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Academic engagement and achievement of a group of African American high school students in northwestern Oregon

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ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF A GROUP OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NORTHWESTERN OREGON

By

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Presented to Educational Foundations and Leadership Department
and the School of Education at George Fox University
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George Fox University
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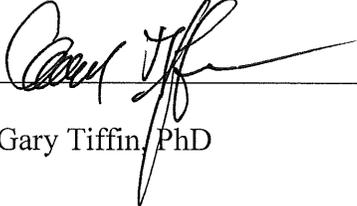
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted using personal interviews of ten African American students in a small northwestern town in Oregon. The purpose of the study was to examine the values and perceptions of the high school students regarding their experiences in their high school and community. The researcher sought to discover if students viewed their experiences in a manner similar to students in the study by John Ogbu (2003) in Shaker Heights, Ohio. Based on the students' responses from the interview, students appeared to have a different perception of their experiences and future when compared to the findings in the Ogbu study that was conducted nine years earlier. The majority of the students in this study viewed their future as very bright and all of the students were very clear regarding their future plans for their education and career. Students were generally very pleased with their experiences in the high school and within the community with the exception of a few students who cited a few unpleasant incidents. The students gave very specific recommendations as to how their high school curriculum and social life in their school could be improved.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	III
CHAPTER 1.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY/PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	5
LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	7
SUMMARY	9
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
INTRODUCTION.....	10
TREATMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS COMPARED TO WHITE STUDENTS	11
ATTITUDES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS - EFFECTS ON SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT	13
ACADEMIC REFORM INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP.....	18
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT - CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP	21
CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW	25
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES.....	27
INTRODUCTION.....	27
SETTING	24
PARTICIPANTS.....	25

PARTICIPANT SELECTION	25
RESEARCH DESIGN	26
<i>IRB Participant Safeguarding</i>	26
INSTRUMENTATION AND MATERIALS.....	30
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES.....	31
ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER.....	32
POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	33
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	34
INTRODUCTION.....	34
FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS	34
<i>Valuable Educational Perspectives</i>	38
<i>Positive Teacher Relationships</i>	44
<i>Negative African American Stereotypes</i>	46
<i>Constructive Curriculum Feedback</i>	48
<i>Positive Ethnic Identification</i>	49
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS	44
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	46
DISCUSSION	54
QUESTION 1: HOW DO THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY IMPACT THE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF A SAMPLE OF HIGH SCHOOL AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS?	48
<i>Summary</i>	48

<i>Recommendations</i>	51
QUESTION 2: HOW DOES SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT INFLUENCE BOTH ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH PEERS AND AFFECT SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN A SAMPLE OF HIGH SCHOOL AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS?.....	52
<i>Summary</i>	52
<i>Recommendations</i>	63
CONCLUSIONS	55
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	59
REFERENCES	61
APPENDIXES	66
APPENDIX A: LETTER REQUESTING DISTRICT PERMISSION	67
APPENDIX B: PARENTAL PERMISSION LETTER	68
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	69
APPENDIX D: SCRIPT TO BEGIN INTERVIEWS	70

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The major focus of this dissertation was to uncover deep ideological perceptions of a small sample of high school students who attend a high school in the mid-Willamette Valley of northwestern Oregon. In searching for answers regarding the achievement gap between African American and White students, questions and scores of research have emerged to help educators uncover the reasons why African American students continue to lag significantly behind White students in their academic performance despite changes in social mobility and the concerted efforts of many highly motivated educators. This study explored the tools needed to better serve African American students as a means to narrow the gap in learning and academic performance between White and African American students.

The researcher reviewed related literature to determine some of the reasons why these gaps in achievement still persist even though major reform efforts have been initiated over several decades. Furthermore, this study examined possible answers to this lack of achievement in African American students through the research of John Ogbu, an anthropologist who coined several theories used to answer questions regarding student behavior and academic achievement of African American students (Ogbu, 2003). Similar to the concerns of Ogbu, the researcher attempted to understand why some African American students lack motivation for school that extends to both academic engagement and extracurricular participation in activities such as sport teams and clubs. In Ogbu's research, high school students were interviewed in order to gain

insight and impressions of their high school experience in Shaker Heights, an affluent suburb near Cleveland, Ohio (Ogbu, 2003). For this study, the researcher explored reasons for the achievement gap of African American students in a small northwestern town in Oregon by asking the students to share their perceptions of their high school experience. It was the belief of the researcher that school experiences of students have significantly impacted their school success. How do the school experiences and personal experiences within the school and community impact the student achievement of a sample of African American students?

Furthermore, it was the belief of the researcher that attitudes of the school staff and community values and actions contributed to poor student performance of some of the high school students in this study. Also, of great importance to the researcher were reasons why some students appear to place limited value on their education. How does school engagement influence both academic motivation and social interaction with peers and affect school performance in a sample of high school African American students?

Due to their lack of motivation, the students in Ogbu's study were at risk of never developing to their full academic potential (Ogbu, 2003). Studies have drawn a relationship between low literacy in adults and the incidence of crime (Hale, 1992). This is especially crucial if we look at the statistics that tie the lack of basic literacy skills and teen dropouts to the disproportionately high number of African American youth, especially African American men in prison (Kunjufu, 2002). Perhaps, if these students

were to achieve in school, we could prevent many of them from ending up living much of their life in the penal system.

This research serves to guide educators in developing programs that will foster a better understanding of the perceptions of some of the issues facing a select group of students. Furthermore, educators will gain insight that will assist them in the developing programs that will motivate students to work harder and to improve their school academic performance. Moreover, based on the theories that resulted from the studies by Ogbu (1978, 2003), the researcher offers a hypothesis regarding why African American students are not achieving at the same academic level as White students and poses additional questions for future studies of African American students. Future school district policies may be influenced as a result of this research regarding the perceptions and needs of these students.

As aforementioned, Ogbu (1978, 2003) has been noted as a primary researcher and contributor in the issue of the achievement gap. The study by Ogbu (2003) in Shaker Heights, Ohio, found that even though many of the African American students came from affluent homes, many lacked the drive and motivation to work hard in school, and did not perform well academically. Based on the demographic information and high socio-economic status (SES) of students in that Ohio school district, most had the expectation that both African American and White students would perform equally well academically. However, this was not the case. The African American students performed far below the White students, both on their report cards and on state standardized tests.

After interviewing these students, Ogbu made some interesting observations and reached some profound conclusions. Overall, the African American students did not view school the same as White students. In fact, in talking with some of the African American students, Ogbu discovered that some students had a negative perception regarding their school experience and lacked motivation, which was reflected in their unwillingness to work hard in school. A substantial number of the African American students interviewed considered working hard and achieving in school as “acting White.” This negative connotation associated with school was one of the ideas that the researcher explored during the interviews with the students in this current study. In addition to negative student impressions of school experiences, the researcher also explored the idea of whether students in the study view the lower socio-economic status of African Americans, in other areas of their city, as a reason that they may have had limited expectations of the value of school. In Ogbu’s earlier research, the lack of economic gains for African Americans is referred to as a “glass ceiling” because African Americans often feel marginalized in their achievement based on what they see in the African American community (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

Purpose of the Study/Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes, perceptions and experiences among a sample of African American high school students. Specifically, the researcher used personal interviews to investigate a variety of important issues related to the educational experiences of a small sample of African American students in a small town in northwestern Oregon (see Appendix A). Among these issues were

measuring perception of feelings of connection to African American role models, parental involvement in education, attitudes toward school, and feelings regarding what it is like to be a minority in a predominantly White school. An objective of the study was to gain greater understanding of the nature of educational experiences of African American high school students in order to recommend school and district policies that improve the educational experience for these students.

The focus of the research in this study was divided into two major themes. First, the research explored whether or not the school and personal experiences of this sample of high school students has had an affect on their academic achievement. Secondly, the researcher examined the level of school engagement of this group of students and explored the connection between school engagement and high academic performance.

Research Questions

1. How do the school experiences and personal experiences within the school and community impact the student achievement of a sample of African American students?
2. How does school engagement influence both academic motivation and social interaction with peers and affect school performance in a sample of high school African American students?

Definition of Terms

Achievement Gap - This term refers to disparities in one or more measures of educational performance (e.g., standardized test scores, graduation rates) among students by race, ethnicity and income. The achievement gap typically measures

differences between high performing groups (i.e., Whites, Asians and high-income students) and low performing groups (i.e., African Americans, Latino and low-income students.) It can also compare differences in student performance by disability status and English language proficiency (Montgomery County, MD, 2008).

“Acting White” - This term was coined in 1986 by Fordham and Ogbu and references that some African Americans performed poorly in school because they did not want to use standard English or earn good grades and thus were labeled “White.”

African American students/Black students - Both terms refer to students of African descent and may be used interchangeably and were capitalized.

Cultural Inequality Theory - A real sense of hopelessness and despair on the part of the students. According to Ogbu (1978), minorities such as African Americans came to the United States involuntarily and therefore had a pessimistic view of the kind of future they will have in this country. This theory was used to explain the lack of motivation that Ogbu observed when studying the students of Shaker Heights

(2003). Glass Ceiling - This term refers to the unwritten rule whereby minorities are not promoted beyond a certain level regardless of their training and qualifications. These feelings of despair were a major obstacle to motivating students to work hard and to earn good grades (Ogbu, 2003).

Involuntary Minorities - Groups who came to the United States against their will, such as those who were forced to come as slaves (Ogbu, 1978).

Oppositional Identity - According to Ogbu (2003), some involuntary minorities developed a negative attitude in response to White society because many failed to

observe the link between educational achievement and access to jobs. These feelings of despair were a major obstacle to motivating students in Ogbu's research to work hard in school and to earn good grades.

Voluntary Minorities - Groups who came to the United States because they had a choice, frequently for the purpose of a higher standard of living (Ogbu, 1978, 2003).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

One major limitation in this study was the fact that the ethnic identity of the participants could not be separated into those who were bi-racial and those who were African American. Students were selected for participation in this study based on their self-identification as African American students during enrollment in high school.

A second limitation was that most of the participants in this study came from single-parent homes. The participants from single-parent homes tend to be low-income students, due to the fact that there is only one primary wage earner in the household. Even though there are comparisons made between the results of this study and the findings by Ogbu (2003), the fact that most of the participants in this research were low-income made this group's socio-economic status different than the group in the Ogbu study.

The third limitation was that this is a qualitative study, which means that the findings of it only represent the perceptions of the small group of participants. However, even though the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population, when taken in conjunction with the Ogbu studies and others, the current findings may

provide additional insights into students and may provide additional avenues for research (see Chapter 5 for more discussion).

A delimitation of the study was that participants came from grades 10-12, as the researcher chose not to include all four grades in high school in the random selection. Based on professional judgment and experience of the researcher, ninth-grade students were not used in the study due to their limited high school experiences. While the reason for this is valid, it is worth noting that this delimitation does provide boundaries to the scope of the research in this study.

An additional delimitation was that the researcher was employed as an assistant principal at the school where the participants attended high school. During the project, the researcher made every effort to separate the roles as staff member and as researcher, and it was for this reason that interviews in this study were conducted at a local community center away from the school setting. However, the fact that the researcher had relationships with students and families from the school meant that, regardless of effort, the researcher was not a completely neutral outside party. Nevertheless, this relationship as a staff member with whom participants were familiar potentially contributed to the students' comfort level and their ability to share open opinions as part of this research. The very close relationship that the researcher has developed with at least five of the students randomly selected may contribute to the apparent comfort of students during the interviews. The researcher believed that students were very open and honest, and noted that several students smiled during the interviews.

Summary

This study examined some of the attitudes and perceptions that students hold today regarding what affects their academic achievement. Although the economic income level of the students who were in the study by Ogbu (2003) differed from students participating in the current research, it was the belief of the researcher that the environment and attitudes of the people that the participants in the study encountered, in school and within the community, deeply influenced the attitudes of students with regard to their academic success. Furthermore, the researcher believes that African American students have continued to be influenced by the ideas coined by John Ogbu, including Oppositional Theory, Acting White, and Glass Ceiling (Ogbu, 2003).

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In order to fully understand some of the major tenets of low-achieving students in our schools, we must closely examine the environmental factors that exist both inside their schools and within their communities. For many minority students, the families live in generational poverty as students live in homes that report incomes that are far below the level of poverty (Payne, 2001). In the United States in 1996, it was reported that one out of four people under the age of 18 were living in poverty (Center for the Study of Poverty, 1996). The plight of Latino students and African American students was even worse (Children's Defense Fund, 1991). Many parents were working in jobs that barely paid the minimum wage due to their lack of formal education beyond high school (Beegle, 2007).

The home environment is a factor that is very likely to affect student achievement because many low-income students do not have access to good medical and dental care, which often contributes to poor nutritional habits and a lifestyle that does not include an exercise regimen. Poor physical health can affect student academic performance; not only are homes lacking the many provisions that help students achieve in schools, the school environment adds to the problem in many inner city schools, where students have substandard facilities. Many of these schools have only limited access to basic equipment and the resources necessary to provide an educational environment that is conducive to high academic achievement (Payne, 2001).

Researchers reported significant failure of inner city school districts to invest appropriately in their schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In addition to the lack of resources, it has been noted that there was tremendous difficulty in hiring and retaining the best teachers. Plans across the nation were developed to improve teacher training and retention (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). New teachers were heavily recruited to areas where there was a high need by offering signing bonuses that would hopefully attract master teachers who had skills to work with students with severe academic needs. Despite all the innovative tactics used to bring good teachers to poor urban areas, good teachers alone could not improve student performance and the majority of the students continued to perform poorly (Darling- Hammond, 2007).

Treatment of African American Students Compared to White Students

The achievement gap between White and African American students is apparent when we examine the statistics. One of the leading concerns regarding the achievement gap examines the treatment that African American students receive compared to their White peers. Negative attitudes and actions directed toward African American students occur and were reported in school, the students' homes, and in their communities. It was reported that over half of all students in high schools were not enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum. The problem is even more alarming when we look at the fact that only one in four students were in the college prep sequence (Freel, 1998). Nationally, 88% of White students graduate from high school, and 25% from college. However, when we look at the percentages for African American students, we find that only 83% graduate from high school and 12% from college

(Beagle, 2007). Furthermore, the numbers are significantly lower if we look at whether or not students, African American students in particular, will graduate from high school with the skills to function in college or in the workplace (Freel, 1998).

There was research to show an African American-White disparity even when comparing the socio-economic status (SES) of students. It was surprising that the achievement gap was the largest among students who have college educated parents (The College Board, 1999). In addition to poor school performance, African American students have consistently scored much lower on the SAT (Belluck, 1999). Moreover, the African American “environmental disadvantage” was alarming when one examines college attendance and completion rates where much lower attendance rates were reported for African American students (Freel, 1998).

In most schools across the country, there were subgroups of the overall student population that were not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP), as defined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. However, in Texas, there was a statewide accountability system that demanded progress among all subgroups in the schools. For example, an exemplary school in Texas must have 90% of all students, regardless of ethnicity, pass the state test. This kind of standards-based system ensures equity in schools through greater attention to subgroups such as African American and Latino students, two subgroups who generally fail to meet state benchmarks (Freel, 1998).

Studies on the achievement gap of African American students are divided with regard to the reasons why African American students have for decades achieved significantly below White students. African American students achieve significantly

below other minorities, especially in math and science (Mason, Schroeter, Combs, & Washington, 1992). There was research that explained the differences in student academic success between African American and White students by pointing to environmental factors such as poor neighborhoods, poverty, single parent homes, and other challenges (i.e., the tendency to have less experienced teachers and the lack of needed school resources such as state of the art technology) that frequently exist in inner city schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Attitudes of African American Students and the Effects on School Achievement

In this study, the researcher examined the attitudes of students that may have contributed to poor student achievement. The students' attitudes may reflect attitudes and perceptions of teachers and staff regarding the potential for African American students to receive a good education. Previous research explored the kinds of experiences that African American students face, especially in schools when the majority of the students and staff are White. In Ogbu's (2003) research in Shaker Heights, Ohio, the African American students lacked confidence in their ability to do well in school. Despite the concerted efforts on the part of teachers and parents, many students felt that getting an education was useless due to the bleak conditions of African American people around them. This was coined as the Theory of Cultural Inequality, a real sense of hopelessness and despair on the part of the students. According to Ogbu (1978), minorities such as African Americans came to the United States involuntarily and therefore they had a pessimistic view of the kind of future they will have in this country. This theory was used to explain the lack of motivation that

Ogbu observed when studying the students of Shaker Heights (2003). Based on the inequality around these students, the students came to believe that African American students could not have a bright future even with a good education.

Another study explored the value of identity in the achievement of African American students (Cross, 1991). In Cross's original stage, pre-encounter (pre-identity) is characterized by an African American person having anti-African American attitudes that often resulted from African Americans being exposed to racism. In the next stage, the transitional stage, an event occurs that would "catch the individual off guard" and made race a more significant part of the person's identity. During the last stage in this process, the individual becomes more proactive by researching African American history and taking up a cause against racial injustice (Cross, 1991).

A study by Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) identified the link between racial identity and academic achievement. In this research, self-esteem, racial identity and academic self-concept predicted academic outcomes for a group of African American students. The strongest predictors of GPA were the student's attitudes and academic self-concept. Not surprising was the fact that students who had the highest self-concept received higher grade point averages (Witherspoon et al., 1997). In other studies, African American students who were involved in negative anti-White sentiments were very likely to exhibit poor school performance. Rowley and Oyessman (2000) found that high school students who perceived some discrimination in education had good grades. In contrast, African American students who under-emphasized race

or over-emphasized their Blackness had poorer academic outcomes. Chavous (2003) found no significant relationship between racial identity and grade point average.

There are several schools of thought regarding self-esteem. Some scholars believe that positive self-esteem was an antecedent for high academic achievement (Awad, 2007). In addition to studies on self-esteem, a healthy self-concept in African American youth may explain some of the feelings that impact learning. To some degree, the influence of academic self-concept allowed students to compare their academic progress with other students (Cokley, 2000).

Although research findings from studies of African American college students may be somewhat scarce, Brookover and Passalacqua (1982) and Awad (2007) found that African American students at historically Black colleges reported higher academic self-concept than students at White universities. In further research, it was found that the quality of faculty-student interaction also had an effect on the academic self-concept of students. Academic self-concept was noted as a very significant variable in looking at student achievement in African American students. In fact, academic self-concept was found to be one of the best predictors of academic success as measured by grade point average (Gerardi, 1990, 2005; Witherspoon et al., 1997).

In several studies, the fear of testing had a serious negative impact on test results. There were reports that due to lack of self-confidence, African American students did not achieve well on standardized test. For many students, this lack of strong confidence caused them to perform poorly even when they had knowledge of the content. Steele (1998) argued that the threats of stereotypes also hindered the performance of highly

capable students because many African American students become self-conscious, spending too much time on questions and rechecking answers.

When interviewing African American high school students, it was determined that there were many factors that affected the high school experience and led to a healthy school environment. Polite (1999) conducted a study with African American males in a suburban high school. One of the major findings was the fact that students felt their school did not challenge them academically, especially in math classes. In addition, many students expressed concerns regarding their school counselors helping them obtain valuable college information. Also, some remarked that the schools overall did not provide a caring environment and this report from students was believed to mirror the feeling of countless students across the country (Gregory, 2000).

Some of the experiences of African American students may have to do with the area of the country in which they live. According to the research of Comer and Poussaint (1992), both African American and White students experience problems when they live totally isolated from other ethnic groups. In some of the studies, African Americans appear to either experience feelings of hopelessness or, in contrast, they searched for solutions. McAdoo (1991) studied ways that middle-class African American families cope with their adversity. For many of the African American families, parents must help their children survive in two worlds – one Black and the other White (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

When students were given a survey about their school experience, 43% of the 271 students who completed a questionnaire said that they had experienced racism at their

high school (Thompson, 2003). Of the students who responded that racism did exist in their school, half of the students said it occurred “occasionally” or “frequently.” Many of the students who experienced racism did not report the incident to school officials. According to one of the bi-racial students in the study, her problems in school were directly related to her race, mainly exclusion from peers and harassment. Often, students could cite examples of racial slurs from their peers and examples of situations where teachers singled out African American students or made stereotypical remarks (Alexander & Gosa, 2007).

A research study of 79 high school students in an Upward Bound Program in Virginia measured student perceptions of their environment (Rowley & Oyessman, 2000). Specifically, the study explored general and racial beliefs that high school students held with regard to their future success in school or in their future careers. The results from student responses furthered uncovered some of the strategies that African American students must learn in order to cope with discrimination and racism in schools. Another study, conducted at the University of Michigan, looked at the student’s belief regarding their race and potential for success in life (Oyessman, 2000). The Oyessman study revealed another coping strategy for African American students. The results showed a positive relationship between students’ cultural identity and academic performance. The study also indicated that when African American students felt good about school, they did well despite their encounters with racism (Casady, 2002).

Academic Reform Initiatives in Support of the Achievement Gap

One theme repeated in the literature was the philosophy that all students can learn and achieve at a high level. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2005) built a model for school reform based on the philosophy that all students can acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions essential for their future success. The emphasis in this work was not solely on raising test scores, but on making a positive difference in the lives of students and thereby fulfilling a fundamentally moral purpose. By accepting this idea, DuFour et al. (2005) suggested that the behavior of teachers in classrooms led to the redirection of thinking from a more teacher-centered approach to a greater emphasis on the needs of the student as learner. Schools in this context can no longer be reserved for the elite or high-income students. Rather, schools must adequately serve all students regardless of socio-economic status. With that being said, in theory, low-income students and minority students would have equal access to a good education. However, we have observed that in practice, this idea does not always hold true.

It is for this reason that initiatives such as the 90/90/90 schools offer so much promise now and in the future because of their success in closing the achievement gap (Reeves, 2003). By definition, these are schools where 90% of students come from homes at or below the poverty level, 90% receive free and reduced lunch, and 90% of students are identified in a minority group. Despite their economic and minority status, 90% of the students do well in school including their performance on state tests. If we look at lessons learned from effective 90/90/90 schools, we understand that teaching was not done in isolation, but teachers worked together collaboratively in teams sharing

the benefits of their collective knowledge, experience and expertise. These teams are generally referred to as Professional Learning Communities or PLCs (DuFour et al., 2005).

Most educators would agree that we want schools to perform and function at a high level. We might need to consider the ideas promoted by Collins (2001) when he shared the results of his research on high-performing organizations. Consistently, there was one common element found in most high-functioning organizations. Each organization had a single organizing idea, a basic principle or a concept that unified and guided the work of everyone within the organizations. In a PLC, the unifying principle asserted that schools have not fulfilled their fundamental purpose until all students have learned at high levels (DuFour et al., 2005). Once the idea that all students will learn was embraced, more reflection regarding the role of the teacher became evident. It also became critical to the mission of Professional Learning Communities, which posed the following questions as a way to ensure learning for every student:

1. What is it we want all students to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has mastered the essential learning?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences initial difficulty in learning?
4. How will we deepen the learning for students who have already mastered essential knowledge and skills?

If we look closely at these questions, we realize that with this kind of focus and organizational framework in schools, the achievement gap would be thoroughly addressed through a renewed focus on what students learn rather than what was being taught (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001).

Effective 90/90/90 schools have used a great deal of this philosophy in making a real change in the approach to student learning and the idea that all students can and will learn. This sends a resounding message that economically disadvantaged students, many of whom are African American, can and will achieve when the right instructional strategies are in place.

Research findings regarding 90/90/90 schools were useful in part due to the maintenance of careful records on actual instructional practices and strategies. Thus, researchers made connections between instructional practices in the classroom and student achievement. In closing the achievement gap, we might look at the research and successful strategies behind the success of this initiative. The research study of the 90/90/90 schools highlighted some classroom practices that might have contributed to students' success (Reeves, 2003). Several important practices were evident in the classrooms:

1. A focus on academic achievement.
2. Clear curriculum choices.
3. Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement.
4. An emphasis on nonfiction writing.

5. Collaborative scoring of student work.

The educational practices of these schools are worthy of notice due to the fact that some may assume that being a low-income student is synonymous with receiving a poor education and that poverty may be a life sentence for these students (Reeves, 2003). According to this research, these students can look forward to a brighter future due to the education that they received.

Recent research has recorded new data that has extended the work of 90/90/90 research study. There are schools where not 90%, but 100% of the students are poor, from minority groups, and receive free and reduced lunches and yet most achieve at very high levels. All of these schools and initiatives offer great promise and should be used to direct and evaluate future attempts to close the achievement gap.

Montgomery County Public School District Works to Close the Achievement Gap

Districts across the country have explored strategies and options that will narrow or eliminate the academic disparity in achievement for African American students who often achieve below White students. As pointed out in the recent study conducted for the City Council in Montgomery County, Maryland (2008), the academic performance between low and high performance of students in schools is substantial. There are several groups of students (i.e., African Americans, Latino, English Language Learners, and low-income students) who have received considerable attention with regard to gaps in academic achievement. The work to help these students has been highlighted in this report because these students generally perform far below White, Asian, and high-income students.

Montgomery County, MD (2008) can be credited with allocating significant funding to clearly look at this problem. State and federal funding was allocated to research the achievement gap. Strategic recommendations and solutions were explored using a council of professional educators who collaborated on several areas where students demonstrated deficiency (e.g., very low performance in math and science for African American high school students). The council was named the Montgomery County Public Council (MCPC). Overnight remedies were very unlikely and the council was very realistic about the need for additional research and data analysis. Repeatedly the council made statements acknowledging that the achievement gap was more than a local Montgomery County, MD problem. In essence, the gap in achievement between various ethnic groups, socio-economic levels and students in special populations (i.e., special education and ELL students) stemmed from a much larger national problem. Keeping this in mind, the district made the work of lowering the achievement gap a high priority by assigning full time staff to oversee and monitor the progress. The council accepted the arduous task before them and set forth very specific guidelines in anticipation of the results and kinds of behavior that would become non-negotiable.

The school district closely adhered to the following guidelines, which eventually became policy:

1. All effort for closing the achievement gap would not affect what top students would learn.

2. The achievement gap would be closed without the bar so low that everyone could pass it.
3. The role of the school in contributing to the achievement gap would be addressed.
4. The classes for the achievement gap were not to push out or discourage students who were at the most risk of failure.
5. Culturally sensitive issues would not reinforce stereotypes that some students can learn and others cannot learn.

The council's work compared the performance results of high-performing and low-performing groups across three types of measures. The measures were grade-level performance, above-level performance and measures of gifted-level performance and disability identification. Analysis of the findings revealed that when the progress of subgroups were compared, vital information was found that would greatly impact the direction and impact of the recommendations that affected two subgroups, namely African American and Latino students. African American students fared better when compared to White students when grade-level comparisons were made. When looking at any other comparison, the achievement gap was very large. However, there was a significant gap between African American and White students when above-grade comparisons were made. Simply stated, African American did poorly on higher-level work.

Due to the pressing concerns that Montgomery County, MD faced regarding achievement, the district took steps based on the council's recommendations to

implement different strategies. Furthermore, the Montgomery County Public Council worked using the guidelines established by the Maryland Bridge to Excellence Act. There were other examples of when the district council raised the bar. The Montgomery County Public Council set guidelines that were higher than the federal laws of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 by requiring that all school students pass the state test and a High School Assessment (HAS) or alternate requirement in order to graduate. Furthermore, the Montgomery County Public Council created another ambitious mandate that all students not only fulfill grade level expectations, but that students reach the above-grade assessments as well.

All target standards for subgroups typically known as low performers were set higher. For example, higher proficiency in English and the native language became the expectation for English Language Learners. There was also an increase in the investment in early childhood education by providing free pre-kindergarten programs. This was especially beneficial to African American students, where the gap in achievement began to narrow at the elementary level. In addition, the Montgomery County Public Council made it possible for all ninth and tenth grade students to take the PSAT, a preparation exam for the college entrance exam, free of charge.

The findings were profound and could stir other districts to see the need to make similar changes to the curriculum and district policies. Even though not expected, there was some progress in narrowing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity and within some groups of students. The study did point to some continued concerns with regards to African American and Latino student. Unfortunately, there were significantly more

African American and Latino students identified as having higher rates of suspensions and mental disabilities (Polite & Davis, 1999).

Based on the extensive work of the Montgomery County Public Council, other districts might use these guidelines and policies to see if indeed this model might be adapted to their schools in order to make similar changes that would reach the ultimate goal of narrowing the achievement gap. The results have great potential for further investigation, research and implementation by other districts.

Conclusions from the Literature Review

There were three areas pointed to in the literature that directly impact the achievement gap between African American and White students. The first was environmental factors, such as being from low-income families that generally causes students to live in poor areas and attend schools with fewer resources, inexperienced teachers, and inadequate facilities with limited technology (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). The second factor that the literature suggested that impacts achievement of African American students is their treatment within the school and community. The third factor that impacts the achievement gap refers to the personal attitudes that a student has pertaining to academic future, aspirations and the individual perceptions of future success in school.

The literature also clearly describes the successful work of Professional Learning Communities, the 90/90/90 School Initiatives, and the Montgomery County School District in Maryland initiatives to implement a philosophy reflected in practices and policies that improve the achievement of African American students in several

academic areas. Even though there appeared to be great optimism to improve achievement for African American Students, the statistical data pointed to the tremendous disparity with regards to the high suspension rates and the high enrollment of African American students in special education programs. One of the great lessons for school districts to learn from the Montgomery County, MD study is the tremendous dedication of resources, both personnel and designated funding, for this project. The evaluation of the implementation process involved true reflection and clear priorities that initiatives to close the achievement gap were efforts that are worthy of every dollar spent.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Procedures

Introduction

This qualitative study examined two basic questions in order to determine how a small group of high school students were affected academically by their personal experiences and encounters in their school and community. Specifically, the researcher posed the following questions:

1. How do the school experiences and personal experiences within the school and community impact the student achievement of a sample of African American students?
2. How does school engagement influence both academic motivation and social interaction with peers and affect school performance in a sample of high school African American students?

In order to fulfill the purpose of this research and to answer the research questions, the researcher established research protocols. This chapter explains the researcher's plan including the setting, participants, research design, instrumentation, materials, procedures for data collection and analysis, for this investigation. This section also includes the role of the researcher, human subjects safeguarding, and contributions the study might provide.

Setting

There are approximately 32,000 residents within this small town in Oregon. The ethnicity of the community is 85% White and a minority population of around 15%,

with an African American population of 0.75%. Forty-three percent of the students in the district receive free and reduced lunch. The school district has approximately 40,000 students with a minority population of 12,000 students comprised primarily of Hispanic descent. Less than one percent of the total the student population are African American students. The total number of high school students of African American descent is 160. The high school, African American staff in the district includes one high school principal, two assistant principals and two district administrators. This high school is unique due to the fact that it has the largest student population in the school district, as there are 2,200 students. The community takes special pride in having their own schools and government separate from a larger, neighboring city that is part of the school district.

Participants

The participants in this study were a random selection of African American high school students currently enrolled in one high school in a small town in the Mid-Willamette Valley in northwestern Oregon who self-identified as either Black or African American during school enrollment. The students in this sample live in one area of a small town where people demonstrate great support for their school and community.

Participant Selection

The student participants were current students who attend one high school in northwestern Oregon. A random process was used for selection as there were forty-four African American students enrolled in the high school. Although a number of the students in the sample are biracial, all the students have self-identified themselves

during school enrollment as African American or African American. Of the 44 African Americans enrolled at the high school, there were 24 girls and 20 boys. There were 10 ninth graders, 16 tenth graders, 8 eleventh graders, and 9 twelfth graders.

Based on personal experience and professional judgment, the researcher made the decision to eliminate the students who were in the ninth grade from the random selection process because these students have fewer school and life experiences and are ineligible for some sports and other school activities that would show school engagement. The researcher asked questions during the interviews regarding honors and AP classes, many of which were not available to the freshmen students. It is the belief of the researcher that older students would have a better understanding of some higher order concepts that would be introduced. The interview questions would require that students have life experiences and would be familiar and acclimated to high school practices.

The researcher placed all the names of African American students in grades 10, 11 and 12 on an alphabetical list. Using a random process, the researcher selected every fourth student until ten students were selected for participation in this study.

Research Design

This study was a qualitative design using personal interviews from a random selection of ten African American students. The school registration secretary provided a list to the researcher that designated the forty-four African American students enrolled in the school.

IRB Participant Safeguarding

The researcher conducted personal interviews with ten African American students with the written permission of the parents or guardians and building principal, acting as the district superintendent's designee. Interviews were held at the local community center instead of at the high school because the researcher wanted to clearly delineate the role as researcher as separate from the staff position known by the students. Following the written approval of the building principal (see Appendix A), the researcher sent a letter to the parents or guardian of participants requesting that students be allowed to participate in two meetings held at the local community center (see Appendix B). The researcher followed up with a call to every parent of a potential participant to answer questions from the parent or student. Parents received a letter explaining the reason for the study with a detachable consent form giving their permission for student participation with the agreement that they would provide transportation to and from the community center. Following the initial contact by letter, students received a follow up reminder from the researcher confirming the time and location of the interviews. Due to the fact that the researcher is employed by the school district, all interviews took place after school hours or on weekends. In the interest of professionalism and the academic interest of students, participants were not interviewed and did not assist in this research during school hours.

Instrumentation and Materials

The researcher employed an unstructured interview format using a portable audio recorder with a set of four to six guide questions (see Appendix C) followed by

five open-ended questions that encouraged more elaboration from the students. The interview sessions were audio recorded and later professionally transcribed. The interviews were scheduled for one-hour sessions with the acknowledgment to students and parents that one follow-up session might be needed. The researcher read a prepared script to the participants and asked students if they had questions (see Appendix D). During each interview, copies of the questions were placed in front of the student so that they could read along with the researcher. Following the interviews, the student interviews and personal demographic information were only accessible to the researcher. All signed consent forms, demographic forms, and the audio recordings will be destroyed by the researcher three years after the completion of the dissertation.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The researcher used general processes and procedures used to analyze qualitative data. According to Berg (2007), a researcher must choose some type of organized system in which information is coded. The researcher used the traditional coding procedures of working through the process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This method is commonly used in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). After the interview text was professionally transcribed, the researcher color-coded categories of responses and later used more detailed data analysis strategies to add and delete categories as needed. The researcher developed a typology to label student responses and categories. The initial process of open coding was used with all interview transcripts. Next, the researcher used color-coding to separate student responses and finally the last phase of selective coding was used.

In applying open coding, the identified characteristics from various data sources were first listed. As part of the open coding process, important patterns in responses were observed. Next, in the axial coding stage, the researcher categorized the data into tentative typologies. Typologies help researchers collapse categories based upon common themes or characteristics (Bailey, 2007). Finally, after further collapsing typologies, the final stage of selective coding was employed to assist the researcher to look for themes and patterns that describe the high school and community experiences of the students who participated in the interviews.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is currently an assistant principal employed by the school district where the participants attend high school. During this project, the researcher made every effort to separate the staff role from that of researcher. It is for this reason that interviews were scheduled at a local community center after school.

This research was conducted under the direction of the Education Foundations and Leadership (EDFL) Department at George Fox University as a dissertation in partial fulfillment for the requirements of a Doctor of Education Degree (Ed.D). The researcher followed the protocol for research when using human subjects as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Therefore, the researcher followed all ethical procedures established by the George Fox University Institutional Review Board. Additionally, the role of the researcher was to analyze the data and draw conclusions from the data in a logical, cohesive, objective and honest manner.

Potential Implications of the Research

This research has potential to build theory and expand ideas regarding the impact of Cultural Inequality Theory and Oppositional Identity (Ogbu, 2003). Furthermore, the researcher was interested in gaining insight from students regarding some of their experiences as minority students in White majority school districts. This research explored ideas regarding the impact of societal and political norms that greatly impact African American students and their academic achievement. The researcher has a special commitment to the topic of the achievement gap due the experiences encountered as an educator in several states. The researcher has observed the tremendous disparity in achievement between African American and White students due to the many reasons described in the literature review. Using the results of this research, the researcher has made some recommendations that will assist districts in helping to one day narrow and further reduce the gaps in academic performance that exist between African American and White students.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

The focus of this study was to gain a student perspective regarding the perceptions, values, and experiences of a group of African American students in a high school located in a small town in northwestern Oregon. The researcher acknowledges that the reported results of this qualitative study only represent the views and perspectives of this small sample of ten students.

In order to gain information through personal interviews with the students, the researcher focused on two aspects in the life of these students that included their experiences in school and within the community. The researcher asked questions during the interviews (see Appendix C) that would help the students describe their educational experience by answering the following research questions:

- 1) How do the school experiences and personal experiences within the school and community impact the student achievement of a sample of African American students?
- 2) How does school engagement influence both academic motivation and social interaction with peers and affect school performance in a sample of high school African American students?

Findings from the Interviews

Ten students were randomly selected from a population of 44 current students who self-identified as African American or African American students in grades 10, 11

and 12 from a high school located in a northwestern town in Oregon. Students from the ninth grade were not included in the study based on the professional judgment and experience of the researcher.

The researcher received approval for the study following the established procedures of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the direction of the dissertation chair and doctoral committee as approved by George Fox University (see Appendix A). After the random selection was completed, the selected participants and parents received a letter explaining the research project with the invitation for the student to participate (see Appendix B). Students and parents were made aware that the study was strictly voluntary and that students were free to withdraw at any time. After the permission letters were returned, the researcher followed up with a phone call to parents in order to answer questions and schedule the interview. Interviews were scheduled at a local community center as to maintain the professionalism of the study and to ensure that students remain anonymous.

Interviews were scheduled for one hour to allow forty-five minutes for the actual interview and fifteen minutes to answer questions and for wrap-up of the interview. When students arrived for the interview, they were asked to fill out a short form with their name, address, name of the middle school they attended, how long have they lived in Oregon, grade point average, and the occupation of their parents (see Table I). Students were seated directly across from the researcher and the interview began with a script (see Appendix D) read by the researcher that introduced the researcher and

explained the purpose of the study and listed the two research questions with an opportunity for the participants to ask questions or request further clarification.

Table 1**Demographics of Student Participants in the Interviews**

Student	Gender	Years in Oregon	GPA	Parent Occupation	State Reading Test Score (passing = 236)	State Math Test Score (passing = 236)
Student 1	Male	8	3.25	Unemployed	230	235
Student 2	Female	14	3.33	Unemployed	230	235
Student 3	Male	2	1.59	Unemployed	231	228
Student 4	Male	14	3.33	Mom - state Dad - construction	242	245
Student 5	Female	Six months	2.0	Mom - nurse	232	230
Student 6	Female	6	2.2	HR assistant	230	238
Student 7	Female	Five months	3.4	Unemployed	239	248
Student 8	Female	17	3.63	Office manager	233	236
Student 9	Female	12	1.6	Mom - unemployed Dad - Florist	220	220
Student 10	Female	5	3.2	Mom - state Dad - carpenter	236	234

The audio recording began with each question being read and explained by the researcher as necessary. Students were identified in the study numerically according to the order in which the students interviewed. For example, the first student to be interviewed was labeled Student #1 and so on with the final student labeled as Student #10. The interview questions were read and explained to each student as necessary for total understanding of what was being asked of each student.

The researcher added several wrap-up questions (see Appendix C) as a way to close the interview soliciting additional ideas that students could think of by answering three more general questions pertaining to high school students and some of the things

that they might typically experience in high school. It was the belief of the researcher that these general questions would add to the depth of the answers and that these final questions would encourage students to share information that they may have failed to mention.

Based on the general themes, the researcher developed a number of typologies that further explain and categorize the student responses. The following typologies were identified:

1. Valuable Educational Perspectives
2. Positive Teacher Relationships
3. Negative African American Stereotypes
4. Constructive Curriculum Feedback
5. Positive Ethnic Identity

The researcher used typologies as a way to classify student categories of response as typologies are commonly used in qualitative research as a way for the researcher to separate and organize ideas in meaningful ways (Patton, 1990). The typologies provide the structure of presenting the findings from data transcribed from the interviews as follows:

Valuable educational perspectives.

When one student was asked about his motivation to work hard in school, he responded:

Student: Yes. Because while I am in class some of the students will be playing or something when we are supposed to be doing an assignment, and I will be doing

the assignment, trying to ignore them so I can get it done and not have homework and I know what I am doing in the class. So, yes, I work hard and my grades show that.

Researcher: Great. So what motivates you to work hard?

Student #1: That is a hard question. Honestly, I think just looking at kids that don't do their work; they motivate me to be successful because I am not going to be one of the kids that are playing around when they should be doing their work. I am one of the students that will do their work and at the end of the year I am going to show them that I got a better grade than them because I did my work when we had the chance, not just play around.

Other students shared their reason for being motivated that was quite different. For example, **Student #2** shared:

Student #2: I work hard. I do my best with what I, with the time that I have. Because I work and then I also help my mom around the house and I pretty much chauffeur her around where she needs to go. So I try my best with the classes that I have.

Researcher: So I notice you have a full class load, so even though you are a senior you take a full...

Student #2: Well, I have one release this semester, but other than that, yeah, I take a full class load.

Researcher: And you didn't have to?

Student #2: My motivation would probably come from my mom and our status; I am going to say that my mom and where we are right now as of income, our poverty level I guess is how you would say it. I guess our poverty level. Because right now our income is below what even poor income should be. I guess below poverty status. And

that makes me want to strive to get more, to be more, to have more than what I already have, because having more than what I have now is better than, if that made sense.

When the researcher asked another student about her motivation, the answer was quite different. **Student #7** said:

School is, I feel like life is difficult in general. Either side, if you are rich, or poor, or anything. But I feel like school is the thing that I can control. I have control on whether I get A's or whether I get F's, and so I will get an A. I know my brain is big enough to where I can get an A, and I can work hard enough to achieve that goal. And so school is like the most important thing in my life right now, other than family and church.

Researcher: Oh wow. So who motivates you to feel this way?

Student #7: I would probably say my mom. She motivates me the most because she had me when she was younger, and so sometimes she does not get the same opportunities, but that is what she wants for me. And so it motivates me, and myself, I motivate myself because I know what position I want to be in life, and so I know what I have to do in order to get there.

Researcher: Okay. So the important thing is to be successful and to be able to finish school and go onto college, I'm sure.

Researcher: Question to **Student #10:** Are you taking AP and Honors classes?

Student #10: I was, I think Sophomore year I took an Honors Government class, but I just kind of decided that I would just take what I needed to so that I would have time to do other things and enjoy high school instead of being stuck in a

book all day, every day, all weekend. So I have, I tried it but it just didn't seem right to me.

Researcher: Okay. So it is something that you know about, but you just decided maybe to think about it.

Student #10: Yeah. Some people can handle doing all of that work and getting more advanced lessons, but I would just rather stick with what I get, I guess.

Researcher: Okay. Next question. What kinds of students take these Honors and AP classes? What kinds of kids do that?

Student #10: Extremely motivated students I would say. I don't like calling them "nerds" or whatever. I just know that students who do that obviously have higher expectations of themselves and they set forth to meet those expectations.

Researcher: Okay. So it is not a, is there a stigma or a bad name associated with kids...

Student #10: Just "geeks," "nerds" and all that.

Researcher: Okay. Some people think of them as "nerds"?

Student #10: But I don't. I admire those people because they do take on a heavier load than everyone else. And if you can take an Honors class and ace it that is awesome because not a lot of people can.

Researcher to Student #6: Are you taking AP or Honors classes?

Student #6: No, I have not. I have last year but it was only for a semester because I did not do really good in it, and so I went to a regular class. But yeah, I'm not taking any this year.

Researcher: So the reason is you did not do well and that is the reason why you are not taking them?

Student #6: Yeah. And I don't want to go through that again.

Researcher: Do you know about AP classes, advanced placement classes?

Student #6: Yeah. To me I think they might be harder than Honors classes, and so I don't really want to take the risk.

Researcher: So what kind of students do you think take these hard classes?

Student #6: Pretty much like, I don't know. My friend seems like the kind of person that would. She is going to, I think she is going to graduate early and go to [a local community college], and she has been taking Honors classes and stuff. But, the kind of people I would say would be straight A students, yeah, the people that study really, really hard. I mean I study hard but probably not as hard as people that would take the Honors classes.

Researcher: So you do know people that study really hard?

Student #6: Yeah.

Researcher: Is working hard for good grades, is that a good thing?

Student #6: Yes. It is a very good thing.

Researcher: Now, are you taking AP or Honors classes?

Student #5: I'm not.

Researcher: Why, or why not? Why not?

Student #5: I am not taking Honors classes because I don't think, I wouldn't say that I don't think that I am smart enough for Honors classes, it is just that

Honors, I get scared to hear the word Honors classes. Like it scares me because I feel like, I feel like once I get into an Honors class I am going to automatically fail, like because it is such a high, like Honors, it is so high, and so I am not in it.

Researcher: Do you think maybe later you might take an AP or Honors class?

Student #5: Maybe like, as my second semester in my junior year I might take an Honors class, because....

Even though getting good grades and a good education was reportedly highly desirable, most students shared multiple reasons why they did not take AP and Honors classes. For some students the reluctance seemed to point to the classes as being too difficult. If students want good grades, they may avoid classes that they perceive to be too difficult.

Positive teacher relationships.

Students mentioned how important the interpersonal relationships with teachers were and how these relationships helped them to adjust to school. Other students shared experiences where teachers were concerned and helped with personal issues outside of school. Overall, the acceptance by teachers and staff had a significant positive effect on the students' outlook and perception of school. The following excerpts list what students said were positive school experiences with teachers.

Students had the following positive things to say about staff members:

Student #5: I would say my favorite teacher would be Mr. A, because he does not give up on me. Like, I thought he would give up on me because I am like, it takes a while for me to learn, and with like teachers in Arizona, they are not as

strict and they don't really care as much as the teachers here that I have noticed.

And I feel that Mr. A, he has not given up on me and I don't know, I think he is a really good teacher, and he is just like, when I am sad or something he will cheer me up somehow, someway.

Researcher to Student #1: Do you have a favorite teacher or staff person?

Student #1: Yes. I have Mr. M.

Researcher: Okay, and why do you like him?

Student #1: I like him because he is an outgoing teacher. He is nice and if you don't make him mad he is really cool. He teaches theater just like Ms. B, she is cool too. He is the reason, him and Ms. B are the reason that I am going to be taking, or be in more plays throughout high school.

Student #8: I have a few favorites. I actually like all of my teachers for the most part. I try to be personal with them, like so we have some type of relationship established. So I find something in everybody that I really do like. I really like Mr. B. I just think he is fantastic. I had him as a freshman and he has not changed. Some teachers, it's like they will see me, they know who I am, but they don't even say "Hi" or they don't really remember your name, or it's just....Mr. B has never changed. He talks to me as if I'm still in his class a few years later. Like he has never changed. And also Ms. S. She deserves some type of award or something because she is fantastic in school and outside of school. Like she is there for you no matter what, and I really like that in a teacher.

Although most of the students cited a favorite teacher who made some positive contributions to their academic progress, several students shared very constructive feedback regarding how the academic experience could challenge students and possibly make school more rigorous and effective.

Negatives African American stereotypes.

In several interviews, students mentioned that they wanted to dispel the negative stereotypes about African American students that were common in their community. In fact, negative stereotypes seemed to cause students to show lack of confidence in their abilities when taking exam. Also, several students in the study described how it felt to be in an area where there were only a few African American people.

Student #5: Well, high school has been very different for me. Because I am not used to being, I'm not used to being in a school with so many, like less African American people. And it is like, sometimes it is awkward because, like when the teachers talk about like, like in American Government when the teachers talk about like, slavery days because it is kind of awkward cause I am like the only African American kid there. And so it is pretty different. It has its good and it's bad.

Student #8: Some of the staff I don't care too much for. I find that they really do pick favorites. Also, like recently in Social Studies we were studying Civil Rights Movements and I find it kind of irritating to have a White teacher try to teach a African American perspective when they really have no idea what they are

talking about. And I feel uncomfortable being put in a situation where I have to raise my hand and correct them and kids are looking at me crazy because I'm speaking up and disagreeing with the teacher. I find that to be irritating. I don't think we have enough diversity in the staff at our school and that is pretty much.

Student #2: I don't think African-American students achieve as much as White students because, I feel like there is this stereotype over African-American students and African-American people just as in a general, that those who don't strive, that we don't strive. And then there are some of us who do, we strive to do well and we get it done. But then there is also just this stereotype over us that we don't push ourselves. And it also comes from the stereotype of where we come from and other things that African-Americans in general have done that other people hang over our heads that most people don't understand that we don't all act like that. We don't all do those things. So that is why I think most African-Americans don't do as well as White kids because they themselves hang that stereotype over their head to not do.

Student #7: Well, as far as me, I would have to say that I always have that little voice in my head that is, okay, people expect certain things from you, not necessarily just in this community but as an African-American, people might not expect as much as a woman, or young woman, people might not expect enough as me just as a person. People might not expect enough, so I love proving people wrong and so I love like going above and beyond people's expectations. So that

is a personal drive that is just to shatter all, you know, suggestions that I might not be at that goal or....

Constructive curriculum feedback.

One student had interesting insight regarding the quality of instruction. One of the students in this study spoke regarding the coordination of student work by teachers so that all teachers did not give major assignments during the same time period. This kind of collaboration would be accommodated through the work of the PLC.

Student #4: I am not really sure, cause, certain teachers I guess, don't do as good of job as I would have liked or don't really teach the way that I would see best. I guess I wouldn't really be disappointed, so I am not really sure about that.

Student #4: Homework seems to be fine, but some teachers, or just all classes, either don't have any homework at all or have too little or too much, and it seems to build up.

Student # 10: I kind of feel like some classes are more just being taught, instead of interacting. And like with me, if I just sit in class and the teacher is talking the whole time, I am going to fall asleep because it is just not fun. But pretty much just being able to, I love having debates and discussions, and I notice how like in all of my classes there are people that I have had classes with that I have never heard them speak ever. But as soon as we get on a topic that they know about, and we debate about it, they will talk about it. That is the same with me. So I feel like just being more interactive with everyone in the class and the teachers, instead of just being taught a lesson, pretty much.

Student #10: Well, I have never personally sat down with someone who absolutely hates going to school every day and how they feel about it. But, like I said, just making school more enjoyable. Making classes like more fun I guess. It seems like when you're in middle school we do all these projects and we get to do all this fun stuff, and go on field trips and stuff like that. But as soon as you get to high school it is like you sit in a class and do work for 1-1/2 hours, and that is not fun for us. We are still kids, so we still want be able to interact and have fun in class. So I think that's probably what contributes most.

Positive ethnic identification.

Several students expressed that they valued living and going to school with other African American students. In fact, deliberate recruitment of African American staff was highly desired by students.

Researcher question to **Student #1:** Have you enjoyed living here?

Student #1: Yes I have. Not as much as I enjoyed living in California. Just because there is more African-Americans in California, so I felt good to be around them. There are African-Americans out here. I can relate to them too, cause they say they wish they could move because some African-Americans don't like it out here. I do, but there is other places I would want to go to.

Researcher question to **Student #1:** Why do you think they don't like it here?

Student #1: Just because the majority of Whites out here. Cause everywhere we turn, like when I was in elementary or middle school there was always Whites. I didn't have a problem with it but I like to see an African American person.

Researcher question to **Student #1**: So, how does it make you feel when you see an African American person in school?

Student #1: I feel excited. Even if I don't know them, you can still get to know them, and sometimes we might not like have anything in common except that we African-American. So not all African-Americans I can be friends with, but the majority of them I can.

Researcher: Does it have an effect on you, do you think? Having African-American teachers or staff members?

Student #1: Yes. I don't think I have had an African-American teacher.

There were several students who reported negative experiences within the school or community. Most of the students tended to share positive aspirations for their future and appeared to accept negative incidents as isolated situations that would not cause them to alter their future goals or their pride or identification with being African American. However, one student described an incident on the bus where he reportedly was called names that had racial overtones.

Student #3: Last time I came here the, when I was coming here when I was not supposed to because it was the wrong time and all, some guy just called me a faggot out of nowhere and I pretty much did not know who he was. I think he was just picking a fight with me ... My peers kind of disappoint me. Cause, usually because they use kinds of words that I don't like, even though I sometimes say some things that are not right, they kind of take it a little bit over level by saying sometimes the "N word" or "spicaroo" one time. Yeah, one of

the peers thought it should be my nickname, but not as in hateful, he thought it was kind of funny in kind of a sick, twisted way.

Researcher: So he wanted to call you “spicaroo?”

Student #3: Yeah.

Researcher: What does that mean?

Student #3: You know the term “spic?”

Researcher: No, I am not familiar with it.

Student #3: Well, it is pretty much supposed to be as worse as saying the “N word” but to Mexicans.

Researcher: Okay.

Student #3: Yeah, and pretty much everybody thought that I look Mexican until I tell them that I am actually African-American. So I kind of also think they change their view towards me when they know that too.

Another student shared an experience that she referred to during the interview as mental bullying.

Student #5: The people? They, well, the beginning of the year, everybody I felt that I talk to now, I felt like they, they welcomed me in a good way because they were really nice. And there was a couple of sour ones that didn’t. They look at you funny like, “Oh, look at her. She is different. We don’t really see a African American girl usually.” So I felt kind of strange at times. But, wouldn’t call it bullying. I would just call it like, I would call it...I wouldn’t call it bullying because I don’t feel like it was bullying-bullying, but I felt it was just their words,

maybe its called like, I don't know. It wasn't physical bullying. It wasn't none of that, but I guess it was like mental bullying.

Researcher: Okay. What happened?

Student #5: Well, like it was the time where, you know, called me like an "African American whatever" and all that, and I felt like that was kind of like unnecessary. And so that is about it. But other than that, like I have always been called like "African Americanie" or like "you're dark" or whatever, but sometimes ... My mom tells me don't let it phase you, because in life you are going to go through struggles. So you just have to like leave them alone and just do you.

Summary of the Findings

The typologies identified by the researcher in the study are Valuable Educational Perspectives, Positive Teacher Relationships, Negative African American Stereotypes, Constructive Curriculum Feedback, and Positive Ethnic Identification.

This group of students indicated that they had very high goals and aspirations for the future. According to their responses, they also had some ideas and plans for completing high school. Although academics were reported as highly valued, the majority of the students were not enrolled in Honors or AP classes. Additionally, three of the students had overall grade point averages below a 2.0 despite their statements that they planned to go on to college. When the students described the positive attributes of the school experience, there were a lot of valuable interpersonal experiences with teachers. However, the rigor of the curriculum and the level of

instruction were not given the same degree of focus when describing these favorable school attributes.

The final typology, Positive Ethnic Identification, was based on statements from students that the school and community experience would be more comfortable if there were more African American people in the community specifically more African Americans in their high school.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

The researcher has focused this study on the perceptions and experience of ten African American high school students in northwestern Oregon. The primary findings based on the interview responses from the students in the sample were used to answer two research questions. From this point forward, the researcher will use the findings presented in Chapter 4 to summarize the findings, make recommendations and draw conclusions, based on the research questions.

At the start of the study, the researcher had two questions that guided the research:

1. How do the school experiences and personal experiences within the school and community impact the student achievement of a sample of high school African American students?
2. How does school engagement influence both academic motivation and social interaction with peers and affect school performance in a sample of high school African American students?

In review of the interview text, the researcher looked for patterns of responses that might lead to themes and overarching ideas that represented the perceptions of the students both in school and within the community. After reviewing the transcription from the interviews that included an introductory statement, the interview questions, and some wrap-up questions, several themes emerged and were quite predominant in

reading and coding the responses: 1) Valuable Educational Perspectives, 2) Positive Teacher Relationships, 3) Negative African American Stereotypes, 4) Constructive Curriculum Feedback, and 5) Positive Ethnic Identification.

The following overall observations were made:

1. Students were highly motivated and stated solid future goals. It appeared that most students possessed a strong focus on graduating from high school and based on their plans were quite eager to finish high school and either go to college or receive post-secondary training to prepare for the workforce.
2. Students felt that getting good grades and working hard was highly desirable. However, some remarked that the work was very difficult for them.
3. All (with the exception of one student) knew what AP and Honor classes were. However, only four of the ten students interviewed were enrolled in these classes.
4. The interpersonal relationships with specific teachers were described as positive by most of the students. Only three of the ten students did not name a favorite teacher or staff member. On the negative side, several students mentioned that teachers sometimes played favorites and it was sometimes difficult to become part of a group.
5. Generally speaking, with only a few exceptions, teachers were viewed as nice, positive and supportive. However, several students had constructive ideas that would improve instruction and contribute to a better academic experience for students.

6. Two students had incidents that might be considered racial or prompted by prejudice. The students considered the incidents a form of bullying.
7. Overall, most of the students reported that they wanted to live and see more African American people and several students suggested the recruitment of African American staff to their high school.
8. Overall, according to the responses from the interviews, the majority of the students were highly motivated despite their reported struggles to have the money needed to get involved in school activities.
9. When students shared their response to the question regarding the achievement level of African American students as being below White students, most of the students stated that there was no connection to race.
10. When students were asked the follow-up questions regarding the greatest problems facing youth today, the answers varied and students often pointed to common problems in school such as smoking, drugs, gangs, and bullying. Students repeatedly mentioned relationships as an area in need of positive change.

Overall, the results of this study did not align with the theories of Ogbu (1978, 2003) regarding the glass ceiling expectation that African American people could only achieve to a specified level or status and to the plight of African American people in the community. The findings from the interviews of this group were quite the contrary. Reportedly, most of the students indicated that they were highly self-motivated, valued education and would reach their goals. In fact, some felt that their low socio-economic

status served as a motivator because they wanted to do more in life and accomplish more than their parents.

Question 1: How do the school experiences and personal experiences within the school and community impact the student achievement of a sample of high school African American students?

Summary.

Contrary to the research by Ogbu (2003) many years ago in Shaker Heights, Ohio, all of the students without exception reported that getting good grades was a desired and favorable thing for students. Some of the students admired students who achieved academically while some felt that the students who received good grades were smarter than they were. But, despite the many reasons, all of the students thought that getting good grades was a desirable attribute. Furthermore, this group of students would not likely categorize getting good grades as “acting White,” as described in the research by Ogbu (2003). These student statements support the research by Rowley and Oyessman (2000), who concluded that a positive learning environment would contribute to the well being of students and their perception that high achievement was within their reach.

There were several students who reported negative experiences within the school or community. However, based on their responses, these isolated incidents did not cause the students to give up their dream for successful high school completion and career success in the future. Most of the students tended to share positive aspirations for their future and appeared to accept negative incidents as isolated situations that

would not cause them to alter their future goals or their pride or identification with being African American.

The student responses regarding grades ran the gamut from very positive statements to statements that the students who take AP classes and get good grades are “just smart” (Student #5). In fact, some remarked that these students “had to be smarter than they were” (Student #5). Actually, there was no mention that getting good grades was anything but positive. For most of these students, good grades would be a status symbol. Even though getting good grades and a good education was reportedly highly desirable, most students shared multiple reasons why they did not take AP and Honors classes. For some students the reluctance seemed to point to the classes as being too difficult. If students want good grades, they may avoid classes that they perceive to be too difficult. The research by city council of Montgomery County, MD (2008) clearly pointed to the value of increasing the number of African American students enrolled in Honors and AP classes. Although most of the students acknowledged the value of the classes, there appeared to be some reluctance to take these classes. Also, several students listed their reluctance as related to their perceived lack of ability.

Students made very strong statements regarding special teachers that they had enjoyed working with in the classroom. It was important to note that all the classroom teachers in the high schools, with the exception of two Hispanic teachers, were White. In essence, one would have to say that students felt that teachers treated them well with just a few exceptions or isolated incidents mentioned. There were two students that led

the researcher to believe that some of the teachers could have benefited from equity training or in services on cultural sensitivity. Specifically speaking, students cited that statements were made regarding events in Black History units that were inaccurate.

Despite the efforts of teachers to create a caring and warm learning environment, some students still felt that some teachers had favorites. Other students seemed to believe that being low income might have limited their opportunities to get involved in school. Consistently, regardless of the good treatment of students by teachers, there was a loud concern voiced to have more African American teachers and staff.

Repeatedly, students shared their prior enjoyment with living in areas where there were more African American people. Only a few students could give examples of major events where they participated in the community although a few had experiences doing volunteer work. Interestingly enough, one student in the tenth grade reported never being taught by an African American teacher.

There were a number of students who shared their concerns regarding the rigor of the curriculum, while several students expressed that the work was difficult. Other students referred to the need for stronger communication between teachers in order to avoid having several major projects due at the same time. Also, several students remarked that instruction should be more hands-on with time for group work and oral discussions. The students rated the teachers' ability to help them learn in several ways with some teachers recommended for awards or at least some kind of recognition, but unfortunately there was a perception by others students that some teachers really needed to do a better job of teaching.

Recommendations.

The real clear and resounding message from the students is the need to recruit and, more importantly, retain more African American teachers and staff. As a part of the recruitment efforts, it would be beneficial to hire teachers who have experienced training in equity and diversity with a great emphasis on cultural sensitivity. Moreover, mentoring programs for African American students will need to be implemented so students have ways to get help and give their feedback. As recommended by one of the students, the African American leaders and professional people in the community must take a stand and not accept the former excuses and reasons from the school district as to why they cannot deal strategically with the age-old crisis of the achievement gap. Collaboration and planning to garner community support must be fully developed. One non-profit organization started a SAT preparation program to assist African American students. This is a great beginning, yet one program will not fully take care of the academic needs of these students.

Programs must be implemented during the early elementary years. Obviously, getting these programs started during high school may very well be too late. In short, greater intensity with regard to the implementation of programs and school practices that support African American students must be created and fully developed in order to promote greater academic achievement for African American students.

Question 2: How does school engagement influence both academic motivation and social interaction with peers and affect school performance in a sample of high school African American students?

Summary.

First and foremost in addressing academic motivation, without a doubt, parents provided strong encouragement for the students to do well in school. From a school district prospective, it was unclear that there were programs that would directly impact African American students. During the interviews, it seemed clear that one could describe these students as almost “invisible” to this district. The numbers of students who were identified as African American was so small that the students were ignored. The only program that had consistently been implemented specifically for African American student in the past was the annual African American Leadership Conference that has been held for a number of years at one of the local universities.

The encouragement of students to take higher level, more rigorous classes would be supported by DuFour et al. (2005) where the Professional Learning Communities worked to not only benefit students performing to meet essential learning skills, but also had teams that were very focused on students who needed to be academically challenged. The research completed to develop Professional Learning Communities (PLC) pointed to the need for greater focus on Differentiation of Instruction (DuFour et al., 2005). This would mean that the level of student instruction by the teacher would be based on the student’s ability.

This group of students was very impressive and their statement led the researcher to equate their drive to achieve in life with what the researcher viewed as a laser-like focus with regard to their future success. Students shared very enthusiastically about their future college plans and other training that would help them prepare for adulthood. Parents often served as the students' personal mentors and academic cheerleaders. Equally as impressive as the students' focus in school was the students' good attendance in school. Most of the students were present in school the majority of the time. Only four students had grades above a B (3.0), most of the students expressed that they would go to college or into a training program after high school. However, only three of the ten students were taking AP or Honors classes.

The motivation of this group of students appeared to be more intrinsic, rather than extrinsic. One student even expressed that the negative actions of some students influenced him to do the right thing in class as not to be associated with negative behavior. Negative stereotypes that other people, especially White people, held of African American people were not something that the students in the study wanted to perpetuate. Some mentioned that they purposely dispelled African American stereotypes as much as possible. Due to the tremendous pride that these students held, the students approached the future with a great deal of optimism that they would help them succeed in life.

Furthermore, school staff members need to make students more aware that, generally speaking, involvement in school extra-curricular activities tends to have positive academic benefits for students. Studies have been conducted that examined

the connection between academic performance and student participation in extra curricular activities. Holloway (2000) discovered that some of these activities such as school sports improve the student commitment to school values that led to increased positive school values. By sharing this kind of information, students will be encouraged to look at school activities in a different manner that hopefully will be very positive.

With regard to the social interactions with friends in school, obviously some activities and programs eliminate students when do not have money. In addition to concerns regarding the funding to participate in sports and other activities, it is of crucial concerns that students have the opportunity to make the sports team. Obviously, if African American students rarely make the team, some will stop trying, as was the situation of one student who tried to play volleyball.

Recommendations.

Despite the obvious benefit of students taking AP and Honors classes, guidance counselors at this school did not make the enrollment of students in the classes a priority. District supervisors and building administrators in high schools need to do a better job of looking at this concern. Consistent monitoring of school data would have highlighted the concern and brought the problem of low enrollment of African American students in Honors and AP classes to the attention of those able to make recommendations with an action plan to get more African American students enrolled in more rigorous courses.

Building administrators and guidance counselors need to share in the responsibility to monitor the progress of the students and this kind of follow-up with

students has to go beyond the academic concerns. Due to the relationship between the academics and social interaction, administrators must carefully look at all kinds of data and information in order to make the best decisions in the total interest of the students. The fact that African American students were not fully engaged in school events should send a message that there are areas that need attention and immediate improvement.

Conclusions

The researcher began this study with the idea that the work and theories of Ogbu (2003) would surface during the interviews with student from a high school in northwestern Oregon. Much to the contrary, the responses from the students in this study were quite different from the responses from the students in the study completed in Shaker Heights, Ohio. The fact that the study by Ogbu (2003) was conducted over nine years ago may account for the differences in the way the students' perceived educational opportunity. Also, the difference in income levels of the two studies may account for the differences in perceptions. The students in the Shaker Heights study were more affluent, unlike the students in Oregon who were low income.

Other reasons why students in this study had a bright outlook on life might be due to the election of the first African American president. From a student perspective, students are likely to feel good about this historical event and this may likely make them feel that opportunities are available to them. With that being said, the election of President Barack Obama and the impact on African American students has been the source of differing views. Some have proposed that an "Obama effect" exists due to the results of a study where a quasi-experiment performed by researchers at Vanderbilt

University found that Obama had a profound effect on the exam performance of a sample of African American test takers and effectively eliminating the Black-White test score gap in the days following the election. Although a lot has been written on the Obama effect, some refute the claims for improved student performance, but rather some have suggested that President Obama served as a salient role model (Ferguson, 2009).

In this study, the researcher noted several common traits with this sample of African American students. Most of the students came from single parent homes, which suggests that their income might be substantially lower than in families where both parents are employed. Often, low economic status can serve as a barrier for student academic progress and opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Interestingly enough, although the students in this study were not from high income homes, these students spoke of the future with a great deal of confidence as if they sounded assured and very adamant that going to college was a very realistic goal. This may have been due to the confidence that they had in their parents to support their education since most of the students in this sample described as their parents as “their heroes.”

Three of the four students with the highest grade point averages (all above a B average) had attended school in the same town from elementary through high school. Possible explanations for students’ positive outlook could be the support and guidance that the school provided as the students moved from elementary to secondary school. Another reason that might explain why these students were doing so well would be the fact that all teachers in this district have participated in professional learning

communities where training was held according to content areas between schools with time provided for teacher planning and articulation between schools. According to the research on Professional Learning Communities, students benefit when teachers work collaboratively on curriculum (DuFour et al., 2005).

After reviewing the literature on rigor, relevance and relationships based on student response, even at the high school level, relationships are so important in developing the kind of school environment that improves academic achievement. The fact that students mentioned how much they valued relationships with teachers in schools is consistent with some of the research on the value of rigor, relevance and relationships (McNulty & Quaglia, 2007). Based on the responses during the interviews, students in the study formed very supportive relationships with their teachers that could significantly and positively impact student achievement. Students mentioned how important the interpersonal relationships with teachers were and how these relationships helped them to adjust to school. Other students shared experiences where teachers were concerned and helped with personal issues outside of school. Overall, the acceptance by teachers and staff had a significant positive effect on the students' outlook and perception of school. Interestingly enough, not one of the students mentioned school counselors as staff who had motivated them in any way academically or personally. Similar responses were noted for this study when compared to the study by McNulty & Quaglia (2007).

The researcher had developed positive relationships with at least five of the students interviewed and this may account for the students' responses that appeared to

be very open and honest. The researcher based the level of comfort on the fact that students did not appear nervous even though most students would view the researcher as a person of authority. Furthermore, the researcher observed the students were smiling during the interviews.

In reviewing state testing data, most of the students in this sample had passed the state test required to graduate and some passed the state test even though they did not have good grades. This might be an area for concern to determine why students are not getting good grades despite the fact that they have ability to pass the state test. It is also not clear why some of the students had good attendance and a positive attitude toward school and yet they had a grade point average (GPA) below a 2.0 (C grade).

This research has changed my focus as an educator and helped me to appreciate the value of the research from the 90/90/90 Schools (schools with 90% students identifying as minorities, 90% living at or below the poverty level, 90% receiving free and reduced lunches). Definitely, these students come from families who fall well below the poverty line. Yet, 90% of the students do well in school including performing well on state test. This sends a resounding message that economically disadvantaged students, many whom are African American, can and will achieve when the right instructional strategies are in place. In closing the achievement gap, we might look at the research and successful strategies behind the success of this initiative.

One of the variables that all of the success stories from schools about the achievement gap had in common is the strong commitment for district funding. In the district where this study was completed, there was a very serious focus and resources

allocated to improve the achievement of English Language Learners (ELL) students due to legal mandates. However, there are few resources to specifically help African American Students. Staff has been assigned to mentor and assist the ELL students through after school tutoring programs. At the high school where the students from the study attend, out of a teaching staff of 110, there is not one African American teacher. There are only two minority teachers; both are Hispanic teachers. If we were to accept the advice of the students in this study, more African American teachers would be hired. Hiring of African American teachers has taken place over the last ten years in this district, but hiring of African American teachers is not the real issue; the real issue is retention of those teachers. The district needs to hire an outreach coordinator who would assume the responsibility to look specifically at the issues that are specific to the achievement of African American students. This person would keep data to support all decisions that need to be made to close the academic achievement gap. Community Resource Coordinators have been hired in this district to support other minorities. Provisions for assistance, tutoring, mentoring and retention of African American teachers must be provided as a means of real support for these students.

Due to the quality of the feedback from the interviews, the researcher would also recommend focus groups or listening sessions to work through the superintendent's office to expand the services and support of African American students. This could take many formats, however, focus groups might provide a wealth of feedback and pertinent information because these small groups have the potential to provide very important information that could later develop into a strategic plan.

This study has provided some information regarding serious issues that some African American students face. Unfortunately, there are limited venues for the students to share these concerns or get immediate help. Based on the comments from the students, some parents want to help, however, many of the parents have little experience or success dealing with school concerns. While it is clear that most of the parents in the study were real advocates for a good education for their children, some felt that their input would not make a difference. This may be an area where the African American professional community could get involved in supporting and training parents regarding advocacy. Another minority group in this community has set up this kind of advocacy program for parents. As previously mentioned, and very strongly suggested by one of the students interviewed, African American professionals in the community must get involved and to use her words, "step up to the plate." Several students also wanted to see more recognition of African American students by providing students with their own special student clubs and organizations where the students could address special issues that they felt were unique to their experience as a Black person.

Implications for Future Research

One limitation of this study was the ability to separate the perceptions of students who were bi-racial from students with both parents who are African American. To examine whether being bi-racial would affect student perceptions would be quite interesting.

Also of interest would be research that looks specifically at classroom instructional strategies that impact the achievement gap. In addition, and also of profound interest, would be to look at schools where there were African American teachers and examine perceptions of these students regarding their education.

The research study of the 90/90/90 Schools highlighted some of the classroom practices that might have contributed to the success (Reeves, 2003). In the Reeves study, several important practices were evident in the classrooms:

1. A focus on academic achievement.
2. Clear curriculum choices.
3. Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement.
4. An emphasis on nonfiction writing.
5. Collaborative scoring of student work.

The students in this current study made reference to the need to take a look at instructional practices. Therefore, if this study were to be replicated, it would be a good idea to look more carefully at classroom instruction and the impact of classroom practices on the achievement gap.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Letter Requesting Permission to Conduct Research

February 16, 2011

Principal
This High School
123 Main Street
Town, Oregon 55555

Dear Principal:

I am currently in a doctoral program at George Fox University. As part of the requirements of my program, I will conduct a qualitative research study under the direction of my dissertation committee. I am requesting your permission and support to conduct personal interviews with approximately ten African American students who are currently enrolled at This High School.

The students will be randomly selected and written parent permission will be granted prior to interviewing students. Student privacy, safety and welfare protocols will follow the guidelines of the university pertaining to the use of human subjects in research.

This study will add to the body of research on the achievement gap between African American and White students. Specifically, the interview questions will closely resemble a study done by a well-known anthropologist, John Ogbu, who studied the achievement gap for over three decades. An objective of the study is to gain greater understanding on the nature of the educational experiences of African American high school students in order to serve them better.

Attached, you will find a copy of the parent permission and human subject approval form. If you have questions or need additional information, I am happy to provide it for you.

Sincerely,

Researcher

Appendix B
Parental Permission Letter

February 18, 2011

George Fox University
414 N Meridian Street
Newberg Oregon 97132

Dear Parent or Guardian,

As a doctoral student at George Fox University, I am interviewing high school students as part of my research dissertation to fulfill the requirement for a Doctor in Education. The focus of this research study is to explore the educational experience of a group of African American high school students who are currently enrolled at This High School. These interviews will take place during a one-hour meeting at the Heritage Center located in Oregon. Parents will be asked to provide transportation to and from the interviews. Following the initial interviews, it may be necessary to contact students with follow-up questions. These sessions will generally take no more than one half hour.

In the interest of honoring the academic time of the students, all interviews will take place during non-school hours. As a token of my appreciation for student participation in this project, each student will receive a gift card that can be used at a local business in the area.

This research is being conducted under the direction of the Education Development Fundamental Leadership (EDFL) Department at George Fox University with the approval of the school district.

I thank you for allowing your son or daughter to participate in this research. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (123) 440-0000 or via email at myemail@here.com.

Please indicate below that you are granting permission for your son or daughter to participate

I _____, give permission for my son or daughter _____ to

participate in the study conducted by researcher. It is my understanding that I will be given written notice of the meeting schedule and I agree to provide transportation to and from the interview sessions. This study with students has been approved by the superintendent of the School District and the principal of this High School.

Sincerely,

Approved by: Principal _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1) How has high school worked for you?

Follow up (as prompts, if needed):

- Tell me about your high school experience. Let's begin with an experience that you may recall from the ninth grade.
- What do you like about high school? Why?
- Do you have a favorite teacher or staff person? Why do you like him/her?
- What has disappointed you during your high school years? How would you improve your high school experience?
- Do you work hard in school? Who motivates you?
- Do you work hard in school? Who motivates you?
- Are you taking AP or Honors Classes? Why or Why not? What kinds of students take these classes?
- How do you feel about students who work hard in school? Is working hard for good grades a positive thing? Why? Why not?

2) How have you enjoyed living in Oregon?

- Do you work hard in school? Who motivates you?
- Are you taking AP or Honors Classes? Why or Why not? What kinds of students take these classes?
- How do you feel about students who work hard in school? Is working hard for good grades a positive thing? Why? Why not?

3) How have you enjoyed living in Oregon?

The Wrap-Up Questions are as follows:

- 1) Studies in the past have shown that African American students do not achieve as well academically as White students. What would be your response to this statement? Why?
- 2) If you could change one thing about your high school, what would you change?
- 3) What is (are) the greatest problem(s) facing today's youth?

Appendix D

Script to Begin Interviews

Researcher Script (to be read verbatim by the Researcher):

Introduction of interviewer: I am _____

Thanks for agreeing to participate in my research project through George Fox University. The purpose of the study is to interview a small number of African American students from our school in order to look at how school and life experiences affect the academic progress and performance of these students.

I appreciate your helping this research project that will assist educators to better serve your needs. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and please provide as much detail as possible.

There are approximately 8 questions with follow up questions for clarification.

Before I begin, do you have any questions?