide various supports. The social network relates to the project by the involvement of a cluster of volunteers from the community. The second is social support, which is the community's involvement with the individual. Social support relates to the project by having the village members offer different levels of support. The third is motivational theory of role model, which is the way that one-on-one support is implemented. The design of the project is arranged similar to the motivational theory of a role model by offering the individual support by three different role models. The fourth is social cognitive career in which the vocational options are explored with an experienced adult. This theory relates to the project by using the business community to work with the student on potential career aspirations. This literature review also provided a foundation for the development of the VPP. In the following section, I provide details on the role that

the African American community can play to improve the academic performance of the African American student.

Project Description

Upon completion of the VBP, the student and family will have identified and established their own natural support systems within their community. The student will carry on the role as the scholar, and the parent will take on the role as the overseer. The natural support system will consist of an elder and career informer. These two positions will be sought after within the family first, and if this attempt is unsuccessful, then local community entities that the student and parent are involved with will be pursued. Pillay (2011) explored the role of the African American church and the barbershop/beauty salons as resources for African American persons living with HIV/AIDS. Based on attempting to find ways to reduce the trajectory of AIDS among the African American community, Pillay sought to incorporate the African American church and barbershops and beauty salons. These locations were included to improve mental health services as well as to provide information concerning health-related topics (Pillay, 2011). In the past, the African American church was viewed as being the hub that would disseminate information for African American on societal issues (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011). With incorporating a representation of these two entities within the village, the African American student can continue getting their support throughout their lifetime.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The main source for potential resources and existing support would be the involvement of the school and local churches. With the school being involved, the

resources such as training location, criminal background checks, and potential meeting space for the village members can be provided. The church can provide the village members.

Potential Barriers

Partnering with the local school will help to reduce the potential barriers for the VBP project. However, potential barriers exist if a school is not willing or able to conduct background checks for the village members. Obtaining criminal background checks on every village member is essential for the student's well-being and safety. If the school budget is limited, then the expense for the background check will be the volunteer's responsibility. Not having the financial resources to conduct the trainings would be another potential barrier. In addition to not having resources for training, not having monetarily compensation to provide village members for the use of their transportation would be a potential barrier that could prohibit the village members from participating.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The implementation of VBP will take place at the beginning of the school year after the first major assessment. Once the scores are back, the school will partner up with the VBP trainer to conduct an informational meeting for all interested students and parents. Prior to the meeting, fliers pertaining to VBP will go out to identify students. At the meeting, information pertaining to purpose, goals, roles, and responsibilities will be discussed. For interested students, the first village meeting will be arranged in order to introduce village members, develop goals, and sign consent forms (appendix J). After this

meeting, each week for 13 weeks the village members will be involved with the student to work toward improving his or her reading scores.

During Week 9, the chief will assist the student and parent with building their own natural support system. Once the student's natural village has been identified, then it is the responsibility of the parent to arrange interaction with the village builders and their new village for sustainability purposes. At the end of VBP (Week 13), the student will take another assessment that was similar to the initial assessment at the beginning of the school year. After an evaluation of test scores, a passing of the torch ceremony will take place at the school. This meeting will allow the new village to meet the village builders, and both villages can review the student's assessment. The new village can be introduced to the school administrators and teachers. By concluding VBP in this manner, the new village can take the torch in providing support for the African American student. The parent will move from being the lead advocate to the chief of the village. At the end of 27 weeks of the VBP, the natural village will continue to provide additional support to their child.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The VBP is a voluntary program in which the identified student and his or her parent would have to consent to participate in the project. Once the student and his or her family agree to participate, they will fill out a consent forms to participate. The school will contact the VBP after they have identified students in order to arrange an informational meeting for the parents. At the meeting, the roles and responsibilities of each member of the village will be covered. These roles include the elder (community

member), chief (community member), career guide (community member), lead advocator (parent), and scholar (student). Everyone in the village except for the lead advocator will agree to contact the scholar once a week. The parent will agree to check in with the student daily to be aware of school assignments and related educational needs. The other village members will contact the student once a week to motivate and empower the student in their role. For example, the elder's role is to inspire the student to read daily. When the elder makes that weekly contact (via phone, Skype, or home visit) to the student, they are encouraged to either read with the youth or have the youth to read to them. For older students (middle school and up), the elder can challenge the youth to read a book along with writing up a summary of the book. Within their interaction, the elder can share personal stories that relate to the story that will give encouragement to the student on overcoming adversity (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

The role of the chief is to contact the parent to discuss current events at school and any additional educational resources needed for the student. The chief empowers the parent to be involved with the school administrators and teachers. The chief will also be the connector of the other village members. One of the key roles of the chief is to help the parent to identify their own natural village before the VB project is completed. By doing so, the student-identified support system can be involved throughout the student's entire educational journey.

The role of the career guide is to meet with the student to expose them to possible career opportunities. This weekly contact can consist of taking the student to various career sites. The role of the student is to be involved with the village members on a

weekly basis. Everyone's roles and responsibilities will be incorporated into a village agreement contract that all of the village members will have to sign at the onset of the village (appendix J). If anyone does not fulfill their role, then that member will be dismissed from the village. The overall role and motto for the VBP is transforming the VIBE for African American students. The VIBE represents the African American community/environment role of volunteering, inspiring, building up, and educating in order to improve the academic performance of African American students (appendix H).

Project Evaluation

The evaluation method, which will determine the effectiveness of the project, will consist of reviewing the NC EOG scores at the end of the school system. Prior to the VBP involvement, the student will have taken a beginning of grade test (BOG). The scores from this test will be reviewed by the village members, family, and school administrator. The goal of the village builders will be to increase the student's reading scores through an organized support system. There will only be three main goals that each of the village member will focus on pertaining to their specific domain. For instance: The elder's goal to motivate the scholar to read books, the chief's goal to empower the parent to be more involved, and the career informer's goal is to expose the scholar to various career options. Goal setting will take place during the first meeting with the student and parents. This allows the student and parent to be actively involved with setting achievable goals with the village. A mid-evaluation will be conducted with the student and family on how well they feel supported midway through the program (13 weeks after the initial contact).

A month prior to completion of the project, the Village Builders will help the family to identify their own natural support. By using their natural support, the social support impact will be long lasting. At the end of VBP, there will be a program evaluation survey during the passing of the torch ceremony for each village member to complete to improve the village experience.

Implications

The implications of this study will be to promote a positive social change for the African American students, their families, the African American community, and the society at large. The initial impact will affect the African American students by addressing the achievement gap. The students will gain external support from the African American community in conjunction with support from their families, which will in turn encourage a positive learning environment for them to succeed academically. The support provided by the community will allow them to see the effects and benefits of working together (which will dispel the theory of learned helplessness) in order to resolve their own deficiencies. Lastly, society will be impacted by experiencing the positive collective efficacy that the African American community possesses when it pertains to educational issues.

Local Community

The VBP addresses the need of the learner, their family, and the community in various ways. For the learner, the VBP provides motivation to achieve reading goals from a community member (elder) within the village. Through this interaction, the youth can gain confidence while developing effective reading strategies. Likewise, being exposed to

a caring and skilled adult to guide them through the learning process can lead to improving their academic performance and establishing positive community bonds (Vygotsky, 1980). Ultimately, the student receives motivation as well as spending more time reading.

The VBP will also help to unite the students and their family, the school administrators, and community in working collectively to improve the academic performance of African American students. This project promotes support, cultural awareness, and self-efficacy to the student in the hopes that the student will feel empowered to succeed academically through role modeling. The student's support system will have a positive impact on the parents; henceforth, they will be well informed and more aware of their child's academic needs. Parents can establish working relationships with school administrators on behalf of their child. The parent can learn about various educational and career opportunities that will enhance the learning environment for their child through the involvement of the community business.

The most compelling effect that the project will have on the community is that it addresses the achievement gap through the willingness of the community members volunteering their time to share their knowledge and expertise. As a result of their efforts, confident African American students emerge, stronger and healthier African American families develop, and resilient community relationships develop within the African American culture.

Far-Reaching

The work from the VBP can illustrate ways to engage the African American community to become an asset in the educational success for the African American students. Establishing many villages within the African American community can be a social change development in a larger context. Once the individual school understands the importance of incorporating the African American community and witnesses the academic improvement of the low performing African American students, then school district would be inclined to use the village builder's concept to close the gap.

Conclusion

The VBP is a strategic support system that is geared toward improving the academic success of low performing African American students. The VBP goal is to motivate the student to read daily, empower the parents to be more involved with the student in the home and school, expose the student to various career options, and to identify the student's own natural support system to have long lasting impact.

While this village concept is unique in nature, it originated from the data collected from the focus groups responses to the research questions. Then it evolved from reviewing the literature, and it is established on previous theories pertaining to community involvement and learning, including theories such as social network, social support, motivational theory of role modeling, and SCCT. Understanding these theories, along with social learning, is crucial in implementing the VBP effectively.

Developing an implementation plan that consists of a time line and the function of the village members helped me to recognize potential resources, barriers, and existing

support within the African American community. Potential resources such as the local school are needed to provide criminal background checks for volunteers. These resources are vital to facilitate a safe learning environment for the student. Potential barriers might be recruiting and identifying consistent African American community to commit to working with the African American student and their family as a part of their natural support system. The project evaluation process will compare reading test scores of the African American student before the onset of the VBP and at the end for the purpose of determining the effectiveness of the project.

The concept of using a tribe of village volunteers to help improve the academic performance of African American students is a distinctive method that can bring about a social change locally, nationally, as well as international. Together with previous research on societal influences on the learning process, and the personal experiences from the focus groups, the concept of the VBP will bring about a social change. This project can add strength to the African American community and encourage that community to work collectively in bringing solutions to societal problems that distress them. In Section 4, I reflect on the knowledge I have obtained and skills I can apply that will promote the success of the VBP.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Providing multimentoring relationships to low performing African American students to improve academic performance was the focus of the VBP's overall development. Low performing African American students' educational performance can be positively altered to close the achievement gap. While previous strategies have been used to address the achievement gap, the impact has not been effective enough to permanently close the gap. The VBP establishes a mentoring system that can be modeled and replicated by the African American community to produce a long lasting effect on the student, their family, and their community. In this section, I reflect on the VBP's strengths, remediation of limitations, project development, and evaluation. I also analyze my role as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I further discuss what I learned from my scholarship experience, as well as being a leader and change. Lastly, I reveal the potential social change that the VBP can have on African American students, families, and communities. Future research was recommended in order to expound on the effectiveness of the mentoring village concept.

Project Strengths

The VBP shares the load of fixing the existing educational disparities known as the achievement gap through involving the collective efforts of the African American community. Sharing the knowledge of community individuals who have experienced life can help African American students, their families, and the community at large in a dynamic way. VBP affects the life of the student by building up his or her confidence to

perform academically through support from his or her environment while learning the importance of setting goals. Parents are empowered to be more actively involved with their child in and out of the home. By the parent's investment, the parental role will be strengthened, and the family bond will grow. The parents will also learn about goal setting and other academic strategies to assist their child academically.

The VBP gives the African American community an opportunity to improve the lives of their young members. This opportunity also promotes the establishment of a natural bond between the community and its members. With this bond, the African American community can together take part in the educational process while establishing a positive collective efficacy as a group. This group can witness their positive results, and the feeling of learned helplessness can be diminished within the community.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

One of the features of the VBP is spending quality time with the student and their families on a consistent basis. The consistency of the village members is a key element that is needed to facilitate success. Demonstrating partial support can have a negative impact on the student's ability to perform academically. This limitation can be reduced by informing the volunteers about how valuable their positions are. However, in reality, there is no concrete method to sustain the community member commitment in this project. Unexpected things happen in the lives of volunteers as well as the families, such as relocation or job loss. For this reason, the VBP's concept of having a multimentoring system is beneficial to ensure the success of the program so that the village can still function. If one village member from the community cannot participate, the project

developer can explain to the village about the change, but the village can continue their efforts as a village. Hopefully, the passion to make a difference in their community and encouragement from other village members will uphold them to complete their commitment.

Another limitation within the VBP is the village members serving within their roles and not attempting to take over the role of the parent. In order to reduce this limitation, preservice training such as VIBE will be needed to describe the roles and responsibilities as mentors while stressing the importance of staying in their designated role. Signing a village agreement form at the onset of each project will help to inform the village members of the regulations within the village.

Another key element within the VBP is the ability to identify the student's natural support system in order to continue the external support from the community after the completion of the project. However, with the many obligations within society, this goal may be challenging to obtain. Individuals who are identified as role models by the families may feel that the task is too great, and they do not have the time. Nonetheless, the VBP can work together to see what entities are already involved with the youth and family. For example, if the youth goes to the barber shop on a weekly basis, the VBP can ask the older barber to motivate the youth by asking the student if he or she is reading. This informal connection can still reinforce the support and encouragement that the VBP initially constructed. Instead of having a joint effort to motivate the youth, the family can separate entities and focus on one established village role. In the example, the barber shop as a whole could take on the role of the elder. The church can take on the role of the

chief in which this role will primarily connect the family to available resources within the church to enhance the student's academic performance (tutoring programs, back to school supplies). For the career informer role, the local business can be sought after, especially businesses that the family patronizes. With these potential solutions to the limitations, the VBP can still be productive in its delivery and sustainability.

Scholarship

As I reflect on my experience of scholarship, I reviewed my own level of efficacy and the impact that my determination to achieve a higher level of learning had on me. Initially, I felt as though this level of learning was beyond my capability and that I could not possibly be able to achieve this level of learning. But, with the encouragement of my husband, family, church, and friends, I realized that I was not giving myself enough credit, and I should embark on this academic journey. While on this road of higher learning, I was also inspired by many of my professors and colleagues. I feel as though I have the ability to take the knowledge that I have obtained and apply it to help others to better their lives. For this reason, the total scholarship experience of working late hours, going to the library, reading extensively, and sacrificing family time was worth it.

Project Development and Evaluation

Allowing the data and research to formulate the structure of the project development and evaluation was a lesson that I learned while on this educational journey. Upon completion of the data collection and the data analysis, the project concept emerged based on the themes within the study. As I reviewed the literature, the theories validated the project development. In addition to validation, I realized that discovering theories

helped broaden my understanding in order to learn about other theories that were applicable to the study, which taught me the importance of synthesizing theories within the project development process.

The project evaluation component is an element within the project development process. Incorporating an assessment system that configures whether or not the project instruments were effective and project goals are being met is beneficial in the validity of the project. It is through the project evaluation that the developer and other researchers can examine the methods implemented in the project to determine if it could be effective in other settings.

Leadership and Change

The role of a leader is not an easy task; but, it is rewarding when everyone works together. Effective leadership works with their group to accomplish set goals. Leaders also have the skill set to produce other leaders by cultivating their member's abilities. This process can be difficult at times, especially when the group members feel insecure in taking on new responsibilities or members resist change. I have learned that leadership requires patience and understanding concerning individual feelings. People are diverse and have feelings that motive them to behave in a certain manner. It is the responsibility of the leader to keep the focus of the vision, to encourage the ability of the group, and to assess the progress of the group in order to steer the group in another direction if necessary.

The idea of change can hinder individuals from moving forward because they are comfortable in and familiar with the regular routine of the group. However, when the

regular routine is ineffective and is not producing the results needed to reach the goal, it is the leader's responsibility to bring awareness to the group and work on implementing new strategies.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

The term scholar practitioner was first introduced to me during my educational journey when obtaining my masters at Walden. At this phase of my journey, I feel as though being a scholar practitioner will always be a work in progress. As a scholar in training, I have learned the value of research and the importance of data. Even though I strive to be a perfectionist, I realize that scholars are human beings and are imperfect creatures. Therefore, I can admit that I do not have all of the answers when it comes to the field of education. However, I have the ability to dissect literature to find them. With this realization, I feel confident in the research skills that I learned at Walden, which has prepared me to be a scholar. I learned how to collect and analyze pertinent data in an ethical manner during my study.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

"To whom much is given, much is required" is a verse that I feel expresses my motto as a practitioner. With the knowledge that I have acquired at Walden, it is my responsibility to do something with the knowledge that I have received. For example, I am a youth leader in my church and conduct meetings to assess the progress within the ministry. Since I have been attending Walden, I have learned about the importance of setting measurable goals and having realistic objectives to achieve a mission. Now, in the meetings I bring awareness to these key components and ignite the group to incorporate

these strategies to track our development. Some members appreciate my input, and others probably wish I would remain silent. I realize that I have a duty to share and implement what I have learned in a practical, nonthreatening manner.

Another lesson that I learned about my role as a practitioner is conducting myself in an ethical manner, whether it is citing others' work or conducting research. As a practitioner, I found it essential to acknowledge others' work in a proper way in order for their work to get the recognition that they deserve. Conducting ethical research protects the participants and myself as a researcher and brings validity to my research.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

During this educational journey, I realized that I have a talent for project development. For years, I have loved to undertake projects from start to finish. One element I enjoy is connecting the dots between who, what, when, and why. However, I realized that I lacked the foundational component in developing a project that consists of examining and reviewing previous literature concerning the project. This has helped me to identify effective, evidence-based strategies. It keeps me informed of the latest trends and patterns within the field of education. The most outstanding discovery was my ability to cross-examine two disciplines: sociology and education. With these skills and my talent to be involved with the details, I am equipped to be an effective project developer.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

There are disparities within the U.S. culture involving African Americans. With regards to the achievement gap, educators and the government have tried to remedy the problem through school strategies and providing funds to identified low performing

schools. However, limited progress has been achieved through these efforts. With the VBP the hope is to not only to address the educational disparity between African American students and European American students, but to empower the African American community to become actively involved in solving societal issues through a collective effort.

I foresee the VBP's potential to affect the society in three areas. First, building up the efficacy of the African American student can ignite hope for a better future for that student when he or she can start believing in him or herself. Once they obtain self-efficacy in smaller ways such as improving their reading abilities, they can feel confident in attempting larger goals. The students may view life positively because they believe that they can achieve bigger and better things. This will be evident in the choices that they make, such as not engaging in delinquent behavior.

Second, the family and surrounding community will be impacted by the change within the African American students. In theory, this change should produce a stronger family unit and that assists the student with flourishing in their endeavors. However, in reality, some people in the family will not be able to mentally support them. The African American student would have to rely on his or her own abilities. Nonetheless, the change within the student will cause the family and community to witness and be exposed to positive efforts that the student exhibits, and the family and community can attempt to adopt their change. This would be considered a role reversal where the child can be the example for the family and the community.

Third, the African American community will be impacted by developing African American students who have hope in themselves to achieve academically. Having a community that consists of people believing in themselves while working together can change the way that society views the African American community. The next generation will be able to pass on their tradition and strategies of goal setting, community involvement, and career exposure to their children.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Mentoring students is not a new method; but, it is an effective strategy that improves students' self-esteem. Over the years and through examining research, I learned the powerful effects that mentoring has on individuals' lives. Through the VBP, three mentors can work with the student and the parent to make academic improvements that are lasting. Future research would need to be conducted to confirm the impact that three mentors have on student and their parents. Additional research on whether or not shared group membership has a greater influence on the building up of student efficacy is needed.

From the VBP's concept, the field of education should work together to help African American students identify and use their natural supports in order to create their own villages. However, in doing so, the African American student may discover that people who they consider to be in their community do not share their ethnic background. Future researchers can assist in determining if this is a validated factor to consider when developing a village.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the entire VBP as well as self-evaluating my roles has allowed me to view my skills as a leader, project developer, and scholar practitioner. As I review the VBP, I recognize the project strengths and limitations. The strengths are in the goals to teach self-efficacy, empower parents, strengthen family bonds, and allow the community to aid in the educational process. Despite the possible limitations of partial support of village members, volunteers not operating in their roles, and not being able to identify natural support, the African American student will gain and be exposed to additional community support. As a result of the project development and evaluation, the VBP can address the local and national problem of the achievement gap by implementing a multimentoring system that provides community involvement. It was through my skills as a project developer that I understood the importance of being a scholar who investigates previous research and theories that support the implementation process. This process of implementing strategies reflects the same functions that I possess as a practitioner. Using the knowledge of being a leader as well as a project developer, I was able to contribute knowledge to the field of education. Most importantly, the skills that I have acquired and demonstrated will also improve the lives of many African American students and their families.

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Appendix A: Recruiting Survey

Recruiting Survey for Participants in the Closing the Achievement Gap Study

Instructions:
Please read each question and circle the answer that best describes you.

1) What is your ethnic background?
   a) White   c) Asian   e) Other_____
   b) African American   d) Hispanic

2) Do you live in the Garner area?
      YES   or   NO

3) Do you work in the Garner area?
      YES   or   NO

4) Do you have or had children attended the Wake County Public Schools?
      YES   or   NO

5) Do you work with children?
      YES   or   NO

6) In which category does your annual income last year fit?
   a) Below $20, 000   c) Between $40,000- $70,000
   b) Between $20,000- $40,000   d) Over $70,000

7) What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
   a) Did not finish High School   c) 2 yr. Associate Degree   e) Doctoral Degree
   b) High School Diploma/ GED   d) Master's Degree

Name: _____Phone number:

_____

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Welcome/ Introduction
        The participants will be welcomed by the facilitator (researcher) and introduction
will be made.

Purpose for focus group:

The purpose for this focus group today is gather information about how the African
American community view the Achievement Gap and what roles can they play to close
the Achievement Gap. The Achievement Gap is known as the difference in test scores
between African American and White students. Within the latest report of the 2013-14
WCPS district Blacks performed at 48% whereas White students performed at 86%
which indicates 38%- Achievement Gap. This conversation is one of three focus groups
conducted to determine practical ways in which the African American community can
improve student achievement for African American student. We are particularly
interested in identifying the causes for the Gap as well as strategies that can empower the
community to be more involved with the progress of their own students.

Importance of their participation:

Many of the studies have indicated several factors that cause the Achievement Gap. The
majority of the factors are external factors in which can be controlled by others. In order
to give African American students the best chance of achieving higher academically, we
have invited you to participate in these focus group to share your ideas of ways the
African American community can help improve proficiency rate for their children. Also
to establish an action plan that the African American community model to ensure the best
educational opportunity for the African American students. While everyone ideas and
comments are valuable to the success of the study your involvement does not obligate
you to implementation of your ideas.

Session expectations:
There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. All of responses, comments and
questions are important so please feel free to talk. Try to speak up so that everyone can
hear each other. In order to make sure that we can hear and understand everyone response
try to speak one person at a time. While everyone may not sure the same feelings or
experiences as some respecting everyone comments is expected. Ask questions for clarity
(if needed) about anything. Most importantly, all information discussed will be kept
confidential.

Agenda for the Focus Group:
We are here to learn what the African American community views the causes of the
Achievement Gap and what roles can they put in place to close the Gap. We will start out
by going around and introducing yourself by sharing information such as your name,

your occupation, how many children you have and their ages, the schools and grade your children attend.

Thank you.

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

Achievement Gap

1) Define the term " Achievement Gap"

2) What are the causes of the Achievement Gap?

Involved with child Education

3) What steps have you taken or do you want to take to support your or other child's education?

Causes of Achievement Gap

4) Fill in the blanks: In today's society, I believe that African American children now perform_____in education because_____.

5) How much money is needed in each African American household to make African American children successful academically? Why?

Community Solutions to Achievement Gap

6) Who is responsible for the educational success of the African American students?

7) If you were selected to develop a plan to close the Achievement Gap here, who would be key players in closing the Gap?

8) In what ways can the key players close the Achievement Gap?

What would you or others like you be willing to do to help improve the status/position of the African American students?

Appendix D: Focus Group Follow-Up Session\

Welcome and Purpose for the follow-up session:

Greetings to everyone. Thank you for coming back to complete the study on Closing the

Achievement Gap. A week ago you came out to discuss your views on the Achievement

Gap which was video and audio recorded. Since that session, the information has be

transcribed and reviewed to determine patterns and themes. On this evening, I would like

to review the transcribed interpretations from your sessions.

Everyone will get a hand out with the coding schemes, explanations and

summaries from the transcribed sessions. Please take time to review and make notes on

the handouts about anything you want to tell me concerning the session. Your feedback is

needed to ensure that I have accurately interpret your answers. This follow-up session is

vital in making this study successful.   Participants will write down any inconsistence and

discrepancies that they notice on the hand out anonymously.

Appendix E: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of closing the Achievement Gap. The researcher is inviting members of the African American community to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Cleopatra Lacewell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to examine the causes of the Achievement Gap from the African American perspective.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Attend a one hour focus group interview session.
- Attend a 30 minutes focus group follow- up session.

Here are some sample questions:
What are the causes for the Achievement Gap?

What do you do to get involved in your student's education?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at _____ (designated recruiting location) will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The benefit in participating in the study is being able to contribute valuable insight on how to close the Achievement Gap while making a social change within the community.

Payment:
Dinner will be provided at each session for participants as a form of payment. Each participant will receive thank you gift in the form of $20 Walmart gift card at the end of both sessions. In order to receive the thank you gift, participants have to attend both sessions.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by locked box. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via Cleopatra Lacewell at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or email at Cleopatra.lacewell@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210). Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix F: Letter of Cooperation (Site 1)

GARNER
A Great Place to Be

900 7th Avenue   Phone: (919) 773-4442
Garner, NC 27529   website: www.garnernc.gov

To: Mrs. Cleopatra Lacewell
From: Sonya Shaw, Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources Director
Date: 3/19/15
Re: Research Proposal Info

After reviewing your research proposal, entitled Closing the Achievement Gap, I support you conducting interviews with parents of youth program participants attending Avery Street Recreation Center programs, who may be willing to participate in your study. You are allowed to distribute informational flyers to inform parents about your study. You can also use the Avery Street Recreation Center meeting room to complete survey information and conduct study and follow-up member check-in sessions, necessary for the completion of your study.

I understand that the data collected will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from Walden University IRB, study participants or this agency.

Sonya R. Shaw

Appendix G: Letter of Cooperation (Site 2)

Charles W. Brooks, Pastor

www.poplar-springs.org

Cleopatra Lacewell

March 2, 2015

Dear Cleopatra,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Closing the Achievement Gap: the voice from the African American Community within the Poplar Springs Christian Church. As part of this study, I authorize you to make announcements during Sunday services, distribute surveys, conduct three focus group, conduct three follow-up member checks and results dissemination activities. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibility is the use of meeting rooms. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Brooks
Pastor/CEO

Appendix H: VBP VIBE Training Curriculum

The Village Builder's Project

V.I.B.E

Training Curriculum

Mission and Purpose:

The Village Builder's Project mission is to provide a group mentorship to low performing African American students and their parents in order to improve their academic performance.

In order to accomplish this mission, a training curriculum has been designed to train the African American community members to work together as a "village" in order to provide a systematic educational support system for identified youth.

History of the Village Builders:

The village Builder's Project is based on the research results from my case study work on "Closing the Achievement Gap: from the African American community perspective" as well as other research on the related topic. The data interpretations lead me to believe that low performing African American students need additional support to help promote academic success. It is with this V.I.B.E. training module addresses the five research based strategies within the Village Builders.

Goal:

The overall goal for the V.I.B.E. training is to provide the African American community members with research based strategies to improve the academic performance of African American students.

Learning outcomes:

Audience:

V.I.B.E. trainings are aimed for adult African American community members that consist of but not limited to senior citizens, college students, business owners, educators and parents. The training size is designed for approximately 15-20 participants.

Curriculum:

V.I.B.E .training curriculum is a total of ten hour training that is divided into four modules. The V.I.B.E. module consist of the Volunteering process (Module 1), the Inspiration process (Module 2), the Building up process (Module 3) and the Education process (Module 4) Each module will have its goal and objectives along with activities and group exercises. The modules will be approximately 2.5 hours. The VIBE training can be conducted either as a 3 day training or a 2 day training.

Module Outline:

MODULE 1. Volunteering Process ………….2.5 hours

MODULE 2: Inspiring Actions……………….2.5 hours

MODULE 3: Building Up……………….....2.5 hours

MODULE 4: Educating the Village…………...2.5 hours

MODULE # 1:

Volunteering Process

Goals:

To understand the history, purpose and goal of Village Builder.

To help volunteers to understand the scope and limits as mentors.

To help volunteers develop skills and attitudes they need to perform well in their role.

Agenda

Welcome, Introduction, Icebreaker …..”Who am I   (30mins)

Overview of the Village Builder’s Project (15 mins.)

Module # 1: Volunteering Process: (30 mins)

I.   Eligibility, Screening,
II.   Level of Commitment.
III.   Expectations and restrictions.
IV.   Benefit and Rewards

Break (15 mins)

Roles of a mentor (15 mins.)

Responsibilities of mentors: “Mentors are vs Mentors are not” (30 mins)

Paradigm Shift: Power of a village (15 mins)

Wrap –up (10 mins)

Trainer’s notes

As participants arrive, have them to sign-in, fill out a name tag and pass out Village Builder Project: VIBE Training Manual.

Welcome/ Introduction:

Welcome everyone for coming out and thank them for their interest in wanting to make a difference in a youth and their families lives.

Introduce yourself and other key stakeholders (school administrators, community leaders or businesses) that are supporter of the project.

Express how glad you are that they are here and how critical their involvement will be for the success of the project. Also express how crucial it is to attend all of the training sessions.

Make sure that everyone has all the materials needed for the training.

Review the agenda, goals and objectives for each module with the participants.

Go over housekeeping logistics (such bathroom locations, room temperature control, breaks, etc)

Ask if anyone has any questions before we start….

If none, let's get started by getting to know each other

: "Similarities Game"

Objectives:

- Participants will actively engage in the icebreaker activity to know other participants in the training.
- Participants will experience a strategy that can be used when they meet their scholar and parent.
- Participants will be exposed to the idea of a "village"

Length:

- About 30 mins.

Materials needed:

- Handed out: Similarities: What do we all have in common.

Steps:

1. Tell the participants to count off from 1 to 5 in order to divide the participants into groups. Each group should have 5 participants in them.
2. Hand out the activity sheet # 1.
3. Read over the instruction on the activity sheet.

4. Once instructions are given then each group will meet in a designated area in the room.
5. When everyone is in their area, tell the participants that they have 10 mins to come up with 4 similarities within the group.
6. Start the time. Once time is completed allow each group to share their similarities with all of the participants.
7. After each group has presented, lead a discussion about how this exercise is similar to starting a new relationship with the student, their parents and other group members.
   Ask questions such as:
   How did it feel when you had to share information about yourself to strangers?
 Did anyone say or do anything that made you feel more comfortable to talk? Or less comfortable

   What would they do differently the next time that they would do this activity?

This activity provides practice in sharing information with a group of people. This is a key component when start a new relationship.

Activity # 1 HANDOUT

"Similarities: What do we have in common?"

Instructions:

You have 10 minutes to come up with at least 4 things that each member in your group have in common. Once commonalities with the rest of participants.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Overview of the Village Builder's Project

Objectives:

To share the program's history, mission and goals

To be clear about requirements and rules

To help mentors feel linked to the Village Builders

Length:

About 15 minutes

Materials needed:

Village Builder volunteer packet.

Steps:

1) Ask the participants to turn to the handout "Overview of Village Builder's" in volunteer packet. Then briefly describe the VB program's history, mission, and structure. This will help volunteers feel connected to the project and give them understanding of what VB hopes to achieve through their collective efforts.

2) Describe the organization chart including the roles of the village member. Be sure mentors understand how they communicate with project developer and that they feel comfortable doing so.

Volunteering Process

Eligibility:

> All interested participants must reside in Wake County North Carolina.

> All interested participants must have access to transportation, a phone and internet services in order to have communication with the student and their family.

> All interested participants must be 18 years old or older.

Screening:

> All eligible participants must fill out a Village Builder application.

> All eligible participants must be approved to volunteer through Wake County school volunteering requirements.

> All participants must attend the VIBE training prior to work with a youth.

Level of commitment:

> Each village members are asked to spend one hour a week with a student or parent for 18 weeks. The time can consist of phone contacts, visitation at school or in the home, and field trips in the community.

> Additional time spent is optional between the village members and student. Overnight and out of town trips are prohibited under the project guidelines.

> If unexpected circumstances occur, please notify the Project Developer first, so the necessary adjustments can be made.

Expectation:

Village Builder members are expected to meet with student or parent once a week for the agreed time commitment (1hour). The village member weekly meeting can consist of phone calls, home or school visitations, or community field trips. Contacts should be arranged with student and parents.

There will be three (3) tribal meetings during the village builder's project that each member is expected to attend. The first meeting is the initial meeting (in the home or at school). At this meeting, introductions will be made, village agreement forms signed and goals will be discussed as well as individual weekly meetings arranged.

The second meeting is the mid-point meeting. This meeting could be conducted over the phone or in person. This meeting is centered around the student and parent progress on

their goals. Also, at this meeting the student and parent will identify their natural supports within the community.

The final meeting is called the "Passing of the Torch" ceremony. During this last meeting which will be held at the end of the project, all goals will be reviewed. The village members will pass over knowledge concerning their experiences to the new village members.

Restriction:

Overnight and out of town trips are not recommended within the village builder's project.

Benefits and Reward:

The Village Builder's Project goal is to promote unity within the African American community in order to improve the academic performance of African American students. As a member of this project, we would like to assist and equip you with the necessary skills needed to make your time with the scholar valuable and memorable. Since we are not a funded project, most of the activities and events with your scholar will be free. However, whenever we get donations for community events we will provide them for you and the village members. This will be a great way to discover educational activities outside of the home in a non-traditional manner.

Activity 2. Roles of a Mentor

Objectives:

Participants will identify qualities of effective mentors.

Participants will explore roles that mentors can play in lives of at at-risk students.

Length:

About 30 minutes

Materials needed:

Index cards.

Newsprint and markers

Steps:

1. Give each participants an index card. Ask them to think back to when they were a child or youth. (Suggest an age range that is the same as the youth they will be mentoring.) Ask them to do the following silently:
    Identify one person, preferably someone who is not a relative, who was a kind of mentor for them.

    Think about why that person was important to them and the result for them of that person's interest.

    Recall the qualities of that person that made her or him so valued, and write down two or three of those qualities on the index card.

2. Have participants talk briefly about the mentor they identified and the qualities on the newsprint. When a quality is repeated, put a check mark next to it each time it is mentioned. (For example, the first time someone says "good listener," write that phrase. Each time someone else identifies this quality in his or her mentee, put a check mark by the phrase.)
3. Review the items on the list. Note which were mentioned most often. Then have the participants identify which of the qualities might be categorized as "communication skills" such as listening, talking, asking questions, and being

non-judgmental. (Later training activities focus specifically on helping mentors develop communication skills, but their importance should be emphasized immediately.)

4. Ask participants –again thinking back to the person they identified –to identify the roles a mentor can play in a youth's life. List their responses on the newsprint. (These might include friend, big brother, big sister, positive role model, resource, guide.) Lead a brief discussion about what each of these roles might involve. Be sure participants see that a mentor is NOT a parent. Teacher or counselor.

5. Allow time for participants to talk about their hopes and concerns in their new role. For example, which of the qualities that they admired in their "mentors" do they feel fairly confident they possess? Which do they need to work on developing? What other concerns do they have about their role? Summarize this discussion with Transparency 1: The Roles of a mentor.

Responsibilities of a Mentor:

Activity #3: The Do ’s and Don’ts of a mentor

Objectives:

To learn the expectations of a mentor.

Length:

About 15 minutes

Materials needed:

Giant post note and markers.

Steps:

1) Ask the participants to call out what do they see their roles are as a mentor. While they listed them write them down on the post note under the title of "A mentor is……"
2) Then ask the participants to list what roles that they should not be as a role model. Write them down under the title " A mentor is not.."
3) Once both list have been generated by the participants, then the program trainer will go over each response (A mentor is not is first) to engage the participants in a discussion concerning each responsibility.
4) After the first column, then the next column (A mentor is…) is discussed.
5) Once both column are discussed, ask the participants if they have any questions about their role and responsibilities.

Paradigm Shift: The Power of the Village

Objectives:

To understand the importance of working together as a group.

To promote the support within the village.

Length:

About 15 minutes

Materials:

Internet access, screen or monitor, paper and pen.

Steps:

1) Before displaying the video, ask the participants if they hear the term of "paradigm shift?" Define and give an example of a paradigm shift. Access the youtube video on inspirational team building (http://www.ashmaxpro.co.uk) What if I……and the power of a village

2) Present 2 two minutes videos to the participants. Ask questions about the relevance of the video to the village.

3) Discuss the power of working together. What are some key traits that the village should possess?

Trainer's notes:

One of the video presentations was on an African Tribe working together to improve the surrounding. Engage the participants to make a correlation to the African American community.

Activity 4. WRAP -UP

Objective:

Participants will reflect on their learning from the session.

Length:

About 10 minutes

Materials needed:

Handout: "Summarizing this Session"

Evaluation Form

Steps:

1) Instruct the participants to look through their VIBE training packet for the "Summarizing Module # 1" and ask participants to write down two or three things they learned during the session that they will able to put to use their individual mentoring relationship as well as the village.
2) Ask for any volunteers to share their items.

ACTIVITY 4 HANDOUT: Summarize Module # 1

List two or three things you learned during this session that will help you when you begin your new role as a Village Builder member. Then explain how each will help.

1.

2.

3.

Questions I still have……….

Module # 2:   Inspiring scholars
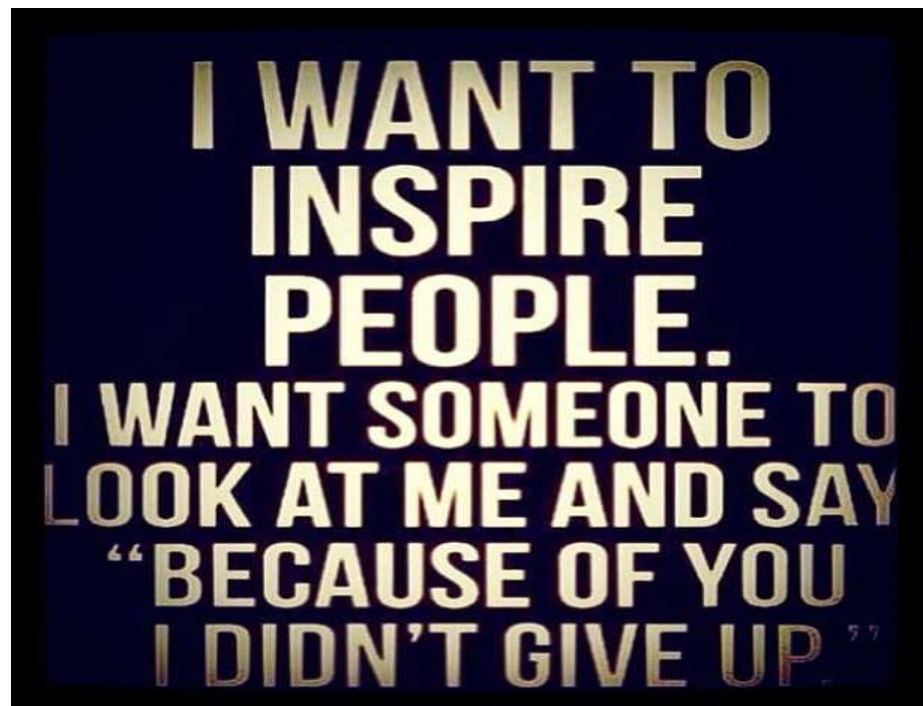
Goals:

Participants will learn ways to get to know each other.

Participants will be an effective listener.

Participants will practice good communication skills within their mentor relationship and in the village.

Agenda

Welcome, Recap and Review Agenda (10 mins.)

Activity 1: "The Importance of Active Listening (25mins)

Activity 2: Effective communication Skills (25 mins)

Break (10mins)

Activity 3: Communication Role Plays (40 mins)

Activity 4: "The Initial Village Builder's Meeting" (10 mins)

Wrap-up (10mins)

Welcome:

Thank you for coming back to Day #2 of the V.I.B.E. training for the Village Builder's Project. Today I am excited to share with you some effective communication strategies to use when working with your student (scholar) or with the parent (Lead Advocate). Before we go into today's agenda can anyone recap yesterday training?

Does anyone have any questions before we get started? If none, let's review today's agenda. After reviewing the agenda, then we will proceed to the first activity.

Materials needed:

Strips of paper with pre-scripted text messages.

Cell phones

Steps:

1) Ask the participants if they ever played the telephone game during their childhood. Instruct the participants to gather in a big circle.
2) Have the participants elbow length apart in order not to be close to each other.
3) Explain that in today's society the youth (teenagers) talk more through texting to communicate than using the phone.
4) Ask for a volunteer who would like to receive the first text.
5) Once a participant agrees, the volunteer will select the first text strip and then whisper the message in the person to their left ear.
6) He or she will then text the message to the person on the left.
7) This person will then whisper what should receive via text to the next person.
8) The next person will then text what she heard to the next person. This rotation will continue on until it comes back to the first person.
9) After comes back around to the first person then the facilitator will then reveal to everyone the original text.
10) Discuss the advantages and disadvantage of texting.

Trainer's notes:

Participants may not have a cell phone be prepared to switch people around to the spots where they have to be the whisperer. Stress the importance of being very clear when using texting as a means of communicating with youth and/or parents.

Activity 2 HANDOUT: I HEAR YOU

People tend to think of listening as something passive, or they tend not to think about it at all. But listening is a skill –a valuable skill that can be practiced and learned. One writer has compared a listener to a catcher in a baseball game.* Observers who don't know a lot about baseball might believe that a catcher is doing nothing more than waiting for a pitcher to throw the ball. They think that all the responsibility with the pitcher, who is, after all, the one who is winding up and delivering the pitch. In the same way, some people believe that all the responsibility in communication rests with the person who is talking. In reality, though, a good catcher is not a passive target waiting to receive the pitch. He or she concentrates on a pitcher's motions; tracks the path of the ball; and, it necessary jumps, stretches, or dives to make the catch. Similarly, a good listener actively tries to catch and understand the speaker's words.

ACTIVE LISTENING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL OF A GOOD MENTOR

When you talk with your "scholar", try to remember to:

- Clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts and distractions, so you can give her or him your undivided attention.
- If your "scholar" is a child or much smaller than you, sit when you talk, so you are at about the same level.
- Make eye contact
- Be aware of your body language.
- Pay attention to your scholar's facial expressions, gestures and body language.
- Read between the lines for your scholar's feelings. Learn to say "How did that make you feel?"
- Ask open-ended questions. Don't ask, "How was school today?" Instead ask, "What did you do in school today?" Then, as appropriate, ask nonthreatening follow-up questions.
- Paraphrase- restate in your own words-what you think the child or youth has said. When paraphrasing is accurate, your mentee will feel understood. If it is off the mark, it invites her or him to clarify and also reminds you to listen more closely.
- Ask questions when you don't understand.
- Put yourself in your scholar's "shoes" and try to understand the world from her or his perspective.
- Put aside preconceived ideas, and refrain from passing judgement.
- Acknowledge that you are listening by occasionally nodding your head and saying like, "I see."
- Give your scholar the same respect that you desire for yourself when you are talking to someone.

ACTIVITY # 3: COMMUNICATION ROLE-PLAYS

Objective:

- Participants will practice applying "active listening" skills by joining in role-plays.

Length:

- About 40 minutes

Materials included:

- Handout: "Sample Role-Plays"

Steps:

1) Tell participants that you want them to apply some of the ideas they have been talking about during this session by role-playing conversations with their scholar or parent. Organize participant into pairs. Give each pair one of the scenarios from the trainer resource "Sample Role Plays" or one of the scenarios you have created. Tell the pairs you want them to use their scenario as the basis for two role plays of a conversation between the village member and scholar and then between the village member and parent. The first role play the participant #1 should play the "scholar" and the second role play participant # 2 should be the parent.
- In the first role play, the village member should display poor listening and other communication skills.
- In the second role-play, the village member should display effective listening and other communication skills.
- As time allows, they should then switch roles and do the role plays again.

Remind participants that there are many positive (as well as many negative) ways to respond to a situation. Good communication skills should be incorporated into a person's own style and not be forced.

As the pairs are doing their role-plays, you as the trainer should listen in on as many as possible. Each time after you listen to a role-play, you can ask the pair a few questions to help them reflect on the experience. For the "bad" role-play, for example, you can ask the "scholar" how the village member words or actions made him or her

feel. For the "good" role-play, you can ask the "scholar" what the village member said or did that made him or her feel the mentor could be trusted.

Allow about 20 minutes for the pairs to complete their role plays.

2. Bring the whole group back together. Ask for a pair to volunteer to give their two role plays. After each of the role-plays, have other participants give feedback on what the village member said and did to block or to foster a conversation that would build trust and help the scholar feel comfortable and included within the village to talk openly. Also encourage the pair to talk about how the experience felt to them and what they might be more aware of now that they have done the role-plays. As time allows, have others pairs present their role plays and receive feedback.

Activity 3 HANDOUT: SAMPLE COMMUNICATION ROLE-PLAYS

These scenario are intended to give participants an opportunity to explore various ways of responding to their scholars, incorporating the community skills they have been exploring during this training workshop. You can cut these along the dotted lines and give one scenario to each pair during the Communication Role Plays activity. Or you might want to create new scenarios that describe situations that more closely represent your particular program.

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1. Your scholar is 11 years old. You have been meeting for more than two months, and she has never expressed an opinion about how you and she should spend your time together. You always suggest the activities. When you suggest one, she always says, "That'll be OK." When you suggest more than one and ask her to choose, she says "It doesn't matter which one." When you ask her to suggest what she'd like to do, she says. "Anything will be nice". You know it's important for her to share in the decision making and in your meeting today you've decided to try to deal with this situation.

----

2. Your scholar is 13 years old. This is only your third meeting with him. His family recently moved and, as a result, he started going to this school just last month, after the school year had already started. He hadn't said much about school during your first two meetings. In fact, he hadn't said much about anything. But today when you meet, you immediately see that he has a black eye. You ask him what happened. "Nothing," he says. "I just got into a fight in the cafeteria."

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3. Your scholar is seven years old. You have been meeting with him for six weeks, and he has always seemed to enjoy your time together. But when you meet with him today, it seems like nothing can make him happy. He doesn't want to play computer games or read a story together or play catch, all things he usually enjoys. He finally agrees to work on putting together a Super Monsters puzzle with you, but when the puzzle is halfway complete, he knocks all the pieces onto the floor and starts kicking them across the room.

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4. Your scholar is 12 years old. During the first two months of your relationship, things seemed to be going well between you. But then she did not show up for your last two meetings. You phoned again and set up another meeting, this time arranging to pick her up in your car. She is home when you arrived there, and she gives you a big smile when she sees you. But you are upset about the missed meetings and feel you have to talk about it.

----

5. Your scholar is 14 years old, and you have been meeting with her for three months. At your meeting today, she proudly shows you the report card she just received," I didn't fail anything," she says. You look at the report card: She has just barely passed all her classes. You know she's smart and should be doing much better in school.

----

6. Your scholar is 14 years old, and you have been meeting with him for a month. On a Monday afternoon, you meet him at school and the two of you are having a great time shooting hoops and talking about what else each of you likes to do to have fun. "I had a great weekend, "he says, "I went to a party where this guy brought all this beer."

----

7. Your scholar is 15 years old, and you have been meeting with him for three months. When you see him today, he has just gotten his report card, and he is failing two subjects, "I can't wait until I am 16," he says "The first thing I'm going to do is drop out of school."

----

8. Your scholar is eight years old, and you have been meeting for two months. During the first half-hour of your meeting today, you and she play hopscotch outside in the schoolyard. She seems a bit quieter than usual, but you don't think much about it because she is very shy and usually doesn't talk much when you are together. It's cold out, and after a while the two of you decide to go inside to the school library to read a book. When you sit down together at the table to read and she takes her coat off, you see that she has fresh large bruises on both her arms.

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9. Your scholar is 14 years old, and you have been meeting for two months. The two of you have just gone to a movie together, and you want to go with her to get something to eat and talk about the movie. "What time is it?" she asks. When you tell her, she says she has to go home to babysit for her sister and make dinner. "I'm already late," she says. "My mother's going to scream at me. It's not fair. She's never home. She makes me do everything.

Your scholar is 14 years old. You've been meeting for three months, and you know he has a huge crush on a girl in his class. He talks about her a lot and considers her his girlfriend. Your scholar is small and shy, and you're pretty sure this is the first girlfriend he's had. When you meet today, he's obviously downcast. "What's the matter?" you ask. He tells you his girlfriend has started seeing a guy who's 17, and she told your scholar, "Why would I want to go out with a runt like you?"

ACTIVITY 3: The Initial Village Builder's Meeting

Objectives:

 Participants will be familiar with the protocol of the first village meeting.

   Participants will review the Village Builder's Project agreement form.

Length:

About 10 mins.

Materials needed:

Handout: The initial village builder's meeting

Steps:

1) Ask the participants to take out their handout on the initial village builder meeting.
2) Inform the participants that the first meeting will be schedule after the parent and youth attend the interest meeting.
3) Review each form with the participants and after each form as the participants if they have any questions.
4) Allow the participant to take notes or fill out the form.
5) Once all of the forms are completed, the village members will schedule a day and time to meet with the scholar and/or lead advocate.

Activity 4. WRAP -UP

Objective:

Participants will reflect on their learning from the session.

Length:

About 10 minutes

Materials needed:

Handout: "Summarizing this Session"

Evaluation Form

Steps:

6) Instruct the participants to look through their VIBE training packet for the "Summarizing Module # 1" and ask participants to write down two or three things they learned during the session that they will able to put to use their individual mentoring relationship as well as the village.
7) Ask for any volunteers to share their items.

ACTIVITY 4 HANDOUT: Summarize Module # 1

List two or three things you learned during this session that will help you when you begin your new role as a Village Builder member. Then explain how each will help.

1.

2.

3.

Questions I still have……….

Module # 3: Building Up

Module # 3: "BUILDING UP" PROCESS

Studies have shown the importance that self-confidence has on student's academic performance. It is the Village Builder's responsibility to equip the village members with effective research based strategies that will empower the student to improve their own academic performance.

Goals: By the end of this training:

- Participants will understand the value of self-efficacy.
- Participants will learn and practice goal setting techniques.
- Participants will also learn reading strategies to use with their scholar.

Agenda

Welcome, Recap and Review (10 mins)

Activity #1 What is Self- efficacy? (10 mins)

Activity # 2 Goal setting (30 mins)

Break (10 mins)

Activity #3 Role plays (40 mins)

Activity #4 The mid- term evaluation meeting (10mins)

Wrap up (10mins)

Welcome:

Thank you for coming back to Day #3 of the V.I.B.E. training for the Village Builder's Project. Today I am excited to share with you how to empower your student (scholar) and/or with the parent (Lead Advocate). Before we go into today's agenda can anyone recap yesterday training?

Does anyone have any questions before we get started? If none, let's review today's agenda. After reviewing the agenda, then we will proceed to the discussing self-efficacy.

Activity #1 Video on Self-efficacy

Objectives:

  Participants will understand the term "self-efficacy".

    Participants will discuss the importance of having self-confidence in order to improve academic performance.

Length:

About 8 minutes

Material needed:

Video on "self-efficacy, motivation, goal revision".

Steps:

1) Introduce the video by stressing the importance of building up the self-efficacy of a person.
2) Ask questions about the video.
   1) What is self-efficacy?
   2) Why is self-efficacy important to improving academic performance?
   3) What ways can we help to improve self-efficacy?

Activity #2 Goal setting

Objectives:

Participants will understand the meaning of goals.

Participants will learn different methods to use when developing goals.

Length:

About 15 mins.

Materials needed:

Handout: Goal setting, timer

Steps:

1) Arrange three tables with different activities that help scholar develop goals. The tables will have three different strategies: goal setting, reading strategies, and career goals
2) Go to each table and review each step of the strategy with the participants.
3) Inform and demonstrate how they can apply each strategy with their scholar and their parent.

Table # 1 General goals

Items you will need

- Paper and writing utensils
- Poster board
- Magazines, catalogs and other picture-heavy print publications
- Scissors
- Folders
- Glue
- Stickers

Step 1

Make a list. Ask the participants to write down some goals that are specific, measurable and attainable within a precise time frame. Suggest that they choose a combination of short- and long-term goals. Reaching short-term goals can boost their confidence and attaining long-term goals builds endurance and perseverance.

Step 2

Transfer the goals to a poster board. Give each participant a blank poster board and ask them to write each ambition in large print on it. Write the goals in a variety of places, angles and sizes so that they are spread randomly over the poster board.

Step 3

Create an action items chart for each participant. Ask the participants to come up with steps they can take to reach each goal. Make a checklist by hand or on your computer with a section for each goal and its corresponding action items. .

Step 4

Give the participants a stack of magazines, catalogs and other publications. Tell them to find photos that represent each of their goals. Cut out the pictures. Create a folder for each child and store the cutouts until each goal is achieved.

Step 5

Mark achievements with stickers and collages. Every time the children complete steps toward one of their goals, give them stickers to place on their action item charts. When they reach goals, help the kids glue their cutouts onto the poster board over the associated written goal. When they have attained all of their goals, they will have a collage displaying their success.

References

- Montgomery County Public Schools: Benefits of Goal Setting
- University of Virginia: Writing S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Table # 2

Reading strategy: READ ALOUD

Items needed:

Books, colorful index cards w/ questions on the back.

Steps:

1) Have various cultural relevant books on table.
2) Allow the participants to come up and select a book.
3) Ask for a volunteer to read their book. After they read the book, have the index card spread out on the table and ask them to select one.
4) The cards would have four strategies: Key Ideas and details, Craft and Structure, Integration of knowledge and ideas, and Range and Level of Complexity.
5) Explain how each strategy can be used with the selected book.

Hand-out

How Parents Can Support the Common Core Reading Standards
By: **Reading Rockets**

Is your school using the new Common Core standards? This is a big change for students — and their parents. Get to know what the four main areas of the Common Core reading standards mean and simple things you can do at home to help your child build skills in these areas.

The Common Core State Standards are national standards that say what K-12 students are expected to learn in math and the English language arts. For older students, the standards expand to include literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects.

Despite the complexities of the standards, there are several basic ways parents can support their child's learning. The recommendations below line up with the four broad areas of the Common Core reading standards: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and Range and Level of Complexity.

Key Ideas and Details
What it means: Your child will be encouraged to carefully read many books and texts. Within these texts, your child will be working to understand what is happening, summarize key events or points and recall details important to the story or topic.

How parents can help: After you share a story, talk about important story elements such as beginning, middle and end. Encourage your child to retell or summarize the reading. After reading nonfiction, ask questions about the information, "Is the spider an insect? How is a spider different than an insect?"

Craft and Structure
What it means: The standards within this area (or "strand") focus on specifics within a book, for example, an author's specific word choices or phrases. A second emphasis relates to understanding the underlying structure of common types of texts, including storybooks, poems and more.

How parents can help: During and after reading, call attention to interesting words and phrases. This may include repeated phrases, metaphors or idioms ("sick as a dog," "a dime a dozen.") Talk about any new vocabulary and other ways the author used language or words to make the text interesting, informative, funny or sad.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
What it means: Within this strand, students will be working to compare and contrast details from stories, describe key ideas using details in informational text, and tell how two texts on the same topic differ.

How parents can help: For younger students, encourage your child to describe how the illustrations within a book support the story. For older students, have fun reading different versions of the same fairy or folk tale. Talk about the similarities and differences between the two books. Then switch to nonfiction and read two books on the same topic. Compare the information in each, again focusing on similarities and differences. "Let's look at each book and think about the words used to describe weather. How are the descriptions alike? How are they different?"

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
What it means: Teachers will be using a variety of techniques to introduce a range of books and other written material that both support and challenge a child's reading level. This may include nonfiction and fiction, infographics, poetry and more. This will be done with the ultimate goal of making sure students understand what they're reading.

How parents can help: Parents can help promote their child's skill while developing their reading stamina (ability to "stick with it."). This means helping them avoid frustration or anxiety about tackling a harder book. Support your reader by talking through some of the things that make a text complex, including multiple levels of meaning, inferred information (implied rather than clearly stated) or more sophisticated graphics.

Table #3: Career goals

Items needed:

Blank paper, crayons, markers, pens,

Steps:

1) Give participants a piece of paper and ask them to draw a picture of what they currently do as their occupation. If they are unemployed, ask them to draw a picture of their dream job.
2) After everyone has completed their pictures, then ask the participants to list on the paper how they acquired their position.
3) Review how making a visible picture can help children set goals as well as naming the steps that it takes to get a goal.
4) Ask a participant to volunteer to share their goals with group.

Trainer's notes:

Always set the example by creating a picture first and then model how to discuss ways to communicate with the student.

Activity # 3 Role Plays

Objectives:

Participants will practice various goal setting strategies through role playing.

Participants will recognize effective methods that will help them to set goals with their scholar

Length: 40 mins

Materials needed:

Items from each table

Steps:

1) Ask participants to pair up with another participant for this exercise.
2) Have each participant role play with each other on how to set goals (reading and career)
3) Each participant will have 5 minutes to establish the goal.
4) After the goal is developed, the participant will then role play for 10 mins on each goal on how to work on them.
5) Once each participant takes a turn to role play. All of the participants will come together to discuss various ways in which they role played.
6) Create a list of suggestions that can copied and handed out to the participants.

   Trainer's notes: Encourage the participants to share ideas.

Activity # 4: The mid-term evaluation

Objectives:

1) Participants will learn the importance of mid- meeting follow-up with the scholar and their family.

2) Participants will know what to expect when they attend the mid-meeting.

Length: 10

Materials needed:

 Handout: Mid meeting Agenda

Steps:

1) Ask participants to take out the mid-meeting handout from their packet.
2) Have the participants to review the handout independently.
3) Explain each of the items on the agenda.
4) Ask participants if they have any questions about the handout.

Trainer's notes:

Inform the participants that the mid-meeting can take place at the home, school or via phone/Skype.

Handout: Mid-term evaluation

1) How would you describe your experience with the village thus far?

    _____

    _____

    _____

2) Is there anything you would like to change?

    _____

    _____

    _____

3) What do you like the least?

    _____

    _____

    _____

4) What do you like the most about the village experience?

    _____

    _____

    _____

5) What goals are you working on?

    _____

    _____

    _____

6) What careers have you been exposed to?

    _____

    _____

    _____

7) How has the village experience helped to improve your educational performance?

    _____

    _____

    _____

8) In what ways do you feel supported by the village?

    _____

    _____

    _____

WRAP -UP

Objective:

Participants will reflect on their learning from the session.

Length:

About 10 minutes

Materials needed:

Handout: "Summarizing this Session"

Evaluation Form

Steps:

4) Instruct the participants to look through their VIBE training packet for the "Summarizing Module # 3" and ask participants to write down two or three things they learned during the session that they will able to put to use their individual mentoring relationship as well as the village.
5) Ask for any volunteers to share their items.

ACTIVITY 4 HANDOUT: Summarize Module # 3

List two or three things you learned during this session that will help you when you begin your new role as a Village Builder member. Then explain how each will help.

1.

2.

3.

Questions I still have……….

Module # 4:   Educating the village

Module # 4: EDUCATING THE VILLAGE

As village members, you must understand that your involvement is temporary but powerful. It is important to lay a foundation in which other communities can come and follow after.

Goals: By the end of this module:

1) Participants will understand how the scholar feels when it is time to close the village builder experience.
2) Participants will practice the closing meeting of " Passing of the Torch".

Agenda

Welcome, Recap and Review (10 mins)

Activity #1 Trading Places (10 mins)

Activity # 2 Preparing for closing (30 mins)

Break (10 mins)

Activity #3 Identifying natural support system (20 mins)

Activity #4 "Passing on the Torch (20 mins)

Wrap up (10mins)

Welcome/ Recap/ Review:

Thank you for coming back to Day #4 of the V.I.B.E. training for the Village Builder's Project. Today I am excited to share with you how to transition your scholar and/or their parent to use their natural own support system. Before we go into today's agenda can anyone recap yesterday training?

Does anyone have any questions before we get started? If none, let's review today's agenda. After reviewing the agenda, then we will proceed to Trading Places activity.

Activity#1: Trading Places

Objectives:
 Participants will identify emotions concerning closing the mentor relationship.
 Participants will learn how to show sympathy.

Length:
 10 mins

Materials:
 Index cards, pens, bowl

Steps:
1) Have each participant write down on an index card an experience that they can remember when they had a loss. The loss can be experience of the passing of a loved one, losing a sporting game, etc.
2) When they finish, have participants folded the index cards and place in a bowl.
3) Once all the index cards are completed, have each participants select a card and read it to the group.
4) The participants will demonstrate how she or he would feel if this occurred to them.

Trainer's Notes:
Inform the participants that the scholar and parent have feelings too. They have just had a support system in their life for several weeks and now things are about to change. Discuss ways in which the participants can sympathize with the scholar and their family.

Activity # 2: Preparing for closure

Objectives:

Participants will learn strategies for closing the mentor relationship
Participants will practice strategies needed to close the mentor relationship.

Length:
30 minutes

Materials:
Video clip (http:/youtu.be/NLZRHcei6pa) index cards, pens, bowl

Steps:
1) Have participants watch the youtube clip on "What do I do to close the mentoring relationship well for the year?"
2) Discuss the strategies mention in the video.
3) Ask the volunteers to write on the card one positive quality you notice about a fellow participant.
4) Hand out the cards to each participant and have them to write it aloud.
5) Discuss how this strategy made the participant feel.

Trainer's Notes:
Have the participants write a card for the person sitting beside them on the left. This done so that everyone gets a card.

Activity # 3 Identifying support systems

Objectives:
        Participants will identify their own support system.
        Participants will understand the how to share their roles with other community members.

Length:
        20 mins.

Materials:
  Paper and pens, dry easer board

 Steps:
                    1)   Ask the participants to draw a tree with several branches on it. Have them to write down everyone who have made a difference in their lives.
                    2) Discuss how they made a difference in their lives.
                    3) Listed individuals that are not related to the participants on board.

Trainer's Notes:
        This activity helps participant to recognize outside supports and the impact that they had on their lives. Allow the participants to make the connection between letting the scholar and parent identifying their own natural support.

Activity #4: Passing the Torch

Objectives:

        Participants will learn what to expect at the passing the torch meeting.
Participants will understand how to pass on their roles to other community
members.

Length:

        20 minutes

Materials:

        Hand-out: Torch agenda, Evaluation, Goal sheet,

Steps:

        1)   Select participants to role play the Torch Agenda.

        2) During the role play, participants can ask questions pertaining to the
involvement of community members.

        3) All of the forms will be reviewed and discussed.

Trainer's Notes:

Role play the entire agenda with the group to explain how the torch meeting will occur.
In the event the scholar and parent does not identified natural supports at the meeting,
focus on empowering the scholar to focus on his abilities to reach his goals
independently.

HANDOUT: TORCH AGENDA

I.   Recognition of all Village Builder's Project participants.
II. Introductions: current village members and future village members.
III. Define the role of each Village Builder's member.
IV. Review scholar's goals and progress.
V.   Words of encouragement to scholar, family, and future support
VI. Evaluation time
VII.   Opening comments from natural support system.

HANDOUT: EVALUATIONS

VILLAGE FINAL EVALUATION

Scholar/ Parent: _____**Village:** _____

Estimated number of contacts with mentor _____

Overall, how would you rate the mentoring experience?
5 – Excellent   4- Good   3 – Satisfactory   2- Fair   1- Poor

Comments: _____

_____

Rate the following statements on the scale of 1 - 5.
5 - Strongly agree   4 - Agree   3 - Disagree   2 - Strongly Disagree   1 - Don=t Know

I feel that I have reached all or some of my goals for personal growth.   _____

I feel the support and guidance from the community.   _____

I feel more self-confident in my reading abilities.   _____

The village played an important part in my growth and development.   _____

I plan to continue explore various career options.   _____

I plan to continue to work on reaching and setting new educational goals.   _____

I feel the village experience had a positive effect on my academics.   _____

I would recommend this program to others.   _____

I would like to serve as mentor in the future. Yes ___ No ___ Don=t Know ____

_____

   Mentee/ Parent Signature and Date

MENTOR FINAL EVALUATION

Mentor _____ **Contact Number** _____

Number of Mentor Contacts with Mentee _____ **Type of Contacts**_____

Mentee_____**Contact Number**_____

Overall, how would you rate the mentoring experience?
5 – Excellent   4- Good   3 – Satisfactory   2- Fair 1- Poor

Comments: _____

_____

Rate the following statements on the scale of 1 - 5.
5 - Strongly agree   4 - Agree   3 - Disagree   2 - Strongly Disagree   1 - Don=t Know

I feel that the mentee reached all or some of his/her goals for personal
 growth.   ____
I feel that the village adequately support the mentee and their parent.   ____
I see in the mentee a greater self-confidence since we began the
mentoring relationship.   ____
I feel I played an important part in the career and personal development
of the mentee.   ____
I think the mentee will continue to work on his/her goals.   ____

I feel that I have gained from the mentoring relationship.   ____

I would encourage others to serve as mentors.   ____
I would like to mentor others in the future.   ____
I found the mentor role to be too demanding.   ____
My mentee and I plan to continue our relationship. Yes __ No __ Don=t Know _

_____
Mentor's signature and date

HANDOUT: GOAL SETTING

Name: **Date:**

Goal setting: Learning Contract

Student Responsibilities--

I am taking part in this learning contract because the strategies listed here will help me to learn the material and perform well in reading.

1

2

3

Village Member(s) **Responsibilities**   --
 1.

 2.

 3.

Length of Contract:

The terms of this contract will last from:_____ **to** _____

Signatures:

_____   _____   _____

SCHOLAR   VILLAGE MEMBER   PARENT

WRAP -UP

Objective:

Participants will reflect on their learning from the session.

Length:

About 10 minutes

Materials needed:

Handout: "Summarizing this Session"

Evaluation Form

Steps:

1) Instruct the participants to look through their VIBE training packet for the "Summarizing Module # 4" and ask participants to write down two or three things they learned during the session that they will able to put to use their individual mentoring relationship as well as the village.
2) Ask for any volunteers to share their items.

ACTIVITY 4 HANDOUT: Summarize Module # 4

List two or three things you learned during this session that will help you when you begin your new role as a Village Builder member. Then explain how each will help.

1.

2.

3.

Questions I still have……….

Thank you for attending the V.I.B.E. training sessions. I appreciate you taking the time to invest in the welfare of our children. If at any time you have additional questions about the material covered in this training, please feel free to contact Cleopatra Lacewell at ████████ or via email ██████████████

Appendix I: VBP Volunteer Packet

To: Potential village builders project members

From: Cleopatra Lacewell, project developer

Re: Thank you

Thank you for your willingness to help African American children improve academically in their homes and school. Your efforts will help to close the achievement gap while building up the family and instilling confidence in the student. With your consistent guided support we can work together to make a difference in our African American children.

By receiving this packet, you have started the process to become a village member. There are three additional steps that are required to be completed before you can start. 1) Fill out the application, 2) complete Wake County volunteer online clearance and 3) attend a 10 hour training session. Once all three components are completed and approved then the project developer will give you further information on the start of the village.

If you have any additional questions concerning the process please feel free to call @ ███████ or email me at ████████████. Thanks again for your interest.

Step 1: Village Builder's Project Volunteer Application

Date:_____

1) Name:_____
2) Home address:_____

_____

Phone number:_____evening:_____
3) Birthday:_____ age:_____
4) Occupation:_____
5) Have you ever worked with youth before?_____
6) Have you ever been convicted of a crime?_____
7) If so, when and where:_____
8) Have you ever volunteered before: _____
   If so, with who?_____
9) What did you like the most about your volunteering experience?

_____
_____
_____

What did you like the least about your volunteering experience?

_____
_____
_____

Please list at least three references:
A) Name:_____ phone_____
   Email address:_____
B) Name:_____ phone_____
   Email address:_____
C) Name:_____ phone_____
   Email address:_____

I, _____ hereby give permission to Village Builder's program and _____(local school) to contact my references in order to make a sound decisions concerning my participation in the Village Builder's Project.
Signature:_____Date:_____

Step 2: Completion of Wake County Volunteer Clearance

The Village Builder Project follows the same guidelines for volunteer participation as the Wake County public schools. It is mandatory for every volunteer to complete an online registration in order to participate in the Village Builders project. In order to access the registration, you must go to any local public school during operating hours to fill out the online application. You must put the school in which we will be serving.(for example: Burney Elementary).

Once you completed the registration, the Wake County Public Schools will run a criminal background check and based on their criteria you will be approved to volunteer for the Village Builder's Project.

Step 3: Attend the 10 hours VIBE training sessions

The V(Volunteering) I (Inspiring scholars) B (Building others) E (Educating)
Training sessions informs volunteers of the goals and procedure of the project. It is an educational interactive training that explains the roles and responsibilities for each village member. Attending the 3 day necessary is mandatory in order to be a village member.

After completion of the VIBE training sessions, the project developer will contact you when the initial village meeting has been arranged.

Appendix J: VBP Agreement Form

VILLAGE BUILDER'S AGREEMENT

A successful village requires a commitment on the part of all five partners. The following agreement is intended to provide a starting framework for the partnership. Either party should understand that they may withdraw from the relationship at any time by contacting _____ at _____. Each party should keep a copy of this agreement and make every effort to fulfill the terms of the agreement.
The village members consist of:

Elder: Contact number:
Chief: Contact number:
Career Informer: Contact number:
Scholar: Contact number:
Lead Advocate: Contact number:

The village members are encouraged to share additional contact information as needed.
CONTACT AGREEMENT

The duration of the formal mentoring project is half of a school year. Contacts with the scholar or parent may be in person, skype or by telephone. Scholar/village members should allow enough time during a contact for discussion of goals, as well as questions from the scholar concerning their educational development.

The village members agree to meet at least once a week for twelve (12) months.

_____
Scholar/Student Signature and Date

_____
Lead Advocator/Parent Signature and Date

_____
Elder Signature and Date

_____
Overseer Signature and Date

_____
Career Informer Signature and Date

Appendix K: VBP Recruitment Filer

The African proverb states: "It takes a village to raise a child." Be a part of

The Village Builder's Project

to improve the academic performance of

African American students.

If you are interested in volunteering some time to make a difference in the academic

performance of an African American student, please contact Cleopatra Lacewell @ ██

██████ or e-mail her at alacewell@aol.com.

Appendix L: VBP Recruitment PowerPoint

HELP !!!!

Only 23 % of African American fourth grade students in North Carolina are testing on a proficient rate in reading.

Do you agree
that we have a
problem?

How can the African American community help improve the academic performance of its students?

Research reveals that
African Americans
children need

- SOCIAL NETWORK =
  Forming a "village"

- SOCIAL SUPPORT =
  Providing
  encouragement

- ROLE MODELS   =
  Showing possibilities

Social Network: Form a Village

Village Builders are looking for

various African American

community members to work

together as a "village" with an

African American youth and

their families.

Social Support= Providing Encouragement

Village Builders want to build

up the self- confidence in the

African American student and

their families.

Role Models: Showing possibilities

- Caring adults who want to help to make a difference in the lives of the

  African American student and their families by volunteering.

- Caring adults who can spare some time to encourage the youth to set goals.

- Caring adults who can expose the youth to various careers.

If you agree that any of these three elements:

Social Network, Social Support and or Role Models can help improve

the academic performance of African American students........

Then let's work together
to...

BUT HOW CAN YOU HELP

Build a village

You are needed to change the outcome of low performing African American students.

If you are interested in being in the Village

- Please contact Cleopatra Lacewell @ 919 328-9595 or email alacewell@aol.com to obtain more information about the Village Builders project.

Appendix M: Codes for Closing the Achievement Gap

ID	Codes	Group 20	Group 40	Group 70
1	Deficiency level once students graduate	JB	CC	
2	Not taking the opportunities	DBG	KD	PJ
3	Lack of exposure	LL	MC	
4	Parents need to invest in children	DBG,LL	GW,MC,KD	PC,SG (1), TT
5	Lack of resources	SJ,JB2		KH,NP,PC
6	"CYCLE " of parents not knowing	JB,JB2,SJ	GW	SG
7	Programs can be costly	JB2		PC
8	Lack of finances	JB2		SG
9	Not being aware of programs	DBG	KD,CC	
10	Not having the time to take kids to program	JB2	KD,CC,MC	SG
11	Not being taught how to look for resources	SJ		
12	Some parents don't want their kids to do better	SJ		PJ
13	Selfishness	LL		
14	Lack of community or lack of sense of community	LL	KD,MC	
15	"Everybody needs a grandmother	DBG,SJ		RL
16	Neglecting their kids	DBG		
17	Parents are afraid to get involved	DBG		
18	Lack of readiness	RT		
19	Low school expectation	LL,RT (1)	KD	KH
20	Not challenging them enough	JB, LL(1)		
21	Low family expectation	LL	KD	
22	Low level of parental education	JB2, DBG		SG
23	Afterschool program (volunteering)	DBG	FP	
24	Kids are embarrassed that they don't know	DBG(3)	PP	
25	Getting involved with parents & family	SJ(1), JB		
26	Gap of the way parents learned years ago vs kid learning	JB, JB2	GW	PC,RL
27	Providing tools and resources	LL	CC(1)	RL,KH
28	Finances are not an issue	SJ, DBG	GW, CC(2)	RL,NP,SG

29	Invested in other things	LL		
30	Misplaced priorities	DBG,SJ	FP,GW	
31	Exposure to the wrong stuff	LL,RT	KD	
32	Families trying to fit into society	LL,JB		
33	Learned behavior	DBG	PP	
34	School system	DBG	FP,GW,KD(1)	
35	Advancement of Technology	JB		KH,SG,NP
36	Role model /mentor	LL,RT,DBG		RL,TT
37	Strong Educators	LL	GW	NP
38	Praying at school/ faith in school	JB2	KD,PP	
39	Christian Counselor	JB2,SJ		
40	Parent liaison	SJ		
41	Faith-based teacher	RT	KD	

42   Parents JB,LL   GW   KH(1)
who are   SG all
intereste   grou
d in their   p
own kids

43
Community liaison
LL

44
performance between groups

GW,PP
RL,KH,SG

45
test performance

KD,FP
SG

46
Bias /unfair test

FP,CC
SG,NP,RL,PJ,KH

47
Parents are not home

KD,CC,GW

48

Categorize kids by testing

FP, KD

49
Interactions between parents & child
LL
GW,MC
RL

50
Different family dynamics

KD

51
Home life

FP,KD(1), GW,MC
SG

52
Kids being afraid to achieve
LL
KD,GW

53
Peer issues

KD,GW

54
Diverse community

GW,KD

55
Teachers are not being able to relate

GW,KD
SG(1)

56
Lack of pride in school

GW

57
Intrinsic motivation within the child

KD,GW

58
Struggling In the classroom

KD (1)

SG

59
school budget

GW
NP,SG(1),RL

60
Quality of teachers

FP,GW
SG

61
Teachers are not caring about the kids
LL
FP,KD

62
Depending too much on the school system

CC(1)
PC,TT

63
overcrowded classroom

CC,FP
RL

64
Passed on w/o mastering grade level

PP,GW

65
Don't know how to read
DBG
PP

66
Teaching style

PP
SG(1)

67
Legislative decision

GW,FP(1)
SG(1)

68
Involvement w/teachers and school

KD, FP
SG(3)

69

Tutoring

GW,MC

70
re-norm test

KD

71
Parents don't care

KD,CC(1),

72
Parents stress over money

CC,KD

73

Saturday school		FP		
74	Summer Camp		CC	
75	Speaking up on their behalf		KD,GW	KH
76	Getting the right people in place	LL	GW	PJ
77	Voting		Gw,FP	PJ
78	Go out to visit the students	SJ	KD	
79	Coaches to check on their players		KD	
80	Interest back into the homes & community		FP,KD(3)	PJ
81	Help other kids out		FP	RL
82	Help parents out	JB	FP	
83	performance in the classroom	RT,JB		KH
84	living in poverty			KH,SG
85	early age kids are behind			KH,PC
86	parents don't stress education	LL		PJ,NP
87	Lack of motivation			SG
88	Culture	LL		SG
89	Environment	RT	KD	SG(1)
90	Lack of stability			KH
91	Volunteering		FDP	NP, SG

92	Help teachers to teach "our" children			SG,KH
93	Parents teach children at home…teachers at home	LL	CC	PC
94	Parent are intimated by schools			KH(1),SG (1)
95	teachers talk over parents head…like they are above			KH,SG
96	lack of communication from the school			KH(2), NP
97	parents are intimated by schools		MC	KH,SG
98	"Back then"	JB2(1),DBG,LL(1)	GW,KD,FP	RL(2),NP,PJ(1), TT,SG
99	Exposing them to opportunities	LL(1)		RL(1),PJ,SG
100	Exploring heritage			RL,TT
101	Networking	LL(1), group		RL
102	household dedicated to education	LL		SG
103	Implementation of program	LL		NP
104	Expert teaching our children			RL(2)SG
105	learning styles			SG(1),PC
106	Village Concept	DBG,JB2	FP	NP,PC,SG,RL
107	lacking black teachers		GW	TT
108	apprenticeship			RL.TT
109	Someone that really cares about the child		FP, KD	RL
110	adopt a student			RL
111	parents not aware of the kids difficulties in school	JB	GW	KH
112	Businesses Involved	LL		RL,SG,NP,PJ
113	Motivate kids	LL		PC
114	lazy parents			NP
115	importance of education			PJ,TT
116	administrators becoming coaches			RL
117	Create smaller groups of kids			RL
118	money is an issue "factor"	JB2(2)	CC	
119	Community being afraid to get involved	JB2		
120	Medicate our children to death		FP,CC	