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Examining the Intersection of Teachers' Expectations, African American Males, and Equitable Strategies

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Adell M. Cothorne

MA, (Johns Hopkins University), 2006

BS, (Morgan State University), 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Elementary African American males achieve proficiency at a lower rate than their peers in both reading and math. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how elementary school teachers described their use of equitable strategies in teaching elementary African American male students, how these teachers described the experience of teaching African American male students, and how they used equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students. Two theories provided the conceptual framework for this study—human development theory and critical race theory in education. Seven participants were selected through convenience sampling. Semistructured interviews were conducted. Data analysis for this case study was conducted using analytic descriptive coding and category construction. Major categories were identified in order to examine patterns, themes, and relationships. Data analysis of the responses of research participants in this study revealed: (a) nurturing teacher-to-student relationships were paramount to students' success; (b) teachers who received professional development focused on the implementation of equitable strategies struggled with monitoring the effectiveness of equitable strategies regarding student outcomes. Consideration needs to occur regarding introducing and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies with preservice teachers in order for them to understand the cultural as well as academic needs of the students they will educate. The findings of this study may provide school stakeholders with the strategies needed to support and improve the academic abilities of elementary African American males, thus constructing positive social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Alex – who inspired my scholarly endeavors before he took his first breath.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I'd like to acknowledge my mother who required I write weekly book reports while in elementary school. She truly sparked my love of reading and writing.

Next, I would like to acknowledge the Cothorne family (particularly Garrett and Sylvia). Even though we are no longer bound by law, we will always be family.

A HUGE "Thank You" goes to all of my colleagues at the Teacher Education department at Loyola University Maryland. They have been my cheerleaders, confidants, and shoulders to cry on.

Michael Matthews Sr. has been such a consistent sense of support, encouragement, and comic relief since we met in 2015. We will no longer consider "dissertation" a curse word (LOL). I love you more every day.

Finally, my faith in God got me through this process. My church family at Omega Baptist Church (Owings Mills, MD) has prayed for my success consistently. I would like to especially acknowledge Pastor Jason Nicholas Clark. One of the many days I was in the campus library writing and editing, I texted Pastor Clark the following:

Me – @ the campus library. I SWEAR if I read this dissertation one more time, Imma throw up!

Pastor Clark – Read it for all those who wanted to travel the path but were not given access. Read it for all those who started the journey but we detoured. Read it because someone coming after needs to read it and understand. Read it so the quitter inside of you is scared to show its head. And when you're done reading it – READ IT AGAIN!

Amen!

Table of Contents

i

List of Tables

Section 1: Introduction to the Study

African American males achieve at a lower proficiency rate than their school peers in major content areas—such as reading and math (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015a). Nine-year-old African American students taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) earned reading scores of 206, while 9-year-old European American students earned scale scores of 232 (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). There has been an achievement gap between African American males and their school peers since national standardized assessment began in 1964 (NCES, 2015a). In order to understand how to increase African American males' achievement in education, education researchers must examine ways teachers can strengthen these students' academic abilities.

Problem Statement

More than 70% of African American students attend segregated schools (NCES, 2015a). Black student density reveals that on average, African American students typically attend schools with a higher African American student population, while European American students typically attend schools with a lower African American student population (NCES, 2015a). Segregated schools are just one of the many ways the U.S. school system replicates the social reproduction of the unacknowledged U.S. caste system (Royal & Gibson, 2017). As early as the second or third grade, African American students have shown academic disparity when compared to their European American school peers (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010). Patterns of exclusion such as lower level curricula (for example, scripted curricula in elementary schools), sub-standard school materials, and exclusion from higher level academic courses (for example, AP courses in high school) tend to persist over the course of African American students' school careers (Jencks & Phillips, 2011).

In order to assess students in Grades 3 to 8 in English language arts and math, Maryland adopted the Partnership for Assessment of College and Careers (PARCC) in 2015 (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2016). Due to the transition from the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) to PARCC, a moratorium on Maryland student assessment data was established in 2015.

Overall on the 2014 MSA, African American males consistently achieved scores within the proficient range lower than their school peers in both reading and math. A score within the proficient range indicates on grade level achievement. According to the Maryland State Department of Education:

> The MSA test produces a score that describes how well a student masters the reading, math, and science content specified in the Maryland Content Standards. Each child will receive a score in each content area that will categorize their performance as basic, proficient, or advanced (MSDE, 2017, paragraph 1).

The proficient range for the 2014 third-grade math MSA was 388 – 455 (MSDE, 2016b).

On the 2014 third-grade math MSA, 57.2% of African American males scored within the proficient range – making them the student subgroup with the lowest number of test-takers scoring in the proficient range (MSDE, 2016b). During the same year, 89.6% of Asian males scored within the proficient range – making them the student subgroup with the highest number of test-takers scoring in the proficient range. There was a difference of 32.4% between third-grade Asian males scoring in the proficient range and third grade African American males scoring within the proficient range. Also, for the 2014 third-grade math MSA, 62.8% of Hispanic females were the student subgroup scoring the second lowest within the proficient range. There

was a difference of 5.6% between third-grade Hispanic females scoring in the proficient range and third-grade African American male math students scoring in the proficient range.

On the 2014 reading MSA, 60.9% of third-grade African American males scored within the proficient range – making them the student subgroup with the lowest number of test-takers scoring in the proficient range. 63.9%.of Hispanic males were the student subgroup scoring the second lowest within the proficient range on the 2014 reading MSA. There was a 3% difference in third-grade reading scores between Hispanic males scoring in the proficient range and African American males scoring in the proficient range. The student subgroup scoring the highest within the proficient range for 2014 MSA third-grade reading was Asian females with 93.8%. There was a 32.9% difference between third-grade Asian females scoring in the proficient range and third-grade African American males scoring in the proficient range for reading. Table 1 contains the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) percentages of third-grade students who attended Maryland public schools and achieved at the proficient level in reading and math in 2014.

Table 1

2014 Maryland State Assessment (MSA), Percent of Third-Grade Students Achieving at Proficient Level

Students (By Race and Gender)	Math Scores	Reading Scores
African American Males	57.2%	60.9%
Hispanic Males	63.1%	63.9%
American Indian Males	69.0%	65.9%
Pacific Islander Males	80.7%	79.6%
White Males	86.6%	84.3%
Asian Males	89.6%	87.6%
African American Females	81.6%	71.4%
American Indian Females	68.8%	71.6%
Hispanic Females	62.8%	73.2%
Pacific Islander Females	84.3%	90.0%
White Females	87.2%	89.9%
Asian Females	92.7%	93.8%

Reprinted from Maryland State Department of Education. Retrieved from http://msp2014.msde.state.md.us/MsaTrends.aspx?PV=1:4:99:AAAA:1:N:10:13:1:2:1:1:1:1:1.

For the 2014 reading MSA, 73% of fourth grade African American males and 73% of fourth-grade Pacific Islander males scored within the proficient range. The student subgroup with the largest number of students scoring within the proficient range was Pacific Islander females with 97.6%. There was a 24.6% difference between fourth-grade Pacific Islander females scoring in the proficient range and fourth-grade African American males scoring in the proficient range for reading.

On the 2014 fourth-grade math MSA, 65.7% of African American males scored a within the proficient range. That same year, 95.6% of Asian males scored within the proficient range – making them the student subgroup with the lowest number of test-takers scoring in the proficient range. There was a 29.9% difference between fourth-grade Asian males scoring in the proficient range and fourth-grade African American males scoring in the proficient range for math. That same year on the fourth-grade math MSA, African American females were the student subgroup with the second lowest number of test-taker scoring in proficient range with 70.7%. There was a 5% difference between fourth-grade African American females scoring in the proficient range and fourth-grade African American males scoring within the math proficient level. Table 2 contains the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) percentages of fourth-grade students who attended public schools in Maryland and achieved at the proficient level in reading and math in 2014.

Table 2

2014 Maryland State Assessment (MSA), Percent of Fourth-Grade Students Achieving at Proficient Level

Students (By Race and Gender)	Math Scores	Reading Scores
African American Males	65.7%	73%
Pacific Islander Males	71.4%	73%
Hispanic Males	71.9%	77%
American Indian Males	72.2%	78.6%
White Males	90.4%	91.7%
Asian Males	95.6%	93.2%
African American Females	70.7%	82.8%
Hispanic Females	72.3%	83.1%
American Indian Females	84.3%	92.8%
White Females	91.7%	95.3%
Asian Females	94.3%	96.6%
Pacific Islander Females	86.0%	97.6%

Reprinted from Maryland State Department of Education. Retrieved from http://msp2014.msde.state.md.us/MsaTrends.aspx?PV=1:4:99:AAAA:1:N:10:13:1:2:1:1:1:1:1.

On the 2014 fifth-grade math MSA, 53.8% of African American males scored within the proficient range. The student subgroup with the highest number of test-takers scoring at the proficient level was Asian females with 92.6%. There was a 38.8% difference between fifth-grade Asian females scoring in the proficient range and fifth-grade African American males scoring in the proficient range for math. African American females were the second lowest student subgroup scoring at the proficient level for 2 014 fifth-grade math MSA with a 60%. There was a 6.2% difference between fifth-grade African American females scoring in the

proficient range and fifth-grade African American males in these two student sub groups scoring at the proficient level for the 2014 math MSA

During the same year for reading MSA, fifth-grade African American males scored at the proficient level with 78.2%. Hispanic males were the second lowest student subgroup scoring at the fifth-grade reading proficient level with 83.2%. There was a 5% difference in fifth-grade Hispanic males scoring in the proficient range and fifth-grade African American males scouring at the proficient level in reading. The student subgroup with the highest number of students scoring at the proficient level in reading was fifth-grade Asian females with 96%. There was a 17.8% difference between fifth-grade Asian females scoring in the proficient range and fifth-grade African American males scoring in the proficient range for 2014 MSA reading. Table 3 contains the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) percentages of fifth-grade students who attended Maryland public schools and achieved at the proficient level in reading and math in 2014.

Table 3

2014 Maryland State Assessment (MSA), Percent of Fifth-Grade Students
Achieving at Proficient Level

Students (By Race and Gender)	Math Scores	Reading Scores
African American Males	53.8%	78.2%
Hispanic Males	78.9%	83.2%
American Indian Males	70.2%	84.6%
Pacific Islander Males	78.9%	89.2%
White Males	84.3%	92.8%,
Asian Males	91.8%	94.4%
African American Females	60.0%	85.7%
Hispanic Females	64.0%	87.4%
Pacific Islander Females	77.3%	89.5%
American Indian Females	no data reported	90.5%
Asian Females	92.6%	94.4%
White Females	86.7%	96.0%

Reprinted from Maryland State Department of Education. Retrieved from
http://msp2014.msde.state.md.us/MsaTrends.aspx?PV=1:4:99:AAAA:1:N:10:13:1:2:1:1:1:1:1.

Background of the Study

Researchers have examined numerous factors impacting the achievement of African

American male students at all levels of the education hierarchy (Moon & Singh, 2015; Sampson

& Garrison-Wade, 2011; Zhbanova, Rule, & Stichter, 2015). Some researchers have studied how

African American male students have tried to excel in an education system not created for

educators to understand or honor their behaviors, identity issues, and behavioral needs (Chance

& Lewis, 2013). A prevalent, pervasive, and continuing achievement gap has existed between

African American male students and their school peers (Chance & Lewis, 2013; McGee & Pearman, 2014). School variables such as lack of teacher knowledge of cultural differences among school stakeholders (Ullucci & Howard, 2015) influence African American male academic achievement. In order to support the abilities and increase the academic achievement of African American males, continuous analysis must occur so that successful strategies for this student subgroup may be identified.

In an analysis of the data of students graduating high school within 4 years in some states, African American male students have a less than 50% graduation rate (NCES, 2011). The National Center for Education Statistics (2013a) reported that in 2012, only 12.7% of eligible African American males enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. In comparison, 62.2% of eligible European American males, 16.6% of eligible African American females, and 58.9% of European American females enrolled in degree-granting post-secondary institutions (NCES, 2013b). Garibaldi (2014) noted African American males have a considerably lower accounting for college admission and retention as compared to their school peers. Lower post-secondary admittance and graduation rates among African American males have a negative impact on their ability to earn competitive earnings.

Students with higher academic ability and achievement have an increased opportunity to matriculate at post-secondary institutions. Researchers have reported that people who obtain higher education levels earn greater income (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Tomul & Çelik, 2009). The National Center for Education Statistics (2015b) reported that in 2014 a person earned an average annual salary of $30,000 when he/she had earned a high school diploma; while someone with a bachelor's degree earned an average of $55,000 and a person with a master's degree earned an average annual salary of $60,000. The annual median income of African American

households in 2014 was $35,398 compared with the national average of $53,657. At every educational level, African American males with the same level of education made less than European American males (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Students earning higher degrees at the post-secondary level may access higher competitive earnings.

Dumas (2016) identified factors impeding the academic ability of African American males such as institutional racism, lower socioeconomic status, and the idea that the African American males need to be "fixed" (p.110). Institutional racism creates and sustains policies, procedures, and rules which are barriers to students' academic success (Chapman, 2013). When persons from marginalized communities embrace and promote racial ideologies aligned with conservative European American ideology, they often are viewed to be more successful than those persons from marginalized communities who do not (Hatcher, 2011; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012). In addition, Manuel, Taylor, and Jackson (2012) found that African American males with a higher rate of poverty as adolescents had a lower rate of education attainment overall (elementary to post-secondary). Therefore, African American male students must deal not only with these factors, but also with lowered expectations from some educators.

Other researchers have identified factors that positively impact the academic ability of African American males. Carey (2014) suggested that a more nuanced and holistic approach to assessing student and teacher performance was a shift away from a hyper-focus on the results of standardized testing. Cowan Pitre (2014) asserted that African American males experience greater ability in academic settings when educators are willing and skilled in knowing how to help this student subgroup recognize and navigate the effects of intersectionality in academic institutions. Although some researchers have focused on skills and strategies educators can use to enhance the academic ability of African American males, there remains a need for research

examining how teachers using equitable strategies view the academic abilities of elementary African American male students.

Schoolteachers and students navigate structures from which they interpret and create meaning (Leonardo, 2013). Researchers such as Parsons and Wall (2011) and Ullucci and Howard (2015) placed a focus on helping teachers improve pedagogical approaches in order to build on the strengths of the cultures of students. However, federal and local education policies coupled with teachers' unexamined biases continue to systematically undermine African American students' access to high-quality academic programs (Chapman, 2013; Dumas, 2016). Although a teacher may have never done anything overtly biased, the absence of inclusion may lead the student to believe that the teacher could be prejudiced, biased, or racist (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Emdin, 2016; Lewis-McCoy, 2014). When European American teachers make references to issues largely of interest to European American audiences, students from marginalized populations are excluded (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Mack, 2012). Teacher expectations play a pivotal role in students' academic abilities, as students have multiple opportunities to connect with or disconnect from the teacher.

Devine, Fahie, and McGillicuddy (2013) identified a love of children and teaching, reflective inquiry, and advocacy for social change as factors of teachers having high expectations for students. Other aspects of teachers having high expectations for students was a strong sense of community (Emdin, 2016; Sorhagen, 2013) and the ability to make curricular adjustments in order to engage students (Kenyatta, 2012). Some challenges associated with teachers having high expectations for students are the teacher's inability to recognize and use the cultural capital marginalized students bring to the classroom (Comber, 2014; Delpit, 2002); the lack of skill needed to build on student discourse when the language patterns of students do not follow the

rules of dominant culture (Delpit, 2002; Straehler-Pohl, Fernández, Gellert, & Figueiras, 2014); and using students' socio-economic status as a means of exclusion from higher-level education opportunities (Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Equitable strategies (refer to Appendix A: Equitable Strategies on page 116) incorporate best practices, such as the development of caring relationships between educator and student (Elmore, Thomas, & Clayton, 2006; Montgomery County Public Schools, 2009). These strategies are part of an effective teacher's toolkit (Durden & Truscott, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Leonard, Moore, & Brooks, 2014). Equitable practices are effective when woven into the daily operation of the school community—inside and outside of the classroom (Woodland, 2008). Implementing equitable strategies has led to strengthening students' academic abilities (Goldenberg, 2013; Mack, 2012; Taylor, 2010) by acknowledging and valuing the struggles and contributions of marginalized communities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how elementary school teachers described their use of equitable strategies in teaching elementary African American male students, how these teachers described the experience of teaching African American male students, and how they used equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students. Many factors have an impact on the academic abilities of elementary African American male students. Some educators blame African American male students and their families for the students' lack of academic ability (Emdin, 2016; Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010). Other research focused on denied access to rigorous educational opportunities, learning environments, the impact of socioeconomic factors, cultural bias of standardized testing, learning styles, language discrepancies, and scripted curriculum

(Berliner, 2009; Brown, 2009; Mack, 2012; Slavin & Madden, 2006; Tomul & Çelik, 2009). A better understanding of elementary school teachers' perceptions of elementary African American male students would provide insight as to how to support and strengthen the academic abilities of elementary African American male students.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative case study methodology design was used for this study to understand how elementary school teachers described their use of equitable strategies in teaching elementary African American male students, how these teachers described the experience of teaching African American male students, and how they used equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students. Participants for this study were drawn from a large suburban school district with a racially diverse student population. The district is among the nation's 20 largest school districts and has more than 155,000 students who speak 138 languages from 157 countries collectively. The students in this school district attended more than 175 schools—including 133 elementary schools, 38 middle schools, and 25 high schools. The district has more than 18,000 employees; 88.6% of teachers in this district have a master's degree or equivalent (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2013). The participants for this study were school teachers in two suburban elementary schools with racially diverse student populations. Elementary schools were chosen, as early intervention has proven to be crucial to student academic success (Burns et al., 2015; Caldarella, Williams, Hansen, & Wills, 2015). These teachers had district-level and/or school-level training in equitable classroom strategies that involve observable teacher behavior (see Appendix A).

The data collection process for this study consisted of interviews with teachers. During the interviews, teachers were given a list of equitable practices to reference (see Appendix A).

Data were examined for patterns, themes, and relationships. The findings of this study may provide school stakeholders with the ideologies and strategies needed to develop, implement, and sustain learning environments conducive to supporting and improving the academic abilities of elementary African American males, thus constructing positive social change.

Data analysis for this case study was conducted using analytic descriptive coding and category construction. Participants' responses to interview questions were transcribed from an audio recording. I used descriptive coding and category construction in the margins of the transcribed data to preliminarily retrieve and categorize chunks of raw data. Major categories were identified in order to make a master list and begin the examination of data for patterns, themes, and relationships.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do elementary school teachers describe the experience of using equitable strategies?

2. How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies describe their experience of teaching African American male students?

3. Of those who use equitable strategies, what are elementary school teachers' views of African American male students' academic abilities?

4. How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students in learning?

Conceptual Framework

Two theories provide the conceptual framework for this study: Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) human development theory and critical race theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate,

1995). The justification for using these theories is that Bronfenbrenner's and Ladson-Billings' theories address adults advocating on the behalf of students. Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) human development theory posits every child should have at least one adult advocate who supports and strengthens the formation of the child's interpersonal relationships. Critical race theory in education challenges macro and micro forms of racism perpetrated through the approval and implementation of traditional school curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) theory posits five critical processes for positive human development. The theory's first tenet of positive human development was most germane to this study; it championed the formation and sustainment of a mutually respectful and nurturing relationship in which the adult served in a role of advocacy for the child. Bronfenbrenner's first theory of positive human development conveyed the importance of developing an advocacy relationship between the adult and child. When a teacher is sensitive to the makeup of a class and chooses an array of instructional practices which will benefit all students, that teacher is sending a message of care and consideration.

While the remaining processes of Bronfenbrenner's (1986) theory were less important to this particular study, they still provided valuable insight. The second process argued that patterns of ongoing interpersonal interactions with a caring adult—which involved strong mutual admiration—enhanced a child's reaction to environmental cues. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) third process suggested that a third party, most likely another adult (who does not necessarily have to be a family member) encourages, assists, and advocates on behalf of and for the child's primary caregiver. Consistent open and honest communication and trust were vital to both parties; this ideology is the cornerstone for the fourth process of Bronfenbrenner's theory. The fifth and final process highlighted the importance of effective child-rearing strategies at home and in school.

Critical race theory took shape in the early 1970s as lawyers, activists, and legal scholars studied the relationship between race, racism, and power pertaining to the legal system. Critical race theory supported the philosophy that racism is pervasive and affects an entire society (Leonardo, 2013). One of the goals of critical race theory in education is to examine the relationship of race, class, and gender in educational settings to historical and local contexts (Chapman, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Many understand race is a socio-political construct (Adelman & Herbes-Sommers, 2003; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006).); however, few are aware of how racism permeates the American education structure (Durden & Truscott, 2013; Howard, 2013). Critical race theory in education is an appropriate theoretical lens for examining how students' everyday experiences with educational institutional racism (that creates and sustains policies, procedures, and rules) serve as a barrier to their academic success (Chapman, 2013). Critical race theory in education is vital, as it challenges macro and micro forms of racism perpetrated through the approval and implementation of traditional school curriculum (Chapman, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's (1986) first tenet of the theory of five critical processes for positive human development and critical race theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) work in tandem because both are based on the principal of promoting the development of caring relationships for all students regardless of race.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Black student density: The percentage of students who are African American (NCES, 2015a).

Dysconscious racism: A way of thinking that supports inequitable practices against people of color in order to stay aligned with the status quo (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Education debt: An unfulfilled promise that America owes to historically underserved and marginalized student groups such as African Americans and other persons from marginalized communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Institutional racism: A pattern of negative treatment perpetrated by institutions against persons from marginalized communities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Paradox of Underachievement Theory: A theory in which students (particularly students from marginalized populations) meet the low expectations of some educators and fail to achieve at higher academic levels (Zhbanova et al., 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Case studies offer insights and meanings that expand the researcher's and readers' purview because they are grounded in real-life situations, and often result in a "rich and holistic account of a phenomenon" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 447). As with all research models, case studies have inherent limitations. Delimitations and limitations for a research study establish the boundaries, exceptions, reservations, and qualifications inherent in every study (Creswell, 2003). Limitations are events/incidents which occur during the study that are beyond the researcher's control (Creswell, 2012). Limitations of case studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008) include—but are not limited to—reliability, validity, and generalizability. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined generalizability as the "applicability of findings from one setting or group of people to other settings and people" (p. 272). Reliability is the consistency between the data collected and reported and the empirical world studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

A limitation was that I was the former administrator of some of the participants being interviewed; they may have felt compelled to respond as they thought I wanted. Delimitation defines the parameters of the investigation and in educational research often deals with

population/sample, treatment, setting, and instrumentation (Creswell, 2012). This study was delimited to school teachers in two suburban elementary schools with racially diverse student populations. The only context was the application of equitable strategies.

Significance of the Study

This study complemented the existing body of research regarding the education of elementary African American males as it includes examination of successful equitable classroom strategies used to eliminate barriers to their academic abilities. Data resulting from this study will fortify existing knowledge about teacher expectations, equitable strategies, and the barriers that impact African American male students attending suburban elementary schools with diverse student populations. These insights and discoveries will provide education stakeholders with a greater breadth of knowledge regarding successful equitable classroom strategies implemented to foster increased academic abilities in African American elementary male students. The results will be useful to school community stakeholder, authors, and education policymakers as they seek to find, access, and publish resources regarding successful equitable classroom strategies used to increase the academic abilities of African American elementary male students.

Summary

Readers of this research will gain a greater understanding of whether teachers' use of equitable strategies influences their expectations of elementary African American males' academic abilities. In addition, qualitative research for this study in the form of teacher interviews identified some of the expectations held by teachers with regard to African American males' academic abilities. In Section 1, I present an introduction, the problem under investigation, the nature of the study, the purpose of the study, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, significance of the study, operational definition of terms, and research questions.

In Section 2, I detail a comprehensive review of the literature. It provides insight on the historical aspect of the achievement gap, African American male students in relation to the achievement gap, culturally relevant pedagogy, equitable strategies, and teacher expectations. In Section 3, I provide an explanation of the research design by describing the qualitative aspects of the research methodology, the study's target population, and procedures that were used for collecting and analyzing the collected data.

Section 2: Literature Review

The review of related literature covering previous academic research and discussions directly related to the achievement gap, teacher expectations, equitable strategies and African American males' academic abilities are established in Section 2. The purpose of the literature review is to identify research gaps and theories with regard to teacher expectations and equitable classroom practices. A significant amount of research has focused on the academic abilities of African American males; however, less has been understood regarding the perceptions of African American males by teachers who implement equitable strategies.

Introduction

The research strategies used for this study's literature review included identifying and analyzing peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, dissertation studies, and research reports from federal, state, and local governments. Key words used for this study's literature review included (but were not limited to): African American males, critical race theory, suburban elementary schools, equitable strategies, teacher beliefs and teacher expectations. Resources from education, sociology, and psychology were referenced to connect the educational challenges faced by African American males and how the expectations of teachers impact the academic abilities of African American male students. ProQuest Central, Educational Resource Information Center, Education Research Complete, SAGE Premier, and Academic Search Complete were databases used for locating peer-reviewed journal articles. Every effort was made to include research within the last 5 years. In addition, earlier and foundational research was included.

This review of literature consists of the following topics: cultural awareness, teacher attitudes, culturally relevant pedagogy, elementary education, the achievement gap, racial

attitudes and critical race theory in education, reflective teaching, the historical challenges of African American boys regarding achievement, student diversity, and teacher expectations. I reviewed literature continually throughout most phases of this study, with the exception of the data collection and analysis phase.

Quantitative researchers focus on developing knowledge through actions such as cause and effect thinking, reduction to variables and hypotheses and questions, and the test of theories, while also emphasizing collecting descriptive data in natural settings using inductive thinking and focusing on understanding the subjects' point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003, 2012). Qualitative research requires a more focused evaluation of the subject(s) being studied due to extensive data collection and analysis. A qualitative case study allows the researcher to collect data through in-depth interviewing in order to investigate a contemporary phenomenon (Glesne, 2006; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Soy, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Historical Context of the Achievement Gap

African American students and the American education system, 1800–1960.

Teaching an enslaved person how to read was a crime in the Southern United States during the early 19th century(Bly, 2011).Public schools were originally intended for the descendants of European American wealthy aristocrats in order to disenfranchise specific inhabitants of the United States (Emdin, 2016). In *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Thomas Jefferson (1873) related his thoughts about African Americans not being civilized enough to educate in comparison to their European American counterparts. Jefferson hinted that African Americans' skin color may have been derived from bile and that they excreted liquid waste from their skin glands rather than from their kidneys, thus producing a very strong and disagreeable odor. Jefferson implied that African Americans required less sleep—evidenced by working all

day and then choosing to entertain themselves into the wee hours of the night (Baker, 2012). This founding father also elaborated on how African Americans were inferior when it came to reasoning, imagination, and the composition of complicated melodies.

Almost a century later, the U.S. education system's funding for the rich and for the poor was unequal (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Sizemore, 2008). In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483* supported ending school desegregation. Many aspects of U.S. society, including residential segregation—through unfair housing practices such as redlining (Adelman & Herbes-Sommers, 2003)—created homogenous racial neighborhoods, resulting in resegregation of schools. The Fair Housing Act and acts of redlining condemned many African American families to live in areas classified as ghettos (Zasloff, 2016).

Simultaneously, members of Congress were working to decide whether federal funds should be withheld from the thousands of school districts refusing to follow the Supreme Court's directive to desegregate (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Ravitch, 2010). The period of increased school desegregation took place at the same time as the most dramatic narrowing ever of the test score gap between African Americans and European Americans. This occurrence may well have been an after effect of the broad reforms associated with the Civil Rights era (Ford & King Jr, 2014; Leonardo, 2013).

White flight began as European Americans sought to escape neighborhoods where African Americans were gaining access (Henry & Hankins, 2012). With the Civil Rights movement, African Americans were able to make small economic gains, which afforded them the opportunity to rent in neighborhoods outside their typical ghetto (Zasloff, 2016). During this same period, African Americans continued to reside in largely segregated communities due to

acts of institutional racism (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Massey & Denton, 1991). For many urban communities, White flight depleted resources available for schools and law enforcement (Adelman & Herbes-Sommers, 2003; Massey & Denton, 1991; Sizemore, 2008; Wilson, 2012). The American structural system, including the government, contributed to the devaluation of communities of color by assigning a belief that greater value is attached to Whiteness (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Sleeter, 2001; Wilson, 2012).

African American students and the American education system, 1961–1990.

During the 1950s to 1970s, achievement gap trends highlighted a large decrease in the achievement gap due to specific legislation regarding school procedures (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Ravitch, 2010; Saatcioglu & Rury, 2012; Sizemore, 2008), although no educational accountability for the federal government, local school district, or students as individuals existed. (Mehta, 2014). In the 1980s, trends highlighted a decrease in the achievement gap with specific policies dealing with promotion/graduation exams. Accountability for school systems was established and largely the responsibility of the federal government (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Ravitch, 2010). During the latter part of this decade, the transition to market-based accountability saw specific policies dealing with vouchers, charters, and school choice (Chance & Lewis, 2013; Harris & Herrington, 2006).

When accountability for public schools became the responsibility of the federal and local governments, specific policies began to deal with takeovers, oversights, reconstitution, and school report cards (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Ravitch, 2010; Sizemore, 2008). During the 1990s, a shift occurred in accountability from the student to the schools due to standardized testing (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Wun, 2014). Educational reform resulted in a hyper mandatory use of standardized testing and increased emphasis on accountability (Hursh, 2013).

Students' academic achievement was directly linked to test scores (Jencks & Phillips, 2011; Nieto, 2000; Wun, 2014). This new era symbolized the American education system as having tough standards, excellence, and a push toward acquiring higher-order thinking skills (Ravitch, 2010; Wun, 2014).

Also, during the 1980s and 1990s, neighborhoods once exclusive to African American families found overwhelming numbers of European American ownership reentry (Adelman & Herbes-Sommers, 2003; Chapman, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006). European American ownership re-entry has led to gentrification. Gentrification creates neighborhoods of segregation by facilitating the increase of property taxes on buildings purchased at below market value and then renovated to middle class standards (Lydersen, 2008). Many African American families lost their residential and familial homes during the gentrification process due to an increased economic strain (Adelman & Herbes-Sommers, 2003; Massey & Denton, 1991). Schools were impacted because certain enclaves become resegregated due to the racial composition of the neighborhood. NAEP reports confirm a widening in the achievement gap since the early 1990s (Diamond, 2006; Wun, 2014).

In the United States, the definition of race is a socio-political construct in which social and political meaning has been attached to physical determinations (Adelman & Herbes-Sommers, 2003; Bronson & Merryman, 2009; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Biological definitions of race have been rejected by the American Anthropological Association (Walsh & Yun, 2011). Despite its being considered a social construct, race in a racist society bears profound consequences for a "daily life, identity, social movements, and the ways in which most groups *other*" (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006, p. 19).

Challenges associated with the achievement gap

This section highlights the barriers minority students face when attempting to accomplish their academic potential. Prominent scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois recognized that ideas and practices connected to race would create a lasting achievement gap (DuBois, 2001). Non-European American schools were chronically underfunded and inadequately supported in comparison to European American schools (Pellegrino, Mann, & Russell, 2013). Schools for minority students often lacked the supplies and teacher expertise that nonminority students were able to access (Chapman, 2013; Goings, Smith, Harris, Wilson, & Lancaster, 2015; Goldenberg, 2013; Highsmith & Erickson, 2015). The American school system sorts students as early as kindergarten, often based on socioeconomic status, language, gender, and race (Bronson & Merryman, 2009; Carey, 2014; Polleck & Shabdin, 2013). Products of institutional racism include tracking (Taylor, 2010); scripted curricula (Milner, 2013); and homogenous, culturally deficient teaching forces (Cyr, McDiarmid, Halpin, Stratton, & Davis-Delano, 2012; Moon & Singh, 2015).

European Americans who do not consider how their lives are enhanced by their Whiteness are said to be unaware of "White privilege" (as coined by McIntosh, 1988), while others consider this unawareness to be dysconscious racism (Hatcher, 2011; Howard et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In order to participate appropriately in diverse professional and social interactions, persons from marginalized and historically underserved communities must be knowledgeable of various aspects of mainstream (European American) culture, including fashion, entertainment, and news (Leonardo, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Singleton, 2012).

People from marginalized communities who embrace and promote racial ideologies aligned with conservative European American ideology are viewed by some to be more

successful (Hatcher, 2011; Howard et al., 2012; Nieto, 2000). This ideology has come to be known as Anglo-normativity. A clear example is Clarence Thomas's appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Thomas's appointment provided a way to racially diversify the Supreme Court without diversifying its racial ideology (Singleton & Linton, 2006). When people of color—who have unmistakably not had the same benefits or advantages of European Americans—are unable to reach the same life goals as their European American counterparts, they are viewed as weak, unskilled, unintelligent, and/or lazy (Cole, 2008; Dowdy, 2008; Ferguson, 2001; Hatcher, 2011; Howard, 2013; Leonardo, 2013; Portes, 2005). Researchers have labeled this phenomenon the deficit thinking theory (Zhbanova et al., 2015).

The ramifications of the achievement gap are apparent through the omission of racially diverse content (Ladson-Billings, 2011), school discipline polices targeting African American males (Hatcher, 2011), and tracking (Goldenberg, 2013; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Disenfranchised students are excluded from instruction which promotes rigor (e.g., Advanced Placement) (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012); are grouped in special education classes— especially for those labeled emotionally disturbed (Howard, 2013); and receive scripted instruction with a one-size-fits-all ideology of student achievement (Milner, 2013). Minority students are perceived as burdens to the educational system (Dumas, 2016) and treated as problems without a solution because they are viewed as being the problem (Leonardo, 2013).

Racial discrimination in employment (Gimenez-Nadal & Molina, 2014); skepticism about the ultimate payoff for educational investment (Howard, 2013); and perceptions of unfair treatment by school personnel (Cowan Pitre, 2014) cause many African Americans to disengage from the educational process (Moon & Singh, 2015). Conversely, bodies of research (including surveys, student and parent interviews, and observational research) challenge explanations

suggesting African American students disengage from the educational process (Berliner, 2009; Howard, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

African American males and the achievement gap

Researchers have also acknowledged that the schooling experiences of American children are the manifestations of political and social acts by stakeholders who have continually pushed for/opposed greater access to an equitable education based on issues of race and racism (Chapman, 2013; Hughes, 2010; McGee & Pearman, 2014). African American males have carried the burden of these inequitable schooling practices (Rowley & Bowman, 2009). African American male students have been identified as the direct cause of their stunted academic abilities (Ford & Moore, 2013). Suggesting African American males created their own academic challenges is akin to saying the impoverished life of the slave was his own doing (Leonardo, 2013). The theory of education debt works against a deficit model of thinking by highlighting the inadequate education marginalized students receive and shifting the focus from student shaming to examining the mechanics of institutional racism (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

African American students reinforce their African American identities through their forms of dress and informal language styles (Chapman, 2013). Yet the urban vernacular and clothing of African American male students causes some educators to view this student group as less intelligent (Butler, Jubert, & Lewis, 2009). For instance, African American dialect and cadence had become more standard in certain arenas with the prevalence of hip-hop music (Hill, 2016). Yet persons who choose to communicate in this dialect are deemed undesirable by many employers (Carey, 2014; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Massey & Denton, 1991). When dealing with African American male students, some teachers may resort to domesticating education by expecting less of African American male students in exchange for these students' good will and

reasonable effort in completing class assignments (Brown, 2009; Dumas, 2016). These classrooms are often void of high expectations, intellectual energy, and excitement (Lynn et al., 2010; Hughes, 2010).

In terms of school discipline, teachers believe boys present more discipline problems than girls and that the least well-behaved group of students is African American males (Butler et al., 2009; Gregory et al., 2010). African American males experience harsher discipline than their European American male counterparts because they are "adultified" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 607). Teachers may tend to look more favorably upon students exhibiting a feminine, docile behavior (Howard et al., 2012), whereas African American male students are often viewed as defiant and oppositional (Wilson, 2012).

As racial demographics continued to shift, scholars were researching the experiences of minority students in predominantly European American schools (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). Few African American male students attending European American majority schools are able to access rigorous curricular experiences (Chapman, 2013). Tracking African American male students into lower tracks affects their future possibilities by limiting their college choices (Wilson, 2012), making them less competitive for jobs (Chapman, 2013), and restricting their exposure to new forms of cultural capital that are present in elite environments (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). As a result, the economic and social possibilities for male students of color remain stratified by race (Rowley & Bowman, 2009). Even though schools are often seen as the instrument to level the playing field, social theorists regard schools as inequality producing (Leonardo, 2013; Lewis-McCoy, 2014).

To try and separate the educational experiences, attitudes, and achievement of students from the broader patterns of racial inequality that exist in communities, schools, and classrooms

would distort the understanding of race and educational achievement (Hacher, 2011; Polleck & Shabdin, 2013; Webb & Thomas, 2015). European American administrators and teachers are the adult majority in suburban schools (Lewis-McCoy, 2014) and buttress issues of the achievement gap by invoking policies, such as tracking African American males into lower-level academic classes (Rashid, 2009) and enacting zero tolerance discipline consequences (Leonardo, 2013).

In order to gain a better understanding of the impact of various educational outcomes and initiatives on African American males, it is prudent to take a more in-depth look at current research studies. In their quantitative study, Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) assessed the correlation between factors impacting the academic abilities of African American male students. The researchers delineated four parenting styles for the basis of their research: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive/indulgent, and neglectful/uninvolved. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory positing that family/parental factors can protect against negative peer influences was used for the study (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). The Parenting Style Index and Academic and Family Supplemental Questionnaire were used as diagnostic assessment tools. The Academic and Family Supplemental Questionnaire was developed to gather supplemental information regarding African American males' community, family, and educational background. In order to examine if there was a significant statistical difference between parenting style and participants' enrollment in honors courses, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted. The researchers (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013) sought to examine whether parenting style influenced students' academic abilities.

Hines and Holcomb-McCoy's (2013) study indicated that numerous factors influenced the academic achievement of participants. For example, they found that a significant percentage of the participants in the study reported taking no honors courses. A smaller percentage of study

participants indicated they took only one or two honors courses. On the other hand, they determined that parenting style had no significant impact on increasing study participant's academic achievement. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy's (2013) concluded that their findings suggested that African American parenting needed to be further investigated to determine the influencing factors when raising African American males.

Zhbanova et al. (2015) sought to answer whether creative minority students could perform as well as their gifted-identified non-minority peers. Eight first- and second-grade from students were identified as potentially gifted. Theories related to minority students and gifted education used for the study were "paradox of underachievement theory, racial identity theory, and stereotype threat theory" (Zhbanova et al., 2015, p. 145).

Two different instruments were used for the Zhbanova et al. (2015) study. The first pretest-posttest instrument asked students to tell researchers what they knew about African animals during a 15-minute interview. A classroom sociogram was used in order to measure levels of "popularity, leadership ability, social acceptance, and attributes such as academic ability, athletic ability, and social poise" (Zhbanova et al., 2015, p. 147). Results from the study showed the two African American students were identified as gifted. One African American student exhibited a gain in the knowledge of the animals in the posttest and was referred to as an expert by his peers (Zhbanova et al., 2015). The second African American student was identified as a candidate for gifted education services (Zhbanova et al., 2015). The study highlighted the need for further research into ways educators can provide alternate assessments to identify African American students as academically gifted.

Bank's (2015) qualitative study examined how preservice teachers at a historically Black college or university viewed male students through the lenses of race, gender and limited

physical ability. Banks used "Disability Critical Race Study" (2015, p. 570) as the theoretical framework for study. The 15 research participants took part in 60-minute interviews which were recorded on a SmartPen. The interview notes were later transcribed in order for patterns and themes to be discovered. Banks found "meanings attributed to disability were highly contextual and formed through personal experiences" (2015, p. 575).

Preservice teachers were more willing to find inclusive ways to incorporate curricular and instructional choices into their practice in regards to African American males facing physical limitations (Bank, 2015).As opposed to making judgements about students based on clothing choices or whether a student was in a wheelchair due to gun violence, research participants took a more holistic approach in regards to how to interact with African American males with disabilities (Bank, 2015).

Role of Teacher Expectations

The socio-cultural mismatch of teachers and students may lead to ineffective teaching (Berliner, 2009; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Taylor, 2010). Teachers' experiences have a significant impact on the parts of the mandated curriculum they choose to teach or not to teach and the level of instruction students receive (Goldenberg, 2013). A student deemed unattractive based upon the teacher's standards is seen as having little or no potential (Howard et al., 2012). Teachers—particularly those who are not persons from marginalized communities —are rarely asked to think about their own racial/ethnic groups or racial and cultural identities and the experiences that shaped those identities (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Effective education practices require a dialogue about race (Delpit, 2012; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Singleton & Linton, 2006). A color-blind mindset

enables people to avoid confronting their own racial presumptions and understanding (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015).

Structured color blindness is a belief that people of color are less successful because they try less, or worse, because they are inferior (Singleton & Linton, 2006). This belief is present in classrooms as innumerable African American males experience harsher discipline than their European American male counterparts because they are adultified (Leonardo, 2013). To normalize social construction of knowledge is to acknowledge the process through which racial meaning is inherited, interpreted, and passed on from one generation to the next (Leonardo, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Teachers able to close the achievement gap had positive relationships with students (Cole, 2008), studied cultural differences (Chapman, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2015), and understood how to apply their knowledge in order to use a range of strategies to reach diverse learners (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Effective teachers also shared examples of African American achievers into the classroom (Howard et al., 2012).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Medical researchers have investigated the amount of time physicians spent with patients and noted that doctors were more inclined to shorten the time spent with patients from diverse communities. There are numerous research articles on cultural competency in the medical field (Adams, 2010; Adamson, Warfa, & Bhui, 2011; Campinha-Bacote, 2005; Estrada, Krishnamoorthy, & Smith, 2011; Galambos, 2003; Marra, Covassin, Shingles, Canady, & Mackowiak, 2010; Marks, 2007; Palombaro, Dole, & Black, 2015; Paul, Ewen, & Jones, 2014; Purnell, 2005; Upvall & Bost, 2007). Research on cultural competence in education settings is available but not as plentiful (Chapman, 2013; Howard, 2013; Parsons & Wall, 2011).

With the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy, learning and teaching are authentic (Klotz, 2006; Moore, Wallace, Schack, Thomas, Lewis, Wilson, & D'Antoni, 2010). Culturally relevant pedagogy validates and affirms the struggles and contributions of marginalized cultures (Gay, 2000; Villa, 2014). The need for understanding the cultural nature of teaching and learning is noted without in-depth analysis about how culture facilitates student and teacher classroom interactions and learning processes (Berliner, 2009; Delpit, 2012b; Devine et al., 2013). Culturally responsive teaching provides educators with the framework needed to understand the role culture plays in knowledge acquisition (King et al., 2009; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011). Culturally responsive teaching helps educators view their professional practice through a critical lens (Parsons &Wall, 2011).

Initially, schools were large and impersonal, established to create a workforce of compliant employees (Singleton & Linton, 2006). No matter the students' needs, everyone was taught the same curricula, at the same time, with the same results expected. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a complete paradigm shift which recognizes and utilizes students' cultures in order to enhance instruction and promote the maximum achievement possible (Richards et al., 2006; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011). Culturally responsive instruction puts forth the social change message of human dignity and acceptance of others (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Instructors who integrate varied perspectives, embed culturally relevant materials, and include engaging, complex, and meaningful tasks and constructivist approaches throughout their instruction are practicing culturally relevant pedagogy (Delpit, 1995; Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

Teachers who provide opportunities for all students to engage in critical dialogue about conflicts among cultures and analyze inconsistencies between mainstream cultural ideals/realities

and those of different cultural systems (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2011) are proponents of culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally competent educators use a range of assessment methods appropriate to diverse learners, such as performance and observations, to provide feedback to students and also became more learner-centered instructionally (King et al., 2009).

In a mixed-methods approach, researchers (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011) studied African American students' preference for culturally referenced or non-culturally referenced lessons. The study took place in a Northeast Denver urban high school. The study participants were 36 high school students of various cultures, races, and nationalities who were selected through convenience sampling.

Qualitative data were gathered through lesson observation in order to generate descriptive statistics measuring whether African American students preferred culturally referenced or non-culturally referenced lessons. A student questionnaire was administered to elicit quantitative and qualitative data. A Likert-type scale was used to determine a student's like or dislike for the observed lesson, students' perception as to the cultural relevance of each lesson, and student interest level during each lesson.

Overall, I found that the quantitative and qualitative data results of the study showed African American students prefer culturally relevant lessons. Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2011) noted major statistically significant findings with regard to quantitative data. One of the research questions presented to study participants was whether teachers of all races could successfully teach a lesson containing the *N-word*. African American male students' responses of educators of all races not being able to teach a lesson containing the *N word* was found to be statistically significant at the ≤ 0.05 level as compared to Latino male students. The findings of

the study were important as they supported the need for culturally relevant pedagogy to be a major component of school curriculum in order to meet the needs of all students.

Equitable Strategies

Teachers use strategies to facilitate student learning. Reciprocal peer tutoring is used when students work together in order work to accomplish a goal and provide support for one another (Muñoz-García, Moreda, Hernández-Sánchez, & Valiño, 2013). Literature circles are small-group settings in which students have a more intimate discussion about a chosen text, as opposed to a whole-class discussion. Many times, the text is self-selected and guiding questions are used to move the discussion (Lenters, 2014). Finally, the Think-Aloud strategy is used when the teacher wants students to explicitly understand a process—as in identifying cause and effect or multiplying fractions—and verbally explains the process step-by-step (Jackson, 2016).

Implementing equitable strategies has led to strengthening students' academic abilities (Goldenberg, 2013; Mack, 2012; Taylor, 2010). True equitable strategies value and acknowledge the struggles and contributions of marginalized communities. Using culture as a way of interpreting children's learning style is not an approach to which teachers are accustomed (Emdin, 2016). Students are judged by the cultural norms of the teacher and are expected to learn in the same way (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Educators must continually ask themselves if they are meeting the academic needs of every student in the classroom (Howard, 2013). Curricula choices let students know whether the knowledge they and their communities value has prestige within society (Chapman, 2013; Nieto, 2000; Jencks & Phillips, 2011).

Summary

Overall, this literature review explored the achievement gap of African American male students and the various factors affecting this student subgroup's learning challenges. Previous research studies have pointed out that learning gaps exist. The phenomenon was attributed to

factors such as quality of instruction implemented by teachers and the types of policies,

practices, and programs implemented by schools. Overall, the challenges confronting academic

abilities among African American males may be resolved by improving teachers' expectations

and strengthening school policies and programs intended to support this student subgroup.

Bodies of research examining African American male academic achievement (Butler et

al., 2009; Hughes, 2010; Rashid, 2009); equitable classroom strategies (Villa & Baptiste, 2014);

and teacher expectations correlation to students' academic achievement (Agee, 2004; Delpit,

1995) were accessible. A need remained for research regarding whether teachers' use of

equitable strategies influences their perception of African American male academic abilities.

Section 3: Methodology

The study design, the sample population, and how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted for the study are described in this section. The main purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how elementary school teachers describe their use of equitable strategies in teaching elementary African American male students, how these teachers describe the experience of teaching African American male students, and how they use equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students

Equitable classroom strategies were studied in order to determine whether the implementation of these practices improved teachers' beliefs concerning African American male academic abilities. I will explain in this section the use of case study as a suitable methodological choice for a qualitative case study. I will also discuss applicable literature associated with the methodology and summarize the design of this study.

Design: Qualitative Research Approach

Quantitative research focuses on developing knowledge through actions such as cause and effect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypotheses and questions, and the test of theories, while also emphasizing collecting descriptive data in natural settings using inductive thinking and focusing on understanding the subjects' point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003, 2012). Qualitative research requires a more focused evaluation of the subject(s) being studied due to extensive data collection and analysis. A qualitative case study allows the researcher to collect data through in-depth interviewing in order to investigate a contemporary phenomenon (Glesne, 2006; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Soy, 2006; Yin, 2014).

This was a qualitative case study. Using the case study method, a qualitative researcher seeks to understand events and behaviors from the participants' perspective. Qualitative research

may also allow for in-depth interviewing and facilitates the production of descriptive data, which can be articulated through words and/or pictures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003C1, 2012). The case study for this research project was bound by context— to study how elementary school teachers use equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students. A case study was utilized in order to methodically study individuals (Creswell, 2012).

Semistructured interviews were comprised of three categories: general questions about equitable classroom practice, teacher relationships with students, and academics. These three areas are aligned with scholarship documenting school capacities which foster student success (Butler et al., 2009; Hughes, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Rashid, 2009).

Numerous designs are associated with qualitative research—grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2006; Yin, 2014). Grounded theory uses firsthand information as a catalyst on which to base inferences in order to build a new theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2006). The grounded theory methodology emphasizes theory development as data are collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory was not chosen as a research methodology for this study because although rich description is vital in the methodology of grounded theory, it is not the main focus. More importantly, grounded theory was not chosen as a research methodology as I did not intend to build new theories as data was collected.

Phenomenology allows researchers to attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2012; Van Manen, 2014). A phenomenological methodology is not

being used for this study as it often requires studying a small number of participants through an extensive and prolonged process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2012; Van Manen, 2014). An ethnographic methodology seeks to interpret people's constructions of reality and identify patterns in their perspectives and behaviors (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2006; Yin, 2014). Ethnography was not chosen as a research methodology as ethnographic studies often require a prolonged period of time looking at the values of a specific group of people, often from a cultural perspective (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2006; Saldaña, 2013; Yin, 2014). Case study is a suitable qualitative research design for those interested in study process (Yin, 2014). Case study is the method being used for this study because it provides descriptive material to teachers' beliefs.

Role of the researcher

I have been an educator for 25 years and held various roles—teacher, assistant principal, principal, and university instructor. In the 3 years preceding the study, I worked in the academic field supporting public school personnel while conducting research and instructing preservice teachers. When I was introduced to equitable classroom practices and saw the implementation of these practices, I wanted to know if these strategies could be used to bolster teachers' beliefs about African American male academic abilities. I am no longer employed by the school district where the research took place. I have no direct relationship with the participants in a personal, teaching, or administrative capacity.

Case study researchers are prone to swaying toward supportive evidence only in order to substantiate a preconceived notion (Yin, 2014). A good case study researcher strives for the highest ethical standards. These may include, but is not limited to such as having a responsibility

to scholarly writing, avoiding falsehoods, and accepting responsibility for one's work (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). In order to further reduce bias, a case study researcher must be a good listener—not "trapped by existing ideologies or preconceptions" (Yin, 2014, p. 76). Sharing interview transcripts and/or drafts of the final study report with research participants enables the researcher to provide participants opportunities to clarify responses (Turner, 2010). Participants had access to transcribed notes and interpreted data – themes and explanations of the themes – from the semistructured interviews so they could substantiate that what was captured realistically represented their responses.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do elementary school teachers describe the experience of using equitable strategies?

2. How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies describe their experience of teaching African American male students?

3. Of those who use equitable strategies, what are elementary school teachers' views of African American male students' academic abilities?

4. How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students in learning?

Context of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how elementary school teachers described their use of equitable strategies in teaching elementary African American male students, how these teachers described the experience of teaching African American male students, and how they used equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage

African American male students. The term achievement gap is consistently used to describe the perceived lack of achievement of African American students as compared to their European American counterparts (Lewis et al., 2010; NCES, 2011; Williams & Noguera, 2010). However, using that term places the onus of failure on the student as many educators see the cultural and cognitive characteristics of African American males as deficiencies (Brown, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These historically marginalized students are made scapegoats for an education system that was never structured for their success (Cowan Pitre, 2014; Diamond, 2006; Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2005; Rashid, 2009). Ladson-Billings (2006) argued the term education debt may be more fitting. Education debt is defined as an unfulfilled promise that America owes to historically underserved and marginalized student groups (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Education debt shifts the conversation from student shaming to examining the mechanics of institutional racism (Chapman, 2013).

Research supports that high teacher expectation and meaningful relationships between teachers and students improves students' academic achievement (Brown, 2009; Cowan Pitre, 2014; King et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2010). Lowered teacher expectations have a significant impact on student achievement (Cowan Pitre, 2014; Lewis et al., 2010; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Equitable strategies incorporate best practices such as the development of caring relationships between educator and student (Elmore et al., 2006; Montgomery County Public Schools, 2009). The use of equitable strategies may help improve teacher expectations of African American male students, which in turn may improve these students' academic performance.

Setting

The setting of this study was two elementary schools. The schools for this study were drawn from a large suburban school district with a racially diverse student population. The

district is one of the nation's 20 largest school districts. It has more than 155,000 students who speak 138 languages from 157 countries collectively. The students in this school district attend more than 175 schools—including 133 elementary schools, 38 middle schools, and 25 high schools. The district has more than 22,000 employees (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2017b). Twenty percent of the households in this district have an annual income of $100,000 to $149,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2014b). More than 71,000 students attended elementary school in the district. The racial disaggregation of the school district is 21.4% Black non-Hispanic, 30.2% European American, non-Hispanic, 29.1% Hispanic or Latino, and 14.2% Asian (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2013). The district serves a diverse student population from suburban and rural communities.

Participants

The participants for this qualitative study were seven teachers from two schools in a large suburban school district in the Mid-Atlantic portion of the United States. For the purpose of this study, an elementary school is any school which houses grades Kindergarten to fifth grade. This school district has approximately 71,000 students enrolled at the elementary level. The district has over 11,000 classroom and resource teachers (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2017b). The first school in the study has a total of 587 students enrolled in grades Kindergarten to Fifth grade and 29 teachers (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2017a). The second school in the study has a total of 696 students enrolled in grades Kindergarten to fifth grade and 43 teachers (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2017c). Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014) was used for the selection of participants for this study. Participants were chosen because I either had first-hand knowledge or was informed by school administration that all teachers at each school site had participated in equity training provided by the school district.

E-mails were sent directly to school email addresses of teachers at both schools. E-mails were only sent to teachers who had participated in equity training provided by the school district. Of the 33 teachers at the first school, 27 had participated in district-wide equity training. Four of the 27 teachers who had participated in equity training provided by the school district agreed to participate in the study. There was a total of 40 teachers at the second school. Twenty-three of the 40 teachers at the second school had participated in district-wide equity training. Of these 23 teachers, initially four agreed to participate in the study. A week before the interviews were scheduled to take place, one of the intended study participants from the second school indicated she could not participate in the study due to a new job out of state. All interviews took place after school hours at a local public library or at participants' residences in order to not disrupt the school day. These two schools were chosen because the administration at each school has stressed faculty implementation of equitable strategies.

Ethical protection

I followed informed consent procedures established by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee at Walden University. Throughout the research process, I complied with Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB# 04-25-17-0059308) policies in implementing ethical practices. Approval to conduct research was based upon permission by Walden University's IRB and the participating teachers. In accordance with guidelines for protecting participants, I obtained consent from each teacher prior to the start of data collection.

Informed consent letters were prepared for teachers of the school. The consent letters described the participants' rights to voluntarily participate in this study and withdraw participation at any time, to ask questions, and to have confidentiality respected throughout the research project (Creswell, 2003). The consent letter informed prospective participants of the

purpose of the study, its significance and, most importantly, how their anonymity was protected. No research was conducted without signed letters of informed consent. Participants were informed that each person was given an identifying number. Research participants' names were not used.

All data are maintained in a locked file cabinet in my campus office. All electronic data were protected and password encrypted. All data collected will be destroyed 72 months after final dissertation approval. Further, all participants were informed that they would be included in the analysis of all data collected via member checking (Glesne, 2006). Member checking involves sharing interview transcripts, analytical notes, and/or drafts of the final study report with research participants to ensure their ideas and responses were represented accurately. Participants were provided with contact information in the event they needed additional clarification prior to consenting. Teachers were assured their information will not be shared with anyone in the school district.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study consisted of teacher interviews. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interviews allow a researcher control over questioning (Creswell, 2003). When collecting data through interview questions for a case study, a researcher must adhere to the interviewee's schedule and be willing to allow a fluid process as the interviewee may choose to not stick to the researcher's line of questions (Yin, 2014). This study utilized semistructured interviews as a source of data collection (refer to Appendix B for interview questions). Interviewing is an opportunity for closer researcher-participant interaction (Glesne, 2006). Semistructured interviews were conducted in order to gather data needed to gain understanding "of the phenomenon in question" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). The interviews took place

face-to-face (one-on-one and in-person) (Creswell, 2003). The open-ended questions I asked were intended to elicit the participants' views and opinions. Participants' responses were recorded and then transcribed to allow for coding.

Interviews are conducted to gather and/or exchange information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). If interview questions are not properly crafted, they will not elicit the type of responses needed to address the focus of the study. In some instances, participants may refuse to answer questions presented by researchers. Just as debilitating as research participants who refuse to answer interview questions are interview questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" response. Creswell (2003) noted that participants may be afraid of repercussions, feel inadequate due to lack of knowledge, perceive an answer violates privacy boundaries, or do not want to admit they are confused and fail to ask for clarification. In order to decrease apprehension, I allowed participants to choose the location in which they would be most comfortable discussing their experiences and perceptions.

Semistructured interviews allow access to "comparable data subjects, but lose the opportunity to understand how the subjects themselves structure the topic at hand" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 104). Semistructured interviews were chosen for this because such interviews are more focused. In semistructured interviews questions are pre-determined and probing is based on participants' responses and not indicative of the process.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis allowed for multiple perspectives to be represented in the final data analysis (Creswell, 2012). Data analysis for this case study was conducted by using the ATLAS.ti 7 for Windows program for category construction. I used analytic descriptive coding that "assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the

basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 262). Participants' responses to the interview questions were transcribed from the audio recording.

I used descriptive coding and category construction in order to preliminarily retrieve and categorize chunks of raw data. Preliminary categories were formed from descriptive coding to determine the most salient points from the transcribed data of the interviews. Major categories were identified in order to make a master list and begin the examination of data for patterns, themes, and relationships (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2013; Yin, 2014). Discrepant data such as unexpected themes and hard to classify themes (Creswell, 2012) were included in the final report as outliers.

Thematic data analysis was used to segment transcribed notes, apply codes, and formulate a set of non-overlapping themes (Creswell, 2012). I used cross-case analysis to compare themes among the study participants and I used Creswell's (2012). The six-step process for qualitative data analysis was used:

1. The researcher collects data.

2. The researcher prepares data for analysis.

3. The researcher reads through data.

4. The researcher codes data.

5. The researcher codes the text for themes to be used in the report.

6. The researcher codes the text for descriptions to be used in the report.

(Creswell, 2003, pp. 191 - 192). Discrepant data such as unexpected themes and hard to classify themes (Creswell, 2012) were included in the final report as outliers.

Trustworthiness

Validation of this case study occurred through three procedures:

1. Peer review and debriefing—external reflection and feedback on the case study's findings. One of my colleagues reviewed my findings in order to give feedback on the case study's findings. This particular colleague was chosen as she and I had worked on a previous data analysis project together.

2. Clarification of researcher bias—the researcher reflecting upon his/her subjectivity. I sought to continuously gauge my bias as to not make the findings of this case study personalized. I have an African American son currently attending public school in a suburban school district other than the one used for this study.

3. Member checking—sharing interview transcripts, analytical notes, and/or drafts of the final study report with research participants to ensure their ideas and responses are represented accurately. I shared interview transcript and notes with research participants. (Glesne, 2006; p. 252).

Researcher bias

In order to ensure objectivity during this study, I had to bracket opinions by not showing any type of facial expressions during the in-person interviews as participants responded to interview questions. In qualitative research, the researcher's role is to "discover and understand meaning of an experience" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 38). The primary researcher for this study was a university faculty member who has worked with public school educators for a number of years and is a former public school principal. I have no direct relationship with the participants in a teaching or administrative capacity.

Once I began to solidify themes for the research as data collection took place, I had to purposefully focus on the transcripts of the research participants in order to diminish bias. The

questions presented to the research participants were vetted through the dissertation chair and 2 of my faculty colleagues to help ensure the questions were not leading. Finally, during the interview process, I made sure to not comment in any way on the responses of the participants. The focus of the interviews was to gather the participants' insight without my undue influence.

As the sole researcher for this study, I engaged in reflexivity (Creswell, 2012; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Reflexivity is the process in which a researcher takes into consideration her or his personal thoughts, views, and/or beliefs which can potentially impact how she/he interprets the responses of research participants. I specifically engaged in endogenous reflexive practice (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) describe endogenous reflexive practice as "the ways in which the actions and understandings of the researcher contributes to the modes in which research practices are constituted" (p. 54). This was as evident in this study as I chose participant interviews as opposed to classroom observations. I wanted to ensure my bias did not influence the data collection process – which may have been an obstacle had I chosen to collect data via observation.

Mehra's research shows that personal beliefs and values influence a researcher's methodology and interpretation of data (2002). While I continually tried to self-monitor my assumptions and biases during the analysis of data for this study, I have to acknowledge this study has inherent limitations regarding analysis and synthesis (Phillips and Carr, 2014). There is also the issue of potential self-selection bias on the part of the participants – in regards to who was interested in the study, felt some sort of allegiance to the researcher, and had time to participate in the interview process (Loh, Tan, Lee, & Koh, 2016).

Summary

In Section 3, I justified the use of qualitative case study as means of data collection for this study. I provided an explanation of the research design by describing the qualitative aspects of the research methodology, the study's target population, and procedures that were used for collecting and analyzing the collected data. Trustworthiness and research bias were also included as components of Section 3, as they are integral to maintain the integrity of research. Section 4, contains information on data collection procedures, participant professional background in regards to the study's research questions, and data analysis results.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how elementary school teachers described their use of equitable strategies in teaching elementary African American male students, how these teachers described the experience of teaching African American male students, and how they used equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students. Many factors have an impact on teachers' perceived academic abilities of elementary African American male students - socioeconomic factors (Berliner, 2009); identification of educators' personal racial awareness and identity (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015); and culturally referenced or non-culturally referenced lessons (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011). Some educators blame African American male students and their families for the students' lack of academic ability (Emdin, 2016).

Researchers stated the need to increase the academic abilities of elementary African American male students in order to enhance their opportunity to enter and successfully matriculate at and graduate from post-secondary institutions (NCES, 2011), creating a stronger economic base for the student (Berliner, 2009). A better understanding of elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies and their perceptions of elementary African American male students will provide insight in how to strengthen the instructional strategies of these educators – with a specific focus on improving the academic abilities of elementary African American male students.

In this section, I present the findings from the case study of teachers who use equitable strategies and teach elementary African American males attending suburban schools.

Data Collection

In June 2017, I conducted interviews with seven participants. Teachers signed a consent form before participating in interviews. The interviews occurred over a 2-week period. Participants were given a choice of meeting in a public venue (i.e. public library with a private room) or their residence. Most interviews were conducted at participants' residences – as they indicated this was their preferred choice. One interview was conducted at a public library. Another interview was conducted in the library of a local university. All participant interviews were recorded and transcribed. Table 4 includes information regarding the number of years and grade levels research participants have taught, and whether they have held a position outside of the classroom.

Research participants for this study have taught all elementary level grades – Kindergarten to fifth grade. One research participant had experience teaching middle school and experience as a school administrator. In order to ensure confidentially of research participants' interview responses, codes were assigned as opposed to using the participants' actual names. None of the research participants were told their code in order to ensure further anonymity. Table 4 contains information regarding participants' professional experience in education.

Table 4

Participants in Semistructured Interviews

Participant	Years Taught	Grades Taught During Career	Held Position Other Than Teacher
D1— European American female	19	Grades 5, 6, 7, 8	Acting assistant principal
D2— European American female	19	K, Grades 1, 2	No
D3—African American female	29	Grades 1, 2, 3	No
D4— European American female	18	K, Grade 1	No
D5— European American female	13	K, Grade 1	No
D6— European American female	20	K, Grades 1, 3, 4, Reading specialist	No
D7— European American male	19	Grades 3, 4, 5	No

Participant D1 was a European American female whose career in education spans 19

years. She spent the beginning of her teaching tenure as a middle school teacher in a suburban

school system in Ohio. The majority of her career in education has been focused on instruction

of students at the middle school level – sixth-grade, seventh-grade, and eighth-grade. Participant

D1 also had 2 years of experience working as an acting assistant principal in an urban school

setting. At the time of the interview, Participant D1 was teaching at the intermediate level of

elementary school – fifth-grade.

Participant D2 was a European American female who has taught a total of 19 years. The

majority of her education career has been focused on instruction of students at the primary level

of elementary school – Kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade. Participant D2 began her

teaching career in a parochial school. At the time of the interview, Participant D2 was teaching at the primary level of elementary school – first-grade.

Participant D3 was an African American female who has been an educator for a total of 29 years. For the entire 29 years, Participant D3 has taught in the same suburban school district at the same school. She has taught first-grade, second-grade, and third-grade. At the time of the interview, Participant D3 was teaching at the primary level of elementary school – first-grade.

Participant D4 was is a European American female whose career in education spans 18 years. She began her career in education teaching pre-school in a rural area, before transitioning to a public school in a suburban school district. The majority of her education career has been focused on instruction of students at the primary level of elementary school – Kindergarten and first-grade. At the time of the interview, Participant D4 was teaching at the primary level of elementary school – Kindergarten.

Participant D5 was a European American female who has taught for 13 years. Like Participant D3, Participant D5 has taught in the same suburban school district. However, unlike Participant D3, Participant D5 has taught at several schools within the school district. Similar to Participant D4, the majority of Participant D5's education career has been focused on instruction of students at the primary level of elementary school – Kindergarten and first-grade. At the time of the interview, Participant D5 was teaching at the primary level of elementary school – first-grade.

Participant D6 was a European American female who has taught for 18 years. She was a career-changer and began her career in education teaching third-grade. Participant D6 has taught Kindergarten, first-grade, third-grade, and fourth-grade. She has also supported elementary

students as a Reading Initiative teacher and Reading Specialist. At the time of the interview, Participant D4 was teaching at the primary level of elementary school – Kindergarten.

Participant D7 was a European American male who has taught for 19 years. 19 years is the same length of time Participants D1 and D2 have been in education. Like Participant D6, Participant D7 was a career-changer and began his career in education teaching fourth-grade. Unlike the other research participants, Participant D7 has taught outside the continental United States. For a short period, he taught in Guam. Participant D7 has taught third-grade, fourth-grade, and fifth-grade. At the time of the interview, Participant D7 was teaching at the intermediate level of elementary school – fifth-grade.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this case study was conducted using analytic descriptive coding and category construction (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding and category construction in the margins of the transcribed data were implemented in order to preliminarily retrieve and categorize chunks of raw data. Major categories were identified in order to make a master list and begin the examination of data for patterns, themes, and relationships. Thematic analysis allowed for multiple perspectives to be represented in the final data analysis (Creswell, 2012).

The following themes emerged from the data analysis:

1. Teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing are paramount to students' success.

2. Teachers who receive PD struggle with monitoring the effectiveness of equitable strategies.

Results

During the interview process, research participants were provided with a reference sheet listing the 27 equitable strategies (Appendix A). As they reviewed the reference sheet,

participants were asked to describe 3 – 5 strategies they have used as part of their instructional

toolkit. Table 5 contains information regarding participants' self-identified implementation of

equitable strategies.

Table 5

Participants' Self-Identified Implementation of Equitable Strategies

Equitable Strategy	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
Practice 1 Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom				X			
Practice 2 Uses eye contact with high- and low-achieving students	X		X				X
Practice 3 Uses proximity with high- and low-achieving students equitably							
Practice 4 Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important	X		X	X			
Practice 5 Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion	X	X		X	X	X	
Practice 6 Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students							X
Practice 7 Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning						X	
Practice 8 Learns, uses, and displays some words in students' heritage language							
Practice 9 Models use of graphic organizers			X				
Practice 10 Uses class building and teambuilding activities to promote peer support for academic achievement		X				X	
Practice 11 Uses random response strategies		X		X			
Practice 12 Uses cooperative learning structures	X	X	X	X		X	
Practice 13 Structures heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning	X	X	X	X		X	
Practice 14 **Uses probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer**	X	X		X	X		
Practice 15 Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions	X	X	X		X	X	

(cont.) Table 5

Participants' Self-Identified Implementation of Equitable Strategies

Equitable Strategy	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
Practice 16 Seeks multiple perspectives							
Practice 17 Uses multiple approaches to consistently monitor students' understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Practice 18 Identifies students' current knowledge before instruction							
Practice 19 Uses students' real-life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives		X				X	
Practice 20 Uses Wait Time I and II	X		X	X			
Practice 21 Asks students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction							
Practice 22 Provides students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion				X		X	X
Practice 23 Gives students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance		X	X	X			
Practice 24 Provides multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard						X	
Practice 25 Explains and models positive self-talk							
Practice 26 Asks higher-order questions equitably of high- and low-achieving students	X			X		X	
Practice 27 Provides individual help to high- and low-achieving students				X			

(MCPS, 2009)

Theme 1 – As a result of the data analysis for this study, I learned teacher-to-student

relationships are nurturing are paramount to students' success. Researchers such as Villa and

Baptiste (2014), have shown there are enumerable aspects that foster nurturing teacher-to-student

relationships. The willingness to understand students on a personal level facilitates learning

(Royal & Gibson, 2017). An educators' ability to understand the impact a lower socio-economic status may have on academic abilities is also paramount (Williams & Noguera, 2010). Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) human development theory posits every child should have at least one adult advocate who supports and strengthens the formation of the child's interpersonal relationships. Bronfenbrenner's human development theory (1977, 1986) is directly aligned with Theme 1. Research participants commented on the importance of knowing students in a meaningful way in order to deliver instruction most aligned with students' needs.

Four participants discussed how they purposefully used room arrangement to meet the needs of students. Arranging the physical classroom space is most closely aligned with Practice 5 of the equitable strategies referenced for this study – Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion.

Participant D5 shared:

> The biggest place I would think in my classroom structure wise . . . probably the most beneficial for my African American males would be my centers because it gives them not only the chance to socialize; they have the option to be up and moving should they choose to instead of being in their seats to complete their work.

Participant D1 commented:

> Sure so they sit in - I switch my desks every quarter and I switch who the students are sitting by every quarter.
>
> They're always in a group of four to five students always and it is always a mixed group both racially and gender.

If it's a group of four I always put two boys, two girls. I just always have because I feel there's an importance in learning how to listen to each other even at that young age and the middle school age you know we don't always listen to someone of another gender.

Participant D6 shared and spoke specifically about arranging the classroom in order to meet the academic needs of African American male students:

Ok um so my um classroom is designed so that I have multiple spaces throughout the room and for movement. Whether those spaces are for math, whether they're for reading, I give the children the opportunity to move to their personal space for their if they feel they need to move away from their table.

I never put a child with their back to the to their resource whatever their resource is you know. What they need at that time it's much better for the child and I specifically seat children so that some children are head on they're you know they don't even have to turn left or right.

They're directly look paying or looking that way cause it's complex. It's complex to go from visual keeping that letter formation that word structure in your brain and then putting it from your brain down through your hand and on to the paper. For some it's a fluid motion and for some it's step by step. I try to give everyone an equitable opportunity for success.

They seem to feel very comfortable.

You know making sure again that the boys have choice. I find that I think I can say that I had to hold my African American boys I had to have more frequent check-ins. Now I'm not experienced enough to know if that's because they're African American boys or because of their home situation. I did have to have more frequent check-ins with them. It

wasn't all of my African American boys and it could be a maturity level. Giving them a little more scaffolding giving them a little more support. How's it going? You're on the right track, let's keep it going. My girls were so independent and my boys needed a little more hand holding.

Participant D2 said:

Um my class is set up um in 4 hexagon tables to facilitate cooperative learning. Um so they are I can group them in groups of 3 or I can group them in groups of 6. Um like the physical set up is such that it naturally lends itself to group learning also lends itself to a lot of socialization which is also not bad as long as it's focused on what we are talking about. Um not necessarily great at Sally's birthday party last weekend um but that happens too. Um I guess the structure depending on the structure of the lesson the lesson itself lends itself to facilitating that the collaborative nature.

My class is set up . . . in groups of three or I can group them in groups of six. The physical setup . . . naturally lends itself to group learning, also lends itself to a lot of socialization, which is also not bad as long as it's focused on what we are talking about.

All four of the participants who discussed how room arrangement meets the needs of students directly or indirectly spoke about how the purposeful physical arrangement of the room positively impacted students' social interactions. Whether it was the deliberate formation of groups of four or allowing students to have the autonomy to freely move about the classroom, these four educators realized the importance of using the physical arrangement of the room to promote socialization of students. Bronfenbrenner noted the importance of socialization through group play (1994). Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) also argued the critical role the school environment has on shaping a child's beliefs and behaviors. All of the research participants who

discussed how their classroom arrangement meets the needs of students were European American females.

There were 27 equitable classroom practices the participants for this study received professional development in regards to implementation (see Appendix A). It is important to note that only one practice – Practice 5: Arrange the classroom to accommodate discussion – emphasizes the physical arrangement of the classroom. Yet this practice was identified by more than half of the research participants as one they implemented with fidelity. This indicates that the four participants see the physical layout of their classroom as being paramount in regards to effective instructional practice.

The fact that the four participants who identified Practice 5 –arrange the classroom to accommodate discussion – means they value student voice and see themselves as facilitators of learning as opposed to the only person in the classroom with the most knowledge. Educators who are willing to arrange their classroom in order to promote and support student autonomy display a strong commitment to fostering strong teacher-to-student relationships.

Only one research participant – Participant D6 – shared her belief on the importance of kinesthetic movement in the classroom. Kinesthetic movement in the classroom as executed by students can be implied in Practice 17 – Uses multiple approaches to consistently monitor students' understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content. For example, an educator may have a student use motion to convey the meaning of a short reading passage, as opposed to responding verbally.

Participant D6 also shared her belief that establishing a classroom setting which allowed and supported the ability of students to visually track information around the classroom creates an optimal learning environment. Providing support for students to visually track information is

in tandem with equitable strategy Practice 7 – Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning. It should be noted that Participant D6 is the research participant with the widest range of experience (Kindergarten, Grades 1, 3, 4, reading specialist).

Four of the participants spoke of their practice of implementing aspects of cooperative learning in their classrooms. Participant D1 shared:

I purposefully plan for small-group activities with specific roles assigned. Anyway, they're always in a group of four to five students always and it is always a mixed group both racially and gender. They work together to get it done.

Participant D6 reported:

I teach them to coach each other. So if your math partner is coming to me for help—wait a minute . . . ask your partner that same question. Look at that. He knew there was another strategy you could use.

Participant D3 recounted:

So then I will have a student who is more capable work with a student that's not. And because the trust has already been established, then those attitudes and dispositions don't come up because they know that they're there to learn.

Participant D4 explained:

We did math changes this year. We talked about error analysis and proof place and just being able to respond to things. So . . . they can talk and hash out why is this answer correct.

But I tried to get it where there was always some kind of group so they could talk to each other.

The implementation of cooperative learning strategies is aligned with Practice 12 –

Uses cooperative learning structures and Practice 13 – Structures heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning. An educator's willingness to remove himself/herself from the focal point of instruction in order to allow and support student voice and autonomy in the classroom again speaks to the theme of teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing being paramount to students' success (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011). Educators willing to serve in the capacity of facilitators of knowledge as opposed to givers of knowledge tend to create learning environments where student voice is welcomed and respected (Devine, Fahie, & McGillicuddy, 2013). This act encourages and supports students being valued as critical thinkers.

For the four research participants who identified cooperative learning as a key to good instruction, my deeper analysis focused on the fact that what the research participants consider cooperative learning really appears to be stronger academic students supporting other students (who may not be as strong academically) in the classroom. Never is there any talk of students supporting each other in higher level thinking (Missett, Brunner, Callahan, Moon, & Azano, 2014). The participants mainly spoke about students who may have difficulty with the assigned activity being able to seek help from peers. This aspect of the research is of particular interest, as cooperative learning is a cornerstone of learning – especially in the elementary grades (Slavin, 2015). The responding participants who mentioned cooperative learning during their interview teach the spectrum of K – 5 grades and one of the respondents held an administrative role.

Most of the research participants spoke about the ways in which they differentiate instruction in order to support the academic needs of students.

Participant D2 said:

> There's an error analysis station. There's um a practice plaza where they're practicing
>
> current skills or past skills. Um proof place where they have to prove their work in

writing or with manipulatives. Error analysis and then I usually have problem solving

station and then a teacher station and that's where I do the differentiated instruction is

usually through my teacher station.

Participant D5 stated:

Whether it's the differentiating the instruction or gathering materials and resources. Or

even just planning the use of some of the technology pieces that I'm expected to be using.

These are strategies I use for students.

Participant D3 shared:

Um I have centers that [sic] differentiated ok. And the differentiation depends on you

know what their ability is.

Participant D4 said:

I have to show up at work probably an hour and a half before my students do. Which is at

least an hour before my contract time in order to ensure that I have everything I need

ready to reach all of my kids. Whether it's the differentiating the instruction or gathering

materials and resources.

Participant D7 share:

I believe that you know education should be something that is available to all students. I

believe that the curriculum should be – that all students should have an opportunity to be

successful you know that despite the curriculum that things should be kinda differentiated

to reach the individual child.

Differentiating instruction in order to support the academic needs of students evolved as a

sub theme for Theme 1 as participants described differentiation as being germane to good

instruction. Practice 17 – Uses multiple approaches to consistently monitor students'

understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content is in direct correlation with differentiation. Participant D7 was the only participant who spoke specifically about differentiating instruction in regards to making learning accessible to students.

Differentiation of instruction can occur in four ways: process, content, product, and environment (Tomlinson, 2014). Differentiation of instruction by process focuses on how students process knowledge through the understanding and integration of information presented (Tomlinson, 2000). An example of differentiation of instruction by process can occur when a teacher takes a learning style inventory at the beginning of the school year. Learning style inventories contain items which help the teacher determine if the student is a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner. For example, if a teacher conducts a data analysis of the learning style inventory and discovers five students are kinesthetic learners, he may choose to differentiate by process by allowing these students more physical movement around the class during seatwork. The same learning style inventory may reveal to the teacher twelve students are visual learners. The teacher may choose to differentiate by process by allowing these students to use sticky notes or picture cues when annotating a text.

The first step in differentiating instruction by content occurs when a teacher administers a diagnostic assessment in order to uncover what students already know and still need to learn in regards to a specific unit, topic and/or skill (Tomlinson, et. al., 2003). The next step in differentiating instruction by content occurs when the teacher conducts a data analysis of the diagnostic assessment in order to determine student's learning needs and goals (Tomlinson, 2000). For example, a third grade teacher may notice that 80% of her math students did not master the second grade math goals in regards to multiplication. As a component of differentiating instruction by content, when teaching the third grade math multiplication math

goals, the teacher may choose to pull a smaller group comprised of the 80% of math students who did not master the second grade multiplication math goals. These students receive the support in mastering the second grade multiplication math goals. The content for this group of students was differentiated as they received second grade and third grade math instruction, as opposed to receiving just third grade math instruction as the rest of the students in the class.

Differentiating by product allows a student to demonstrate his/her knowledge in a modality that best fits his/her learning needs (Tomlinson, 1999). If a student has identified as a visual learner, he/she may be allowed and encouraged to create a pictorial representation of a chapter summary as opposed to a written report. A student who has identified as a kinesthetic learner may be able to perform a physical interpretation of the same chapter summary. Finally, a student who has identified as an auditory learner may be allowed to write and perform a short rap or song of the same chapter summary. The emphasis is placed on the student being able to demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge in a modality that best fits his/her learning needs.

Differentiating by environment focuses on the physical arrangement of the classroom and the physical needs of some of the students in the class (Tomlinson, 2000). A teacher may choose to differentiate by environment by arranging the classroom is such a way that quiet spaces are easily accessible and available to students who may need reduced distractions while they work. However a teacher decides to differentiate, the concept of differentiation speaks directly the theme of teacher-to-student relationships as being paramount to students' success. An educator willing to diagnose and analyze student learning needs is one component of successful instruction. An educator willing to diagnose, analyze and incorporate differentiated instruction in order to support student learning is an exemplar of how educators should approach teaching and learning in order to ensure the success of students.

During the interview process, three of the participants shared their belief about having a love for their students. This concept is most closely aligned with equitable strategy Practice 4 – Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important.

Participant D1 shared:

My classroom is definitely very love centered. I am firm, but loving.

Participant D3 stated:

I love children and I love little ones.

Participant D4 stated:

They just need that little - they need to know that they're loved. And I think that's my ultimate job is to teach them that they are loved and cared for and that you actually want the best for them as do other people.

The three research participants who shared they had a love for their students were all female and two of the three taught at the primary level (Kindergarten to second grade). None of the participants spoke intimately about how they demonstrated love for their students in the classroom. While one could argue all 27 equitable classroom practices speak to having a love for students since the emphasis of the practices is to attend to students' learning needs, others may surmise that none of the strategies directly speak to an increased fondness regarding teachers who implement equitable strategies and the students they instruct. All three of the research participants who shared they have a love for their students simply made broad, generalized statements.

Three of the participants from the study shared their practice of having the teacher serve as a facilitator of knowledge. This concept is most closely aligned with Practice 14 – Uses probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer. Participant D4 stated:

> I would try to sit back and just encourage them to call on somebody, call on somebody. And then that got them talking and sharing and listening to each other instead of just waiting for me to respond to them.

Participant D5 recounted:

> The students are engaging with each other as well as me there—specifically to help guide the conversations and to keep them on task and pose . . . higher-level questions to make them think a little bit deeper.

Participant D1 shared:

> I believe that my role as teacher is to facilitate learning.

All of these practices support the notion of teacher serving in the role of facilitator of learning as the onus of knowledge acquisition is placed on the students. Educator who view students as thinkers are more apt to view themselves as facilitators of the expertise in the classroom. Allowing and supporting student self-sufficiency in the classroom supports the theme of teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing being paramount to students' success.

The three research participants who believed the teacher should serve as a facilitator of knowledge were all female and two of the three taught at the primary level (Kindergarten to second grade). None of the research participants who spoke to being facilitators of knowledge provided concrete examples of how the facilitation process looks in her classroom (Devine, Fahie & McGillicuddy, 2013).

When participants spoke about their educational philosophy, three participants mentioned their belief of every child being able to learn. Participant D1 noted:

> My belief is truly that every child can succeed. I think that if you set high expectations
> children rise to the expectations that you set. And I think that the only way to get them
> there is to get to know who they are as people support them through their struggles and
> tell them that they can.

Participant D5 shared:

> All students should have equal opportunities to engage in meaningful learning
> experiences in an environment where they feel cared for, welcomed, and have a
> relationship with their teacher.

Participant D3 stated:

> All children can learn. Children are flowers in a garden. You have to help them to be all
> that they can be by removing weeds that are around them that they can get so easily
> entangled with. And to weed that garden, it takes care. It takes dedication.

Practice 15 –Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions has a direct relationship to the belief that every child can learn, as the implication is the educator has the understanding that every students' thoughts and ideas are important to the class community. The belief that every child is able to learn is closely aligned with Bronfenbrenner's and Ladson-Billings' theories addressing adults advocating on the behalf of students. Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986), 1994 human development theory argues every child should have at least one adult advocate in his/her formative years. Ladson-Billings' research promotes the development of caring relationships for all students regardless of race (2006, 2011, 2013).

Theme 2 —Teachers who received professional development focused on equitable strategies were able to give a definition for culturally relevant pedagogy and explain how they incorporated equitable practices in their instruction. Ladson-Billings identified three areas for teachers who strive to deliver culturally-relevant pedagogy to students: "academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness" (2014, p. 75). Students from marginalized populations are excluded when European American teachers make references to issues mainly of interest to European American audiences (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Mack, 2012). Critical race theory in education challenges macro and micro forms of racism perpetrated through the approval and implementation of traditional school curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Four of the seven research participants were able to share their definition of culturally relevant pedagogy. Participant D1 said:

> They don't have culture relevant texts available to them. Their word problems are not culturally relevant. I think that in order to reach a child effectively, the more culture relevant you are, the more chance you have of getting them because it's something that they can connect to and when you start making connections to your real life in your education, it just works out better.

Participant D4 stated:

> I think understanding where everyone comes from is important. Um and understanding how you can reach them to make their life better. Um I think when we're talking about all that all the culturally responsive lessons that we learn sometimes you – one thing I struggle with is I think my certain values are important but not everyone agrees on those values and struggling to teach that this is important but then also understanding why they don't value it – maybe they value something else.

Participant D5 noted:

> Culturally relevant pedagogy – um we've been doing so much study on this within my
> school system and in my building and it's still kind of hard for me to narrow it down in to
> my own words. But to make it culturally – like what I am doing for my kids to make it
> culturally relevant I need to know about them. I need to know about their families. I need
> to know about their individual cultures and how that collectively builds our classroom
> culture. So that I can make them all feel included and so that I myself can make sure that
> um, I'm presenting instruction that is accessible for them.

Participant D6 said:

> Um culturally relevant, so making sure that I validate, recognize, validate, embrace the
> cultures my children are bringing to my classroom.

Participant D7 explained:

> I believe that the curriculum should represent all cultures and should um reflect an
> understanding of and a respect of you know people from – that have different opinions.
> Whether they're from different cultures or different you know backgrounds. Um I just
> believe that there should be – that people should, not necessarily not everyone has to agree
> but everyone has to respect the idea that everyone has different opinions and different
> outlook of different things. And you might not agree 100% but that doesn't make the other
> person wrong. Um so I just believe that it should – you know the curriculum and the way
> things are done in school procedurally and everything should kind of encompass
> everybody. Just to encompass the idea that you're teaching a diverse population.

Participant D2 spoke specifically to the struggle of defining culturally relevant pedagogy:

Well, I guess if I had better training [chuckles], I would know exactly what I'm doing that

is culturally relevant. Um, I try to respect where all of my kids are coming from.

Even though the local school system had provided district-wide professional development

to all school-district teachers, many of the research participants still struggled to provide a

working and internalized definition for culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994,

2006, 2011, 2013, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The educators were able to give a

general overview of what they thought was culturally relevant pedagogy and how they delivered

culturally relevant instruction in their classrooms. In regards to strategies, participants simply

identified strategies (from the list in their possession – see Appendix A) without providing

further information on how they implemented the strategies in their classroom.   The fact that

teachers who received professional development focused on equitable strategies were able to

give a definition for culturally relevant pedagogy and explain how they incorporated equitable

practices in their instruction was paramount. It helps support that some aspects of the district-

wide professional development was effective for some of the teachers in the district, as they were

able to give a personal definition of culturally relevant pedagogy.

When asked, what it is like to use equitable strategies with African American male

students most of the research participants were able to give a clear explanation of how their use

of this strategy impacted African American males in their classroom. Participant D1 mentioned:

So what I have noticed is that number one they're more willing to participate.

I will say that I have seen an increased performance from my low performing students then

I ever did not using equitable practices or at least not being more intentional with my

equitable practices. They're just more relaxed. They feel that they have – everybody has a

voice – and everyone's voice matters and that's really what they come away with.

I do my best. It's not always easy, because not everything that's culturally relevant is approved or looked highly upon. And so I look for texts that connect to kids. For example, while I've been teaching 5th grade it's the first time I've had the opportunity to teach reading. And so I've looked for texts, like I taught *Roll of Thunder*. I've taught *Watsons go to Birmingham* and I don't avoid the tough conversations. I think sometimes having the tough conversations is just as important for the kids as it is for you. As an educator I think you know you can't sugar coat things . . . . You have to be in the moment with the children and do what they need you to do, which is be their support system.

Participant D5 shared:

Um based on my experience, I need to provide more opportunities for them to move, for them to become socially engaged with the content and provided opportunities for them to be hands on with things.

Participant D3 explained:

Um my African American students and I have, my males if there is intrinsic motivation in them then they will they welcome it.

And that's where in some cases, in some cases not all cases the equitable practices can work.

Participant D4 mentioned:

So I had six African American boys in the class this year. And the two with special needs had preferential seating right in front of me.

Um using equitable strategies with them, I had to because they were all they were all great kids I had such a great class this year. But they were also the ones that would have just sat

there with their - cause I have my learning position hands and they would have just sat there and stared at me and not have ever answered anything if I didn't ask them.

Participant D6 shared:

It is like smiles and sunshine and enthusiasm.

All four of the participants who described to the practice of using equitable strategies with African American male students spoke about how the implementation of the equitable strategies appeared to improve the engagement of African American males in the classroom setting. None of the participants provided insight into whether or not they viewed the implementation of the equitable strategies as having a positive impact on African American males' academic abilities.

Two research participants spoke about not doing anything different instructionally in regards to the use of equitable strategies with African American male students.

Participant D2 shared:

Hmm well to be honest I don't know that I have spoken, I haven't focused specifically on African American males or the effect of using them on that targeted group.

Participant D7 stated:

I feel like when working with African American male students um I feel like that within the classroom – like the way that I kind of approach everything I think I feel like I kind of send this message that like all kids are going to be treated the same.

Participant D7 shared that he did not do anything different in regards to equitable strategies and African American males, and spoke about his use of culturally relevant pedagogy:

Um I really do make an effort, even if the curriculum does not call for it. I really do make an effort to make sure that what we're doing in school represents …the culture within your

classroom. But I try to make sure it's culturally diverse, even if I don't have that particular culture or that you know a kid who represents that culture in my classroom. I try to make sure I'm pulling that person in to the classroom. Whether it's you know like a belief system or just kind of representing them you know within illustrations or whatever the case may be.

Three of the research participants were able to expound on how they implemented the district-wide and/or school-level professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies. During the interview process, Participant D2 noted:

The most helpful training we had was the last staff meeting of this year. Where we looked at how different races perceive um different interactions. And how um it – primality it looked at Latin families African American and White. And how they view interactions differently. And that truly was – like I could look at my class and say, that's why that kid does that all the time (chuckles). And it it honestly it helped me because when I had a kid who was telling me a tale that was 3 minutes long to give a 30 second answer (chuckles) I knew why he was doing that. And I didn't cut him off and go give me the answer. Like alright. Like get to the point. There was meaning behind that training for me.

Participant D1 spoke to participating in a school-level equity training with a predominantly European American teaching staff serving students from marginalized populations:

We had to do our racial profile—which really was for us to think about, to reflect about how we have encountered different racial experiences throughout our lives. And you know, I currently work in a building where the majority of the staff is White. And no one wanted to go. Everyone was complaining they didn't understand the purpose.

Participant D4 recounted:

> We have been doing staff development twice a month and one of them is devoted to
> culturally responsive practices and teaching . . . just learning about different cultures and
> what we think is right is not always what the world thinks is right and how do we teach in
> that kind of community?

All of the participants interviewed were able to discuss how they used culturally relevant pedagogy and incorporated equitable practices into their instruction. Most of the research participants were able to give a clear explanation when asked what it was like to use equitable strategies with African American male students. Four of the seven research participants were able to share their definition of culturally relevant pedagogy. Finally, some research participants were able to expound on district-wide and/or school-level professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies.

Summary

With regard to the first research question—How do elementary school teachers describe the experience of using equitable strategies—many of the study's research participants were able to expound on the district-wide professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies, yet none of the participants clearly explained how the use of equitable strategies impacted student achievement. For the third research question—What views do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies have of African American male students' academic abilities—elementary school teachers who were interviewed for this case study unilaterally stated that they believed all children can learn. Finally, for the fourth research question—How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students in learning—two of the seven

participants spoke specifically to the struggles of using culturally relevant pedagogy. Although this is an outlier, it is important for two reasons: (a) some teachers do not understand the importance of employing culturally relevant pedagogy; and (b) various school stakeholders do not see the need to embed culturally relevant pedagogy as part of the school curricula. In Section 5, I will discuss interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Readers of this research will be able to discern whether the findings for this case study are transferable to other suburban school teachers who employ equitable strategies and instruct elementary African American male students. Future research may involve the study of multiple cases in order to increase transferability. To ensure dependability, I used detailed descriptions of research methods and provided extensive, researcher-transcribed interview notes.

Section 5: Discussion

Introduction

The conceptual framework for this study consists of two theories – Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development and Ladson-Billing's and Tate's theory of critical race theory in education. Bronfenbrenner's theory posits five critical processes for positive human development. The theory's first tenet of positive human development is part of the conceptual framework for this study as it champions the formation and sustainment of a mutually respectful and nurturing relationship in which the educator serves in a role of advocacy for the student.

One of the goals of critical race theory in education is to examine the relationship of race, class, and gender in educational settings to historical and local contexts. Critical race theory in education is an appropriate theoretical lens for this study as it examines how students' everyday experiences with educational institutional racism (that creates and sustains policies, procedures, and rules) serve as a barrier to their academic success.

Theme 1— teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing are paramount to students' success — aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1986) human development theory that posits every child should have at least one adult advocate who supports and strengthens the formation of the child's interpersonal relationships. Theme 2 — Teachers who received professional development focused on equitable strategies were able to give a definition for culturally relevant pedagogy and explain how they incorporated equitable practices in their instruction—is aligned with critical race theory in education. Critical race theory in education examines how students' everyday experiences with educational institutional racism—that creates and sustains policies, procedures, and rules working against the sustained academic achievement of marginalized

students—serves as a barrier (Ladson-Billings & Tate). For the purpose of this study, discrepant data are any data with two or fewer responses from participants (Creswell, 2012).

Teachers who use culturally responsive pedagogy recognize and utilize students' cultures in order to enhance instruction and promote the maximum achievement possible (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011). With the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy, learning and teaching are authentic (Klotz, 2006). Teachers intentionally and unintentionally draw from their cultural toolkits to develop strategies for how to interact with students (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). Equitable strategies are part of this cultural toolkit.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how elementary school teachers describe their use of equitable strategies in teaching elementary African American male students, how these teachers describe the experience of teaching African American male students, and how they use equitable strategies to shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students. Emdin (2016) found educators often blame African American male students and their families for the students' lack of academic ability. Yet researchers have ascertained students' academic abilities increase when educators consistently hold high expectations for all students and put supports in place to help students meet those expectations (Howard, 2013). Consequently, students experiencing greater academic ability enhance their opportunity to enter and successfully matriculate and graduate post-secondary institutions (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011), creating a stronger economic base for the student (Berliner, 2009).

To answer the essential question of how teachers who use equitable strategies perceive the academic abilities of elementary African American male students, supporting research questions were crafted:

1. How do elementary school teachers describe the experience of using equitable strategies?

2. How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies describe the experience of teaching African American male students?

3. What views do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies have of African American male students' academic abilities?

4. How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students in learning?

The data collection process for this study consisted of teacher interviews. Semistructured interviews were conducted in order to gather data needed to gain understanding "of the phenomenon in question" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). All interviews took place face-to-face. The open-ended questions I asked were intended to elicit the participants' views and opinions. Participants' responses were recorded and then transcribed to allow for coding.

Summary of Findings

Theme 1 — Teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing are paramount to students' success.

All of the research participants commented on the importance of knowing African American male students in a meaningful way in order to deliver instruction most aligned with those students' academic abilities in order to increase student achievement. While many participants spoke to the value of cooperative learning in supporting the needs of students; others simply briefly mentioned the concept of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is essential to nurturing teacher-student relationships as building a sense of community and connectivity in the classroom empowers students. Teachers are to be aware of students who learn best in

collective groups while simultaneously acknowledging the learning styles of students who prefer to work independently.

Most of the research participants spoke about the need to differentiate instruction in order to support the academic needs of African American male students. Most participants spoke either directly or indirectly to having a "love" for their students. Four of the seven participants saw the teacher serving as a facilitator of knowledge as a key component of how teachers use equitable strategies.

Theme 2 — Teachers who received professional development focused on equitable strategies were able to give a definition for culturally relevant pedagogy and explain how they incorporated equitable practices in their instruction.

Participants shared that they purposefully found ways to incorporate equitable strategies and culturally relevant pedagogy into their teaching repertoire. A few participants spoke specifically to the struggles of using culturally relevant pedagogy. Many of the research participants were able to expound on the district-wide professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies. Some of the study's research participants were able to expound on the district-wide professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies. None of the participants clearly explained how the use of equitable strategies impacted student achievement.

The data collected illustrated research participants implemented a considerable amount of equitable strategies in their classrooms. Participants for this study received professional development indirectly focused on the idea that every child can learn. Practice 15 suggests the teacher acknowledge all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions. Over half of the research participants – five to be exact – reported acknowledging all students' comments,

responses, questions, and contributions and part of their instructional toolkit. Practice four recommends the teacher use body language, gestures and expressions to convey a message that all student's questions and opinions are important. Three participants responded in the affirmative in regards to using Practice four in their instruction. Practice three calls for teachers to use proximity with high and low achieving students. Only three participants reported using Practice three in their classroom. Practice two suggests teachers use eye contact with high- and low-achieving students. Three participants responded that they used Practice two as part of their instruction.

These four practices indirectly focus on the idea that every child can learn as the emphasis is placed on the value of every student having ownership in the learning taking place in the classroom. The three research participants who stated every child is able to learn were females. One of the respondents held an administrative role, while the other three teach grades K – 5. None of the respondents explained how they specifically measure a student's ability to learn.

Two of the equitable classroom strategies used as a reference for this study focused on kinesthetic movement of the teacher as opposed to incorporating kinesthetic movement for students into instruction for the benefit of students. Practice three calls for teachers to use proximity with high and low achieving students. Practice three requires kinesthetic movement of the teacher as he/she moves around the classroom ensuring she has proximity with all students and not just those students the teacher perceives as high achieving. Practice four recommends the teacher use body language, gestures and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important.

Four equitable classroom practices referenced in this study directly or indirectly focused on the incorporation of cooperative learning into instructional practice. Practice 12 highlights the

teacher's use of cooperative learning structures such as Think-Pair-Share, Jigsaw, and Partner A and B. Five research participants (D1, D2, D3, D4, and D6) stated they used cooperative learning structures in their class environments. The same five participants stated they implemented Practice 13 which focuses on the teacher's structuring of heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning. Practice 10 calls on the teacher to use class building and team building activities to promote peer support for academic achievement. Only two research participants responded that they used class building and team building activities to promote peer support.

Practice five focuses on the teacher arranging the classroom to accommodate discussion. Practice five calls on the teacher to arrange the classroom to accommodate discussion – teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher. Five research participants (D1, D2, D4, D5, and D6) stated they arranged their classroom to accommodate student-to-student and teacher-to-student discussion. Educators willing to allow and support student voice and autonomy in the classroom supports the theme of teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing being paramount to students' success. When an educator views students are thinkers and not just empty vessels to be filled with the particular set of knowledge that particular educator possesses; a reciprocal relationship is established in who determines what knowledge is and how it is acquired.

Practices 23 and 24 also work in partnership. Practices 23 suggests teachers give students effective specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance. Three participant responded they provide students with oral and written feedback. Practice 24 recommends teachers provide students with multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard. Only participant D5 reported she provided students with multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work.

Four equitable classroom practices used as a reference for this study focused on the idea of incorporating students' cultural experience into instruction. Practice one suggests the teacher welcome students by name as they enter the classroom. This is especially important as for many students, their name is the only aspect of themselves that they own outright. Taking the time to learn and correctly pronounce students' names is a sign of respect. Only participant D4 reported she welcomed students by name as they entered the classroom. Practice six calls for the teacher to ensure bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students. It is key that more than one perspective is validated in the classroom. D7 was the only research participant to report he ensured the visuals in his classroom (i.e. bulletin boards, displays, and instructional materials) reflected the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of his student. Practice 19 calls for the teacher to use students' real life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives. This allows to transfer cultural context to academic endeavors in order to enhance their success in the classroom. Participants D2 and D6 reported they used students' real life experiences to make connections.

Overall, research participants were able to identify 22 equitable strategies they used in the classroom. The equitable strategies not identified as being implemented by any of the participants were: Practice 8 – Learns, uses, and displays some words in students' heritage language; Practice 16 – Seeks multiple perspectives; Practice 18 – Identifies students' current knowledge before instruction; Practice 21 – Asks students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction; and, Practice 25 – Explains and models positive self-talk. The data supports that teachers who received professional development focused on equitable strategies were able to

give a definition for culturally relevant pedagogy and explain how they incorporated equitable

practices in their instruction.

Interpretation of Findings

Much consideration and study has been given to how institutional racism impacts daily

life. With the tenets of *Brown v. Board of Education* and other civil rights actions intended to

support and empower marginalized communities, some had hopes for a post-racial America

(Hill, 2016). This has been particularly true in the realm of education.

The two theories providing the conceptual framework for this study were

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) human development theory and critical race theory in education

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).The justification for using these theories was that

Bronfenbrenner's and Ladson-Billings' theories address adults advocating on the behalf of

students. Data analysis resulted in two themes being for this study. Theme 1—nurturing teacher-

to-student relationships are paramount to students' success—aligns with Bronfenbrenner's

(1986) human development theory that posits every child should have at least one adult advocate

who supports and strengthens the formation of the child's interpersonal relationships. Theme 2 –

Teachers who received professional development focused on equitable strategies were able to

give a definition for culturally relevant pedagogy and explain how they incorporated equitable

practices in their instruction. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Theme 1— teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing are paramount to students'

success —focuses on the work that has been implemented in regards to helping teachers change

their pedagogical approaches in ways that are more consistent with the cultures of their students.

Teachers able to address education debt have positive relationships with students (Cole, 2008),

study cultural differences and understand how to apply their knowledge in order to use a range of

strategies to reach diverse learners (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Teachers who employ

culturally-responsive pedagogy strategies in the classroom, understand the significance of bringing examples of African American achievers into the classroom (Howard, 2010). The results of this study support the practice of teachers building meaningful and authentic relationships with elementary African American male students in order to improve the educational experience of these students.

Theme 2 – Teachers who received professional development focused on equitable strategies were able to give a definition for culturally relevant pedagogy and explain how they incorporated equitable practices in their instruction – supports the need to have a tool to monitor whether the implementation of equitable strategies has a positive impact on the academic abilities of elementary African American male students. Researchers claimed culturally relevant pedagogy validated and affirmed the struggles and contributions of marginalized cultures (Gay, 2000; Villa, 2014). Zhbanova et al. (2015) conducted a study with eight first- and second-grade students who were identified as potentially gifted in order to answer whether creative minority students could perform as well as their gifted-identified non-minority peers. The researchers found two African American students were identified as gifted by their teachers.

Bank's (2015) qualitative study examined how preservice teachers at a historically Black college or university viewed male students through the lenses of race, gender and limited physical ability. The result of the study showed preservice teachers were more willing to find inclusive ways to incorporate curricular and instructional choices into their practice in regards to African American males facing physical limitations The findings of Bank's (2015) qualitative study are most closely aligned with the Theme 1 of this study.

Theme 1 of this study is – teacher-to-student relationships that are nurturing are paramount to students' success. Bank's (2015) study found research participants took a more

holistic approach in regards to how to interact with African American males with disabilities as opposed to making judgements about students based on clothing choices or whether a student was in a wheelchair due to gun violence, research. This is closely aligned to building a nurturing teacher-to-student relationship as the participants in the Banks study were more apt to make individual judgments as opposed to broad generalizations. The willingness to view students are individuals as opposed to members of a larger group was important to building nurturing relationships.

Limitations of Study

Case studies have inherent limitations. Limitations of case studies include—but are not limited to— credibility, dependability and transferability (Laureate, 2013). Credibility of a case study entail several components. One of these components is triangulation. Triangulation for this study was the use of seven research participants as multiple data sources. The research participants for this study were provided with periodic updates of the transcription process and given a copy of their transcribed interview notes to review and give final approval of the interview note contents. Allowing research participants to review and approve interview note contents supports a third component of credibility – member verification. Peer review is different from member verification. Peer review for this case study was conducted as my colleague reviewed my findings to provide feedback. Dependability for this study was accomplished via an audit trail of research journals and peer review. Transferability of this case study may not be achieved due to the small participant sample.

I can only offer broad recommendations for educators and policymaker as to how educators' implementation of equitable strategies impact the academic abilities of elementary African American males attending suburban public elementary schools. My research was limited

to two schools in a district with over 100 elementary schools. Since no middle, high, urban, rural, parochial, or private schools were included in the study, it would be difficult to apply the findings of this study to all schools.

Researcher bias

In order to establish and make certain objectivity was consistent throughout the interview process, the process of nullifying personal views and opinions was optimal (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). As the researcher for this case study, I am the mother of an African American son who attended a suburban elementary school as recently as 2014 and a former administrator of three suburban elementary schools in the school district where the study took place. I worked diligently to make sure no leading questions were asked and all responses for participants were neither validated nor invalidated during the interview process. Baxter and Jack (2008) found that research participants feel inclined to respond in a particular way or altogether change their responses if the researcher presenting questions fails to dampen or hide his/her biases during the interview process. Having research participants transcript check allowed them to provide clarification or rebuttal. This is essential to making sure researcher bias is once again regulated during the data collection and data analysis process.

Recommendations

The recommendation is that this study be replicated on a broader scale with (a) a larger sampling of teachers interviewed; (b) classroom observations, and (c) teacher surveys. A larger sampling is needed in order to gather a more accurate analysis of teacher perceptions of the academic abilities of elementary African American male students. A broader replication of this study would be conducive to a more in-depth data analysis. Classroom observations would provide researchers with a more accurate and detailed account of the equitable strategies that teachers implement, which would have a significant impact on the data collected as there would

be an actual representation of implemented equitable strategies as opposed to self-reporting by teachers. Finally, teacher surveys are needed to elicit more honest answers from teachers. Face-to-face interviews may compel some educators to provide responses that they think a researcher is looking for, as opposed to their true beliefs.

Implications

The feedback from educators in suburban schools regarding the implementation of equitable strategies and the impact on the teachers' perceived academic abilities of African American males is a topic needing further research. The information contained in this study serves not only as a reflective tool for suburban school districts requiring the use of equitable strategies, but also as a template for next steps in order for school systems to work strategically and continuously to eradicate the systems of oppression apparent in current education systems.

The findings of this study may provide school stakeholders with the strategies needed to develop, implement, and sustain learning environments conducive to supporting and improving the academic abilities of elementary African American males, thus constructing positive social change. Particular emphasis should be given to introducing and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies with teacher interns. The foundation for teachers to understand the myriad needs of the children whom they will instruct should begin before they become teachers of record. The infusion of culturally relevant pedagogy and equitable strategies into collegiate education programs for preservice teachers is vital for the success of all students. Addressing and working against this mindset would directly benefit elementary African American male students and other students on a global level.

For this study I chose to use a case study method. After numerous rounds of edits and self-reflection, I am finding my data analysis style and writing process is not the best fit for case

study analysis which calls for "rich, thick descriptions". I am currently working on co-writing an article with a professor at my institution and she mentioned I really am a qualitative type of researcher (which struck me as a little odd). I have tended to shy away from anything numerical my ENTIRE life. I have learned through this process of writing my dissertation is that I am more aligned with quantitative methods as opposed to qualitative methods.

Conclusion

In order to support and increase the academic abilities of African American males, continuous analysis must occur to identify successful strategies for this student subgroup. Effective teaching requires teachers to not only know the school curricula, but also have extensive knowledge (social, emotional, learning style preference) of each student being instructed. When educators are proactive and help African American male students prepare for academic demands—such as student discourse, higher-level questioning, complex thinking skills that require students to operate more in their zone of proximal development and positive and appropriate group and social interaction with peers—the outcome results in African American male students experiencing greater academic ability. Systems of education must work tirelessly to ensure past and current practices of institutional racism are eradicated in order to ensure the overall success of all student populations.

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Appendix A: Equitable Strategies

Practice 1	Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom
Practice 2	Uses eye contact with high- and low-achieving students
Practice 3	Uses proximity with high- and low-achieving students equitably
Practice 4	Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important
Practice 5	Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion
Practice 6	Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students
Practice 7	Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning
Practice 8	Learns, uses, and displays some words in students' heritage language
Practice 9	Models use of graphic organizers
Practice 10	Uses class building and teambuilding activities to promote peer support for academic achievement
Practice 11	Uses random response strategies
Practice 12	Uses cooperative learning structures
Practice 13	Structures heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning
Practice 14	Uses probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer
Practice 15	Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions
Practice 16	Seeks multiple perspectives
Practice 17	Uses multiple approaches to consistently monitor students' understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content
Practice 18	Identifies students' current knowledge before instruction
Practice 19	Uses students' real-life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives
Practice 20	Uses Wait Time I and II
Practice 21	Asks students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction
Practice 22	Provides students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion
Practice 23	Gives students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance
Practice 24	Provides multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard
Practice 25	Explains and models positive self-talk
Practice 26	Asks higher-order questions equitably of high- and low-achieving students
Practice 27	Provides individual help to high- and low-achieving students

(MCPS, 2009)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Teacher Background
1. Tell me about your teaching experiences.
a. How many years have you taught?
b. What grades/subjects have you taught?
c. In what school districts have you taught – suburban, urban and/or rural?
d. Have you held any other positions in education besides teacher? If so, what?
e. Do you teach diverse student population?
2. Why did you become a teacher?

Educational philosophies of teachers who instruct African American males
RQ 4:
How do elementary school teachers, who use equitable strategies shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students in learning?
1. What is your educational philosophy?
2. What is your definition of culturally relevant pedagogy?
3. How do you incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy?
RQ 1:
How do elementary school teachers describe their experience of using equitable strategies?
1. Describe 3 – 5 strategies you have used as part of your instructional toolkit.
2. Now I want you to focus on your use of equitable strategies during instruction. Share with me what it is like using equitable strategies with students.
3. Keeping your focus on your use of equitable strategies during instruction, share with me what it is like to use equitable strategies with African American male students.

Teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding African American males
RQ 2:
How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies describe the experience of teaching African American male students?
1. Describe a typical day of teaching.
RQ 3:
What are elementary school teachers' who use equitable strategies perceptions of African American males students' academic abilities?
1. Having taught African American males and using equitable strategies, how do you perceive these students' academic abilities?
2. How do you use equitable strategies to strengthen all students' academic abilities.
3. Specifically, how do you use equitable strategies to strengthen the academic abilities of African American males?

Classroom Environment and Student Engagement
RQ 4:
How do elementary school teachers who use equitable strategies shape the classroom environment to engage African American male students in learning?
 1. Describe your classroom environment in terms of how it is designed for student engagement. 2. What is your perception of how the classroom environment engages your African American male students?

Concluding/ Clarifying Questions:

a. Is there anything else you would like to contribute that we haven't discussed during this interview?