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Teachers' Perceptions of African American Middle School Males' Reading Performance

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MA, William Paterson University, 1996

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

School administrators at a middle school in the northeastern United States lacked understanding regarding reading services and teaching strategies to improve African American middle school (AA MS) males' performance on standardized state reading assessments. English language arts (ELA) teachers' perspectives on and experiences of teaching reading to AA MS males at the target site were explored using Kolb's model of experiential learning. A qualitative intrinsic case study with an anonymous survey was used to collect data at the target site. Fifteen individuals who met inclusion criteria of being 6th- or 7th-grade ELA teachers at the target site were recruited using purposeful sampling. First-cycle data analysis with initial coding was followed by second-cycle analysis using axial coding. Through the process of iterative categorization, key themes emerged. Findings based on themes indicate that when teaching AA males, teachers need to develop a positive relationship, demonstrate an understanding of cultural responsiveness, show understanding and patience when issues or problems arise, develop agreement on clear expectations, and use relevant topics and a variety of resources. A project study was developed that led to recommendations to support ELA teachers instructing AA MS male students and to use targeted professional development to improve teachers' knowledge and skills. Adoption of the recommendations could improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and understanding, resulting in more effective reading instruction for AA males and better supports for their academic success.

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my family and friends who supported me throughout this journey. I thank God for the opportunity and the strength to forge on during the more difficult times in my life these past few years. I have been blessed with two loving children: my daughter, Mia, who inspires me each day with her love, and my son, Louie, who makes me smile each day with his kindness and passion for life. My wife, Jenn, has had to take the brunt of my frustrations, as she helped me type and supported me in every way possible. Jenn was often tired after a long day of work, and she would help me before finishing her own work. I am forever grateful. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my loving mother. I could never thank you enough for a lifetime of support and love. Although the days were hard and often lonely, you did what you could to try to soften the harshness and provide comfort to the soul. I thank God each day that you were my mother. I know you are resting now … sleep in the comfort of knowing that your undying spirit lives on in all of us who were fortunate to know you.

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Section 1: The Problem

Background

African American (AA) students have fallen behind European American students in both English and math in the public schools of the state in which this study was conducted, as recorded in state-mandated testing results. In order to track how all students, including minority students, were performing on state-mandated assessments, the U.S. government passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001); this brought about changes in education that focused on increasing the achievement of all students. Annual yearly progress (AYP) standards were established for schools to measure state-mandated testing. NCLB, which was reauthorized in 2011, emphasized test scores, with penalties implemented if schools and/or districts failed to meet predetermined AYP results.

Students in urban schools are not reading at grade level (Graham & Teague, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The state-mandated scores are reported as scale scores in language arts literacy (LAL). Scores from 200 to 249 are in the proficient range, and those from 250 to 300 are advanced proficient. Any score below 200 is classified as partially proficient and below the state minimum for proficiency. Students scoring below 200 may be in need of instructional support. On average, AA students score 33 percentage points below their peers in LAL.

Motivation, or the incentive to improve, is not a singular construct, and it may stem from a variety of sources and take various forms. By understanding how different teachers address motivation or the incentive to improve performance regarding the ability

of middle school (MS) AA males to regulate their focus, it may be possible to gain insight that can help these students address the challenges that face them and help them sustain a level of regulation and focus on improved reading achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Social factors such as parental involvement and bonding with others may also play a role in motivation or incentive levels regarding AA MS males and their ability to regulate their focus (Washington, 2012). Other factors that researchers have found to affect overall ability to achieve for AA MS males are school engagement, school support, teacher involvement, socioeconomic issues, and peer concerns (Trask, Tate, & Cunningham, 2010; Yu & Patterson, 2010).

Leadership teams in the target middle school have been examining performance data for all students from 2007 to the present. According to building administrators during the 2007-2008 school year, central office administrators directed campus principals to initiate analysis of state performance data and locally generated assessment data to identify patterns and academic target areas in need of additional support. Grade-level teams examined each ethnic subgroup individually and ascertained which academic strengths could be fortified and which academic weaknesses were more prevalent. Teachers began reviewing and analyzing these data from their students' prior year mandated state assessment scores and used these data to formulate a plan for the upcoming year to remediate the students' weaknesses. Staff development began to shift toward better understanding of the different subgroup populations, including AA male MS students. According to building administration grade-level teams conducted informal and formal dialogues about the AA MS males in an effort to design a plan to improve

these students' language arts performance. Each teacher was required to develop an individual focus plan that was aligned with the school-level plan. In addition, teachers' daily lesson plans had to include how they would use best practices and formative assessment to inform instruction.

The school and district administrators provided professional development (PD) for teachers and supported their professional learning communities (PLCs). Additionally, during that school year, key male personnel were asked to work with small groups of AA males in an effort to gain insight into AA MS male reading achievement. During this school year, the school educators enjoyed their second year in a row making AYP, and discipline referrals for the AA population declined to 20% of all discipline referrals, which was a reduction of 8% from the previous year, as recorded in end-of-the-year school summary reports by the principals to the district.

This individual prescriptive process continued throughout the next school year. During the 2008-2009 school year, the grade-level teams began discussing more curriculum-related topics and focused more on best practices in their classrooms. PD continued throughout the district, and the faculty was encouraged to explore PLC implementation and to look at county or state training programs to further teacher development. There was a positive impact on student achievement during this transition. According to the assistant principal, the following year AA males experienced a 14% decrease in overall failures, made AYP, and experienced a 16% drop in discipline referrals.

The efforts of the school to focus on the development of plans to address the academic disparities evident among the targeted subgroups have proven thus far to be only partially effective. It is important to properly assess the strategies and processes implemented to date and further explore how the AA male students in the school perceive the motivational components instilled in the school in relation to their academic success. These data provided information to the school administrators and to the leadership team to consider revisions in how best to support AA students. The school staff can make adjustments that target the motivational needs of these students based on a review of the findings.

Several years of testing data indicated that AA students continued to perform less well on standardized state testing than their European American counterparts (Mendoza-Denton, 2014). According to building administration at the target site, AA males have suffered several negative stereotypes that have affected their motivation and achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). AA MS males have shared issues that are consistent with factors such as academic self-concept, racial centrality, school engagement, and general school climate, which have been identified as affecting motivation and achievement (Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009).

The Local Problem

Definition of the Local Problem

According to the building administration the problem at the target MS is the lack of understanding about why AA MS males have underperformed on reading assessments, and what actions teachers could take to specifically address this performance

issue. While MS students have a unique set of issues and concerns, data from the local district for the years 2010-2015 illustrated that AA MS male students consistently performed below district and campus averages. Student scores on the state assessment reflected that AA MS male students scored approximately 33% below their grade-level peers in LAL. According to building administration, despite interventions to support the instruction and progress of AA MS males, no gains in achievement have been made. The interventions the leadership and campus personnel have implemented include targeted PD, specific district goals addressing instruction for AA MS males, the implementation of PLCs, specially designed lesson plans to address AA MS male students' needs, redesign of ELA teachers' lesson plans, as well as targeting small group reading instruction using flexible regrouping. Local school leadership has little understanding regarding what programs and teaching strategies could help improve AA males' performance on standardized reading assessments.

Most students have a desire to perform on grade level academically. The concern with male students learning to read or understand math may have to do with the motivation to learn, which must be looked at with an understanding that male students may fear that others will view them as intellectually inadequate (Pershey, 2011). AA students' self-perception in terms of ability and confidence can be directly correlated to their performance on standardized tests (Pershey, 2011).

AA MS males may have different perceptions of school, even as compared to AA students in elementary school. In one study of struggling AA students, MS students reported more confidence but less satisfaction with school compared to elementary

school students (Pershey, 2011). There are students who assert that they are not proficient in a particular subject and are very concerned about any perception that they are being viewed by others as academically poor (Johnson, 2011).

Most schools and classrooms use punishment-and-reward models as well as stimulus-and-response, behavior-modification, or assertive-discipline techniques, which are all external forms of motivation for students (Cortright, Lujan, Blumberg, Cox, & DiCarlo, 2013). According to building administration, a shift in pedagogy toward focusing on internal rewards, along with improved instructional strategies, may help these students improve their reading performance. These students may also have issues involving perceptions of how other students regard their academic success.

Some AA males perceive that some members of their community do not look upon strong achievement favorably; thus, poor academic performance may be reinforced by peer culture (Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Martin & Dowson, 2009). By the time these students enter MS, ideas of racial identity have been established as factors in their self-identity (Okeke et al., 2009). Factors such as these are connected to students' self-concepts and identities. Students' ability to remain motivated and focused becomes an important factor in their success. Marzano (2009) stressed the importance of understanding students' interests and backgrounds, as well as the importance of respect and the value of asking questions of lower performing students. There are external as well as internal factors that create motivation in students (Kusurkar, Ten Cate, Vos, Westers, & Croiset, 2013). Factors of racial identity and issues of self-concept are linked

to students' personal histories of either achievement or failure (Evans, Copping, Rowley, & Kurtz-Costes, 2011).

Evidence of the Problem From the Larger Educational Field

Researchers have found that students in urban settings are not reading on grade level (Graham & Teague, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In addition, the achievement gap has continued to expand over the past 3 years for AA male MS students. AA MS male students have also struggled with the perception from others that they are not capable of performing on grade level. Engagement for learning, strategies regarding motivational beliefs, and perceptions about competence are closely tied to academic success for AA male students (Law, Elliot, Andrew, & Murayama, 2012). These are some of the factors that affect these students' academic performance.

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Rationale

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Evidence of the Problem From the Local Level

Addressing the underperformance of AA MS males is a societal issue that needs public attention. In gaining information on teachers' perspectives, data have been obtained to provide leadership staff with insight to support teacher preparation and practice, as well as target PD that may lead to more success for AA MS male students.

This was not only an issue during the 2006-2007 school year; an analysis of state data revealed that gaps in performance have continued to be a concern. This was evidenced by the mandatory state exam results from 2011, 2012 and 2013, which showed a gap of 38.7% between AA students and the highest achieving group. The subgroups that were a focus of district leadership staff were AA and Latino American males, special

education students, and economically disadvantaged students. In many cases, one student could qualify in more than one category. If a previously determined number of students (30) in any category fail the state-mandated exam, the school is cited as a school in need of improvement. By learning more about how to help AA MS males and focusing on the motivational factors that may improve their academic performance, the goal was that data obtained from this research study might also help other students improve academically.

According to the latest available data, in 2013, sixth-grade overall results on the state-mandated exams showed that LAL, 64.5% of female students scored at or above proficient, compared to 58.6% of male students who scored at or above proficient. In terms of ethnicity, in LAL the percentage of partially proficient students ranged from 56.4% for AA students to 13.7% for Asian students. This was a gap of 42.7% between the lowest and the highest achieving groups. The state DOE created a grading system that focused on the highest and the lowest achieving groups. The gap between the lowest and the highest group had to be less than 42%, or the state DOE would put the school in a category of schools that required state monitoring. Thus, in the state and district, the focus has been on the highest and the lowest achieving groups and less on how the groups performed in comparison to Caucasian students. The mandatory statewide assessment for LAL grade 6 results reported by the state DOE on September 9, 2013 for the spring of 2013 showed that the mean scale score for general education students was 213.1 and for AA students was 194.2, a mean difference of 18.9 points. The female scale score mean was 210.8, and the male scale score mean was 205.1, with a mean difference of 5.7 points.

In seventh grade, state-mandated assessment scores for LAL showed that 54.7% of female students scored at or above proficient on the state assessment, compared to 50.3% of male students who scored at or above proficient. In LAL, the percentage of partially proficient students ranged from 58.0% for AA students to 14.4% for Asian students, which is a gap of -43.6% between the lowest and highest achieving groups. General education students' scale score mean in LAL was 217.3 points, and AA male students' scale score mean was 193.1, representing a difference of -24.2 points. Female students' scale score mean was 215.1 points, and the male students' scale score mean was 206.7. These scores indicate a difference of 8.4 scale score points.

In the eighth grade, state-mandated assessment scores for LAL showed that 85.8% of female students scored at or above proficient (71.4% proficient and 14.5% advanced proficient), compared to 78.1% of male students who scored at or above proficient (69.7% proficient and 8.4% advanced), representing a difference of 7.7%. The percentage of partially proficient students ranged from 36.4% for AA students to 6.6% for Asian students, a net gap of -29.8% between the lowest and highest achieving groups (State DOE, 2013).

The results are similar for the state assessment results reported for the spring of 2011 and 2012. Results for state assessment scores in 2011 showed that in Grade 6, female students scored 9.6% at or above proficiency in LAL higher than males, and the net percentage gap between AA students and the highest achieving group was 40.0%. The LAL scale score mean for general education students in was 19.7 percentage points higher than for AA students. Female students scored an average of 7.5 points higher than

male students did. In seventh grade, in LAL, 9.4% more females than males scored at or above proficient. There was a difference of 44.8% in score between AA MS students and the highest achieving group, and in math the gap was 49.1%. The general education scale score was 26.6 points more than the AA score in LAL, with female students scoring 8.9 points higher than male students. For LAL in eighth grade, AA MS females scored seven percentage points higher than AA MS males in terms of proficiency. In LAL, the scale score mean for general education students was 22.1 points higher than for AA students. Female students scored 7.7 points higher than males.

Results from 2012 showed an outcome similar to what 2011 and 2013 state assessment results revealed. In LAL, 7.9% more females than males scored at or above proficient in sixth grade, with 8.1% more in seventh grade and 6.2% more in eighth grade. In LAL, the scores on the state proficiency exam demonstrated a gap between AA students European Americans which was 46.2% in eighth grade and 30% in eighth grade. Differences remained similar for general education and AA students from sixth through eighth grade in LAL, where the average difference in scale score mean was 21.9 points. In 2013, results also showed important differences, in LAL females in 6th through 8th grades scored at or above proficient an average of 8.5%. The gap between AA students and the highest achieving group was an average of 38.7% in LAL (State DOE, 2013). Given the significant ethnic and gender disparities evident in the aforementioned scores, these highly relevant statistics from the state DOE demonstrated the need to look at ways to improve achievement for male AA MS students. This qualitative case study focused on exploring ELA teachers' perspectives regarding how to

address gaps in reading achievement for AA MS males in Grades 6 and 7 to improve their reading scores. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives and experiences in relation to teaching reading to AA MS males.

Definition of Terms

The following terminology used in this study is defined.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): Under NCLB (2001), states were given the responsibility of establishing criteria to illustrate how schools and school districts would be graded with respect to the yearly progress of their students. AYP is generated by determining whether a predetermined percentage of students performed up to state standards (NCLB, 2001).

Motivational factors: Intrinsic or internal motivation and personal interest lead to greater achievement; extrinsic or external motivation involves activities/things that tap into students' deep-seated interests (Kusurkar et al., 2013).

Middle school (MS): For the purpose of this study, MS students are in the sixth and seventh grades. These students normally range from 10 to 13 years of age.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): In 2001, then-President Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB, or Public Law 107-110, requires schools to ensure adequate education for all students (NCLB, 2001).

School in need of improvement (SINI): In accordance with NCLB, beginning in 2001, schools were identified based on their inability to achieve annual yearly progress (NCLB, 2001).

Grade-level teams: At the MS level in this school, students and teachers are grouped into teams to create small learning communities for all.

Significance of the Study

Students with poor academic skills fall behind academically and struggle to keep up with other students (Skiba et al., 2011). Certain challenges can create negative academic stereotypes for AA males (James, 2011). At the middle and high school level, additional obstacles (socioeconomic concerns, lack of parental support, societal pressures, etc.) appear to create further distance academically for some students and greater pressure from racial stereotypes in relation to peers (Evans, Copping, Rowley, & Kurtz-Costes, 2011). This pressure can create academic concerns that may lead to widening of learning gaps separating AA male students from peers.

The results of this study hold significance for reading instruction at the target site. An analysis of the state performance data for AA MS males indicated a need to obtain a deeper understanding of the problem of AA MS male students' performance in order to discern actions that should be pursued to close achievement gaps. Teachers' perspectives on and experiences of this problem provided insights as to how to help AA MS males to achieve and minimize the presence of interfering factors that may be inhibiting teachers from providing instruction to AA MS males' to perform at a rate similar to their other male MS peers.

Researchers have found that students' motivation declines as they progress from elementary school through high school (Fredricks et al., 2011). When MS students are positively influenced—whether their motivation is external, internal, or a combination of

both—researchers have suggested that students show a stronger probability of greater academic success with respect to grades and standardized test scores (Fredricks et al., 2011). Conceptually, the work of Fredricks et al. (2011) supports the identification of strategies that are more effective for reading instruction with students of diverse backgrounds.

Research Question

The problem that provided the basis for this study was low reading performance among AA MS males at the target site. This study was developed to provide foundational insight into this problem. The purpose of this study was to explore ELA teachers' perceptions and experiences when teaching reading to AA MS males. Using data collected through an interview questionnaire process, I examined teachers' perspectives on and experiences with the learning needs of AA MS male students related to reading, preferred learning styles, student engagement, lesson design, strategies to support reading content, and methods of managing student behavior while teaching reading. These data were obtained from the 15 participating teachers in the study. The guiding research question for this study was the following: What are the ELA teachers' perspectives and experiences when teaching reading to AA MS males at the target site?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework for Qualitative Research

Teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching AA MS male students reading are critical for the overall success of these students. Teachers' ability to use their experiences and improve their practice may be associated with the teachers' own learning

experiences (Peterson, DeCato, & Kolb, 2015). This study's conceptual framework was based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which focuses on the notion that "experience is the source of learning development" (pp. 5-8). Kolb described how learners prefer certain modes of learning while avoiding others (Peterson, DeCato, & Kolb, 2015).

Kolb's experiential theory is applied to better explain how learning takes place. The experiential theory includes a plan to review learning by focusing on the individual's personal experience at the core of learning (Kolb, 1984). With this model, the focus is on learning as a lifelong adaptive process, which is consistent with human development. The emphasis here is on the "important role experience plays in the learning process" (pp. 24-25). This lifelong process may also be affected by other factors, such as the teachers who work with students.

It is important to understand teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching AA MS males ELA and how teachers perceive that they have personally adapted to the learning needs of their AA MS students. Kolb's (1984) theory that "learning is a continuous process implies that all learning is relearning" (p. 28). Kolb noted how tempting it is "to think of a learner's mind as blank as the paper in which we scratch our outline" (p. 28). I sought to examine whether ELA teachers considered these students the same as other students, or whether the ELA teachers developed strategies that focused on how their AA MS male students learned best.

Kolb's (1984) focus was on the four learning modalities of complexity. These modalities are "behavioral, symbolic, affective and perceptual" (p. 141). Kolb postulated

that each one of these dimensions proceeds "from a state of embeddedness, defensiveness, dependence, and reaction to a state of self-actualization, independence and self-direction" (p. 140). Kolb contended that the process is heavily guided by one's own experience and "that at the higher levels of development, a place where we would expect our teacher creativity and growth" (p. 141). Kolb also argued that "development in one mode precipitates development in the others" (p. 140). Based on Kolb's research, it can be argued that these students may experience additional growth in other modes as they develop in one mode.

Review of the Broader Problem

In this study, I explored the experiences and perspectives of ELA teachers regarding their instruction of AA male MS students and whether they used any special resources for creating specific lesson plans that could assist these students in developing their reading skills. This study produced data that may help district leaders to more deeply understand how ELA teachers described teaching strategies and experiences, which may help them to address the learning needs of AA male MS students in order to narrow the achievement gap.

Academic achievement and AA MS males. Academic achievement of AA male students is lower across math and reading core areas in comparison to non-AA students. A quantitative study provided information on the factors influencing reading achievement and self-perception in relation to reading. Findings revealed a significant gap in reading achievement in comparison to peers for AA males (McDonald, 2017). The use of iPad activities was examined to measure improvements in reading skills. A 6-week study

provided evidence that iPad activity that interest students promote engagement and therefore can be effective in influencing perceptions and improving reading skills.

Inconsistent teacher perceptions of AA male students result in cohesive structural and cultural explanations of students' academic abilities. Allen (2015) stressed the importance of understanding the ideologies behind teacher practices involving AA male students be applied in qualitative research methods. Teacher ability was identified as a key factor in teacher practices. The ideologies of teachers can impede students' educational progress or lift barriers through advocacy. Focus in these students can engage these students and help to lift barriers, leading to improved student performance.

Researchers have examined AA males' perception of perceived barriers in relation to education and have found that students' relationships with teachers are positively related to students' academic performance (Vega et al., 2015). Understanding perceived barriers can influence the responses of educators as they prepare to address the needs of these students. The current racial divide whereby students of color receive lower quality education received than their European American peers creates barriers to equitable education (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). In this study, I examined the current literature to identify a pedagogical method to prevent AA male students from being stereotyped in the classroom.

Researchers examined 50 AA males' reading abilities in elementary and middle school and examined the cultural relevance of the findings. Students in the study who understood the cultural relevance of educational experiences scored higher on "word recognition meaning-maintenance, rereading at miscues, and literal comprehension"

(Christ et al., 2018, pp 8-26). The analysis of student scores and test protocols revealed mixed results. Culturally relevant teaching improves academic performance and creates a more culturally sensitive classroom.

Davis (2017) measured teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy to improve the literacy skills of AA students in Mississippi elementary schools. Data were collected from schools in which at least 50% of the student population was African American (Davis, 2017). In this study, teachers were asked to complete a 38-question survey (Davis, 2017). The findings showed perceived barriers to implementing culturally competent strategies. Reading proficiencies and literacy skills have been connected to family involvement and socioeconomic status, but the middle school environment has the greatest impact on reading proficiency (Williams, 2015). A longitudinal study revealed that negative perceptions by teachers influence the reading proficiency of AA students.

Academic interventions to improve performance. Another aspect of teacher influence is the selection of strategies, such as the use of running records for reading assessment in the classroom. Running records are reading assessment tools that provide ongoing assessment of students' knowledge and skills in reading and the reading process (Clay, 2000). Researchers have noted that running records have been used in elementary education classrooms and for teaching students with limited access to formal education, such as displaced refugees (Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014). Running records are suggested as a method to improve learning and implementation of the curriculum (Clay, 2000).

Shea (2006) examined the use of running records in elementary and middle school classrooms, focusing on Grades 5 through 8. One of the benefits of running records in the classroom is the ability to use the information gathered to adapt the curriculum more quickly and effectively. According to Shea, "Based on the reliable information that records provide, we can make appropriate adjustments in the type and level of books we use with students across reading experiences" (p. xvi). Running records provide educators with immediate feedback and help teachers design lesson plans to meet educational goals efficiently. Researchers who compared the efficacy of running records with other curriculum-based measures determined that both measures for improving reading were "highly correlated," indicating a preference for implementing both interventions simultaneously (Goetze & Burkett, 2010, p. 295). In this way, running records could become an effective tool for addressing the reading skills of AA MS males to adjust lessons and curriculum.

Nonacademic interventions. In a review conducted by Same et al. (2016), the researchers examined interventions used to support the academic performance of AA students. One successful approach identified was connecting AA male students to mentors and encouraging parent participation (Same et al., 2016). The teacher's role is to communicate expectations, develop positive student-teacher relationships, and conduct formative assessments (Same et al., 2016). These assessments can help to identify students who are struggling to read so that they can receive additional instruction time.

A quantitative study conducted by Taylor (2016) identified a significant difference in the reading comprehension capabilities of AA males compare to the

Caucasian counterparts. Taylor examined 134 at-risk AA males and found that 90% were not properly prepared to enter college. Low reading scores and less access to and enrollment in honor roll classes led to barriers to proper college preparedness. Taylor found that self-determination was identified as a key factor for success, along with the Advance Via Individual Determination (AVID) and the African American Male Initiative (AAMI) learning methodologies (Taylor, 2016). In these approaches, mentors support students in building the confidence and skills they need to improve their academic skills.

Researchers have investigated the effects of same-race teachers on student achievement. Gershenson et al. (2017) examined "attainment gaps and the role of the teacher" (p. 4). They reported that when a teacher of the same race taught students, there were positive academic results related to student achievement. Pairing AA male students with AA male teachers can have a positive influence on academic performance. Thus, race matching is one potential intervention to support better performance levels.

Phenomenological research was conducted to examine the daily school experiences of AA males in relation to school performance. Semistructured interviews identified five themes related to achievement gaps: resource gaps, parental support, environmental obstacles, the persistence of racism, and individual motivation (Moon & Singh, 2015). Addressing these gaps can support achievement changes. A study conducted by Guthrie and Klauda (2016) examined the factors influencing AA males' motivation to read. The findings of this study were that meaningful reading material can motivate AA male students to read and selecting the right material and encouraging students to read can improve motivation levels.

Reading and Middle School African American Males

Student engagement with staff is a component of learning that may make a significant difference for AA MS students regarding their reading achievement. There are disparities between Caucasian and AA males in relation to academic performance in core content areas (Fantuzzo, Leboeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012). Among AA male students, environmental factors, such as less-than-adequate teaching and learning environments and inadequate resources, have been tied to poor teacher-student relationships that may be mediated by academic engagement performance (Fantuzzo et al., 2012). Social bonding and a sense of belonging are critical factors in strong academic performance for AA males (Washington, 2012). The relationship between teacher and student is particularly important for AA males. AA males perform worse than their female counterparts do when teacher-student relationships are poor (Wood, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, & Okeke-Adeyanju, 2010).

Many AA males experience social challenges that may affect their self-concept as potentially successful students (Evans et al., 2011; James, 2011). Many of these students are disaffected, are resistant, and appear to have given up hope on academic success. A sense of apathy creates situations in which many AA males feel that their schoolwork is meaningless in their world (Evans et al., 2011). AA male students may be concerned that their success in the classroom will be seen as trying to emulate Caucasian students in their classes (Fryer & Torelli, 2010). Stinson (2013) described how many bright AA males

retreat from success in the classroom in order not to be ostracized by their peers. Fryer and Torelli (2010) affirmed that AA students might intentionally ignore academic pursuits in an attempt to fit into social expectations (Stinson, 2013).

Many AA male students become underachievers; in order to help AA MS males reach their academic potential, systemic change in the school system is needed. Moreira, Dias, Vas, and Vas (2013) identified study habits as a significant factor in the engagement and motivation of AA MS males. That is, students who studied harder were more likely to be engaged in their academics. There are those who believe that in order to motivate these students, one must resocialize them (Brophy, 1998). Other educators believe that extrinsic rewards can be extremely positive tools in creating more motivated students when working with those who are disaffected (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013).

Factors Influencing AA MS Male Student Performance

AA MS males are faced with many factors that have an effect on their motivational foundations, with race and culture being two prominent ones, both in their lives and in the classroom (Byrd & Chavous, 2011). Poverty, stereotype threats, and sociofamilial and environmental risks all affect educational outcomes for this population (Fantuzzo Leboeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012). Family dysfunction and neighborhood conditions are among the influencing factors (Whitaker et al., 2012).

According to Sheridan et al. (2012), for example, it was determined that a combination of family involvement and school factors were key in improving motivation

for these students. In terms of stereotypes, students who perceived racial injustice were more likely to disengage from academics (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). The rise in disciplinary problems among AA male students has led to more referrals to special education, larger gaps in achievement, and higher dropout rates (Washington, 2012). An additional problem with regard to AA males is the use of discipline policies, such as zero-tolerance policies, that treat all discipline situations as the same rather than addressing issues on a case-by-case basis (Debnam, Bottiani, & Bradshaw, 2017). Among male students in the middle and in high school grades, some are motivated to succeed, while others lack a focus on the important elements that are needed to succeed at the secondary level. Understanding the role of regulation in supporting affirmative academic behaviors that result in enhanced reading performance is critical to addressing this ongoing issue. There are indicators in the literature that members of the MS AA male population are at risk for poor academic performance and are more likely to be disciplined for their behavior compared to students of other ethnicities (Skiba et al., 2011).

Despite differences when looking at large groups, individuals have the ability to succeed despite stereotypes and punitive categorization. To this end, ethnic data should not be used in place of evaluating students' individual traits, such as intelligence or motivation (Park, Holloway, Arendtse, Bempechat, & Li, 2012). No assumptions should be made about the abilities of children based on their ethnicity or culture; judgments should be based only on children's underlying personalities and the challenges that they have faced in seeking their

goals. The focus on academics is often overshadowed by the reality of life for many young AA males (Hunter, 2016).

AA MS males face not only normal MS concerns, but also societal norms that are not in their favor. Many AA MS males begin as highly motivated students in elementary school but begin to falter academically when moving into their MS years (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012). The experience of school itself may play a role in AA students' attitudes in MS and beyond (Cokley et al., 2012). It is not possible to motivate these students if educators do not know *who* they are, or perhaps more importantly, what their educational experiences have been (Cokley et al., 2012).

A study conducted by Voight, Hanson, O'Malley and Adekanye (2015) revealed a significant gap between AA and Caucasian students in levels of feeling safe and connected as well as positive adult-student relationships in the middle school environment. However, the results also indicated a disparity between middle schools in which AA students in schools with lower levels of safety and connectedness also experienced lower levels of academic achievement. In contrast, in schools with a higher level of connectedness and positive student-adult relationships, AA students attained higher levels of academic progress. The results thus indicated a noteworthy correlation between the overall school climate that affected AA students and their ultimate academic achievement.

By the time AA MS males enter MS, racial identity has been noted to affect their self-identity (Okeke et al., 2009). It is essential that for AA MS males

to succeed, that there must be positive learning opportunities provided (Butler-Barnes, Williams, & Chavous, 2012). Unfortunately, there is evidence that self-perceptions are strongly connected to negative stereotypes, in that those people who are stereotyped are likely to believe these views about themselves (Okeke et al., 2009; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). This is a crucial time for AA MS males to connect positively to their school environment because of the implications it brings for their high school years, in that self-identity establishes itself at the MS level (Okeke et al., 2009).

School environment plays a critical role in academic engagement, especially for AA males. Kwon, Hanrahan and Kupzkk (2017) concluded that young students reporting more consistent emotional regulation as well as feelings of happiness were consistently observed as more engaged in their education, which allowed them to achieve higher scores on standardized tests. Conversely, the researchers reported that students who were more likely to experience feelings of anger or an inability to fit in cared less about their academic goals and subsequently performed poorly on standardized tests.

Additional effective interventions, coupled with relationships with natural mentors, as well as parental monitoring and involvement can be effective intervention tools for improving motivation and successful educational performance for AA MS males (Hurd, Sanchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). The implications regarding high school success can be devastating, and the consequences of this challenge can lead to academic difficulty, failure, and even dropout (Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009). It is clear

that during this time of uncertainty, in order to succeed, AA MS males need positive

support systems in place in an effort to help them avoid the challenges associated with

negative influences and stereotypes (Okeke et al., 2009; Woolley et al.,

2009).   Researchers appear to point at the important aspects of learning "who the

children are, and not focus on what we assume them to be" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p.

103). The importance of looking at these students as individuals should be an integral

part of the collective whole and most importantly individual differences should be

celebrated.

Hill and Wang (2015) reported significant differences in the effectiveness of

parental monitoring (wherein parents maintain oversight and awareness of their child's

progress in school) between Caucasian and AA students. Parental monitoring was very

effective in improving GPA as well as promoting overall positive behavior in school for

AA students, but the same was not true for Caucasian students, who preferred more

autonomy. Nevertheless, the findings still indicated a need for AA parents to find a

proper balance between monitoring behaviors and allowing their children greater

autonomy. Furthermore, an analysis of the findings also indicated that parents who

bonded closely with their children were able to encourage improvements in academic

achievement regardless of race.

AA males who have not had success in MS may turn to an assortment of other

possible ways of boosting their self-concept, such as through engaging in adolescent

sexual practices (Snitman et al., 2011). Although increased self-concept can be a positive

thing, it can also lead to sexual behavior and its related physical and psychological

consequences (Snitman et al., 2011). While researchers have demonstrated that some of the behavior of AA males is reactionary to their self-concept issues and anger, the concern is that often, AA males direct their anger into inward destruction and also demonstrate outward manifestations of anger, which continues the pattern of discipline issues some AA males experience (Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons, 2015). Strategies to support positive AA MS males' self-concept through academic success at the MS level, may provide these students a better chance at MS academic and social success as they progress towards adulthood.

One way that AA males view self-concept is their personal view of their ethnicity. Lozada, Jagers, Smith, Bañales and Hope (2017), who investigated how AA adolescents relate race to social development, highlighted this. Specifically, the study was designed to determine how important race was to the individual, how they personally felt about their race, and the extent to which they experienced oppression due to race. Focusing on 265 AA male students in grades 7-10, who attended suburban, Midwestern schools, the results indicated a correlation between racial pride and positive social behaviors. Similarly, findings pointed toward a positive relationship between positive self-worth and emotional maturity.

In the target public school there were 5% AA MS males disproportionately identified as a student with a disability who were receiving special education services.(principal communication, 2015). Being labeled early as a student with a disability, whether or not this is clinically the case, also factors into students' minds when evaluating their ability to achieve as students (Galster, Santiago, & Stack, 2016).

Regardless of their surroundings, peer and cultural pressures can have a significant impact on young men's self-concepts and identities, perhaps more so than other demographic groups (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Researchers indicated that AA MS students enter school at a disadvantage compared to their other MS counterparts (Saeuz & Ponjuan, 2009). All of these factors have affected school outcomes for AA MS males, as well as how these students feel about school their level of self-esteem. This is an important factor in the success of AA MS males because students' self-concept is linked to their personal history of either achievement or failure (Farkas, 2017).

Understanding why there is a gap between minority and non-minority middle school students related to affirmative values is important if the desire is to close that gap. In a study designed to assess possible reasons for this gap, Borman, Grigg and Hanselman (2016) conducted research to determine if promoting values affirmation in a randomly selected group of seventh-graders could improve students' GPA. Following an analysis of the results of testing, the researchers found a positive effect on AA students that, while less significant than earlier studies, still indicated that promoting positive self-affirmation may play a role in counteracting negative stereotypes experienced by AA male students. This finding was revealed by slight improvement in AA students' GPAs who received the intervention of positive self-affirmations.

Researchers suggested that when AA males make certain academic strides, or reach out for academic support on their own, they face ridicule other AA students (Stinson, 2013). It has been reported, for example, that AA and Latino male students use the phrase "acting White" to create social controls so that there is an increased pressure to

comply with expected norms regarding academic behavior (Stinson, 2013). This concept was first introduced by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and revisited by more recent researchers (Fryer & Torelli, 2010). Some AA students face ridicule when they engage in behavior normally associated with "acting White", especially when these students are academically successful (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). In other words, some AA males adopted the viewpoint that academic achievement was not characteristic of AA males and therefore academic achievement and success was seen as a negative rather than a positive trait from a sociocultural perspective (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). The perception of achievement being a negative trait also influences the AA students' development of self-perception in terms of what they could aspire to in job and career goals.

Student Experiences and Motivation

Certain types of motivation may be considered to increase AA male MS student engagement during the learning process (Jing et al., 2013; Spires, Hervey, Morris, & Stelpflug, 2012). AA males, who are overrepresented in special education classrooms, have the lowest rate of graduation of any group, and, as a group, their scores are consistently lower than Caucasian students (Howard, 2013). In many large, urban school districts, AA 8th grade males have the reading level of Caucasian students in 4th grade, and AA male students even perform worse than comparable Caucasian with disabilities (Howard, 2013). AA females perform better than AA males, though they also face stereotypes and challenges, including performing worse than counterparts of other races (Howard, 2013). However, some researchers have indicated AA females are not subjected

to the onslaught of negative stereotypes as AA males are, perhaps because in terms of racism, AA males are seen by other races as a "larger threat" (McGuire, Fearn, White, Mayo & Ondr, 2015). Many media offerings play into this stereotype of AA males as instant juvenile delinquents (McGuire, Fearn, White, Mayo & Ondr, 2015). This may also affect the experience these students have in school.

For many AA students, their school experiences are not similar to those experienced by the majority of their peers. Goyer et al. (2017) specified that this inequality is often promoted by differences in the psychological processes experienced by both groups. In many cases, minority students are unable to develop a feeling of belonging or fitting into the school environment due to a greater frequency of experiencing disciplinary measures. AA students also were less likely to be placed in advanced classes. These researchers found that, if a feeling of affirmation was realized by AA students, such negative experiences were lessened.

In a similar vein, a more recent study (Knifsend, Camacho-Thompson, Juvonen, & Graham, 2018) investigated the possible mediating impact of social connectedness and belonging on the academic attainment of a variety of racial groups, including AA. Based on this study, it appears that actively engaging in extracurricular activities with peers results in an improved outlook on school culture and overall engagement with school activities. This study was significant as the researchers reported similar findings across all ethnic and racial groups. In all cases, academic improvements were observed,

implying a need for encouraging AA males to engage in activities that can increase a sense of school connectedness.

The disparity between basic discipline experienced by AA males and other races is an issue not discussed as often in the literature as that same disparity in suspensions. This was the topic addressed in the study conducted by Gregory and Roberts (2017). The researchers noted how much instructional time is lost when AA males are subject to such a disproportionate level of discipline. Statistics fail to reveal any significant differences between AA and Caucasian students concerning behavior drawing discipline from teachers, other than race. The study concluded with a call for teachers to become more aware of the negative stereotypes contributing to this reality. Researchers also indicated that this problem does not begin in MS. Rather, Gregory and Fergus (2017) reported that such differences between AA and Caucasian students begin as early as preschool. Finally, Gregory et al. (2016) added that this trend would continue unless changes are made at the teacher level, including providing additional training that specifically addresses the issue.

Family and Teacher Influence

Family influence. Parents, guardians, and other adults living in the household can play an important part in the lives of AA MS males as they develop. As early as kindergarten, AA males have better educational outcomes when parents are involved, for example, by reading to them (Baker, Cameron, Rimm-Kaufman, & Grissmer, 2012). The family is an important component in terms of academic performance school outcomes for AA MS males. Researchers have suggested that the most influential family processes on academic performance include actions taken by parents, such as attending school events,

checking children's homework, engaging children in discussing what they do at school, or providing ongoing encouragement (Baker et al., 2012).

The parent relationship with the student can be one that is a hindrance or one that supports academic progress. Parental involvement is one of the more important components regarding AA MS males' motivation towards academic achievement (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Banerjee, Harrell, & Johnson, 2011; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010; Yu & Patterson, 2010). This parental involvement may play an important part in this learning continuum.

Although there are obvious benefits to positive parental involvement in an AA MS males' motivation to succeed academically, there is a perception that these parents have poor connections with their children and that research can be a compromising or negative proposition (Jeynes, 2012). There is a benefit to including parents in programs that request their input in an open forum, since parent involvement is important to student achievement (Stevenson, 2016). Parent involvement in a child's schooling may also help to bridge cultural gaps and it may be a sign to the child that their motivation to learn is important to their family. Added to other positive aspects of support, the parent and child relationship may create positive results in the levels of AA MS males relegated to impoverished surroundings (Jeynes, 2012). An integral part to any change that must occur will only happen if the perception held by parents of AA MS males about the education system is created to be trusting of the school system and results in effective progress for their children (Pang, 2015).

Many AA MS males from lower income families are exposed to clusters of risk factors that may have a negative impact on their school achievement (Fantuzzo, Leboeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012). For these AA MS males, the number of invested and loving adults at home and in their neighborhoods will have effect on their school engagement. (Wang & Eccles, 2012). It is clear that family and neighborhood adults also influence the behavior of these boys (Wang & Eccles, 2012). This issue must extend past the boundaries of the student's living space and into the streets in which they travel. In order to defy the negative elements that AA MS males encounter, researchers demonstrated that increasing the number of adults who can positively influence the lives of young people at risk is an effective strategy to help alleviate the negative experiences and environment to which they may be exposed (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Researchers suggested the importance of these individuals as mentors or volunteers in the lives of AA MS males is critical. Spending time with such attentive and caring adults could provide AA MS males the feeling of support, and additional protection from the risks in their environments (Wang & Eccles, 2012).

Mentoring is one effective method for encouraging academic success among AA males. Recent research has uncovered a positive relationship between mentoring and improved academic achievement among AA young males (Sánchez, Hurd, Neblett, & Vaclavik, 2017). Results also found improvements in positive racial identity and social skills. While a significant amount of literature described the positive benefits that result from mentoring AA young males, Albright, Hurd and Hussain (2017) stated that there

was a need for caution to ensure that possibly negative (albeit unintentional) affects are

not introduced by the older mentor that could encourage stereotypes of AA youth.

Encouraging a partnership between parents and schools typically begins as soon

as children enter school. Nonetheless, that relationship becomes more difficult to

maintain and nurture as students enter middle school, according to Hill, Witherspoon and

Bartz (2018). The needs of students, as well as parents and teachers, will need to adjust

during this critical time in the student's life. Some adjustments recommended by this

researcher were focusing on independence, helping children see the connection between

education and future success, and providing positive and continuous communication.

Parents need to become more involved rather than less.

Teacher-student relationships. Teachers are therefore well placed to work with

other adults to transform students' lives, motivate and inspire them to reach their personal

and professional objectives. This statement reflects a core strategy and potential outcome

for middle and high school AA males. AA MS males have benefited from male teachers

that serve as role models and mentors. Unfortunately, there are too few minority male

teachers involved in public education today (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Strategies that

have been proved effective include showing interest in the activities, or the subject matter

that the student is interested in, spending time discussing out of school interests or

hobbies, extending the school day with extracurricular activities, and by taking a genuine

interest in the young man for himself. Teachers are essential to the growth and

development of AA male students (Gregory & Roberts, 2017).

Through proper staff development at the school and district level teachers can be made more aware of how to develop these relationships and therefore help to foster learning. Murphy (2005) noted the importance of teacher leadership development through PD opportunities, especially through the solicitation of feedback from colleagues. In this endeavor, however administrators and directors of staff development must support teachers while working on the necessary skills to effect change in the instructional strategies and pedagogies employed in teaching AA MS males. Teachers can also support intrinsic motivational outcomes by supporting their students' interests, which may help the AA MS students become more engaged in the learning process (Furtak & Kunter, 2012).

There is no greater need for qualified and caring individuals to assist students in their quest for academic achievement than at the MS level (Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, Mikami, Allen & Pianta, 2016). Especially in the AA communities, highly qualified educators may be one key component in helping to establish more positive reflections on their educational experiences (Ingersoll & May, 2016). Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. For example, "in some school districts, particularly those in urban areas serving high percentages of low income students, hiring anyone – certified or not - to teach in the middle grades is a continuing challenge" as "teacher vacancies in large urban districts have been reported as more severe in MS than in elementary or high schools" (Neild, Farley-Ripple, & Byrnes, 2009, p. 734). The importance of the teacher-student bond or relationship should not be underscored. Teacher-student relationships change over the course of the school year, for better or for worse, and may have a

significant influence on a student's social or motivational perspective (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Harris, 2012). AA MS male students have demonstrated positive benefits from working with teachers who they perceive to be caring and supportive (Tosolt, 2010). In a recent study, the researchers indicated that teachers' behavior toward the students had a significant positive influence on motivating students intrinsically in reading (De Naeghel, Valcke, DeMeyer, Warlop, van Braak, & Van Keer, 2014). The importance of the student-teacher relationship was an important component to the success of AA MS male students.

In addition to the importance of simply bonding with a teacher, in the case of AA students, it is also critical that bonding occurs with an AA teacher. According to Egalitea, Kisida and Winters (2015), reading achievement was increased when a student was taught by a teacher of his or her own race. While no definitive results were found, there was a potential that students who are taught by same-race teachers could experience academic improvements that could lower the achievement gap when compared to their peers. There was also the benefit of the AA MS male student having an exemplary role model that could inspire continual academic success.

In terms of the federal NCLB legislation, there is little data on teacher preparation that has yet had a positive systemic impact on the educational success of AA MS males (Neild et al., 2009). In this battle to deter negative perceptions, AA males are also stepping into classrooms where effective teaching strategies may not be uniformly utilized (Goldhaber, Lavery & Theobald, 2015). In urban school districts, often the

number of experienced and certified teachers is not enough to meet the needs for all students, and MS teachers are often less experienced than others (Neild et al., 2009).

However, there are some positive implications about the current direction of MS education for AA males. There is a growing focus on teacher quality issues (Neild et al., 2009). Students' relationships with their teachers develop in various ways throughout their careers and the perception by the student will range from supportive to adversarial in nature (Anderman & Anderman, 2010). Students' perceptions of their relationships with their teachers can be positive or negative in nature (Yu & Patterson, 2010). Teachers' expectations for AA students may be affected by negative attitudes towards each other, which may cause a negative influence on student achievement. This may be one factor that results in fewer referrals to advanced programs for AA MS students (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010).

There are educators, researchers, and politicians who are looking at the dilemma of the MS AA males with an intention towards change to go beyond what has stereotypically been considered movement or progress in this area. This type of problem requires that all stakeholders are aware of the issues and are willing to work together towards academic and social progress.

While teachers begin to prepare MS students for high school and eventually college, these students are often faced with additional concerns along the way. AA MS males face problems of "gross inequalities that result from unequal distribution of school funding, underprepared teachers, high teacher turnover, and poor administrative leadership" (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p. 62).

Given these factors, it is important to recognize the role that caring and supportive actions play in supporting student motivation and success in the academic lives of students. The effect a teacher may have on these students should not be underscored, in that academic and social support from teachers can directly lead to positive change. (Wang and Eccles, 2012).

Implications

In reviewing the current literature, it appears that there are challenges that AA MS males face in their young adolescent lives that are inherent to the AA community. AA males experience a negative effect in their academic classes related to their self-esteem due to strategies used, relationships with teaches and mentors, level of parent involvement and self-perceptions related to high or low esteem. AA MS males can be helped if the adults around them implement processes that target the reading needs, which fosters academic success throughout their MS years extending to high school and beyond. Getting the teachers' perspectives and experiences on how to help AA MS males improve their reading achievement in their integrated language arts (ILA) MS classes will enable campus and district administrators to focus on strategies and relationship building pedagogy which will result in improved achievement and more positive self-perceptions.

Data collected in this study has provided information on the teachers' perspectives and experiences that are associated with reading performance improvement among AA MS males. The feedback collected will give the educators in the MS a clear perspective of what is working, what is not, and what can be added or changed to better

serve these students based on their teachers' perspectives. With these data collected and analyzed, there are possible changes that could be made to improve the teacher support and strategies used with AA MS males, which will benefit the teacher and students. Therefore, I will more specifically provide recommendations to the leadership team regarding to the findings of my study.

Summary

In this qualitative project study, the perceptions and experiences of ILA teachers of AA MS male students in grades six and seven were analyzed to address the achievement gap between AA MS males' reading performance and non-AA males' reading performance in ILA. Kolb's (1984) theory that, "learning is a continuous process" implies that all learning is essentially relearning (p.28). By looking at teacher experiences and perspectives, the data have been generated for analysis of more deeply understanding the problem identified at the target site regarding teaching reading to AA MS. Another factor that should be considered when looking at the experiences the AA MS males it is critical to remember and understand the context of the home environment and peer pressures that may influence their academic success (Hunter, 2016). Specific modes of learning were preferred for AA MS males (Peterson, DeCato, & Kolb, 2015). These data have provided administrators with a deeper understanding of avenues to access in making a difference in AA MS males' lives and closing the performance gap in reading.

Research regarding AA males' perception of barriers to education revealed that positive working relationships with teachers were influential to academic performance

(Vega et al., 2015). Understanding that some AA males perceive that they are considered less academically motivated by some educational professionals, creating a barrier of trust, which may influence the response to intervention for these students. This barrier may create inequality of education for students of color (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). In a systematic review conducted by Same et al. (2016), interventions to help the academic performance of AA students were examined. One approach that had success was connecting AA male students to mentors and encouraging greater parental involvement (Same et al., 2016). Assessments can be created that will help identify struggling students with reading thereby triggering additional reading instruction time.

In Section 2 of this research study, I will discuss the specific methodology used to answer the central research question discussed in Section 1. In addition, I describe the sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis procedures used which helped me to answer the research questions identified in Section 1 so that the local gap in practice and local problem identified address the gap in practice.

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Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and the perspectives of teachers in supporting reading performance among AA MS males. The local problem for this project study was the continuously poor performance of AA MS males on state-mandated language arts assessments. A recent review of the literature regarding AA MS male students' performance provided confirmation that the problem also exists at the state and national levels. The purpose of this project study was to explore the teachers' perceptions of and experiences with improving AA MS males' reading performance. By exploring participants' perceptions and experiences in relation to teaching reading, educational stakeholders may gain a better understanding of the problem, as well as of the PD that needs to be developed for ELA teachers.

The research question guiding this study was the following: What are the ELA teachers' perspectives and experiences when teaching reading to AA MS males at the target site?

Case Study Design

A qualitative case study approach was used for this study because this approach provides the researcher with the ability to research a specific phenomenon that requires exploration within a specific environment. For this study, the case was a middle school in the northeastern region of the country where teachers were providing instruction to MS AA males in a regular-education, public-school setting.

This case study was bounded by both time and place (Creswell, 2013). This study was bounded by the middle school, the students, and the teachers in this environment. A case study allows for flexibility in the use of multiple sources of data that can be revised as the study progresses (Creswell, 2013). A case study approach was used for this research project because the focus with this approach is real-life and contemporary, as well as detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2013).

The specific research design for this study was instrumental case study. This single case study was conducted in a natural setting, involved inductive reasoning, and was appropriate for gathering data that addressed the research question (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This research used qualitative methodology whereby I developed naturalistic generalizations from the data analysis that people can learn from and apply (Creswell, 2007). In the qualitative research process, the researcher must keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold regarding the issue being researched and not the meaning that the researcher brings to the research (Creswell, 2007). In addition, in this study, it could be assumed that learning would occur in the environment developed by the teacher participants and the school. The data collected were compiled in order to look at what the teachers of AA MS males do to specifically assist them and engage them in reading achievement and teacher responses regarding instructional strategies used in reading instruction. The data were obtained from the participating teachers in the study.

Design Justification

Other research designs were considered for this project study. Those other designs included ethnography, narrative inquiry, phenomenological inquiry, and grounded theory.

A study that uses the ethnography research design primarily focuses on the culture of a particular group. That would not have been appropriate for this case study, in which the research question focused on investigating the perceptions and experiences of ELA teachers teaching reading to AA MS males. The intent of ethnographic research is to determine how the culture relates to the research, rather than developing an in-depth understanding of a specific issue or case (Creswell, 2013). This research study focused on exploring teachers' experiences and perspectives, rather than a specific culture.

Narrative inquiry is based on the researcher telling the story (Creswell, 2013). The focus in this research process was gathering data on teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching reading. A narrative research method was not chosen because narrative stories are collected and shaped by the researcher into a chronology, and the participants may not have conveyed their stories in the same manner in which they are represented by the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

A phenomenological study focuses on the experiences of participants who are involved in a phenomenon. In this case study, there was a specific issue at a specific place that was focused on (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological research approach would not have been the best method for this project study because with the phenomenological method, the focus is describing what all participants have in common and reducing individual experiences to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This research study involved surveying individual ELA teacher participants about their experiences, rather than taking a group perspective over time.

A grounded theory research approach was also not chosen for this research project. The intent for a grounded theory study is to move beyond descriptions and toward a theory that may help to explain a particular practice (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which a general explanation is generated that is "grounded" in data regarding a practice or process that is widely used by a large number of participants (Creswell, 2013). This research study did not use a databased theory in the effort to answer the research question.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this research project because the guiding research question supported the creation of a data collection tool in the format of a survey to pose a series of open-ended structured questions to the ELA teachers. Qualitative research should be conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored (Creswell, 2007). ELA teachers' responses to the questions asked on a survey regarding their experiences and perspectives on addressing the needs of their AA male MS students were collected, and the data were used to answer the research question and address the purpose and problem using a qualitative approach. Case study research involves an issue to be explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative research does have its limitations. Qualitative data may not be transferable to large portions of the population; however, it can be applied to certain populations (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research can be time consuming, and because the researcher is the primary data collector, it is possible that there will be a level of researcher bias included (Stake, 2005).

The unit of study is the teacher participant's perspective and experiences when teaching reading to AA MS males. This was a bounded study in terms of activity, place, time, and context (Yin, 1999). Data were collected using a cross-sectional approach where the teacher participants' perceptions or points of view were obtained from their completed surveys. The teacher participants were asked to focus their experiences on reading-only activities, which constrained this activity by focusing on a singular subject. The context was constrained by the school environment in which the teachers taught their students.

Qualitative researchers explore people, places, and events in their natural settings, as this approach allows for identifying unknown concepts in relation to a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers explore information that is provided from collected data that builds an understanding of a specified phenomenon, creating an inductive research process that is also considered an emergent design (Creswell, 2014). The field of qualitative research allows for a variety of data collection methods. These data collection methods include surveys, field notes, records, documents, transcripts, photographs, and videos (Creswell, 2014). In this research study, the primary data collection method was the use of semistructured individual surveys that the teachers worked on independently.

An instrumental case study approach allows the researcher to explore individuals, communities, and relationships; thus, instrumental case study was an appropriate approach for this case study (Yin, 2003). Case study research may be instrumental, intrinsic, or collective (Stake, 2005). The focus of this instrumental case study design

was to gain a deep understanding of the perceptions and experiences of teachers when teaching reading to AA MS males. The ELA teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching reading to AA MS males at this northeastern middle school constituted the phenomenon studied. This instrumental case study offered insight into educators' perceptions and experiences in relation to teaching reading proficiency to these students.

For this research study, inductive reasoning within a bounded system approach was used, which is consistent with the case study approach (Stake, 2005). The middle school that served as the site for this case study was in the northeastern area of the United States, which bound the school by geographic location. The teachers at the school were surveyed about their perceptions and experiences in teaching their AA MS male students, which bound the particular participants in this case study.

The research question was explored through individual surveys provided to the participating ELA teachers. This method of data collection is often used in order to gain a deeper understanding from participants' perspectives and experiences (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). Qualitative research was the most appropriate design to use because, according to the school principal, there were no data regarding MS teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching reading to AA males at the target middle school. The qualitative research method was favored over quantitative or mixed methods or this research project, because the other methods would not have addressed the research question and problem (Creswell, 2013). In addition, with both the quantitative and mixed method approaches, data are used to prove or disprove a given hypothesis, which was not the process in this research study (Creswell, 2013).

Constructivist assertions allow focus to be on the individual's perspective (Creswell, 1998). "Pluralism, rather than relativism, is stressed with a focus on the circular dynamic tension of subject and object" (Yin, 1999, p. 10). Searle (1995) asserted that a social construction of reality is at the core of constructivism. Through stories, the researcher can understand the participant's point of view better because it is through this venue that participants describe their reality (Lather, 1992). Through the constructivist approach, the researcher and the participant are allowed to connect in order for the participant to tell his or her story and describe his or her reality (Creswell, 1998).

For this study, the qualitative method was appropriate because the focus was on the perspectives and experiences of the teacher participants (Creswell, 1998). This method provided the means to describe the culture in the classroom in order to deepen understanding about factors in AA MS males' reading instruction and learning.

Instrumental Case Study Design

The methodological approach used to investigate this problem was qualitative research. This project study used an instrumental case study approach to explore what teachers did specifically to help AA MS males attain higher achievement on reading assessments. In a single instrumental case study, one issue is focused on and one bounded case is selected to illustrate the issue (Stake, 1995). A case study involves the study of an issue that is explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). It can be viewed as a methodology, a type of design, or an object of study in which the researcher investigates a bounded system (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher can also study multiple bound systems or cases involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). This suggestion of data gathering in the qualitative approach led me to focus on surveys for the data required for this project study. This allowed individual teachers to provide data, anonymously and unencumbered by other teachers. This case study approach provided a method for gathering data from teachers that would keep them anonymous to any superior, including me, by using surveys and allowing each teacher participant to include multiple sources of information on their survey document in an effort to better understand ELA teachers' perspectives and experiences when teaching AA MS males reading.

The individual surveys allowed the teacher participants to provide their own private feedback concerning their perspectives on what they had done to specifically assist AA MS males in succeeding in reading achievement. The surveys also provided the teacher participants with a level of privacy as they provided information.

This project study was bound to the individual teachers who taught AA males as students at the middle school. A bounded system was used, and it was one in which the case selected had boundaries that also had interrelated parts that formed a whole (Stake, 2005).

Participants

The setting for this study was a middle school in a diverse middle-class urban school district in the northeastern United States. The target school was set in a mid-sized public school district composed of eight elementary schools and three secondary schools, one of which was the target school. The school staff were responsible for meeting all

state mandates for public middle schools. The student population was approximately 50%

Caucasian, 35% Asian, 8% Hispanic, and 5% African American. The population for this

sample consisted of all sixth- and seventh-grade LAL teachers who were employed at the

middle school. There were 179 teachers employed at the school. Of these teachers, 39

taught language arts.

Purposeful sampling was used to select teachers at the target site. There were 15

teacher participants involved in the study. The criteria for participation stated that eligible

individuals were ELA teachers at the target site who had instructed at least one AA male

student in their classes. Volunteers from this pool of teachers were the only participants

in this project study. In order to participate, teachers had to be at least 18 years of age and

employed by the school district, and they had to be willing to agree to the terms of the

informed consent form, in addition to being willing to complete the survey in a timely

manner. Teachers who did not agree to participate were thanked for their consideration

and assured that they would not be sanctioned or punished in any way for

nonparticipation.

Based on research guidelines, saturation levels could not be predicted. In total, 15

teacher participants returned the anonymous survey. In qualitative case study design,

selecting a few cases is acceptable because it allows the researcher to collect data that

contains rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2012). In this study, there were 12 cases.

Selecting only 12 case study participants allowed me to gather in-depth, rich data that

were coded about each participant and associated setting (Creswell, 2012). With 12

participants, I believe that I reached saturation, given the depth of responses gleaned from the participants.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

Permission to conduct the research was provided by the superintendent of schools prior to any data collection at the target school. I secured the superintendent's signature on the letter of cooperation specifying the school district's agreement to participate in the project study (Appendix D). I was also granted permission to conduct the project study by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the completion of an IRB application. The Walden IRB approval number is 09-25-17-0111301. After receiving permission from the Walden IRB, I shared the IRB approval with the superintendent of schools. Next, I arranged for a meeting with the superintendent to review the purpose of the study and to address any questions or concerns. The superintendent agreed to allow me to meet with the principal of the middle school and to work with him to arrange access to provide anonymous surveys to appropriate teachers.

I obtained access to teachers by contacting the principal of the middle school. Once access had been granted, teachers were invited to participate via a message board in the teacher information area of the main office of the building. This area is a private area for teachers that houses their school mailboxes and has school and union information for their perusal. Teachers had the opportunity to volunteer to take the survey, answer the questions, and return it. I had no direct contact with the participants. Each participant was thanked for participation.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

Research within the district has not historically been permitted. The study was designed to be an anonymous research study. Therefore, the researcher/participant relationship was established by discussing the study with the Superintendent of Schools and then with the principal. Through these meetings, it was established that I would be able to give the survey and accompanying permission information to the potential participants by leaving the surveys and information in a designated place where access by teachers would be anonymous. Therefore, the invitation letter was the vehicle for communication to build rapport and the instructions and tone of the invitation letter and survey were the only real means in which a relationship was built, as this was an anonymous survey.

Protection of Participants

This study was an anonymous survey design using open-ended questions to study the phenomena of teaching AA males reading/literacy skills at the target middle school. Surveys and permission information were put in self-stamped envelopes for easy submission once the survey was completed. The directions were clear that no names or identifying information was allowed on any survey information. This allowed the surveys to be completely anonymous. If the survey was returned, that signified that the letter of invitation and consent was agreed upon. In addition, I participated in the NIH class and all non-electronic information data was placed under lock and key.

As the researcher, I did not have direct contact with the teachers who volunteered for this study. Teachers chose to participate or decided not to participate. Campus

administrators and I did not know the names any teacher who participated, or any teacher that decided not to participate as I used an anonymous survey due to my position in the district. Teacher responses and comments, as well as the identity of any of the volunteer teachers were anonymous to the researcher. Data was collected via a drop box provided for the teachers in their private area of the main office. As the assistant superintendent, I physically collected all surveys from the drop box during the evening hours when school was not in session and there were no administrators or staff members present as well. The district was not accustomed to allowing any type of survey administered to students or staff for many years prior to my request. However, a new focus on the importance of using approved surveys, coupled with the board of education, the district and building administrators and the teachers' union all working together to advance learning for all in the district, has been implemented successfully.

Data Collection

This qualitative study consisted of teacher perceptions and experiences collected through anonymous surveys. The surveys and the invitation to participate/consent form were placed in a specified place in an area that allowed all teachers access. Each survey and invitation to participate/consent was put in an individual envelope. This allowed this researcher to also study bound systems or cases involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). This type of qualitative data collection provided a method for gathering data involving teachers that would keep them anonymous to any superior, including the researcher, by using semi structured individual surveys. These surveys allowed each anonymous participant to include multiple sources of information on their survey

document. My Chairperson at Walden University, the Superintendent of Schools and the principal of the school, reviewed the surveys. The survey was adjusted based on the feedback of the expert panel.

Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments

Once the project study was approved, data was collected via the teachers depositing the completed survey questionnaires in the drop box provided in the teachers' private area of the main office of the school. The main questionnaire protocol consisted of 10 open-ended questions that were answered via survey (Appendix B). The main questionnaire was divided into four main constructs. The four constructs on which I focused were (a) Lesson Plan Preparation and Design, (b) Instructional Delivery, (c) Student Learning and (d) Student Behavior. All questions were open-ended meaning that participants were encouraged to describe their answers in detail.

A consent and invitation to participate approved by the Walden University IRB was posted in the teachers' private area of the main office of the school. Those teachers that were willing to volunteer did so by turning in the survey. If they decided not to participate, then they did not complete the survey. If a teacher picked up the survey in the teachers' private area of the main office, completed and returned the survey in the drop box, which signified their consent to participate because this was an anonymous survey. Each survey packet contained a copy of the invitation and consent form, the survey questions and a small thank you for their consideration in the form of a gift card. Teacher names were not on the survey materials to maximize privacy and

anonymity. This process was the only vehicle for collecting data that the district leadership would approve.

Qualitative data was collected by the knowledge shared by the teachers. The data collection process for this study was gathered via an anonymous survey that provided a method for gathering data involving teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching reading to AA MS students. The individual surveys allowed the teacher participants to provide their private feedback to what their perspectives and experiences were on what they have implemented to specifically assist their AA MS male students to progress in reading skills. .The teachers' lesson plan preparation, instructional delivery, student learning and student behavior were focal areas on the survey to allow teachers to share experiences and perceptions in order to address the research question. The structure of the survey and the way in which the questions were asked were tied to the research question and designed in an open-ended format allowing the teacher to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives of teacher reading to AA MS students. With the 15 teacher participants, the data obtained was sufficient to address the research question, purpose and problem of this research study.

In this case study design, the qualitative data collection method utilized was most appropriate for collecting evidence from teachers with regards to their experiences and perceptions of what is needed to help their students succeed. I used an instrumental case study approach to explore what teachers did to specifically help their AA MS male students to engage and perform during reading lessons and instruction. It was a district requirement that the data collection be kept anonymous for this study. Thus, no

administrators or school personnel at the campus or district knew the identities of the teacher participants.

Systems for Keeping Track of Data

Anonymous surveys were completed by staff and put in a designated location near the teachers' school mailboxes. There were 15 surveys completed by participants and placed in the return designated area. There were no names or numbers on the surveys in order to ensure that each survey was completely anonymous. I collected the surveys after school hours to avoid any personal contact with school staff. I retrieved the surveys and stored them in my personal office at home in a locking file cabinet. Within 24 hours of collecting the survey, I reviewed the survey and began my transcription process. Reflective notes and transcriptions were also kept in the locking file cabinet in my personal home office. I was the primary instrument for collecting data. There was no contact between the researcher and any of the teachers that completed the survey.

Access and Ethical Protection of Participants

To gain the trust of participants is integral to ethical academic inquiry and research (Creswell, 2003). The participants (ELA teachers) were informed about the overall purpose of this research project. Participants were informed about the potential risks and benefits about participating in this study. Participants were all volunteers and it was made certain to them that there would be no penalty for either refusing to participate, or discontinuing participation. Participants were informed that they could request to exclude themselves from the research study at any time they felt uncomfortable. Teacher participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous and presented no risks or

benefits from their participation. The letter of consent detailed the purpose and procedures of the study; informed the participants that there were no risks or benefits resulting from their participation in the study; and assured respondents of anonymity. Participation in this study will help to increase further research on the topic as well as improve the academic performance of the students in this demographic group in the target district.

Role of the Researcher

I am currently the assistant superintendent of schools in the district of this study. Previously, I was in a neighboring district that had a similar problem as the one identified with this study. In my previous district, I had been an assistant principal at the high school level, an elementary principal and a middle school principal. Prior to my work as an administrator, I was a middle school teacher, an elementary school teacher and a high school special education teacher. My professional experiences have led me to the realization that certain students may not get the attention they deserve in the area of language arts and reading achievement.

I choose to conduct this case study in my present district because it is considered a district that is an academically advanced district. In addition, there are several surrounding districts, like my former district, that are experiencing a similar concern regarding the academic needs of our AA MS male population. I followed up all procedures outlined in this study with securing IRB approval, the district's consent, and all associated ethics when conducting this type of research. The rights of all participants were protected during the processes used in this project study.

After the data is collected and synthesized and a qualitative narrative produced, then the school district will receive a copy of all results. All data was collected without any intentional bias or interference from me or any other campus or district personnel. Proper safeguards must be in place to effectively keep all knowledge acquired during the study used for the targeted purpose intended. No identifying names or numbers were attached to any teacher survey. The information was relayed to the researcher through the answers provided on the surveys provided. A researcher has an obligation to understand their position as the information receiver and to maintain strict confidentiality. In this study, the identity of the participants was anonymous. Each participant signed a participation agreement form. To protect the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the research participants, proper care and attention was provided. One chosen school administrator managed the dissemination and retrieval of teacher surveys, with the understanding that the information was totally anonymous. In this study, the identity of data was carefully secured from anyone participating in creating the data information. As the researcher, I was the only one who had access to survey information. A secured numbering system was assigned to each participant to have a method to refer to the participants in the anonymous survey.

Data Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data obtained through the ten qualitative questions referred to in Appendix A. The researcher grouped and labeled concepts identified through the data collection after reviewing all of the raw data. These created themes will be sufficiently defined so that they can easily be communicated to

others. Once these themes were refined, the collective perceptions and experiences of the

teachers were illustrated in the themes and the sub-theme that were extracted from the

data. These themes were synthesized into a qualitative narrative that formalized specific

elements retrieved from the data.

There was not an analysis of social data or demographics in this study other than

ethnicity and its possible link to the experiences of students. These components may

affect the motivation of students. The social context regarding students was determined to

be outside of the scope of this study.

Coding

The coding process, which is the process of categorizing qualitative data, in this

project study is iterative and nonlinear. The coding process involves describing the

details, as well as the implications of the categories selected. Initially open coding was

used and then categories were developed.   This process yielded a highly organized, data

set that was used to identify emergent themes that oriented and grounded the

analysis. The first step in the coding process was to conduct line by line coding. "Open

coding" was the most foundational which Strauss and Corbin (1990) as "the analytic

process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and

dimensions" define (p. 74). This was primarily accomplished by asking mental questions

involving the data collected, making appropriate comparisons and then creating labels

and groupings for similar such phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After this process I

used the "axial coding" process which consisted of reconstruction of the data that had

been collected. According to Strauss and Corbin, these data are reconstructed in new

ways by making connections between a category and its subsequent subcategories

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The perspectives that drive the researcher to analyze

subsequent aspects of their subject iteratively and reflexively, provides understanding and

explanation, and allows the researcher to interpret patterns and make comparisons to

shape these types of data collection resulting in an interpretation of a substantial amount

of data gleaned from the analysis process (Briggs & Coleman, 2007).

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and the perspectives of

the teacher in supporting reading performance among AA MS males. This was

accomplished by providing teachers with an open-ended survey of 10 questions that

allowed each one of the teachers to share their perceptions, and experiences

anonymously.

Qualitative data collection focused on information provided by the teachers via

the anonymous surveys. Initially the qualitative data analysis process required finding

codes and recurring themes of the perceptions and experiences of the middle school

teachers who participated in the study upon the return of completed surveys. The study

findings provided insight into the perceptions and experiences on improving AA MS

males reading performance.

Findings

Based upon the data from the anonymous teacher surveys, the 15 participants

appeared to care about the relevance of the topics that they provided to their AA MS male

students when preparing lessons to address the needs of these students. The participants

believed that in addition to the importance of relevant material for these students, the use

of best practices was also a major consideration when developing their lessons to address these students' needs.

The participants also believed that when the focus is on lesson preparation and design, specifically on how they identify the learning modalities of their AA MS male students, the students' interests played a major role on that determination. Student interest and then differentiation tailoring the lesson to the individual's learning modality was the process used when focusing on the student's learning modality. Background knowledge of the student and emotional connections to the material, also were factors in this process.

In terms of instructional delivery, the focus was on the strategies utilized by teachers when delivering prepared lessons to their AA MS males. The participants did not feel that they do anything special when delivering lessons to these students. Those participants who cited specific strategies that they utilize for lesson delivery listed care and consideration as factors when strategizing lesson plan delivery. Participants who utilized strategies to deliver lessons to these students also considered student interest and student choice.

The participants' overwhelming believed that their AA MS male students respond positively to the strategies they do use by demonstrating increased comprehension engagement and interest in their work. Additionally, participants reported that these students respond with additional respect, are more emotionally connected, and are more positive in class.

When participants were asked if there were any areas of lesson plan implementation that could be stronger when working with their AA MS male students, the participants reported using pre-assessments and regular classroom formative and summative assessments to ensure that their lesson plan implementation is effective. Running records and background information on these students are also critical components when developing effective lesson plan development, as well as the use of multiple intelligence surveys and interest inventories.

When surveyed as to the best and most effective methods of teaching reading or language arts to their AA MS male students, the participants overwhelmingly believed that student interest was the key to lesson effectiveness. Student engagement, rapport with their students and working towards having their students strive for a deeper meaning of the material that these students were most interested in, were the most effective methods when teaching reading to their students.

When the participants were surveyed about their perceptions whether their strategies had improved their AA MS males' students learning, the participants believed that student engagement was increased by their efforts. In addition, it was reported that instruction was more intense because of the strategies utilized, students were encouraged, and rapport improved.

When participants were surveyed on what they believe they need to better address the reading needs of their AA MS male students, the participants overwhelmingly reported that student choice on what their students can read and overall engagement when

reading were the two most important components. Participants also believed that building better relationships with these students was also important.

Participants believed that building relationships with their AA MS male students was the reason they had no behavioral problems in class. Participants that believed that instruction and clear expectations were most important when focusing on their students' behavior, reported some behavior problems in class with their AA MS male students. Lastly, the participants were surveyed on their belief of how they effectively manage the behaviors of their AA MS male students. A sensitive, respectful approach and handling issues on an individual basis as they arise, were cited as positive factors in establishing a well-managed classroom. Sensitivity towards their AA MS males' student needs and instructional rigor were also reported as main factors in managing student behaviors in class. The following tables reflect the responses per participant per question with analysis of the overall response per survey/interview question. Following the analysis of the survey responses per question, facilitated the identification of codes, categories to support identification of the themes, which follow the analysis of responses from the survey using open-ended questions. In reviewing the protocol questions, it is important to observe the connection between the Research Question, protocol questions and identified themes.

The overarching research question was: What are the perspectives and experiences of when teaching reading to African American middle school males? The teacher protocol contained four focal areas, which included (a) Lesson Plan Preparation (b) Instructional Delivery, (c) Student Learning, and (d) Student Behavior. Protocol

questions were related to each of the focal areas and supported answering the overarching research question. The following themes were identified:

Theme 1: Using relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices.

Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension and engagement.

Subtheme 1: Use preassessments to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities.

Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement

Table 1

Emerging Themes and Description

Theme	Description of theme
Theme 1: Using relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices	Teacher considerations for lesson plan development and implementation
Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension and engagement	Teacher perceptions of critical instructional delivery considerations
Subtheme 1: Use preassessments to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities	Teacher perceptions to identify learning modality and effective strategies
Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement	Teacher perceptions of relationship building based on respect and sensitivity

Table 2 shows the connection between the themes that emerged and the focal

areas embedded in the protocol questions. There were three identified three themes and

one sub-theme, which emerged from the overarching research question

Table 2

Research Question Focal Areas and Emerging Themes

Theme	Research question focal areas and emerging themes
Theme 1: Using relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices	Lesson plan preparation
Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension, and engagement (some overlap here with protocol question and responses)	Instructional delivery
Subtheme 1: Use preassessments to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities	Instructional delivery
Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension, and engagement	Student learning
Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension, and engagement	Instructional delivery
Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement	Student behavior
Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement	Student behavior

Questions one and two on the Teacher Survey Protocol pertained to theme one

and two. I outline the responses from each protocol question and describe how the

responses are connected to the identified themes and corresponding focal areas in Table 3

which aligned with the focal area of Lesson Plan Preparation.

Table 3

Lesson Plan Preparations: *How Do You Prepare Lessons to Address the Needs of Your AA MS Male Students?*

Responses	Occurrences	% of occurrences
Relevance of material	8	53%
Use best practices	3	20%
Relevance & best practices	3	20%
Just follow district curriculum	1	7%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Theme 1

Theme 1: Using relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices. Overwhelmingly, the most common answer the teachers gave on this question was that the relevance of the material was most important, according to the perceptions of the teachers, for these students to have the interest to succeed. Intrinsic motivation or personal interest lead to greater achievement; extrinsic or external motivation are activities/things that will tap into students' deep-seated interests (Kusurkar et al., 2013). These teacher participants perceived that what their AA MS male students were interested in was most important to shaping the lesson plan that would be developed for class.

Participants 2, 4, and 7 prepare their lesson plans using the district's best practices. There is no focus on the AA MS males' needs specifically. Participants 5, 8, and 13 used a combination of relevance to the student and best practices when preparing lessons to address the needs if their AA MS male students. They perceived that the commitment was being made to think "outside the box" when looking for resources that were relevant for these students, however it would not raise to the level of being at the expense of the district's best practices. One participant's perception was that when creating lesson plans, it was best to focus on the district curriculum, rather than looking at the individual needs of any particular student or group of students.

Table 4

Student Learning: How Do You Identify the Learning Modalities of Your AA Middle School Males?

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Look at what they are interested in	4	27 %
Through differentiation	3	20
Look at background knowledge	2	13
Make emotional connections first	2	13
The same way I identify for all students	2	13
Use questioning techniques	1	7
Look at needs/previous recommendations	1	7

Analysis of Responses Supporting Theme 2

In addition to using relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices, another important identified component of student learning is the modality in which the student learns best. Relevant material that engages the student (Theme #1) will need to be delivered in a manner that appeal to the student's learning style or preference (Theme #2).

Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension and engagement. The greatest number of teacher participants (4 out of 15) answered that they use their AA MS male students' interests when determining the individual student's learning modality. The teacher participants who provided this answer in their surveys stated that if their students appeared to be interested in the material provided, then that genuine interest would allow the teacher to better determine that student's learning modality (participants 3, 7, 8, and 10). This is also consistent with what some of these teacher participants said regarding their determination that this genuine interest from the student would normally lead to better academic performance (participants 3, 7, and 10). Moreira, Dias, Vas, and Vas (2013) identify the engagement and the correlation to performance. The engagement and study habits are significant factors in motivation with AA MS males.

Other participants explained that they use differentiation as their basis when working to determine their AA MS males learning modalities (participants 1, 2, and 12). These teacher participants reflected on their practice and answered the survey in a more "clinical" or a process-oriented manner.   As did one teacher participant who answered

this survey question by writing in, "I use questioning techniques to help me determine the learning modalities of these students." Two teacher participants explained that they look at emotional connections (participants 5 and 11). One of these participants (Participant 11) explained that the emotional connection that this teacher uses is that of the student to the material, while the other participant (5) explained that the emotional connection is the one between the student and the teacher. The other teacher participants were candid in their approach to this survey question. Participants 4 and 13 explained that they use background information that is primarily gathered from the students' previous teachers, while participants 12 and 15 stated that they do not do anything special to determine or identify the learning modalities of their AA MS male students.

Table 5

Instructional Delivery: Strategies Used by ELA Teachers When Delivering Prepared Lessons to AA MS Male Students

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Use interests/choices	3	20%
Special care/consideration	4	20%
Use minilesson format	2	12%
Encourage sharing	1	7%
Emotional connection	1	
No special strategies	4	27%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Themes 1 and 3

The following are strategies that teachers used when delivering prepared lessons to their AA MS male students. Twenty-seven percent of teachers stated that they did not do anything special for their AA MS male students, other than deliver the soundly prepared lesson targeting all students. Forty percent of the teachers prepared lessons with their AA MS male students' interests, selected choices, or simply took special consideration regarding these students when preparing their lessons.

Theme 1: Using relevant material that incorporates students' interests and students' choices. Teachers surveyed their students and asked for their input when selecting materials for reading assignments. Students were provided the option to read materials in subjects that they enjoyed or were interested in pursuing further as they entered high school.

Theme 3: Relationships are important to student behavior, and handling issues with respect and sensitivity can be leveraged to increase closeness and engagement. Some teachers reported that developing positive working relationships with their AA MS male students helped curb possible poor student behavior concerns. In addition, those teachers reported that respect and handling issues that came up in class with sensitivity were positive aspects when it came to student engagement.

Participants also explained that they look at the interests of the student and give the student choices to use as strategies when delivering their lessons (participants 5, 7, and 14). Participants 7 and 9 further explained that part of the choices they provide are included as extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards can be extremely positive tools in

creating a more motivated student when working with students who are disaffected (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013).   Similarly, other participants explained that they provide special care and consideration to these students when delivering their lessons (participants 3, 13, and 15). Two teacher participants stated that they use a mini-lesson format as a strategy when delivering their prepared lessons to their AA MS male students (participants 2 and 6). One teacher participant (5) explained that sharing with all students is a strategy that is utilized and another teacher participant (9) explained that student sharing, as well as special care and consideration are strategies used when delivering their lessons to these students. Another teacher participant (6) explained that the strategy that is used is to develop a strong emotional connection with the student prior to delivering the prepared lesson.

Some inconsistencies in teachers' responses were found in the analysis of this protocol question. While the overwhelming majority of teachers reported that they did "*Nothing Special*" is provided to AA males. Teacher participants answered this survey question by stating that they do nothing special to deliver prepared lessons to their AA MS males (participants 8, 10, 11, and 12), provided additional information regarding their answers. Participants 8, 10, and 11 explained that their focus is on the appropriate preparation of the lesson, which includes any additional specifications for their AA MS males. They further explained that the lesson preparation was where the strategies they were using would be found, thus they do not include any additional strategies when delivering the lesson. Participant 15 explained that nothing special needs to be

incorporated in the strategies when delivering the lesson because the delivery should be

the same for all students.

Table 6

Instructional Delivery: Teachers' Perceptions of Student Responses to Strategies Used in Lesson Plan Implementation

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Increased comprehension/ engagement/interest	7	47%
Respect/fairness	2	13%
Increased emotional connectedness	2	13%
Nothing specific	2	13%
More empowered	1	7%
More positive	1	7%

Protocol Responses and Analysis of Responses Supporting Themes 2 and 3

Recognizing and adhering to student learning modalities to deliver effective

lessons that increase student interest, comprehension and engagement (Theme 2), was

identified as a major component of teaching and learning for AA MS males by the

teachers surveyed. In addition, in order to deliver these lessons in the most effective way,

the teachers identified the relationship the teacher has built with the student (Theme 3), as an important factor to the success of the students' behavior and learning.

Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension and engagement. Overwhelmingly, the most common response to this survey question regarding the ways the teacher participants AA MS male students respond to the strategies utilized to implement the lessons provided was that these students have demonstrated increased comprehension, better engagement, and more interest. These teacher participants (2, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15) explained that these students demonstrated a better capacity to organize and manage information; these skills are commonly termed executive functions (Gayo, Deano, Conde, Ribeiro, Cadime, & Alfonso, 2014).

Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement. Other teacher participants responded that their students demonstrated greater respect for their teacher and were fairer or understanding when they did not understand a particular aspect of their reading (participants 1 and 7). Teacher participants also responded that their students appeared to be more emotionally connected when they perceived that their teacher specifically designed something for them during a lesson. One participant (5) also reported that because of the emotional bond between the teacher and their AA MS male students, there is a moment of "pride" when the students perceive that a strategy was implemented during a lesson to specifically help them. One teacher participant (3) reported that these students are more positive based on the strategies implemented in class and another reported that the students appear more

empowered (participant 4). Some inconsistent responses were two teacher participants

that reported that their AA MS male students do not respond in any specific way to

specific strategies used (9 and 12).

There was also a sub theme noted in this study. The sub theme was the use of pre

and post assessment materials to build a strong foundation of a starting point for learning

and authentic goals that can be attained by the student throughout the course.

Table 7

Instructional Delivery: Are There Any Areas of Lesson Plan Implementation That Can Be Strengthened?

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Do preassessments/planning to gauge	5	33%
Utilize running records	2	13%
Running records/background info	2	13%
Multiple intelligence survey/interest	2	13%
Background knowledge	1	7%
Learning modalities/flex seating	1	7%
Interest inventory/interests	1	7%
Interest inventory	1	7%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Subtheme 1

Subtheme 1: Using preassessments to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities. A third of the teacher participants (1, 3 10, 13, and 14) explained that they have limited areas of concern because they use pre-assessments to formulate their lesson plans and then they closely monitor the progress of their students.   Teacher participants 3, 10, and 14 also reported that by effectively gathering pre-assessment information on their students, there is less of a chance that these students will receive negative feedback from other students or be connected to negative stereotypes. There is evidence that self-perceptions are strongly connected to negative stereotypes, in that those people who are stereotyped are likely to believe that these views about themselves (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

Some teacher participants were more specific about the tools that they use to monitor their students' progress. Two teacher participants (2 and 8) use Running Records to help them prepare lessons that allow for the optimum lesson effectiveness. Two other teacher participants utilize Running Records and the background knowledge that is obtained from their students' previous teachers (participants 7 and 9). Two teacher participants use a multiple intelligence survey and what their students are interested in to provide the strongest possible lessons (participants 11 and 12). One of the teacher participants reported just using the background knowledge of the students when they report to class initially and then the student is monitored closely (participant 5). Another teacher participant utilized information received after their students' learning modalities were documented and then using

flexible seating schemes in the classroom to ensure the most effective lessons. One

teacher participant utilizes an interest inventory, but also decides what would be best for

the individual student (participant 7). Finally, participant 5 uses an interest inventory and

uses the information from there to help create the best lessons for class.

Table 8

Teachers' Perceptions of Most Effective Method of Teaching Reading to AA MS Males

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Interest/instruction	7	47%
Engagement	3	20%
Rapport	2	13%
Deeper thinking/intense instruction	2	13%
Differentiation	1	7%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Themes 2 and 3

Recognizing and adhering to student learning modalities to ensure student

increased engagement leading to effective instruction (Theme 2), was identified as a

major component to learning for AA MS males. Teachers also identified that rapport with

their students (Theme 3), was also a major factor in determining which method to utilize

with their students.

Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension, and engagement. Overwhelmingly, the most common survey answer to this question was have students interested and then make sure your instruction is effective. Teacher participants (8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15) explained that effective lessons are centered on student interest. They reported that after you have these students interested, then good instruction is essential to the creation of the most effective lesson plans for AA MS male students. Teacher participants 8, 9, and 12 also reported that they perceived their effectiveness and strengths in these areas as possible reasons some of their AA MS male students avoided special education classification. Children with diverse ethnicities are vastly overrepresented as people with disabilities, and the number of male students of color are the most significant group within that designation (McKenna, 2013).

Theme 3: Relationships are important to student behavior, and handling issues with respect and sensitivity can be leveraged to increase closeness and engagement. Teacher participants also reported that student engagement was the best way to get the most from their students (participants 1, 2, and 3). Two teacher participants (4 and 13) reported that rapport with their students was what was strived for when determining the effectiveness of the method utilized to teacher their students reading. Two other teacher participants reported that deeper thinking created by intense instruction was the most effective method to teaching their students reading (participants 5 and 6). One participant reported that differentiation is the most effective method of teaching reading (participant 7). This teacher participant explained that part of their

differentiation process of lessons included differentiation on the way the students were

monitored for success (participant 5).

Table 9

Do You Believe That the Strategies You Have Used Have Improved Your AA MS Males'
Learning Reading?

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Strategies improved engagement	5	33%
Strategies improved interactions	4	28%
Encouraged students to learn	2	13%
Strategies improved rapport	2	13%
Strategies improved conferencing	2	13%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Theme 3

   Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve

engagement. Teacher participants reported that their perception was that the strategies

they have utilized have improved their students' engagement when learning (participants

1, 2, 9, 12, and 15). Teacher participants 1, 2, and 12 explained that some of these

students in their classes have made academic improvements and that there was a fear that

some of the progress made would be limited because of the perceptions of their

friends. Researchers have suggested that many times when AA males make certain

academic strides, or ask for academic assistance, they face ridicule from within their own group (Stinson, 2013).

Four teacher participants (6, 8, 10, and 14) reported improved interaction. The improved interaction was explained as better interaction from student to student and better interaction with the teacher. Two teacher participants reported that their students had made important academic strides that the teachers perceived as being because of the encouragement the students had received in class (participants 3 and 5). Two teacher participants reported that they perceived that their efforts have improved their students' rapport with them, thus giving their students additional hope for academic improvement (participants 4 and 13). Two teacher participants reported that that their students have demonstrated improved conferencing skills, which they perceived as important skills as the students continue to progress towards improved academic success (participants 7 and 11).

Table 10

What Do You Believe Would Help You Better Address the Needs of Your AA MS Male Students?

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Increased closeness and engagement	10	60%
Student choices	3	19%
Build better relationships with students	1	7%
Nothing	1	7%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Themes 3 and 1

Teachers were asked what they believed would better help their AA MS male students succeed when learning to read more effectively. Many of these teachers expressed similar beliefs relating to relationship building with their students (Theme 3). Teachers also reported that the relationship building would be helped by allowing students' additional access to resources that interested them more (Theme 1).

Theme 3: Relationships are important to student behavior, and handling issues with respect and sensitivity can be leveraged to increase closeness and engagement. Overwhelmingly, the teacher participants reported that they would like to be closer to their students because they perceive that by being even closer to their

students, it would lead to improved student performance (participants 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15). These teacher participants explained that more could be done to improve student progress, if the student/teacher relationship was closer and included more trust. Teacher participants 5, 8, 9, and 12 also reported instances where they perceived that their students wanted to do better during the learning process, however social issues may have prevented some of that growth. One teacher participant reported that building a better relationship with their students would help the teacher to better address their students' needs (participant 3). Another teacher participant believed that better engagement with their students would ultimately help to address their students' needs (participant 2).

Theme 1: Using relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices. Three teacher participants reported that additional student choices regarding educational resources and reading materials would be very helpful in their efforts to address the reading needs of their students (participants 4, 6, and 7). Add 2 sentences – you could use transition sentence to lead us to next paragraph

Some inconsistent responses were that one participant reported that there was nothing that was needed that would help to better address their students' needs (participant 5).

Table 11 focused on AA MS male student behavior in class and the role relationship building between teacher and student plays in the success of these students. The teachers' responses were clear that relationship building is an important component to learning with their students.

Table 11

How Do Your AA MS Male Students Behave in Class and How Important Are the
Relationships Built With Your Students?

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Relationships important to behavior	8	53%
Instruction and clear expectations important	6	40%
Patience and understanding important	1	7%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Theme 3

From table 11 (above) it can be determined that teachers believe that relationship building is important to student behavior and it is important to student learning for these students.

Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement. Relationships are important to student behavior. Teacher participants reported that building relationships with their students is the most important factor in determining student behavior. There were a variety of methods these teachers utilized to build these positive working relationships with their students. Teacher participants 1 and 15 reported that relationship building came naturally, or not at all. Teacher participants 2 and 7 reported that their focus with their students was extrinsic rewards. Teacher participants 5, 6, 11, and 12 all reported using some type of intrinsic motivation

successfully at various points with their students. It should be noted that intrinsic

motivation is a more effective tool for male students (Cortright et al., 2013). All of these

teacher participants reported that they have little or no student behavior issues in their

classes.

Six teacher participants reported that good instruction and clear expectations are

most important regarding their students' behavior (participants 4, 8, 9, 10, 13, and 14).

Each one of these teachers reported that they have at least some behavior problems in

their classes with their students. One teacher reported that the most important of student

behavior was for the teacher to have patience and understanding (participant 3). This

teacher participant did not include any data on student behavior in their classes.

Table 12

How Do You Effectively Handle Issues With Your AA MS Males in Class?

Responses	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
With respect and sensitivity	7	47%
Independently	6	40%
With sensitivity and rigor	2	13%

Analysis of Responses Supporting Theme 3

Teachers were asked how they handle classroom issues (i.e., behavior concerns)

with their AA MS male students. Respect and sensitivity was a focus for almost half of

the teachers reporting.

Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement. Teacher participants reported that all issues in class are handled with respect and with sensitivity (participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 11, 13, and 15). These teacher participants did not give specifics on how they handle each issue with respect and sensitivity. However, three teacher participants (3, 5, and 13) did comment on their perceptions of what would happen to some of their students, if each issue were not handled with respect and sensitivity. These teachers reported that they perceived that some of their students would have been considered for special education because of potential behavior issues previously exhibited by their students. Teacher participants 3 and 13 further commented that their belief was that AA male students were overrepresented in special education classrooms. Nationally, AA males who are overrepresented in special education classrooms, have the lowest rate of graduation of any ethnic group and their overall academic performance scores are consistently lower than white students (Howard 2013).

Teacher participants also reported that when issues arise in class with their students, each of these issues are handled independently (4, 6, 9, 10, 12, and 14). Teacher participants 4, 9, and 12 further specified that they as meaning that the student himself was considered, when determining what should be done about a specific issue, perceived handling each issue independently. Teacher participant 12 further clarified that some of the students do not understand that certain actions may be wrong. Those students need to be identified and the action thoroughly explained and monitored closely to prevent recidivism. Two teacher participants reported that their

students are managed with sensitivity and added that classroom rigor was an important

factor in their classroom management plan (participants 7 and 8).

The data was analyzed based on Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) and

the dimensions of each one of his modes. Kolb's (1984) concept of the experiential

theory focused on the notion that experience is the source of learning development. Kolb

describes how learners come to prefer certain modes to other type modes and that

learners may remain in certain, more familiar parts of the learning cycle, while avoiding

other parts (Peterson, DeCato, & Kolb, 2015). Kolb's experiential learning theory

describes how learning shapes the course of development (p.140). Kolb's focus is on the

four learning modalities of complexity. These modalities are behavioral, symbolic,

affective and perceptual (p. 141). The analysis of findings related to Kolb's conceptual

framework provided themes that were consistent from the data gathered. In order to

make a positive difference in their students' lives, the teachers have modified lessons,

used flexible seating, and provided small group instruction, as well. Other methods were

also used to try to improve their students' performance in reading (Theme 1: Using

relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices and Theme 2:

Identifying student learning modalities to deliver lessons that are more effective).

Teachers have worked to adopt their teaching styles to better meet the needs of their

students and to try to engage their students in the learning process by developing positive

working relationships. Teachers have also worked on talking and listening to students'

concerns and fears that impact their overall academic success (Theme 3: Relationships

are important to student behavior, and handling issues with respect and sensitivity can be leveraged to increase closeness and engagement).

Table 13

Themes in Kolb's Conceptual Framework Modalities

Behavior (active experimentation)	Symbolic (abstract conceptualization)	Affective (concrete experience)	Perceptual (reflective observation)
3.1 Use student interests and choices, special care and consideration in delivering prepared lessons 5.1 Using preassessments. 6.1 Effective lessons centered on student interest.	1.1 Relevance of the material to the student. 2.1 Use what the student is interested in to help identify their learning modality.	4.1 Increased comprehension, engagement, and interest. 8.1 Increased closeness and engagement.	7.1 Improved student engagement. 9.1 Relationships are important to student behavior. 10.1 Handle issues with respect and sensitivity.

Themes

The following themes were identified for the research question: What are the ELA teachers' perceptions and experiences teaching their AA MS males? The correlation of the identified themes to Kolb's conceptual framework and noted Table 13 and below.

Theme 1: Using relevant material that incorporates student interests and student choices. (1.1, 3.1).

Theme 2: Identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension and engagement. (2.1, 4.1, 6.1, 7.1)

Theme 3: Establish relationships based on respect and sensitivity to improve engagement. (8.1, 9.1, 10.1) (8.1, 9.1, 10.1)*Subtheme* 1: Using preassessments to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities. (5.1)

Based on the data analyzed, the responses to the survey questions were coded and categorized into a total of three major themes and one subtheme. The findings derived from the data were within the categories of using relevant materials that incorporates student interests and student choices, identifying student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension and engagement, and using pre-assessments to identify student interests, background knowledge and learning modalities. These three major themes are what the teachers perceive are crucial in improving AA MS males reading performance.

Major Theme 1: Using Relevant Material That Incorporates Student Interest and Student Choice

The first major theme, which emerged from the teachers' responses to the survey, was that the relevance of the material was most important for these students to have the interest to succeed. Intrinsic motivation or personal interest lead to greater achievement; extrinsic or external motivation are activities/things that will tap into students' deep-seated interests (Kusurkar et al., 2013). These teacher participants perceived that what their AA MS male students were interested in was most important to shaping the lesson plan that would be developed for them and the class. Participants 4 and 7 shared that they spend a great deal of time researching relevant materials for their students that will increase their engagement. They both also added that more time is spent on this task than actually preparing the lesson plan itself. Participant two stated:

"I have students that will not focus unless they are interested in the material that they are reading. My AA MS males tend to go off task when they are reading material that is not consistent with the world they know." Use a transition sentence to signal that we are moving to theme 2. The second major theme identified from the analysis of responses was related to student learning modalities and how to engage students.

Major Theme 2: Identifying Student-Learning Modalities to Deliver Effective Lessons That Increase Interest, Comprehension, and Engagement

The second major theme that emerged was the use of what the student is interested in to help identify their learning modality. A significant number of teacher participants (4 out of 15) answered that they use their AA MS males' interests when

determining the individual student's learning modality. The teacher participants who provided this answer in their individual surveys stated that if their students appeared to be interested in the material provided, then that genuine interest would allow the teacher to better determine the student's learning modality (participants 3, 7, 8 and 10). Moreira, Dias, Vas, and Vas (2013) identified the engagement and the correlation performance. Participant three stated, "I find it easier to ascertain the learning modality of these students by initially finding out what they enjoy, then looking at what the best way they learn, or the best way I should deliver the instruction". Participant 10 similarly stated, "You first have to know what they like. Then you can test which modality suits them best. Each is their own person and learns their own way". In addition, participant 7 stated:

Looking at learning modality of a student is useless, if you are not aware of what will interest him. Genuine interest in the subject matter and the reading material the relates to him is the key to finding out his way of learning. Student relationships with their teachers can also be a factor in student success in the classroom.

Major Theme 3: Establish Relationships Based on Respect and Sensitivity to Improve Engagement

The teacher participants reported that they would like to be closer with their AA MS male students because they perceive that by being even closer to their students, it would ultimately lead to improved student performance (participants 5,8,9,10 11, 12, 13 14 and 15 all made some reference to this theme). These teacher participants explained that more could be done to improve student progress, if the student/teacher relationship is

closer and included more trust. Teacher participants 5, 8, 9 and 12 all agreed that in some cases their students appeared to want to do better during the learning process; however, "social issues" may have prevented that growth. Finally, also a sub-theme emerged from the data. Using re-assessments/planning to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities also emerged from the data as important components. There was one sub theme identified from the analysis of responses.

Subtheme 1: Using preassessments to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities (5.1). Some teachers used pre-assessment tools to help them discover what their students' interests were. Pre-assessments were also used to gather information on background knowledge and on information on how the students learn best.

Discrepant Cases

It is possible to have discrepant cases emerge during data collection. This occurs when data considered examples of conflicting information are inconsistent with emergent themes during the data analysis process (Gast & Ledford, 2014). I minimized the potential for discrepant cases by requesting on the survey that each participant write their thoughts completely and be as specific as possible when answering the survey questions (Yin, 2014). The participants were very thorough when responding to the survey questions**.** There were some inconsistent responses but they were not deemed discrepant cases. The inconsistent cases were discussed in the data analysis.

Evidence of Quality

At no time did the researcher meet with any of the participants. A consent and invitation to participate was posted in the teachers' private area in the main office. Those teachers willing to participate did so and turned in the anonymous survey. The criteria for participation was noted clearly in the notice of invitation and consent. Triangulation across teacher responses was used to validate codes, categories and themes. If a teacher decided not to participate, then that teacher did not complete the survey. Teacher names were not on the survey materials to ensure anonymity.

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Summary

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Participant responses were analyzed, and emergent themes were identified. From those 10 questions, three major themes and one sub-theme were selected as the most representative of participant responses. Each theme addresses the primary methods, pedagogies, and principles educators use in their instruction of AA males in order to improve their reading outcomes and reduce reading underachievement. The first theme confirmed that teachers *use relevant material that incorporate student interests and student choices.* The second theme was that teachers *identify student-learning modalities to deliver effective lessons that increase student interest, comprehension, and engagement.* The third theme was that teachers understand how *relationships are important to student behavior, and handling issues with respect and sensitivity can be leveraged to increase closeness and engagement.* The sub-theme was that *teachers use pre-assessments to identify student interests, background knowledge, and learning modalities.* The themes reveal that there are actionable steps teachers can implement

immediately to begin addressing the achievement gap for AA males in order to improve their academic outcomes. These themes will be revisited in a discussion of the literature in support of the chosen project components: professional development for teachers.

This study utilized Kolb's experiential learning theory. Kolb's (1984) concept focused on the notion that experience is the source of learning development and learners prefer certain modes of learning over others which they avoid (Peterson, DeCato, & Kolb, 2015). Kolb's theory was used to better explain how learning occurs. One of the focuses of the experiential theory is how learning happens which is accomplished by placing emphasis on the individual's experience, which is at the center of learning (Kolb 1984). The emphasis here is on the importance of the role experience plays during the learning process (p. 24-25). This lifelong learning process may also be affected by other factors, such as the teachers that work with these students. Kolb's theory that learning is continuous and a learner's mind is like a "blank paper" and this study examined if these ELA teachers considered their AA MS male students this way, or if they developed strategies that focused on how their students learn best. In this study, I explored the experiences and perspectives of these ELA teachers that are instructing AA MS male students and whether they used any special resources to develop lesson plans that could assist their students to improve in their reading skills. The themes that emerged will help to improve the understanding of how ELA teachers create strategies and experiences that will serve to address the learning needs of their AA MS male students.

Inconsistencies in the perception of AA MS male students by teachers resulted in competing structural and cultural explanations of their academic abilities. To better

understand the ideologies behind teacher practice, Allen (2015) applied qualitative

research methods in research. Agency towards these students will engage and help lift

barriers that lead to improved academic performance. Researchers also examined AA

males' perception of perceived barriers and found that student relationships with their

teachers was positively related to their academic performance (Vega et al., 2015). In a

systematic review conducted by Same et al. (2016), the researchers examined

interventions used to help the academic performance of AA students. Connecting AA

male students to mentors and encouraging parent participation were deemed successful

approaches toward helping these students improve achievement (Same et al., 2016).

Conclusion

The underachievement of AA males has been well documented by numerous

research studies backed by daunting statistics. AA males are in trouble, and it is the duty

of every parent, educator, administrator, librarian, and policymaker to develop and apply

specific, measurable strategies to help improve AA males' academic achievement.

Without a concerted effort, AA males will continue to be at-risk of failing to learn, failing

standardized assessments, incurring suspensions, being arrested, and juvenile

delinquency, which all funnel this vulnerable population into the prison pipeline. In order

to prevent these negative outcomes, teachers must be trained and developed to properly

educate AA males by making culturally relevant curriculum choices that directly appeal

to their interests, backgrounds, and aspirations. By centering AA males in the classroom

rather than marginalizing and punishing them, teachers can lead the way in reversing the

trends observed since *Brown v. Board* in order to finally dispense with negative

stereotypes and discrimination against this demographic.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and examine teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching AA MS male students. Based on the three major themes, and the one subtheme revealed from participant responses, I propose that a PD plan for teachers of AA males is the best option for addressing reading underachievement in AA MS males. This professional development workshop, entitled *Providing Teachers' With Additional Tools to Help Create a Culturally Aware Learning Environment,* is designed to offer teachers options for creating an environment that may help their AA MS male students to thrive and achieve more consistently, as well as provide systemic opportunities for positive change in the classroom environment.

The program consists of 3 days of workshop-model PD, in which 1 day is conducted partially online and 2 days are conducted face to face. Teachers will explore relevant readings similar to the studies presented in the literature review to follow, and will assess their own beliefs, perceptions, thought patterns, stereotypes, propensity for empathy, past behaviors, and measurable outcomes to determine whether they align or have the capacity to align with the suggested pedagogies and strategies for teaching and reaching AA MS males. The professional development will include readings, videos, and assessments that teachers will complete on their own. The development plan will also include small-group projects and role playing in cohort groups.

Rationale

The findings presented within this study showed that there is a need to consider ongoing PD for ELA teachers who work with AA MS males. Drawing the recommendations set forth by the literature, this project presents the most viable option because it incorporates a major factor contributing to AA male underachievement in reading: the quality of teacher training. The participant responses revealed how teachers perceived their instruction of AA males and the strategies used to instruct AA males successfully. Teachers need to be made aware of the pedagogies and strategies that they use, as well as their effective or ineffectiveness, and they must be provided with opportunities to develop culturally relevant pedagogies and strategies to foster learning and improve academic achievement among AA males. The PD project offers a 3-day PD session, which focuses on evidence-based instructional practices and teacher behaviors to strengthen teachers' ability to improve reading for AA males.

My research on existing PD options provided for the teachers at the study site indicated that there were no opportunities for teachers to explore diversity issues. There were also limited opportunities for teachers to work together to develop lesson plans that might address some of the identified deficits for AA MS male students. Therefore, the PD developed for this project will provide teachers with the opportunity to examine their personal beliefs on teaching AA MS male students and work with colleagues to develop lessons and explore strategies that may help their students succeed.

Review of the Literature

The extant literature was perused in order to compile research studies that would validate the selection of the PD program. I used educational databases including Education Source and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). I used the following key terms: *AA males*, *reading*, *reading achievement*, *teacher training*, *professional development*, *instructional practices*, *instructional strategies*, and *curriculum plans*. The results were then limited to peer-reviewed, scholarly articles from 2012 to 2018. This yielded 16 study results. The period was expanded to 2006 to include the monumental work of Tatum (2006, 2008, 2009, 2014), who identified specific strategies that can be used to improve AA male reading achievement, especially involving culturally relevant texts, enabling texts, and establishing a textual lineage. The focus will be on measurable outcomes to determine whether the teachers align with the suggested pedagogies and strategies for teaching AA MS males.

Teacher Workshops/Professional Development

Tatum (2006; 2008) and Hughes-Hassell and their colleagues (2012) recommended teacher professional development as an essential means through which a culture of literacy can be developed by incorporating evidence-based strategies into classrooms, schools, libraries, and districts in order to improve AA male reading achievement. Grade-level retentions, school suspensions, alternative school placements, arrests, and juvenile detentions are all used with AA male students at disproportionate rates compared to other ethnicities. In a focus group with incarcerated AA male teens, Walker (2012) uncovered that negative schooling was one of the factors influencing

students' pathways to placement in a juvenile detention center, with AA administrators being perceived as more likely to suspend or expel them than Caucasian administrators. Negative schooling experiences for AA male students included being targeted with provocations and blame when they were innocent and being excessively punished for minor infractions. The teens also stated that the teachers they had the best relationships with were those who helped them, treated them with respect, and were funny and fair, including both Caucasian and AA teachers. These incarcerated students perceived that lack of support and disregard in school and at home contributed to their negative outcomes. To contribute to the effort to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, I sought to more deeply understand teachers' experiences and perceptions related to AA males. The negative experiences and perceptions that are identified may be remedied with PD focused on evidence-based strategies to build multiple perspectives, pedagogical understanding, interdisciplinary approaches, and a commitment to equity and social justice (Walker, 2012).

Expanding on the problem of negative schooling with regard to AA males' perceptions of and achievement in school, Johnson (2015) conducted a case study of the pedagogy associated with a middle school with AA students. The positive climate of the middle school was reflected in the painting the entrance and walls vibrant, soothing colors such as green, gold, blue, purple, and yellow. Educators at the middle school then worked to create a clean, orderly environment free of trash and graffiti. They displayed college, university, and Black sorority and fraternity paraphernalia, including pennants, banners, and t-shirts. They created homey decorated classrooms with couches, lamps, and

framed pictures, in which there were affirmative messages on posters, bulletin boards, wall spaces, and even ceiling tiles. Positive images of AA males such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Barack Obama were displayed in hallways and bathrooms. *Place pedagogy* was used explicitly to "influence behavior and motivate and inspire … AA male students," offering "an alternative to the punitive discipline practice of 'singling them out all the time'" (Johnson, 2015, p. 915). The school's pedagogy led to a successful reimagining of school as a community with teaching as a collective act among principals who shaped the culture, teachers who enacted the culture, and students who experienced the culture. Teachers followed the principals' lead, and students followed their teachers' leads. In this way, Johnson's research added to the selection of professional development as a part of the present project aimed at improving AA males' achievement potential by creating a school culture of high expectations in which AA males would be held accountable.

Advocating an approach similar to the place pedagogy supported by Johnson (2015), Corprew and Cunningham (2012) suggested that AA males' characteristics and tendencies toward bravado can be converted by teachers from negative stereotypes into positive factors with the right amount of school social support. Negative stereotypes of AA males stigmatize them in all of their experiences in their communities, creating structural and social constraints that deny them access to resources, employment, support, and humanity. The internalization of these stereotyping messages can thwart positive development and lead to the externalizing of behaviors and attitudes through which individuals seek to deal with these experiences. Coprew and Cunningham used Spencer's

phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) to explain how AA

males experience stressors and develop coping strategies that result in emergent

identities, which may be productive or unproductive. Productive outcomes include

involvement in sports and clubs leading to academic achievement; unproductive

outcomes include gang activity and juvenile delinquency. Bravado was identified as a

specific coping mechanism used by AA males to cope with the vulnerability and

powerlessness that derives from negative racial stereotypes and oppression. This bravado

can be harnessed into productive outcomes over unproductive outcomes with the support

of school officials such as teachers, who can "take educationally underdeveloped students

to greater academic heights and conversely deter students who want to achieve" (Coprew

& Cunningham, 2012, p. 575). In a study of 126 AA males between 13 and 18 years of

age, Coprew and Cunningham (2012) showed that perceptions of teacher support were

important for AA males who had negative experiences that might have turned them to

bravado as a coping mechanism. This research demonstrated the power that teachers have

to influence students' experiences and to help them overcome negative experiences by

being aware of their struggles, having high expectations, and voicing their support

through emotional communication (Coprew & Cunningham, 2012). Teachers must be

educated to understand adaptive and maladaptive forms of coping and their role in

shaping AA males' attitudes and behaviors, especially with regard to academic

achievement.

Allen and White-Smith (2014) showed how the school-to-prison pipeline is a

direct result of school practices and policies that are rooted in institutionalized racism and

racial oppression. Using critical race theory, Allen and White-Smith (2014) documented how individual educators play into these macro structural factors acting as gatekeepers, which spotlight the lack of cross-cultural interactions between Caucasian suburban women who become teachers and AA males they may teach. Education programs have a responsibility to prepare future educators for their roles as teachers of diverse student populations, but they often lead to teachers expressing disinterest and disdain for discussions of racial issues, which only further entrenches the interests of dominant groups and the status quo of inequality. As a result, these education programs may serve only to further cultural and racial incongruences that predicate deficit views of students of color, in which AA males are seen as deviant, aggressive, disrespectful, and intimidating, even when this is not the intent behind students' words or behaviors. The resulting fear of AA male students is then used to justify excessive disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions, which serve to reinforce racist views about AA male intelligence and academic potential.

The most powerful factor influencing students' academic outcomes is the quality of teachers they receive. School counselors and administrators are equally culpable for the factors influencing AA male achievement, especially with regard to academic tracking based on low expectations, deficit views, and stereotyping. Nevertheless, Allen and White-Smith (2015) contended that "education programs can prepare educators with the competencies and dispositions needed to work with culturally diverse populations, particularly Black males" (p. 454). They specifically recommended reimagining teacher education through integrated educational studies that position teachers as leaders and

change agents; ethically responsible decision makers; learners and scholars; advocates for inclusive and supportive communities; facilitators; and collaborators. The goal is to prepare teachers who are race conscious and social justice minded to work toward dismantling the prison pipeline for AA males. Allen and White-Smith (2015) expressed confidence that teachers can be developed to act as catalysts for change in their communities, which will then transform institutions and society as a whole.

Husband (2012) proposed a multicontextual approach to address the issue of reading underachievement in AA males by focusing on new opportunities in curricula, teachers, and schools. The strategies are presented as taking into consideration the gender, racial, and cultural factors that individually and collectively lead to reading underachievement in this population. Husband (2012) found that reading attitudes, reading preferences, neurological differences, texts presented in curricula, curriculum standards, classroom expectations, teacher discourse on student abilities, and school disciplinary policies were significant factors in AA males' reading underachievement.

Husband's (2012) multicontextual approach incorporates findings based on effective practices in three critical contexts that schools have used to help AA males. Within the curriculum context, teachers are encouraged to use culturally relevant texts with AA male characters that include events, settings, ways of talking and interacting, and real-life issues that are common or relatable to the lived experiences and realities of AA males. Within the classroom context, teachers should build on multiple literacies of AA males that include cultural, emotional, and social typologies. Teachers should also implement active reading strategies into daily reading instruction such as using

movement and kinesthetic devices; rapping, dancing, and singing poems and passages;

adding humor and drama to practice fluency; participating in debates to engage

perspective taking; using graphic organizers; and completing art projects. The

comprehensive school context involves creating a whole-school literacy program based

on alternative behavior management systems that redirect rather than reprimand to

increase reading instructional times, as well as developing alternative reading support

systems (ARSS) that are intervention and remediation enrichment opportunities that can

be conducted before and after school, during lunch, and even on weekends. Within these

three contexts, there is a need for a robust commitment on the part of teachers, schools,

and curricula to center AA males and their learning modalities in order to improve their

reading achievement (Husband, 2012).

In an attempt to understand how teachers' perceptions of multicultural classroom

settings can be measured and applied, Warren (2015) validated the Scale of Teacher

Empathy for African American Males (S-TEAAM), which identifies empathy as the

teacher disposition that can successfully mitigate negative perceptions of AA males.

Teacher empathy is necessary to address the needs of AA male youth across the range of

cultural differences that may be present. The goal is for teachers to leverage this empathy

to make effective instructional decisions, build positive student-teacher relationships, and

generate positive student outcomes. To that end, "empathetic teachers … create more

nurturing classroom environments where all students, regardless of race, culture, or

ethnic identity feel understood and cared for" (Warren, 2015, p. 156). S-TEAAM is a tool

that can be used to specifically determine "empathy dynamics of teachers toward black

male students … to be used in professional development of teachers … to measure practicing teachers' conception of empathy relative to their present-day interaction with AA males" (Warren, 2015, p. 158). In a survey of 94 teachers, results demonstrated that teachers agreed that empathy is important but displayed inconsistencies in the application of empathy toward AA students, both in face-to-face interactions and in noninteractions, such as during grading. Empathy was found to consist of empathic concern and perspective taking, and while the S-TEAAM cannot confirm teachers' abilities in these areas, it does provide a snapshot of when and where empathy is most important.

Training in empathy can help teachers come to terms with how they demonstrate empathy relative to the demands of their work. Teachers who teach AA males effectively can be used as models in observations to elucidate how they demonstrate empathy toward these students. Such observations may make it possible to mainstream these empathetic practices through teacher education and PD programs. This research posits that teachers can be trained to be more effective in producing positive outcomes in AA males through the development and consistent implementation of empathy (Warren, 2015).

In her advocacy of education programs that improve teachers' ability to empower vulnerable students, Banks (2017) explored the impact of labeling on AA male students with disabilities. The landmark legal case *Larry P. v. Riles* was taken as proof that teacher bias was largely to blame for the disproportionate labeling of AA students as intellectually disabled. Unlike their European American counterparts, AA students who are moved to special education classes are more likely to be placed in restrictive educational settings and experience poor quality educational instruction. In a case study

of seven AA male students labeled with a learning disability, Banks (2017) uncovered

that these students felt segregated in contained classrooms, experienced difficulties

navigating high school, and were mischaracterized as having behavioral problems, which

detracted from their self-determination, leading to internalizations of dominant narratives

about their disabilities as social stigmas and stereotype markers. The students agreed that

they would not have been labeled learning disabled if their teachers had a higher quality

of instructional proficiency that could have aided them in accessing the general

curriculum with different teaching and learning modalities. Teachers' negative responses

to their race, their gender, and their disability created cyclical experiences of labeling that

further burdened them with confounding identities and pejorative stereotypes resulting in

lowered expectations, unfulfilling academic experiences, and poor academic outcomes.

Implicit biases and racial macroaggressions are perpetuated both by teachers

referring students to special education classes and by special education teachers

themselves. As a result, educators must be trained to recognize how their own actions

contribute to the detriment of students based on their gender, race, or overall status. The

participants in Banks's (2017) study recommended that teachers learn to provide a high

quality of differentiated instruction, along with substantial knowledge of special

education policies and practices that can be implemented in general education

classrooms. Teachers must be aware of how their instructional decisions to target

mainstream; MS students create inequities and excludes AA students and disabled

students. This research is incredibly useful in further demonstrating how teachers must

prepare to address not only the cultural needs of AA students, but also the educational

needs of these students who have been labeled as disabled, in order to prevent compounding of negative outcomes (Banks, 2017). Researchers also indicated that this problem does not begin during the MS years. Gregory and Fergus (2017) reported that such differences between AA and Caucasian students begin as early as during the preschool years.

Simmons (2013) explored the impact that AA male teachers can have on AA male students. Simmons research surveyed 10 AA male teachers at three urban schools to explore how they deal with the issues surrounding AA males' underachievement in reading. The participants' responses indicated that they utilized subversive practices that included instruction that deviated from district-mandated training programs and curriculums. Teachers' instructional practices included the regular incorporation of hip-hop and a revolutionary spirit that defied the hyper-accountability and hyper-standardization that AA male students often faced. Teachers also revealed that their views are often disregarded and not given enough attention with regard to solutions proposed to improve AA male educational outcomes and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Hip-hop was situated as an important tool that embraced culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom that is capable of bridging course content with curriculum standards, while encouraging students to analyze their own lives and society, sort and analyze information, and employ critical thinking. AA male teachers were thus able to perform doubly as motivators, mentors and role models, as well as effective teachers providing high-quality educational experiences that build connections to students' lives, help them understand academic content, and aid them in developing awareness of social

issues. The researchers attest to the role teachers have in being role models who can use effective instructional practices in service of improving AA male academic performance and positive outcomes. The present field of teachers does not have enough AA male teachers, but the techniques they use can be taught in teacher training and PD (Simmons et al., 2013).

In a research study related to the work of Nasir and her colleagues (2013), Ross and their colleagues (2016) explored how racialized experiences affects the teaching philosophies of AA male teachers of AA male students. Referring to the theories of sub person and sub student, and the notion of Black suffering, the researcher examined AA male teachers' perceptions of their status, their philosophies, and their pedagogies in order to determine how they influence them as community educators. Using observations and interviews of 48 students and six teachers, they found that AA male teachers considered teaching to AA male students to be a part of their life's purpose, and that they based their instructional pedagogies on humanizing and loving AA male students and teaching them to reciprocate that love. Teachers expressed resistance to the treatment of AA males as subhuman and encouraged them to acknowledge, state, and respect their feelings and the feelings of others. The instructors offered support by sharing their own personal feelings and challenges along with providing advice on how to deal with problems that came up. The AA male teachers were able to use their own experiences as AA males to help understand, recognize, and love their AA students. They provided opportunities for everyday humanity, knowledge of self and self-love, and giving them a safe space to be kids. Teachers also implemented counter narratives that held students

accountable for their socialization-caused misbehavior through positive behavior

interventions that included push-ups for negative talk or compliments after insulting, with

rules equally applying to everyone, including the teachers. The researcher demonstrated

the salience of encouraging AA male teachers to enter the teaching field in order to act as

positive role models for AA male students in ways that AA women and non-AA teachers

may be unable or unaware of how to be positive role models for these students. At the

same time, the strategies that AA male teachers use can be taught to other teachers

training and professional development in an attempt to increase the cultural

responsiveness to this population in ways that improve their academic outcomes (Ross et

al., 2016).

Furthering Simmons' (2013) and Ross' (2016) identification of AA male teachers

as crucial to AA male achievement, Ndemanu (2014) examined a flaw in teacher

education programs that Allen and White-Smith (2014) also uncovered that indicated

teacher education programs were not effectively training teachers to have multicultural

perspectives that truly value diversity, equity, and social justice. Ndemanu (2014)

conducted a case study of a twenty-year-old AA male teacher who was majoring in

elementary education and taking a course titled, 'Education for a Pluralistic Society', but

whose experience revealed that the course only served to perpetuate inequalities and

racism. The course taught a Caucasian-centered curriculum, silenced minorities, falsely

defined AA culture and lacked evidence-based practice. As a result, the education

program was weak and detrimental to actually transmitting to teachers a truly

multicultural educational course that helped to challenge their biases prior to entering the

classroom. In this way, rather than challenging racist views, the course seemed to further entrench them in pre-service teachers by failing to delve deeply into the topics from the very perspectives the class claimed to be teaching in service of. As a result, the AA male teacher believed that the course would instead result in teachers continuing the practice of teaching Caucasian-centered curriculums, inflicting assessment bias on students, and lacking practical applications of theory in specific instructional strategies. These data should be an alert to stakeholders that teacher education programs and professional development must be deliberately cultivated to actually realize the goals of reducing their racial biases and improving their ability to effectively deal with AA male students in ways that improve their academic performance rather than further hindering or thwarting it (Ndemanu, 2014).

In a similar research study, Jett and Cross (2016) compared their experiences training pre-service teachers as an AA male and a Caucasian female teacher. Jett discussed how his own background helped to shape how he conducted his classes. Jett and Cross based the classes on critical race theory but found it difficult to directly discuss issues of race with students, letting his AA students lead those discussions instead. Jett and Cross expressed a wish to better address how socioeconomics effected race as well, especially with regard to the influence of poverty on AA achievement. Jett and Cross further reported often feeling a need to avoid racial conflicts, especially between Caucasian and AA students. These researchers expressed teachers' dreading teaching the class to pre-service teachers because they did not feel qualified to be teaching the course on race and racism (Jett & Cross, 2016). The researchers did not believe she had the

appropriate insights or background to speak about equity and social justice to a group of diverse learners, despite her passion for the subject. Similar to Jett, she allowed her students to take the lead in discussing the texts and developing their own views and perspectives. She spent her time being worried she would say the wrong thing. Additionally, Cross also experienced a heated disagreement between a white male student and an AA female student, who later wrote that she dreaded the class, felt isolated, and unsupported as the only AA student. She experienced accusations of racial bias with regard to grading the AA student's work. She felt ill equipped to teach the class and prepare diverse teachers for the diversity they will face in their classrooms. Despite their challenges, both researchers advocate strongly for continuing to educate teachers about culturally relevant instruction and teaching practices that center diversity. They recommend explicit instruction in how to confront biases, the creation of a culture that welcomes constructive challenges to prevailing belief systems, and continuous examination of goals and objectives of the course. They proposed that teacher preparation programs be specifically designed to train them in how to serve diverse, urban communities (Jett & Cross, 2016).

Additionally, Parsons (2017) offered six best practices for cultural responsiveness based on positive behavioral interventions. Based on the School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS), also known as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is a program that can help educators that seek to disrupt punitive discipline practices in a holistic view of classrooms and schools. Culturally responsive PBIS acknowledges the disparities in the discipline of AA students in general and seeks to

remedy these issues by taking steps to implement teacher preparation and training that makes them aware of these issues of disproportionality and prepared to confront and challenge them. First, SWPBS seeks to enhance teachers' cultural knowledge that includes language, communication styles, socioeconomic status, and perceptions of authority. Secondly, SWPBS enhances teachers' cultural self-awareness, which enables them to deconstruct and reconstruct their own cultural backgrounds, biases, stereotypes, and maintenance of the status quo. Thirdly, SWPBS validates others' cultures by teaching educators to establish meaningful connections with diverse students that acknowledge their cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds instead of feigning colorblindness. Fourth, cultural relevance is important in the academic content and in social skills as students are given resources to have rich discourses without feeling intimidated by threats of discipline. Fifth, cultural validity treats every student as an individual with his or her own circumstances and backgrounds that can be useful in understanding misbehavior and responding with a plan of action rooted in empathy and dignity. The final practice involves cultural equity that reduces teachers' subjective judgments in favor of data and evidence driven responses to increase equity and fairness. These six practices are the foundation of cultural responsiveness in discipline, which are then extended into the classroom as teachers instruct using culturally relevant texts to improve AA male achievement in reading (Parson, 2017). The purpose of these culturally relevant texts is to provide the educational, social, and political capital AA males need to develop resilience to overcome vulnerabilities related to underachievement and stereotypes. However, outside the range of the acceptable period, this research includes characteristics to use

when selecting texts for AA males, and a list of books from the middle school and high school levels (Tatum, 2006).

In a related research study, Tatum and Muhammad (2012) drew a distinction between traditional literacy and critical literacy. Traditional literacy was viewed as students being able to read and comprehend printed words on their own, as well as being able to perform at or above standards on reading assessments; whereas critical literacy as reading within a social and cultural practice exhibited through the development of multiple literacies. With regard to relevant instructional factors for the most effective reading instruction, students needed to be taught several components. Students needed to be taught how to manipulate phonemes in phonemic awareness; systematic phonics instruction in letter-sound correspondence; fluency instructing using guided reading; vocabulary instruction that is grade-level appropriate and targeted instruction strategies, such as teaching text structures, engaging discussions, building vocabulary, integrating reading and writing, and differentiating texts and instruction. Tatum and Muhammad (2012) cited literary presence, literary pursuits, and literary character as the potential basis for literacy practices that center AA males, such that their ability to read and write, to aspire to read and write about a variety of topics, and to use reading and writing in service of their community were essential to the intellectual development of reading identity. To that end, their proposed model of literacy instruction places teacher preparation and teacher inquiry as the foundation along with mediated texts, assessment profiles, and curriculum orientations at the top in order to improve literacy teaching for AA males. Tatum and Muhammed (2012) suggested vital signs to identity in an

education-based literary instruction solution that tackled reading (skill development,

word knowledge, fluency, language, and writing proficiency), readers (multiple identities,

personal, culture, environment, financial), reading instruction (engagement, instructional

support, text, context, assessment, and technology), and educators (teacher quality,

competence, caring, commitment, culpability, and courage). Each of these vital signs

contributes to the overall suggestion that AA males reading achievement can be

positively impacted through curriculum choices and teachers' professional development

(Tatum & Muhammad, 2012).

Taking their research further, Tatum (2008) constructed textual lineages to

illustrate how AA males might view texts as meaningful and significant to their lived

realities as demonstrated by the tests they produced. A textual lineage was intended to

illustrate the authors and texts that had shaped literacy the most significantly. In his own

textual lineage, Tatum (2008) identified Richard Wright, Malcolm X, Frederick

Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Claude McKay, and Harper Lee. From 243 textual

lineages, Tatum (2008) uncovered that AA males need four characteristics to consider a

text engaging, which are healthy for the mind, focused on the struggle of the people,

provides a plan, and an awareness of the modern world.

Additionally, the lack of textual lineages from middle school students demonstrated

the prevalence of disabling texts as opposed to enabling texts. Enabling texts merge skill

and strategy development with social, cultural, political, spiritual, and economic

concerns. On the other hand, disabling texts reinforce negative perceptions and

stereotypes that define AA males as struggling and deficient rather than empowered and capable.

As a final step in determining the meaningfulness of texts to AA males, Tatum (2014) asked 73 AA males to create textual lineages and identify texts they viewed as meaningful or having a positive impact on their well-being. The texts they selected as being consistently meaningful included Richard Wright's Black Boy, Bill Cosby's autobiography, Malcolm X's autobiography, and Walter Dean Myers, Monster were rated as meaningful, relatable, and teaching them a lesson. On the other hand, Romeo and Juliet, To Kill a Mockingbird, and the Giver were rated as having no meaning to certain students and being unable to relate. Tatum (2014) concluded that AA males were often asked to read texts that were culturally irrelevant and lacked meaningfulness for them; however, when they did read meaningful texts, they were encourage, inspired, and performed well academically on assessments of their comprehension, writing, and analytical skills. To that end, Tatum (2014) made specific recommendations to facilitate AA males reading achievement, which include familiarity with historical context, establishing a litmus-test for selection of text by asking targeted questions (ie: out of all the possible texts), balance across a wide variety of disciplines that build student capacity and developing the ability to teach reading to all types of learners (p.45). These recommendations are intended to help teachers make curriculum choices that incorporate meaningful literary texts into their instruction, while also allowing AA males to follow their interests, demonstrate choice, and experience empowerment through content, while learning (Tatum, 2014).

In a case study of three third grade AA males, Robin Mara (2011) found that the Accelerated Reader (AR) program successfully facilitated increased reading practice, which arose from a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that included scoring a 100 percent on AR tests and impressing the teacher. At the same time, sustained independent reading declined significantly after the AR program ended, which suggests that classroom practices must incorporate long-term reading programs in order to boost attainment and utility of reading tasks and skills. Additionally, students did not substantially improve their reading achievement levels, which further suggests that AR programs should be combined with instruction in effective reading strategies, modeling book selection behaviors, increasing social interactions related to reading, and maintaining equitable access to a variety of books. While AR programs are popular because they do increase students reading time, they should be used in concert with instruction that improves print literacy, comprehension, critical thinking, and improves intrinsic motivation to read independently (Mara, 2011). While this source is one year outside the accepted range for the present research, its valuable contribution comes from its analysis of a popular nationwide curriculum program, AR, used to increase reading time in order to determine its efficacy in achieving desired outcomes related to reading achievement among AA males.

With regard to further increasing AA male literacy, Wood and Jocius (2013) coined the three Cs of critical literacy: culturally relevant texts, collaboration, and critical conversation in order to address literacy achievement on three fronts: combating student assumptions about reading, society's preconceptions of AA male students, and traditional

views of literacy. Wood and Jocius (2013) compiled several online resources and book

lists for teachers to use in searching for literature and literacy activities aimed at AA male

youth. Engaging with critical literacy helps AA males to discover that their experiences

outside of the classroom are equally valuable inside the classroom and can be tapped into

to build achievement in reading.

Offering a variation of the concepts proposed by Wood and Jocius (2013), Edman

(2012) presented his five strategies for reaching and teaching AA males, the five Cs

rooted in a reality pedagogy: generative dialogues, coteaching, cosmopolitanism, context,

and content. Generative dialogues group four to six students, a mix of high and low

achieving AA males, in small groups and invite them to have dialogues outside of regular

class time, such as during lunch, before, or after school. In these dialogues, students are

able to talk about their experiences in the classroom without the pressures of formal

classroom structures. Students have the opportunity to create an action plan to address

any issues they discuss. Coteaching involves enlisting AA male students to be experts on

a topic that they have the opportunity to teach the class, which validates their intellectual,

emotional, and social development. Cosmopolitanism is based on a philosophy that all

humans have a responsibility to each other, and this extends to AA male students being

given roles in the class that show their value to the class. These roles can transition from

supporting the class structure, for example, collecting homework, to supporting academic

success by increasing interest in doing well. Context involves the symbolic artifacts that

are of interest and significance to AA males that can be connected to lessons and class

activities, such as hip-hop, sports, pictures of students' communities and families, and

other examples of positive association. Content involves embracing instructor limitations in content knowledge with statements like, "I don't know," and "That's a good question," that allow AA males to demonstrate their ability to analyze and critique in constructive ways. This demonstrates to students that learning is not a closed body of knowledge, but an active and ongoing process. Emdin (2012) proposed these strategies as an effective way to generate positive outcomes in academic achievement among AA males by engaging them through their interests, with a demonstration of authentic care, and by building relationships.

In an attempt to engage AA males with books that were culturally relevant following the recommendations of Tatum (2006), school librarians in Durham, North Carolina were enlisted to help create a culture that facilitates this creation with deliberate practices that encourage their reading time (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2012). The first strategy was to collect books by and about AA males, display them accessibly throughout the school library and in classroom libraries, and make specific recommendations to AA male students least likely to visit the library using a mobile library. The second strategy was to invite AA male students to select books, any books they wanted, to be ordered and delivered to them personally. The third strategy was to media enabling texts through connecting reading with writing about reading, discussion of concepts, themes, and perspective issues in book discussions. For example, they conducted a focus group in which students chose different books to read, recorded their responses, and then met for an hour to discuss what they had read with a group of all AA males. The fourth strategy was to let students facilitate their own discussions in book clubs in which they chose the

book, created a book trailer, and developed discussion questions to ask each other. A fifth strategy was to invite community members into the school, such as poet groups and writers, to discuss their works with students in ways that allow them to see how text relates to their real lives and future career paths. A sixth strategy was to conduct professional development workshops for teachers to better understand how they can work together to implement the program and its principles into their teaching practices. Each of these strategies helped to address the achievement gap in AA male reading and aid them in understanding the utility and relevance of reading, as well as its ability and connection to their peers and community (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2012).

As an example, the incorporation of technology into literacy, Ellison (2017) described how an AA male student enrolled in the Dig-A-Youth: Digital Storytelling Project, used online-simulated roleplaying video games to tell a digital story that reflect their literacies, personal agency, and racial identity in an aspect of digital participatory choice culture (DPCC). DPCC enables students to exhibit choice, voice, and perspective as they complete an activity, such as storytelling in ways that leverage their critical thinking and improve their digital practice. Using Minecraft, a popular online video game, the student was able to express themselves artistically and creatively, receive informal mentoring, and increase social connections with others. Digital literacy is an emerging digital tool in which AA males are capable of using tools to exert their presence and leave their mark in ways that extend beyond the virtual world into the physical one. The skills students learn in the digital world translate to the academic world and beyond. Offering students' choice was found to be the greatest factor in support of their

acquisition of literacies, agency, knowledge, and identity in DPCC. The student was able to successfully answer questions related to the components of a story and what makes a good story. The student was focused, independent, and self-motivated, learning more about himself as a creative person who liked to talk and collaborate with others. The research is one example of how teachers can incorporate digital participation into school projects in ways that contribute positively to classroom instruction by allowing students to take an active role in their learning that can be transformative, while still addressing literacy standards (Ellison, 2017).

With regard to emergent literacy development, Holland (2015) examined the culturally relevant practices of four Head Start teachers to identify the specific ways they were able to develop literacy in AA males living in poverty. Using literacy gain scores on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening assessments as a measure of students reading achievement, Holland (2015) conducted observations and interviews of four Head Start teachers of 4-year old AA boys in an urban city. The teachers expressed a belief in culturally relevant teaching that included incorporating movement, validating their emotions and individuality, and making curriculum decisions that include race, ethnicity and culture. AA male students were allowed to move around freely in activities, such as racing for letters, building words, and acting out stories to teach phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, print concepts, and comprehension. The warm demander perspective was most frequently demonstrated as a way to be context specific and navigate systems of inequity that are often replicated in school and learning. The teachers accepted their students, but also insisted that they meet expectations with

supports when necessary. This included utilizing home visits and frequent

communication with parents to help them develop consistent responses to behavior and

expectations of care. Rather than handing out punishment, misbehavior is viewed as a

problem to solve collaboratively. The warm demander perspective overlaps with

culturally relevant instruction through commitment to the school community, embracing

family relationships, and fulfilling communal responsibilities. These data suggest the

importance of early literacy strategies, which focus on how children learn in order to

build a solid foundation for future reading achievement, while also taking into

consideration the family and community issues that affect their ability to learn (Holland,

2015).

In the same research vein as Simmons and their colleagues (2013), Broughton

(2017) examined the impact of hip-hop on a class of kindergarten students taught by an

AA male teacher. Using auto ethnography, the researcher investigated hip-hop pedagogy

and play in a retroactive examination of a K-1 teacher over 11 months. The study

included 13 AA children, eight males and five females, who were from low to upper-

middle socioeconomic status. Using dramatic play, freestyle rapping, story times, and

free play centers, children expressed learning about their home life, community, and

school experiences, as well as their identities, the elements of rhyme and rhythm, and

their understanding of setting, vocabulary, and current events. The researcher

recommended allowing children to choose how they spend their time during free play

without trying to control or impose upon them, to improve engagement and attention to

listening to children, and to actively build authentic, positive relationships between

children and with the teacher by understanding individual personalities and cultural perspectives. This researcher exemplified how an AA male teacher was able to use subversive instructional practices to engage children in their interests, let them choose, and facilitate their learning and knowledge exchange (Broughton, 2017).

Through interviews with 48 exemplary teachers in California, Essien (2017) discovered five strategies these educators utilized that resulted in positive academic outcomes and success with teaching AA MS males in early education contexts. Based on the notion of a boy's empowerment club also reflected in Ross and colleagues' (2016) work, Essien used the theories of four primary intelligences and eight teaching and learning strategies for teaching boys and young men of color that were drawn from Wood and Harris III (2015; 2016):

> (a) culturally relevant content – connecting the curriculum to the lived socio-
> cultural realities and experiences of students; (b) addressing racism and
> stereotypes – intentionally confronting and deconstructing messages that
> perpetuate racism, stereotypes, and misnomers about boys and young men of
> color; (c) mastery learning principles – ensuring that course content is acquired
> prior to engaging new content; (d) fostering critical reflection - providing learning
> and development activities that engage students in reflection and introspection
> into their actions, mores, and assumptions; (e) cooperative and collaborative
> learning- using guided learning in small group settings to engage learning and to
> explore the nuances of course content; (f) engaging problem (project)-based
> learning – engaging inquiry-based learning modalities that allow students to

problem solve and learn through guided or independent investigation; (g) healthy

competition- increasing student interest in course learning through competitive

activities that engage socialized competitive ethos among boys and young men;

and (h) leadership opportunities – that re-center males of color as leaders in-class

and out-of-class learning opportunities" (p. 8).

The 48 teachers elected for inclusion had a demonstrated record of success with

teaching AA MS males that included measurable outcomes. The teachers espoused anti-

racist and anti-deficit perspectives and emphasized the importance of children's

physiological and safety needs related to healthy food, clean water, adequate sleep, a

stable living place, and positive interactions with others. Their instructional strategies

included family relational strategies (open dialogue and consistent communication with

families), child relational strategies (building trust, respect, and authentic care for

children that validates their effort, abilities, and interests), and classroom management

techniques (fair disciplinary practices that include non-confrontation and positive

reinforcement). These teachers had five instructional strategies in common:

1. Culturally relevant teaching that leveraged students' socio-cultural

   experiences to instruct in ways that invoke intrinsic motivation;

2. Kinesthetic-based instruction that incorporates physical activities into learning

   experiences;

3. Oral-intelligence based instruction that teach course materials in ways that

   activate oral intelligence;

4. Small group learning to engage students in cooperation and collaboration; and

5. Healthy competition to foster a sense of pride, teamwork, and intrinsic interest in learning.

This research successfully captured the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching practices that centered the learning outcomes of AA boys in every stage of instruction and resulted in learning, interest, and achievement among AA boys (Essien, 2017).

Because of racist and deficit perspectives and structural inequities, AA students are less likely to be identified for gifted and talented programs. Zhbanova, Rule, and Stichter (2015) explored the outcomes of a 12-week enrichment program. The students were selected to participate in the program that offered challenging curriculum units and activities to students identified as high achievers, but who had not made it into gifted and talented programs through standardized assessments. These students were given opportunities to participate in thematic units on Africa, projects involving technology and the creation of curriculum materials, and peer teaching. As a result, the students improved in confidence; however, the AA students were identified based on their leadership skills, creative expressions, and academic performance. Additionally, their behavior problems disappeared once the enrichment program. The selection of a unit on Africa may have also contributed to the success of the AA students by showing that the program valued their racial background and racial appearance allowing them to feel more connected to what they learned. This research demonstrates the necessity of culturally relevant instruction administered with high expectations and a belief in an AA male student's academic potential to succeed despite barriers with proper engagement and support (Zhbanova, Rule & Stichter, 2015).

In an investigation of the efficacy of an individualized reading intervention, Roberts, Vaughn, Fall, and Vaughn (2013) investigated whether students reading achievement was improved after participation. The reading intervention identified struggling middle school readers and placed them in small groups of six similarly situated students. The instructional groups consisted of 50 minutes of instruction on a daily basis during phase one, and 90 minutes every other day during phase two and three. The instructional groups featured presentations of new skills, practice with reading and fluency, and regular progress assessment and monitoring. The instructional groups were divided into three phases with phase one consisting of word study, fluency, vocabulary, sentence and paragraph level comprehension, and complete comprehension. In phase two, students focus on vocabulary and comprehension selected from class texts, mostly informational with some narratives. The final phase, phase three includes word-level and comprehension practice in science and social studies texts, with a significant focus on critical thinking and sentence, paragraph, and multi-paragraph comprehension. The reading interventions were based on the IES Adolescent Literacy Practice Guide that recommended systematic, structured instruction for each lesson. Reading achievement was measured using the Gates-MacGinite Reading Test. Their findings showed that students who participated in the reading intervention performed an average of .5 score points higher than students who did not participate. This research validated the efficacy of reading intervention programs at improving the reading achievement of students in the bottom 25%. While the research did not focus exclusively on AA males, 31.5 % of the sampled students were AA students. The research demonstrates the salience of intensive

curriculums to address reading underachievement and improve reading achievement (Roberts et al., 2013).

Describing another reading intervention for a single middle school, Lewis-Lancaster and Reisener (2013) investigated reading interventions that incorporate repeated reading, immediate corrective feedback, and listening passage preview. Participants included a fourteen-year-old AA male in a self-contained special education class with mainstream classroom access for parts of the day. The student was in seventh grade, having been retained once, and read at a 1.6 grade reading level. The student was experiencing a lack of progress in reading skills since the fourth or fifth grade, did not like reading, and refused to read aloud due to difficulty sounding out multisyllabic words. Phase one of the intervention included repeated reading of three passages for one minute each with immediate corrective feedback and motivation methods with a token system to earn points for reinforcers and candy. Phase two increased the amount of time to an unlimited amount. In phase three, a component of phonological awareness was included to help with decoding difficult, unfamiliar words. In phase four, Eddie returned from a break and was given a cold probe on third grade materials. In phase five the intervention continued with targeted feedback and phonics training. The findings suggested that providing unlimited time for repeated readings with immediate corrective feedback along with phonics training were the most effective at improving fluency; however, the intervention was ineffective at increasing the students' instructional reading level with highly variable data across all phases. Lack of consistent motivation and relational problems may explain the lack of significant reading achievement. The data demonstrates

that the reading intervention was more effective than no intervention at all and should be modified to better incorporate student interests in content, as well as building an authentic relationship with the student to facilitate their engagement and motivation (Lewis-Lancaster & Reisener, 2013).

In a similar attempt to determine the interventions and curriculums that would best enable AA males to develop the critical readings skills necessary for reading achievement, Anderson and Sadler (2009) performed a longitudinal research study in which they collected five years of data on reading achievement curriculums and reading assessments implemented with AA males in general and special education. They sought to identify the specific reading skill sets that would be most likely to lead to future reading achievement in AA males in special education. Anderson and Sadler (2009) proposed a total of six hypotheses on the factors directly influencing AA male future achievement that were some combination of the following factors: family income, urbanicity, rapid naming, residual, oral reading fluency, word segmentation, prior comprehension, oral reading, letter-word recognition, or word segmentation. Their results found that when analyzed individually, all of the skills were found to have a strong relationship with future reading achievement among non-AA males when income and urbanicity were controlled for and considered. . However, for AA males, only letter-word recognition, fluency, and comprehension had a significant relationship to future reading achievement.

Project Description

Professional Development

This PD project will be a three-day workshop entitled *Providing Teachers' with Additional Tools to Help Create a Culturally Aware Learning Environment.* The purpose of the professional development is to more adequately prepare teachers for instructing AA MS males in reading in order to maximize their learning, improve their academic outcomes, and decrease their underachievement. Providing resources for teachers to learn more about how various students learn, could help teachers better understand the significance of understanding their students' background and interests. Furthermore, Gregory et al. added that this should be done as early as possible, so that the differences between students can be reduced. It is proposed that more successfully preparing instructors with specific evidence- and theory-based pedagogies and strategies will result in an improvement in AA MS males reading achievement and thus decrease their likelihood of drop out, suspension, expulsion, arrest, and other negative impacts brought on by their racialized and gendered circumstances.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The PD was designed to build teachers' capacity in working with their AA MS male students and to create culturally responsive classroom environments. There is no greater need for trusting and caring individuals to assist students in their quest for academic success (Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, Mikami, Allen and Pianta, 2016). This PD offering is designed to co-exist with the current district PD that develops the skills and abilities of the teaching staff in curricular avenues. This PD opportunity will be shared

with the Assistant Superintendent of Academics to ensure that it is aligned with the existing PD offered in the district presently. Once this approved by the Assistant Superintendent of Academics, the MS Principal will notify the ILA teachers via email of this PD offering. The Principal will work with the Assistant Superintendent to decide at which time and at which site the PD will be provided.

Materials

- Entrance Ticket

- Post-It Notes

- Poster Paper

- Markers

- Dots to Stick on Poster

- Exit Tickets

- Bring your own laptop

- Bring related articles

Goals

The goals of the professional development are to:

1. Educate teachers on the specific strategies they can use when instructing AA MS males in reading;

2. Prepare teachers for dealing with AA MS males using culturally relevant curriculums and positive behavior supports;

3. Create positive classroom environments that enhance learning and improve outcomes for our AA MS male students

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes of the professional development are

1. Learn anti-deficit perspectives and pedagogies that can be implemented in the classroom to improve AA MS male reading performance;

2. Learn specific strategies that can be implemented in the classroom to improve AA MS male reading performance; and

3. Learn how to select and structure curriculum plans in ways that improve AA MS male reading performance.

Target Audience

The target audience of this professional development is all instructors, educators, and teachers who are currently teaching or who may one day teach AA MS male students at all levels from elementary to high school. A second target audience is the administrators of schools and districts who make decisions with regard to which professional development and training programs will be used, such as principals and superintendents. A third target audience is the policymakers and legislators who make the regulations and laws that determine how schools are run, specifically the resources and funds they receive.

Outline of Components

The professional development will include a three-day training schedule that consists of one day of self-paced pre-training instruction and 2 days of in-person training. During the first day of training, educators will be focusing on a selection of readings, completing a self-inventory, and a pre-assessment of their perspectives and pedagogies.

During the two days of in-class training, educators will participate in whole group discussions of the readings, small group discussions and activities, role-playing, and a post assessment.

Timeline

   Day 1.

   Preassessment. Each teacher will complete the S-TEAAM scale to determine the amount of empathy they perceive themselves to have, specifically toward AA males.

   Reading 1. Teachers will read a selected reading.

   Discussion questions. Teachers will answer in-depth discussion questions in response to the reading.

   Reading 2. Teachers will read a selected reading.

   Discussion questions. Teachers will answer in-depth discussion questions in response to the reading.

   Reading 3. Teachers will read a selected reading.

   Discussion questions. Teachers will answer in-depth discussion questions in response to the reading.

   Reading 4. Teachers will read a selected reading.

   Discussion questions. Teachers will answer in-depth discussion questions in response to the reading.

   Day 2.

   Hours 1-2. Breakfast, welcome, introductions, overview of the training

Breakfast will be provided each day of in-person training. Teachers will be introduced to the facilitators and each other. Teachers will receive an overview of the packet materials.

Hours 3-4. Small group discussion of readings #1 and #2. Teachers will discuss their answers to the discussion questions.

Hour 5. Break for lunch, also provided

Hours 6-7. Small group discussion of readings #3 and 4. Teachers will discuss their answers to the discussion questions.

Hour 8. Whole group discussion of readings.   Teachers will discuss their answers to the discussion questions in a whole group setting. Facilitator will provide final wrap-up and preview of day four.

Day 3.

Hours 1-2. Breakfast, review, whole group discussion. Breakfast will be provided. Facilitator will review previous days' discussions and give an overview of that day's discussion and activities. Teachers' will discuss any challenges they had with the material and explore changing perceptions.

Hours 3-4. Small group discussion of reading #5. Teachers will collaborate on a unit plan that includes assigned units for instruction on a chosen reading skill or strategy.

Hour 5. Break for lunch, provided.

Hours 6-7. Whole group discussion of readings. Teachers will volunteer to role-play their lesson plan with the entire class acting as students. Teachers will take notes. The facilitator will give constructive feedback.

Hour 8. Wrap up, take-aways, post-assessment. Facilitator will give post assessment, summarize major take-ways, answer any remaining questions, and close out the training with contact information and additional resources.

Activities

1. Small group discussions with discussion questions.

2. Collaborative unit planning and lesson planning

3. Role playing

4. Pre- and post-assessment

Trainer Notes

The facilitator will prepare by completing the readings ahead of schedule. The facilitator will have discussion questions prepared, as well as rules and expectations for conduct. The facilitator must directly address inconsistencies or inappropriate talk. The facilitator should circulate and join groups during their small group activities. The facilitator should answer questions by referring to the readings.

Module Formats

The pre-training readings and pre-assessment will be delivered via email, and teachers will be responsible for printing them out. Teachers will be given copies of the discussion questions and activities on day three of the training. The post assessment will be disseminated in paper format on the final day of training.

Implementation Plan

Participating districts will hold teachers accountable using their regular evaluation procedures, such as classroom observations, mentoring, and reading assessments.

Project Evaluation Plan

The focus of this PD workshop is to provide teachers with evidence based culturally responsive tools and instructional strategies to help them develop better lesson plans that will help their AA MS male students succeed better in their reading achievement. The overarching plan is to create a teacher learning opportunities, where teachers work together to develop culturally responsive lessons on a regular basis, they use each other's knowledge base, and experiences to help their students' succeed. Teachers will be evaluated by voluntary follow-up surveys that they complete at regular intervals after the professional development. Teachers will be given an entrance ticket each day and an exit ticket at the end of each session, so data can be collected prior to the participants leaving for the day. The goal of the PD workshop will be evaluated with a five point Likert scale evaluation tool, which will allow participants to record their observations and provide their feedback. All information collected will be used to improve future PD offerings.

Learners

The targeted learners are all AA MS males, but specifically AA MS males who are struggling with reading, including expressing dislike for reading, low reading time, poor reading skills when observed, and poor reading scores on reading assessments. These learners can be in special education or general education classes.

Scope

The curriculum class will consist of a Reading and Writing workshop that teaches reading skills and strategies within the context of culturally relevant, enabling texts.

Sequence

The following sequence will be employed for each daily lesson of the unit plans

to consist of two 50 to 60-minute blocks per day:

1. Phonics instruction

2. Fluency practice

3. Vocabulary acquisition

4. Comprehension strategies

5. Varied text reading practice

6. Independent interest-led reading

7. Group/shared/choral reading

8. Group activities

9. Small groups/independent enrichment

Materials will consist of designated notebooks for each student, phonics games.

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Project Evaluation Plan

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The evaluation plan will include both formative and summative evaluation

components. Formative evaluation will be utilized to monitor teacher understanding,

learning and implementation of what is being learned. The formative assessment process

and data collected will assist the facilitator decide if any modifications should be made,

or if additional professional development is needed. Summative evaluations will be

utilized to determine whether the participants have met the goals of the professional

development. The goals will be based on teacher participation rates, completion rates,

pre- and post-assessment results of student reading assessment outcomes relevant to

fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and personal connection. The project success will be evaluated according to these components.

The goals of the professional development are to:

1. Educate teachers on the specific strategies they can use when instructing AA MS males in reading;

2. Prepare teachers for dealing with AA MS males using culturally relevant curriculums and positive behavior supports;

3. Create positive classroom environments that enhance learning and improve outcomes for our AA MS male students

Learning outcomes of the professional development are:

1. Learn anti-deficit perspectives and pedagogies that can be implemented in the classroom to improve AA MS male reading performance;

2. Learn specific strategies that can be implemented in the classroom to improve AA MS male reading performance; and

3. Learn how to select and structure curriculum plans in ways that improve AA MS male reading performance.

Goals 1 and 2 will be evaluated formatively and will be a voluntary follow-up survey that the teacher can complete at regular intervals after the completion of the professional development. Goal 3 will be a summative follow-up on the progress of the students as they continue through middle school and high school.

Project Implications

Local Community

The local and state implications include a need for districts to adopt the professional development and curriculum plans. This project presented, a three day in-person professional development plan, was designed to support teachers who work with a diverse student population focusing on AA MS males in becoming even more effective in their teaching practice. This is an important project for local stakeholders because the implications for social change in a population that has been at risk by providing educators with additional tools for them to help this population, is powerful and overdue. The target population that will help these students is middle school reading teachers. However, teachers and community leaders at any level may utilize this study.

Based on the findings of this study, the teachers that participated in this volunteer and anonymous survey realized and valued the importance of wanting to learn how to better serve their AA MS male students. Providing these teachers, and others interested, with professional development that can help them learn specific strategies and develop curriculum that will address this at-risk population, can better help them understand and create true social change through classroom interventions.

Federal Implications

The federal implications require legislators and policymakers to standardize professional development and curriculum plans that do not mainstream education, but provide effective, individualized academic instruction that centers vulnerable and at-risk populations. You need more than one sentence for a paragraph.

Conclusion

In the short-term, teachers are expected to improve their cultural sensitivity, racial awareness, and commitment to social justice and equity practices in their classrooms. In the long-term, teacher education programs need to improve their educational standards with regard to high quality preparation in culturally-relevant teaching that dispels racist and deficit perspectives in favor of humanization, relationship building, high expectations, and community mindedness. By looking at teacher perceptions and experiences, these data have been generated for analysis to more deeply understand the problem identified at the target site regarding teaching reading to AA MS males. It is critical to remember the home environment and peer pressure that influence these students' academic success and overall decision making (Hunter, 2016). These data will provide administrators with a deeper understanding of avenues to consider, like modes of learning preferred by AA MS males, that now can be accessed and differences can be made in the lives of these AA MS males and allow them better opportunity for greater academic success.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions in relation to improving AA MS males' reading performance in a middle school in the northeastern United States. Based on the findings of the research, I developed a 3-day PD workshop, which is designed to coexist and align with the PD provided in the district currently. This additional PD offering is designed to provide teachers, support staff, administrators, instructional coaches, and counseling staff strategies to address the current literacy needs of their AA male MS students.

In this section of the study, I present my reflections on the strengths and limitations of this process of implementing a PD plan that will benefit teachers, support staff, building administrators, instructional coaches, and counseling staff. This PD will be used to better equip teachers to address the literacy needs of their AA MS male students in a suburban school district in the northeastern United States.

Project Strengths

This project study is important to the success of the students, teachers, building administrators, instructional coaches, support staff, and counseling staff as it pertains to addressing the needs of male AA MS students. This project study may also be applicable when addressing other diverse groups of students, or students in general who need additional supports. This project study has the potential to affect the way in which teachers approach students and student learning by offering evidence-based, effective

best practices that are culturally appropriate and that address the issues of poor performance for any particular group of students.

The focus on PD and evidence-based solutions is among the strengths of this project study. This PD program can help teachers look at how they approach lesson preparation for their male AA MS students. For example, Tatum (2014) concluded that African American males were often asked to read texts that were culturally irrelevant to them, noting that when they were provided opportunities to read more meaningful texts, they were inspired and performed well on academic assessments.

Project Limitations

A major limitation of a project designed to address the problem of academic performance for any particular group of people is finding a way for educators to be open about changing their practices and to think differently about how they approach teaching and learning. This is especially difficult with educators who have had a great deal of success with the majority of students they have taught. The proposed educational PD workshop does little to make that cultural change with staff. That kind of change has to be authentic and meaningful and must occur on a personal level for the staff involved, so that they can reflect and grow at their own pace and in the manner that best suits them for long-term systemic change. If teachers cannot relate to the culture that they are teaching in, they will be more reluctant to change their instructional methods because they do not see the true value in the change (LeFevre, 2014). Some teachers in this study wanted additional PD in order to make significant changes to their process and realize systemic change. Some teacher participants in this study had a low sense of self-efficacy regarding

teaching culturally responsive literacy skills, which is another reason why they may have been hesitant about pursuing change (LeFevre, 2014).

An additional limitation of this study, which was focused on a middle school in a suburban district in the northeastern part of the United States, is generalizability. The study findings are applicable to the study site but not to other middle schools in the region. This type of study can be strengthened by adding districts in various parts of the United States and collecting similar data from them (Peters et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Providing resources for teachers to learn more about the various ways that different students learn could help teachers better understand the significance in considering students' overall background when preparing lessons. Gregory and Fergus (2017) reported that differences between African American and Caucasian students begin to emerge as early as preschool. Gregory et al. (2016) added that these trends will continue unless change is made at the teacher level that includes providing additional PD. Additional PD resources could help to create more culturally aware and responsive teachers. This PD could be provided online and include PLC follow-up.

Another recommendation for gathering data that are more relevant would be to open this research study up to other districts across the United States. This would allow more authentic conversation regarding resources and best practices that might even strengthen the teachers' resolve about how best to move forward in making a cultural and systemic change in their teaching methodology.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

During the time in which I have been working on this project study, I have

learned a great deal about teachers' perceptions and the practice of teaching, and I have

learned even more about how students learn. This problem was identified after I spent

three years as a middle school principal (2009, 2010, and 2011) and continued to see the

scores of my AA male MS students continue to go down.

Once I had identified the problem, I began to search out relevant peer-reviewed

literature that centered on this subject. Initially, I was concerned that if I conducted a

study on teachers' perspectives on and experiences of teaching AA MS males, the result

would be an increase in discourse and potential resistance. I was pleased to find out that

many teachers had already identified the concern and were looking for resources and PD

to address the issue.

Scholarship was achieved initially by understanding and focusing on what the

teachers' perspectives were regarding teaching reading to AA MS males. This initial step

was instrumental in my development of the PD program created during this study. This

PD program will help teachers understand and use evidence-based practices that can

show them results and culturally diverse resources that will make a positive difference in

the classroom.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The rationale for this project study came out of years of looking at trends in

student assessment data and observing how the assessment data of the AA MS males with

whom I worked continue to show little or no growth. As a classroom teacher and a

principal, I witnessed firsthand how devastating it can be for students who feel that school is not a place in which people understand or focus on them. That can have a devastating effect on students, especially during a time such as middle school when they are still learning about themselves in many ways. This work and its findings can be applied to help other students from various races or backgrounds. The importance of this work resides in its potential to help educators realize that change can be good if one does it right and does it earnestly.

The most difficult part of this work was researching the literature for the extensive literature review. Dr. Cathryn White was instrumental in keeping me focused and on task throughout this difficult yet rewarding journey.

This project was developed to help teachers look at their perceptions and experiences and realize their paths to positive change. The evaluation instrument was simple, and the questionnaire was unbiased. The workshops will be monitored and staff will be surveyed before and after they occur, using pre- and posttests that will measure the effectiveness of teacher learning and acceptance.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The expectation of this research project is that teachers will gain a better knowledge of what can be done to make change that will affect AA MS males' performance in reading. Ultimately, students who realize that lesson plans and resources are more sensitive to their needs and who have more positive support from teachers and parents/guardians have better opportunities for improved educational outcomes (Baker, Cameron, Rimm-Kaufman, & Grissmer, 2012). In order for society to truly move

forward and reach deep into the 21ˢᵗ century, everyone must find ways to bring others up, so that everyone can attain goals together and make true social change occur every day.

This research was grounded in the perceptions and experiences of middle school teachers who had the opportunity to work with AA MS males while teaching them reading. There is no greater need for trusting and caring individuals to assist students in their quest for academic success (Gregory et al., 2016). Future researchers may look at additional ways to reach students that are not outlined here. As students change, their spheres of influence may also change. Future research could examine the use of culturally responsive lessons with students of various cultures and backgrounds. In addition, researchers may investigate the use of culturally responsive lessons and the belief system changes that this approach prompts in teaching staff.

Conclusion

This project study was developed to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers who teach reading to AA MS males. I developed a PD workshop model to address some of the needs documented in this study. Change can be difficult for anyone, especially if a person does not understand the reason for the change. This research has provided an avenue to see and understand why change is needed, and the PD workshop is a venue to help start that social change.

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Appendix A: The Project

Teachers' Sense of Ability to Enhance Student Literacy Scores

Teachers are always learning as they teach. Allen (2015) applied qualitative research methods to better understand the ideologies behind the importance of teacher practice when working with teachers and students that may have competing structural and cultural explanations. Agency towards the students will help to lift the barriers that lead to increased academic improvement (Allen, 2015). Researchers also examined African American males' perceptions of perceived barriers and found that the teacher's relationship with the student was significantly related to improved academic performance for the student (Vega et. al 2015).

Purpose of The Project

The purpose of this project was to address the efficacy needs of middle school language arts teachers and to provide them current professional development that could help them better prepare and deliver more culturally sensitive lessons and help them develop even better working relationships with their students. Gregory and Fergus (2017) reported that as early as preschool there are noted differences between African American and Caucasian students. These differences will remain unless there is change through professional development for teaching staff (Gregory, et. Al, 2016).

Target Audience

The target audience for this professional development will be middle school language arts teachers. Over the course of this professional development plan, other staff members, including administrators, may be included to participate. Eventually, all

language arts teachers across the district should be invited to participate in this professional development. However, as additional grade levels are added to the professional, development plan, it may be prudent to adjust the training to address the needs of the various grade levels.

Time Lines

This professional development plan consists of 3 days of full day professional development. The workshop will be offered in the beginning of the school year during the fall season during the first quarter of the school year. The workshop will commence each day at 8:00am with a light breakfast offered and will be concluded each day at 3:30pm., leaving time for additional reflection before the teachers leave. After the 3-day workshop has concluded, there can be additional follow-up meetings at the building level throughout the school year.

Follow-up will occur at various intervals and can be accomplished by either mentor leaders, or professional development staff. The mentor or professional development staff member will facilitate monthly sessions that will include reviewing the teachers' lesson plans and ensuring that the plans are created for a diverse student population and that lesson plans allow for sharing and bonding between the staff and the students. Teachers will be asked to share their stories of successful lessons and discuss questions or concerns that they may have regarding either present or upcoming lesson plan development.

Goals of the Professional Development (PD)

The following goals are set for the PD:

1.) Educate teachers on the specific strategies that they can utilize when instructing

African American middle school males in reading.

2.) Prepare teachers to work with African American middle school males by

preparing the teachers to use culturally relevant curriculums and positive behavior

supports.

3.) Improve overall teacher preparedness and ensure high-quality education in

reading for all students.

Materials and Equipment:

1.) Internet availability

2.) A projection device or Smartboard

3.) A Power Point presentation

4.) Relevant handouts

Paper, poster paper, sticky dots and writing instruments for teachers

DAY 1 SESSION:

Objectives for Day 1:

*Pre-assess present level of individual knowledge of culturally sensitive and diverse

materials that teachers utilize for lesson plan development.

*Open dialogue on teacher efficacy and cultural norms on teaching

*Examine exemplars of culturally diverse lesson plans

TEACHER PRE-ASSESSMENT:

Rating Scale:

1- Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Agree 4- Strongly Agree

Please answer the following questions:

I utilize culturally sensitive and culturally diverse reading materials in class?

(Please answer either 1, 2, 3, or 4)

I believe that teaching materials should be culturally sensitive and/or diverse?

(Please answer 1, 2, 3, or 4)

I would be willing to learn about and share lesson plans that are culturally sensitive

and or diverse with my colleagues?

(Please answer 1, 2, 3, or 4)

Day #1 Reflection Sheet:

Please list some of the points of interest you received from today's workshop.

DAY 3 SESSION

Objectives for day # 3:

*Facilitate free discussion of teachers on culturally diverse reading materials

*Work on a unit of instruction that is culturally diverse

   *Plan on ongoing monthly meetings and dialogue

PowerPoint to be Used for 3-Day PD for Teachers

Providing Teachers'with
additional tools to Help

Create a Culturally Aware Learning Environment

Goals: Sessions 1-3

- *Understand how culture impacts learning and discuss specific strategies that teachers use when instructing AA MS males in reading (Session 1)

- *Examine culturally relevant curriculums and positive behavior supports that teachers can use to help AA MS males engage better in the learning process (Session 2)

- *Create positive classroom environments that enhance learning and improve outcomes for our AA MS males (Session 3)

Learning Outcomes:

- *Learn anti-deficit perspectives and pedagogies that can be implemented in the classroom to improve AA MS males' reading performance

- *Learn specific reading strategies that can be implemented in the classroom to improve AA MS males' reading performance

- *Learn how to select and structure curriculum and lesson plans in ways that improve AA MS males' reading performance

Rationale

- The findings presented within the study showed the need to consider on-going professional development for ELA teachers that work with AA MS male students. This project allows for teachers to be provided with opportunities to develop culturally relevant strategies which foster learning and improve academic achievement among AA MS male students. This PD project offers a 3-day PD session which will focus on evidence-based instructional practices and teacher behaviors to strengthen teachers' ability to improve reading for AA MS male students.

Providing Teachers'with
additional tools to Help
Create a Culturally Aware Learning Environment

The Problem at the Local Level

- *Analysis of state data revealed that the performance gap has continued to be a concern as evidenced by the mandatory state testing results from the 2011, 2012 and 2013 school years which showed a gap og 38.7% between AA students and the highest achieving group (State DOE, 2013).

- *The subgroups that were a focus of district concern were AA and Latino males, special education students and economically disadvantaged students.

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- *The subgroups that were a focus of district concern were AA and Latino males, special education students and economically disadvantaged students.

Preparing my Lessons to Meet the Needs of my Students- Questions for Teachers

1. *Each teacher will be asked to complete the questionaire to determine the amount of consideration they perceive themselves to have when preparing lessons, specifically toward AA males. The questionnaire is intended for teachers begin to think about the process they use to prepare lessons for their AA MS males. Hopfully this can be utilized as a tool to be used in the professional development of teachers.

Preparing my Lessons to Meet the Needs of my Students- (Questionaire Created by L. Figueroa)

- Please answer the 4 questions with either "ALWAYS" (A), "SOMETIMES" (S), or "NEVER" (N)
- 1. I consider the students in my class when I begin creating lessons
-   (A)____   (S)____   (N)____
- 2. After each lesson I reflect on how my students reacted to the lesson
-   (A)____   (S)____   (N)____
- 3. I think about the learning modalities of my students when I create lessons
-   (A)____   (S)____   (N)____
- 4. I create lessons that affress the needs of my AA MS male students
-   (A)____   (S)____   (N)____

Preparing my Lessons to Meet the Needs of my Students- (Questionaire Created by L. Figueroa)

- Please answer the 4 questions with either "ALWAYS" (A), "SOMETIMES" (S), or "NEVER" (N)
- 1. I consider the students in my class when I begin creating lessons
- (A)____   (S)____   (N)____
- 2. After each lesson I reflect on how my students reacted to the lesson
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- 3. I think about the learning modalities of my students when I create lessons
- (A)____   (S)____   (N)____
- 4. I create lessons that affress the needs of my AA MS male students
- (A)____   (S)____   (N)____

Preparing my Lessons to Meet the Needs of my Students Questionaire (continued)

- Complete questionaire to begin thinking related to teaching AA males
- Use this as a self-perception assessment
- To promote reflection and thought about AA MS male students
- Transparency is the key
- For individual use only

- Discuss the importance of empathy and understanding pedagogy related to teaching AA males
- Empathy = relatedness

Agenda Day 1

- *Light Breakfast (provided) :   8:00am-9:00
- *Pre-Assessment-Each teacher willcomplete the questionaire to allow teachers to begin to think about lessons   9:00-10:00
- *Reading #1- Selected reading and Pair and Share with partner   10:-11:00
  (All readings are suggestions of facilitator with input from attendees)
- *Reading #2- Reading and Share take-aways with table on wall posters   11:00-12:00
- *Reading #3- Reading and put dots on poster comments of interest   12:00-1:00
                              Lunch (provided)   1:00-2:00
- *Reading #4- Reading and answer in-depth discussion questions   2:00-3:00

- *Wrap-Up and post-assessment   3:00-4:00

READING # 1

- *Teachers will read a related selected reading related to understanding how culture impacts learning and specific strategies that teachers can use when instructing AA MS male students

- Pair and Share: How does cultural perception shape our thoughts and behaviors?

Reading # 2

- *Teachers will read another related selected reading on how culture impacts learning and on strategies that teachers can use when instructing AA MS male students.

- *Teachers will explore cultural identity and potential biases (assumptions). Share Take-Aways with Table and place thoughts on wall poster (posters will remain up for entire workshop duration).

Reading # 3

- *Teachers will read another related selected reading on how culture impacts learning and on strategies that teachers can use when instructing AA MS male students in reading.

- *Teachers will discuss their thinking process and the cultural makeup of their classes when preparing lesson plans. Put dots on wall posters that contain comments of interest.

Reading # 4

- *Teachers will read the final related selected reading of the day focusing on how culture impacts learning and strategies that teachers can use when instructing AA MS male students in reading

- *Teachers will discuss what approaches can be used to understand someone else who has a different cultural experience

Reading # 4

- *Teachers will read the final related selected reading of the day focusing on how culture impacts learning and strategies that teachers can use when instructing AA MS male students in reading

- *Teachers will discuss what approaches can be used to understand someone else who has a different cultural experience

CLOSE- SESSION 1:Wrap-Up

- *What are the take-aways from today/Post-Assessment
- -What did you lern from today's session that you may try?
- -What might you stop doing?

- *Preview of Day # 2 Agenda

- Have a Great Night!

Agenda: DAY TWO – SESSION #2

- *   Light Breakfast (Provided)   8:00am-9:00
- *Welcome/Introductions/Overview of Agenda Day #2 9:00-10:00
- *Small group discussion of readings #1 and #2(day #1)-10:00-11:30
  *Small group discussion of readings #3 and #4(day #1)-11:30-1:00 *
  *   Lunch (Provided)1:00-2:00
  (Teachers asked to bring a research article day 3)
- *Discuss thoughts to the discussion questions(big group) 2:00-3:00
- *Wrap-Up and preview of day #3 (Bring in article)   3:00-4:00

Goals: Sessions 1-3

- *Understand how culture impacts learning and discuss specific strategies that teachers use when instructing AA MS males in reading (Session 1)

- *Examine culturally relevant curriculums and positive behavior supports that teachers can use to help AA MS males engage better in the learning process

- *Create positive classroom environments that enhance learning and improve outcomes for our AA MS males

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

- * Reading # 1 and Reading # 2 from day 1 will be discussed

- Teachers will discuss their answers to the discussion questions from day 1

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (#2)

- Reading # 3 and Reading # 4 from day 1 will be discussed

- *Teachers will discuss their responses to the discussion questions after Readings # 3 and # 4 from day 1

Peer Reviewed Article- "HOMEWORK"

- *After Day #2 Teachers will be asked to bring in a peer reviewed article for discussion on Day #3

- *Each teacher will be asked to send a link to all participants for their selected article during or after Day#2

- *Each teacher will be asked to prepare to discuss their related peer reviewed article with their team at their table

Agenda: DAY THREE – SESSION # 3

• ˙	Light Breakfast (Provided)	8:00am-9:00
•	*Teachers will discuss readings they selected for today	9:00-10:00
•	*Small group discussion of reading #5	10:00-11:00
•	*Collaborate on a unit plan that includes instruction on a chosen reading skill or strategy	11:00-12:00
•	*Whole group discussion of readings	12:00-1:00
• ˙	Lunch (provided)	1:00-2:00
•	*Teachers will volunteer to role-play their lesson plan with the entire class acting as students (The facilitator will lead in constructive criticism)	2:00-3:00
•	*Facilitator will give post-assessment and group will summarize major take-aways Close-out with contact information and additional resources	3:00-4:00

Goals: Sessions 1-3

- *Understand how culture impacts learning and discuss specific strategies that teachers use when instructing AA MS males in reading (Session 1)

- *Examine culturally relevant curriculums and positive behavior supports that teachers can use to help AA MS males engage better in the learning process (Session 2)

- *Create positive classroom environments that enhance learning and improve outcomes for our AA MS males (Session 3)

Reading # 5

- * Teachers will be asked to read a final related selection

- Teachers will meet in small groups to discuss reading # 5

- Teachers will collaborate on a unit plan that includes assigned units for instruction on a chosen reading skill or strategy

- Share unit plan with another small group

ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITY

- * Whole group discussion of the 5 selected readings

- *Teachers will be asked to volunteer to role-play their lesson plan with the entire class acting as students

- Teachers (acting as students) will take notes on their percetions of the lesson shared

- *The facilitator will lead a discussion focused on constructive feedback

- *Take-Aways and Post-Assessment

WRAP-UP

- *Facilitator will give a post-assessment survey

- *The group will summarize the major take-aways

- *Questions/Concerns/Comments

- Contact information sharing

- Additional resources

Goals: Sessions 1-3

- *Understand how culture impacts learning and discuss specific strategies that teachers use when instructing AA MS males in reading (Session 1)

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Final Thoughts

- Activities/Sharing/ Take with You:
- *Small group discussions with discussion questions
- *Collaborative unit planning and lesson planning
- *Role-playing
- *Pre- and post-assessment
- *Notes from Take-Aways

References

- Suggested potential articles:
- "Scale of Teacher Empathy for AA males (S-TEAAM) Measuring Teacher Conceptions and the Application of Empathy in Multicultural Classroom Settings- Chezare A. Warren, *The Journal of negro education*, vol.84, No.2, The 35thAnnual Charles H. Thompson Lecture (Spring 2015), pp.154-174
- "How Assumptions about Race and Gender Skew School Reforms for Black Boys- Keisha Lindsay, Scholars Strategy Network, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, Oct. 2015
- "The Relationship Between Teacher Perception and AA Male Students' IEP Refferral- Steward, Christina (2016) Honors Projects. 306
- "Teacher Inquiry for Equity: Collaborating to Improve Teaching and Learning- Linda Friedrich and Marilyn McKinney, The National Council of Teachers of English (2010)
- "Equity and Social Justice in teaching and Teacher Education- Baljit Kaur, Teaching and Teacher Education, School of Educational Studies and Human Development, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand (2012)
- "Addressing Reading Underachievement in AA Boys through a Multi-Contextual Approach- Husband, T. (2012) *Reading Horizons*,52 (1)

Resources for Lesson Plans

- **Learners**
-      The targeted learners are all AA MS males, but specifically AA MS males who are struggling with reading, including expressing dislike for reading, low reading time, poor reading skills when observed, and poor reading scores on reading assessments. These learners can be in special education or general education classes.

(Continued)

- Scope
- The curriculum class will consist of a Reading and Writing workshop that teaches reading skills and strategies within the context of culturally relevant, enabling texts.

(Continued)

- Sequence
- The following sequence will be employed for each daily lesson of the unit plans to consist of two 50 to 60-minute blocks per day:
- Phonics instruction
- Fluency practice
- Vocabulary acquisition
- Comprehension strategies
- Varied text reading practice
- Independent interest-led reading
- Group/shared/choral reading
- Group activities
- Small groups/independent enrichment

(Continued)

- **Materials**
- Materials will consist of designated notebooks for each student, phonics games, index cards for vocabulary words, reading passages, a copy of the book chosen for each unit, graphic organizers, a reading passport, construction paper, white paper, art supplies.

(Continued)

- *Unit 1: Who am I?*
- In unit 1, students will be oriented to the Reading and Writing workshop. They will learn the rules and expectations. They will be given a book list and allowed to choose the books they will read for each unit. Their book choices will be used to construct reading groups. Students will complete a student survey, create a visual or digital representation of their self-identity, participate in read alouds while reading along, practice daily journaling, and meet with their reading groups to begin preliminary group activities, such as choosing a group name, establishing group rules and group roles.

(Continued)

- *Unit 2: Who are we?*
- In unit 2, students will explore themes of social justice, equity, race, poverty and economics, opportunity, passions, and dreams. Students will read their chosen books in their reading groups, participate in group activities, such as discussions, research projects, and art projects, and be included in small groups for additional practice with reading skills. Students will be assessed through written and oral comprehension, as well as scores on standardized reading assessments.

(Continued)

- *Lessons*
- *Week 1*
- Lesson 1: Student survey and book list
- Lesson 2: Digital identity representation (visual art project)
- Lesson 3: Reading groups, rules and roles
- Lesson 4: Types of text and text features
- Lesson 5: Types of sentences and paragraph structure

(Continued)

- *Week 2*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

- *Week 3*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

-
- *Week 4*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

- *Week 5*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

- *Week 6*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

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(Continued)

- *Week 7*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

- *Week 8*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

- *Week 9*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

- *Week 10*
- Lesson 1: New vocabulary and reading groups
- Lesson 2: Phonics and reading passages
- Lesson 3: Reading groups and discussion questions
- Lesson 4: Reading groups and art projects
- Lesson 5: Small group mini-lesson and independent enrichment

(Continued)

- *Objectives*
-        The objectives of the curriculum plan are
- Improve AA MS males reading achievement
- Increase AA MS males reading time
- Strengthen AA MS males reading skills and strategies

(Continued)

- *Activities*
- During each week, the following activities will be included in each lesson:
- Phonics instruction
- Fluency practice
- Vocabulary acquisition
- Comprehension strategies
- Varied text reading practice
- Independent interest-led reading
- Group/shared/choral reading
- Group activities
- Small groups/independent enrichment

Appendix B: Teacher Survey Protocol

Lesson Plan Preparation

- In what ways do you prepare lessons plans for your male AA students

- In what ways do your lesson plans address the needs of your male AA students

Instructional Delivery

- In what ways do you deliver lessons plans to your male AA students

- In what ways do your male AA students respond to the method of delivery that
 you use

Student Learning

- How do you identify the learning modalities of your AA students?

- What is the most effective method of teaching Language Arts/reading to AA
 students?

Student behavior

- How do your AA students behave in class?

- How do you effectively manage AA student's behavior in class?

The individual teacher survey should take about 20 minutes.

EXIT TICKET

1.) What will you take away from this session that you will be able to utilize

immediately in your classes?

2.) Are there any processes that you need to include or modify in order to

utilize what you have taken away from this session? Please explain.

3.) Do you plan to share what you have learned in this session with your

colleagues? Administrators?

4.) What affect do you think what you have learned in this session will have on your AA MS male students? ON others?

5.) Will you look for further PD in this area? Would you like to facilitate such PD?

Thank You for Participating in this Professional Development Workshop!