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Elementary Teacher Knowledge of and Practices for Teaching Reading to African American Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Troy University, 2010

BS, Albany State University, 2007

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

State standardized tests results indicated that between 2012 and 2016, fewer African American students at a rural, Title I elementary school met state standards in reading compared with other racial/ethnic groups of students. A gap in practice existed because the school and district had not conducted studies to understand teacher knowledge and practice as they related to teaching reading to African American students. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to address the problem and gap in practice by exploring elementary teacher knowledge and understanding of the learning needs in reading among African American students. Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction served as the conceptual framework for this study. Interview data were analyzed from 10 experienced elementary teachers using 2-cycle provisional coding and pattern coding, which revealed the themes that constituted the findings of my study: (a) teachers understanding of factors that contribute to underachievement in reading of some African American students, (b) professional development and preparation of teachers for teaching African American students, (c) classroom pedagogy for teaching African American students, (d) challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students, and (e) resources and supports that teachers perceive as necessary for teaching reading to African American students. The findings indicated that elementary teachers would benefit from participating in professional development, which would help them better teach reading to African American students. The study and resulting project may affect local positive social change by increasing teacher knowledge about the learning needs in reading among African American students, leading to an eventual increase in reading achievement among African American students at the study school.

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated to the memories of my loving grandmother, Trudie James, and my aunt, Rosemary Keeton, who were with me throughout this journey. Your passion for teaching and love for helping others inspired me to walk in your footsteps to pursue a calling in education. Remarkable role models as educators, women, and mothers, you set the bar high, making it look easy to raise a family while pursuing your goals. Through prayers and your guidance, I was able to persevere rather than give up. Not one day passes that I do not think of you. I love you and know that you are always watching over me. Thank you, Grandma Trudie and Auntie! We did it!

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My God, thank you for granting me the strength, wisdom, guidance, and courage to pursue this endeavor of my life's work and seeing me through it.

To my instructor, Dr. Salina Shrofel, thank you for your confidence in me as I transitioned into a scholarly writer. Through our countless phone conferences, you have helped me create a more profound work to contribute to the field of education. Thank you for your guidance and your wisdom. To my second member, Dr. Ann Smith, thank you for your great feedback, quick reviews, and encouraging words. Your positivity helped me to continue to push forward. To my University Research Reviewers (URR), Dr. Sara Marcus and Dr. Beate Baltes, thank you for your valuable comments. Again, thank you all for working together with me to get the process completed. I have gained a wealth of knowledge from you.

I would like to especially thank my family for their constant support, patience, and love that they have shown from the moment I decided to pursue my doctorate degree. Thank you for taking this journey with me! We finally made it! To my husband, Jamereon, thank you for being Mommy and Daddy to our children (Camdyn, Jamereon, Jr., and Justice) when I could not be there. To my parents, Nehemiah Jr. and Ann, and my sister, NeAnn, thank you for allowing me to call on you for your help, being a listening ear, and for your thoughts and prayers. Thank you for instilling in me to go as far as I could.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

I designed this qualitative case study to explore elementary teacher knowledge and understanding of the learning needs in reading among African American students at a rural, Title I elementary school, located in the southeastern region of the United States. I explored (a) instructional practices that these teachers used to meet the reading needs of African American students in their classrooms, (b) teacher perceptions of the challenges that they faced when teaching reading to African American students, (c) teacher perceptions of the support and resources that they needed to better meet the needs in reading of African American students, and (d) teacher perceptions of their preparedness to improve the reading performance of their African American students.

By focusing on African American students, I did not intend to imply that all African American students underachieve in reading, nor did I intend to imply that low reading achievement among non-African American students is less important than that among African American students. Rather, I focused on this group of students because relatively little has been documented regarding the teaching of reading to African American students at the elementary level despite research showing that a larger percentage of African American students underachieve in reading than any other ethnic/racial group in the United States (Husband, 2013; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2014).

In Section 1, I define the problem and gap in practice being addressed by the study, provide evidence that the problem exists at the local and national levels, and review professional and research literature.

Studies conducted by the National Center for Children in Poverty (2014) found that more than half of African American children in the United States lived in low-income families. The National Center for Children in Poverty found that 64% of African American children, who resided in the state where the study school was located, were members of low-income families. Nationally, African American students were three times more likely to come from families of low socio-economic status than Caucasian students (American Psychological Association, 2015). The number of African American children living in low-income families has significantly increased since 2000 (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Some African American students with low socio-economic backgrounds have single-parent homes, households that earn minimum wage incomes, and parents/guardians whose education was limited (Rothstein, 2014). A large number of those African American households have grandparents who serve as guardians or primary caregivers as a result of the child's biological parents' inability to care for them (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010). Those at-home conditions are obstacles that negatively affect educational achievement and hinder the academic achievement among African American students who are underprepared for school learning (American Psychological Association, 2015; Rothstein, 2014). Because they do not possess the traditional literate practices that are valued in school, African American children and

their families may be perceived, by other cultural groups, as disadvantaged (Edwards et al., 2010).

Research reported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012) showed that children, including African Americans, whose families lived in poverty, lack resources for decent housing, food, and clothing. Children, including African Americans, who live in poverty and are not reading proficiently by third grade, are less likely to graduate from high school than students who have never lived in poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Edwards et al., 2010).

Schools located in low socio-economic areas are often underfunded and unable to attract high quality teachers (American Psychological Association, 2015; Persell, 2007; Rothstein, 2014). African American students tend to reside in low socio-economic areas where public school districts receive less funding than public schools in high socio-economic areas receive (Rothstein, 2014). African American students are exposed to less rigorous curricula, attend schools that lacked resources, and may have teachers who expect less of them academically as compared with students in high socio-economic areas (American Psychological Association, 2015). Many African American students do not experience the same opportunity to receive an adequate education (American Psychological Association, 2015; Persell, 2007). African American students are often faced with low expectations from educators and administrators who in turn place them in low ability groups where they may lose interest in learning (American Psychological Association 2015; Persell, 2007).

According to Persell (2007), African American students experience more disciplinary issues and are suspended or expelled from school more frequently than students in any other cultural group. In every state, excluding Idaho, African American students have been suspended in greater numbers than would be expected from their percentage of the student population (Witt, 2007). On average, throughout the nation, the percentage of African American students who are suspended or expelled from school is almost three times the rate of that for Caucasian students (Witt, 2007). More likely than their Caucasian peers, African American students are suspended or expelled from school for the same kind of misconduct. According to Edwards et al. (2010), these rates of suspension and expulsion affects even the youngest African American students.

Lack of financial resources in disrupted communities may contribute to children's educational failures (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; McTague & Abrams, 2011; Ready & Wright, 2011). The schools that African American students attend may be poorly resourced (Persell, 2007). Limited financial resources for schools mean buildings in disrepair, inadequate supplies, and an ill-prepared teaching staff (Edwards, et al., 2010). The school may be deteriorated and exhibit an unwelcoming atmosphere and offer few or no programs for enhancing African American student achievement (Persell, 2007; Rothstein, 2014). Textbooks may be outdated, class sizes may be large, technology may be limited, and curricular rigor may be absent (Edwards et al., 2010; Persell, 2007; Rothstein, 2014). These low-income schools may have hired teachers who are not qualified and lack teacher preparation or experience, which in turn lead to African American students not receiving an adequate education.

       In the United States, national assessments have shown a gap in reading proficiency between African American students and Caucasian students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The gap in reading achievement between Caucasian students and African American students has been identified since 1990 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Delaware, Florida, and New Jersey reported that the reading gap between Grade 4 Caucasian and African American students had narrowed from 1992 to 2007 owing to larger gains in scores among African American students. The remaining states, for which results were available, reported no reduction in the reading gap between Grade 4 Caucasian and African American students between the years 1992 and 2007 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The state where the study school is located is representative of the states for which no reduction in the reading gap was reported.

       The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report on reading achievement has made it possible to examine relationships between students' performance and various background measures such as race and ethnicity (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The NAEP measured student performance each year in various subject areas at Grades 4, 8, and 12. According to the NAEP, from 2008 to 2013, on average, national reading scores among African American students in Grade 4 through Grade 8 were significantly lower than reading scores among Caucasian students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In 2013, Caucasian students scored an average of 26 points higher than African American students in all subjects, including reading.

Cultural stereotypes of intellectual inferiority haunt minority students and significantly affect test scores (Aronson, 2004). According to Aronson, "stereotype threat" (p. 15), is defined as being at risk of accepting a negative perception about one's cultural group, and it plays a vital role in the achievement gap. Stereotype threat affects basic needs of students, such as sense of competence, feelings of belonging, and trust in individuals, which could influence intellectual capacities and motivation.

According to Aronson (2004), when students take a test, stereotype threat causes many to become anxious, become apprehensive, and have negative views of test taking. Having a negative view of the tests may lessen the likelihood of minority students passing standardized tests and may widen the achievement gap (Aronson, 2004; Kirp, 2010). Steel and Aronson (1995), in a study of stereotype threat on test taking among African American and Caucasian college students, concluded that culturally shared stereotypes that suggest poor performance of certain cultural groups could disturb testing performance among individuals who identify with that group. African American participants perform below their Caucasian counterparts in the stereotype threat condition. Performance among African American participants is equal to their Caucasian counterparts when the non stereotype threat condition is present.

In studies conducted by Aronson and Williams (1995) and Johns and Schmader (2005), teaching students, including African American students, about stereotype threat could result in higher test scores. When students became aware that testing anxiety is linked to stereotype threat, students could better understand their challenges regarding test taking (Aronson & Williams, 1995; Johns & Schmader, 2005). Although Steel and

Aronson (1995) conducted their study on test-taking performance among adult students and their findings are not readily generalizable to elementary students, their findings regarding the effect of stereotype threat are informative to any discussion of test-taking performance among members of minority groups who experience stereotyping.

Definition of the Problem

To assess whether students are meeting state standards in reading, education officials in Georgia administer the Georgia Milestones. Milestones results are reported using four categories of achievement levels. An achievement level is a range of scores that defines a specific level of student performance. In a previous system of state tests, achievement was reported in three categories (Does Not Meet, Meets, and Exceeds). Under the new system of reporting, proficiency is the target: (a) beginning learner-student does not yet demonstrate proficiency; (b) developing learner-student demonstrates partial proficiency; (c) proficient learner- student demonstrates proficiency; and (d) distinguished learner- student demonstrates advanced proficiency (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2016), the study school reported that 88.4% of African American students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 scored beginning or developing on the 2015-2016 Georgia Milestones compared with 49.3% of Caucasian students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 who scored beginning or developing. The study school reported that for the 2015-2016 school year, 0.6% of African American students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 scored distinguished on the Georgia Milestones, whereas 3.8% of

Caucasian students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 scored distinguished on the Georgia Milestones (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

Because of the demographics and socio-economic status of the study school, approximately 89% of the students receive free lunch/reduced price lunch qualifying it as a Title I school (USA K-12 Education Guides, 2014). For the 2015-2016 school year, the study school reported a student population of 683 students: 334 students were African American, 209 students were Caucasian, 123 students were Hispanic, 3 students were Asian, 1 student was American Indian, and 13 students were of two or more races/ethnic groups. Reading achievement on the Georgia Milestones in Grades 3 through Grades 5 at the study school during the 2015-2016 school year indicated that 49.4% of African American students were beginning learners, 29.4% of Hispanic students were beginning learners, and in comparison, only 10.1% of Caucasian students were beginning learners (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

As reported on the district's webpage, the study school district and the study school were aware of and concerned about the disparity in reading achievement between minority students and Caucasian students. However, they had not yet conducted a study to further understand the problem nor introduced professional development (PD) programs for teachers to address the problem. This was the gap in practice that I addressed in my study, in which I attempted to add to the understanding of the problem of low reading achievement among African American students and inform administrators as they create curricular and professional interventions to address the problem.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

According to the 2015-2016 Georgia Milestones assessment data, 27.6% of all students in the state were considered beginning learners on reading standards, 33.6% of all students in the state were considered developing learners on reading standards, 31.3% of all students were considered proficient learners on reading standards, and 7.5% of all students were considered distinguished learners. In comparison, 39.3% of African American students in the state were considered beginning learners, 36% of African American students in the state were considered developing learners, 21.7% of African American students in the state were considered proficient learners, and 3% of African American students in the state were considered distinguished learners (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

As the study school related to the state, during the 2015-2016 school year, the percentage of African American students (49.4%) who were considered beginning learners on reading standards at the study school is higher than the percentage of Caucasian students (10.1%) who were considered beginning learners on reading standards at the study school. The percentage of African Americans (39%) who were considered developing learners on reading standards at the study school was lower than the percentage of Caucasian students (39.2%) who were considered developing learners on reading standards. The percentage of African American students (11%) who were considered proficient learners on reading standards at the study school was lower than the percentage of Caucasian students (46.8%) who were considered proficient learners on

reading standards. The percentage of African students (0.6%) who were considered distinguished learners on reading standards at the study school was lower that the percentage of Caucasian students (3.8%) who were considered distinguished learners on reading standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

Test results among African American students at the study school indicate a gap in reading performance when African American students and Caucasian students are compared. At the study school, during the 2015-2016 school year, 88.4% of African American students scored at beginning or developing levels in reading standards compared with 49.4% of Caucasian students who scored at beginning or developing levels in reading standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). At the study school, during the 2015-2016 school year, 11.6% of African Americans scored at proficient or distinguished levels in reading standards compared with 50.6% of Caucasian students who scored at proficient or distinguished levels (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Used for measuring student academic achievement at the national level, the NAEP test is administered to students at the beginning of Grade 4 to assess what the student has learned by the end of Grade 3. Grade 4 NAEP test results show that disparities in reading achievement persist among African American students and Caucasian students (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2014).

Based on data from the Nation's Report Cards, reading scores are represented in numbers from a scale of 0 to 500 and reading achievement levels are represented in

percentages (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2014). The 2014 Nation's Report Card reported that the average reading score of all 4th grade students in the study school's state was 222 on a scale that ranges from 0 to 500. For public schools in the nation, the average reading score of all 4th grade students was 221, indicating that the study school's state scored 1 point above the national average. The study school's state reading achievement level in 2013 for 4th grade African American students showed that 33% scored below basic, 33% at basic, 25% proficient, and 9% advanced. The national reading achievement scores of 4th grade African American students in 2013 showed that 33% scored below basic, 33% scored at basic, 26% scored proficient, and 8% scored advanced (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

These percentages indicate that more African American students in the state and in the nation scored higher in the below basic and basic levels than in the proficient and advanced levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Similar to the national percentages, the study school's percentage of African American students who achieved in the below basic level (10.5%) was higher than Caucasian students (0.7%) who achieved at the below basic level. The percentages of African American students (89.5%) who achieved at the proficient and advanced levels were lower than Caucasian students (99.3%) who achieved at the proficient and advanced levels.

According to the National Report Card (2013), the national average reading score among 4th grade Caucasian students was 233 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2014). The national average reading score among 4th grade African American students was 209, 24 points lower than that for Caucasian students. Forty-five percent of

Caucasian students scored at the proficient level in contrast to 20% of African American students who scored at the proficient level. Thirteen percent of Caucasian students scored at the advanced level and only 0.3% of African American students scored at the advanced level (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These national figures are important because they show the gap between the achievement levels in reading among African American students and Caucasian students. African American students at the study school scored lower in reading than their Caucasian counterparts beginning in the early grades.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap: This term refers to a significant disparity in academic performance between different groups of students such as Caucasian students and minority students or students from higher income and lower income households (Aronson, 2004; Edwards, Thornton, & Holiday-Driver, 2010).

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): This term refers to a yearly measure of student achievement on statewide assessments. This measure is used by schools, districts, and states to determine whether schools are educating their students successfully (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

Criterion reference competency test (CRCT): The CRCT is a test administered to public school students in the study state to measure knowledge of 1st through 8th graders in reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

Culturally relevant pedagogy: This term refers to the practice of making instruction of African American students culturally relevant (Edwards et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Differentiated instruction: Differentiated instruction is instruction that is modified to meet the individual needs of students. The content (what is being taught), process (how content is taught), and product (how student learning is demonstrated) is modified by the teacher to best fit the student's learning styles and/ or needs (Heacox, 2012; Long, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013, 2014).

Highly effective teacher: A highly effective teacher is a teacher who provides effective instruction and assessment to all students of different learning styles and needs (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012).

Highly qualified teacher: A highly qualified teacher is a teacher who holds a bachelor's degree from a 4-year institute, is fully certified or licensed by the state, and demonstrates competence in the subject area being taught (Glazerman & Max, 2011; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001; Partee, 2012).

Interactive read-aloud: A systematic method of reading aloud that incorporates reciprocal teaching (Lennox, 2013; Wiseman, 2011).

Interest inventory: An interest inventory is a measure, such as a survey or interview, created to reveal an individual student's likes, dislikes, and preferred activities. Results of the measure can be used by teachers to differentiate instruction (Grande, 2008; Kane, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Wangsgard, 2014).

National assessment of educational progress (NAEP): The NEAP is the United States' largest, continuing assessment representative of what students know and can do in various subject areas. These assessments are conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, and technology and engineering literacy (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

No Child Left Behind Act: President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) on January 8, 2002 which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB significantly raised expectations for all states, local school districts, and schools by requiring that all students meet or exceed state standards in reading and mathematics. NCLB requires all states to establish state academic standards and a state testing system that meet federal requirements (Public Law PL 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001).

School improvement plan: A school improvement plan is a 2-year plan that addresses the academic issues in a school that has not made sufficient progress in student achievement. A school improvement plan is implemented to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school (C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011; Long, 2014).

Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is a term that refers to an individual's personal beliefs about their abilities to perform various tasks (Bandura, 1977; Maloney, 2014; Schunk, 1986).

State-mandated test: This is a subject area test that a state requires that schools administer to students at specific grade levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

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Stereotype threat: This term refers to a circumstance during which individuals are or feel at risk of experiencing negative stereotypes about their social group (Aronson, 2004).

Thinkgate Benchmark assessment: This assessment is a national assessment administered to students in kindergarten through Grade 12 to measure growth and performance on various skills and subject areas (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

Title I school: Under the Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a Title I school is a school in which a high percentage of children from low-income families receive federal funding. Financial assistance is provided to these schools to help ensure that all children meet state standards (U. S. Department of Education, 2015).

Significance of the Study

In this qualitative case study, I explored (a) elementary teacher knowledge and understanding of the learning needs in reading among African American students, (b) what instructional practices these teachers use to meet the reading needs of African American students in their classrooms, (c) teacher perceptions of the challenges that they face when teaching reading to African American students, (d) teacher perceptions of the support and resources they need to better meet the needs of African American students, and (e) teacher perceptions of their preparedness to improve the reading performance of their African American students. The results of this study may provide the study school

and other similar schools with information that may contribute to their ability to improve the reading performance among African American students.

Results of the study may provide knowledge that will suggest interventions such as PD for teachers that may lead to improvement for the teaching of reading to elementary level African American students. Application of the findings of the study may promote social change by increasing the number of African American students who achieve success in reading at the elementary school level. This increased success may lead to increased participation among African American high school graduates in the American economy, in colleges, and in the military (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). Without narrowing the gap in reading achievement between African American students and students of other races and ethnicities, educational failure among African American students may continue to be a problem into the next generation (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012).

Research Question(s)

Many African American students who attend the study school achieve lower reading scores than do other demographic groups at the school when tested with state mandated assessments. To address the problem of low reading achievement of African American students and the gap in practice, I developed the following research questions:

- What do elementary teachers, in Grades 1 through 5, at the study school, know and understand about the learning needs in reading among African American students in their classrooms?

- What instructional practices do elementary teachers in Grades 1 through 5 at the study school use in their classrooms to address the learning needs in reading of their African American students and improve the reading achievement of their African American students?

- What are the teacher perceptions about their preparedness to improve the reading achievement of African American students?

- What challenges do the teachers encounter when addressing the learning needs in reading of their African American students?

- What resources and supports do the teachers identify that they need to better meet the needs in reading of African American students?

Review of the Literature

In the literature review, I will explore (a) elementary teacher knowledge and understanding of the learning needs in reading performance among African American students in their classrooms, (b) what instructional practices teachers use to meet the reading needs of African American students, (c) teacher perceptions of the support and resources that they need to better meet the needs of African American students, and (d) teacher perceptions of their preparedness to improve the reading performance of their African American students. I have organized the literature review using the following headings: (a) factors that positively affect reading performance among African American students, (b) factors that negatively affect reading performance among African American students, (c) teacher beliefs about African American students' reading achievement.

Conceptual Framework

Tomlinson's concept of differentiated instruction will be used as the framework for the study. Tomlinson (2013) defined *differentiated instruction* as the teacher's response to the different needs of students and provided a framework to guide teachers in accommodating different learners' needs.

According to Tomlinson, teachers can differentiate content of the lesson, assessments of student learning, process of the lesson, and products of the lesson according to students' readiness, interests, and learning styles (Long, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Research indicates that differentiating instruction is effective for teaching reading to high achieving students, struggling students, and students with mild to severe learning disabilities (Long, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013, 2014).

Content of the lesson, assessments of student learning, process of the lesson, and products of the lesson are areas where teachers can address individual students' learning needs during planning and instruction (Heacox, 2012). Content of the lesson includes factual knowledge, concepts, and skills that students are required to learn. Teachers differentiate content of the lesson using various delivery formats such as readings, video, or audio (McCarthy, 2014).

Assessments of student learning play a major role in how instruction is differentiated to meet students' needs, interests, readiness, and learning styles (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). To begin differentiating instruction, teachers administer carefully constructed assessments to students. Results from these assessments are used to guide

instruction so that all students have the support needed for success (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

The process of the lesson refers to how teachers help students to learn the content of what is being taught (Heacox, 2012; McCarthy, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013). The process of the lesson could be individual instruction or student work, small group instruction or discussion, or whole group instruction or discussion. Students need time to reflect on and grasp the skill, before proceeding further into the lesson.

When differentiating product of the lesson, teachers give students' choices of product outcome (Long, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013, 2014). To meet each student's individual learning level, teachers should range products in complexity. Tomlinson (2013) stated that students should be provided the option of at least three choices for product option. According to Tomlinson (2013), the key to product options is for the teacher to set clear, academic expectations that are comprehensible to students. When products are aligned to learning targets, student choice for product option develops and expands which ensures the teacher that content of the lesson is being addressed (Heacox, 2012; McCarthy, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013, 2014).

To develop this review of the literature, I read various scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles and books on topics related to elementary teacher knowledge and the learning needs in reading among African American students. I achieved saturation of the literature by searching Walden University's Thoreau, online databases such as Academic Research Complete, Education Research Complete, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Sage, primary sources, and journals, such as

Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, *Journal of Reading Education*, *Journal of Research in Reading*, *Harvard Educational Review*, *Reading Improvement*, and *Reading Research Quarterly*.

I limited my searches to current, peer reviewed, scholarly journals using key terms such as *reading development*, *elementary level*, *reading teaching*, *African American students*, *reading performance of African American students*, *teaching African American students to read*, *reading instruction for African American students*, *the achievement gap*, *academic achievement*, *highly qualified teachers*, *self-efficacy*, *scaffolding*, *social learning*, *teacher perceptions of reading*, *differentiated instruction*, *parental involvement*, *culturally relevant pedagogy*, *interest inventories*, *at-home learning strategies*, *school improvement plans*, *teacher instructional strategies*, and *best practices for teaching reading*. After searching the literature until no new sources emerged; I was assured that I had saturated the literature.

Factors That Positively Affect Reading Performance Among African American Students

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2016), Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965, is the largest federal assistance program for schools in America who enroll students from low-income families. The federal government offers funding to states each year with the provision that they submit school improvement plans and programs to help educate low-income children (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Studies reported by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) involving six focus groups of kindergarten through 12th grade public

school teachers, showed that reading performance for African American students in kindergarten through 12th grade could be improved by developing parental involvement, school improvement plans, and teacher instructional strategies (Center for Public Education, 2014; Long 2014). These topics are more fully discussed in the sections that follow.

   Parental involvement for improving student achievement. Parental involvement in student learning has lasting positive effects on students' academic achievement (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Flowers, 2007; Long, 2014; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Banerjee, Harrell, and Johnson (2011) stated that students who have parents who are highly involved in their education have better academic outcomes in elementary and secondary school. According to Thompson and Shamberger (2015), when parents are highly involved in their child's education, students are more likely to earn good grades, attend school more regularly, perform higher on assessments, are less likely to misbehave, graduate from high school, and then attend college (Howard, 2015; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Parental involvement in educational activities includes parents having direct contact with the school, such as attending school functions and parent-teacher conferences and implementing at-home learning strategies for their children (Banerjee et al., 2011).

   Parental involvement is characterized as parenting, volunteering, communicating, facilitating at-home learning, and decision making (Center for Public Education, 2014; Epstein, 2010). Parental involvement refers to the participation a parent devotes to their child's schooling and or academic career (Center for Public Education, 2014; Epstein,

2010). Epstein (2010) identified two types of parental involvement: indirect and direct parental involvement.

Indirect parental involvement includes parents being involved indirectly or away from the school. An example of an indirect form of parental involvement occurs when schools provide parents with information about children's progress and offer advice on how parents can make their homes learner friendly (Epstein, 2010). An example of indirect form of parental involvement occurs when schools and teachers share ideas with parents to promote learning at home. Teachers can provide ideas and strategies to parents that can teach them how to monitor and check their child's homework (Center for Public Education, 2014; Epstein, 2010).

Direct parental involvement occurs when schools involve parents directly at the school. An example of a direct form of parental involvement occurs when parents volunteer at the school in a support capacity. When parents volunteer at their child's school, they come into the school to visit their child's classroom, serve on a school committee, and/ or participate in school fundraisers (Center for Public Education, 2014; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Thompson and Shamberger (2015) suggested that teachers can provide parents of African American students with resources to aid them with improving reading performance at home, in addition to sharing reading strategies for decoding and comprehension skills. Parents who encourage their children to participate in extracurricular activities at school, sports, clubs, and summer programs indirectly support their children's education (Spencer, Grimmett, & Kambui, 2015).

Benefits for students of parental involvement include fewer student absences, improved student socio-emotional behavior, and improved students' attitudes toward school (Joe & Davis, 2009). Parental involvement is imperative to improve the reading performance of African American students (Spencer et al., 2015; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). African American students whose parents are involved in their education by attending school events or participating in teacher/parent discussion, showed significant gains in reading performance (Joe & Davis, 2009). Spencer et al. (2015) conducted a study involving African American parents and their students' high school academic achievement. The study found that African American students whose parents were actively involved in their children's education showed great gains in academic achievement. Spencer et al. (2015) concluded that when African American parents supported their children's' efforts, parents began noticing that their children's grades began to reflect their hard work. Parents' positive reinforcement and support motivated students to strive for success (Spencer et al., 2015).

Joe and Davis (2009), using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, concluded that parenting behaviors, including those of African American parents, such as reading books and showing interest in what was taught in school, are most operative in fostering school readiness and early achievement (Joe & Davis, 2009; Riconscente, 2014). African American parental emphasis on academic skills led to higher reading achievement for their children (Joe & Davis, 2009).

To help parents develop their abilities for at-home instruction and understand reading skills, teachers can teach parents some of the current and effective strategies they can employ at home for aiding with their children's reading development (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003; Murray, 2016). To ensure parents can effectively teach their students reading strategies and skills at home, teachers must model strategies for parents (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003). According to Murray (2016), teachers can offer online classes to parents during which they can model reading strategies or teachers can model reading strategies to parents during after school sessions.

Teachers modeling reading strategies to parents. Teachers can model effective reading skills necessary for parents (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013). Through workshops, conferences, and school events, African American parents, including African American parents with little to no education, can learn effective reading strategies that they can use at home to teach their children (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003; Lopez, 2013). According to Malouf, Reisener, Gadke, Wimbish, & Frankel (2014), parents can also learn how they can incorporate culturally relevant activities into at-home learning activities.

Teachers could invite parents to the classroom where they can watch how the teacher actively engages students with books during reading time (Lopez, 2013). During read-alouds, parents can observe how the teacher helps the student to become an active reader (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003; Lopez, 2013). According to Honig, Diamond, and Gutlohn (2013), students become active readers when teachers involve them in read-alouds by asking questions about the story. When reading a picture book, teachers can ask questions about the pictures and parents can do the same at home.

Burton (2013) suggested that teachers can model reading strategies to parents by demonstrating how to:

- Point to each word on the page when reading aloud which helps the child make connections between words and print.

- Take picture walks which helps the child use pictures to tell a story before reading.

- Make predictions by reading a book's title which ensures that with practice, the child can independently incorporate how to make predictions when reading.

- Read aloud fluently with expression which allows the child to hear pitch, tone, and excitement in voice.

- Ask questions after reading which helps assess the child's understanding of the text.

- Connect reading and writing which provides the child the opportunity to respond to what was read by drawing pictures or writing about what was read.

By observing reading strategies modeled by the teacher, parents can learn skills and strategies to implement at home which may contribute to improved reading performance of African American students (Malouf et al., 2014; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013).

If needed, teachers can provide materials and school supplies, obtained from administrators, to low-income African American parents to use at home with their children (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). The Center for

Public Education (2014) and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) reported a study conducted by Shaver and Walls (1998). Nine schools in West Virginia participated in a study to enrich the home environments of their students. The study offered workshops to parents of 74 low achieving students in Grades 2 and 8 at which at-home learning packets of reading materials were provided (Center for Public Education, 2014; Shaver & Walls, 1998). Training was provided to the parents on how to use the packets. Shaver and Walls (1998) found that Title I students in grades two and eight whose parents used the packets made stronger reading gains (13.3%) than students whose parents did not use the packets (4.4%). It would be beneficial for all schools that have students whose home environment would benefit from enrichment to provide such home learning packets of reading materials (Shaver & Walls, 1998).

Parents most often provide children with their first educational experiences and strongly influence academic achievement. Therefore, it is important to involve parents in their children's education (Kambui, 2014; Spencer et al., 2015). Parental at-home learning strategies that may contribute to improved reading performance of African American students include helping with homework, reading interactive read-alouds, completing writing activities, and engaging their children in summer reading (Spencer et al., 2015; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

In a study of 144 urban Head Start students, Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, and Childs (2004) found that home-based parental involvement such as reading to children, helping with homework, and providing children with space for learning activities had the strongest relation to positive reading outcomes in African American children and other

minority children (Suizzo, Pahlke, Yarnell, Chen, & Romero, 2014). Suizzo et al. (2014) conducted a study involving 41 mothers which included 14 Mexican American mothers, 15 African American mothers, and 12 European mothers participating in semi structured interviews examining educational achievement and parental at-home roles in young children's learning. Results concluded that all mothers expressed determination and resourcefulness in supporting their children's learning at home (Suizzo et al., 2014). Reading (e.g., bedtime stories) was the most common reported at home learning activity stated by all mothers. African American parents mentioned at home strategies they engage in at home to help their children succeed in school were helping with homework, reading together, creating crafts, writing stories, and playing educational computer games (Suizzo et al., 2014).

   At-home learning strategy-homework. At-home learning strategies that African American parents can implement for children include helping with homework assignments, creating literacy related activities as previously modeled by the teacher, conveying high expectations for achievement, and encouraging their children to do their best (Banerjee et al., 2011; Long, 2014). Joe and Davis (2009) argued that when African American parents enrich the home environment by helping their children with homework they are implementing an effective at-home strategy. Parents should be disciplined about aiding their children with homework and should emphasize the importance of effort and understanding of content to the child (Perry, 2010).

   At-home learning strategy-interactive read-aloud. An at-home strategy that African American parents can begin with children at an early age is interactive reading

aloud with them. Interactive reading aloud is an effective way to aid African American children in obtaining reading skills such as comprehension and decoding skills (Delacruz, 2013; Morgan, 2009). Interactive read-alouds allow for active participation from the child. Parents and children can engage in discussions about the text and learn to identify letters, words, and meanings of words as suggested or previously modeled by the teacher (Delacruz, 2013; Morgan, 2009). As well as stimulating children's imaginations, reading aloud expands children's knowledge of the world around them (Delacruz, 2013). Reading at an early age lays the foundation for a student's success in school and in life (Delacruz, 2013; Morgan, 2009). Research indicated that interactive reading aloud at an early age is more effective when parents engage children to think critically by asking children analytic questions (Delacruz, 2013; Morgan, 2009). Morgan (2009) also stated that when parents read aloud to children, they can clarify concepts that children may not understand.

Culturally relevant material should be incorporated by parents at home when reading aloud with their children (Hughes-Hassell, Berkley, & Koehler, 2009; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). According to Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009), interactive reading aloud to African American children is more successful when they become exposed to literature in which characters and content are recognizable and relevant to them. Reading aloud to African American children, particularly reading African American literature, or literature about African American people, can positively affect reading achievement and motivation of African American children (Gangi, 2008; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009).

At-home learning strategy-writing activities. Parents can implement writing activities at home to aid with reading improvement of their African American students (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). According to Morgan (2009), writing activities reinforce good reading habits by allowing children to use comprehension skills such as summarization and visualization. Learning to communicate and write with words are essential skills that children, as well as African American children, attain as they grow and develop (Morgan, 2009; Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012). Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Pope Edwards, and Marvin (2011) conducted a study involving 217 Head Start parents who were examined on the utilization of at-home learning strategies and the effect that they had on students' language and writing skills. Results concluded that family involvement is imperative for young children's literacy and writing skills.

To support writing at home, if possible, parents should provide children with a quiet, well lit area, supplied with paper, pencils, and crayons which can be provided by the teacher if necessary (GreatKids, 2016; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Parents can display family photos or provide magazines to encourage writing and to use as story starters. Reading exposes children to general vocabulary and content-specific vocabulary in which they can begin to use in their personal writing (GreatKids, 2016).

Parents can help children make connections between writing and the real world by letting children write their own party invitations, thank you notes, letters to family members, and grocery lists. Parents can have children read a newspaper article at home, then ask them to write a short story based on what they read. To aid African American students with improving reading performance, parents can have children practice letter

writing by asking their children to write a letter to a favorite book character. Children incorporate reading comprehension skills into letter writing (GreatKids, 2016; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

During writing activities, parents can encourage children to write about their thoughts and feelings about what they read or how various events in stories affect the characters' thoughts and feelings (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Literature written by African American authors can be used by parents to motivate writing for their children (Kunjufu, 2006; Strickland-Dixon, 2011; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Parents can encourage their children to keep a reflective journal, which can be teacher provided, to write about events that happen at school, at home, or in their community (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). To ensure parents are reinforcing writing skills at home with their children, teachers can allow students to bring in at-home writing products into the classroom to share (GreatKids, 2016; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

At-home learning strategy-summer reading. With little access to educational programs during the summer, students fall behind their other counterparts, putting them more at risk of underachieving in reading (Hernandez, 2012; Torgesen, 2004). Results from a pilot study of Missouri's Mid-Continent Public Library and the Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium, involving elementary schools from three school districts, found that summer reading increased students' reading levels (Barack, 2014; Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium, 2013; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015). Students in the study, which included African American students, showed growth in the students' level of reading ability.

Young boys, including African Americans, who were considered at-risk, showed more growth in reading levels than young girls who were not considered at-risk (Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium, 2013).

Public libraries, located in both urban and rural areas, support summer reading by providing recreational reading to help students develop as engaged readers (Bogel, 2012). Through collaborations between schools and libraries, summer programs offered through public libraries provide parents with support for reading that builds on the instructional role of the school and teachers (Allington, McGill-Frazen, Camilli, Williams, Graff, Zeig, Zmach, & Nowak, 2010 ;Bogel, 2012).

Bogel (2012) conducted a 3-year study of 357 elementary students which included African Americans. Bogle concluded that summer reading programs, offered through public libraries, contributed to maintaining the reading skills of participating students. The study also concluded that recreational reading, offered through the public library, made a positive difference in students' reading scores, regardless of race or socio-economic status (Bogel, 2012).

School improvement plans. African American students not meeting standards on state mandated tests has been an ongoing issue in the United States (Edwards et al., 2010). During the past two decades a concern for presidents, governors, policy makers, and stakeholders, has been school improvement (Edwards et al., 2010). According to Edwards et al. (2010), to increase student academic growth and performance, it is essential that schools incorporate improvement plans that include a new vision for all underperforming students. If the majority of the school's students do not meet standards,

schools must revise improvement plans periodically so that plans address specific needs of all students, including African American students (C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011; Edwards et al., 2010). According to Edwards et al. (2010), the integration of school counselor activities into instructional time provides a positive influence on African American students' reading performance. The implementation of school improvement plans which implement comprehensive, integrated counseling activities can improve student achievement (Edwards et al., 2010; Stone & Dahir, 2015). School guidance counselors come into the classroom and use interventions during class instructional time to help students with goal setting, progress monitoring, memory skills, problem solving skills, and listening skills to aid in improving the achievement gap for African American students (Edwards et al., 2010; Stone & Dahir, 2015). Counselors also aid in assisting students and families by providing academic and emotional support, as well as being liaisons for notifying parents of school events by informing parents of African American and minority students of presentations about college readiness (Spencer et al., 2015).

School improvement plans can convert low achieving schools into elite learning settings where all students are engaged and educated toward higher gains in reading performance (C.A.R.E.: Strategies, 2011). Schools should implement plans that focus on all students. These plans should employ research based strategies, such as cooperative learning, peer helping, mentoring, and student involvement in curriculum planning, which have been shown to close academic achievement gaps, which include reading achievement gaps (C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011). School improvement plans could focus on improving reading performance by implementing instructional workshops for

teachers that offer research based strategies that have proven effective for successful

academic performance by all students (C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011).

School improvement plans focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment; staff

development; family, school, and community engagement; school organization and

lowering class size (C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011). Reducing class sizes in kindergarten

through 3rd grade increases African American student achievement in reading (Biddle &

Berliner, 2008; Center for Public Education, 2014). Biddle and Berliner (2008) conducted

experimental studies on class size and the effects and concluded that the desired class size

for students, including African American students, in kindergarten through 2nd grade for

effective learning is 17 students or less (Biddle & Berliner, 2008). For students, including

African American students, in 3rd through 5th grades, the desired class size is 20 students

or less for effective learning (Biddle & Berliner, 2008; C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011;

Center for Public Education, 2014).

According to the Center for Public Education (2014), class size reduction (CSR)

is a key reform strategy at the state and national level. The Tennessee Student-Teacher

Achievement Ratio (STAR) Study was the first of three phrases in the Tennessee class

size project which began in 1985 studying kindergarten through 3rd grade (Mosteller,

1995). Created to determine the effect of smaller class sizes on student performance, the

STAR Study indicated several findings about reduced class sizes:

- Smaller class sizes in the optimal years, kindergarten through 3rd grade, promoted
   students' academic achievement.

- Class sizes of 18 students or less, per teacher, was necessary to attain the greatest benefits.

- African American and low-income students showed greater gains when placed in smaller sized classes in the primary grades.

- Teacher experience and preparation was essential in the success or failure of class size reduction programs.

- PD for teachers and a rigorous curriculum enhanced the effect of smaller class sizes on academic achievement of African American students.

An evaluation of Wyoming's improvement plan that implemented reduced class sizes, found that students in 2nd and 3rd grades performed higher in all subject areas, particularly reading, on the state mandated test in comparison to surrounding states whose schools did not implement reduced class sizes (Center for Public Education, 2014; Wyoming Department of Education, 2014). The evaluation indicated that reducing class size in the primary grades resulted in academic gains for African American Students (Center for Public Education, 2014; Wyoming Department of Education, 2014).

Teacher instructional strategies. To ensure all students, including African American students, succeed academically, classroom instruction must be effective (Dean, 2012). Teachers must implement instructional strategies that increase student achievement (Dean, 2012). According to Torgesen (2004), effective practices for teaching reading to African American students include identifying students at risk for reading failure, incorporating explicit instruction that matches the students' needs,

modifying teaching to meet the needs of all students, and understanding classroom behaviors of African American students.

Identifying students at risk for reading failure. Knowing which students are more likely to be at risk of not meeting reading standards allows teachers to provide early interventions (Allington, 2011). To identify students at risk of becoming struggling readers, schools assess kindergarteners' knowledge of letter names (Allington, 2011). Pearson and Hiebert (2010) noted that two-thirds of students entering kindergarten, including African American students entering kindergarten, had existing knowledge of the letter names of the alphabet and had prior knowledge of consonant sounds. The remaining one-third of students entering Kindergarten, including African American students, did not have existing knowledge of letter sounds and were most likely to become struggling readers (Pearson & Hiebert, 2010).

Diagnostic screener measures are quick assessments teachers can administer to students at the elementary level, which provide information to teachers about the student's development in an academic area (Connor, Alberto, Compton, & O'Connor, 2014). Screening all students, including African American students, at the beginning of the school year, and then utilizing assessments to monitor student progress, is a valid way to identify elementary students at risk for reading failure (Connor et al., 2014).

Modifying teaching. Teachers should modify teaching to meet the needs of all students, including African American students (C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011; Guillaume, 2008). Teachers can modify teaching before the lesson by previewing challenging vocabulary, providing students with study guides, providing students with

script for films, or offering students outlines for lectures. During the lesson, teachers can modify teaching by using flash cards, having students repeat directions, or providing written directions for students (Kupzyk, Daly, Ihlo, & Young, 2012).

Teachers can modify teaching the lesson by asking students questions that require short responses. Teachers can provide African American students with additional wait time when seeking responses to questions, or allow students to share information through written reports or artistic creation (Kupzyk et al., 2012).

For students, including African American students, who have difficulty with reading, teachers can modify the lesson by allowing students to read text written at a lower level. Teachers can offer African American students a shortened amount of time for required readings or have a classmate read aloud to them (Kupzyk et al., 2012).

Classroom behaviors. Kunjufu (2006) argued that classroom behaviors of African American students can contribute to low reading performance. Based on classroom observations of African American students. Kunjufu reported that classroom behaviors of African American students include having shorter attention spans, greater energy levels, slower maturation levels, less developed fine motor skills, less cooperation in the classroom, more of an effect of influence by peers, and weak listening skills. Such behaviors of African American students should be addressed by teachers during the occurrence of the behaviors to improve classroom performance (Guillaume, 2008; Kunjufu 2006). To address these classroom behaviors, teachers should adjust the learning environment to accommodate these behaviors by shortening the lesson, gearing the lesson toward the interests of the student, making the curriculum culturally relevant, and

developing critical thinking skills by asking open ended questions (Guillaume, 2008; Kunjufu 2006).

 Incorporating explicit instruction. Incorporating explicit instruction that matches the students' needs is an effective practice for teaching reading to African American students (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Although, African American students are active learners, explicit instruction is essential to learning when presenting instructions to students for aiding in mastery of reading skills (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Explicit instruction is a structured, direct approach to teaching that includes scaffolding from the teacher that guides students through the learning process (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Khaiyali, 2014). During explicit instruction, clear explanations about the purpose and rationale for learning the new skill are described by the teacher. When teaching reading to African American students using explicit instruction, the teacher should state clear expectations for the instructional target and provide repeated practice with feedback until mastery of the skill has been achieved (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Khaiyali, 2014).

 Additional teacher instructional strategies that may aid in improving reading performance of African American students include interactive read-alouds, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, observation modeling, culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated instruction, interest inventories, and analyzing assessment data (Gregory & Chapman, 2012). These teacher instructional strategies may contribute to the improvement of reading performance of African American students (Delacruz, 2013; Kunjufu, 2006; Spencer et al., 2015; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

Interactive read-alouds. Incorporating interactive read-alouds in the classroom enhances African American students' and other students', comprehension skills and encourages independent thinking among African American students and other students (Delacruz, 2013). Delacruz (2013) conducted a nine-week quantitative study of kindergarten through 2nd grade students comparing reading assessment scores at a school which implemented daily interactive read-alouds to the scores at a school which did not. Delacruz found that interactive read-alouds improved reading assessment scores at the kindergarten and 2nd grade levels.

Cooperative learning. African American students prefer cooperative learning experiences where learning is relevant and meaningful (Kunjufu, 2006; Olson, 2014; Spies, 2011). According to Spies (2011), African American students are active learners and are more prone to excel in environments which are active, spontaneous, and where self-motivated learning is encouraged. Strauss and Margolis (2015) conducted a study where they observed African American students in elementary classrooms and concluded that those students learn best when teachers provide active, student centered instruction. Effective, active, student centered instruction, engages students emotionally, intellectually, and physically (Strauss & Margolis, 2015). According to Strauss and Margolis (2015), the learning experience for students is elevated when physical movement is incorporated into the classroom. Teachers should allow for more student movement, such as stretching, shaking, jumping, or twisting in the classroom (Spies, 2011; Strauss & Margolis, 2015). Implementing movement based activities aids the

learning of all students, including African American students (Kunjufu, 2006; Olson, 2014; Spies, 2011).

Peer tutoring. According to Olson (2014), when children teach other children by acting as peer tutors, their mastery and knowledge of the skills greatly improve. In a study of 2nd grade students, 40 lower performing student tutors and 40 higher performing student tutees, Olson found that the lower performing students who acted as peer tutors outperformed the higher performing tutees. The results suggested that the lower performing tutors benefited from being in a role position as an expert (Olson, 2014). African American students who are not meeting reading standards can act as peer tutors. Acting as peer tutors allow African American students the opportunity to receive more reinforcement with learning the skill (Olson, 2014; Spies, 2011). African American students who are not meeting reading standards could teach other students. This may help them develop their own understanding of the skill (Olson, 2014; Spies, 2011).

Observation modeling. Teachers can improve reading performance of African American students through observation-modeling, where teachers act as role models, modeling behaviors, thinking processes, and procedures for students (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013; Spies, 2011). According to Pomerantz and Pierce (2013), observation-modeling is a process where students learn or acquire new information or skills from observing the actions of the teacher. Modeling involves showing a student the correct way to complete a skill. The skill is performed by the teacher allowing the student to see the skill performed correctly. The teacher can encourage African American students to use the "I Do, We Do, You Do" strategy. The teacher models the skill, then the skill is

employed cooperatively with the teacher and student working together, then the student independently demonstrates the skill (Malouf et al., 2014; Spies, 2011).

According to Malouf et al. (2014) and Pomerantz and Pierce (2013), observation-modeling can be effective for achieving gains in reading performance of African American students and other students. In a study conducted by Begeny (2011), the effectiveness of the Helping Early Literacy with Practice Strategies (HELPS) program to increase reading fluency of students with diverse reading levels was examined. HELPS incorporated modeling by having a skilled reader read aloud to students. The study targeted two students using the HELPS program who were both struggling with reading fluency. Results of the study indicated that the HELPS program increased both students' reading fluency as evidenced by an increase in the number of words read correctly per minute (Begeny, 2011).

Observation modeling can increase reading achievement by providing students with opportunities to observe the words being read correctly by the teacher (Malouf et al., 2014; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013). According to Turner (2012), based on teacher reports, students improved in rate, accuracy, and comprehension when teachers modeled fluent reading to students.

Culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated instruction. In a study examining books for struggling readers, Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009) used critical race theory (CRT), a theoretical framework that places race at the center of educational research, to determine whether people of color were represented in literature read by

struggling readers. Results indicated that children of color were rarely represented in literature provided to African American students. Hughes-Hass

ell et al. (2009) concluded that the lack of representation denies children of color resources needed to become motivated, engaged, and skilled readers.

Effective teachers seek ways to connect learning to African American students' lives and daily experiences (Esposito, Davis, & Swain, 2012; Guillaume, 2008; Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, & Stillman, 2015). Classroom learning can be integrated with students' knowledge of their life outside of the classroom by utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy to bridge the academic gap between instruction and students' diverse experiences (C.A.R.E.: Strategies for, 2011; Esposito et al., 2012).

Incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated instruction, such as adapting the curriculum and classroom environment to meet the needs of African American students, may improve school experiences and outcomes for African American students (Edwards et al., 2010; Esposito et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Research indicated that a culturally relevant school experience, as well as differentiating instruction, is imperative for African American children to succeed (Edwards et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

Due to a lack of texts and materials that reflect their social and cultural experiences, African American students are often disengaged from reading (Husband, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). According to Strickland-Dixon (2011), the absence of African American depiction in printed curriculum materials shows students that the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans is not

valued at school. As a result, African American students may be at risk of becoming disengaged from reading (Edwards et al., 2010; Husband, 2013; Strickland-Dixon, 2011; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

In a study of African American students, Ladson-Billings (2007) found that when teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated instruction, they provide African American students with instruction that builds on students' prior knowledge and cultural experiences. Teachers must relate to and engage students by creating pedagogical practices that are culturally relevant, grade appropriate, meaningful, and racially affirming for their students (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

According to Kunjufu (2006), African American students' classroom behaviors include shorter attention spans, higher energy levels, and less classroom participation than other students. Kunjufu concluded that strategies for improving reading performance of African American students should include providing culturally diverse interactive read-alouds, modifying teacher instruction to allow for students to move around the classroom, placing students near the teacher during seatwork activities, and incorporating cooperative learning (Kunjufu, 2006).

Culturally relevant pedagogy includes making instruction relevant to the student's cultural background (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2007). By linking the student's skills and knowledge to culturally enhanced classroom instruction, African American students can discover relationships between what they already know and what their teacher wants them to learn (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Examples of culturally relevant pedagogy for African American students include providing books,

toys, posters, activities, food, games, music, videos and dance in the classroom that portray and show African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Learning for African American students is most effective when students can draw upon prior knowledge of concepts, strategies, and procedures to construct a mental representation of the new concept, strategy, or procedure (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Research shows that incorporating culturally specific books into the classroom to engage African American students in reading, leads to enhanced student recall, comprehension, and critical reading skills (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). Educators should modify teaching to meet the needs of African American students regardless of intellect, social, or personal development (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Guillaume, 2008). Educators must know about their African American students' interests and learning styles just as they should know about all students in their classrooms (Guillaume, 2008; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Teachers can relate teaching to learning by using pictures, demonstrations, music, artifacts, or manipulatives (Guillaume, 2008). To accommodate the learning styles of African American students, educators may have African American students learn through using their bodies. Research has found that African American students, particularly males, have greater energy levels than their peers as well as shorter attention spans and need some type of physical activity daily (Kunjufu, 2006). A culturally relevant school experience is imperative for African American children (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Incorporating cultural diversity in the classroom and relating instruction to a student's culture play an important role in improving reading performance of African American students (Lavigne, 2014).

Interest inventories. Using interest inventories is a method whereby teachers can learn about the interests of their students (Wangsgard, 2014). Teachers can assess students' perceptions of themselves as readers by interviewing them. Students read their written responses to the interest inventories. Teachers listen to the students read their responses. Once teachers understand the students' self-perceptions regarding their interest reading, they can plan individualized instruction (Wangsgard, 2014). Teachers can implement interest inventories to learn about African American students to match instruction to the interests of the student (Kane, 2011). Interest inventories are compilations of questions composed by educators or instructors who want to learn about student interests. An interest inventory or survey can be administered by any educator, classroom volunteer, or administrator who wants to become familiar with individual students' thoughts, feelings, talents, and intellects (Grande, 2008; Kane, 2011). Teachers can reflect on the outcomes of these inventories by observing their students and their students' work. Teachers can determine what kinds of learners they have in their class and how these learners learn best (Wangsgard, 2014). Teachers use information gleaned from the interest inventories to differentiate instruction (Wangsgard, 2014).

Questions included in the interest inventory may be open or close ended and can focus on seeking out the likes and dislikes of African American students. Questions may ask about students' favorite colors, books, sports, foods, and movies. Student responses to these questions give the teacher opportunities to learn more about students (Kane, 2011; Wangsgard, 2014). Once students complete these, the inventories can be analyzed by the teacher and student responses can be utilized to drive instruction. According to

Wangsgard (2014), class instruction, activities, assignments, and projects can be centered on the results, allowing educators to effectively engage African American students in classroom instruction (Kane, 2011). According to Kane (2011), administering interest inventories in the classroom is a beneficial way of learning about African American students and in turn improving reading performance.

Analyzing assessment data. Analyzing results of benchmark tests and assessment data of African American students give teachers insight as to what standards or skills need to be revisited and how instruction should be differentiated. According to Tomlinson (2014), assessments are constant exchanges between teachers and students created to help students grow and help teachers contribute to the students' growth. Assessment data informs teachers where the areas of weakness for students lie while offering potential to improve instruction and learning (Tomlinson, 2014).

Teachers can determine how to effectively meet the needs of African American students and implement successful learning strategies. When teachers differentiate reading instruction, African American students can gain a better understanding of skills and standards taught, in addition to becoming engaged in the lesson and motivated to learn (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2011).

According to Newton and Winches (2013), student failure and mistakes provide the teacher with information for directing student learning. Understanding which standards African American students are not meeting on assessments will allow teachers to have a perspective of student mistakes and address the lack of student understanding. When teachers know the standards that African American students are not meeting in

reading, they can understand what steps can be taken to enhance student learning (Newton & Winches, 2013). Culturally relevant pedagogy, interest inventories, and analyzing assessment data are teacher instructional strategies that may aid in improving reading performance of African American students.

Factors That Negatively Affect Reading Achievement Among African American Students

Lack of reading motivation, limited access to books, lack of exposure to general literacy, low economic status, and teachers' leisure reading habits may contribute to low achievement in reading of African American students (Rubie-Davies et al., 2012). Factors discussed in this section include African American students' family factors, literacy development, socio-economic status, highly qualified teachers, highly effective teachers, lack of African American teachers, teacher education programs, and teachers' personal reading experiences.

African American students' family factors. Many low-income African American students lack the motivation to read. Many African American children lack early interactions such as little or no parental support, not being read to as a child, and little to no motivation to read, that promote linguistic development (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). Factors affecting this lack of motivation for reading of African American students include a small amount of, if any, parental support in reading, and/ or African American students' low level of reading comprehension (Nolen, 2007). Literate practices of Caucasian middle-class families such as reading bedtime stories or visiting the local library may not be practiced in African American families (Edwards et al.,

2010). Because some African American adults did not go to the library as children, in turn they may not take their children to the library (Edwards et al., 2010).

Primary indicators of future academic success include parents reading to their children at a young age and having books in the home (Nolen, 2007). There is a positive connection between the amount of time African American students read for pleasure with their parents and their achievement in different subject areas in school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Nolen, 2007). African American students who read more frequently for fun outside of the classroom have higher reading proficiency scores than those who read less frequently (Reading is fundamental, n.d.). To promote literacy and the motivation to read, various activities such as draw and tell a story, partner reading, and think-pair-share, can be incorporated to provide learning opportunities that trigger imagination and encourage reading through interaction with peers (Hartry, Fitzgerald, & Porter, 2008; Reading is fundamental, n.d.).

Literacy development. African American children whose families live in poverty may lack resources for decent housing, food, and clothing (Hernandez, 2012). Families may not have access to quality child care or pre-kindergarten education resulting in their children's development of weaker academic skills and lower level of academic success. Such children enter kindergarten without the language or skills needed for learning (Hernandez, 2012; Torgesen, 2004).

In a study conducted by Torgesen (2004), children ages two through five were studied to examine their development of phonological awareness. Participants included 238 preschoolers from middle to upper income families and 118 preschoolers from low-

income families. Torgesen found that the average African American 3-year old from a low-income family possessed an active vocabulary of about 500 words, whereas, the average 3-year old from a middle to upper income Caucasian family possessed an active vocabulary of about 1,000 words. Gaps in developmental outcomes among African American children and Caucasian children arise in infancy, widen in toddlerhood, and persist over the students' school experiences (Torgesen, 2004).

Having limited access to books may contribute to the low achievement in reading of African American students. Because many African Americans are living in poverty, African American children may have few or no books at home (Reading is fundamental, n.d.). African American children most at risk of low achievement in reading come from low-income families where parents cannot or do not read to their children (Nolen, 2007). Public libraries and schools could provide African American children with access to print materials, such as discarded books, so that reading performance may improve. From print materials and discarded books, African American students could learn the basics of reading. Phonemic awareness, letter and word identification, and sentence completion can be taught in school by teachers or in after school programs using the print materials or discarded books (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Hartry et al., 2008; Reading is fundamental, n.d.).

Torgesen (2004) conducted a study of 5-year old African American children and found that many enter school already academically behind their Caucasian counterparts in word knowledge, phonological skills, and general background knowledge about the world. African American students who struggle with phonological skills, such as

phonemic awareness, decoding, and letter recognition during kindergarten and 1st grade, are predicted to be poor readers in 4th grade (Torgesen, 2004). Because their reading skills are weak, many African American students find reading independently a challenging or unpleasant experience, escalating their problems. Delayed progress of reading skills affects vocabulary development and negatively affects students' attitudes toward reading. By the end of 1st grade, African American children who are underachieving in reading almost never obtain on-grade level reading skills by the completion of elementary school (Torgesen, 2004).

Torgesen (2004) found that middle to upper income students have more opportunities to practice reading due to early reading skills taught at home by parents prior to the first three years of elementary school. Lack of early exposure to general literacy may be related to low achievement in reading of African American students. The development of language and children's literacy development begins at birth and is a lifelong process that is crucial during the early childhood years. The gap among the academic achievement of African American students and that of Caucasian students is apparent beginning in kindergarten and widens thereafter (Burger, 2010: Hartry et al., 2008). An absence of basic literacy skills in African American children is linked to academic failure (McTague & Abrams, 2011). African American children who are not exposed early to reading struggle academically and may possess low self-esteem as well as a low level of literacy development (McTague & Abrams, 2011).

According to Harris, Kamhi, and Pollock (2014), low literacy development can lead to poor educational opportunities for African American students, as well as long-

term consequences for African American students. The long-term consequences for African American students include grade retention, increased high school dropout rates, and increased incarceration rates when the students become adults (Torgeson, 2004). Low literacy development ensures restricted access to information and decreased employment opportunities (Harris et al., 2014). Low literacy development is one characteristic that most African American prison inmates have in common (Torgesen, 2004).

Socio-economic status and the achievement gap. According to Joe and Davis (2009), differences exist in parents' academic beliefs based upon families' socio-economic status and race/ethnicity. Middle and working class families have higher expectations for their children's achievement than do less privileged families (Joe & Davis, 2009). On average, students from families with lower socio-economic statuses achieve lower performance scores than students from families with higher socio-economic statuses (Gut, Reimann, & Grob, 2013).

Families who live at or below the poverty level cannot afford to buy books or seldom have books in the home (Gut et al., 2013). According to Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012), low-income parents and parents with little education may not have the knowledge, skill, nor do they have positive occurrences to draw upon when helping their children succeed. A parent, who has a limited educational background, may not have the knowledge or skills to help their student at home (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012).

The achievement gap refers to the disparity of educational measures regarding groups of students, described by gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Edwards et al., 2010; Orfield, 2008). Family and community factors that play a role in the achievement gap include birth weight, early nutrition, excessive television viewing, family composition, both parent availability, and parent participation with the child. Other factors that contribute to the achievement gap are academic expectations from home and the level of education the parents possess.

The existence of the gap between the performance levels of African American students and the performance levels of Caucasian students has been established prior to formal schooling and has continued to grow. For many children, particularly African American children, when reading skills are not mastered in the early grades, gaps in literacy development form and widen throughout their academic careers (Orfield, 2008).

Highly qualified teachers. Effective teachers are the best advocates of change in the most challenged schools. Effective teachers improve reading performance of all students, including low-income and minority students, by encouraging them to excel at high levels (Berry, 2009). The issue of African American students not meeting, meeting, and exceeding achievement goals on tests is a major issue in education that needs resolving (Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2012). When African American students do not succeed academically, most often the teacher is held accountable (Rubies-Davies et al., 2012).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was passed and enacted by Congress to enhance student performance (PL 107-110: No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). A

component of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was the requirement that all teachers be

highly qualified. Before entering the classroom as a teacher, individuals are required to

take and pass all minimum requirements to ensure that students are getting the best

possible education (Glazerman & Max, 2011). This component entails that teachers attain

at least a Bachelor's degree and receive full certification. The No Child Left Behind Act

allowed students to experience the benefits that highly qualified teachers had to offer

them in the classroom (Partee, 2012). However, not all schools hire highly qualified

teachers. According to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2016), only half

of the school districts in the study school's state had teachers who were highly qualified.

During the 2015-2016 school year, only 91 school districts out of 183 met the

requirements for teachers to be highly qualified (Georgia Professional Standards

Commission, 2016).

Highly effective teachers. A factor that affects reading achievement of African

American students is teachers who are not highly effective. Teachers who are not highly

effective lack experience, certification, and have poor classroom performance

(Glazerman & Max, 2011; Partee, 2012). Because of ineffective teachers, African

American students, as well as other students, may not be benefitting from effective

instruction (Partee, 2012). African American students taught by ineffective teachers lack

the guidance and knowledge needed from teachers to succeed academically in reading

(Glazerman & Max, 2011; Partee, 2012).

Teachers are disseminated unevenly throughout school systems contributing to the

low reading achievement of African American students (Glazerman & Max, 2011).

According to Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012), school districts disproportionally assign low-income and African American students to ineffective teachers who are weak in academics or who are teaching out of their field of expertise. The percentage of ineffective teachers teaching at schools with a high minority population is twice as high as the percentage of those teaching in a low minority school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). Low-income area schools are frequently not equipped with enough highly effective teachers who possess strategies and knowledge to accommodate large numbers of struggling readers.

According to Kunjufu (2006), some behaviors of highly effective teachers include:

- motivating and listening to students,

- having high expectations for students,

- establishing clear rules and consequences to students,

- providing cooperative learning experiences for students,

- making curriculum relevant to students.

Lack of African American teachers. According to United States Secretary of Education, Duncan (2010), a factor in low reading performance of African American students may be the low number of African American teachers. According to Ingersoll and May (2011), minority students in the nation's schools lack minority adult role models whom they can relate to in race and culture. A shortage of minority teachers results from a lack of minority students entering and completing college, and low passing rates of minority teaching candidates who are administered teaching entry tests (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Duncan (2010) stated that children enrolled in low-income schools are more likely

to have the least qualified teachers and that failure to attract and retain African American teachers may contribute to the low reading performance of African American students (Duncan, 2010).

More than 35% of the nation's public school students are African American but less than 15% of teachers are African American and only 0.2% are African American males (Duncan, 2010). Easton-Brooks, Lewis, and Zhang (2009), using growth modeling of a national sample of over 1,000 public school elementary students, concluded that African American students who had at least one African American teacher had significantly higher reading scores than other African American students who had no African American teachers. According to Bond (2015), students obtain academic gains from having access to teachers who reflect their race and culture. Teachers of color aid in the academic performance of students of color by encouraging their confidence and easing their sense of marginalization (Bond, 2015).

Dee (2004) conducted research that determined that student exposure to teachers of the same race generated a four percent increase in reading scores (Dee, 2004). Since *Brown vs. Topeka* (1954), there has been a 66% decrease in African American teachers in America (Kunjufu, 2006). According to Kunjufu (2006), Caucasian female teachers made up 83% of the teaching workforce. The teacher population at the study school for the 2015-2016 school year was approximately 34 with seven teachers being African American (Grady County Schools, 2015; USA K-12 Education Guides, 2014). The African American student population at the study school is 142 or 58.4% of the student population (Grady County Schools, 2015; USA K-12 Education Guides 2014).

Wright (2015) found that African American students who have African Americans as teachers, are suspended less often, suggesting that the under representation of African American teachers has important implications for African American students in the area of school discipline. Wright (2015) conducted a study involving teacher-reported assessments of non-cognitive skills of students in kindergarten through eighth-grade: externalizing problem behaviors, internalizing problem behavior, interpersonal skills, approaches to learning, and self-control. Results showed that teacher assessments of African American students' behavior were highly sensitive to the race of the teacher (Wright, 2015).

Teacher education programs. Preparing teachers to teach reading or restructuring teacher education programs to better meet the needs of students can improve reading performance of African American students (Barone & Morrell, 2007). New teacher residency programs show potential for improving teacher effectiveness and retention rates (Han & Doyle, 2013).

Preparing teachers for success in schools plays an important role in improving the reading performance of African American students (Berry, 2009). Many techniques and strategies that must be implemented in the classroom are gleaned through education certification programs (Rubie-Davies et al., 2012). To transform a low-income school into a high performing school, universities and school districts must adequately prepare teaching candidates to become effective teachers of reading (Berry, 2009). Incorporating new teacher residency programs, improving working conditions, offering teacher incentives, and outlining teacher effectiveness can ensure a constant source of well

equipped, culturally competent teachers to aid in improving the reading performance of African American students (Berry, 2009).

According to Edwards et al. (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2007), many classroom teachers desire to teach African American students effectively; however, teacher education programs do not adequately prepare teachers to teach African American students (Edwards et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Researchers believe that to enhance the literacy attainment of African American students, teacher education programs must surpass in preparing teachers to have a greater level of understanding of the influence African American culture plays on students' learning styles and a true appreciation of the experiences African American students bring to the classroom (Edwards et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Preparing teachers to teach African American students involves altering teachers' multicultural attitudes, increasing their culturally diverse knowledge base, and aiding them in developing the necessary skills to effectively teach African American students (Siwatu, Frazier, Osaghae, & Starker, 2011). New teacher residency programs must provide new teachers with active, in school experiences so that they can begin to apply teaching approaches and methods that are appropriate for all students, including African American students (Dorel, Kearney, & Garza, 2016). Prospective teachers can be provided opportunities to engage in teaching experiences that resemble that which they will encounter in their classrooms. Efforts to prepare teachers to teach African American students should extend beyond pre-service teachers' classroom instruction by allowing

then to participate in urban, community based service learning projects (Dorel et al., 2016; Siwatu et al., 2011).

Teachers' personal reading experiences. Teachers' personal leisure reading experiences outside of the classroom may contribute to low achievement in reading of African American students (Burgess, Sargent, Smith, Hill, & Morrison, 2011; McKool & Gespass, 2009). According to Burgess et al. (2011), teacher knowledge of reading development and instructional practices in the classroom are strongly related.

Burgess et al. (2011) conducted a study involving 161 kindergarten through 5th grade teachers from three mid-western states in the United States. The study examined the relationship between the reading habits of elementary school teachers, their knowledge of children's literature, and their use of best literacy practices in the classroom. Burgess et al. (2011) created teacher comparison groups based upon television viewing, book reading, and knowledge of children's books. Chi square analysis was conducted to find that a strong correlation existed among best teaching practices and the teacher's individual reading habits and understanding of children's literature (Burgess et al., 2011).

McKool and Gespass (2009) studied teachers' responses to a questionnaire that displayed their views concerning reading instruction routines and teacher leisure reading habits. Results indicated:

- Many teachers value reading as a relaxing hobby; however only half read for pleasure on a regular basis.

- Teachers who read at least 30 minutes a day incorporate additional best practices strategies in their classrooms.

- Teachers who value reading share insights with other teachers and colleagues from their own personal reading.

- Teachers who read as a leisurely activity use intrinsic and extrinsic types of incentives to promote increased reading performance among African American students.

Teachers who do not read as much for pleasure, predicted weaker word reading gains for students during in class explicit reading instruction (Burgess et al., 2011; McKool & Gespass, 2009). Teachers who read more for pleasure outside of the classroom predicted higher reading gains for students during in class explicit reading instruction.

Teachers' Beliefs about African American Students' Reading Achievement

Based on race, appearance, income, gender, and parental involvement, many teachers may lower their expectations of African American students, emphasize basic skills, and or limit the students' opportunities to participate in critical thinking (Edwards et al., 2010; Kunjufu, 2006). In the classroom, teachers are less likely to verbally praise or encourage students based on race or appearance. African American students are not called on as frequently to answer questions nor given feedback (Edwards et al., 2010; Kunjufu, 2006). African American students are often overlooked in the classroom and not provided the opportunity from their teacher to respond in classroom discussions (Edwards et al., 2010; Kunjufu, 2006).

Teacher self-efficacy. According to Boutakidis and Lieber (2013), teachers are critical elements in children's development, such as in their academic achievement and socio-emotional growth. Teacher's self-efficacy may influence student achievement and have lasting effects on students' cognitive, behavior, emotional, and academic development (Filippello, Sorrenti, Larcan, & Rizzo, 2014; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015; Zhang, 2014).

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her own ability to be successful in a specific situation. The self-efficacy theory has been applied in educational settings at all grade and ability levels and subject areas (Zhang, 2014). Bandura theorized that self-efficacy affected peoples' choices of activities, efforts, and persistence (Bandura, 1977; Lavigne, 2014). Choices individuals make rely heavily on what he or she believes. How equipped a person feels about his or her ability to cope, and how in control he or she feels when completing a task, are characteristics of self-efficacy (Dilmac, 2009; Maloney, 2014).

Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to utilize classroom management approaches, adequate teaching methods, encourage student autonomy, keep students on task, and manage classroom problems (Jiang, Song, Lee, & Bong, 2014; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012). The results of a study conducted by Mojavezi and Tamiz (2012) support the findings that there is a significant connection between teacher self-efficacy and enhanced student performance. According to Mojavezi and Tamiz (2012), teacher self-efficacy is related to various beneficial educational outcomes such as teacher persistence,

teacher enthusiasm, teacher commitment, instructional behavior, student achievement, and student motivation.

To improve reading performance of African American students, efforts to increase teacher self-efficacy beliefs may need to be implemented (Lavigne, 2014). Siwatu et al. (2011) suggested that effective teachers of African American students were proficient in integrating their students' culture throughout the instructional and learning process. Becoming an effective teacher of African American students requires teachers to be able to implement culturally responsive teaching, and possess self-efficacy beliefs to utilize those skills in the classroom with students (Siwatu et al., 2011). Culturally responsive teaching includes using the students' cultural knowledge, the students' frameworks of reference, the students' learning style, and the students' prior experiences to make learning effective for them (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Siwatu et al., 2011).

Teacher beliefs about student backgrounds and behavior. The ways in which teachers perceive student behavior or react to a student's native language or dialect can affect their attitudes toward discipline, the quality of their interactions with students during the learning process, and the value of teacher interactions with colleagues and other members of the school population (Lavigne, 2014; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Teachers observe considerable racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and gender inequalities from students' literacy skills. Lavigne (2014) conducted a study which examined beliefs teachers held about students during their first five years of teaching in the classroom. Lavigne (2014) concluded that when teachers understand the backgrounds, ability levels, and learning styles of students, effective instruction can be implemented for

successful academic achievement. Lavigne argued that teachers develop positive conceptualizations about students over time (Lavigne, 2014).

Some teachers believe that students come to them already having mastered reading skills from previous grades (Miller, 2014). According to Miller (2014), teachers may fail to realize that their students do not possess the level of understanding of special reading skills, such as phonics, decoding, blending, and comprehension, as their grade level indicated. Teachers' beliefs about children's academic ability are important to children's continual academic performance. Gut et al. (2013) conducted a 3-year longitudinal study which involved 221 children ages 5 to 7 years. The goal of this study was to explore the influences of children's academic performance and family characteristics on teacher perceptions. The study examined why teachers perceive kindergarten and 1st grade students with low socio-economic status less positively than kindergarten and 1st grade students with a higher socio-economic status (Gut et al., 2013). Being aware of students' academic abilities, behaviors, and maturity levels is critical in that teachers establish classroom climate. The way students respond to teachers can be positive or negative based upon a students' academic ability, behavior, or maturity level.

Thompson & Shamberger (2015) suggested that student apathy is most often caused by low teacher expectations. Because of low student apathy, student misbehavior occurs. The National Center for Education Statistics (2013) reported that African American students are labeled by teachers as discipline problems more than any other group of students (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Having low expectations of African

American students is the belief that they are incapable of academic achievement (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Results from a study conducted by Thompson (2010) found that 92% of 237 teachers stated that they did not know how to effectively work with African American students and 60% stated that African American students were not capable of academic success. Thompson (2010) concluded that teachers must examine and address their negative perceptions about African American students through ongoing personal reflection and PD. Any teacher with negative stereotypes or assumptions about African American students may subconsciously engage in ineffective teaching practices (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Teachers who are eager to improve their relations with African American students are more likely to be able to work effectively with them (Kunjufu, 2006; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review presented information from the professional and scholarly literature about improving reading performance of African American students, factors that affect low achievement in reading of African American students, and teachers' beliefs of African American students' reading achievement. The review presented evidence-based strategies that elementary teachers use to improve elementary teacher knowledge of, preparedness for, and practices for teaching reading to African American students.

Implications

This study will provide an understanding of elementary teacher knowledge of, preparedness for, and practices for teaching reading to of African American students. The

findings of my study may point to the need for the implementation of teacher PD to provide elementary level teachers with knowledge about the learning needs of African American students and instructional strategies that they can use in their classrooms. In addition, findings from this study may effect social change by increasing the number of African American students who achieve success in reading at the elementary school level. Findings from this study may also be used to increase elementary teacher knowledge of, preparedness for, and practices for teaching reading to African American students. Finally, the results from this study may lead to improvements for the teaching of reading to elementary level African American students.

Summary

The goal of this study was to explore elementary teacher knowledge of and practices for teaching reading to African American students. In Section 1, I defined the problem of the study, provided evidence that the problem exists at the local and national levels, and reviewed professional and research literature. In the literature review, I reviewed the literature using the following headings: factors that positively affect reading performance of African American students, factors that negatively affect reading performance of African American students, and teacher beliefs about African American students' reading achievement.

In Section 2, I will provide a detailed discussion of the research methodology including justification of the research design, explanation of the data collection procedures, and description of the data analysis processes that led to the findings. I end Section 2 with a description and discussion of the findings. In Section 3, I present and

justify the professional development program that was designed to apply the findings of my study. In Section 4, I present my reflections on the project strengths and weaknesses and about what I learned about conducting research and developing a project. I also discuss implications, applications, and directions for further research.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The research design for this study was qualitative case study. A case study is a detailed exploration of case within a bounded system and includes in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2012). The bounded system consisted of 1st through 5th grade teachers at a rural Title I elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States. The case that I explored was elementary teacher knowledge and practices for teaching reading to African American students. Case study research determines meaning, examines processes, and obtains insight of an individual, group (e.g. teachers), or situation (Creswell, 2012).

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

- What do elementary teachers, in Grades 1 through 5 at the study school know and understand about the learning needs in reading of African American students in their classrooms?

- What instructional practices do elementary teachers in Grades 1 through 5 at the study school use in their classrooms to address the learning needs in reading of their African American students and improve the reading achievement of their African American students?

- What are the teacher perceptions about their preparedness to improve the reading achievement of African American students?

- What challenges do the teachers encounter when addressing the learning needs in reading of their African American students?

- What resources and supports do the teachers identify that they need to better meet the needs in reading of African American students?

To address these research questions, I used a qualitative case study research design that explored and provided an in-depth description of a case within its natural environment where many African American students at a rural, Title I elementary school, located in the southeastern region of the United States, were not meeting state standards in reading.

I conducted my research at a rural, Title I elementary school. The total student enrollment in Grades 1 through 5 of the study school in 2016 was 683. Of the 683 students, 334 were African American students, 209 were Caucasian students, and 123 were Hispanic students. The percentage of African American students who scored at the beginning or developing levels at the local school (88.4%) was higher than the percentage of Caucasian students at the study school (49.3%) who scored at the beginning or developing levels (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

As outlined in the district's policies, guidelines, and mission statement, the study school consists of a safe, positive school climate where the classrooms are well-managed and high expectations of teachers and students are clearly stated by administrators (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). The study school has received many awards and recognitions for their service and partnerships with the community. To promote parental involvement, parents are required to volunteer a certain number of hours as mandated in the school's improvement plan. An online access program allows parents to receive information regarding their children's assignments and grades. The Parent

Teacher Organization (PTO) offers parents and teachers the opportunity to work together to enhance the school. At PTO meetings, students at the study school perform and display skills learned throughout the year. Students attend music, art, physical education, and Spanish classes-weekly.

Selection of a Qualitative Research Design

I chose a qualitative design to examine elementary teacher knowledge of, preparedness for, and practices for teaching reading to African American students. I considered quantitative design for the study but I did not choose it. I chose a qualitative design because I wanted to achieve an understanding of the problem from in-depth data which would provide rich contextual detail that a quantitative study would not allow. I considered using a quantitative survey methodology approach, but I did not choose it because a survey would provide broad data and would not allow me to probe the teachers for contextual detail.

Case Study Approach

According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), case study research entails determining meaning, examining processes, or obtaining an understanding of an individual, group, or situation. Because my study addressed a case situated within a bounded system, I selected the case study approach (Lodico et al., 2010). I selected the case study approach to reach an in-depth understanding of elementary teacher knowledge of, preparedness for, and practices for teaching reading to African American students. For this case study, the bounded system was a sample of 1st through 5th grade teachers at a rural, Title I elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States.

The case was elementary teacher knowledge of, preparedness for, and practices for teaching reading to African American students.

Alternative Qualitative Approaches

I considered qualitative approaches other than case study for this study. I considered a phenomenological approach but did not select it because phenomenology focuses on participants' lived experiences to achieve an understanding of the essence of their shared experience. A phenomenological study would explore the essence of the experience of being an elementary teacher of reading to African American students (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Merriam, 2009). My study was not intended to reach an understanding of the lived experience of being an elementary teacher of reading to African American students. Hence, I did not choose a phenomenological design.

I considered an ethnographic approach for this study. The purpose of ethnography is to describe, analyze, and interpret a cultural group's shared patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and language that develop over time (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Merriam, 2009). Because my study was centered on the culture of the participants at the study school that gave rise to the problem being addressed, I did not select an ethnographic approach.

I considered a grounded theory approach for this study but I did not select it because the purpose of the grounded theory is to generate a theory. Because I did not intend to generate theory grounded in the view of participants (Creswell, 2009), I did not select a grounded theory approach.

I considered a narrative approach for this study but I did not select it because the purpose of narrative is to describe the lives of individuals, tell stories about these individuals' lives, and write narratives about their experiences. Because my study was not centered on telling the stories of the participants, I did not select the narrative approach (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Merriam, 2009).

Participants

The participant sample was comprised of elementary teachers who teach Grades 1 through 5 at the study school. I purposefully selected a sample from the 34 teachers who teach at the study school. Purposeful sampling entails researchers intentionally selecting individuals to better understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). This type of sampling aids researchers in obtaining knowledge that will provide useful information, help others learn about the phenomenon, and give voice to those who may not be able to do so for themselves.

Teachers who had at least five years of teaching experience, possessed a Master's degree in the field of education, and taught 1st through 5th grade African American students were selected for the study. Twenty-five teachers at the study school met the criteria according to the school principal, who provided me with a list of potential participants. I purposefully selected 10 teachers from 16 who volunteered. I attempted to include two teachers from each grade (Grades 1 through 5) from among those who agreed to participate. Ten is a relatively small number and allowed for the collection of in-depth interviews and rich, detailed data.

Upon receiving permission from the school district, school principal, and Walden's IRB to begin the study, I took specific steps to recruit the participants:

1. I prepared a list of prospective participants' email addresses using public information provided by the school district's internal website.

2. I sent an individual email invitation to prospective participants explaining the purpose and importance of the study, the protection of their privacy, the risks they would face when participating in the study, and how their confidentiality would be protected. I provided my contact information in case they had any questions about the study. The invitation email included a consent form which they emailed to me to indicate that they agreed to participate. I asked prospective participants to reply to me by return email.

3. I sent an individual email follow-up reminder one week later to prospective participants who had not yet replied to my electronic invitation. Additional email follow-up reminders were not needed.

4. I selected the participants using the criteria for selection.

5. I sent a thank you email to those who responded but were not selected. The letter informed them that I would possibly contact them again should any of the selected participants withdraw from the study.

6. I contacted selected recipients by email to schedule interviews at times and locations that were mutually acceptable.

No participants withdrew from the study.

I conducted this qualitative case study in a rural, Title I elementary school in the southeastern region of the United States. I invited a purposeful sampling of elementary teachers in Grades 1 through 5 to participate in the study. I selected two teachers from Grades 1 through 5 based on the requisite selection criteria. Ten participants took part in the study: two 1st grade teachers, two 2nd grade teachers, two 3rd grade teachers, two 4th grade teachers, and two 5th grade teachers. Of the 10 participants, 3 participants had 10 years of experience or less, 3 participants had 10 to 20 years of experience, and 4 participants had more than 20 years of experience. Eight of the 10 participants had obtained a master's degree. Of the two remaining participants, one participant had obtained a specialist degree and one participant had obtained a doctorate degree. Three of the 10 participants had years of experience in the same grade that they were currently teaching. Three of the 10 participants had years of experience in two grades and four participants had years of experience in three or more grades. All 10 participants were certified in reading. Each teacher participated in a one hour, semi-structured interview.

Each interview of 10 participants began with demographic questions that generated descriptive information about participants. I organized the data into four categories: years of experiences, highest degrees obtained, grades taught, and areas of certification. I identified the teacher participants in the order that I interviewed them. The characteristics of my sample are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Each Participant

Participant #	Years of experience	Highest degrees obtained	Grades taught	Areas of certification
1	9	Master's	2	Reading
2	20	Master's	Pre-K, 1-4	Reading
3	14	Master's	2-4	Reading
4	18	Specialist	5	Reading
5	24	Master's	K, 2	Reading
6	8	Master's	1-3	Reading
7	10	Master's	1	Reading
8	16	Master's	K, 2, 4, 5	Reading
9	30	Doctorate	5, 7	Reading
10	20	Master's	1, 2	Reading

Ethical Protection of the Participants

As the researcher, I adhered to explicit guidelines to ensure that the proposed study was ethical. I (a) secured permission from the study school district, study school principal, and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study; (b) outlined the measures taken to protect privacy and data of participants; (c) included a consent form for participants to sign before they engaged in the study noting any risks to the participant; (d) guaranteed confidentiality to the participants, assuring them that they could withdraw at any time and provided a list of names of persons to contact if they wanted to ask questions about the study; (e) ensured confidentiality and privacy of the participants by conducting interviews outside of the study school and protected the privacy of participants by not including any information in the final report

that might lead readers to identify specific participants; (f) asked the participants to refrain from discussing their involvement in the study with colleagues at the study school or in the local professional teaching community.

Data Collection

I collected data for this study during the months of June and July by conducting and audio recording individual interviews with the participants.

Interviews

I scheduled a time with each teacher participant to discuss the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and a time and place for conducting the interview. To protect the privacy of the participants, I conducted the interviews in a conference room of a local library because it was outside of the study school and was a mutually agreed upon location convenient for the participants and suitable for recording.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder and took handwritten notes in my research journal. Handwritten notes included the context of the interviews and my observations of the participants. Teacher interview questions were comprised of open-ended interview questions. I developed and used an interview protocol, based upon Walden University's guidelines to guide the interview (see Appendix B).

In Table 2, I present the interview questions and research questions matrix in to demonstrate that the protocol questions were sufficient to answer the research questions.

Table 2

Research and Interview Question Matrix

Research questions	Interview questions
What do elementary teachers, in Grades 1 through 5 at the study school know and understand about the learning needs in reading of African American students in their classrooms?	What are your thoughts about the reading achievement of African American students in your classroom? What do you identify as the primary components of the reading process where African American students need improvement? Can you tell me about the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom?
What instructional practices do elementary teachers in Grades 1 through 5 use in their classrooms to address the learning needs in reading of their African American students and improve the reading achievement of their African American students?	How do you learn about the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom? What instructional practices do you use in the classroom to address the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom?
What are the teacher perceptions about their preparedness to improve the reading achievement of African American students?	Have you received any preparation on the topic of teaching reading to African American students? What issues, if any, do you think may affect the reading performance of African American students?
What challenges do the teachers encounter when addressing the learning needs in reading of their African American students?	What teaching resources would you need or would like to have to better meet the learning needs in reading of African American students?
What resources and supports do the teachers identify that they need to better meet the needs in reading of African American students?	What supports would you like to have to better meet the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom?

After completing the interviews, I transcribed responses from the interview audiotapes by hand, keyboarding the responses into a Word document (see Appendix D). Then I indicated on each transcript the grade level taught by the participant. After I completed transcribing all interviews in this manner, I checked each transcription against the recording to be sure the transcriptions accurately represented the recording. This method of transcription allowed me to become very familiar with my raw data because I listened to each interview recording many times. I asked the participants in the study to check the transcriptions. I emailed each participant a transcript of her interview responses and asked her to check that the transcripts accurately represented what she said during the interview. I asked participants to reply to me within five days if they disagreed with their transcripts. No participants replied. I used an electronic journal to keep track of, and record any emerging thoughts or analyses as I conducted the transcription process.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative case study, my role was that of sole data collector and analyst of the data. My involvement in the educational field as an elementary teacher for the last seven years allowed me to become knowledgeable of research based strategies for meeting the needs of African American students in reading. I am certified in Early Childhood Education and have a Master's degree in Foundations of Education.

I collaborated with teachers and administrators at the study school on curriculum and instruction. I have participated in discussions with faculty and served on various committees with administrators to address reading performance of African American

students. Because I was viewed by my teacher participants as a colleague of equal status, my professional relationship did not affect my study.

Researcher's Experiences and Biases Related to the Study

I was the sole instrument for data collection and data analysis for this study; therefore, researcher bias may have been a potential problem. I was previously employed as an elementary teacher from 2008 until 2013 by the school district where the study was conducted. During this time, I was a self-contained teacher and I taught all subjects to 2nd graders-reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies. I believe that all students can meet or exceed reading standards if teachers are equipped with the necessary tools and strategies. To reduce potential bias, I followed strict protocol guidelines for data collection and analysis. To enhance validity, I conducted transcript checking and peer debriefing.

Data Analysis

After data collection was complete, I analyzed and interpreted the information provided by participants. Creswell (2012) recommended that the researcher follow six steps to achieve data analysis and interpretation. I followed these steps: (a) explored initial data by coding; (b) established a common idea of the data by using codes; (c) found themes by analyzing the codes; (d) represented results through narratives and visuals;(e) interpreted the meaning of the results; (f) conducted strategies to validate the findings. Data analysis for this study included a two-cycle coding process of provisional coding and pattern coding (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010).

Coding

Coding is the process of organizing data into segments or chunks, to create a general meaning of the data (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). I reviewed the data collected from the participants and using provisional codes began the coding process.

Provisional coding. Provisional coding utilizes a master list of codes generated by the researcher (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). For this study, I generated a list of predetermined codes derived from the literature review and conceptual framework (see Appendix C).

Pattern coding. According to Creswell (2012), pattern coding is used to abbreviate large quantities of data into smaller units that identify patterns in the data. I compared the list of provisional codes and the list of pattern codes to obtain a list of codes that accounted for the data. I then examined the final list of codes to search for patterns within the codes to identify the themes that best represented the data.

Analytic Mapping

Using an Excel spreadsheet, I developed a visual map of the data, codes and themes. In the first column, I listed the themes. In the second column, I listed the related codes. In the third column, I listed the data related to each of the codes. I used this visual display to verify the unity of the analysis and for analytic purposes such as arriving at findings and drawing conclusions.

I used a two-cycle coding process to analyze the data using provisional codes and pattern codes to identify patterns in participants' responses to interview questions. In Cycle 1, I used provisional coding using a predetermined list of 15 codes derived from

the conceptual framework and the review of literature (see Appendix C).

In Cycle 2, I used pattern coding to identify emerging themes and condense large quantities of data into smaller units. I derived pattern codes from the interview data. I conducted pattern coding by analyzing the coded segments of each interview transcript. I compared the pattern codes and the provisional codes. From that comparison, I arrived at one final list of codes. I then examined the final list of codes to search for patterns within the groupings of codes to identify five themes: teachers' understanding of factors that contribute to underachievement in reading of some African American students, professional development and preparation of teachers for teaching African American students, classroom pedagogy for teaching African American students , challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students, and resources and supports that teachers perceive they need for teaching reading to African American students. Table 3 provides a summary of the relationship between the themes and codes.

Table 3

Relationships of the Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes
teachers' understanding of factors that contribute to underachievement in reading of some African American students	lower achieving students, struggling students, behavior, discipline, disengaged in reading, motivation to read, prior knowledge, exposure, culture, socio-economics, achievement gap, motivation to read, student interests, reading levels, teacher motivation, factors at home, parental support, home support, home language, lack of parent participation, resources for parents, parents lack of reading skills, parent school visit, parent teacher organization, parent teacher conferences, homework, language, bullying, at-home technology, fidgets, loss of instructional time, deficit in reading, time management, parent workshops, preparedness to learn, lack of motivation, budget, high expectations of teachers, unsupportive administration, resource teachers, reading series, improve after school help, African American teachers, smaller class size, limited resources, supportive administration, reading practice book, students not evenly distributed
professional development and preparation of teachers for teaching African American students	staff development, professional development, workshops not pertinent to African American students, workshops, master's degree, online research, teacher prior knowledge of students, meet with other districts, workshops pertinent for African American students, reading strategies workshop, high expectations, years of experience, prepared, college courses, not as prepared
classroom pedagogy for teaching African American students	technology, African American authors, African American literature, small groups, read-alouds, reading logs, book buckets, engaged in reading, classroom environment, physically active, reading coaches, field trips, interest surveys, volunteers, informational books, differentiation, student relationships, independent reading, conferencing, teacher tutor, peer tutoring, race, tag, learning styles, partner activities, literacy stations, highlighters, consistency, movement, guest readers, motivation
challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students	comprehension, writing, vocabulary, phonics, fluency, subject verb agreement, rhyming words, speech, star test, renaissance program, student growth, standardized tests, common core, DIBELS, Cindy Cupp, MobyMax, pre-assessments, assessments, progress monitor, accelerated reader, response to intervention, teacher observation, interpretation of data, accuracy of data, spelling inventory
resources and supports that teachers perceive they need for teaching reading to African American students	summer programs, after school programs, public library programs

Research Journal

Throughout data collection and analysis, I maintained a research journal in which I recorded emerging thoughts, reflections, observations, and ideas I referred to the journal entries during analysis and during the reflection and final stages of my study.

Discrepant Data

After I coded the data, I reviewed the data to search for discrepant or contradictory data. I found no discrepant or contradictory data.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are concepts that guide a process of evaluating and checking the accuracy of a research study (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). According to Creswell (2012), and Lodico et al. (2010), validity determines whether the research measures what it intends to measure or how truthful the results are. It refers to the accuracy of the inferences researchers make based on data collected. Reliability determines the quality of the research in a study. It refers to the consistency of the inferences made by researchers over time (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010).

Interviews should be accurate, current, and relevant to the area of study (Creswell, 2012). All aspects of the study need to be thoroughly covered by the interview questions (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). To ensure validity and credibility, I audio taped interviews from teachers. Audio taped interviews accurately presented teachers' responses. I used transcript checking to verify the accuracy of the transcribed data with participants.

Transcript checking. The first strategy to increase validity and reliability was

transcript checking. During this process, I asked the participants in the study to check their transcriptions. I emailed each participant a transcript of his or her interview responses and asked them to check that the transcripts accurately represented what they said during the interview. All participants agreed that the transcriptions were accurate representations of their responses.

Peer debriefing. The second strategy to ensure validity and reliability was peer debriefing. During peer debriefing, I involved two colleagues who held impartial views about the study (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The colleagues possessed doctorate degrees in the field of education and were researchers with expertise in qualitative research. I asked my colleagues to review my data analysis and provide feedback in a phone conversation during which we discussed my analysis and their feedback. Because of the feedback, I revised my analysis. I included a discussion of the peer debriefing process in the narrative report as well as a description of the feedback.

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Limitations

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Because of the nature of the qualitative design and the small sample size, this study is not generalizable beyond the local situation.

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Data Analysis Results

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I analyzed the data I collected from the 10 interviews I conducted and generated five major themes. The five major themes that emerged from the data analysis were:

1. teachers' understanding of factors that contribute to underachievement in reading of some African American students,

2. professional development and preparation of teachers for teaching African American students,

3. classroom pedagogy for teaching African American students,

4. challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students,

5. resources and supports that teachers perceive they need for teaching reading to African American students.

A discussion of each theme follows:

Theme 1: Teachers' Understanding of Factors That Contribute to Underachievement in Reading of Some African American Students

All the participants appeared to be certain about the factors they perceived contributed to the underperformance in reading of some elementary level students. Participants discussed underperforming readers in general and did not single out a particular subgroup of low achieving readers except when they were asked specifically about African American students. The responses from participants fell into six discrete subtopics: at-home parental support for student reading, family structure and home life, students' lack of prior knowledge, classroom pedagogy, lack of student interest in reading, and lack of qualified African American teachers.

At-home parental support for student reading. All participants, with the exception of Participant 4, reported that their underachieving African American students lacked home parental support such as reading to and with their children, providing reading materials purchased or borrowed from the school or library, and modeling

reading for their children. All participants, with the exception of Participant 4, noted that the African American students who received parental support were those who were successful readers. Participant 1 stated, "A lot of my African American students do not have the home support" and Participant 3 stated, "[African American students] have not had that parent read to them…haven't had that print experience."

Research has found that parental involvement in student learning has lasting effects on students' academic achievement (Flowers, 2007; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015) and reading (Lam, Chow-Yeung, Wong, Lau, & Tse, 2013; Long, 2014). Further, Joe and Davis (2009) found that African American students whose parents are involved in their education by attending school events or participating in teacher/parent discussions, showed significant gains in reading performance. Participant 7 mentioned that the parents of underachieving readers needed to be educated about how they could enhance the educational experiences of their children. Participant 2 noted that the school provided some developmental programs for parents but that not very many parents attended and that the parents of underachieving students were least likely to attend. Participant 2 stated, "We offer them (parents) the services…during lunchtime…at night…but they don't come. The ones [parents] of the children that are already performing well, are the ones that come."

Research has shown that students who under achieve in reading tend to come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Gut et al., 2013; Rothstein, 2014). Low socio-economic parents frequently lack time to spend with their children because of work and family demands (American Psychological Association, 2015; Edwards et al., 2010).

These parents often do not have the time to attend sessions at the school designed to help them develop reading with their children. Further, low socio-economic level parents often lack adequate education that prohibits them from guiding reading development or helping their children with their homework (Edwards et al., 2010; Gut et al., 2013). Because low-income parents may not have been read to as children or were not exposed to library or summer reading resources, they may not, in turn, read to their children or expose them to reading resources (Edwards et al., 2010). Although all the participants, with the exception of Participant 4, were aware that the parents were challenged in these ways, they wanted the parents to be more involved in reading with their children. Participant 2 stated, "The blame sometimes has to be put on the parents. We [teachers] can't do everything."

Family structure and home life. Participants 2, 5, 8, and 9 responded by explaining their perceptions about how family structure and home life played a role in the challenges that teachers faced when teaching reading to African American students. Participants 2, 5, 8, and 9 generalized about African American students stating that many African American students live with their grandparents, or live in single-parent homes, or have young mothers, or have parents whose educations were limited. Baker, Silverstein, and Putney (2008) and Rothstein (2014) found that at-home conditions such as African American households consisting of grandparents serving as guardians were obstacles that negatively affected educational achievement and hindered the academic achievement of African American students.

Participant 9 was concerned about the match between school language and home language, remarking that many African American students learn ungrammatical language

at home which does not serve them well at school and affects their reading performance (Baker et al., 2008). Participant 9 stated, "Sometimes the language, I think can be an issue…some of these students may not be hearing correct grammar."

Van Laere, Aesaert and van Braak (2014) conducted a study involving 1,761 4th grade students from 67 schools and concluded that home language and reading literacy play a significant role in student achievement. Many African American children speak a linguistic dialect referred to as Ebonics, Black English, African American English, or African American Language that differs from Standard American English used in American schools (Glover, 2013). According to Glover and Van Laere et al., oral language affects reading performance of African American students and contributes to the achievement disparity between African Americans and Caucasians. Craig and Washington (2004) found that students who used fewer African American English features in their speech achieved higher reading achievement scores than students who used a higher rate of African American English features in their speech.

Students' lack of prior knowledge. Participants 2, 4, 5, and 7 noted that underachieving readers lacked prior knowledge and vocabulary that could be gained from reading at home or from exposure to broader experiences. They felt that this lack of prior knowledge contributed to ongoing difficulties in reading for these students because the students lacked prior knowledge and broad vocabulary. Participant 7, referring specifically to some of her African American students, stated, "I've noticed with some African Americans, not being as prepared because …they haven't had as many background knowledge experience when they come to class." According to Ozuru,

Dempsey, and McNamara (2009), a lack of pertinent information in a text requires the reader to access prior knowledge to fill in the gaps. Once the reader is able to access their prior knowledge, they can begin to retrieve relevant information about the text from their long- term memory with little effort (Ozuru et al., 2009).

Torgesen (2004) found that many African American children enter school lacking general background knowledge about the world and broad vocabulary, making independent reading a challenging or unpleasant experience. Torgesen found that low-income African American pre-school children possessed active vocabularies of about 500 words, about half the active vocabularies of upper income Caucasian children. Torgesen noted that African American children who are underachieving in reading at the primary level almost never obtain on-grade reading skills by the end of their schooling.

Classroom pedagogy. Participants 1, 5, and 8 perceived that if teachers provided a comfortable classroom environment that promoted learning, all students, including African American students, would benefit from instruction. Participants 1, 5, and 8 mentioned how they utilized student interests and built relationships with their students to establish meaningful classroom pedagogy. Participants 1, 5, and 8 stated how they strived to create a welcoming classroom environment to try to improve the school experience for their African American students.

According to McIntyre (2015), adapting the classroom to foster a nurturing environment to meet the needs of African American students begins with the implementation of culturally responsive instruction. To create a culturally responsive environment, teachers can build trusting relationships with their students by showing

interest in the students' cultural, emotional, and intellectual needs (Bennett, 2012; McIntyre, 2015). When teachers acknowledge the value of students' histories and cultures, students engage and learn more during instruction (Griner & Stewart; 2012, McIntyre, 2015).

Lack of student interest in reading. In their responses, Participants 2 and 3 generalized to all students about how lack of student interest in reading can affect the reading performance of students. Their responses did not single out a particular race or ethnic subgroup of low achieving readers except when they were asked specifically about African American students. Participants 2 and 3 singled out boys in general and African American boys specifically as lacking interest in reading. Participant 2 expressed the difficulty she experienced trying to keep her African American male students interested in reading. As an example, Participant 2 stated, "If you have a child that's not interested, no matter what you do they're not going to get interested". She went on to say, "When it comes to the African American boys with reading, they're not interested in that."

Marinak and Gambrell (2010) conducted a study involving 288 3rd grade students to examine their attitudes toward reading. Results concluded that boys experienced less personal enjoyment while reading than girls and are more resistant to engage in reading related activities than girls (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). According to Husband (2012), boys in general have less favorable attitudes toward reading than girls. Because most of the literature used in elementary classrooms do not embody themes and characters that boys prefer (e.g., action, non-fiction, super heroes), boys are less motivated to engage in reading than girls (Husband, 2012).

In contrast to Caucasian boys, African American boys in elementary classrooms may be disengaged from reading because the reading materials do not reflect their culture or lived experiences (Husband, 2012; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Kunjufu (2006) and Husband (2012) found that African American boys benefit more from instructional activities that are stimulating and arousing than instructional activities where student roles are more passive.

Lack of qualified African American teachers. Participant 4 noted that African American children would benefit academically from being taught by African American teachers and argued that the district should hire more African American teachers. Participant 4 stated, "… [districts] need to look into hiring more qualified African American teachers. There are students that are able to relate to someone that looks like them or that they feel like they can relate to". Dee (2004) found that student exposure to teachers of the same race generated a four percent increase in reading scores. Easton-Brooks et al. (2009) found that African American students who had at least one African American teacher achieved significantly higher reading scores that those who did not. Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, and Rivkin (2005) found that African American teachers were more successful than Caucasian teachers in improving the reading scores of African American students.

Theme 2: Professional Development and Preparation of Teachers for Teaching African American Students

All participants appeared confident that they were well prepared to teach reading to all students in their classrooms. As an example, Participant 10 stated, "I have a

Master's degree in reading, so therefore I can teach reading extremely well." When Participants 2 and 4 were unsure about their practice, they sought out learning from the internet. All participants felt that their formal training and district provided PD had been helpful. However, they reported that they had not received PD or pre-service development targeted specifically for teaching reading to African American students.

To learn about teaching African American students, Participants 2 and 4 had taken upon themselves to learn more about teaching reading to African American students. Participants 2 and 4 noted that they had conducted online research to search for strategies that could aid in their instruction of teaching reading to African American students. Participants 3, 7, 8, and 9 felt confident that their years of experience teaching African American students had prepared them to teach reading to African American students. As an example, Participant 8 stated, "I feel prepared just because I've learned along the way just from teaching African American students."

The research literature found that teachers who are prepared to teach reading increase the reading performance of their students (Barone & Morrell, 2007). In the local situation, the teachers were well-prepared and well-qualified. However, that preparedness did not lead to improving the reading achievement of African American students as shown by the reading achievement scores of the African American students at the study school.

Theme 3: Classroom Pedagogy for Teaching African American Students

All participants discussed that they attempted to use effective classroom pedagogy to teach reading to African American students. All participants identified effective

classroom pedagogy as measuring and monitoring student growth, establishing a positive classroom environment, and incorporating effective instructional strategies. All participants discussed underperforming readers in general and did not single out a particular subgroup of low achieving readers except when they were asked specifically about African American students.

      Measuring and monitoring student growth. All participants responded that they utilized some type of diagnostic to learn about, measure, provide interventions, and monitor student growth in reading. Connor et al. (2014) found that screening students at the beginning of the school year, and then utilizing assessments to monitor student progress is a valid way to identify elementary students at risk for failure. In addition to identifying students at risk, Connor et al. suggested that screening students at the beginning of the school year guides teachers to develop appropriate interventions for individual students. All participants noted that they used formative assessments such as the STAR Test, state mandated assessments, teacher observations, and or listening to the students read when learning about, measuring, and monitoring student growth in reading of their students. Teachers described some of the interventions that they used such as MobyMax and the Cindy Cupp Readers, both of which are designed for struggling readers.

      MobyMax is an online adaptive curriculum that creates individualized education plans for each student. Teachers can assign online reading materials to students to develop students' reading skills and monitor students' progress. Teachers utilize MobyMax in their classrooms as formative assessments. Using MobyMax, students are

able to work on developing reading skills independently at their own pace (MobyMax, n.d.). The Cindy Cupp Readers Series is a collection of illustrated stories and phonics games designed for kindergarten and 1st grade students that teach basic sight vocabulary and phonics (Cindy Cupp, 2016).

Establishing a positive classroom environment. All participants stated that establishing a positive classroom environment where students feel comfortable, nurtured, and loved in the classroom aids student learning. All participants generalized to all students and did not single out any particular subgroup in their responses to establishing a positive classroom environment. As an example, Participant 8 stated, "If a child feels comfortable in your classroom, and if they feel loved, they're going to learn. If they feel nurtured and loved in your classroom, they're going to succeed."

According to Williams (2015), teachers should create nurturing classroom environments, or communalistic environments where students can feel safe and learn at their greatest potential without feeling criticized, judged, or humiliated. Implementing a family-type classroom can promote sharing, bonding, and interdependence among students. Collaborative activities reinforce team building, caring, and respect. When students are taught in communalistic environments, engagement and learning are increased by all students. By providing a nurturing classroom, students may develop positive self-esteem about their abilities (Williams, 2015).

All participants also stated that they created a positive classroom environment by providing instruction that addresses the students' interests. Long (2014), Tomlinson (2014), and Vygotsky (1978) found that differentiating instruction according to students'

readiness, interests, and learning styles is effective for teaching reading to high achieving

students, struggling students, and students with mild to severe learning disabilities.

Participants 1 and 5 stated that they used interest inventories and talking with students to

find out their likes, so that they could adapt their instruction to address the students'

interests. Kane (2011) found that administering interest inventories in the classroom is a

beneficial way of learning about students and in turn using that knowledge to provide

instruction to improve reading achievement.

   Incorporating effective instructional strategies. All participants identified

effective instructional strategies as partner activities such as peer tutoring, partner

reading, think-pair-share, teacher modeling, movement, and small group activities. Hartry

et al. (2008) found that various activities such as draw and tell a story, partner reading,

and think-pair-share, can be incorporated to provide learning opportunities that trigger

imagination and encourage reading through interaction with peers. Olson (2014) found

that various activities such as draw and tell a story, partner reading, and think-pair-share,

can be incorporated to provide learning opportunities that trigger imagination and

encourage reading through interaction with peers. When children teach other children by

acting as peer tutors, their mastery and knowledge of the skills greatly improve (Olson,

2014).

   Malouf et al. (2014), Pomerantz and Pierce (2013), and Spies (2011) found that

observation modeling, where teachers act as role models, modeling behaviors, thinking

processes, and procedures for students, can improve reading performance of African

American students. Participant 2 explained that when working with small groups of

students, she uses a strategy called "I Do, We Do, You Do". When incorporating this strategy, she models the skill first, then has students work as partners to complete the skill together, and last, each student demonstrates the skill independently.

Kunjufu (2006), Olson (2014), Strauss and Margolis (2015), and Spies (2011) found that implementing movement based activities aids all students in learning, including African American students. Strauss and Margolis (2015) concluded that the learning experience is elevated when physical movement is incorporated into the classroom.

Participant 10 reported that she incorporates movement and music into her lessons to meet the needs of African American students. She noted how having students being able to interact with each other in groups, being able to move around the classroom to exert energy, and incorporating music helps student learning.

Theme 4: Challenges That Teachers Encounter When Teaching Reading to African American Students

All participants stated that they encountered challenges when teaching reading to African American students. The responses from all participants fell into four discrete subtopics: student behavior in the classroom, lack of parental support for student learning, limited resources, and class size.

Student behavior in the classroom. Participants 5, 6, and 10 generalized to their African American boys in their responses and perceived that boys needed to move around the classroom because of their short attention spans. They reported that these short attention spans and energy levels contributed to the increased disciplinary issues in the

classroom, as well as to their underperformance in reading achievement. Participants 5, 6, and 10 stated how their African American students, particularly males, had a difficult time focusing on reading instruction due to the need for movement, which resulted in discipline issues. Kunjufu (2006) found that classroom behaviors of African American students include having shorter attention spans, greater energy levels, slower maturation levels, less developed fine motor skills, less cooperation in the classroom, more of an effect of influence by peers, and weak listening skills.

Participant 5 noted that student behavior in the classroom affects the learning of some African American students. She stated, "The behavior of the student can work against how the student is learning in the classroom." Kunjufu (2006) argued that classroom behaviors of African American students can contribute to low reading performance. Participant 10 discussed how behavior affected African American student performance. She mentioned that some African American students will misbehave to get the attention of their peers.

Lack of parental support for student learning. All participants responded how lack of parental support was a factor in the reading performance of African American students. As an example, Participant 4 mentioned how it's going to take the teachers, parents, and students working together for the reading performance of African American students to improve. Parental involvement is imperative to improve the reading performance of African American students (Spencer et al., 2015; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). Joe and Davis (2009)

found that African American students whose parents are involved in their education showed significant gain in reading performance.

Limited resources. Edwards et al. (2010), Persell (2007), and Rothstein (2014) found that schools that African American students attend may be poorly resourced, textbooks may be outdated, class sizes may be large, technology may be limited, and curricular rigor may be absent. The study school appeared to be under-resourced. For example, Participant 2 stated that the school had not purchased the complete set of reading textbooks. Only the basal reader had been purchased. Further, the textbook series that the study school was using was outdated. Because of limited funds in the school's budget, teachers had to use outdated reading textbooks which made some elements of the book inadequate for teachers to teach reading. Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 responded that having limited resources, such as funding for technology, funding for reading materials, and funding for field trips were challenges that contributed to the low reading performance of African American students.

Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 responded that having more funding for technology, reading materials, and field trips would benefit the reading achievement of African American students. Participant 5 stated, "Field trips would be nice, more of those, even if they were walking, but we don't have the money, you know how money is, but field trips would be nice."

Class size. Biddle and Berliner (2008) found that African American and low-income students showed greater gains in reading when placed in smaller sized classes in the primary grades. Reducing class sizes in kindergarten through 3rd grade increased

African American student achievement in reading. Class size at the study school ranged from 18-21 students. Participants 2, 3, 5, and 7 perceived that this range of class size was large considering the range of students' reading achievement levels in their classrooms and that they had difficulty managing student behavior. They stated that small class size would allow for more effective teaching of reading.

Participant 7 stated that having a smaller class size would be more effective for one-on-one and small group instruction. She generalized to African American students by going on to say, "To me, the smaller classrooms are the most beneficial for the African American students to learn and grow."

Participant 3 responded that smaller class sizes would allow for teachers to get to know and relate to their students. Participant 5 also mentioned how smaller class sizes allow for students to feel comfortable participating in the classroom, as well as allowing for more one-on-one instruction.

Theme 5: Resources and Supports that Teachers Perceive They Need for Teaching Reading to African American Students

All participants stated that they needed resources and support to help them teach reading to African American students. Resources and supports that teachers perceived that they needed fell into four discrete subtopics: resource personnel support, technology resources, culturally and age appropriate reading materials, and supplementary reading programs.

Resource personnel support. Participants 2 and 7 stated that resource personnel would help them teach reading to low achieving African American students by providing

pull-out programs. Participant 2 recommended the restoration of a pull-out program that she thought had benefited the students.

Participant 2 stated:

> I think we [teachers] need reading coaches, at our school … who can pull them [African American students] and work with them [African American students] throughout the day. Because there's only so much time a [classroom] teacher has.

The roles of literacy coaches and reading specialists include working with struggling readers, supporting teachers' learning, and developing school or district wide reading/literacy programs (Vogt & Shearer, 2016). According to Vogt and Shearer (2016), reading specialists work with students inside and outside of the classroom in small groups and one-on-one to provide intensive literacy instruction. Reading specialists who serve as coaches help teachers with the implementation of instructional practices to enhance student learning (Vogt & Shearer, 2016).

Phillips, Nichols, Rupley, Paige, and Rasinski (2016) conducted a study investigating the effect of coaching on student achievement after teachers attended a six-hour PD session. Benchmark results from students in 1st through 3rd grade suggested that coaching significantly influenced student reading scores when teachers attended both PD and coaching sessions more than teachers who attended PD with no coaching sessions (Phillips et al., 2016).

Technology resources. Participants 1, 2, 8 and 10 responded that having access to more technology resources would better assist them in teaching reading to African American students. Participant 1 reported that her school may be losing a computer lab so

having more student computers in the classroom would benefit the students and their learning. Participant 1 noted that each classroom was equipped with only one computer and that was inadequate for integrating technology into her instruction.

Participant 2 stated, "I would like to have more computers in my classroom, because we only have… 10 iPads per grade level, so really not enough, because everybody wants to use them". Participant 8 noted that school-provided technology was especially important for low-income students who were unlikely to be exposed to learning from digital resources outside of school. Participants 1, 2, 8, and 10 argued that digital resources would add to the effectiveness of their teaching. Participant 10 stated:

> Computers would play a role. iPads would play a role. Laptops would play a role; that would help. …at some point during the day if you have every student using their own laptop or iPad, you're actually able to send them and give them time within their classroom to work on an area that they need more help in. Technology teaches it to them and then I can grade them from those iPads, or laptops, or computers, [I can] bring it back together as a small group and then we review and then I see that they've learned the assignment…".

Culturally and age appropriate reading materials. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012) found that incorporating culturally specific books into the classroom to engage African American students in reading, leads to enhanced student recall, comprehension, and critical reading skills.

Lavigne (2014) found that incorporating cultural diversity in the classroom and relating instruction to a student's culture play an important role in improving reading

performance of African American students. Participants 4, 5, 9, and 10 noted that having access to culturally and age appropriate materials would aid in improving the low reading achievement of African American students.

Participants 4, 5, 9, and 10 responded that having access to culturally and age appropriate materials would aid in improving the low reading achievement of African American students. Participants 4, 5, 9, and 10 observed that incorporating African American literature in their classrooms motivated their African American students to read.

Participant 10 stated, "Yes, reading has come a mighty long way, helping our students see people just like them, African Americans, being displayed in books that students like to read."

Husband (2013) found that due to a lack of texts and materials that reflect their social and cultural experiences. African American students are often disengaged from reading. Educators and researchers have argued that because of a lack of African American representation in printed curriculum, African American students may be at risk of becoming disengaged in reading (Edwards et al., 2010; Husband, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Strickland-Dixon, 2011; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

Supplementary reading programs. Allington et al. (2010) and Bogel (2012) found that summer programs offered through public libraries provide students with support for reading that builds on the instructional role of the school and teachers. Participants 4 and 9 responded that support provided through supplementary reading programs would aid teachers in improving the reading achievement of African American

students. Participant 4 discussed how participating in after school and summer programs help students improve reading skills and how parents should begin searching for effective summer programs early in the year, prior to summer. Participant 9 spoke highly of the Summer Reading Program at the local public library and stated that if students were provided a way to get to the library, then the students would benefit by learning that reading can be fun.

Generalizations about the Findings

Based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis, I was able to make six generalizations about my findings: (1) all participants were very cognizant about the reading development of all students, (2) all participants were certain about factors that they perceived contributed to the underperformance in reading of all students, (3) all participants were sure that they knew how to teach reading to all students although they were unsure about specific pedagogical strategies that would specifically benefit African American students, (4) all participants were conscious about supports and resources they needed and that would contribute to the reading performance of all students, and (5) no participants distinguished student underachievement in reading by race until they were asked to do so, and (6) all participants stated that they would like to learn more about teaching reading to specifically to African American students.

All participants seemed quite knowledgeable and aware of their students' reading development and what they needed to better aid low reading performance of students. All participants had an understanding of why students were not achieving in reading and

were confident in their teaching of reading to all students. All participants considered all their students to be in need of quality instruction.

Project as an Outcome

This doctoral study was conducted to address a local problem, namely, low reading achievement of elementary level African American students at a rural school in a southeastern state. The findings of the study indicated that although the elementary teachers had knowledge and proficiency in teaching reading to all students, they lacked in-depth understanding of the needs of African American students and knowledge of the pedagogy and resources that could improve the reading achievement of African American students. These findings and my discussion of the findings led me to develop a project that would meet the following goals: enhance teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students, build knowledge among teachers of the challenges that may affect the reading performance of African American students, aid teachers in creating and utilizing strategies and activities into the classroom to meet the learning needs in reading of African American students and prepare elementary teachers to model and instruct parents how to effectively aid their children at home with reading. The project that I developed will be a 3-day PD workshop for elementary teachers.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore elementary teacher knowledge and practices for teaching reading among African American students. I collected and analyzed data from 10 interviews. Based on my analysis of participants' responses, I generated five themes. The five themes that emerged from the study were as follows: (a) teachers' understanding of factors that contribute to underachievement in reading of some African American students, (b) professional development and preparation of teachers for teaching African American students, (c) classroom pedagogy for teaching African American students, (d) challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students, (e) resources and supports that teachers perceive they need for teaching reading to African American students.

The project that I developed as an outcome from the research was designed to address these themes. I created a 3-day PD workshop for elementary teachers regarding strategies and materials for teaching reading to African American students entitled, *Reading for Everyone* (RFE). This PD workshop was designed to provide teachers with knowledge about the learning needs in reading among African American students and instructional strategies that the teachers can use in their classrooms for teaching reading to African American students. The project will increase teacher knowledge about the learning needs in reading of African American students and provide an eventual increase in reading achievement of the students at the study school. The PD workshop will allow for teachers to participate in collaboration.

In this section, I describe and explain the purpose and goals of the PD workshop, learning outcomes, target audience, the components and timelines of the workshop, activities of the project, and a rationale for the project genre. This section also includes a review of literature related to PD workshops and programs, a description of the project as an outcome of the study, an explanation of needed resources, existing supports and potential barriers. I also present my duties and responsibilities, as well as those of the teachers. In addition, I include the project evaluation plan, a summary of the possible social change implications, and a discussion of the importance of the project to the students, administrators, and community.

Description and Goals

The purpose of this 3-day PD workshop is to enhance elementary teachers' knowledge of the learning needs in reading among African American students and provide strategies for teaching reading to African American students. The goals of the PD workshop are as follows:

1. enhance teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading among African American students,

2. build knowledge among teachers of the challenges that may affect the reading performance of African American students,

3. aid teachers in creating and utilizing strategies and activities into the classroom to meet the learning needs in reading among African American students,

4. prepare elementary teachers to model and instruct parents how to effectively aid their children at home with reading.

Target Audience and Learning Outcomes

The 3-day PD workshop is designed for elementary teachers in 1st through 5th grade (approximately 20 teachers). The workshop, hosted by the study school, will be presented by some of the teachers and me. Teachers presenting, will be from the study school, which according to the school principal have a track record of success teaching reading to African American students. This will determine who will present which sessions. The objectives of the workshop are as follows:

1. The teachers will gain knowledge about the learning needs in reading among African American students.

2. The teachers will be able to identify, describe, and explain challenges that may affect the reading performance among African American students.

3. The teachers will be able to create and use strategies and activities into the classroom to meet the learning needs in reading of African American students.

4. The teachers will be able to model and instruct parents on how to effectively aid their children at home with reading.

Components of the Workshop

The 3-day PD workshop, RFE is designed as a face-to-face workshop. However, the RFE PD will have a continuously accessible companion site on the study school's public website where all workshop resources will be posted. The companion site will provide workshop attendees with the opportunity to engage in private, member-only post-

workshop dialogue and communication via a discussion board and chat room. The workshop will be presented on three consecutive days (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) from 7:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. during the pre-planning days of the Fall 2017 semester. At this time of the school year, teachers are embarking on the new academic year and are already participating in various sessions to prepare for the return of students. All teachers in grades one through five will be expected to attend each day of the workshop. Each day of the workshop will include a continental breakfast (45 minutes), restroom/ snack breaks (15 minutes), and an on-your-own lunch break (90 minutes). Day One of the workshop includes the following:

1. Session One- A 90-minute session entitled, *Teachers' Understanding of Factors that Contribute to Underachievement in Reading of Some African American Students.* This includes a 60-minute presentation followed by a 30-minute question and answer period to facilitate clarifications and further explanation. The purpose of this session is to explain the findings of the study as they relate to teachers' perceptions of factors that contribute to the underperformance in reading of some African American students. This session is designed to encourage the attendees to participant fully and immerse themselves in the 3-day workshop that awaits them. I will be the presenter for the session and will provide handouts during the presentation.

2. Session Two- A 90-minute session entitled, *Challenges That Teachers Encounter When Teaching Reading to African American Students.* This session includes a 30-minute PowerPoint presentation, a 30-minute small

group activity using scenarios emerging from the PowerPoint presentation,
and a 30-minute period for discussing the outcomes of the group activities.
The purpose of this session is to describe challenges that teachers encounter
when teaching reading to African American students. Two different scenarios
will be presented to teachers and faculty who will work in groups of five.
Each group will be given a short scenario that will depict a challenge teachers
face when teaching reading to African American students. The groups will
identify the challenge presented in each scenario. The group will select a
leader who reads the case scenario, a recorder who writes the findings that the
group agrees on, and a reporter who reports back to the general audience. I
will be the presenter for the session using presenter's notes and administering
handouts during the presentation.

3. Session Three- A 90-minute panel discussion entitled, *Effective Classroom
   Pedagogy to Teach Reading to African American Students* presented by
   teachers from the school includes 50 minutes of discussion, a 30-minute
   question and answer period to facilitate clarifications and further explanation,
   and 20 minutes of summary of the session. The purpose of this session is for
   teachers to share effective classroom pedagogy for teaching reading to African
   American students with each other. Attendees will be able to explain effective
   pedagogical practices for teaching African American students. This session
   aims to establish awareness of the benefits of effective classroom pedagogy to
   teach reading to African American students.

Day One concludes with 30 minutes of discussion and reflection of the day's activities. Workshop attendees will complete an evaluation at the end of each day (see Appendix A). The purpose of the evaluation is to provide me with immediate response from the attendees about the effectiveness and clarity of the session. This will help me to provide improvement for the workshop as it is occurring.

Day Two of the workshop includes the following:

1. Session One- A 90-minute presentation entitled, *Resources and Supports Teachers Need to Teach Reading to African American Students* presented by teachers, which includes 60 minutes of an oral presentation by me and 30 minutes for answering any questions stemming from the session. The purpose of the presentations by teachers is to share real cases to reinforce the importance of resources and supports teachers need to teach reading to African American students. Attendees will be able to identify and explain various resources and supports needed to effectively teach reading to African American students.

2. Session Two- A 90-minute session entitled, *Strategies for Teaching Reading to African American Students,* which includes a 30-minute small group round table talk and brainstorming, 30 minutes for presentations from small groups, and 30 minutes for a group discussion about what was presented. The goal of the session is to present strategies for teaching reading to African American students. Attendees will be able to discuss, describe, and explain strategies for teaching reading to African American students. Attendees will review reading

strategies that will improve the reading performance of African American students.

3. Session Three- A 90-minute session entitled, *Incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Effective Materials for Teaching Reading to African American Students* to be to be presented by a guest African American children's author and teacher. The session will end with a 30-minute question and answer period. The goal of this session is to explain and describe culturally relevant pedagogy and effective materials for teaching reading to African American students. Learners will be able to identify culturally relevant pedagogy and how to incorporate it into the classroom. Attendees will be able to share effective materials from their classrooms that are culturally relevant for teaching reading to African American students.

Day Two concludes with a 30-minute discussion and reflection of the day's activities. Workshop attendees will complete an evaluation at the end of each day (see Appendix A). The purpose of the evaluation is to provide information to the facilitator for improvement within the training as it is occurring.

Day Three of the workshop includes the following:

1. Session One- A 90-minute session entitled, *Differentiated Instruction* to be presented by a guest motivational speaker, includes 30 minutes for answering any questions the learners may have arising from the presentation. The motivational speaker is a former assistant superintendent from a neighboring county who is a dynamic speaker and an expert in the field of teaching reading

to African American students. She can engage and connect with teachers and infuse positive energy. She is knowledgeable about the content, able to share relevant life experiences, and able to share strategies that teachers can successfully implement into their classrooms. The goal of this session is to provide attendees with methods and benefits for differentiating instructing. Attendees will be able to identify strategies from this session that can help them differentiate instruction to meet the learning needs in reading of African American students.

2. Session Two- A 90-minute session entitled, *Teachers Modeling Reading Strategies to Parents* that includes an 11- minute video (Mack, 2012), a 50-minute PowerPoint presentation, and a 30-minute discussion period. In this session, attendees are shown how to effectively model reading strategies to parents. At the end of the session, teachers will be able to implement reading strategies to model for parents. I will be the presenter and facilitator for this session.

3. Session Three- A 90-minute session entitled, *Effective Classroom Implementation of Reading for Strategies for African American Students,* will allow teachers to volunteer to share reading strategies gleaned throughout the workshop that they plan to implement in their classrooms.

Day Three concludes with a 30-minute wrap up session in which all attendees will be asked to complete evaluations for Day Three's sessions as well as a summative evaluation for the 3-day workshop (see Appendix A). The purpose of the evaluation is to

provide me with immediate response from the attendees on the effectiveness and clarity of the session and the overall workshop. I will thank attendees for participating in the workshop and provide information for accessing the information presented in the workshop.

Rationale

Based upon the findings of my study and my discussion of the findings, I created a professional development workshop. According to the findings of my study, elementary teachers at the study school felt confident about teaching reading to all students; however, most of them stated that they had not received any training specifically for teaching reading to African American students. The project has the potential to facilitate the successful implementation of strategies beneficial for teachers to effectively teach reading to African American students.

The PD project will provide elementary teachers with information about the following: (a) contributing factors affecting the underachievement in reading of African American students, (b) challenges that teachers encounter, (c) effective classroom pedagogy, (d) resources and supports, (e) strategies for teaching reading, (f) culturally relevant pedagogy, (g) differentiated instruction, (h) modeling reading strategies to parents, and (i) classroom implementation of reading strategies.

A broad search was carried out to determine suitable project genres based on the research findings. After considering Evaluation Report, Professional Development, Curriculum Plan, and Position Paper, I chose the Professional Development genre because a PD workshop offers teachers the opportunity to interact and collaborate, offers

teachers information about teaching reading to African American students, and offers teachers effective strategies that they can use to involve parents in the teaching of reading.

Review of the Literature

In the literature review, I discuss research and studies that focused on the concept of PD, which is the selected genre for this project. The literature review also includes discussion regarding research and studies focused on teacher knowledge of and instructional strategies about improving the reading performance of African American students, which are the contents of the PD workshop for this project. The purpose of this review of the literature was to explore best practices for designing and implementing a PD workshop for teachers.

Literature Review Search Strategy

I used the Walden University online library and Google Scholar as my primary sources to retrieve scholarly journals and peer reviewed articles. I used the following databases: Education Research Complete, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. Search terms and phrases included: *professional development, professional development for reading strategies*, *effective workshops for teachers*, *designing professional development workshops*, *faculty development*, *best practices for the design of professional development workshops*, *benefits of professional development workshops*, and *effective professional development for elementary teachers.* Additional search terms and phrases included: *creating effective professional development workshops, workshops for faculty development, best practices for presenting*

a professional development, *professional development for teacher learning*, *professional development activities*, *professional development workshops for teachers*, *workshops for teachers as learners*, *presenting professional development workshops*, *the implementation of professional development*, *the implementation of workshops for teachers*, *teacher activities during a workshop*, and *creating teacher workshops and professional development.*

I searched multiple academic journals including *Journal of Pedagogic Development, Journal of Research in Reading*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Infants and Young Children*, *Child Care Quarterly*, *The Urban Review*, *Harvard Educational Research Review*, and *Multicultural Perspectives.* In addition, I searched the *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *Curriculum Inquiry*, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, and *Journal of Family Issues.* I located numerous articles, but many were outdated. I used sources older than five years if the information was applicable and could not be found in more recent sources. I considered that the literature review was complete when I encountered repeated references and my searches did not result in new sources. In alignment with genre and content of the project, I organized the literature review under two headings, (1) research about best practices for the design and presentation of a PD workshop for teachers, (2) research about best practices for the implementation of a PD workshop for teachers.

Research about Best Practices for the Design and Presentation of a PD Workshop

for Teachers

I organized the discussion about best practices for the design and presentation of a

workshop into five topics: (1) the concept of PD, (2) the effectiveness of PD, (3)

designing PD activities, (3) teachers as learners in PD, and (4) evaluating the success of

PD workshops.

The concept of professional development. PD has a plethora of definitions,

theories, and viewpoints that have been extensively researched and studied (Bayar, 2014;

Desimone & Garet, 2015; Desimone, Smith, & Phillips, 2013; Sharma, 2016). Sharma

(2016) stated that PD should include a formal and informal means of helping teachers

learn new skills and pedagogy by exploring advanced knowledge of content and

resources. DeMonte (2013) argued that effective professional development for teachers is

about teaching teachers by incorporating what they already know and building on that

knowledge to improve their teaching. Appropriate conditions and characteristics of

professional development such as a shift from passive to active participant involvement,

consistency, and being supported by peers in a professional learning community affect

the potential for depth of teacher understanding that leads to change in teaching practice

(Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; Stewart, 2014).

The effectiveness of professional development. The effectiveness of PD has

been widely researched with numerous studies conducted on the components that make

PD effective (Bowe & Gore, 2017; Covay Minor, Desimone, Caines, and Hochberg,

2016; Sharma, 2016).

According to Bowe and Gore (2017) a focus on pedagogy that guides teachers' efforts at improvement is essential to an effective PD. Covay Minor et al. (2016) suggested that effective PD, is beneficial in aiding teachers to build instructional skills and further content knowledge to improve student performance. Through in-depth interviews of middle school teachers, Covay Minor et al. (2016) found that PD that is more content focused is most effective in influe2ncing teacher learning. Effective PD will expand teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills by providing them with opportunities to practice, discuss, and receive feedback (Covay Minor et al., 2016; Sharma, 2016).

Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, and Hardin (2014) conducted a study which included 45 elementary, middle, and high school teachers from two school districts and found that a greater number of PD hours in differentiating content of instruction was positively associated with teacher efficacy and the teachers' sense of efficacy beliefs. Results from the study showed that teachers were more likely to implement what they learned during a PD workshop, if the workshop focused on effective content instruction (Dixon et al., 2014). Teachers who received more PD in content differentiation also perceived that they were more effective in differentiating instruction. Participation of teachers in a 10-hour or more PD in which strategies can be learned and practiced was found to relate to better implementation into the classroom (Dixon et al., 2014).

Designing professional development activities. Bayar (2014) found that teachers define PD activities as effective if organized to meet teachers' needs and provide for ongoing collaboration among teachers. Bayar (2014) conducted a study of 16

elementary teachers which concluded that 12 teacher participants felt disconnected from the PD focus because they had no input in the planning of PD activities. The teachers perceived that having a role in the design or creation of activities would improve their sense of ownership and relevancy of the activities (Bayar, 2014).

Guskey (2014) argued that the effectiveness of designing a professional development workshop is dependent upon how well PD activities are planned. Hirsh (2012) suggested that when designing a professional development workshop, planning activities must begin with the end result which is to improve student learning (Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013). Specific student learning outcomes to be attained must first be considered when designing professional development workshop activities for teachers (Guskey, 2012, 2014).

To effectively improve teaching practices and student learning, a PD should entail five features: (1) content focus, (2) active learning, (3) coherence, (4) sustained duration, and (5) collective participation (Bayar, 2014; Desimone & Garet, 2015). Content focus, active learning, coherence, sustained duration, and collective participation in PD activities are beneficial in creating PD activities that transfer to the classroom. When these features are incorporated into professional development activities, a cycle of continuous improvement in teacher learning can occur (Stewart, 2014).

Content focus involves activities that focus on subject matter content and how teachers utilize that content (Sharma, 2016). When the activity is content focused, the content is centered on improving and expanding teachers' content knowledge. Teachers understand learning objectives and obtain a greater understanding of how students learn

the content (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Stewart, 2014). Desimone et al. (2013) conducted

a 3-year longitudinal study involving 457 mathematics teachers to determine the effect of

content focused professional development on student achievement. Results showed that

when the PD focused on advanced mathematical topics, the mathematics achievement of

students of the teachers who learned advanced mathematics concepts increased more

quickly than students of teachers who received PD targeted at basic math instruction.

Active learning during PD provides opportunities for teachers to observe others,

be observed and receive feedback, analyze student work, lead discussions, or make

presentations rather than inactively listening to lectures (Desimone et al., 2013).

Providing active learning experiences during PD, such as reviewing student work or

receiving feedback on teaching was found to increase the effect of the PD on teachers'

instruction (Desimone, 2002; Stewart, 2014). In a study of 207 teachers, Desimone,

Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002) found that teacher instruction is enhanced when

PD offered activities that require active learning. Results from the study also concluded

that districts and schools must choose between serving large numbers of teachers with

less focused PD or providing higher quality activities for fewer teachers (Stewart, 2014).

Coherence in a PD program occurs when the PD is relevant to teachers' perceived

needs and state initiatives so that the workshop is connected and compatible to what is

being taught (Allen & Penuel, 2015). Interviews with teachers and discussions with

professional learning communities can aid in identifying areas of concern that need to be

addressed in professional development workshops to help all students master concepts

and skills (Guskey, 2012, 2014). Results from student assessments, school records, and

classroom observations can show areas where students may be struggling. The question of whether the instructional practices implemented will produce the desired results needs to be asked. Practices to be implemented should be research based from credible sources (Fishman, Konstantopoulos, Kubitskey, Vath, Park, Johnson, & Edelson, 2013; Guskey, 2014).

Similar to students, teachers learn new content and skills best through sustained professional learning over time through several lessons (DeMonte, 2013). Research has found that sustained duration, defined as ongoing PD activities that are provided throughout the school year and includes 20 or more hours of contact time, is necessary for implementing ongoing learning into practice (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Bayar (2014) found that PD activities are mostly short-term and tend to lack the necessary depth needed to have a lasting effect on teaching practice. Long-term PD activities provide a deep and lasting influence on teachers' learning and are more effective than shorter PD activities (Bayar, 2014; Gonzalez & Lambert, 2014).

Incorporating collective participation in a PD workshop allows teachers to collaborate with teachers in the same school, who teach in the same grade, or who teach the same or similar content areas. Activities are designed with frequent collaboration among teachers which result in improved teaching practices and student learning (DeMonte, 2013; Stewart, 2014).

Support and enthusiasm about PD from school and district leaders play an influential role in teacher willingness and motivation to participate in activities promoted in PD (Desimone & Garet, 2015). When school administrators provide time for teachers

to participate in and practice what is learned in PD, teachers are more likely to utilize strategies aligned with PD content (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Through faculty relationships such as co-teaching, team teaching, teaching circles, and curriculum development, teachers may share expertise from their respective fields. During the PD activities that I have created for my project, teachers are provided opportunities to share their expertise with each other. The project that I have developed includes panelists made up of teachers from local schools and neighboring counties who will share how their relationships with colleagues can help them learn from each other (Laverick, 2016).

Teachers as learners in professional development. In PD workshops, teachers are adult learners and activities implemented in workshops should be organized to address the core learning principles as developed by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2014). According to Knowles et al. (2014), andragogy is a set of core adult learning principles that can be applied to all adult learning situations. The six principles of andragogy that guide adult learning are as follows: (1) learners are motivated and self-directed, (2) learners bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences, (3) learners are goal-oriented, (4) learners are relevancy oriented, (5) learners are practical, and (6) learners like to be respected. Andragogy is most effective in practice when it is tailored to fit the uniqueness of the learners and the learning situation (Knowles et al., 2014). The project that I have developed incorporates these six principles.

My project encourages these principles by allowing learners to be motivated and self-directed by providing teachers a setting in which the environment is conducive to learning and teachers feel safe and comfortable with expressing themselves. Teachers

will be able to evaluate their own learning through problem solving activities and PD evaluations. Implementing roundtable discussions will provide learners with opportunities to share their own teaching experiences and apply it to new learning experiences. Adult learners are ready to learn when they experience a need to learn and when what they are learning is relevant to what they want to achieve (Knowles et al., 2014). Learning goals of my project will be outlined at the beginning of the project and throughout the workshop. My project will allow teachers opportunities for hands on active participation in various sessions. Because adult learners want to be respected, my project will allow teachers the opportunity to provide feedback of each session and facilitators will encourage expression of their ideas. By integrating these six principles into the design of my project, I will encourage teachers to be engaged in each session and eager to apply what they learned.

Evaluating the success of professional development programs. Successful PD workshops should provide participants with the opportunity to share feedback with PD facilitators about the success of the workshop for facilitators to learn how they could improve the PD or determine what follow-up might be necessary (Phillips & Phillips, 2016). According to Darling-Hammond (2014) and Smylie (2015), providing participants with the opportunity to evaluate PD programs provides the facilitator with knowledge on how to support meaningful improvement of teacher performance and practice. Participant reaction and evaluation data can offer insight into the learning process of the participants attending the PD workshop (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Smylie, 2015). Evaluating the success of PD workshops allows for facilitators to take advantage of results that derive

from measuring and evaluating PD workshops (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Phillips & Phillips, 2016).

The success of PD workshops can be measured through formative and summative evaluations (Burke, 2014). Formative evaluations occur throughout the workshop to provide feedback on an ongoing basis to improve learning. Formative evaluations provide the facilitator with immediate feedback of the effectiveness and clarity of the session (Thum, Tarasawa, Hegedus, Yun, & Bowe, 2015). Results of the evaluations may lead to improvement of the workshop as it is occurring.

Summative evaluations occur at the end of the workshop to provide feedback on the overall PD workshop. Summative evaluations allow for additional feedback from the learner on how the overall PD workshop can be improved for future implementation. Formative and summative assessments can be administered to learners manually, through electronic surveys, observations, or interviews.

Benefits of measuring and evaluating the success of PD workshops include improving program design, identifying and improving inadequacies and enhancing learning transfer (Phillips & Phillips, 2016). A comprehensive evaluation system should provide information to improve the overall design of the program such as content delivery, duration, timing, and expectations. Evaluation data can determine whether the information presented was conducted accurately (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

Research about Best Practices for the Implementation of a PD Workshop for Teachers

The implementation of effective professional development for teachers leads to changes in teacher practice and student learning (Killion & Hirsh, 2013). Implementing effective professional development extends teachers' content knowledge, instructional and leadership practices, and their knowledge of how students learn (DeMonte, 2013; Killion & Hirsh, 2013). According to Killion and Hirsh (2013), required resources for the implementation of an effective professional development include staff, time, funding, technology, and materials. I organized the discussion about best practices for the implementation of a PD workshop for teachers into five topics: (1) differentiating the staff in PD, (2) providing ongoing time for PD, (3) increased funding for PD, (4) the role of technology in PD, and (5) materials needed to facilitate PD.

Differentiating the staff in professional development. Active participation and support from faculty and staff members are needed for the implementation of a professional development workshop (Killion & Hirsh, 2013). Including various faculty members such as coaches, teachers, principals, instructional facilitators, curriculum leaders, and   program and manager leaders into a professional development allows for additional collective expertise (Coleman, Gallagher, & Job, 2012; DeMonte, 2013; Killion & Hirsh, 2013). Through teacher mentoring, teacher coaching, and facilitated learning, teachers can help each other improve student learning as well as implement their knowledge and expertise learned from PD workshops (Lumpe, Vaughn, Henrikson, & Bishop, 2014; Knight, 2011).

Thomas, Bell, Spelman, and Briody (2015) found that instructional coaching supports teachers by improving teacher practices and is utilized as a professional development strategy to increase teacher competence. Teaching practices that are modeled by instructional coaches are effective at aiding teachers in grasping new approaches before they attempt implementation in the classroom (Knight, 2011; Lumpe et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2015).

Providing ongoing time for professional development. For teacher practices to change, professional development should occur over time and be ongoing (Killion & Hirsh, 2013). Adjusted school day and school year schedules that allow teachers' ongoing time for learning and collaboration is effective for the implementation of a professional development workshop for teachers (Killion & Hirsh, 2013). Professional development workshops require large amounts of teachers' time to be effective. Ongoing collaboration among teachers allows them the opportunity to transfer their learning into practice, develop their shared expertise, and refine practice through continuous improvement (Killion & Hirsh, 2013).

Increased funding for professional development. When implementing professional development workshops, funding aids in supporting registrations, programs, courses, supplies, and services that extend local expertise of school and district staff (Killion & Hirsh, 2013). Schools and districts may have to provide funding to pay for substitute teachers to cover teachers' classrooms or hire more staff to accommodate the teachers' need to be out to participate in the professional development workshop.

The role of technology in professional development. Integrating technology such as interactive whiteboards, tablets, projectors, and education portals into a professional development workshop provides attendees with innovative programs and resources to aid in addressing the participants' differentiated learning needs (Killion & Hirsh, 2013).

Technology in a professional development workshop can also be utilized to connect attendees to local and global networks of experts and colleagues (Fishman, Konstantopoulos, Kubitskey, Vath, Park, Johnson, & Edelson, 2013; Killion & Hirsh, 2013).

Materials needed to facilitate professional development. In the implementation of a professional development workshop, materials such as books, lessons, instructional tools, and other print or electronic resources may be necessary to facilitate effective implementation of learning.

The implementation of an effective professional development workshop for teachers builds teacher effectiveness and increases results for students. Teachers who are leading, implementing, or facilitating a professional development workshop, including guest participants, must be clear on the outcomes of the professional development, have an ongoing plan for supporting implementation of new learning, and the resources to meet the demands of the workshop (Kennedy, 2016; Killion & Hirsh, 2013).

Project Description

The literature review showed that a workshop is an effective means of providing PD to aid elementary teachers gain knowledge, skills, and attitudes to promote the

reading performance of African American students. The RFE workshop is a PD opportunity extended to 1st through 5th grade teachers. The PD is designed to (a) enhance teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students, (b) build knowledge among teachers of the challenges that may affect the reading performance of African American students, (c) aid teachers in creating and utilizing strategies and activities into the classroom to meet the learning needs in reading of African American students, and (d) prepare elementary teachers to model and instruct parents on how to effectively aid their children at home with reading. Thus, the RFE PD workshop aims to generate change in knowledge and skills as defined by Sharma (2016), who stated that PD implies learning skills that include formal and informal means of helping teachers learn new skills and insights into pedagogy by exploring advanced knowledge of content and resources.

The RFE PD workshop is designed in consideration of the needs of elementary teachers (Laverick, 2016). The RFE PD workshop will include learning objectives for teachers and presentations that include factors that contribute to underachievement in the reading performance of African American students, classroom pedagogy for teaching African American students, challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students, and resources and supports teachers need for teaching African American students; all of which will provide learners the opportunity to understand the importance and relevance of learning during this workshop. The RFE workshop is geared toward the self-directed learning needs of adults such as collaborative and brainstorming sessions, which offer teachers some degree of control and involvement

in what they are learning (Bayar, 2014; DeMonte, 2013). The motivation of the RFE attendees is encouraged through the provision of an inviting and hospitable atmosphere of breakfast and snacks for all participants, diverse learning opportunities that pique the interest of elementary teachers collectively and independently, and through challenging learning experiences during which attendees can express and use their viewpoints to help solve problems (Sharma, 2016).

In planning the RFE workshop, I gave consideration to the special attributes of the elementary teachers as learners to accommodate their needs for a variety of modes of content delivery (Bayar, 2014; Laverick, 2016). The RFE workshop aligns well with the recommendations of Bayar (2014) and Desimone and Garet (2015), who found that effective PD activities describe content, goals, and activities that are consistent with the curriculum and goals of the school, teacher knowledge, students' needs, and school, district, and state policies. Attendees will present learned experiences, engage in round table discussion, participate in small and whole group discussion, listen to guest speakers, and evaluate the sessions.

Desimone and Garet (2015) found that sustained duration includes PD activities that are provided throughout the school year and includes 20 or more hours of contact time. The RFE workshop will span over three consecutive days from 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. The RFE PD workshop will be offered during the first month of the fall semester. During these times, teachers are most often eager to engage in PD workshops to implement knowledge gained into their instructional practices. For any additional questions that may arise post the RFE PD workshop, I will give the participants my

contact information and provide them with information about how to use the companion

website (*Let's All Read*). Additionally, the companion site will allow workshop attendees

the opportunity to participate in informal post-workshop dialogue, receive updates about

the topic, and interact with their colleagues via discussion board and chat room. These

follow-up activities will be explained to teachers during the PD workshop and attendees

will be encouraged to utilize them.

Bayar (2014) suggested that follow-up trainings, individually or collectively, with

PD workshop organizers offer an avenue for participants to easily transition into

implementation of what they learned throughout the PD workshop. Teachers attending

the RFE workshop will participate in follow-up collaborative sessions during which new

views, ideas, and strategies will be shared for the benefit of students (Desimone 2002;

Sharma 2016). As supported by the literature, the RFE PD workshop reflects the central

characteristics of designing an effective PD workshop: content focus, active learning,

coherence, sustained duration, and collective participation. The RFE workshop will

incorporate various interactive and task-driven activities throughout the various sessions.

Attendees will achieve competencies through planned activities targeted at enhancing

teacher knowledge and improving student performance (Bayar, 2014; DeMonte, 2013;

Gonzalez & Lambert, 2014). The RFE workshop is designed to promote participation,

include participants' experiences, develop collaborative inquiry, direct participants on

applying what they learned, and empower the participants through reflection and action

based on their learning. Both formative and summative evaluations will be utilized in the

RFE workshop. The formative evaluation will be used to make changes to the remaining

days of the workshop as needed. The summative evaluation will be used to solicit

participant feedback for further clarification of the content and revisions to the content

that will posted on the companion website concluding the workshop. I created evaluation

surveys for this study based on the objectives and learning outcomes of the various

elements of the workshop (see Appendix A).

Covay Minor et al. (2016) stated that effective PD practices are beneficial in

aiding teachers to develop instructional skills and further content knowledge to improve

student performance. By offering a 3-day workshop PD that is geared toward enhancing

teacher knowledge about the learning needs in reading of African American students and

improving the reading performance of African American students, the needs of the

attendees are addressed as suggested by Covay Minor et al. (2016).

The findings and discussion of my study showed that teachers were

knowledgeable and aware of all students' reading development and the factors that

affected students' reading performance. The findings also revealed that teachers wanted

to learn more about teaching reading specifically to African American students. Based on

this, I have developed a 3-day PD workshop that will provide training for teachers in 1st

through 5th grades on improving the reading performance of African American students.

The following subsections include a discussion of the potential resources and

existing supports necessary to create an effective PD workshop, specifically addressing

six elements: time, financial support, human resources, technology resources, logistics,

and school wide community support.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Time. The study school values and promotes PD in its overall vision and mission statement. As such, the school reserves time during the first week of the fall semester to engage faculty members in PD. During this time, all faculty members are contracted to participate. During the month prior to the fall of 2017 semester at the reserved time for PD, all 1st through 5th grade teachers will attend meetings to prepare for the 3-day PD workshop. In preparing for the workshop, teachers will be provided with a copy of the proposed workshop agenda and an explanation of the roles they are expected to play during the workshop. The RFE workshop spans over three consecutive days from 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. with intervals for breaks and lunch.

Financial support. The second potential resource is that of financial resources necessary to successfully fund the PD workshop. Financial resources are needed to cover the expenses for breakfasts for all attendees, pay for the motivational speaker and guest author's attendance, lodging and travel, and purchase gifts for guest presenters. Because the motivational speaker, guest author, and some of the panelists are external resources from out of county locations, a stipend will be given to them. The study school's budget includes a line item for PD. It is anticipated that all expenses will be paid from this budget, pending the administrators' approval. There is no charge for using the institution's facility to conduct the workshop. Costs associated with printing workshop materials including evaluation sheets, worksheets, and agendas will be expensed by the study school's PD budget.

Human resources. The third component, human resources, will include me as the facilitator, staff, and faculty members from the study school, IT technical support staff, and community leaders who partner with the study school. Because this workshop will be conducted mainly by existing teachers and volunteers, an extensive human resources budget will not be required. The workshop will occur during a time when the study school is already in session. Therefore, the office managers, custodial staff, cafeteria staff, and maintenance staff will not require additional compensation. The motivational speaker, guest author, and the panelists are external resources from state and local locations respectively. The motivational speaker is a former assistant superintendent from a neighboring county who is a dynamic speaker and an expert in the field of teaching reading to African American students. She can engage and connect with teachers and infuse positive energy. She is knowledgeable about the content, able to share relevant life experiences, and able to share strategies that teachers can successfully implement. The teacher panelist will include teacher representatives from local elementary schools.

Technology resources. The fourth component, technology resources, will affect the success of the workshop. The facilitator, panelists, presenters, and motivational speaker will use audio-visual equipment, projector screens, computers/laptops, internet, and hard drives to successfully implement the workshop. All presentation rooms are fully equipped to meet these needs. Additionally, the study school's media specialist will provide personnel and equipment to video tape the workshop. The study school's website will include a link, along with a companion website (*Reading for All*), with post-

workshop support and access to all workshop materials. The link and companion site will be updated regularly by me as new information becomes available.

Logistics. The fifth component of the potential resources and existing supports is logistics. The workshop and break out session will occur in the study school's media center and conference rooms that are centrally located and easily accessible to all attendees. The media center is equipped with round tables, rectangular tables, and chairs to accommodate the table sessions, group activities, and breakfast service, which will include buffet tables to be set up in the rear of the media center. The conference rooms for breakout sessions include movable desks and chairs that can be arranged to accommodate different settings as required. The room's layout will be set up by the custodial and maintenance staff as requested.

School wide community support. The sixth component of the potential resources and existing supports is school wide community support. There is strong evidence of support from the administration, faculty members, and staff for initiatives that drive and support student academic success. Additionally, all faculty and staff members are passionate about the success of all students. This last component leads into the discussion on potential barriers to the implementation of the RFE workshop.

Potential Barriers and Solutions to the Barriers

Despite the many benefits of implementing the project, there are potential barriers. There is always a possibility of resistance of teachers to workshop participation. The PD will be scheduled during the pre-planning period and teachers may have conflicts with other activities that are scheduled during that time. Those conflicts may result in

some teachers not being able to participant in every part of the 3-day planned PD. Teachers could show lack of interest to participate due to other priorities, or they may not see the benefit of attending the workshop. The principal may not view the workshop as coinciding with the agenda of the school. Furthermore, guest participants may be reluctant to participate due to the degree of preparation that the workshop and upcoming implementation may entail.

Therefore, I will personally begin correspondence with teachers several weeks prior to the workshop telling them about the benefits of elementary teacher knowledge of the reading performance of African American students. I will inform the teachers of the plans for the workshop. I will request that teachers reserve the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of pre-planning in the fall semester to accommodate the workshop. I will also discuss the workshop with the principal of the school to impress upon her the relevance of the workshop and how the goals and objectives fit into the overall goals and objectives of the study school.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

It is my intention to make a formal proposal to the principal of the study school in June of 2017 to request permission to hold the 3-day PD workshop in July 2017. During this meeting with the principal, I will present the findings of my study to the principal, the details of the proposed workshop, and the estimated budget needed to execute the workshop. Upon approval from the principal, I will proceed with the planning and organizing of the events as follows:

1. Request a salary quote from the motivational speaker and guest author and submit requisition to the program administrator for payment.

2. Request menus and quotes from the on-campus cafeteria staff for breakfasts and services required.

3. Recruit the teacher presenters, panelists, and other program participants.

4. Inform the teachers of the workshop ensuring to state the objectives and benefits.

5. Contact the study school's IT department outlining technical needs and times.

6. Print workshop materials for the three days.

7. Request room set up for the three days.

8. Upload workshop content and materials to the *Let's All Read* companion website.

9. Maintain presence on the *Let's All Read* companion website for follow-up and support to participants.

Roles and Responsibilities of Self and Others

I will serve as the facilitator for the workshop. More importantly, my role and responsibility is to initiate the implementation of the RFE workshop for teachers. Following the workshop, I will be responsible for following up with teachers to offer support with the reading performance of African American students.

The teachers' and administrators' responsibilities will be to support the initiation of the RFE workshop and ensure implementation of the RFE workshop learning in the classroom. The role of the motivation speaker is to inspire teachers to become more

knowledgeable of the learning needs in reading of African American students and offer

techniques for cultivating positive and professional attitudes toward improving the

reading performance of African American students. The on-campus cafeteria staff is

responsible for providing nourishing and well-presented breakfasts and snacks to the

workshop attendees during the three days of sessions. It will be the responsibility of the

technical staff to develop the companion website (*Let's All Read*), and address all audio-

visual needs before, during, and after the workshop.

Project Evaluation Plan

The evaluation methods for the RFE workshop will be both formative and

summative. At the end of each workshop session, I will use a short formative evaluation

survey which includes a five-point Likert Scale rating instrument and open ended

questions (see Appendix A). The formative evaluation will be used as feedback about

individual sessions and to aid me and other workshop presenters make improvements for

the remaining days of the workshop. The utilization of a survey following each day

facilitates immediate modifications to better serve the stakeholders. I will conduct the

formative evaluation at the end of each day. The formative evaluation will ask the

attendees their perceptions about, (a) the presenters' expertise on the content presented,

(b) the organization and flow of the presentation, (c) the depth of the materials used, (d)

whether the presentation enhanced an understanding of the subject, and (e) whether the

handouts enhanced the content of the presentation. The formative evaluation will include

two open-ended questions that ask attendees to state, (a) how they will use the

information learned in the session, and (b) to share any additional thoughts on the topic or

presentation. The formative evaluation will aid to provide improvement within the training as it is occurring, by altering as necessary to the following day's sessions.

To fully grasp the workshop attendees' knowledge and to make overall improvements for future workshops, the facilitator should combine the formative and summative evaluations. The summative evaluation assesses learning at the end of the RFE workshop and offers feedback on the overall workshop rather than the individual sessions. Although the formative evaluations will be utilized to gain feedback to the quality of the session, the summative evaluations will obtain information about the entire workshop to learn whether goals of the workshop were achieved. Attendees will be asked to describe what part of the workshop was most valuable and any suggestions they may have for future workshops.

By incorporating a summative evaluation, I will be able to determine successes and deficiencies in both evaluations; because of this, I will be able to develop the most appropriate plan of action to reinforce transfer of learning. The open-ended questions that are included in both the summative and formative evaluations will provide additional feedback that will be used to triangulate the survey data. This will ensure that any other concerns raised by workshop attendees are addressed. The key stakeholders include faculty members and community leaders who partner with the study school. Stakeholders will be informed of the evaluation results on the companion website, *Let's All Read*.

Project Implications

The RFE workshop will address the findings of the research that showed that elementary teachers were cognizant about reading development of all students, but would

benefit from participating in some type of PD that would better aid and prepare them to teach reading to African American students. The possible implication for social change is the increase in the number of African American students who achieve success in reading at the elementary school level. Teachers could incorporate the strategies they learned into planning, designing, and implementation of instruction which ultimately may aid in improving the reading performance of African American students. The increased success of African American students at the elementary level, may lead to an increase in participation of African American high school graduates in the American economy, in colleges, and in the military. The implication for social change resulting from the project extends to the graduates who may be better positioned to find well-paid employment in society.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

I developed the project to improve elementary teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students. The project was a professional development workshop designed to enhance elementary teachers' knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students and provide strategies for teaching reading to African American students. I developed the project to address the findings and my discussion of the findings of my study. In this section, I will discuss the project's strengths and limitations and provide recommendations for alternate approaches. I will present my reflections on scholarship, project development, leadership and social change, in addition to reflecting on the importance of the work. I will also discuss the implications of the project, its application, and directions for future research.

I identified many strengths of the RFE workshop. First, the workshop was created to engage elementary teachers, which may contribute to their effective implementation of strategies in the classroom that may lead to an increase in the reading performance of their African American students. The RFE workshop will provide elementary teachers with opportunities to engage in active learning through various group activities embedded in the workshop.

A second strength of the project is its design to provide elementary teachers with learning experiences in a collaborative interactive environment that encourages them to apply knowledge they learned through the workshop. Elementary teachers participating in the RFE workshop will work together in various sessions during which they will have

the opportunity to share ideas and explore new strategies toward the common goal of improving the reading performance of African American students.

A third strength of the project is its inclusion of local teachers who will be guest contributors and share their expertise with their colleagues. Local teachers will be able to share their successful experiences, skills, and knowledge of teaching reading to African American students.

A fourth strength of the workshop is that full participation from all 1st through 5th grade teachers is expected. The project will address an issue shared by 1st through 5th grade teachers: the underachievement in reading of African American students. Due to related concerns among teachers regarding their preparedness to teach reading to African American students, it is very likely that there will be full participation from 1st through 5th grade teachers. Full participation of all attendees will allow a greater understanding of elementary teacher knowledge of the reading performance of African American students at the study school. Implementing this knowledge will in turn aid in increasing the reading performance of African American students in grades one through five at the study school.

I identified three limitations of the PD design. First, there is no formal long-term plan for follow-up support that leads to the full implementation of the project and beyond. To develop such a plan will require a substantial amount of time and energy and may require regularly scheduled faculty meetings to ensure consistency and uniformity in developing teacher knowledge and preparedness to implement strategies for teaching reading to African American students. This limitation could be rectified by requesting

that time be set aside two days a month during faculty meetings for teachers to work

collaboratively on the development of teacher knowledge and their preparedness to

implement strategies for teaching reading to African American students. Teachers could

also form a working group that would regularly share strategies that have been

implemented in their instruction that aid in improving the reading performance of African

American students.

The second limitation is that the full attendance at all sessions of all 1st through

5th grade teachers for the full three days may be unlikely. Teachers may have other

obligations, including employment, classes, and other meetings. In addressing this

limitation, teachers will be given ample notice regarding the upcoming workshop. Such

notice will allow teachers adequate time to adjust their personal schedules.

The third limitation is duration of the PD activities throughout the school year.

Because of teachers' personal schedules, teachers may not be able to fully participate or

engage in ongoing PD activities during the school year which include 20 or more hours

of contact time. To address this limitation, a schedule of ongoing PD activities could be

provided to teachers with dates and times so that they can plan accordingly to attend.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

An alternative approach to the project could be to include faculty from the study

school and local elementary teachers in collaborative sessions that would allow both

groups to develop the professional development plan together. In using this approach, the

opportunity exists for the collaborative team to identify and address issues that may occur

in the implementation. This alternative approach would also allow the local elementary

teachers to share and justify how they believe the implementation of reading strategies for African American students should occur within their classrooms. With teachers from the study school taking part in collaboration efforts with the planning, they may take ownership and be more eager to participate in the implementation of the project.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

As a doctoral scholar in the field of education, I learned that the process of conducting research is rigorous and requires an incredible amount of attention to detail and the development of scholarly writing skills. This doctoral study has enhanced my knowledge of scholarly thinking and has helped me to develop critical thinking skills. Having to locate current, peer reviewed, relevant scholarly journals, compelled me to enhance my knowledge of saturation of the literature. I have learned to write a sound proposal, organize research material, and systematically conduct and analyze data. Through collecting data, I have learned how to conduct interviews with probing questions which has led me to be cognizant of researcher bias and how to prevent its occurrence in research. The continuous practice of searching, reading, and examining scholarly articles has contributed immensely to my growth and development as a scholar.

In conducting this project study, I obtained an understanding of how to utilize the findings of research to develop a project to address a research problem. I have not only acquired knowledge and skills in conducting research, but I have learned a great deal about project development as an outcome of my research. I am now able to design PD workshops that are tailored to meet the needs of different learners collectively and separately. Conducting the research study has aided me in honing my planning skills in

that I considered including a variety of activities for the learners. I paid close attention to the physiological needs of the learners by including breakfast, lunch, and breaks for each day.

After completing the data analysis and consulting with my doctoral chair and second member, I decided that a professional development for 1st through 5th grade teachers at the study school would be a suitable project. When I began to plan the project, I was doubtful about going this route; however, I reassured myself by re-examining the findings of the study and substantiating the need to address elementary teacher knowledge of and preparedness to improve the reading performance of African American students. Consequently, the development of my project was grounded in research. A review of the literature guided my design of the overall workshop and my development of the workshop learning sessions. From the review of the literature, I learned how to write learning outcomes and create evaluations for the sessions as well as for the overall project. 1st

The development of the project included challenges. Having no experience in developing a professional development project made it difficult for me to measure the degree of the content for each session. Another challenge I encountered in developing the project was deciding which sessions would include guest speakers, panelists, and local elementary teachers from neighboring schools and counties. However, with further review of the literature and frequent revisits to the findings of the study, it became evident how to involve the workshop participants in the different sessions. Moreover, I

learned that collaboration of faculty members and local elementary teachers will be necessary to achieve the overall goals and objectives of the project.

This project was designed to achieve positive change by enhancing elementary teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students. The project will initiate conversation about the implementation of reading strategies for African American students into the classroom. However, change is created and not mandated, and can only occur successfully with effective leadership.

Conducting this project study has strengthened my leadership skills and enabled me to become an instrument of change and convey a vision to enhance elementary teacher knowledge of improving the reading performance of African American students and to motivate other teachers to implement change. I look forward to the opportunity to utilize my newly developed leadership skills to aid me with the implementation of the project at the study school. I am passionate about improving elementary teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students.

Reflective Self-Analysis

My journey as a doctoral candidate has been challenging and tedious. I have become more knowledgeable of my personal and professional strengths. Through self-analysis, I have examined my growth and development as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer.

Reflective self-analysis as a scholar. As a scholar, I learned that writing a quality project study takes dedication, discipline, hard work, and perseverance. I had never been subjected to having to put forth as much effort into a graduate program as obtaining my

doctorate. One of the hardest parts about this journey was the decision to begin it. I was eager and excited to get started. Goals were set and a balance between life and Walden had been established. After three years of successfully completing my core classes, I began the process of drafting my proposal. After multiple drafts were submitted and not approved by the university research reviewer, I became aware of what being a scholarly writer entailed. My frustration of having to continuously go back and revise drafts was taking a toll on me. After understanding the comments and feedback from my committee members, I began to take time and implement their revisions into my drafts for improvement. I started seeing more positive comments and growth in my writing. Each revision became much improved and provided the opportunity to demonstrate what I had learned. Ultimately, I encountered a new sense of learning as a scholar that could eventually lead me to many new endeavors.

Reflective self-analysis as a practitioner. As a practitioner, I integrated evidence from the literature into my teaching and leadership practice in education. I am able to incorporate many of the techniques and strategies I gleaned during the development of the project in my daily teaching and collaborations with colleagues. I can share resources and strategies with fellow colleagues for improving reading performance of African American students. I will utilize the RFE workshop as a means to convey knowledge and strategies to teachers that will aid in improving the reading performance of African American students.

Reflective self-analysis as a project developer. Prior to completing this study, I had not planned a 3-day professional development workshop for elementary teachers.

However, as a teacher and adult learner, I have been a participant in various 3-day workshops and have acquired knowledge of what constitutes effective workshops. The literature review increased my prior knowledge and guided the content selection, content design, and evaluation. I learned that through collaborative activities such as round table discussions, group presentations, and reflections that teachers will be more engaged and inclined to implement what was learned into their instruction. By utilizing prior knowledge from being a professional development participant and from what I learned from the literature review, I developed a systematic and effective PD that will facilitate learning for teachers. Based upon the evaluations of the sessions and the overall workshop, I will determine the actual effectiveness of the PD workshop.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Though the doctoral process has been very challenging, discouraging, and frustrating, it has been an exciting, encouraging, and rewarding experience. As a goal-oriented, persistent, self-disciplined person, it was extremely difficult to work hard and not see the immediate benefits. I have always been passionate about the study; often having it consume me. However, various life events which have occurred throughout this process caused me to stray just a little. I made up my mind that I would stay focused and work even harder. From this doctoral journey, I learned to implement scholarly writing and constructive feedback into each draft revision and the result every time would be an improved quality study.

This project is significant in that it aims to improve teacher knowledge of the reading performance of African American student performance which ultimately will

lead to social change. The potential effect of my project on social change will be the increased number of African American students who achieve success in reading at the elementary school level. This project study afforded me the opportunity to engage in research that will positively affect teachers within the local environment, but most of all, it will positively affect the reading achievement of African American students whose learning, development, and success are my passion.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The possible implication for social change is that elementary teachers could learn strategies for improving reading of African American students. Teachers could incorporate strategies and knowledge learned into the planning, designing, and implementing of their instruction which eventually may aid in improving the reading performance of African American students at the elementary school level. Due to students' increased reading performance, high school graduation rates may increase.

Another implication for social change is the effect of the collaboration with the study school teachers and local teachers from neighboring schools and counties. Because of the collaboration, the teachers from neighboring schools and counties will contribute to the community at large and will improve elementary teacher knowledge in their schools respectively.

A recommendation for future research is to utilize a mixed methods research design to study the problem of low reading achievement by African American students. Qualitative data in the mixed methods design would come from teacher interviews that would be focused on elementary teachers' instructional practices for teaching reading to

African American students, descriptions of the school climate, elementary teachers'
beliefs about the reading performance of African American students, and general ideas
about teaching. Quantitative data in the methods design would come from survey data
collected from teachers and parents. The mixed methods research design would promote
clarity and intensity and would be valuable in gaining triangulation which would be
necessary to increase validity and credibility of the study. Another recommendation for
future research is to utilize a quantitative research design to study the problem of low
reading achievement by African American students. A quantitative survey of elementary
teachers' beliefs about African American students and their knowledge of effective
strategies for teaching reading to African American students could be implemented. An
in depth quantitative study examining the reading achievement of African American
students as measured by the Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) and
disaggregated by school, could identify schools where African American students are
achieving well, allowing the state to conduct further research to learn what practices these
schools are effectively implementing. An additional recommendation for future research
is a program evaluation. The study school district could implement an evaluation of the
effectiveness of programs such as the adoption of reading programs, parental
involvement programs, and after school programs to study the effectiveness of all
initiatives that they have implemented to improve the reading performance of African
American students. Evaluating the effectiveness of these programs would determine
whether these school programs aid in increasing the reading performance of African
American students.

Conclusion

I conducted this study to examine elementary teacher knowledge of and practices for teaching reading to African American students. I used a qualitative research methods approach that included 10 elementary teacher interviews to arrive at the findings. The findings highlighted a need to design a project to help improve 1st through 5th grade teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students.

The intellectual understandings that I experienced in completing each section of this study has transformed my way of thinking as well as my approaches and methods of analyzing cases within the elementary education academic arena. This doctoral study has played a significant role in my growth and development as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I have reflected on my ability to write scholarly academic proposals, collect, research, and analyze data, engage in and contribute to higher critical inquiry, design professional development projects, and align projects to bring about positive social change.

It is my aspiration that this study will have a lasting and notable effect on the knowledge and actions of all teachers involved with the RFE project for the successful implementation of strategies into the classroom to improve the reading performance of African American students. Elementary teacher knowledge of and practices for teaching reading to African American students was a topic worthy of investigation.

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Appendix A: The Project

Promotional Flyer Template
Target Audience: Elementary Teachers in Grades 1 through 5

First through Fifth Grade Teachers

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Reading for Everyone (RFE)Workshop

<u>**JOIN US!!!**</u>
Monday July 31
Tuesday August 1
Wednesday August 2

7:30 a.m. -3:00 p.m.
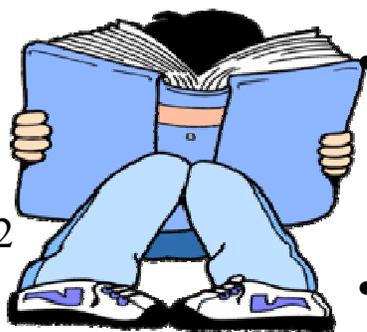
STRATEGIES GEARED TOWARD IMPROVING THE READING PERFORMANCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- Expand your knowledge of teaching reading to **African American students**

- Learn applicable strategies for teaching reading to **African American students**

- Improve the reading performance of **African American students** in your classroom

Title: Reading for Everyone (RFE) Workshop	
Purpose	The purposes of the RFE workshop are to (a) enhance elementary teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students and (b) provide strategies for teaching reading to African American students.
Goal	The goal of the workshop is to aid elementary teachers and faculty members gain knowledge, skills, and attitudes to promote teacher knowledge of the learning needs in reading of African American students in their classrooms. • **Knowledge:** Attendees of the workshop will gain knowledge and understanding of the learning needs in reading of African American students. • **Skills:** With the knowledge gained, workshop attendees will be able to utilize and implement strategies and practices learned in the workshop. • **Attitudes:** Participating teachers will cultivate positive, professional, and responsible attitudes towards the academic success of all students. Teachers will develop knowledge of and skills needed for effectively teaching reading to African American students. Upon completion of the workshop, all attendees will have knowledge of how to improve the reading performance of African American students.
Learning Outcomes (Teachers)	Upon completion of the RFE workshop, each teacher will be able to: 1. Demonstrate an understanding of teacher knowledge about the different learning needs in reading of African American students. 2. Use strategies to implement into their classrooms to meet the learning needs in reading of African American students. 3. Become more prepared in improving the reading performance of African American students.

	4. Identify challenges that may affect the reading performance of African American students.
Target Audience	Teachers in Grades 1 through 5
Timeline	Three days
Location	Main Event- Study School Media Center Breakout Sessions- Rooms throughout the Study School Media Center

Workshop Plan

Presented below is an outline of the topics, activities, timeframe, mode of delivery, materials, and resources for conducting the workshop.

RFE Workshop: Day One					
Topic/ Activities	**Time**	**Duration**	**Mode of Delivery**	**Presenter**	**Materials**
Workshop Sign In/ Registration	7:30-8:15 a.m.	45 mins.	Sign In via Sign In Sheet,	Facilitator (Camille Little),	Name Tags, Sign In Sheet, Agenda
Continental Breakfast	7:30-8:15 a.m.	45 mins. (overlap)	Buffet Style Breakfast in Rear of Media Center	Self- Serve	Disposable Utensils
Welcome and Introduction	8:15-8:30 a.m.	15 mins.	Discussion	Facilitator (Camille Little)	Microphone, Projector Screen
Session One: Teachers' Understanding of Factors that Contribute to the Underachieve-ment in Reading of Some African American Students	8:30-10:00 a.m.	90 mins.	Presentation (60 mins.) Q&A Session (30 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (Camille Little)	Projector Screen, Microphone, Note Pads, Pens
Restroom/ Snack Break	10:00-10:15 a.m.	15 mins.	Served in Rear of Media Center	Self- Serve	Disposable Utensils
Session Two: Challenges That Teachers Encounter When Teaching Reading to African American Students	10:15-11:30 a.m.	90 mins.	PowerPoint Presentation (30 mins.) Small Groups Activity (30 mins.) Discussion (30 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (Camille Little)	Projector Screen, Microphone, Handouts, Activity Cards, Note Pads, Pens

Topic/ Activities	Time	Duration	Mode of Delivery	Presenter	Materials
Lunch	11:30 a.m.-1:00 pm.	90 mins.	On Your Own/ Off Campus	-------------------	----------------
Session Three: Effective Classroom Pedagogy to Teach Reading to African American Students	1:00-2:30 p.m.	90 mins.	Panel Discussion (50 mins.) Q&A Session (20 mins.) Summary (20 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (local elementary school teachers, Camille Little)	Microphone, Handouts, Note Pads, Pens
Break	2:30-2:45 p.m.	15 mins.	--------------	----------------	----------------
Wrap Up/ Evaluation	2:45-3:00 p.m.	15 mins.	Group Discussion Reflection	Facilitator (Camille Little)	Microphone, Evaluation Forms
RFE Workshop: Day Two					
Workshop Sign In	7:30-8:15 a.m.	45 mins.	Sign In via Sign In Sheet,	Facilitator (Camille Little),	Name Tags, Sign In Sheet, Agenda
Continental Breakfast	7:30-8:15 a.m.	45 mins. (overlap)	Buffet Style Breakfast in Rear of Media Center	Self- Serve	Disposable Utensils
Welcome, Introduction, Recap	8:15-8:30 am..	15 mins.	Discussion	Facilitator (Camille Little)	Microphone, Projector Screen
Session One: Resources and Supports Teachers Need to Teach Reading to African American Students	8:30-10:00 a.m.	90 mins.	Presentations (60 mins.) Q&A Session (30 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (study school teachers, Camille Little)	Microphone, Chart Paper, Markers, Pens

Topic/ Activities	Time	Duration	Mode of Delivery	Presenter	Materials
Restroom/ Snack Break	10:00-10:15 a.m.	15 mins.	Served in Rear of Media Center	Self- Serve	Disposable Utensils
Session Two: Strategies for Teaching Reading to African American Students	10:15-11:30 a.m.	90 mins.	Presentation (50 mins.) Q&A Session (30 mins.) Summary (10 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (Camille Little)	Projector Screen, Microphone, Handouts, Activity Cards, Note Pads, Pens
Lunch	11:30 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.	90 mins.	On Your Own/ Off Campus	------------------	--------------
Session Three: Incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Effective Materials for Teaching Reading to African American Students	1:00-2:30 p.m.	90 mins.	Motivational Speaker Presentation (60 mins.) Q&A Session (30 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (XXX, African American Children's Author)	Microphone, Handouts, Note Pads, Pens
Break	2:30-2:45 p.m.	15 mins.	--------------	----------------	----------------
Group Wrap Up/ Evaluation	2:45-3:00 p.m.	15 mins.	Group Discussion Reflection	Facilitator (Camille Little)	Microphone, Evaluation Forms
RFE Workshop: Day Three					
Workshop Sign In	7:30-8:15 a.m.	45 mins.	Sign In via Sign In Sheet,	Facilitator (Camille Little),	Name Tags, Sign In Sheet, Agenda
Continental Breakfast	7:30-8:15 a.m.	45 mins. (overlap)	Buffet Style Breakfast in Rear of Media Center	Self- Serve	Disposable Utensils

Topic/ Activities	Time	Duration	Mode of Delivery	Presenter	Materials
Welcome, Introduction, Recap	8:15-8:30 a.m.	15 mins.	Discussion	Facilitator (Camille Little)	Microphone, Projector Screen
Session One: Differentiated Instruction	8:30-10:00 a.m.	90 mins.	Motivational Speaker (60 mins.) Q&A Session (30 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (XXX, local, former Assistant Superintendent)	Projector Screen, Microphone, Handouts, Activity Cards, Note Pads, Pens
Restroom/ Snack Break	10:00-10:15 a.m.	15 mins.	Served in Rear of Media Center	Self- Serve	Disposable Utensils
Session Two: Teachers Modeling Reading Strategies to Parents	10:15-11:30 a.m.	90 mins.	Presentation (50 mins.) Q&A Session (30 mins.) Summary (10 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (Camille Little)	Projector Screen, Microphone, Handouts, Activity Cards, Note Pads, Pens
Lunch	11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.	90 mins.	On Your Own/ Off Campus	-----------------	-------------
Topic/ Activities	Time	Duration	Mode of Delivery	Presenter	Materials
Break	1:00-1:15 p.m.	15 mins.	--------------	----------------	----------------
Session Three: Effective Classroom Implementation of Reading Strategies for African American Students	1:15-2:45 p.m.	90 mins.	Presentations (60 mins.) Q&A Session (30 mins.)	Facilitator/ Presenter (study school teachers, Camille Little)	Microphone, Chart Paper, Markers, Pens
Group Wrap Up/ Evaluation	2:45-3:00 p.m.	15 mins.	Group Discussion Reflection	Facilitator (Camille Little)	Microphone, Evaluation Forms

RFE Workshop Content and Resources

- **Welcome and Introduction (15 mins.)**
    - o Welcome attendees
    - o Verbally acknowledge guest presenters
    - o Explain purpose of the 3-day RFE Workshop
    - o Discuss the objectives for Day One's agenda

- **Session One: Teachers' Understanding of Factors that Contribute to the Underachievement in Reading of Some African American Students**
  The purpose of this session is to explain the findings of the study and the literature review as they relate to teachers' perceptions of factors that contribute to the underperformance in reading of some African American students. At the end of the session, teachers will be able to explain the factors that contribute to the underachievement in reading of some African American students. Information and background data gleaned will aid attendees in obtaining an understanding of severity of the issue. This will encourage the attendees to participant fully and immerse themselves in the 3-day workshop that awaits them. I will be the presenter for the session and will provide handouts during the presentation.

    - o Presentation (60 mins.)
        - At-Home Parental Support for Student Reading
        - Some Student's Lack of Prior Knowledge of
        - Classroom Pedagogy
        - Lack of Student Interest in Reading
        - Lack of Qualified African American Teachers
    - o Question and Answer Session with Facilitator (30 mins.)
        - This time allows the audience to seek clarity and ask questions generated from the content of the presentation. The facilitator will respond accordingly.

- **Session Two: Challenges That Teachers Encounter When Teaching Reading to African American Students**
  The purpose of this session is to describe challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students. At the end of the presentation, attendees will be able to explain the challenges that teachers face when teaching reading to African American students
  .

PowerPoint Presentation (30 mins.)
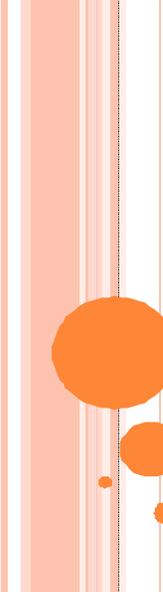
I will welcome the attendees to Day One, Session Two of the workshop and provide a brief overview of what the session entails. I will engage the attendees in a short ice-breaker by asking the audience their perception of what they consider challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- At the end of the session, you will be able to explain challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students.

2

2. Following the ice breaker, I will explain the learning objective for this 30-minute presentation.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

1. Student Behavior in the Classroom

2. Lack of Parental Support

3. Limited Resources

4. Class Size

3

3. In this slide, I will discuss with the audience four challenges that teachers encounter, emphasizing that each one will be discussed separately.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

- Classroom behaviors of African Americans include having shorter attention spans, greater energy levels, slower maturation levels, less developed fine motor skills, less cooperation in the classroom, and weak listening skills.

- To address these behaviors, teachers should adjust the learning environment to accommodate these behaviors by shortening the lesson, gearing the lesson toward the interests of the student, making the curriculum culturally relevant, allow for students to move around the classroom, and incorporating cooperative learning.

4

4. I will explain to the attendees the first challenge teachers encounter is student behavior in the classroom and provide a few examples. I will discuss: the need to for some African American students to move around the classroom and some African American students having short attention spans.

LACK OF PARENTAL SUPPORT

- Parental involvement is imperative to improve the reading performance of African American students. Direct parental involvement occurs when schools involve parents directly at the school. Indirect parental involvement occurs when schools involve parents indirectly, or away from the school.

  - Direct parental involvement
  - Indirect parental involvement

5

5. I will discuss the lack of parental support as the second challenge teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students. I will engage the audience by asking volunteers to provide me with what they perceive is an example of each sub point.

LIMITED RESOURCES

- African American students tend to reside in low socioeconomic areas where public school districts receive less funding than public schools in high socioeconomic areas receive.
- Lack of limited financial resources such as buildings in disrepair, inadequate supplies, an ill-prepared teaching staff, outdated textbooks, and limited technology contribute to students' educational downfalls.

6

6. Here, I will discuss limited resources as a challenge teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students

SMALLER CLASS SIZES

- Reducing class sizes in Kindergarten through third grade increases African American student achievement in reading.

- The desired class size for students in Kindergarten through second grade is 17 or less students. The desired class size for students in third through fifth grades is 20 students or less.

7

7. In this slide, I will emphasize the affect smaller class sizes have on the reading performance of African American students. I will include this slide with a summary of the presentation, reiterating the challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students. I will ask if there are any questions or need for clarification. I will thank the audience for their participation in Session Two and give directions for lunch, as well as informing them of the upcoming sessions following lunch.

R EFERENCES

- Biddle, B. J., & Berliner, D. C. (2014). Small class size and its effects. *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education: A Sociological Approach to Education*, 76.

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8

- Small Group Activity (30 mins.)

The objective of the activity is for attendees to identify challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students. Two different scenarios will be presented to teachers who will work in groups of five. Each group will be given a short scenario that features a teacher working with her class which includes African American students. The groups will identify the challenges that teachers encounter when teaching reading to African American students presented in each scenario. The group will select a leader who read the case scenario, a recorder who writes the findings that the group agrees on, and a reporter who reports back to the general audience.

Scenario #1

John, a 2nd grade African American male, is constantly out of his seat and often disturbs his classmates by tapping on his desk with his pencil. During whole group instruction, his teacher, Miss Smith has a difficult time keeping him on task. Most often, John seeks the attention of others around him by talking out or playing with something in his desk. During small group instruction, John is not sitting properly in his seat, not following along with the lesson, asking to go to the restroom, or talking out while Miss Smith is talking.

Scenario #2

Mary, a 4th grade African American female, works hard in school and always tries to do her best. Polite and well behaved, Mary struggles with completing homework and any other assignments that are to be completed at home. Important papers that need to be returned to school signed are not brought back at all. Her teacher, Mr. Jones has made several attempts to contact her parents, but he has not been successful. The 4th grade teachers recently held a curriculum night inviting parents to come to learn reading and math skills so that parents could help their child at home. Mr. Jones hoped Mary and her parents would come, but they didn't.

- Discussion (30 mins.)

The reporters from each group will present their findings which will lead into a general discussion. The session will conclude with a brief summary given by the facilitator.

- **Session Three: Effective Classroom Pedagogy to Teach Reading to African American Students**
The purpose of this session is to share effective classroom pedagogy to teach reading to African American students with each other. Attendees will be able to explain effective pedagogical practices for teaching African American students. This session aims to establish awareness of the benefits of effective classroom pedagogy to teach reading to African American students.

  o Panel Discussion (50 mins.)
  A panelist group of five elementary teachers, not employed by the study school, will discuss 'Effective Classroom Pedagogy.' They will discuss the topic with each other by asking questions and reacting to each other's views and opinions.

  o Question and Answer Session (20 mins.)
  The panel will engage the audience in questions and answers, providing clarity on any concerns raised by the audience.

  o Summary (20 mins.)
  The facilitator will close the session with a summary of the panel discussion and question and answer session.

- **RFE Workshop- Day One References and Resources:**
  o Biddle, B. J., & Berliner, D. C. (2014). Small class size and its effects. *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education: A Sociological Approach to Education*, *3*, 86-95. Retrieved from http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Class-size-and-student-achievement-At-a-glance/Class-size-and-student-achievement-Research-review.html

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http://www.teachersofcolor.com/2009/11/how-to-improve-academic-achievement-in-African-American-males/

- **Welcome, Introduction, and Recap (15 mins.)**
    o Welcome attendees and verbally acknowledge guest presenters
    o Recap Day One's Sessions
    o Discuss the objectives for Day Two's agenda

- **Session One: Resources and Supports Teachers Need to Teach Reading to African American Students**
  The purpose of the presentations by teachers and faculty members is to share real cases to reinforce the importance of resources and supports teachers need to teach reading to African American students. Attendees will be able to identify and explain various resources and supports needed to effectively teach reading to African American students.

    o Presentation (60 mins.)
      Five teachers, who are currently employed at the study school, will each demonstrate 15 minute presentations on how they believe various resources and supports not only can aid teachers, but can aid with the reading performance of African American students.

    o Question and Answer Session (30 mins.)
      Within the time allotted, the attendees may seek clarity and ask questions that were generated from the content of the presentations. The facilitator will respond accordingly.

    o Group Wrap Up and Evaluation (15 mins.)
      The facilitator will close the session with a brief summary of the day's events. Attendees will be asked to fill out evaluation forms for each day.

- **Session Two: Strategies for Teaching Reading to African American Students**
  The purpose of this session is to engage the audience in conversations that will elicit strategies for teaching reading to African American students. Attendees will be able to create a list of effective strategies elementary teachers can use to incorporate into their instruction and classrooms.

    o Small Groups Round Table Talk and Brainstorming (30 mins.)
      The audience will be divided into groups of five. Each group will receive

flip charts and markers with instructions to brainstorm ideas and create a list of ways and strategies that teachers and faculty members could incorporate strategies for teaching reading to African American students into their classrooms. Each group will designate a writer and a presenter.

Write a list of strategies that teachers can implement into the classroom to teach reading to African American students.

Strategies for Teaching Reading to African American Students
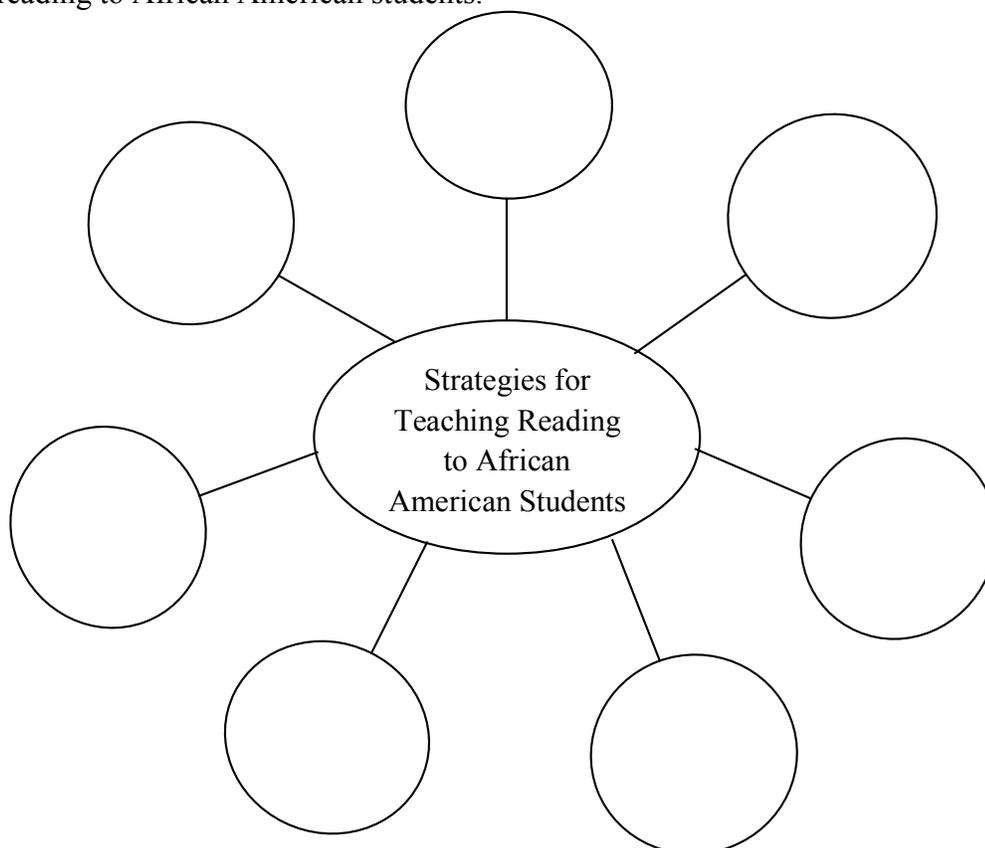
o Presentations (30 mins.)
   Each group will post their charts on the wall around the room and talk about their list of items on the chart along with reasoning for their choices. The facilitator will highlight the repeating ideas among the groups.

o Discussion (30 mins.)
   The facilitator will engage the attendees in a discussion of the ideas posted by the various groups. The facilitator will conclude the session with a brief summary.

Session Three: Incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Effective Materials for Teaching Reading to African American Students

The purpose of this session is to explain and describe culturally relevant pedagogy, effective materials for teaching reading to African American students, and how to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy and materials into the classroom. Attendees will be able to discuss, review, and share culturally relevant pedagogy and effective materials such as African American literature.

- o Motivational Speaker (60 mins.)

  The speaker will explain and describe culturally relevant pedagogy and present materials for teaching teach reading to African American students. The presenter will discuss African American Literature strategies that will aid with the reading performance of African American students.
  - Speaker's Talking Points
    - o Culturally relevant pedagogy
    - o African American Literature
    - o Materials for teaching reading to African American students

- o Discussion (30 mins.)

  The speaker will encourage attendees to ask questions concerning the content of the presentation. The speaker will ask attendees to share what materials, if any, they have in their classrooms that are culturally relevant. The speaker will respond accordingly.

- **RFE Workshop- Day Two References and Resources**:
  - o Allington, R., Mcgill-Franzen, A., Camilli, G., Williams, L., Graff, J., Zeig, J., Zmach, C., Nowak, R. (2010). Addressing summer reading setback among economically disadvantaged elementary students. *Reading Psychology, 31*(5), 411-427. doi:10.1080/02702711.2010.505165

  - o Kunjufu, J. (2006). How to improve academic achievement in African American males. Retrieved from http://www.teachersofcolor.com/2009/11/how-to-improve-academic-achievement-in-African-American-males/

  - o Lopez, E. (2013). Helping parents understand and foster their child's literacy development. *Texas Child Care Quarterly, 37*(2), 1-4.

RFE Workshop: Day Three
- **Welcome, Introduction, and Recap (15 mins.)**

- o Welcome attendees and verbally acknowledge guest presenters
- o Recap Day Two's Sessions
- o Discuss the objectives for Day Three's agenda

Session One: Differentiated Instruction

The purpose of this session is to discuss differentiated instruction and differentiating skills in the classroom to meet the learning needs in reading of African American students. Learners will be able to apply strategies for differentiating instruction gleaned from this session to implement into the classroom.

- o Motivational Speaker (60 mins.)

  The speaker will present attendees with differentiated instructional strategies to effectively teach reading to African American students. The presenter will discuss strategies that will aid with the reading performance of African American students.

  - Speaker's Talking Points
    - o Get to know your students
    - o Learn students' likes and dislikes
    - o Provide instruction that builds on students' prior knowledge
    - o Differentiate content of the lesson
    - o Differentiate assessments of student learning
    - o Differentiate process of the lesson
    - o Differentiate products of the lesson

- o Question and Answer Session (30 mins.)

  This time allows the audience to seek clarity and asks questions generated from the content of the presentation. The speaker will respond accordingly.

Session Two: Teachers Modeling Reading Strategies to Parents

In this session, attendees learn the importance of modeling reading strategies to parents for them to reinforce reading strategies teachers have taught in the classroom. At the end of the session, teachers will know the importance of and how to effectively model reading strategies to parents.

- o Video (11 mins.)

  This video demonstrates a read-aloud and how to effectively model reading strategies. The video serves as a precursor to the PowerPoint that will explain more depth and how teachers can model reading skills to parents.

   o   PowerPoint Presentation (50 mins.)
      o Teachers Modeling Reading Strategies to Parents

Teachers Modeling Reading Strategies to Parents

CAMILLE LITTLE, PRESENTER

In this slide, I will welcome attendees to Day Two: Session Four of RFE Workshop. I will inform learners of the importance of modeling reading skills to parents in relation to improving the reading performance of African American students. I will inform learners that this PowerPoint presentation provides the necessary information on the importance of teachers modeling reading skills to African American students.

Learning Objectives

2

- At the end of the presentation, attendees will be able to:
  - Develop and understanding of the importance of teachers modeling reading strategies to parents in relation to the reading performance of African American students
  - Determine how to model reading strategies to parents
  - Understand how parents can help their children at home

2. In this slide, I will explain the learning objectives outlined in the slide. I will stress how important it is for teachers and faculty members to model reading skills to parents.

Benefits of Teachers Modeling Reading Strategies to Parents

③

- All parents can learn effective reading strategies that are taught and modeled by the teacher, by inviting parents to workshops, conferences, school events, etc.

- By observing reading strategies taught by the teacher, parents can learn information, skills, and strategies to implement at home which may contribute to improved reading performance of all students.

3. In this slide, I will discuss the benefits of teachers modeling reading strategies to parents.

How to Model Reading Strategies to Parents

④

- Parents can also be invited to the classroom where teachers can model how to actively engage students.

- During read alouds, parents can observe how the teacher allows the student to become an active reader.

4. These next few slides will explain to attendees ways for teachers to effectively model reading skills to parents.

How to Model Reading Strategies to Parents

5

- While reading aloud to students, teachers can model the following strategies to parents:

  ○ pointing to each word on the book's page as the parent reads: assists children with making connections to print while building children's tracking skills from line to line
  ○ taking picture walks: aids children with using pictures to tell a story before reading
  ○ making predictions by reading the book's title: ensures that with practice, children can independently incorporate making predictions when reading

How to Model Reading Strategies to Parents

6

- While reading aloud to students, teachers can model the following strategies to parents:

  ○ reading aloud fluently with expression: allows children to hear pitch, tone, and excitement in voice
  ○ asking questions after reading: assesses children's understanding of the text
  ○ connecting reading and writing: provides children the opportunity to respond to what was read by drawing pictures or writing about what was read

Parental at Home Reading Strategies

(7)

- Helping with homework

- Interactive read alouds

- Completing writing activities

- Engaging children in summer reading

7. I will identify at-home reading strategies that parents can incorporate at home based on strategies previously modeled by the teacher. I will explain to the attendees that each element will be discussed separately in the upcoming slides.

Helping with Homework

(8)

- When African American parents enrich the home environment by helping their African American children with homework, they are implementing an effective home strategy.

- Parents should have a designated place for students to complete homework.

- Parents should check homework daily.

8. I will discuss the at-home strategy of parents helping with homework.

<div style="border:2px solid purple;">

Interactive Read Alouds

(9)

- Interactive reading aloud is an effective way to aid African American children in obtaining reading skills such as comprehension and decoding skills.

- Parents and children can engage in discussions about the text and learn to identify letters, words, and meanings of words as suggested or previously modeled by the teacher.

</div>

9. In this slide, I will explain to attendees the importance of interactive read-alouds and the benefits of parents reading aloud to their children.

<div style="border:2px solid purple;">

Completing Writing Activities

(10)

- Writing activities are at home strategies that can aid with reading improvement of African American students.
- To support writing at home, if possible, parents should provide children with a quiet, well lit area, supplied with paper, pencils, and crayons, of which can be provided by the teacher.

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10. Attendees will learn how reading and writing are connected and how parents can help with writing activities at home.

<div>

Engaging Children in Summer Reading

11

- Research suggests that summer reading increases students' reading levels.

- Public libraries support summer reading by providing recreational reading to help students develop as engaged readers.

- Public libraries can offer parents with support for reading that builds on the instructional role of the school and teachers.

</div>

11. In this slide, I will discuss how public libraries can aid with the reading performance of African American students. Once all points have been discussed, I will provide a summary of the presentation and conclude with this slide. I will invite learners to ask questions at this point.

<div>

References

12

- Allington, R., Mcgill-Franzen, A., Camilli, G., Williams, L., Graff, J., Zeig, J., Zmach, C., Nowak, R. (2010). Addressing summer reading setback among economically disadvantaged elementary students. *Reading Psychology, 31*(5), 411-427. doi: 10.1080/02702711.2010.505165

- Lopez, E. (2013). Helping parents understand and foster their child's literacy development. *Texas Child Care Quarterly, 37*(2). Retrieved from http://www.childcarequarterly.com/pd/fall13_literacy.pdf

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  o Question and Answer Session (30 mins.)
   Within the time allotted, the attendees may seek clarity and ask
   questions that were generated from the content of the presentation.
   The facilitator will respond accordingly.

  o Group Wrap Up and Evaluation (15 mins.)
   The facilitator will close the session with a brief summary of the
   day's events. Attendees will be asked to fill out evaluation forms
   for each session and review the handouts before attending Day
   Three.

- **RFE Workshop- Day Two References and Resources**:
  - Allington, R., Mcgill-Franzen, A., Camilli, G., Williams, L., Graff, J., Zeig, J., Zmach, C., Nowak, R. (2010). Addressing summer reading setback among economically disadvantaged elementary students. *Reading Psychology, 31*(5), 411-427. doi:10.1080/02702711.2010.505165

  - Lopez, E. (2013). Helping parents understand and foster their child's literacy development. *Texas Child Care Quarterly, 37*(2). Retrieved from http://www.childcarequarterly.com/pdf/fall13_literacy.pdf

Session Three: Effective Classroom Implementation of Reading Strategies for African American Students
  In this session, the teachers from the school will present effective reading
  strategies for teaching reading to African American students.

  o Presentations (90 mins.)
  o Group Wrap Up and evaluation (30 mins.)
   The facilitator will close the session with a brief summary of the 3-day
   workshop. Attendees will be asked to fill out evaluation forms for each
   session on day three, in addition to a summative evaluation. The facilitator
   will thank attendees for attending the workshop and provide contact
   information for follow up questions and concerns.

- **RFE Workshop- Day Three References and Resources:**
  - Kunjufu, J. (2006). How to improve academic achievement in African American males. Retrieved from http://www.teachersofcolor.com/2009/11/how-to-improve- academic-achievement-in-African-American-males/

o   Lavigne, A. L. (2014). Beginning teachers who stay: Beliefs about students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *39*, 31-43. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.12.002

o   Mojavezi, A., & Tamiz, M. (2012). The impact of teacher self-efficacy on the students' motivation and achievement. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2*(3), 483-491. doi:10.4304/tpls.2.3.483-491

Partee, G. L. (2012). Using multiple evaluation measures to improve teacher effectiveness: State strategies from round 2 of no child left behind act waivers. *Center for American Progress.* Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/reports/2012/12/18/48 368/using-multiple-evaluation-measures-to-improve-teacher-effectiveness/

Reading Strategies for African American Students (RFE) Workshop Evaluation Forms

End of Day Evaluation
Your attendance is this workshop was greatly appreciated. Your feedback is important. Please take a moment to complete the following survey.
Name of Workshop _____

PLEASE CIRCLE RESPONSES TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

The presenter demonstrated sufficient expertise on the knowledge of the content.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The presentation was well organized and easy to follow.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The material was presented in sufficient depth.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The presentation enhanced my understanding of the subject.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Handout materials were appropriate to presentation content (if applicable).				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

How will you utilize the information learned in this session?
_____
_____

Please share any additional thoughts or comments on the topic or presentation:
_____
_____

Summative Evaluation
Your attendance is this workshop was greatly appreciated. Your feedback is
important. Please take a moment to complete the following survey.
Name of Workshop _____

PLEASE CIRCLE RESPONSES TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

The presenter demonstrated sufficient expertise on the knowledge of the content.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The presentation was well organized and easy to follow.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The physical environment was conducive to learning.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The material was presented in sufficient depth.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a result of attending the workshop, I have a better understanding of the reading performance of African American students.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Handout materials were appropriate to presentation content (if applicable).				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

How will you use the information learned in this workshop?
_____
_____

Please share any additional thoughts on the topic or presentation:
_____
_____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your participation in this educational research about teacher perceptions of the reading achievement of African American students is essential. The study will lead to greater understanding about elementary teacher knowledge of and practices for teaching reading to African American students. When the interview is complete, after about two weeks, I will email you a transcript of your interview responses and ask you to check that my transcripts accurately represent what you said during the interview. This study may be published, but your name will not be mentioned in any documentation related to this study. The results of the study may be presented at conferences, professional meetings, or workshops. Do you have any questions about the interview?

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. What grade do you currently teach?

3. What are your thoughts about the reading achievement of African American students in your classroom?

4. Have you received any preparation on the topic of teaching reading to African American students? Can you tell me about them?

5. What do you identify as the primary components of the reading process where African American students need improvement?

6. Can you tell me about the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom?

7. How do you learn about the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom?

8. What challenges have you encountered when addressing the learning needs in reading of African American students?

9. What instructional practices do you use in the classroom to address the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom?

10. Explain how prepared you feel to improve the reading achievement of African American students. Why do you feel this way?

11. What teaching resources would you need or would like to have to better meet the learning needs in reading of African American students?

12. What supports would you like to have to better meet the learning needs in reading of African American students in your classroom?

13. What issues, if any, do you think may affect the reading performance of African American students?

Closing: (Name of interviewee), Thank you for sharing your time and ideas. I am extremely appreciative for your participation with this study. To ensure that I recorded your responses accurately, I would like to email you a copy of your transcription, for your records, after I prepare it. Will this be acceptable with you?

Appendix C: List of Provisional Codes

Provisional Codes
1. Teacher instructional strategies used for teaching African American students
2. Best practices for teaching reading instruction to African American students
3. Professional development
4. School improvement plans
5. At-home learning strategies teachers teach parents
6. Prior teacher knowledge of reading skills for African American students
7. Differentiated instruction
8. Parental involvement
9. Culturally relevant pedagogy
10. At-home reading strategies
11. Classroom environment
12. Literacy development of African American students
13. African American students learning styles
14. African American students' motivation to read
15. Lack of resources

Appendix D: Interview Transcript

Participant 4 Interview

Interviewer: Hi. My name is Camille Little. I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I'm conducting qualitative interviews about elementary teaching knowledge of and practices for teaching reading to African American students. Your participation in this educational research is very essential. Hopefully the study will lead to greater understanding about elementary teacher knowledge of preparedness for and practices for teaching reading to African American students.

Once this interview is complete, after about two weeks or so, I'll email you the transcript of your interview responses and ask you to check that the transcripts accurately represent what was said during the interview. This study may be published; however, your name will not be mentioned in any documentation related to the study.

The results of this study may also be presented at conferences, professional meetings or workshops. Do you have questions about the interview?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: I just want to ask you a couple of questions about your experience with teaching reading to African American students. Is this okay?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: I understand that you teach reading or you have taught reading in the past to African American students, is that okay?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How long have you been teaching?

Interviewee: 18 years.

Interviewer: Have all of those years been in the same grade?

Interviewee: Yes, they have been in the same grade, not necessarily at the same school, but the same grade.

Interviewer: What grade are you teaching now?

Interviewee: I'm currently teaching 5th grade.

Interviewer: You were saying all of those years you were at different schools? Could you tell a difference with your African American students at different schools? Can you tell me a little bit about their academic achievement? Did the schools make a difference? The administration?

Interviewee: Even though the schools are not far apart, I could tell a difference. One of the schools, the school that I'm currently at is a more Southern school. It's laid back to where I actually attended school in this county and I know some of the parents of some of the students where the school that I taught at the beginning of my educational career, I didn't really know a lot of the parents and so it was a little bit different working with those students, however, I think knowledge of parents, knowing a little bit about the county that you work in make a difference in the academics of the students.

Interviewer: Okay and can I ask you, have you ever received any preparation, any informal training, formal training, about the topic of teaching reading to African American students?

Interviewee: Not necessarily teaching on African American students, however, on teaching students overall. I have done my own personal research on working with African American students just because I had a desire to want to know how I could improve some things to help with their academics. There was not any formal training per se on working with African American students in particular, but I have had training on working with all students.

Interviewer: Can I ask you about personal research? You were saying that did, or you were finding ways to help African American students with reading, did you think what you found in the personal research was helpful? Were you able to apply it in your classroom?

Interviewee: I think it was very helpful. It gave me a lot of background information and insight on just experiences. If the students were not experienced or had no knowledge on some of the things that they were reading, it was a little bit harder for them to comprehend what they were actually reading and giving input on. That helped me to know that there were things that I needed to pull into my lessons that would help those kids to better understand. Whether it be a video or some personal experience to help them understand and process the reading experience better.

Interviewer: You've been doing this so far, could you go ahead and tell me a little bit more about your thoughts and how you feel about reading achievement in African American students in your classroom?

Interviewee: Um.

Interviewer: Any strengths you see, weaknesses you see? Anything about the reading achievement based on your experience in working with African American students?

Interviewee: Okay. I think the achievements have grown. I do think it's going to take a team effort with the parent, the teacher and the student in order to improve or to continue to improve. I think parents would have to become knowledgeable about what testing is all about and how to better help their children at home with the reading process and things that they can do ... Summer programs that would enhance their reading. Find out programs throughout the year that would help. After school programs, things of that nature that will help with the process of improving their reading skills.

Interviewer: You mention in your response about parental support, do you think parental support is essential for African American students achievements in reading?

Interviewee: Absolutely. I know that there are some parents that feel a little bit overwhelmed with coming to the school and asking for help because some, out of personal experience, I've heard some say that they felt a little bit overwhelmed just because some teachers made them feel like they were not knowledgeable enough to help their children. However, I feel a strong teacher would also need to give parents support and ideas of things that they would need to do at home to help their kids. Even if they couldn't do it themselves, if they were struggling readers, to give them support systems in the community that would help those kids become successful.

Interviewer: Can you think of any issues in your experiences, what may affect the reading performance of African American students?

Interviewee: As I stated before, prior knowledge and experience with doing different things and just on a personal level, when raising my children I try to get them exposed to different things out of the normal element. Taking them to zoos, taking them to museums and different things of that nature. Exposing them to vocabulary that would help them to better understand the reading process. I also think that parents prior knowledge may affect some of the kids because things have changed so greatly in the past couple of years where we have gone so quickly from QCC to GPS to Common

Core that because of the change happening so quickly, that it's hard for the students as well as some of the teachers to gather the information and put it out there so that the kids understand it, the correct way. So I'm thinking that when it says, "What are some of the things that are affecting?" I think it's prior knowledge of the child. It may be slight knowledge of the parent. It could be the change in the way the state is changing the standard. I think there are several things that may affect the academics of the reading process.

Interviewer: You mentioned the QCC, GPS, and Common Core standards, can you tell me ... I think because of experience that states that transition from [inaudible 00:09:28] in the past, could you tell me how you think those who transitioning from the standards that affected reading performance from African American students?

Interviewee: With me being an educator, I don't like to be biased when it comes to those type things, however, I do feel in my personal opinion that some of those things are transitioning rather quickly and some of the students may not be ready for that transition. I also think that as they are transitioning if we don't stick with those standards for a length of time, it's hard for you to actually know what the kids understand. Because, if you're moving on to a new standard or changing the standards, you don't know whether they understood it to begin with before they're moving on to something new that they may not have prior knowledge enough to understand for the new standards.

Interviewer: Could you tell me ... And I know that you've mentioned vocabulary, are there any other primary components that you identify that can affect the reading performance of African American students? Or, what do you identify as the primary components of reading where African American students need to improve in? I know you mentioned vocabulary.

Interviewee: I also think they need some assistance in comprehension and fluency. Just my experience of teaching reading and listening to students read, I think that if you are a fluent reader, you tend to comprehend what you're reading a little bit accurately. I've also heard students that, what I call, word call. If they're just calling words and not understanding it because they cannot read fluently, it tends to differ their comprehension and they're not actually comprehending what's being ... there for them to understand. They're actually calling words. I feel that that's where a lot of kids struggle, the comprehension and the fluency is not there.

Interviewer: You talk about comprehension and fluency, how do you determine that these are the areas of weaknesses?

Interviewee: When given comprehension questions, the way that I can tell if a child understood or comprehended what was the expected, or the intended answer, is once those answers are given. If they don't elaborate. If they give short answers then I tend to think that they might not have understood or comprehended everything that was intended. Of course with Common Core, we are now asked to extend and give your responses in an extension, and if they tend to give shorter answers, then sometimes I feel that they may not have understood or comprehended everything that was intended.

Interviewer: You mentioned that the Common Core standards that have allowed the students to, I guess they have to write more if they have to answer .. You said short answer questions. Can you tell me a little bit about the writing part and how writing may play a part in the reading of African American students?

Interviewee: Okay, with my experience of getting to know about Common Core, they are being given selected responses, constructed responses and extended responses. And the selected responses are still what we consider as multiple choice questions where they are asked to give just one answer. The constructed responses where they are asked to give an elaboration on a question that is given to them. It would need to be at least 5 or more sentences to be sure that they understand. The constructed responses where they are actually given two passages and they are asked to read those two passages and they are asked questions to elaborate on as well as write their personal experience about what they understood about the question.

Interviewer: I now earlier you stated that comprehension was a main component where African American students were struggling. If they're taking all of these assessments, are there any accommodations given for them when they're administering the tests? Or assessments that they can't comprehend passages, is there anything done to help the student out?

Interviewee: Of course with any state testing, there's no help given unless the child is being served on an IEP. And if they are served on an IEP, they do have some modifications and accommodations where the story could be read to them. Or, if they're taking the test on a computer, it's read to them and the questions are actually read to them. However, if a student is not being served under any type of special services, they are expected to be able to read and comprehend all of the questioning on their own. The teacher is only allowed to read the directions.

But in a classroom setting on the other hand, where there could be a little

bit more help given, I have in the past broken my classes up into groups where if I know that there are struggling students, there may be a little bit more one-on-one where I would sit down with the students and they may read a paragraph, I may read a paragraph, we may discuss it a little bit more. That would be my lower group, my struggling students. Whereas if I had students that were fluent readers and that could do it a little bit more on their own, then they'd be doing more independent work where they are doing that on their own. That's my experience of how I would help those struggling students.

Interviewer: In the classroom when you're working with your students, with your African American students, and you're in small groups and doing your differentiated instruction, can you tell me how the African American students are responding to instruction? Do they seem engaged or do they maybe shy away if they're not familiar with, or may not know how to read? Do they feel maybe intimidated or maybe just afraid to read?

Interviewee: All of those things do occur, however, I think it also takes a strong teacher to pull those qualities out of those children when they see that those things are happening. The teacher needs to make the children feel comfortable. If they are struggling, to help them to understand that we are in this together, we are going to work together. I have also had the experience of using manipulatives and doing some hands on type things to get the kids to better understand. Show pictures, make flip books, make note cards, so that they have a visual image because, of course, we know that we have some students that are auditory and we have some students that are visual. If those are things that I see once working with my kids that help them, then those are some things that we'll sit down and we'll work with in order to assist them in comprehending what's intended.

Interviewer: You said you use different methods that you use, were flip books and a lot of different visual images based on students learning styles, could you tell me a little bit ... How do you determine, or how do you get to know your kids to determine what their needs are or what kind of learning style they may have?

Interviewee: Well initially, I would give a pretest or some pre-assessment in order to see who is working on what level. Once I look at those results, then I can kind of gauge which students are on which level. There's also a computer based program that I've used in the past called STAR Reading, which I don't read anything to the kids it's all computer based, where the students will test and the results will let me know what level they are on and how to base their learning and know who need to work on which level.

Interviewer: With that STAR test, how frequent, or how often would you administer that?

Interviewee: Currently we use STAR testing 3 times a year. We use it at the beginning of the year. We also do one mid-year and then we do one at the end of the year. There is testing in between on STAR reading. If I were to notice that a student struggles and I may be looking to send that child through to RTI, which is Response to Intervention program because I do see that they are struggling, I may administer the Star test on a weekly basis so that I have accurate documentation whether the child is actually improving or whether they are regressing. That way I know the specific skills that I need to work because the results of the Star test also gives specific areas of concern so I know specifically what skills I need to address with those individual students.

Interviewer: You kind of mentioned but I'll ask you again, are there any challenges that you have encountered when addressing learning needs in reading of African American students; In a previous response you mentioned parents and exposure. I know there are some things outside of the classroom. Are there any other challenges outside of the classroom or inside of the classroom that you think that may be affecting the learning and reading of African American students?

Interviewee: There are some challenges that I feel affect the students. Once again, prior knowledge and the students feeling comfortable enough to be able to share what they currently know. One of the challenges I feel would be to build a re-pore with those students and to start off on a slow pace to get them to understand that we're starting off slow but this is where I want us to be, I want you to be able to read fluently and understand most importantly, what you're reading, and to be able to respond accurately to questions if they are given after reading a response.

Interviewer: With prior knowledge, is this knowledge you think African American students should have coming from a previous grade? With you teaching 5th grade, the student would have come through the previous 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th. Do they already come to you with a lot of knowledge or do you have to do a lot of re-teaching and reading or could you tell me a little bit about that?

Interviewee: My experience, and I guess where I was going with the prior knowledge, is that yes, those kids do come with what they've learned from previous years. However, when I stated prior knowledge, it is pretty much the exposure and the life experiences to be able to recall some of the information that is being given in the reading setup. Some of the kids have

the skills coming from a previous grade, however, the may not be able to connect those skills in comprehending what they are being given. I guess an example would be, they might be able to read a passage and understand what they read but, with what we're been given now, they would have to respond to it and they may not be able to give a connection and understand what that connection is with what they read.

Interviewer: What, you've stated this, are there any other instructional practices you use in the classroom to address the learning needs in reading of African American students?

Interviewee: One of the strategies I like to use is peer tutoring, where one or more students may be in a group together and they're reading to each other. A little bit of one-on-one where they would read to me. And of course, the traditional choral reading where they are reading aloud within the classroom. Like you said, I know this is based on struggling readers. The reason we would do the choral reading is for the kids to build up a sense of being able to read aloud in front of others so that they gain that confidence in being able to respond to different reading passages over different levels.

Interviewer: I want to go back to when you say peer tutoring. I want to ask you about your class size with peer tutoring or even when the kids are evenly distributed, do you think that makes a difference with class size? And with the class size, should kids be evenly distributed based on their academic level? Or, what are your thoughts about class sizes and kids being grouped on their academic reading level?

Interviewee: I have had the experience to work in an inclusion class, where the students were actually leveled from pre-primer to gifted students. That particular year I felt was one of the most successful years of my teaching career simply because those students that were in a gifted program, or were high achieving students, were very, very willing to help those students that struggled. I use that strategy to pair some of those students together in order for them to be successful. Not saying that it worked every time, however, they felt a little bit more comfortable because they were working with a peer of their age and felt like they could express a little bit more with those other students.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think African American students are more comfortable in working with their peer?

Interviewee: I do think they felt more comfortable. With that being said, it all goes back to the very beginning of the year where the teacher would, I guess train per se, the class to understand that we are all working together. We don't

put anyone down. We all are in here to learn. Once that has been built, I think the kids feel a sense of being comfortable with their classmates and having them to help on that level.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what you think contributes to the underperformance in reading of African American students in your classroom?

Interviewee: Going back to the standardized testing which is the end result of what is done in the classroom, I think that in prime readers, we focus on the reading process. Getting them to read and understand and comprehend where now the students are made to be able to read, comprehend and elaborate by writing a response to what they were reading. Back years ago when I first begin teaching, we did a total multiple choice assessment where the students were asked to give their answer choice to questions and now the students are being asked to give a written response and elaborate.

I think that once again with the exposure and terminology and the vocabulary, if they are not exposed to those things, then it's going to be hard for them to write about those things. I think that that would be some of the problems for why the kids may struggle in that area. I also think that with the link of what they're being asked to do, such as going back to the examples with the constructed and the extended response, it takes practice. I think within the classroom, the teachers, if the students have to do this, the teachers has to be willing to give those kids the proper time to practice so that they can be successful for when that time comes.

Working in a school system and knowing that time is a necessity, I feel that all academic time needs to be used wisely. Just because if those kids don't have the appropriate time to practice in class, they're not going to be able to give that end result when they are given the standardized testing at the end of the year. I do think time management within the classroom is also something that may need to be looked at very closely. When working with those students and getting them to be able to elaborate and give those answers.

Interviewer: Okay. Can I ask you, when you talk about time is a big factor, and giving students that time they needed to practice and work on the skills, are there any additional supports? You said timing. Are there any additional supports or resources you think would be beneficial that you were given, either from your administrators or the district. I know time, instructional time, where more time would be needed? Are there any other supports or resources that you feel could be given to better meet the learning needs in reading of African American students?

Interviewee: I do think that there are other resources, as far as one of the questions before, where we would have PTO meetings or specific meetings that are geared toward parental involvement. I think that their needs to be a support system so that the parents would be able to go and get the information so that they know what's available as added resources for their children. Also, I think that there needs to be a resource for parents specifically so that they are knowledgeable about what their children are doing in a school setting. So that they are given an explanation of what the children are expected to do.

   A lot of parents come in and they feel, or they think why does my child have this grade, they know how to read? Of course being in education, we know that it's not all about being able to read, they have to be able to read and comprehend and elaborate. So, I think that administrators would need to have a resource or a parent night where parents are invited out to see some of the actual items that the children are being asked to do so that they know how to better help the children at home. And when they're given some of these resources, of course they can go on Google.

   So of the things I find are old resources, but I do think that there needs to be a community resource where the parents may be able to go out and get some of the information so that they know what their children are facing in school. Once they know, they can better help their children when they are home. Because of course, as we've said before, it takes all involvement between the student, the parent and the teacher.

Interviewer: Okay. You talked about class involvement, class impact ... a big role in the reading performance of African American students, what are some things even at home ... I know you said it would be helpful if the school could provide PTO meetings where parents could learn reading skills or strategies, what would be needed for parents to do at home, I know that you can reinforce things in the classroom with the kids, but what can parents do at home so that the kids can be able to improve their reading skills from at home?

Interviewee: Of course we know we're living in a technology world as of now, however, everyone does not have the finances to have these items. I know that there at one time were different grants and different things so that schools were able to get technology that the students may be able to take home, sign out and take home, so that they can come practice on those resources if they did not have those things at home. Some of the conversation with the new test that are coming up are that students may possibly have to take their standardized tests on a computer. As we know, some schools are very limited with technology and computer use. I think

those are some things that may be able to help in that area.

Encourage parents to go to the library to get library cards so that their children are able to use those technologies free of charge if they are not able to afford to have those items at home so that they can familiarize themselves with being able to do these things. Like I said, in a school setting, some schools get more funding than others so some schools may have more technology than others and children are able to be exposed to those items. However, the low funding schools may not have it to where they can have those technology pieces so I think getting more grants for schools and teachers being able to utilize and have access to some of those things. I also think that that would be something that would help to get those parents and students engaged in improving their reading skills.

Interviewer: I want to ask you about your administration and their support. Are they supportive with helping teachers improve the reading, the needs of African American students? Could you tell me a little bit about how to administration supports the teachers at your school?

Interviewee: With my experience, every beginning of the year after we have done our state standardized testing, we are given the results, but as we're given those results, it's broken down by race and it's broken down by subject area and we do know that in the years past that there has been a low rate of African American students in reading. So, we are given feedback and resources and things that we would need to do in order to help to improve the academics of African American students. We do know that it is also based on the number of students that are in a school setting compared to the African American students.

For example, if there is a school that is predominantly Caucasian students, we're comparing those African American students to the Caucasian students, if they are less of a number, it may look as if the African American students are performing lower however, when compared to Caucasian students, if there are more Caucasian students and less African American students it does look a little skewed because of the way the percentages come out. I think that what the administrators need to do is actually lay out the results of the number of students that are being tested to see if it is accurate when we're saying that the low performing is in the African American students.

Interviewer: When administrators present you with data from the tests does this kind of help with your instruction and in determining how you will instruct these students?

Interviewee: It does help, however, in my personal experience, like I said, I think the numbers kind of play a part with that also because sometimes we get stuck on the terms low achievement and associate with the African American students, however, if there are more Caucasian students that they're testing, of course the scores may look a little better on that end. However, we also need to take into account the students that are being served in special needs classes. Of course, we have gotten to where all students are being tied into the results. That's why I said that I think that the administrators would need to break it down to look at actual skills and numbers and things of that nature to make sure that the numbers are accurate in those areas.

Interviewer: Okay. And after that may be presented, or the administration comes in and gives you that support you need, do you feel prepared to teach reading and see an improvement?

Interviewee: I do feel prepared however, on a personal level, I don't like to look at things as an African American need because of course being in education, we're there to serve all students. I don't ever want my kids to feel like I'm targeting or I'm helping one race of students more than another. So when I get in the classroom, my preparation for the new year, I do look at data, I do look at previous test scores, I do look at skills. If I know that there is an African American student that may be struggling, or not being exposed, that's part of one of my strategies that I use in order to remediate and help those students to become more knowledgeable in the areas that they are struggling in.

Interviewer: Okay. I want to go ahead and thank you again for sharing your time and ideas. I am extremely, extremely appreciative of your participation with this study. To ensure that I recorded your responses correctly, I would like to send you a copy of your transcription for your records after I prepare it in about two weeks. Would this be acceptable to you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to share or add on that I may not had mentioned or..?

Interviewee: Just in addition to some of the things that were asked about ways to improve the academics of African American students, I do think that there needs to be, when I say exposure or someone of their, that they can relate to ... I do think that systems need to look into hiring more qualified African American teachers. Not saying that a Caucasian teacher, a Hispanic teacher would not be able to do the job, however, there are

students that are able to relate to someone that looks like them or that they feel like they can relate to. I do think that school systems need to look into being evenly distributed when they are looking for candidates or applications and different things of that nature to be hired to their school systems. I do think that that could be something that may help to improve the academics of African American students.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I also think that being exposed to field trips that express some of the things that African American students may be able to relate to. Of course I do feel at times that some testing is biased as to where those African American students may not be able to relate because in traditionally in their families, thy many not do some of those things. So, I think that when looking into resources that we are using within the classroom, that it needs to be on all levels. That we are exposing all ethnicities to our learning, that we are incorporating all traditions into our learning of our kids so that all races feel comfortable when they are being exposed to learning. Because there could be some things that another race may be able to learn about an African American student so that everyone would be able to relate to each other a little bit better.

Interviewer: You just mentioned exposing all ethnicities and traditions to learning in the classroom, what are some ways that you do this in the classroom, you expose African American students and different ethnicities to things in your classroom?

Interviewee: One of things that I do is, I try to find resources that we can use within the classroom that we can teach them different beliefs and morals and different things. And so, one of the examples that I use this year is, I incorporated the book The Black Snowman, where in that book it was about two little African American boys and their mother and they built a Black snowman. The Black snowman was given powers through a Kente cloth. I actually brought in a Kente cloth so that they can actually see what it looked like, the patterns in it. We also did research on the computer and looked up the background and the history of the Kente cloth.

So, we read the book and we brought in hands on material. We did comprehension questions and I felt like that was meeting the needs of all of the students in the classroom. If there are Caucasian students, if there are Hispanic students, we try to also incorporate some of those things of different races and nationalities so that everyone in the classroom feels that they are accepted and that their ethnicity is just as relevant as everyone else in the classroom. We also had cultural feast in our

classrooms where the students brought in a traditional food that they would have in their families. So, everyone was exposed to trying and tasting a little bit of the foods from the different cultures. We also did research in that area to talk about some the different things and where those things came from. So, the kids were learning new traditions and new cultures as we did those hands on activities within the classroom.

Interviewer: Okay, and did you get a good response from your African American students as well? Did they really engage and participate in these activities?

Interviewee: They were actually engaged. The students really learned some new things that they had not been exposed to and that was the ultimate goal, to get the kids to be exposed to different traditions so if they are out in the world they would have a little bit more knowledge of different things in that area, different restaurants, different museums. It was good to hear them say that, "Oh now I understand why this is this." I think the kids were really engaged and they understood. And they were excited to know some different traditions within the classroom.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. Anything else that you want to add or say?

Interviewee: I would like to thank you for having the opportunity to partake in your interview and I hope you much success.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. I enjoyed it. Thank you again for sharing your time, ideas, your experiences, your thoughts. Again, I'm appreciative of this study, for you participating in it. To ensure that I recorded your responses accurately, again I'll send you a copy of the transcription for you to check. It should be there in about two weeks, and just thank you again.

Interviewee: You're welcome.