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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS OF READING

by

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DISSERTATION

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of Wayne State University,

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Approved by:

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Advisor   Date

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DEDICATION

To my husband Horace E .Stallings, my best friend.

Thank you for your love, support, and friendship.

You showed me the value of this endeavor and the

importance of laughter.

I am grateful to have you as my husband.

Show a boy the inside of a library,

and he'll never see the inside of a prison.

President Herbert Hoover

1929-1933

iii

the Rock 'n 'Roll Hall of Fame R & B group, The Dells and Steven Parker, PhD, I want to simply say thank you for the love and invaluable support you have shown me. Steve your personal and professional advice has been great comfort during this arduous process. Your confidence in me was inspirational. And Mickey (Michael) in the summer of 1960, as you have frequently and eloquently stated, that I got into your car at the age of four and turned on the ignition and began to drive your car, you had to run and jump into the moving vehicle to stop me. You have always understood that I was going places. You provided the guidance and wisdom that I needed, but most importantly you understood my innate desire to try the unconventional and avant garde. You embraced my serendipitous quality. I can only say thanks to you, your wife Rose, and your three lovely daughters, Lorraine, Linda and the second PhD in our family, Lisa. Your love and support have provided my family and me great sustenance. I am proud to assume my place as the third doctorate in the family. And June Cline you are legendary. You lived up to your reputation. Thank you for your invaluable support.

I would be remiss if I did not mention my friend, the late Dr. Lee Randall. His uncanny wit kept me laughing. I would enter his office prepared to cry about some injustice perpetrated towards me, and spend my entire visit laughing with him.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Johnson (1988) referred to the African American male as the "New Bald Eagle" another endangered species. Two others on the list of endangered species were the wolf and eagle, and now their population has improved, and they have been removed from the list. The African American male has not.

As a fledgling, he begins his academic career with enthusiasm and excitement. However, Kunjufu (1983) concluded that African American male students begin having difficulties in school by the fourth grade. This problem is pervasive in the public schools where the African American males are enrolled. Kunjufu referred to the condition as the fourth grade failure syndrome (FGFS). Holland (2007) witnessed the same behavior from African American boys during his encounters with them and their teachers. Research is needed to determine if factors can be identified that are contributing to this phenomenon. This qualitative phenomenological study described experiences of African American boys who encounter difficulties when trying to complete fourth grade.

In the United States, elementary education is divided into early elementary which includes students from prekindergarten through third grade, fourth through sixth grades are considered upper elementary school. Fourth grade is the first grade in upper elementary school where children are expected to apply skills mastered in early elementary grades to learn more complex subjects (e.g., science, social studies, etc.) independently.

Many African American children, especially boys, begin to lose interest in school and start showing significant signs of failure in the fourth grade. Teachers in the early childhood segment of school typically are nurturing and encouraging. In contrast, the upper elementary teachers are preparing their students for standardized, high-stakes testing. The classroom is more structured and children are expected to remain at their desks, focusing at the learning tasks for long periods.

Ladson-Billings (2007) suggests that children of color in general, and African American children specifically, face a cultural dissonance in American schools. She claims that the students are thought of as empty vessels or little "know nothings" and that the teachers are "all knowing." She believes that the classroom atmosphere should be interactional. The teacher and the students should have an exchange of ideas. From her experience, she found that teachers who were the most effective in the classroom were the teachers that implemented this interactional approach. Irvine (2003) believed that the parents and teachers should work collaboratively to promote student achievement. Irvine further suggested that the marginalization of African American students may be a result of the lack of concordance between the home and the school. Noguera (2002) asserted that teachers' perceptions and treatment of their students often is influenced by the ethnicity and socioeconomic status of students. He notes that little research has been published about the effects of these perceptions on their performance in schools.

Irvine (2003) asserts that the curriculum should be culturally congruent. However, she argued that children of color face cultural dissonance when they come to school because their teachers are apathetic towards them. The cultural discrepancy between the

children and the teacher may result in teachers thinking that students of color are automatically inferior. The students sense this friction and are reluctant to perform.

African American males can benefit enormously from interactional approaches being implemented in the classroom. According to the U.S. Department of Education, African American children are failing to meet state and national standards for literacy. Hale (2002) points out in her book, *Learning While Black*, that the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment revealed that the educational gap continues to widen for minority and disadvantaged children compared to their peers. She reported that fourth grade results among three ethnic groups indicated that 69% of African American students and 64% of Hispanic students scored below the "basic" level in reading compared to 29% of Caucasian students.

African American males may be reluctant to read because of social pressures that claim that reading a book is effeminate behavior. Other reasons for their reluctance include a lack of interest in reading or a paucity of readers or reading material of any kind in their homes and communities.

Educators believe that environmental print is seen by children daily. Children see print on cereal boxes, restaurant signs and menus, etc. While they see print in their respective environments, they also have frequent literacy experiences. Literacy experiences in a child's environment could include parents writing shopping lists or writing a check to purchase an item while shopping. Siblings can thumb through magazines or read directions in a cookbook. "Literacy is a tool for daily living that is demonstrated to children from their earliest experiences in the home and community (Pinnell, 1994, p. 1). According to Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), opportunities to witness literacy occur in all homes. Children become involved in literacy

activities very early. Such involvement in literacy activities may include comprehending a mystery that is being read to them, debating a topic of interest with a sibling or memorizing a poem they have read.

These early experiences are pertinent in developing the skill of reading because it is "[i]n the context of these early literacy experiences [that] children begin to understand reading and writing" (Pinnell, 1994, p. 1). According to Trehearne (2005):

> the research on print awareness is very clear. Children who begin grade one with strong print awareness skills have a real advantage in learning to read. Ideally, by the time they finish preschool, children should be familiar with books and other printed matter and be able to recognize and write most of the alphabet. These skills are developed both at home and in preschool settings. In preschool, teachers must consciously teach print awareness through intentional literacy experiences throughout the day. Print awareness consists of concepts about books, concepts about print, and attitudes toward reading and writing (p. 129).

Development in literacy originates before children enter school. Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) concurred that children as young as three years of age already have a great deal of understanding about literacy concepts that once were considered to be concepts taught only in classrooms. According to Trehearne (2005), three-year-olds often understand that print contains meaning and that written text conveys a message. This skill is the underpinning of literacy. Teachers who underestimate the literacy experiences of young children or who believe that young students have virtually no understanding of literacy concepts need to engage I more in-depth inquiry to actually see what their students already know (Harste et al., 1984).

Because it is vital that literacy is developed in young children, it is incumbent that educators provide the appropriate literacy experiences to their students who are entering school for the first time. According to Reid (1984), there is great potential in making a difference in students' reading achievement, logical thinking, and sophisticated thinking about written language that is important. Children who practice literacy skills often develop a repertoire that can serve them well throughout their school career. The other disciplines (e.g., science,

mathematics, social studies, art, and music) are dependent on sound literacy skills that include reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Young children who are poor readers suffer negative consequences academically and socially. Cunningham, Defee, and Hall (1991) discovered that students who were the poorest readers in a first-grade class were substantially less likely to be chosen by the other members of the class as friends when compared with "good" readers.

The U. S. Department of Education (DOE) examined test scores of all school districts nationally. According to Hale (personal communication, June 18, 2009), the DOE determines the number of African American males who fail the reading section of the test in third grade and use that figure to estimate the number of prisons to build.

Delpit (2001) contends that teachers and administrators are unaware of the damage being done to students and may be indifferent to their needs. Delpit argued that the teachers should value the students' differences and that the students need to be taught the rules of power. She asserted that the rules are arbitrary and that they reflect the values of the dominant culture. The effectiveness of children's education may be determined by their ability to participate in the culture of power. According to Howe (1997), "This form of covert oppression can only be dealt with adequately through the principle of non-oppression, which would protect groups that are threatened with marginalization and exclusion from meaningful democratic participation" (p. 48).

Statement of the Problem

The African American male is failing at an alarming rate in urban U.S. schools. Edelman (2008) argues that the pathway that starts at birth and ends in prison for African American men--the cradle to prison pipeline--must end." Holland (1990) asserted that "African American boys have limited African American adult male role models that

value scholastic achievement. There are too few positive adult male role models in their young lives--school and home" (p. 8).

According to Boothe (2007), African American male children enter life with little chance for success. For example, the chances of an African American male becoming:

an NFL player is 1 in 1,250

an NBA player is 1 in 4,600

a Ph.D. in engineering, mathematics, or the physical sciences is 1 in 2,000

a doctor is 1 in 548

a lawyer is 1 in 195

a teacher is 1 in 53

However, the same African American boy has a probability of 1 in 13 of going to prison at least once before dying; a 1 in 3 chance of being a felon; a 1 in 7 chance of never graduating from high school; a 1 in 6 chance of graduating from college; and a 50:50 chance of becoming a drug abuser. African American male adolescents are 46 times more likely to be sent to a juvenile detention facility than Caucasian adolescents. According to Noguera (2002), the hardships that African American males encounter in society are related to their educational attainment.

African American male students begin experiencing failure when they enter fourth grade. At this grade, the curriculum becomes more focused, students are expected to complete high-stakes standardized tests, teachers become more distant, and students are expected to become independent learners. Many African American male students are not ready for this transformation. They may not have developed the reading skills needed to

understand text books for social studies and science, and are deficient in regard to the math skills needed for problem solving. Understanding which factors are contributing to African American male student failure is important, especially in determining if these factors are consistent across the population or are specific to the student.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if specific factors can be identified that are contributing to fourth grade failure among African American male students. The focus of inquiry for this research project is guided by the following questions:

1. How do African American 10 to 12 year old males circumvent Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome (FGFS)?

2. Do reading materials of the boys' interests motivate African American males to read more?

3. How will African American males respond to their school districts' required reading material as opposed to reading materials that reflect their own interests?

Significance of the Study

Research is needed to determine factors that may be contributing to the lack of interest in reading among African American male students. Many researchers believe that cultural differences are responsible for the differences, although some African American children do well in school. Investigating the phenomenon of fourth grade failure syndrome to determine which factors students who have encountered this syndrome attribute to their problems in school, is important. Educators can begin to understand and

develop instructional strategies to minimize the academic challenges. School social workers and counselors can use the results of this study to determine if specific preventions/interventions can be developed to assist in social problems that may be factors in the lack of progress in schools. Parents need to understand the importance of understanding why African American male students are more likely to fail in the fourth grade and the importance of making progress to improve academic outcomes in middle and high school. Breaking the pattern of fourth grade failure could result in more African American males becoming successful adults.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study is limited to African American male students living in urban areas.

2. This study is limited to elementary students and may not be generalizable to those who are in middle or high school

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions are made for this study:

1. Fifth and sixth grade students are aware of factors that are associated with the fourth grade failure syndrome.

2. Reasons for failure in fourth grade may be the result of factors that are beyond the scope of the present study.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have these operational definitions for this study:

Bibliotherapy   The use of reading materials for help in solving personal problems or for psychiatric therapy.

Constructivism	The view that meaningful learning is the active creation of knowledge structures rather than a mere transferring of objective knowledge from one person to another.
Early childhood teacher	A state-certified early childhood employee of a school district whose primary responsibility is to provide learning opportunities for children ages three to eight years.
Early literacy	Development of understanding, abilities, and skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking within a beginning learner.
Early literacy transactions	Occurrences during which the beginning learner interacts through action sand/or words, with objects or with others, causing changes in his and/or others' literacy understandings.
Early literacy teaching practices	Events, such as direct instruction, games, reading aloud, etc. that are intended to enhance the literacy development of beginning literacy learners.
Empirical paradigm	Originating in or based on observation or experience. Relying on experience or observations alone often without due regard for system or theory.

Environmental print	Written words found in one's surroundings (e.g., home, community, and classroom).
Ethnography	The essential core of ethnography is the concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people being researched. Ethnography is a culture-studying culture. It consists of a body of knowledge that includes research techniques, ethnographic theory, and hundreds of cultural descriptions.
Interpretivist paradigm	The interpretivist paradigm involves the knowledge and beliefs that people perceive as true or accurate about the world they have constructed as they interact with each other for a duration of time in a particular venue.
Jim Crow	Ethnic discrimination especially against blacks by legal enforcement or traditional sanctions.
Learning theories	Learning theories are research-based descriptions of how individuals acquire knowledge, abilities, and skills.
Literacy	The ability to read and write.
Literacy theories	Literacy theories are research-based descriptions of how individuals acquire literacy understandings, abilities, and skills.

Phenomenological study	A form of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to identify commonalities in the perceptions of several individuals regarding a particular phenomenon.
Reliability	Demonstrating that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results.
Scaffolding	The process of someone "propping up" or aiding an individual to help him/her understand something or perform a task.
Schemata	Organized patterns of behavior.
Validity	The extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure.
Verve	Special ability or talent, an enthusiastic performance, energetic, vivacity.
Young children	Children from birth to eight years of age.
Zone of proximal development	The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (as cited in Vygotsky, 1978).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theories of Learning and Their Proponents.

Four primary theories of learning; cognitivism, constructivism, humanism, and behaviorism; are used as a framework to reflect the theory, research, and practice of how individuals learn and process information. This chapter distinguishes these theories through concepts that are pertinent to African American males in learning to read and achieving academic success in fourth grade. Additionally, research and classroom practices are analyzed through these theories.

Learning Theories

Cognitivism.

The cognitivist theory of learning is reflective of the process that defines intellectual development based on the assimilation and accommodation model (Piaget as cited in Miller, 1989). The learner plays an active role in constructing meaning from individuals in his or her environment (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Piaget (as cited in Miller, 1989) stated that "adaptation involves two complementary processes: assimilation and accommodation" (p. 74). Assimilation is the process of fitting reality into one's current cognitive organization. In every cognitive encounter with objects or events, there is a degree of "bending" or distorting of experience as a person attempts to incorporate, understand, or interpret the experience. Accommodation is the term that refers to adjustments in cognitive organization that result from the demands of reality. Piaget (1969) theorized that children learn through their actions – that is their concept of reality is connected to the actions in the environment. Equilibrium is the process of bringing assimilation and accommodation into balance.

Constructivism.

According to Brooks (2001) and Shapiro (2002) as cited in *Psychology Applied to Teaching* (2006):

> Meaningful learning is viewed as the active creation of knowledge structures rather than a mere transforming of objective knowledge from one person to another. When people actively try to make sense of the world – when they construct an interpretation of how and why things are – by filtering new ideas and experiences through existing knowledge structures (schemes). Each learner builds a personal view of the world by using existing knowledge, interests, attitudes, goals and the like to select and interpret currently available information (p. 311).

What the African American boy can bring to the page when reading is rich. He has a litany of ideas and experiences to share and a repertoire of skills just waiting to be unleashed. Because of his austere and bleak environment, he is constantly extrapolating, facilitating, and innovating. He frequently refers to this practice as *hustling 24/7*. Gelman (as cited in Snowman & Biehler 2002) agreed that each learner builds a personal view of the world by using his or her repertoire of skills. He pointed out that "this assumption highlights the importance of what educational psychologists refer to as entering behavior – the previously learned knowledge and skill that students bring to the classroom" (p. 311).

According to Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2002) "the knowledge that learners bring with them to a learning task has long been suspected of having a powerful effect on subsequent performance" (p. 311). Ausubel further purported "that if he had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, he could say this: the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly" (Ausubel et al. as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2002, p. 311).

Constructivist explanations of learning are not new. Over the past 75 years, they have been promoted by notable scholars, such as: Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner. Piaget and Vygotsky made significant contributions in this area.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980).

Born in Neuchatel, Switzerland, Piaget often is considered the inventor of a new field called genetic epistemology, which is the study of the origins of knowledge and how humans develop what they know. According to Watson, (2002), "Piaget's theory completely dominated the study of child development in the 1970s and 1980s" (p. 97). Never in the study of development had there been such a complete paradigm shift, such a complete revolution in the collective worldview, essentially from a mechanistic approach to an organismic approach. He was the extreme organismic thinker, looking at the human as an organism that acted on the world and did not just passively react to the environment, an organism that functioned as a structured whole, in which the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Piaget's Theory. The basic principles of Piaget's cognitive development theory were that human beings inherit two basic tendencies: (a) organization (the tendency to systematize and combine processes into coherent general systems and (b) adaptation (the tendency to adjust to the environment). For Piaget, these tendencies governed both physiological and mental functioning. Humans' intellectual processes seek a balance through the process of equilibration (a form of self-regulation that all individuals use to bring coherence and stability to their conception of the world).

Watson (2002) stated:

Schemata are organized patterns of behavior or thought formulated by children as they interact with their environment, parents, teachers, and cohorts. Schemata can be behavioral (throwing a ball) or cognitive (realizing that there are many different kinds of balls). Whenever a child encounters a new experience that does not easily fit into an existing scheme, adaptation is necessary. [Adaptation is the process of creating a match between one's conception of reality (one's schemes and the real-life experiences one encounters)] Just as human and nonhuman organisms adapt physically to the environment, as do thought adapt to the environment at a psychological level (Miller, 1989, p. 40).

African American male boys may encounter new experiences vicariously through reading materials that reflect their interests and culture. Adaptation can be taught or enhanced through reading materials that are more tailored to their societal needs. Reading can be perceived by them as a *cool* thing to do. Through reading, African American boys can be taught that they to have something worthwhile to contribute to society.

According to Holland (2002), "the African American male youth is the *canary in the coalmine*" (3). The coalmine is a metaphor for the inner city public schools. He is unable to thrive in such an alien and lethal environment. His school, his home, and his community are not addressing his needs. A paucity of role models are available for him to emulate in his environment. The African American men in his community are not endorsing achievement (Holland, 1996). Tatum (2005) noted, "Schools are perceived as hostile environments by many Black males . . . these perceptions have an impact on their reading achievement" (p. 12). "The schools that these boys (and girls) attend are characterized by "unqualified teachers" and poor [literacy] instruction, which negatively affects the reading achievement of male and female students alike" (Tatum, 2005, p. 15).

African American youth, males specifically, can adapt their thoughts to their environment at a psychological level if they are exposed to appropriate reading materials in their classrooms. These children can use reading as a tool to *connect the dots*. Structuralists look at how parts are organized into a whole, and they abstract patterns of change.

Piaget belonged to an approach called *structuralism*. Structuralists look at the organizational properties of whatever they are studying. He proposed that a small set of mental operations underlies a wide variety of thinking episodes. Thus, there is an underlying structure to the apparent diversity of the content. Structuralists are concerned with relationships – between parts and the whole and between earlier and later states. For example, the thinking of younger

and older children has similar elements, but these elements are combined in different ways to form the organized whole of thought.

According to Piaget (as cited in Miller, 1989):

the nature of mental structures changes as they develop. An infant's cognitive structures are labeled "schemes," "schemas," or "schemata." A *scheme* is an organized pattern of behavior; it reflects a particular way of interacting with the environment. For Piaget, a scheme is whatever is repeatable and generalizable in an action. The sucking scheme, then, describes the way the child puts various objects into his mouth and sucks them. As the scheme becomes more differentiated, the child classifies objects into "suckables" and "nonsuckables", with various subcategories such as hard suckables, soft suckables, pliant suckables, and hairy suckables (Daddy's leg)" (p. 40-42).

In contrast, the older child has a different cognitive structure. From approximately age 7 years, the children's cognitive structures are described in terms of abstract mental operations organized into logical mathematical systems. The structuralist framework can be seen in the way these schemes and operations mediate content and function and organize themselves into an organized whole. For example, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division are operations that are coordinated in a concept of number that underlies (mediates) much mathematical behavior.

The most controversial of Piaget's claims is that cognitive development proceeds through a series of stages. For Piaget, a *stage* is a period of time in which the child's thinking and behavior reflect a particular type of underlying mental structure in a myriad of situations. Because Piaget was a student of zoology, it is not unusual that he would place a great deal of emphasis on stages. The stages can be seen as sequential levels of adapting. Just as various species have different means of adapting to the environment, so do various cognitive levels provide different ways of adapting to the environment. Because developmental psychology is replete with stage theories, Piaget's particular brand of stage theory must be characterized by illuminating these five salient characteristics:

1. *A stage is a structured whole in a state of equilibrium*. Piaget the structuralist, sees a stage as an integrated whole that organizes the parts. The schemes or operations of each stage are interconnected to form an organized whole. Each stage has a different structure, which allows a different type of interaction between the child and the environment, and consequently provides fundamentally different views of the world. The essence of Piaget's stage approach is the movement through the stages involves structural changes that are qualitative (changes in type or kind) rather than quantitative (change in degree, amount, speed, or efficiency). For example, a qualitative change occurs when the child moves from structures based on actions in infancy to structures based on mental representations in the preschool years. At the *end* of each major period of development, the cognitive structures are in a state of balance or equilibrium.

2. *Each stage derives from the previous stage, incorporates and transforms that stage, and prepares for the next stage*. The previous stage paves the way for the new stage. In the process of achieving this new stage, the previous stage is reworked. Thus, once children achieve a new stage, they no longer have the previous stage available. Although previous skills remain, their new position, or role in the organization, changes. For example, elementary school children can still roll or hit the ball (a skill acquired during infancy), but they now imbed this skill into a number of skills. Furthermore, a more advanced level of thought controls the old skills of rolling and hitting. Rolling and hitting are now combined with other actions to win the game. One implication of this characteristic is that regression to an earlier stage is impossible because the previous stage is no longer present. This notion is in contrast to Freud's theory of stages, in which a person overwhelmed with anxiety may regress to an earlier stage.

3. *The stages follow an invariant sequence*. The stages must proceed in a particular order. No stage can be skipped. In other words, since the first stage does not have all the building materials needed for the third stage, the second stage is required. This claim that stages follow an

invariant sequence is implied by the second claim that each stage is derived from the preceding stage.

4. *Stages are universal*. Because Piaget was interested in how humans as a species adapt psychologically to their environment, he focused on the structures and concepts acquired by humans everywhere. Of course, because of mental retardation from brain damage, severe deprivation, or other sources, some people may not progress through all the stages or may progress through them slowly. The crucial claim is that the stages they do achieve are achieved in the predicted order by everyone. Even people who are not retarded vary in how fast they proceed through the stages. Again, the crucial claim is that the same order is found in children of the African jungle, the American suburbs, or the Swiss mountainside.

5. *Each stage includes a coming-into-being and a being*. Each stage has an initial period of preparation and a final period of achievement. Unstable, loosely organized structures mark the initial period of transition from the previous stage.

Stages are structured wholes that emerge from and transform a previous stage, follow an invariant and universal sequence, and proceed from an unstable period of transition into a final stable period (Miller, 1989). According to Miller, the following description of development of the stages of development should be prefaced by mentioning Piaget's terminology. "Although Piaget refers to 'stages' of development, each of the four major stages is designated a 'period', for example, the 'sensorimotor period.' When Piaget identifies substages within one of these four major periods, they are designated 'stages' (p. 40-42).

1. *Sensorimotor period* (approximately birth to 2 years). Infants understand the world in terms of his or her overt, physical actions on that world. He moves from simple reflex through several steps to an organized set of schemes (organized behavior).

2. *Preoperational period* (approximately 2 to 7 years). No longer do children simply make perceptual and motor adjustments to objects and events. They can now use symbols (mental images, words, gestures) to represent these objects and events. They use these symbols in an increasingly organized and logical fashion.

3. *Concrete operational period* (approximately 7 to 11 years). Children acquire certain logical structures that allow them to perform various mental operations. These operations are internalized actions that can be reversed.

4. *Formal operational period* (approximately 11 to 15 years). Mental operations are no longer limited to concrete objects. They can be applied to purely verbal or logical statements, to the possible, as well as the real, to the future, as well as the present.

According to researchers (Brooks & Brooks; Haney & McArthur, Yager as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006):

> Meaningful learning, occurs when people *create* new ideas, or knowledge (rules and hypotheses that explain things), from existing information (for example, facts, concepts, and procedures). To solve a problem, humans have to search their memory for information that can be used to fashion a solution. Using information can mean experimenting, questioning, reflecting, discovering, inventing, and discussing. This process of creating knowledge to solve a problem and eliminate disequilibrium is referred to by Piagetian psychologists and educators as *constructivism* (pp. 40-42).

The African American boy can use reading materials as a therapeutic tool. Bibliotherapy is the use of reading materials for help in solving personal problems and educators can use this strategy in the classroom. The disequilibrium or turmoil felt by African American boys can be eradicated if bibliotherapy is added to their curriculum. The reading materials should have a moral it is trying to convey to the boy. The dearth of worthwhile information that is lacking in his private life can be eloquently portrayed in his assigned reading material. He can construct meaning from the passages that would be germane to his lifestyle and culture. Extemporizing in his personal life can improve (e.g., conflict resolution, if he has a frame of reference).

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934).

Vygotsky was born in 1896, the same year that Piaget was born, near Minsk, Russia. Vygotsky was Jewish and wanted the Bolshevik Revolution to put an end to discrimination against Jews in Russia. Hegel's and Marx's philosophies stressed the importance of society and the value of work in order for human beings to accomplish their best and these philosophies played an important role in Vygotsky's life. These philosophies shaped his thinking to the degree that his theory evolved from their philosophies. Vygotsky believed that the Marxist view (i.e., technology and tools transform society and help humans to evolve socially) could be the foundation for a new Marxist theory of human development that could better account for human functioning.

> According to Watson (2002):
>
> . . .part of this social view of development was a dialectic view of change. In dialectic reasoning, one begins with a *thesis* or argument. An *antithesis* is presented to challenge the thesis. And, by the combination of thesis and antithesis, a person constructs a *synthesis*, a new level of argument or understanding. For Vygotsky, the dialectic was between the individual and others. In synthesis, they combined to move development to higher levels of thinking and functioning (pp. 164-165).

These principles formed the foundation of Vygotsky's theory. Synthesis is reminiscent of the metaphors, necessity is the mother of invention or pressure makes diamonds. Through conflict, humans emerge stronger, more confident, and self-reliant. In traditional learning theory and social learning theory, society is thought to influence and shape the child, but in Vygotsky's theory, children are part of society and *collaborators* in their learning with adult mentors. They are not simply passive recipients of conditioning and socialization. Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories account for the way children develop. Vygotsky's theory and Piaget's theory differ in this way:

> . . . Vygotsky's metaphor for the conceptualization of children was that of an apprentice. Piaget's metaphor for the conceptualization of children was that of a

lone scientist. Vygotsky believed that the child actively learns skills and symbolic processing by his or her interactions with an adult mentor and incorporates what the adult provides to him or her in knowledge and cognitive tools. Whereas Piaget believed the child, on his or her own and through his or her own actions, discovers how the world works and applies his or her reasoning to various problems and challenges presented by the world (Watson, 2002, pp. 164-165).

Vygotsky's Theory. *Cognitive mediation* is the title of Vygotsky's theory. He saw humans as sharing lower mental functions with other animals. Humans are able to evolve beyond lower animals because they possess mental or psychological tools to help them think. Tools mediated progression, according to Vygotsky and he based his theory on Marxist philosophy. From their culture and prior learning of their species, humans acquire their psychological tools.

Humans are not at the mercy of outside stimuli like the lower animals. Outside stimuli elicits responses from humans and lower animals. However, humans acquire a psychological tool, such as language, to mediate between the outside stimuli and the responses. Humans' psychological tools create intentionality, comparisons, and higher-order planning.

Culture is handed down from human to human in society, e.g., parent to child. What is in the culture is incorporated into an individual's cognitive processes as the psychological tools that humans use. Vygotsky believed that what was intermental soon became intramental. Humans cannot function on an adult level without the culture of which humans are a part showing them what they need to know to become successful in society. Society, through adults, helps children regulate themselves at the beginning until they have internalized the mediators needed to regulate themselves without adult supervision. The African American male is no exception. He needs appropriate role models in his life. He can be introduced to some of these role models in the literature that he reads. Vygotsky's theory acknowledged a deep level of social interaction. The tools are symbolic. Piaget contended that humans use primary tools (e.g., language, symbolic play, art, and writing) for thinking. Vygotsky's description and Piaget's description of the tools used by humans may appear to be similar with the exception of two aspects that

Vygotsky emphasized. Initially, the symbol systems come to humans from other humans rather than from within themselves as Piaget believed. Secondly, the symbol systems are not just used in humans' thinking, but completely reorganizes their thinking. As inspiring and important as the cognitive variables are in learning, humanism involves another equally important approach.

Classroom practices and the cognitivist model. According to Light and Littleton (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) "when it comes to social experiences, Piaget clearly believed that peer interactions do more to spur cognitive development than do interactions with adults" (p. 40). Children are more comfortable discussing, analyzing, and debating the merits of a cohort's view of some issue (such as whose turn it is next or what the rules of a game should be) than they are in taking serious issue with an adult. The balance of power between children and adults is simply too unequal. Children quickly learn that adults know more and that their reasoning is superior to the reasoning ability of children. The child is not as savvy as the adult and the adult has the last word. The battle of wits played out among peers is fairer.

According to Vygotsky (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006):

. . . empirical and theoretical learning illustrates how well-designed instruction is like a magnet. If it is aimed slightly ahead of what children know and can do at the present time, it will pull them along, helping them master things they cannot learn on their own" (p. 49).

Vygotsky referred to the differences between what children can do without assistance and what they can accomplish with some assistance as the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)*. Students with wider zones are likely to experience greater cognitive development when instruction is pitched just above the lower limit of their ZPD than students with narrower zones because the former are in a better position to capitalize on the instruction. Researchers (Tappan; Judge & Scrimsher as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) indicated that the ZPD refers to those abilities, attitudes, and patterns of thinking that are included in the ZPD are associated with maturation and require assistance to be developed appropriately.

Helping students tackle difficult questions or solve problems by prompting them with hints or asking them leading questions is an example of a teaching technique called *scaffolding*. External scaffolding is used by construction workers to support their building efforts. Vygotsky suggested that teachers support learning in its early phases similarly to scaffolding techniques used by builders. The purpose of scaffolding is to help students acquire knowledge and master skills they might not have mastered without outside assistance. As students demonstrate mastery over the content being learned, learning aids are diminished and subsequently removed. Teachers can use scaffolding techniques to help students traverse the ZPD. These techniques include prompts, suggestions, checklists, modeling, rewards, feedback, cognitive structuring (using such devices as theories, categories, labels, and rules for helping students organize and understand ideas) and questioning. According to Gallimore and Harp (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2002), "as students approached the upper limit of their ZPD, their behavior becomes smoother, more internalized, and more automatized" (p. 49). Tappan (1998):

> . . . proposed a four component model that teachers can use to optimize the effects of their scaffolding efforts and help students move through their ZPD:
>
> 1. Model desired academic behaviors**.**
>
> 2. Create a dialogue with the student.
>
> 3. Have students practice the desired skill.
>
> 4. Give the student confirmation by acknowledging his/her difficulty and reassure him/her that with your (the teacher's) help he/she will do fine" (Snowman & Biehler, 2006, p. 40).

Students from different ethnic groups often prefer different instructional formats and learning processes. According to Snowman (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2002) "African American students, for example, may favor cooperative learning over lecture/recitation, while Native American students may dislike debates and contests" (p. 227). Hale (2002) stated that "Most African American households contain a larger number of people, and the children are

accustomed to having their learning mediated by people. African American children therefore learn best when their learning is oriented toward people rather than objects" (p. 46).

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, n.d.) asserted that constructivist teaching resulted from research on the human brain and learning theory. Table 1 presents 12 principles set forward by Caine and Caine (as cited in NCREL, n.d.) to explain brain-compatible teaching.

Table 1

Brain-Compatible Teaching Principles

Principle	Explanation
1. The brain is a parallel processor	It (the brain) simultaneously processes many different types of information, including thoughts, emotions, and cultural knowledge. Effective teaching employs a variety of learning strategies.
2. Learning engages the entire physiology.	Teachers cannot address just the intellect.
3. The search for meaning is innate.	Effective teaching recognizes that meaning is personal and unique, and that students' understandings are based on their own unique experiences.
4. The search for meaning occurs through 'patterning.'	Effective teaching connects isolated ideas and information with global concepts and themes.
5. Emotions are critical to patterning.	Learning is influenced by emotions, feelings, and attitudes.
6. The brain processes parts and wholes simultaneously.	People have difficulty learning when either parts or wholes are overlooked.
7. Learning involves both focuses attention and peripheral perception.	Learning is influenced by the environment, culture, and climate.
8. Learning always involves conscious and unconscious processes.	Students need time to process how as well as what they have learned.
9. We have at least two different types of memory: a spatial memory system, and a set of systems for rote learning.	Teaching that heavily emphasizes rote learning does not promote spatial, experienced learning, and can inhibit understanding.
10. We understand and remember best when facts and skills are embedded in natural, spatial memory.	Experiential learning is most effective.
11. Learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat.	The classroom climate should be challenging but not threatening to students.
12. Each brain is unique.	Teaching must be multifaceted to allow students to express preferences.

Classroom practices and the constructivist model. *Discovery Learning* is a concept created by the constructivist Jerome Bruner in the 1960s. Bruner (1983) argued "that too much school learning takes the form of step-by-step study of verbal or numerical statements or formulas that students can reproduce on cue, but are unable to use outside the classroom." "True learning", says Bruner, "involves figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you already think" (Snowman, 2006, 310). Like Piaget, Bruner argues that conceptions that children arrive at on their own are usually more meaningful than those proposed by others and that students do not need to be rewarded when they seek to make sense of things that puzzle them.

Bruner did not suggest that discovery learning is efficient enough to use in every learning situation. Discovery learning is too inefficient a process to be depended on extensively, and learning from others can be as meaningful as personal discovery. Rather, Bruner argued that certain types of outcomes – understanding the ways in which ideas connect with one another, the possibility of solving problems on one's own, and how what we already know is relevant to what we are trying to learn – are the essence of education and can best be achieved through personal discovery.

According to Snowman and Biehler (2002):

. . . discovery learning is increasingly being done in the classroom with computer simulation programs for the purpose of learning science concepts and skills; e.g., designing and conducting genetics experiments, creating graphs from experimental data, or determining the cause of the spread of an influenza epidemic (p. 311).

The constructivist model has been discussed by many researchers who have developed specific approaches. Some of these models and the researchers responsible for their development include:

- Situation, groupings, bridge, questions, exhibit, and reflections (Gagnon & Collay, 2001.

- Initiating – constructing – utilizing (Stephens & Brown, 2000)

- Learning cycle model: Discovery, concept introduction, and concept application

  - 5E Model: Engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate (Bybee, 1997

  - 7E Model: Elicit, engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate, extend (Eisenkraft, 2003)

  - Analysis – Design – Evaluation (A Constructivist Model, n.d.)

Table 2 presents a constructivist model (instructional framework) that is used in practice.

Table 2

Constructivist Model (Instructional Framework) Used in Classrooms

Stages	Description	Participants	Work	Theoreticians
Context and metaphor	Creating rich and real contexts for learning, and creating metaphors to make the content concrete.	Teacher-Learners		Honebein (1996) Jonassen, Gagne, Brooks & Brooks (1999)
Posing problems and questions	Posing real problems on which students work and asking directive, thoughtful, opoen0ended questions, and encouraging students to create/ask questions to each other. Use of technology.	Teacher-Learners Learner-Content-Technology	Individual, Collaboration	Vygotsky Wilson & Cole Jonassen, Gagne, Bloom
Discussion	Peer or group work interaction to reveal previous knowledge, "classify," "analyze," "predict," and "create." Content analysis, social interaction, think and act like experts.	Learners Learner-Content	Collaboration	Vygotsky Cunningham, Duffy & Perry
Consolidation	Combination of what the peers/groups created through collaboration and cooperation on the board or any hyper environment. Exemplifying the multiple perspective and reality.	Learners	Collaboration	Vygotsky
Concept introduction & contradiction	Introducing a new concept, brining a new solution and a new perceptive to the problem, scaffolding, activating the formal and abstract schemata, creating clash between old and new knowledge	Teacher-Learners – Technology	Individual	Piaget, Bruner, Bybee
Links	In two levels: 1st creating links between prior knowledge and new knowledge, 2nd: creating links beyond school context (construction of knowledge) process of enculturation, anchored instruction.	Learners Learner-Conent	Individual, Collaboration	Piaget, Bruner, vonGlasersfeld, Ausubel, Gagne, Jonassen
Utilizing	Thoughtful process in which students must use their minds as sculpting tools to chisel and refine concepts and ideas so that they are useful and relevant, projects, real outcomes	Learners Learner – Content Learner – Technology	Individual, Collaboration	Stephens & Brown, 2000 Jonassen, Bruner, Vygotsky
Reflection	Reflection on learning process, self-relfexive process	Learners	Individual	Jonassen
Evaluation & Extention	Evaluating the learning process by both teacher and students, goal-free, context dependent, process oriented	Teacher-Learners Learner – New Content Learner - Technology	Individual Collaboration	Jonasssen, Duffy, and Cunningham Rogers

Note: A Constructivist Model (Constructivist Instructional Framework; n.d.)

Implications for the African American Male and Cognitivism.

According to Judge and Scrimsher (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) "children are first introduced to a culture's major psychological tools through social interactions with their parents and later through more formal interactions with classroom teachers. Eventually, these social interactions are internalized as cognitive processes that are autonomously invoked" (p. 46). As Vygotsky (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) eloquently stated, "through others we become ourselves" (p. 370).

The urban African American male youth have a paucity of quality male role models in their environment that he can emulate. In America, Jim Crowism (ethnic discrimination especially against blacks by legal enforcement or traditional sanctions) has been so pervasive that African American men have been obliterated from the American canvas. On September 25, 2008, Congress passed the Emmett Till Justice Bill, S. 535, into law. Emmett Till, an African American teenager from Chicago, was visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi on August 28, 1955 when he said, "Hi baby" to a white store owner's wife. Till was lynched (drowned) for the act. His elderly uncle identified the store owner as his nephew's murderer. At trial, the all-White jury found the murderer not guilty. Because so many African American males were lynched during the Jim Crow era in the South and their murderers went unpunished, Congress passed a law that ensures $100 million would be allocated to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) over the next 10 years to apprehend their murderers, many of whom are already dead. America has come to the realization that the African American male has been preyed upon to the extent that it has had a very deleterious effect that still continues. His perception of how a man is supposed to behave is often skewed, and sometimes, pathological. Sears (1965) claimed that:

> . . . girls can continue using the female model for dependency and imitation of behavior that is adult like and sexually appropriate, while boys experience similar reinforcement from the nurturing female model without the benefit of the female model as a sexually appropriate model. It is a fact that girls experience less

conflict with their models. For boys, consequently, dependency on mother can no longer remain the major source for sex identification; their development becomes diffused and slowed down and has to depend upon their conception of the male role" (82).

Holland (2007) stated that additional African American role models are needed that can be included in their curriculum. He contended that African American men are necessary to teach African American boys how to be African American men in this cultural milieu. More men, especially African American men, are needed to teach at the elementary school level. Klocek (2008) states:

> . . . as an elementary school teacher, there have been years when I was the only male teacher at my school. It's a distinction that I am comfortable with. There is this stereotype that a male teacher should be at the middle school or high school level, I sometimes get asked why I chose to teach elementary school. I tell them it's because I love the kids (p. 20).

> Despite a recent uptick, only about 5 percent of teachers in early education are men – about 19 percent in elementary and middle schools. Surveys indicate that the percentage of men who teach continues to bump along near a 40 year low. And gender disparity is even greater for those who teach the very young. Only 4,000 of the more than 103,000 members of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 2003, were men (Nelson, 2008, p. 12).

The number of African American men teaching elementary, middle, or high school is even lower. In 2006, one African American male was certified as a reading teacher in the entire state of Michigan. That teacher is now pursuing a doctorate in reading at Wayne State University.

Diah (2008) wrote:

> . . . it took volunteering to help young people get a second chance at going to college for me, an African American man, to recognize that teaching just might be my true calling (12). I was a financial accountant at the time when I was asked to tutor some recent high school graduates who needed to improve their math skills in order to get into college. It was then when I realized that I could make a difference helping kids. I am now a member of the New Haven (Connecticut) Federation of Teachers. . . . I felt I could make a special contribution to the kids I would regularly come into contact with on the street of New Haven, some of whom came from family backgrounds similar to my own. Many of these kids don't have a father in the home either.

I am currently in my second year of teaching seventh and eighth grade math. I've been a father, counselor, and advisor and an older brother to many of my students. I've used these roles to convince my students that there are more career opportunities available than those they might see on television or in their communities. When I ask the kids what they want to be, it's always a basketball player or rapper. I'm hoping when they see me, a Black man; they see it's *cool* to go to college and become a teacher.

Since becoming a teacher, Diah has helped set up an after-school program for students who need help with math and he has been a basketball and soccer coach. He also works with the school's Math Counts team, which competes against other area schools.

Diah has found that his female colleagues are among the biggest fans for male teachers. Women teachers also want their students to have role models in their schools. They want their students to see that both men and women can be teachers (Nelson, 2008, p. 12).

Through persuasive male role modeling, in general, and African American male role modeling specifically, young African American males can perceive being "smart" as a wise choice. Society has handed them a tool that can sustain them. Their self image can be forever changed. The hypermasculinity that they portray can be abolished because their concept of what a man is can change. These young African American males can become valued members of society when they contribute to the community. When they become adept at reading and passing examinations, they too, can be privy to the idiosyncrasies of the culture of power purported by Irvine (2003). Young African American males need to know that all men read and that reading is not the antithesis of manhood.

Boys lag behind girls in reading performance across all age groups, according to a 2000 study cited by the National Center for Education Statistics. Experts say the reading gap for African American and Latino young men is even more pronounced. Many factors contribute to this problem. Some boys find books boring and have trouble connecting with the stories. Urban literature novelist, Tyree (2008) asked, "How can we turn this around?" His solution was the epitome of bibliotherapy. He concluded that these young men and boys needed books that

reflected their interests and lives. Tyree was interested in the phenomenon of boys of color choosing not to read that he departed from writing adult novels to write a book just for boys of color.

Tyree (2008) wrote a short story collection for middle-graders called *12 Brown Boys*. Tyree explores the lives of a memorable cast of 'tween' (11-13 years of age) brown boys. His characters, with names like Red-Head Mike, Chestnut, and Oneal, come from different family situations and backgrounds. While they face unique trials and their interests and beliefs are diverse, they are united in being young men with frailties and flaws, strengths, and talents. Tyree succeeded in creating distinct personalities with complex lives.

Tyree (2008) opened the book with the story of a boy named Michael who loves Heavy D and Rakim and looks to an older teen, named Cool Dave. When Michael discovered what Dave did for a living, things got more complicated. Tyree's protagonist is a boy who *struggles* with reading in public until his dad teaches him a trick he used as a child. A young artist and musician inspires his friend, with an older son standing up when he is needed most. In Tyree's book, the reader travels to venues like Jamaica, Detroit, Washington DC, Charlotte, and a camp in the Poconos to meet boys who stick up for their beliefs, have fun their own way, weather challenging moments, and have unfamiliar experiences to become their best selves. Reading about experiences that reflect their lives can be therapeutic and uplifting. *Twelve Brown Boys* is a book that provides African American boys with an important incentive to read a reflection of themselves (Tyree, 2008). Bibliotherapy can be a solution that educators and parents can offer these boys without great effort or expense.

Sims-Bishop (1997) insisted "that children need to be involved with literature which not only allows them to see through the window to the world around them, but also to see themselves mirrored in the texts with which they come into contact" (p. 632). If school districts implement

critical and media literacy into the African American males' reading curriculum that depicts their issues and interests, a profound effect could materialize to influence their educational attainment.

Societies are transformed when members of the society are literate. The lack of education is a constraint in the 21st century that keeps the African American man on the *plantation*. The plantation has been replaced by the *prison*. In both venues, he was and remains, ill served. "School is *cool"* should be the rap anthem of school-aged African American males, with educators working towards the abolishment of the marginalization of this vulnerable population. Akbar (1989) explained that:

> . . . white boys overcome the phenomenon of *the nerd* because they are supported by the many white images of white men who have accepted this phenomenon and have made it. African American guys feel that school forces them to deny both their manhood and their race because they do not know any African American men who have accepted the collegiate role and gained self-respect. Those of us who have done it are regarded as freaks (p. 58).

Something must occur to stop black boys from thinking that they are acting white simply because they read books (Obama, 2004). The psychological tools that Vygotsky espoused dictated that these boys should follow the behavior that their mediators deem appropriate. Vygotsky stated, "through others we become ourselves" (Watson, 2002, p. 166). Once African American professionals attain their wealth, they often leave their poorer environment for more a affluent one. While this upward movement is the American Dream, it denies African American youngsters opportunities to see successful African Americans enjoying the fruits of their efforts.

As African American males live in environments outside of school that often are tumultuous, they frequently choose to socialize with cohorts who share similar dilemmas. Bronfenbrenner (2005) claimed that "as parents and other adults move out of the lives of children, the vacuum is filled by the peer groups. Attachment to age mates appears to be influenced more by a lack of attention at home than by any positive attraction of the peer group itself" (56).

Public school education in urban America has deteriorated, with African Americans of means moving to the suburbs and placing their children in suburban schools. When they leave the cities and the schools in them, they take their advocacy with them. Their influence and tax dollars supported their new more affluent communities. So many affluent African Americans have moved to the suburbs that their children do not stand out as they once did. This phenomenon is why the Jack and Jill society was formed by wealthy African Americans. This society was formed across the 48 contiguous United States so that their children could have playmates, as they were never invited to their Caucasian classmates' homes for parties, and sleepovers. These parents were concerned that their children were facing an identity crisis and did not want their children to feel isolated..

Fashola (2005) wrote:

> . . . external factors such as structural racism, community patterns, parents' education attainment, and socioeconomic status, all play a vital role in the ability of African American males' level of achievement attained in school. The internal factors that serve as barriers to achievement for African American males are self-concept and identity issues. They often exhibit various cultural-specific coping mechanisms – such behaviors are acting tough, failing to retreat from violence, avoiding self-disclosure, and dissociating from school. These students are often subject to disproportionate and sometimes unfounded grade retentions and suspensions because teachers and administrators misinterpret these behaviors and find them offensive (p. 42).

Often fathers are not in the African American males' homes, the boy is often considered the "man of the house." He is considered to be a man at home and is expected to behave like a child in school. He is confused and his identity is in turmoil because of his conflicting roles. Many times he behaves precociously (Wood, 2006). The African American male's status at home as man of the house can lead to his becoming the breadwinner of the family. This burden makes school less appealing and crime (drug selling and home invasion) more appealing. His precarious home situation, school dilemmas, and peer pressure can lead to enormous stress and anxiety. The African American male hides his pain and frustration behind aggression, frequently

becoming a candidate for special education classes that eventually lead to dropping out of school. Female high school teachers often are afraid of him.

In Europe, the teaching profession is dominated by men, and girls are disproportionately represented in special education classes (Kunjufu, 2007). The African American males' inability to read past the fifth grade level prohibits him from attaining educational achievement. His lack of interest in the commercial reading material offered in most urban school districts do not meet his needs and his perceptions that reading is an effeminate behavior have resulted in being at the bottom rung of the ladder in American education.

Tatum (2006) claimed that:

> . . . several solutions proposed over the last ten years specifically address the literacy needs of African American males. They include providing culturally responsive literacy instruction that links classroom content to student experiences; developing character development programs, rites-of-passage programs, comprehensive literacy programs, and academically oriented remedial programs; and establishing all-male academies or alternative schools and programs designed specifically for African American males" (p. 11).

All the proposed solutions should emphasize a meaningful curriculum reflective of students' experiences. However, many marginalized African American males are in public schools in which literacy instruction is not responsive to their needs. According to Tatum (2006):

> . . . by selecting appropriate reading materials, teachers can engage African American males with text, particularly those students who have not mastered the skills, strategies, and knowledge that will lead to positive life outcomes. This productive shift in literacy takes into account students' four literacy needs— academic, cultural, emotional, and social—and relies on instructional practices that have proven effective with African American males (p. 11).

Implications for the African American Male and Constructivism.

According to Bruner (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2002, 310), "the constructivist model of learning holds that meaningful learning occurs when people actively try to make sense of the world when they construct an interpretation of how and why things are – by filtering new ideas and experiences through existing knowledge structures of schemes" (p. 310). Organized

patterns of behavior or thoughts that children construct when they participate with their parents, teachers, and cohorts are known as schemes or repertoire. Bruner (as cited in Snowman & Breheler, 2002) further asserted that "instead of using techniques that feature preselected and prearranged materials . . . teachers should confront children with problems and help them seek solutions either independently or by engaging in group discussion. True learning involves figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you already think" (p. 310). Like Piaget, Bruner (2002) argued that "conceptions that children arrive at on their own are usually more meaningful than those proposed by others and that students do not need to be rewarded when they seek to make sense of things that puzzle them. The intrinsic satisfaction of simply knowing outweighs any extrinsic reward like a sticker or token" (p. 310).

Bruner (as cited in Watson, 2002) "coined the term *scaffolding* to refer to cooperative help from others and the environment" (p. 184). The African American male can benefit from the scaffolding process in his proximal zone of development. In observations of children being asked to tell about something that happened, the adult or teacher, and usually the child, co-construct the narrative account. The adult or teacher provides prompts that allows the child to recall the events. The cues and the repetition directed at the child permanently encodes the sequencing of the event in the child's memory. Good pedagogy is when a teacher recognizes the appropriate amount of help or scaffolding a student needs to master a skill such as the number of examples and the amount of practice a student needs. Similar to a chef adding a condiment to a dish, the teacher wants to enhance the flavor, not ruin it. Good teachers know when to withdraw their help and scaffolding so as to not cripple the students.

This teaching approach is appealing to African American students, especially the African American male. The teacher who values his prior knowledge or "entering knowledge" as Ausubel would state it would be the ideal teacher for him. The teaching style would resonate

with him as a form of respect. This approach would cater to him and promote his feeling of self worth.

According to Hale (2001) "the African American males' learning style, like most African American children, is relational rather than analytic" (30). This approach is consistent with Ladson-Billings' interactional classroom setting where students' and the teachers' cultures are both seen as relevant.

Bibliotherapy is a worthwhile teaching approach for the African American male because cognitive and social constructivism are involved. "Cognitive constructivism is based on the student's ability, with the teacher acting as the facilitator. Social constructivism holds that meaningful learning occurs when people are explicitly taught how to use the psychological tools of their culture and are then given the opportunity to use these tools in authentic, real life activities to create a common, or shared understanding of some phenomenon" (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2002, p. 312).

Humanism.

According to Snowman and Biehler (2006):

. . . the humanistic theory concentrates on the noncognitive variables in learning, specifically, students' needs, emotions, values, and self-perception. It assumes that students will be highly motivated to learn when the learning material is personally meaningful, when they understand the reasons for their own behavior, and when they believe that the classroom environment supports their efforts to learn, even if they struggle. Consequently, a humanistic approach to teaching was proposed during the 1960s principally by Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Arthur Combs (p. 370).

The African American boys could be expected to thrive in this environment. If reading materials assigned to them are meaningful personally and the classroom environment supports their efforts to learn, they would have intrinsic reasons to pursue achievement and not look at learning doubtfully.

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970).

According to Groeben (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006):

Maslow earned his Ph.D. in a psychology department that supported the behaviorist position. He came into contact with Gestalt psychologists (a group of German psychologists whose work during the 1920s and 1930s laid the foundation for the cognitive theories of the 1960s and 1970s), prepared for a career as a psychoanalyst, and instead became interested in anthropology. As a result of these various influences, he came to the conclusion that American psychologists who endorse the behaviorist position had become so preoccupied with overt behavior and objectivity that they were ignoring other important aspects of human existence (hence the term *humanistic* was used to describe his views). When Maslow observed the behavior of especially well-adjusted persons – or self-actualizers, as he called them – he concluded that healthy individuals are motivated to seek fulfilling experiences (p. 409).

Abraham Maslow's Theory. According to Maslow (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006), the single most important principle that forms the basis of development is *need gratification.* A single holistic principle connects the diversity of human motives, with Maslow asserting that the predisposition for the emergence of a new and higher need is the fulfillment of the lower need. As intangible or abstract as the belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization needs may be, African American boys can use need fulfillment in their personal lives and in their classrooms. The marginalization they suffer in America, can damage them. In too many cases they are damaged.

Maslow developed a five-level hierarchy of needs based on his principle, "need gratification." Physiological needs are at the bottom of the hierarchy, followed by safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization needs in ascending order. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the needs hierarchy.
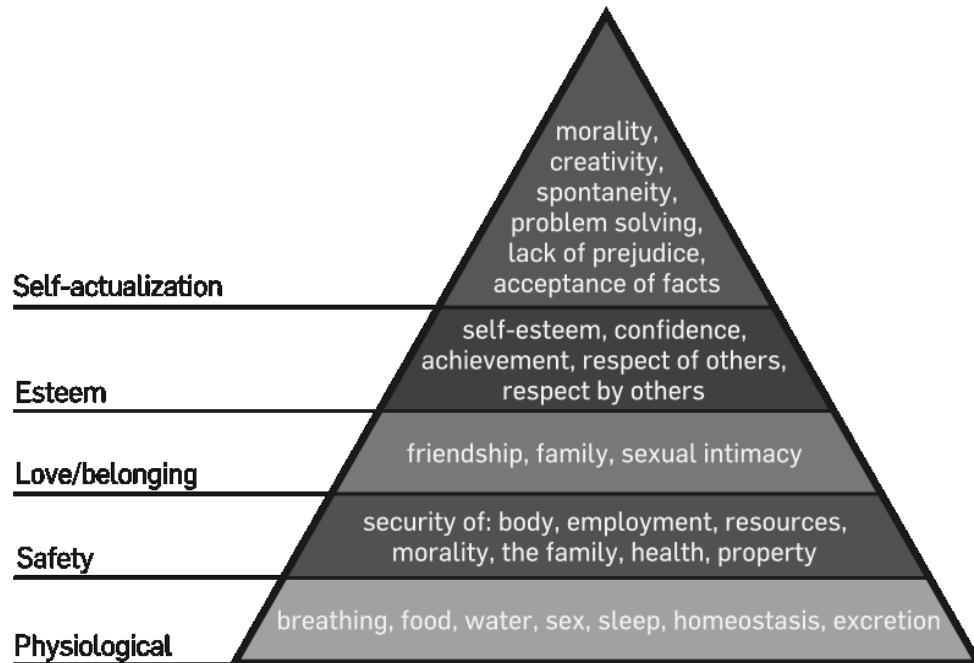
Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Cherry, n.d.)

The lower a need is on the hierarchy, the greater is its strength, because when a lower-level need is activated (as in the case of extreme hunger or fear for one's physical safety), people generally stop trying to satisfy a higher-level need (such as self-esteem or self-actualization) and focus on satisfying the currently active lower-level need.

Because many African American boys' households usually have only one parent (typically the mother). They rarely receive adequate child support, and lack access to a two parent income. Often, these children live in abject poverty and suffer from low esteem because their physiological needs are not being met adequately.

According to Maslow (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006):

the first four needs (physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem) are often referred to as *deficiency needs* because they motivate people to act only when they are unmet to some degree. Self-actualization, by contrast, is often called a *growth need* because people constantly strive to satisfy it. Basically, self-actualization refers to the need for self-fulfillment – the need to develop all of one's potential talents and capabilities (p. 409).

Because many African American male youth have a paucity of resources at their disposal, their deficiency needs rarely are met and often resort to drug dealing. Subsequently, they may end up incarcerated or dead. Combating challenges daily they become street savvy, which allows them to develop coping skills. These students enter classrooms with certain skill sets and personal baggage also. Appropriate reading materials could assist them in learning to handle anger and reduce their blatant disregard for school. Bibliotherapy could put them on the right track and possibly keep them in school. If educators welcomed and valued these students, they could become active learners and achieve academic success in school.

The theorist who espoused the concept of acceptance or "unconditional positive regard" was Carl Rogers. He defined this concept as the acceptance of a person "without negative judgment of . . . [a person's] basic worth."

Carl Rogers (1902-1987).

A psychotherapist, Carl Rogers (Snowman & Biehler, 2006), initiated a novel approach to helping people cope with their problems more effectively. He called this approach, client-centered (or nondirective) therapy, to stress that the client, rather than the therapist, should be the central figure and that the therapist was not to apprise the client what was wrong and what could solve his problem (Snowman & Biehler, 2006).

Carl Rogers' Theory. When Rogers established a warm, positive, acceptant attitude toward his clients and had some idea of what their thoughts and feelings were, he saw improvements in their behavior (Snowman & Biehler, 2006). While practicing this person-centered approach, Rogers came to the conclusion that he was most successful when he did not attempt to put up a false front of any kind. Rogers concluded that these conditions set the stage for successful experiences with therapy because clients became more self-accepting and aware of

themselves. Once his patients acquired these qualities, they were inclined and equipped to solve personal problems without seeking the help of a therapist.

In addition to functioning as a therapist, Rogers served as a professor. Upon analyzing his experiences as an instructor, he realized that the person-centered approach to therapy could be applied successfully to education. He thus proposed the idea of *learner-centered* education. Rogers believed that teachers should establish the same conditions as person-centered therapists. Rogers (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) argued "that the results of learner-centered teaching are similar to those of person-centered therapy: students capable of educating themselves without the aid of direct instruction from teachers" (p. 372).

Arthur Combs (1912-1999).

Dr. Combs was a professor of education, chairman of the Foundation in Education and director of the Center of Humanistic Education at the University of Florida. As a psychologist who studied education, his greatest contribution to the field of education was the concept that the most important contributor to educational success or failure was what learners believed about themselves.

Arthur Combs' Theory. Combs (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) assumed that people's behaviors were the direct result of their field of perception or phenomenal field at the time of their behaviors. Based on this assumption, the manner in which people perceives themselves is important. He asserted that the basic goal of education is to assist each student to develop a positive self-concept. He observed, teachers should not be prescribing, making, molding, forcing, coercing, or cajoling. He further suggested that teachers should act as facilitators, encouragers, helpers, assisters, colleagues, and friends of their students. Combs elaborated on these points by listing six characteristics of good teachers:

1. They are well informed about their subject.

2. They are sensitive to the feelings of students and colleagues.

3. They believe that students can learn.

4. They have a positive self-concept.

5. They believe in helping all students do their best.

6. They use many different methods of instruction.

Humanism in Education.

Taken together, observations of Maslow, Rogers, and Combs lead to a formation of an educational theory in which teachers trusted students enough to permit them to make many choices about their learning. Teachers also should be sensitive to the social and emotional needs of students, be empathetic, and respond positively to them. In addition, teachers should be sincere, willing to show that they have needs and experience positive feelings about themselves and what they are doing.

Classroom practices and the humanist model. According to Maslow (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006):

> . . . children's academic and personal growth are enhanced when various needs are met. One of those needs, belonging, has been the subject of considerable research. Belonging, which is also referred to as relatedness and sense of community, means the desire to get support from and be accepted by teachers and classmates and to have opportunities to participate in classroom planning, goal setting, and decision making (p. 370).

Belonging is one of the three basic psychological needs (autonomy and competence are the other two) essential to human growth and development, according to some motivational theorists. However, the need to belong receives less attention from educators than autonomy or competence. One possible reason for the discrepancy is the belief that students' emotional needs are best met at home and in other out-of-school groups. This point of view might have had some merit years ago when the family unit was more intact. The church was more prominent in people's lives. Grandparents played a more essential role in their grandchildren's lives. Society

today is more autonomous and less child-centered. This perspective of children's emotional

needs are best met at home and in other out-of-school venues does a disservice to students for

two reasons: "[a] teachers play an important role in helping to satisfy the need to belong, and [b]

research has uncovered positive relationships between satisfaction of the need to belong and the

following school-related outcomes" (Anderman et al. as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006, p.

374).

The Third International Mathematics and Science Study revealed persuasive evidence as

to why Japanese students outscore U.S. students after fourth grade. This test is an internationally

normed standardized test of mathematics and science. This study was not a typical source to

understand the positive effect that a humanistic classroom environment can have on a myriad of

student behaviors. After observing 10 science lessons taught in five Japanese public schools,

Linn et al. (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) wrote:

> . . . in addition to emphasizing cognitive development, elementary education in
> Japan also places a high value on children's social and ethical development. This
> is done by such tactics as (1) giving children various classroom responsibilities so
> they feel a valued part of the school, (2) emphasizing such qualities as
> friendliness, responsibility, and persistence, and (3) communicating to students
> that teachers value their presence in the classroom and the contributions they
> make. By fourth grade, Japanese children have been steeped in a school culture
> that emphasizes responsibility to the group, collaboration, and kindness. Every
> lesson began with an activity that was designed to spark the students' interest in
> the topic by connecting it to either their personal experiences or to previous
> lessons. The positive emotional attachment to school and the commitment to the
> values of hard work and cooperation that this approach produces are thought to
> play a strong role in how well students learn mathematics and science lessons.
> Japanese children and American children cannot be compared in the subjects of
> reading and language arts because of the language barrier (p. 374).

The result of this study on classroom atmosphere has strong implications for teachers in urban

areas whose classrooms have a high percentage of minority students. According to Anderman (as

cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006):

> African American students who were bused to school or were attending an urban
> school reported weaker feelings of belonging than students who were attending

neighborhood or suburban schools. . . . However, according to Baker (1999), African American students in urban schools who said they liked going to school described their relationship with their teacher as a supportive and caring one" (p. 376).

Implications for the African American Male and Humanism. According to Glasser (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006, 378):

> . . . the implications of Maslow's theory of motivation for teaching are provocative. One implication is that a teacher should do everything possible to see that the lower-level needs of students are satisfied so that students are more likely to function at higher levels. Students are more likely to be primed to seek satisfaction of the esteem and self-actualization needs, for example, if they are physically comfortable, feel safe and relaxed, have a sense of belonging, and experience self-esteem. Low-achieving students have admitted to wanting better grades but do not make more of an effort, because, in their opinion, teachers do not care about them or what they do (p. 378).

African American males could flourish under these conditions because they would feel that their teachers were genuinely interested in them. Educators need to do their best to ameliorate the deficiency needs of their students.

A Hispanic school district in southern California learned that its students were testing well each day except Monday. After an investigation, school officials learned that the majority of their students were doing a stellar performance on the tests during the week because they were well fed by the school district. However, on Mondays they were famished because they had barely eaten all weekend. The school officials arrived at a solution. Before the close of school on Friday, even after the testing was completed, the children's backpacks were filled with nonperishable food.

Carl Rogers' approach would benefit the African American male (Snowman & Biehler, 2006). His warm, positive, and accepting attitude towards his patients motivated them to be more self-accepting. This successful approach prompted his learner-centered approach. Learner-centered education involves students educating themselves without constant instruction. This teaching approach promotes efficacy. Young African American males are bombarded daily with

negative stereotypes, so having a teacher believe that they can succeed would be welcomed by them. They would think positively about their ability to perform a task and they would be motivated to complete that task and pursue a new, more challenging task. By increasing their self-worth, their self-esteem would increase greatly.

Arthur Combs' approach would also benefit the African American male. Combs (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) assumed that:

> all behaviors of a person is the direct result of his/her field of perception at the moment of his/her behaving. From this assumption, it follows that the way a person perceives his/herself is of paramount importance and that a basic purpose of teaching is to help each student develop a positive self-concept. Good teachers use these humanistic concepts: They are well informed about their subjects, are sensitive to the feelings of students and colleagues, believe that students can learn, have a positive self-concept, believe in helping all students do their best and use many different methods of instruction (p. 372).

Observations by Maslow, Rogers and Combs led to a conception of education in which students are considered trustworthy by their teachers and are allowed to be collaborative in the learning process. They are allowed to make choices about their own learning.

> These students' teachers are to be sensitive to the social and emotional needs of the students in their care, empathize with them, and respond positively to them. Lastly, but certainly not least of all, teachers should be sincere and willing to show that they too, have needs and experience positive feelings about themselves and what they are doing (Snowman & Biehler, 2006, p. 372).

This approach coincided with Ladson-Billings (2007) interactional and culturally congruent approaches. Teachers as facilitators and a classroom reflecting students' culture are concepts endorsed by Ladson-Billings. The cooperative atmosphere in the classroom was supported by Hale (1982). According to Hale (1982) "the African American style is relational rather than analytic, more people oriented and expressive than mainstream White culture; thus African American children may have difficulty organizing knowledge in sequential and depersonalized ways favored by schools" (p. 30).

Irvine (2003) purported that the African American students' home and the school lack alignment that could facilitate the marginalization process that could impede learning. She was interested in having a seamlessness approach between the home and school.

Boykin (1977) stated that in African American households, movement is the norm. This movement is referred to as having *verve*, which is music to African American children. However, movement and noise is the antithesis of the atmosphere found in most classrooms.

African American males can benefit from being in teachers and classrooms that allow them to bring their interests into the classroom for further exploration, rather than telling them to leave those aspects of their personalities at home. This approach can result in decreased self-esteem because his self-worth is being attacked. By reading books and examining media that cater to their interests, African American males can become motivated to learn what is expected of them. The impenetrable veneer that shields them can be removed and they can become excited about participating in class throughout their entire school careers.

Behaviorism.

The behaviorist theory emphasized the importance of the environment on children, who as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate), could be molded into anything society wanted them to become. The perspective of psychology was changed to the extent that psychology became the study of observable behavior, rather than the study of intellectual and psychological processes. John Locke, an empiricist, believed that all humans are the result of experiences within their environment. Children, he claimed, are born neutral and society molds them. The metaphor tabula rasa defined children at birth with society writing upon them. Providing that children have normal neurological functioning, they can develop any skill set or personality that their environment dictates.

Scientists began to develop systematic theories to explain developmental sequences that they saw in children, and the underlying processes that could account for their development. These scientists became known as the grand theorists. One famous grand theorist was John B. Watson. In the 1920s, he took the concepts of Pavlov of Russia, who had studied conditioning in animals, and applied those same concepts to babies and humans. Watson developed the theory called *Behaviorism* and was known as the Father of Behaviorism. His behaviorist theory looked to the future – children are born neutral and are influenced by their environment. His views influenced another famous behaviorist, B.F. Skinner. Behaviorism changed the perspective of psychology with psychology becoming the study of observable behavior, as opposed to the study of intellectual and psychological processes.

During this same time period, while at Yale, Arnold Gesell developed a stage theory of normative behavior based on maturational processes, rather than Watson's environmental influences. Gesell's work spawned such vernacular as "just going through a stage" and "the terrible twos."

In Europe, during the same time period, Sigmund Freud was formulating the most extensive and far-reaching theory relating to development and was revolutionizing thinking about children. His theory became known as the psychodynamic or psychoanalytic theory. Freud's grand theory began influencing American developmental psychologists in direct competition with Watson's behaviorist theory. The two theories conflicted because behaviorism emerged from a mechanistic approach and psychoanalytic theory emerged from an organismic approach.

The last of the grand theorists of child development who revolutionized European thinking before influencing American scientists was Jean Piaget.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development was the most all-encompassing and systematic theory of human development to emerge and represent a clear

embodiment of the organismic approach. It was the most influential stage theory that has yet emerged. In the 1970s and 1980s, it dominated research and thinking in developmental psychology throughout the world (Watson, 2002, p. 144).

Burrhus Frederic (B.F.) Skinner (1904-1990).

B.F. Skinner earned his B.A. in English and hoped to become a writer. As, this profession did not materialize, he entered the psychology graduate program at Harvard at the age of 24, where he met William Crozier. Skinner was taken by Crozier, an ardent advocate for animal studies and behavioral measures, and began to tailor his studies according to Crozier's highly functional, behaviorist framework. As he worked across disciplines, Skinner integrated methods and theories from psychology and physiology and developed new ways of recording and analyzing data. As he experimented with rats, he noticed that the responses he was recording were influenced by what precedes them as well as by what followed them. The typical behavioral approach at the time was influenced by the work of Ivan Pavlov and John B. Watson, both of whom focused on the stimulus-response paradigm. Their form of classical conditioning focused on what occurred prior to a response and how these stimuli affected learning.

> Skinner, however, focused on what occurred after a behavior, noting that the effects or repercussions of an action could influence an organism's learning. By 1931, he had a Ph.D. in psychology and was well on his way to developing operant conditioning, the behaviorist paradigm that ruled for the second part of the 20th century (Watson, 2002, p. 128).

B.F. Skinner's Theory. The theory that Skinner created is a mélange of many different concepts that act as the foundation for many different applications to human behavior. Skinner's theory, operant conditioning, works on the premise that many voluntary responses of animals and humans are strengthened when they are reinforced (followed by a desirable consequence) and weakened when they are ignored or punished. In this way, organisms learn new behaviors and when to exhibit them and unlearn existing behaviors. The term, *operant conditioning,* refers to organisms learning to operate on their environment (make a particular response) to obtain or

avoid a particular consequence. Some psychologists use the term, *instrumental,* because the behavior is instrumental in bringing about consequences.

Skinner invented an ingenious apparatus appropriately referred to as a Skinner box. The box is a small enclosure that is equipped with only a bar (or lever) and a small tray. On the exterior of the box is a hopper filled with food pellets that are dispersed into the tray whenever the lever is pressed under certain conditions.

While exploring its new environment, a hungry rat approaches the lever and presses it. When the rat is rewarded with a food pellet, it presses the lever more frequently than it did before being rewarded. According to Snowman and Biehler, 2006):

> If food pellets are supplied under some conditions when the bar is pressed down, for example when a tone is sounded – but not under others, the rat learns to discriminate one situation from the other, and the rate of bar pressing drops noticeably when the tone is not sounded. If a tone is sounded that is very close in frequency to the original tone, the rat generalizes (treats the two tones equivalent) and presses the bar at the same rate for both. But if the food pellets are not given after the rat presses the lever, that behavior stops, or is extinguished (p. 212).

The rat sees the lever as a tool or instrument for obtaining food. Locke, the supreme empiricist, would agree with Skinner that the rat would learn how to survive within his environment, the Skinner box. According to Locke (as cited in Watson, 2002):

> . . . all that we become, everything we are, results from our experiences with our environment. Everything that we know has to come from our sensory input; from what we observe, from what we take in. And that is what we become. Children are born a tabula rasa, a blank slate that society and their environment write upon (p. 39).

Closed model. According to Oglan (as cited in Kelley-Wash, 2005), the closed model, based on empirical research, was based in behavioral theory from the late 180ss. This model influenced teaching and learning through the early 1970s when theories of education shifted to the cognitive methodology. According to Kelley-Wash (2005):

> . . . this perspective views learning and understanding as linear. This part-to-whole approach chunks information in an effort to transmit knowledge

hierarchically by experienced individuals, usually parents and teachers. Furthermore, this knowledge is conveyed to all children in one way (p. 44).

Opened model. The interpretive paradigm emerged in the 1980s when another shift in educational philosophies occurred. According to Kelley-Wash (2005):

> . . . this paradigm advocates meaning and the social processes individuals use as strategies to have meaning making experiences. An individual's prior knowledge serves as a catalyst to establishing meaning. This whole-to-part approach celebrates multiple ways of knowing. Furthermore, knowledge is transmitted by any person regardless of age or educational experiences, through collaborative experiences (p. 44).

Classroom practices and the behaviorist model. Clear goals, logical sequencing of materials, and self-pacing were components of B.F. Skinner's approach to instruction. The main approach to Skinner's conception of teaching was that learning should be shaped. Programs of stimuli (material to be learned) and consequences should be designed to lead students using a step by step approach to a predetermined end result. "In the mid-1950s, Skinner turned this shaping approach into an innovation called program instruction" (Morris as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006, p. 218). Shaping is a form of behavior modification, with teachers having the ability to shape students' behavior by ignoring undesirable responses and reinforcing desirable responses.

One popular shaping technique involves having students make a list favorite activities on a card. The students are told that they can indulge in one of those activities for a stated period of time after they have completed a set of instructional objectives. According to Kelley and Carper (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) "this technique is sometimes called the *Premack Principle* after psychologist David Premack (1959), who first proposed it" (p. 222). This technique also "is called *Grandma's rule* since it is a variation of a technique that grandmothers have used for hundreds of years ("Finish your peas, and you can have dessert;" Kelley & Carper, as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006, p. 223).

From Skinner's viewpoint, society was too primitive in shaping desired behavior. Aversive means often were used to shape desired behavior. Punishment was used, rather than positive reinforcement, which Skinner considered more effective,. Society was too comfortable with the "spare the rod spoil the child" sentiment.

The second technique used to strengthen behavior in the classroom is a flexible reinforcement system called *token economy*. The token economy was introduced first with people who had been hospitalized for emotional disturbances and then with students in special education classes. A token is something that has little or no inherent value but can be used to *purchase* things that do have inherent value. While cookies and candies have limited flexibility and often lose their reinforcing value fairly quickly when frequently supplied, the token economy approach was developed. Tokens are reusable and can be given immediately after a desirable behavior.

Contingency contracting is a third technique teachers can use to strengthen behavior. A contingency contract is a means of identifying desired behaviors and consequent reinforcement. According to Miltenberger (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006):

> . . . the contract, which can be verbal or written, is an agreement worked out by two people (teacher and student, parent and child, counselor and client) in which one person (student, child, client) agrees to behave in a mutually acceptable way, and the other person (teacher, parent, counselor) agrees to provide a mutually acceptable form of reinforcement. For example, a student may contract to sit quietly and work on a social studies assignment for thirty minutes. When the student is finished, the teacher may reinforce the child with ten minutes of free time, a token, or a small toy (p. 222).

The primary goal of behavior modification is to strengthen desired behaviors. Toward that end, techniques (e.g., shaping, token economies, and contingency contracts) are likely to prove useful in the classroom. However, situations in the classroom often occur that require teachers to weaken or extinguish undesirable behaviors that may disrupt the learning process. At these times, some procedure must be used to extinguish the undesirable classroom behavior.

According to Miltenberger (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006), "research has demonstrated that extinction is effective in reducing the frequency of many types of problem behaviors" (p. 222).

According to Miltenberger (2004 as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006), an effective strategy to minimize or eliminate unwanted aggressive or disruptive behaviors for both children in regular and special education classes is time out. Before using this strategy, teachers need to explain the rules associated with time outs. After imposing a time out that should not last more than five minutes, the child should receive positive reinforcement to assure better behavior in the future.

Miltenberger (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) attested to another technique of negative behavior extinction called, *response cost*. Response cost is similar to time-out in that it involves the removal of a stimulus. This technique often is used with a token economy. With this procedure, a certain amount of positive reinforcement (e.g., 5% of previously earned tokens) is withdrawn every time a child makes an undesired response. This technique is similar to paying overdraft banking fees, speeding tickets, and points on one's driver's license. Children can understand, as well as adults, that these measures are "setbacks." The power of response cost can be used to modify negative behavior. According to Miltenberger (as cited in Snowman & Biehler, 2006) "the research confirms that extinction, time-out, and response cost all help reduce a variety of problem behaviors (such as getting off-task, not following directions, engaging in disruptive behavior) for a wide range of children" (p. 222).

Implications for the African American Male and Behaviorism. The behaviorist theory stressed the influence of the environment on children. These children are referred to as blank slates or tabula rasa, who can be made into anything their caregiver wants (Watson, 2002, 40).

African American males can benefit from this approach to education because they can be perceived by their teachers as having potential. They will not be seen as uneducable, merely a candidate for special education placement. Teachers can incorporate aspects from the students' environments into their curricula. African American males identify with the hip-hop culture and can debate positive and negative elements of that culture. They can listen to the music, watch videotapes and read texts on their favorite subjects. This type of positive reinforcement discussed by Skinner could help African American males. They would not need extrinsic reinforcement (e.g., stickers or tokens) because this subject is something of interest to them, therefore learning about it could have intrinsic value.

His teacher could provide some enabling texts for him. Tatum (2006) contended that "identifying reading material is not sufficient. Teachers need professional support to help them mediate texts with students, such as WestEd's Reading Apprenticeship framework" (p. 46). According to Tatum (2006):

> *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1963), an important anti-colonial text written by Caribbean-born Frantz Fanon, became a blueprint for many African American males in the 1960s who were trying to define themselves without embarrassment, apology, or external constraint as they embraced the *Rights of Man* ideology put forth centuries earlier by Thomas Paine (p. 48).

One man of the 1960s saw one book in particular as therapeutic. Haki Madhubuti. Madhubuti (2005) wrote:

> I found *Black Boy* on the library shelf, there were two copies. I took one of them, walked to an unpeopled section of the reading room, sat down and began to read.
>
> I was immediately captivated by the boldness of the language, the clarity of the ideas, *the similarity of the writer's living experiences to my own*, the familiarity of the landscape, the intellectual genius of the protagonist to get what he needed at any given time, the ability of Richard Wright to present a world in which our people were completely locked down emotionally, physically, economically and culturally, yet still functioned as whole human beings.

> Each word, every sentence of paragraph after paragraph, page after page, was like a sledgehammer hitting me upside my head, stating in no uncertain terms: Wake up Negro!

> I checked out *Black Boy*, ran home, went to the room I shared with my sister and read all night. The next morning, upon completion of the book, the first serious book I read in less than twenty-four hours, I was not a different person but a different questioner. Wright gave me context for my own content.

> I now had focus and direction for my own cultural and intellectual development. His work formed the circle for my own investigations into the ways and whys of white folks and my own life. Suddenly it slapped me right in the face, reading the right books, newspapers, magazines, and journals and comprehending and questioning what one reads is fundamental to developing a critical consciousness and worldview. Knowledge of oneself, of one's culture is what shapes a person (p. 52).

Madhubuti (2005) went on to become an award winning poet, publisher, essayist, and educator. His youth was spent in poverty in the former Black Bottom district of Detroit. He had an absentee father and a drug addict, alcoholic mother. Madhubuti was the first African American poet to be Poet-in-Residence at an Ivy League university, Cornell University, from 1968 to 1969. He was an English professor and director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing and the founder and director-emeritus of the Gwendolyn Brooks Center at Chicago State University, as well as a board member of the Institute for the Study of the African American Child (ISAAC) at Wayne State University founded by Janice E. Hale, Ph.D.

Providing African American males with enabling texts is bibliotherapy. Texts that address their concerns can have healing effects. Introducing texts that are "disabling" (e.g., basal readers and commercial reading programs that the schools favor) can have a deleterious effect on African American students, especially males. As Tatum (2006) mentioned, "an enabling text is one that moves beyond a sole cognitive focus – such as skill and strategy development – to include a social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic focus" (p. 48).

According to Scieszka (2008), the dilemma is that many boys are not enthusiastic about reading. Educators, including teachers and librarians, as well as parents are aware of this

problem, as are the children. Findings of national statistics over the last 25 years support this contention. In 2008, Scieszka created the "Guys Read" website (guysread.com). He argued that the premise behind the website was to assist boys in becoming interested in reading by "the basic idea of *Guys Read* is to help get boys interested in reading by linking them to materials they would be interested in reading. According to Hamston (2001), "boys who read are powerfully influenced by parental guidance and modeling" (p. 1). Woolcott (2001) contended that the primary difference between readers and non-readers are in the number of them who have peers who read and parents who facilitate reading practice. Readers obtain advice from their friends regarding books to read. They "require and, importantly, accept, the interpersonal relationships that their parents endeavor to maintain around reading (Hamston, 2001, p. 1) and do not believe that "real men don't read" (West, 1996, 1).

The research indicated that boys are most likely to enjoy electronic and graphic forms of literate practice (Alloway et al., 2002). Boys are willing to participate in literacy-related activities (e.g., debating, drama, and public speaking) publicly (Alloway et al., 2002). However, they do not want to have to read text aloud (Sanderson, 1995). Alloway et al. (2002) further contended that "boys are eager to engage with 'real-life' literacy contexts and 'real-life' literacy practices" (p. 4). According to Woolcott (2001) "boys and girls enjoy action and adventure, science fiction, and nonfiction similarly and books "about real people" are preferred by one in two teens, though among boys 36% versus 60% for girls" (p. 42).

The intrinsic value of learning to read and recognizing the importance of knowing how to read are two aspects that resonate with the African American male. This skill can be liberating, as well as thought provoking. Teachers of African American male students can introduce the greatest arsenal of all – BOOKS! As Holland (2008) stated, "Black boys must learn to read in order to read to learn" (p. 6).

Detroit Public Schools' emergency financial manager, Robert C. Bobb, issued a Call to Action to the citizens of Detroit to support Detroit Public Schools' children by signing to join the DPS *Volunteering Reading Corps*. Bobb (2010) wrote:

> . . . research shows that it is extremely difficult for a struggling reader to "catch up" if the child is unable to read by the end of third grade. For this reason, the District has identified a goal of ensuring that by 2015, all of the current pre-kindergarten students and those thereafter, will be able to read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.
>
> The Call to Action for a new Reading Corps comes on the heels of recent test scores that showed Detroit schoolchildren ranked the lowest in the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math test.
>
> In terms of performance levels in the fourth grade in Detroit on the math test, 69 percent of students scored below basic level. In terms of performance levels in the eighth grade in Detroit, 77 percent were below basic.
>
> These scores confirm that there is a reading emergency. People should not just have a sense of urgency after seeing these scores, but instead should have a sense of outrage over these scores. These scores should not paralyze the community. On the contrary, knowing where the children are academically provides the community an opportunity to strategically develop and tailor instruction to the specific needs of Detroit's children. Everything is being done to completely remake the academic program in Detroit Public Schools. The community is being asked to join in the fight to ensure that the children of Detroit have every opportunity to become successful.

More than 3,300 prospective volunteers have come forward to serve as reading tutors. They are being asked to tutor at least one hour a week in a school, working with a pre-kindergarten student, as well as committing to at least one year, and if at all possible, to continue to work with their respective children through subsequent grades. As the griots of Africa stated so eloquently centuries ago, that "it takes a village to raise a child".

Summary

Cognitivism, constructivism, humanism, and behaviorism are conceptual frameworks that can influence student achievement. Each one of these frameworks are related to the human psyche and when used repeatedly and effectively, stimulate desired responses. *Cognitivism*

involves the intellectual development of human beings and their ability to adapt to their environment.

When children see a whale swimming, they automatically assume that the creature is a fish. To learn that the creature is a mammal, children need to adapt their thinking processes. Adaptation has two complementary processes: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of fitting reality into one's current cognitive organization. In every cognitive encounter with objects or events, a degree of "bending" or distorting of experiences occurs as people attempt to incorporate, understand, or interpret their experiences. Accommodation is the term that refers to adjustments in cognitive organization that result from the demands of reality. Once children learn the new concept, the new idea becomes a part of their repertoire of knowledge. Children learn through their actions, meaning. with their concept of reality connected to actions in the environment. Equilibrium results from the balance between assimilation and accommodation.

Constructivism. Discovery learning is the hallmark of constructivism. The constructivists argue that too much guided instruction takes the form of step-by-step study of verbal or numerical statements or formulas that students can reproduce on cue, but are unable to use outside of the classroom. True learning involves figuring out how to use what you already know and go beyond what you already think. Constructivists argue that conceptions that children reach independently often are more valuable to them than those proposed by others. In a constructivist classroom, students do not need extrinsic rewards when they seek to make sense of things that puzzle them.

Humanism. The humanistic theory concentrates on the noncognitive variables in learning, specifically, students' needs, emotions, values, and self-perceptions. This theory assumes that students are highly motivated to learn when the learning material is personally meaningful, when

they understand the reasons for their behavior, and when they believe that the classroom environment supports their efforts to learn, even if they have to struggle to master concepts.

Behaviorism. The behaviorist theory emphasizes the importance of the environment on children. Children are born a blank slate (tabula rasa), with society imprinting what it expects of its children on their personalities. People in the children's environment mediate how the children should behave. Behaviorism also includes stimulus and response that play important roles in children's lives because positive reinforcement can encourage children to behave acceptably and achieve successfully. Behaviorism is valuable to parents and educators as this conceptual framework can promote good behavior and extinguish poor behavior.

These four conceptual frameworks can be used to enable children to function appropriately in their respective environments. Cognitivists emphasize adaptation, constructivists emphasize extrapolation, humanists emphasize being in touch with one's own feelings and the feelings of others, and behaviorists believe that the environment shapes the child. Each of these concepts plays an important role in child development and classroom management. Students are taught new concepts to learn daily. By extrapolating the concepts, these students are able to apply learned skills and acquire new skills. This process was used by children throughout their entire lives. The ability to transform one's environment is peculiar only to humans. Acceptance of one's self and others is the foundation of any learning process. The human aspect or quality is present regardless of the endeavor. Each individual is dependent on his/her environment to spell it out, act it out, or as Vygotsky would say, "mediate." Significant others in the environment tell us and show us how to behave, what to think, and what to become.

The African American male is not an exception. What he needs is a classroom environment designed with him in mind specifically. Research has revealed that Black and Brown boys view reading as an effeminate behavior. This research investigated African

American boys' value of reading and their desire to read, as opposed to their inability to read. It is the assumption of this researcher that their lack of skills in reading is due largely to their perceptions or misconceptions of reading.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter three outlines the methodology that was used to conduct this study. The problem addressed in the study was reflected in the research questions.

Research Questions

1. How do African American 10 to 12 year old males circumvent Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome (FGFS)?

2. Do reading materials of the boys' interests motivate African American males to read more?

3. How do African American males respond to their school districts' required reading material as opposed to reading materials that reflect their own interests?

Research Design

This study employed an ethnographic design. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) stated that "The emphasis in ethnographic research is on documenting or portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others . . ." (p. 12).

> Researchers undertaking a phenomenological study investigate various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon (e.g., African American boys' perceptions of reading and its impact on fourth grade failure syndrome). The researcher strives to gain some insight into the world of his or her participants and to describe their perceptions and reactions. Data are collected through in-depth interviewing (p. 13).

The method of inquiry used for this phenomenological study was a qualitative research design comprised of in-depth interviews with African American boys. Data were collected, analyzed, and presented in a cyclical process for the duration of the study.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) defined a phenomenological study as "… the researcher focuses on a particular phenomenon (such as school board conflict), collects data through in-

depth interviews with participants, and then identifies what is common to their perceptions" (p. 13). The data from each of the five boys who participated in the study were presented in narration form through rich descriptions that depicted their respective circumstances and perceptions of reading that may result in, or lead to, fourth grade failure syndrome.

Many African American children, especially boys, begin to lose interest in school and start showing substantial signs of failure in the fourth grade. Teachers in the early childhood segment of school typically are nurturing and encouraging, while upper elementary teachers are preparing their students for standardized high-stakes testing. The classroom is more structured and children are expected to remain at their desks, focusing at the learning tasks for long periods.

The researcher attempted to identify and describe aspects of each individual's perceptions and reactions to his experiences in some detail. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) wrote:

> [Phenomenological study] is the essential structure of a phenomenon that researchers want to identify and describe. They do so by studying multiple perceptions of the phenomenon as experienced by different people, and by then trying to determine what is common to these perceptions and reactions. This searching for the essence of an experience is the cornerstone − the defining characteristic − of phenomenological research (p. 437).

The research methodology for this study was qualitative in nature. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006):

> . . . one finds a number of approaches to qualitative research. Cresswell, for example, has identified five of these approaches − biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, case studies, and ethnography. These five approaches do not exhaust the variety of approaches that exist, they are included because they represent different discipline traditions, have detailed procedures, and ….. are popular in the human and social sciences (p. 435).

This research method is discovery oriented, descriptive, process oriented, and concerned with understanding human behavior. It allows the researcher to systematically search for meaning and

involves the participants in a philosophical process of deliberative and close examination. Qualitative designs are naturalistic in that the researcher does not manipulate the research setting. The setting is a naturally occurring event, program relationship or interaction that has no predetermined course established by and for the researcher; rather, the point of using qualitative methods is to understand naturally occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states. A frequent technique used in acquiring data for qualitative research is getting direct quotations from the subjects themselves through face-to-face interviews. Data obtained from qualitative evaluations provide detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors.

By employing an ethnographic design, which is supported by a phenemonological study, the researcher established methods that were consistent with ethnography and phenomenological studies. This method was not concerned with explaining, predicting or controlling. The essence of phenomenon was captured through a rigorous process of disciplined reflection and an identification of common themes. The methodologies and instruments that were used by the qualitative researcher included open-ended questions, interviews of the boys, and examples of reading materials that the boys have read, as well as the reading lists from the large urban school district. The questioning was open-ended to obtain rich, sensitive data to address the research questions. The data were reviewed and analyzed to determine patterns and trends that could be used to address the research questions. Thus, this kind of qualitative evaluation allowed (even encouraged) responses that the researcher had not anticipated.

The researcher was considered a participant-observer. The researcher engaged in overt or obtrusive participation because his or her presence was noticeable in the recreation center. The boys' respective families were made aware of the researcher's purpose in the center. The objective was to become a friend with whom the students could conduct a dialogue and

ultimately gain insight into the African American boy's mindset to understand his perceptions of reading.

Frequently, the researcher in this type of research participates to some extent in the phenomenon the participant is experiencing. Unlike traditional scientific research, the researcher is involved, becomes connected, and seeks contact with the participants. The researcher achieved total involvement with the participants through the interview process; the original contact, the invitation, the arrangements, the interviews, and the follow-up. The participants were considered partners in the search and in the experience of data collection. Free flowing interaction and communication between the researcher and participant were used to ensure complete understanding of one another's experiences. The researcher employed a system, a method, and a process that accurately defined and rigorously applied to both the data gathering and data analysis. The framework for this model had structure and order. It allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of each participant on the topic under investigation.

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do African American 10 to 12 year old males circumvent Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome (FGFS)?

2. Do reading materials of the boys' interests motivate African American males to read more?

3. How do African American males respond to their school districts' required reading material as opposed to reading materials that reflect their own interests?

Limitations of the Study

1. This study is limited to five African American males residing in an urban area.

2. This study is limited to elementary-aged students and is not generalizeable to those who are in middle or high school.

Description of the Setting

The interviews were conducted in an urban community youth center in southeastern Michigan. This community youth center's population is comprised of 100% African American youth; 60% of whom are African American males. The membership is comprised of 500 youth and four counselors who are African American males. The 40-year old facility is opened from 11:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. Sunday through Saturday. Youngsters gather at the center after school to collaboratively do homework and play basketball (girls and boys). Only one fifth of the membership reports on any given evening of each of the 52 weeks a year the center is open. The facility is financed with city funding. The local public school district ceased access to doing research with individual students; therefore it was necessary to locate a site where 10-12 year old African American boys were accessible.

Selection of Students

Approximately 50 boys at the center are between the ages of 10 to 12 years and are in either the 5th or 6th grades. Most of the other boys are older. The first 15 boys who enter the center were asked their age. The boys who are between 10 and 12 years of age were given an opportunity to randomly choose a number from a box. Five boys whose numbers match the five random numbers selected by the researcher were asked to participate in the study. After checking to make sure the boys' ages and grade levels are appropriate, the researcher made a home contact to determine if the boys' parent(s) would grant permission for the boy to participate in the study. The home contacts continued until five eligible boys were identified for participation.

The boys participated in two interviews that provided much of the data for this study (See Appendix A for Interview Questions). The questions asked during interview session #1

generated data that were analyzed to develop questions for interview #2. The two interviews were audio taped. The second interviews were held approximately two weeks after the first interviews. The questions focused on the school-based material that the boys have been reading during the summer.

These questions prompted the boys to reflect on their, or their lack of, reading experiences. They discussed their thoughts that they wrote in their reflective notebooks with the researcher. The recognition that reading materials could reveal so much that could be helpful in one's life served as an epiphany for these boys.

Data Collection Strategies

Data for this study came from prospective and retrospective sources. Prospective data were obtained during initial individual interviews, while retrospective data emerged from the respondents' reflective notebooks. Together, these data sources provided a set of data that allowed the research questions to be addressed.

Qualitative methodologies offer many creative ways to investigate a situation. "A strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that the researcher employs as he or she moves from paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiry put paradigms of interpretation into motion" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 22).

The timeline for the data collection and analysis for the study is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Time Line for Data Collection and Analysis

Duration	Focus	Methods
October	Obtain HIC Approval Begin recruitment process	
November	Begin first interviews Transcribe interviews Analyze interviews to develop questions for second interviews	Interviews Field notes Audio recordings
December	Begin second interviews Transcribe interviews Review transcriptions with a peer	Interviews Field notes Audio recordings
January	Analyze interviews Write Chapters IV and V	

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interview audio tapes were transcribed for review by a second reader. The second reader verified the results of the transcriptions. This technique is referred to as peer debriefing. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this technique allows the researcher to discuss the study with a peer, who serves as a "devil's advocate" in an effort to have the researcher acknowledge her own biases and the methodology of the study. Each interview was summarized for presentation in Chapter IV, with all identifying information removed. The researcher coded the interviews to determine patterns and trends in the data that could be used to address the research questions. Table 4 presents the process that is used in content analysis research.

Table 4

Content Analysis Research Process

Step	Process
1	*Theory and rationale*: The development of the research questions and/or hypotheses
2	*Conceptualization* - This step reflects how you will answer the research questions. Here you must define what variables will be used in the study and how you will define the variables conceptually.
3	*Operationalization* – This step reflects the how you will measure the variables. Your measures must match your conceptualizations (internal validity). An a priori coding plan that provides a description of all measures must be created (Face and content validity are assessed at this point).
4	*Coding* – Either human coding or computer coding can be used. With human coding, you need to create a codebook where all variable measures are fully explained and a coding form. With computer coding, a codebook of sorts is needed with a full explanation of your dictionaries. A standard dictionary or an original dictionary created by the researcher can be used.
5	*Sampling* – At this step, determine the sampling plan (random sampling, census of the population).
6	*Training and pilot reliability* – Coders work together during a training to determine if they can agree on coding variables. In an independent coding test, the inter-rater reliability will be determined. The coding form and coding dictionaries can be revised during the training.
7	*(A) Human coding*: Use a minimum of two coders. Coding should be done independently, with the results checked. A minimum of 10% overlap is needed to determine the reliability of the coders; or *(B) Computer coding:* Apply dictionaries to the sample text to generalize per unit frequencies for each dictionary. Check sporadically for validation.
8	*Final reliability* – Calculate a reliability figure for each variable using correlation analysis.
9	*Tabulation and reporting* – At this step, the material is coded and analyzed. After that is completed, you may proceed with reporting the results, using an appropriate format.

Neuendorf (2001).

Trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness is a method used to determine if the study's results "match reality"

(Merriam, 1998, p. 201). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness as:

> How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the
> findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?

What arguments can be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked that would be persuasive on this issue (p. 209)?

Trustworthiness was achieved via triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is the use of data from multiple sources that support the conclusions for the study (Creswell, 1998). Member checking is when the researcher verifies the results of the analysis with the participants. Peer debriefing is having a colleague review the study and ask questions regarding the methods, meanings, and interpretations of the results (Creswell, 1998). The component "auditing was included in the study. The researcher reduces bias and error through sampling, measurement, and analyses that contribute to the conclusions of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 451). Triangulation of the data was completed through participant interviews, reflective journals, and evidence of the boy's willingness to read. This form of data collection revealed the trajectory of the themes that emerged.

Credibility in the study was achieved by interviewing the boys twice and having them write in reflective journals. Field notes maintained by the researcher also added to the credibility of the findings.

According to Creswell (1998), the purpose of qualitative research is not to produce research that can be generalized to a larger population, but to explain phenomena being studied. The findings of the interviews and reflective journals were described in rich detail to allow others to replicate the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, ANALYSES, AND EMERGING THEMES

Chapter 4 presents findings, analyses, and emerging themes of the data collected by observing the behavior of five African American boys between the ages of 10-12 years. Along with presentation of findings, analyses and emerging themes, the feelings, observations, perceptions, and ideas about reading are presented. The material presented in this chapter came from the boys' responses during interviews and journal entries, including experiential data provided by interviews.

Sample Selection

The researcher approached the manager of the recreation center that had agreed to participate in the study. She identified approximately 50 boys at the center who were between 10 and 12 years of age and were in either the 4th, 5th or 6th grades. Many other boys at the center were older and could not be included in the study. The researcher asked the first 15 boys who entered the center their age. Those boys who were in the inclusion age range were given an opportunity to choose a number from a box. Five boys whose numbers matched the five random numbers selected by the researcher were asked if they would like to participate in the study. After rechecking to make sure the boys' ages and grade levels were appropriate, the researcher made a home contact to determine if the boys' parent(s) would grant permission for the boys to participate in the study. The home contact involved making a telephone call to the mother/father. If the parents agreed to allow their children to participate in the study, the researcher sent an informed consent form home for the parents to review. They were given a telephone number to contact the researcher if they had any questions regarding the study. The home contacts continued until five parents agreed to allow their eligible boys to participate in the study.

The boys participated in two interviews that provided much of the data for this study (See Appendix A for Interview Questions). The responses to questions included an interview session #1 which produced data that were analyzed using content analysis. The responses to these questions were used to develop questions for interview #2. The two interviews were audiotaped. Approximately two weeks following the first interviews, the researcher conducted the second round of interviews. The questions focused on the school-based materials that the boys had been reading during the summer.

The interview questions prompted the boys to reflect on their, or lack of, reading experiences. They discussed their thoughts that they wrote in their reflective notebooks with the researcher. The recognition that reading materials could reveal so much that could be helpful in one's life served as an epiphany for these boys.

In addition to the two formal interviews, the researcher talked to the five boys two additional times. These informal talks were not audiotaped, but she did record their comments and remarks in her field notes. The information obtained from the informal interviews are also included in this chapter.

Description of the Sample

The audiotape recorded formal interviews, informal interviews, and field notes were transcribed verbatim, with each participant assigned a pseudonym for identification and to help protect his anonymity. The boys were named Albert, Benjamin, Carlos, Duane, and Eric. The five boys were participating in after school activities at a recreational center in a large Midwestern city. They were interviewed four times at the center. The following section provides descriptions of each of the five boys. Table 5 presents a brief synopsis of the demographic characteristics of each of the boys.

Table 5

Description of the Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Name	Age	Grade	Household Composition	Report Card Grades
Albert	10	4th	Mother (Father incarcerated)	All As
Benjamin	10	5th	Mother and father	As and Bs
Carlos	11	5th	Mother and maternal grandmother (father in trouble with the law)	A in mathematics, C in science, and Bs in remaining classes
Duane	11	6th	Single mother, two brothers (no male in the household)	All Bs
Eric	12	6th	Mother and maternal grandmother (father lives in another state, but is actively involved in his life)	Mostly As, B in mathematics, and C in science

Albert: Albert is a 10-year old African American in the fourth grade in an urban school district. He was extremely articulate and well-groomed and had a great passion for the sport of boxing. This school year is his first year in an urban school district and the first time he has lived in an urban environment. He was enrolled in a suburban public school district from kindergarten through third grade. His nuclear family recently became matriarchal. His father, for whom he was named, recently became incarcerated. His mother and younger brother had to leave their suburban, affluent lifestyle in the suburbs to live in a large urban city that has high crime and unemployment rates.

He appeared to be undaunted by his recent circumstances, but his mother appeared to be traumatized. She was concerned that Albert and his younger brother Alonzo were not being challenged enough in school. She complained that they seldom had homework assignments. She had spoken to both boys' teachers, but to no avail. At the time, she was contemplating taking her complaint further. Their progress reports were all As and she did not know what to make of that. She was concerned that As were really equivalent to Bs in the suburban district.

Benjamin: Benjamin is a 10-year old African American in the fifth grade, attending school in an urban school district. Benjamin is ten years old in the fifth grade, while Albert, who had a late birthday of December 2, 1999, had to wait an entire year before entering prekindergarten. Benjamin also was a bright boy as evidenced by his report card that reflected As and Bs, more As than Bs. Benjamin's pedigree was quite different from the other boys.

His maternal grandfather was a dentist and his maternal grandmother held a doctorate in biology. She is a full professor at a local university. Benjamin's father is a laborer and his mother is a registered nurse. Benjamin has two female siblings who are identical twins and are two years older. Benjamin attends a magnet public school in an urban setting where many upper echelon African Americans send their children.

No one has everything, and Benjamin is no exception. He is eternally grateful to have a man for a teacher for once in his life. According to Benjamin, his teacher is the white counterpart to President Obama. Benjamin, who began school (prekindergarten) at the age of four, waited six years before he could experience a male teacher. Benjamin wore a smile daily and thoroughly enjoyed the computer lab at the recreation center.

Carlos: Carlos is an 11-year old African American boy who loves Hip Hop culture as was reflected in his attire and demeanor. Carlos is a fifth grader in an urban public school. His progress report indicated an A in mathematics, all Bs in his other classes, with the exception of a C that he received in social studies. He claimed that he could not remember all the old dates because he was more interested in what is happening right now!

Carlos is an only child who resides with his mother and maternal grandmother. He claims that his strict, no-nonsense mother, does not let him go anywhere because she is afraid he will turn out like his father. Dad has had several infractions with the law. According to Carlos, one reason he gets into trouble is because he is a poor reader and did not finish high school like his

mother. They were high school sweethearts. "Now, I don't see Pops." His mother works for a fast food chain.

Duane: Duane is an 11 year old African American, attending sixth grade in an urban school. He is the oldest of three brothers living in a single-mother household. He had more issues than the other four boys who participated in the study. His mother has never worked outside of the home and according to Duane, money is scarce. Every time his mother was eligible for the Work First federally-funded program, she would have a baby to be deferred from entering the mandatory program. All three boys have different fathers and none of the fathers visits or pays child support. According to Duane, he is a victim of "baby mama drama."

Considering his precarious home circumstances, his grades were pretty good. His progress report consisted of all Bs. Duane commented, "that he wasn't the dumbest nor the smartest. I do my work in school and Mrs. …. [the teacher] don't give homework." He claimed that he gets into the ring and boxes at the recreation center, goes home, eats, then crashes. If his baby brother does not wake up in the middle of the night cryin' – it's a good thing.

Eric: Eric is a 12-year old African American in the sixth grade. His birthday is December 10, 1999. Like Carlos, he resides with his mother and maternal grandmother and is an only child. His mother and grandmother share ownership of a beauty salon. His father resides in another state and has another family, but includes Eric in all major family functions. His father is a postal employee and gladly pays child support.

Eric is an avid reader who explained that he uses it for escape and relaxation. His grades on his progress report were stellar. His report card was all As, with the exception of a B in mathematics and a C in science. He claimed that these two subjects bore him some. He has aspirations to become a lawyer, and indicated that he had better hone his science skills. He

enjoyed the recreation center, including boxing, the computer lab, and writing poetry – in that order.

Data Analysis for Research Questions

The data analysis for this qualitative study was ongoing, and entailed combining data from various sources of information including interviews, observations, journals, field notes, etc. into a descriptive format that presented a clear and accurate portrait of the investigations. The data analysis included coding and categorizing each participant's interviews. The researcher read the transcriptions to begin the coding process. She checked the transcriptions for accuracy by listening to the tapes and added any information from the field notes she maintained during the interviews and observations. The transcriptions were read again to verify that the coding was precise. After coding each interview, the researcher began to group the boys' responses together to determine patterns and trends among the five sets of transcribed interviews. The findings were then grouped to address each of the research questions.

The researcher used formal interviews, informal interviews, and field notes to triangulate data. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) explained triangulation as "By self-consciously setting out to collect and double-check findings using multiple sources and modes of evidence. The researcher built the triangulation process into ongoing data collection" (p. 199). The process of establishing trustworthiness was done by using member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking is a technique that established validity in this study by allowing each boy opportunities to listen to his audiotaped responses to verify that he said what he intended to say so there would be no reason to recant later. Peer debriefing is another technique that ensures validity to this study by discussing the findings with a disinterested third party who plays the "devil's advocate" with the researcher. The researcher periodically dialogued with the peer debriefer to eliminate any biases inherent in the interpretation of the data. Through the establishment of trustworthiness, truth was

established and assurances were provided that the data were reliable. The researcher observed patterns within and across interviews obtained from the boys who were included in the sample.

This initial step in the data analysis began by coding the data into as many units and categories as possible. Glasser and Strauss (cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985) suggested that categories are established when the researcher groups the data in two distinct ways. One way is through the analysis of the data sets – observations, interviews, and reflective journals maintained by each of the five boys. The researcher's goal was to unveil patterns, themes, and categories that were meaningful to determining commonalities among the five boys. The second way categories were formed was through inductive analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined inductive data analysis as "making sense of field data. Sources of this data included interviews, observations, documents, unobtrusive measures, nonverbal cues, or any other qualitative or quantitative information pools" (p. 202). Through inductive analysis the uncovering of embedded information is used in the construction of theories. However the categories were derived, Glasser and Strauss encouraged researchers to use their tacit knowledge when coding the data, which allowed for the correction of errors or omissions through successive review. Meaningful blocks of information represented as units were identified and coded from the interviews, observations, and reflective journals.

Participants' Reading Backgrounds

Albert

Albert indicated he liked action books and books about sports. He said that he liked these types of books because they made him want to be in the middle of the action, "right in the storyline." When asked what kinds of reading materials he liked, he indicated that realistic stories in urban settings were among his favorites. He also liked either nonfiction or realistic fiction. He did not like Harry Potter because the story has to be believable. The length of the

story was immaterial to Albert. He indicated that he like to read stories that were 20 to 50 pages in length, but the storyline was more important, especially if the books were action and adventure. Role models are important for boys during their childhood. They look up to their role models and often mimic their actions. When asked what kind of reading materials that men in their family read, Albert indicated that his uncles read sports magazines for about 20 minutes. He further indicated that his father did not really read when he was around (his father is incarcerated), and his uncles do not come about often enough for him to notice if they read. When asked about reading in public, Albert commented that is was okay to read in public because smart girls like smart boys. Albert, when asked about the importance of reading as an adult, recounted that a judge came to the school on career day and told a story about a man was arrested for trespassing in another person's property because he could not read the no trespassing sign. This story stayed with Albert, increasing his awareness of the importance of being able to read as an adult. Albert wanted his teachers to ask the students what they wanted to read and not just assign uninteresting stories. He commented that he would pick good things to read, and would not pick something stupid. When asked how he felt when girls liked him because he was smart, he stated that "I feel happy because she [the girl] is pretty." Albert was asked how he would attain the skill of reading to avoid serving time in prison. He commented that he would keep on reading and try to read the hard books sometimes. Albert's answers to the interview questions were short and to the point. He was very mature in his responses.

Benjamin

Benjamin answered the same seven questions as Albert. He indicated that he liked to read about sports figures because they run, jump, and catch balls. He wished that he could be like the athletes. His reading preferences were for real-life stories set in urban settings. He did not like fiction because he wanted to read about events that really happened. He preferred reading stories

that were about 20 pages long. However, if the characters were interesting and the story had lots of action he could go about 50 pages. He asserted that he chose 20 pages because most books assigned for reading by the teacher were boring. Benjamin lived in an intact family, with both his mother and father, along with his grandparents. His father, who was a laborer, did not read. He talked about his grandfather, who was a dentist, who read the Bible every night for about an hour. Benjamin thought it was cool to read in public because men need to be educated. Benjamin indicated that he was willing to do anything to stay out of prison, even read. He recounted that a friend's father is in prison and the family is really sad. Benjamin said that he would read more if he liked the book and that choosing his own reading materials was important in motivating him to read. He was proud if a girl liked him because he was smart. He would like to take the girl out. He reemphasized that he would read more if it would keep him out of jail.

Carlos

Carlos admitted he was not much of a reader, especially for pleasure. However, he did admit that if he needed to read something he would. He asserted that reading did not mean much to him because he got bored fast, although he did like to read sports magazines. He, like the other boys, preferred nonfiction, especially stories about real events set in urban areas that focus on action and adventure. He also indicated that he liked to read about sports and sports figures. He would read a book about 50 to 100 pages if it was about Hip Hop. He wanted to know all about the Hip Hop culture and was willing to read about it. Carlos did not have any male role models because his father was incarcerated. Carlos was unaware if his father read or what he read. He did indicate that his mother's boyfriend visited, but did not read while at his home. When asked if it was okay to read in public, he thought that if the book was "cool" it was okay. but he would not want to be caught reading a book like the *Hardy Boys*. Carlos indicated that his father was in and out of jail. His mother did not want him to have any contact and would not even let him use

the Jr. in his name to avoid his being mistaken for him. He indicated that he would read just to avoid this type of life. Although Carlos did not read at home because he did not have any good books there, he indicated that he would probably read more if he had a voice in selecting his reading materials. He thought it was a good thing that girls liked boys who read because they were smart.

Duane

According to Duane, reading was not a guy thing, although he admitted that he read to complete his assignments. On occasion, Duane would read a sports magazine for pleasure. He also preferred reading for information, although his personal choice was to read about sports. He liked to read stories set in urban areas because these stories had relevance to him. He wanted to read short articles in sports magazines, but found school reading assignments boring, especially those in text books. Duane had no male role models who read. While his uncle came to his house, he had never seen him read. While reading in public may be okay in some groups, he preferred playing basketball to reading. When asked about the link between not reading and going to prison, Duane stated, "If knowing how to read will keep me out of prison, then I need to read more." Duane agreed with the other boys that being able to pick out his own books would motivate him to read more. When asked how he felt when girls liked him because he was smart, he was somewhat glib, commenting, "I'm happy because I think I'm a pretty good catch."

Eric

Eric was the most goal-directed boy who participated in the study. He had set his goal on becoming an attorney and was willing to work hard to achieve that goal. When asked why he loved to read, he commented, "I love to read because it relaxes me. I use reading for escapism. I live vicariously through the character. I like adventure." While Eric read fiction, he preferred nonfiction in urban settings. He again commented that he read a lot of books because he wanted

to become a lawyer. He also was the only boy that thought 50 pages was a good length, but would read longer books if the story was interesting. He also indicated that he often fell asleep when reading. Although Eric's father lives in another state, they have a good relationship. Eric indicated that he had never seen his father read. Eric thought it was cool to read in public, commenting that "How can I become a lawyer and don't want anybody to see me reading?" Eric was going to continue reading, no matter what. He was adamant that he was not going to go to prison. His remarks included "A lot of times, the men read a lot when they get to prison. So they should've been reading before they went." Eric indicated that he also liked to write, especially poems. He reads these poems aloud to his mother and grandmother. He also indicated that his mother was a reader, talking about the book, *Bridges of Madison County*, and then watching the movie together. Eric, in agreement with the other boys, wanted to select his books. When asked about girls liking boys to read, Eric stated, "Boy, I love when a pretty girl smiles at me. It makes me want to read more."

Interviews

The boys participated in four interviews, with two of the interviews made by informally discussing reading with the boys. The first set of interviews is presented, followed by the first informal interview. The second set of interviews is then provided, followed by the second informal interview.

Interview Set One.

Each of the five boys was interviewed separately. They were asked the same seven questions. The responses to each question are presented first. The patterns as well as the similarities and differences that emerge from the interviews were used to address each of the research questions.

Interview question 1: Describe the various types of reading materials that you enjoy

reading and why do you enjoy reading those types of reading materials?

Each boy responded to this question. Table 6 presents the responses to this question.

Table 6

Interview Question 1

Name	Response
Albert	I like action books and books about sports. I like those books because they make me wish I was there – right there in the storyline.
Benjamin	Well, I like to read about sports figures because they run, jump, and catch the ball. I wish I could do that . I try.
Carlos	If I need to read somethin', I will. Readin' don't mean that much to me. I get bored too fast. I guess I like sports magazines.
Duane	Readin' ain't a guy thing to me! If I need to read to do my assignments, I read. Sometimes, I'll read a sports magazine.
Eric	I love to read because it relaxes me. I use reading for escapism. I live vicariously through the characters. I like adventure.

Three boys, Albert, Benjamin, and Eric, indicated they liked to read and read for

pleasure. The types of reading materials they preferred were action and adventure or sports

books and magazines that allowed them to escape into a make-believe world. The other two

boys, Carlos and Duane, did not read for pleasure, but did read for school. When they did read,

they preferred sports magazines.

Interview question 2. What categories of reading materials do you read (e.g., fiction or

nonfiction, stories set in western or urban settings)?

Each of the boys during their interviews indicated the types of materials they preferred to

read. Their responses were summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

Interview Question 2

Name	Response
Albert	I like stories in urban settings. I like nonfiction or realistic fiction. I don't like Harry Potter. The story has to be believable.
Benjamin	I prefer urban settings to a western one. I don't like fiction. I like nonfiction. I like true stories. Stories where the events really happened.
Carlos	I like nonfiction. I don't like stories like Harry Potter. I like something to be real. I love adventure and action. I read about sports and sports figures. I like urban settings.
Duane	I don't read too much. Sometimes I read about sports. That's all. An urban setting is okay.
Eric	I have read fiction, but I prefer nonfiction. I like an urban setting. I try to read a lot of books because I want to become a lawyer.

Based on the responses from the boys, it appears that the boys like informational reading that has a basis in reality. Albert liked stories set in urban settings and stories that were realistic. He preferred nonfiction to fiction because the stories were more believable. He did not like Harry Potter. Benjamin was in agreement with Albert, indicating that he liked stories with urban settings and nonfiction true stories about events that actually happened. Carlos also preferred nonfiction stories about real events. He indicated that he liked adventure and action stories about real events. He also reported reading about sports and sports figures. Eric was open to both fiction and nonfiction stories, but actually preferred nonfiction. He also stated that he reads a lot of books because he wants to be a lawyer.

The boys generally were in agreement that they preferred nonfiction to fiction. They also liked stories set in urban settings. If they were going to read fiction, they preferred action or adventure stories set in urban areas. Two of the five boys indicated they did not like fantasy fiction, such as Harry Potter. They wanted the stories they read to be believable or about events that really happened. Reading has to be relevant and on a topic to which the boys can relate.

Interview question 3. What length does a story have to be before you consider the story a good read and why do you prefer the length you chose?

The boys were asked about the length of the reading materials they preferred to read. Their responses are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Interview Question 3

Name	Response
Albert	I don't care. I've read stories/books as short as 10 or 20 pages and as long as 50 pages. It's all about the adventure or action to me.
Benjamin	Oh about 20 pages, unless the characters are very interesting, lots of action. Then I can go about 50 pages. I chose 20 pages because mostly books for school are boring.
Carlos	If it's about Hip Hop, about 50 to 100 pages. I chose that number of pages because I want to know all that I can about the Hip Hop culture.
Duane	Two pages! Just kiddin'. I don't know. If it's a sports magazine, I'll finish the article. Most reading material bores me, particularly school books.
Eric	Fifty pages is a good number. Because I don't care how good the story is, I fall asleep.

The boys seemed to prefer stories that were about 20 pages long, although they would read longer stories if the stories or characters were interesting. Albert indicated the length was not as important as the content, with adventure and action being more critical than the number of pages. Benjamin concurred with Albert, but added that books for school were generally boring. Carlos appeared to be interested in reading about Hip Hop, but was not specific about the number of pages that he read in a story. Duane wanted to read articles in sports magazines, stating that most types of reading materials were boring. While Eric indicated that 50 pages were a good length, he found that reading was a good way to fall asleep regardless of the content of the story.

The length of the stories were generally about 20 pages, although most of the boys would read a story about 50 pages long if the stories were interesting, had good characters, or was action or adventure. The boys also were in agreement that books assigned in school or school books were boring.

Question 4. What kind of reading materials do the men in your family read?

The boys' responses to this question were short as most of the boys did not have continuous contact with their fathers or other men in their family. Table 9 presents results of this analysis.

Table 9

Interview Question 4

Name	Response
Albert	My uncles read sports magazines and that takes about 20 minutes.
Benjamin	My grandfather reads the Bible before he goes to bed at night. He reads for about an hour, at least 20 minutes.
Carlos	I'm not around my father to know what or if he reads anything at all.
Duane	My mother's brother comes over to our house, but I've never seen him read nothing.
Eric	When I'm around my father never reads, but I do.

As seen by the boys' responses, the men in their families do not read on a regular basis. Albert indicated that his uncles read sports magazines, while Benjamin's grandfather reads the Bible before going to bed. The other boys were unaware of what their male relatives, including their fathers, read, if they read at all. These responses provided information that the men in their lives were not acting as role models in encouraging the boys to model their behavior in regard to reading for either information or pleasure.

Interview question 5. Can you describe the frequency of the allotted reading time that the boys/men in your family have?

When asked this question, the boys responses were reflective of their nuclear family status. The boys responses are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Interview Question 5

Name	Response
Albert	No, Daddy didn't really read when he was around and my uncles don't come around often enough for me to notice.
Benjamin	Grandpa finds the time every night to read the Bible anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour.
Carlos	No, because my pops is not around. My mother's boyfriend comes over, but he doesn't read anything.
Duane	I can't answer that question because hardly any men come to my house.
Eric	I've never really seen Daddy read anything.

The only boy who has observed a male relative reading is Benjamin who indicated that this grandfather reads the Bible every night. The other boys did not have sufficient contact with any men in their lives to observe them reading. These responses provide additional evidence that for these five boys, adult African American males are not acting as role models in encouraging them to read either for information or for pleasure.

Interview question 6. Do you think it is cool for boys and men to read publicly and why do you think the way that you think?

Each of the boys provided an answer to this question. Their responses are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Interview Question 6

Name	Response
Albert	Yeah, I think it is okay because smart girls like smart boys.
Benjamin	Of course, reading in public is cool. Men need an education too.
Carlos	Well, it's okay to read in public if you're reading something cool – not the Hardy Boys.
Duane	In some circles, reading publicly is okay. It's not as cool as being seen playing basketball.
Eric	How can I become a lawyer and don't want anybody to see me reading? I think it's very cool.

All of the boys thought that reading in public is cool, but for different reasons. Albert considered it cool because he wanted to attract smart girls. Benjamin agreed that reading was cool because men need an education. Carlos thought that reading publicly was cool as long as the reading material was cool (not the Hardy Boys). Duane was less enthusiastic, thinking that being seen playing basketball was more cool than reading. Eric was very focused and stated that reading was very cool because he was intent on becoming a lawyer and lawyers need to be seen reading.

Interview question 7. How important is knowing how to read if you know that men who can read are less likely to serve prison time than those who do not know how to read and what is your rationale for using the response you chose?

The boys responses to this question are provided verbatim in Table 12.

Table 12

Interview Question 7

Name	Response
Albert	Very important because a judge came to our school on career day and told a story how a man got arrested for trespassing on a man's property simply because he could not read and did not know the sign read "no trespassing."
Benjamin	To stay out of prison, I'll do anything. My friend's father is in prison and his family is so sad.
Carlos	My father can't live a decent life because he's always in and out of jail. She [his mother] won't let me use the Jr. in my name because she doesn't want me mistaken for him.
Duane	Well, I hope I don't end up in jail or prison. If knowing how to read will keep me out of prison, then I need to read more.
Eric	I'll read no matter what. I'm not going to prison. A lot of times, the men read a lot when they get to prison. So they should've been reading before they went.

The boys seemed anxious to stay out of prison and if reading was a way to avoid this future, they were willing to read. Albert recalled a judge coming to his school and talking about a man who was arrested because he could not read a sign indicating "no trespassing." This story made an impact on him and he considered reading very important. Benjamin was aware of the effect that having a father in prison has on a family. He indicated that he would do anything to remain out of prison, even read. Carlos' mother was adamant that he could not use Jr. in his name because she did not want him associated with his father who is in prison. He appeared to be willing to read to avoid prison. Duane indicated that if reading would keep him out of prison, then he intended to read more. Eric, the future lawyer, was going to read regardless. He was emphatic that he would not go to prison and even indicated that when men go to prison, they begin to read when they should have been reading before they went to prison.

Informal Interview 1

In talking to the boys informally, they were asked how they handle the reading assignments in schools. Their responses were very interesting. Albert indicated that he was trying to get through the boring books, while Benjamin said that his teacher let him choose a

couple of books that he wanted to read and he liked them. According to Carlos, the teacher had not assigned any reading at the time when the interviews were being conducted. Duane explained that his teacher was on maternity leave and they had new substitute teachers every day who had not given them any reading assignments. Eric indicated that he does whatever the teacher tells him because he works hard at school.

The next topic of discussion was, "Are you reading at home more, if at all?" An interesting side effect of asking the interview question about going to prison was that two of the boys indicated that they were going to read because they could avoid prison later if they read now. Benjamin told his grandfather about the study and how men who cannot read often go to prison. As a result, he and his grandfather now read the Bible together at times. Eric reported that yes he is reading at home because he wants to stop men from going to prison by being a lawyer and he does not want to go to prison. Albert indicated that he was reading about the same and Carlos said no because he did not have any good books at home. He also is expected to help around the house by grocery shopping and doing the yard. He explained that he was too busy to read. Duane indicated that his house was too noisy to read; his baby brother cried all the time and he could not concentrate.

The boys were asked how they felt about writing short stories or becoming a novelist. Their responses were informative as four of the boys were not sure about novels. Albert said that he never gave being a writer much thought. His writing was limited to texting on his mother's phone. He thought that writing a novel would be a lot of work and he did not know if he was able to put that much effort into this task. Benjamin indicated that he wrote short texts and that if he was going to write a novel, he would probably have to read one first and he was not up to that at this time. According to Carlos, he had never thought about writing a short story and questioned what a novel is. He did not want to end up in jail like his father and was willing to read more, but

was sure that he would never write a novel. Duane indicated that his little brothers were so noisy that he could hardly talk on the phone at home. He even said that he can't even talk to himself. He also asked, "What's a novel?" Eric indicated that he would love to write a story or even a book. His grandmother had helped him write a letter to an overseas pen pal last year. He spends time writing poems and reading them to his mother and grandmother. His mother showed him a novella once called *Bridges of Madison County* and they watched the movie together on Lifetime.

Interview Set 2

Interview question 1b: How can teachers, parents, and researchers encourage boys to read recreationally?

The boys' responses to this question are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Interview Question 1b

Name	Response
Albert	If teachers at school would ask us what we want to read, boys I think would read more. We won't pick something stupid!
Benjamin	If I like a book, I'll read it.
Carlos	If the teachers let me choose the books I would probably read more.
Duane	I'd read more if I could choose the books, maybe.
Eric	I read. I prefer to read books I choose to read.

The boys generally were in agreement that they would read more if they were given more input into the selection of books. Albert indicated that he would read more if teachers would ask the students what they wanted to read. He was sure that the students would not pick something stupid. Benjamin indicated he would read a book if he liked it. According to Carlos, he would read more if the teachers would let him choose the books, while Duane in agreeing with Carlos

indicated that if he could choose the books, he would read more. Eric indicated that he reads, but he prefers to read the books he chooses to read. These responses indicate the importance of empowering the boys to choose their own reading materials.

Interview question 2b. How do you feel when girls like you because you are smart and why do you feel that way?

The boys' responses to this question are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Interview Question 2b

Name	Response
Albert	I feel happy because she is pretty.
Benjamin	I feel proud and wished I could take her out.
Carlos	I feel good because the girls are pretty.
Duane	I'm happy because I think that I'm a pretty good catch.
Eric	Boy, I love when a pretty girl smiles at me. It makes me want to read more.

The boys responded positively when asked how they feel when girls like them because they are smart. Albert indicated that he felt happy because the girl was pretty and Benjamin felt proud and wanted to take the girl out. Carlos indicated that he felt good because the girls were pretty. Duane was not shy explaining that he was happy because he thought he was a pretty good catch. Eric stated that he loved it when a pretty girl smiled at him because he was smart. He continued that it made him want to read more.

Interview question 3b. Tell me more about how you would attain the skill of reading to avoid serving time in prison and how you would attain the reading skill.

The boys' responses were summarized for presentation in Table 15.

Table 15

Interview Question 3b

Name	Response
Albert	I just keep reading and I try to read the hard books sometimes.
Benjamin	I'll read every day to stay out of jail.
Carlos	I have to put the Jr. in my name because my dad has been incarcerated, so I'll try to read more.
Duane	As much as I don't like to read, I'll read if it'll keep me from going to jail.
Eric	I'll just keep doing what I'm doing that's all.

The boys appear to be willing to put in the effort to continue reading if they can stay out of jail. For example, Albert indicated that he would not only continue to read, he would also try to read hard books sometimes. Benjamin said that he would read every day to stay out of jail. Carlos indicated he wanted to put the Jr. in his name because his dad has been incarcerated. He also indicated that he would read more. According to Duane, he does not like to read, but he will read if it could keep him out of jail. Eric was going to continue reading because he was reading all of the time. Most of these boys knew a man either in their immediate family or in a friend's family who was incarcerated. They were aware of the effects of jail on the family members and were willing to make the effort to do what was necessary to stay out of jail, including reading on a daily basis.

Informal interview 2.

The boys were asked if they were aware that reading environmental print was reading. Their responses were similar. Albert indicated that he and his brother read traffic signs and billboards when they ride in the car. They make a contest of it and whoever reads the most signs wins. Benjamin said that he and his sisters spot traffic signs and flyers when in the car. Sometimes his father tells them to be quiet because of the noise they make trying to beat each other. Carlos indicated that he likes to read the paint cans at Lowes. Duane was not sure and

asked if they meant stuff like they see on TV and billboards. Eric says he practices words when he sees them outside.

The boys were asked if they ever thought about becoming an editor at a publishing company. Albert was not sure of what that meant and indicated that he did not want to go to jail like Dad. Benjamin also was unsure of what it meant to be an editor and stated that he did not know what he wanted to be when he grew up. He asserted that he had just started liking school. Carlos also had never heard of an editor at a publishing company and stated that he was going to be a Hip Hop artist. Duane was emphatic that he was not going to be an editor, instead he thought he might be a boxer. Eric did not know what an editor was. He remained consistent in his plans to be a lawyer, but indicated that he needed to know about other professions in the world.

Trends that Emerged from the Data

Five trends emerged from the data collected from the five boys. These trends provide support that boys understand the importance of reading, but their reading preferences differed in reasons for reading.

Trend 1: The boys differed in their attitudes for reading for pleasure.

Two boys were generally in agreement that they rarely read for pleasure. They understood the importance of reading and read for school, but rarely read for pleasure. Duane stated that "Readin' ain't a guy thing to me! If I need to read to do my assignments, I read. Sometimes, I'll read a sports magazine." According to Carlos, "If I need to read somethin', I will. Reading don't mean that much to me. I get bored too fast. I guess I like sports magazines". Eric loved to read "because it relaxed him." He indicated that he read to escape and he lived vicariously through the characters because he liked adventure. Albert indicated that he liked action books and sports books. These books made him wish that he was right in the storyline,

experiencing the action and adventure in the books. Duane also commented that he will read if it is a sports magazine, but reading bored him, particularly school books.

Trend 2: Reading is okay if it is the right material.

The length of the story was an important consideration, as was the type of story. The boys wanted to read action and adventure stories or sports stories. They wanted the stories to be set in urban areas as these stories had relevance to the boys. They were living in urban areas and had little interest in reading stories in settings that were foreign to them. They wanted to read about sports, Hip Hop, and action. They could relate to these topics. Science fiction, westerns, and historical novels were not interesting because they had difficulty connecting the characters and topics to their experiences.

Most of the boys preferred reading nonfiction stories as they could relate to the topics better than reading fiction like Harry Potter. Carlos liked reading nonfiction. He wanted the reading to be real, and provide action and adventure. Duane preferred to read about sports when he did read. Benjamin preferred nonfiction stories set in urban areas. He preferred true stories about events that really happened.

The boys universally did not like reading assignments at school. They thought that the teacher should give the students some choice in the reading assignments. They all indicated that they would probably read more if they could choose the reading materials they wanted to read.

Trend 3: Lack of male role models in their lives.

Research has shown that parents who read for pleasure provide their children with positive role models that make them want to read for pleasure. Having a strong, positive male role model who reads for pleasure could help encourage the boys to read. However, the boys generally lacked male role models. Albert's father recently had been incarcerated, and his uncles only read sports magazines. Benjamin talked about his grandfather who read the Bible every

night before bed. He did not discuss his father who was a laborer so it was hard to tell if his father was a strong role model. Carlos was not around his father or other male relatives, therefore providing no men to model. Duane indicated that his mother's brother (uncle) came over occasionally, but he had never seen him reading. Eric's father lived in a different state. While he was in contact with his father, he has never seen his father read. The lack of positive role models who read may have had a negative effect on their interest in reading for pleasure.

Trend 4. Reading can help an African American male stay out of jail.

This trend was apparent throughout the interviews. The boys either had a male relative (father, uncle, or brother) had was either incarcerated at the time of the study or had been at some time. When they were told that men who were readers were less likely to serve prison timel, they all indicated that they were willing to read anything if it could help them stay out of jail. Their comments were very interesting. Albert related that a judge had come to his school on career day and told about a man who was arrested for trespassing because he could not read the sign "no trespassing." According to Benjamin, "to stay out of prison, I'll do anything. My friend's father is in prison and his family is so sad". Carlos said that his father cannot live a decent life because he is always in and out of jail. His mother has tried to sever the ties by not allowing him to use the Jr. in his name because she does not want him mistaken for his father. Duane indicated that he hoped that he would not end up in jail or prison and if knowing how to read can help him stay out of prison than he planned to read more. Eric was going to read because he did not plan to go to prison. He was the one boy who had career plans, wanting to be an attorney. He commented that men in prison read a lot to pass the time. He continued that they should have read before becoming incarcerated. The boys could relate to men going to prison and they wanted to avoid that possibility. They were all willing to read more since they found out that not reading was associated with increased likelihood of serving time in prison.

Trend 5. Encouraging the boys to read more.

The boys wanted to have more control over the materials they were reading for school. Albert, Duane, and Carlos indicated that teachers should ask the students what they want to read. He thought that boys would read more if they could choose their own reading. He assured the researcher that he would not pick stupid reading materials. According to Benjamin, he reads books that he likes, with Eric indicating he preferred to read the books that he chose. Children need to be empowered to choose their own reading materials, instead of always being told what to read. The boys had specific preferences for what they wanted to read. While they did not name books specifically, they did indicate the genre that they preferred. For example, sports magazines and books about sport figures were popular among all of the boys. They all liked to read action and adventure books, especially if they were set in urban areas. They did not like to read fantasy (e.g., Harry Potter) or westerns as these books had no relevance to their lives. The length of the reading materials also may have been a factor in the types of reading materials they preferred. Short stories usually less than 20 pages was optimal, although the boys indicated they would read longer books and stories if they were interesting.

Summary

After meeting the five boys at the recreation center and talking to them about reading, the research gave clarity as to why boys read and why they do not read. According to their responses, they want more control over the reading materials that they read. They want stories set in urban areas, depict realistic situations, use action and adventure in telling the story. The boys also liked sports stories and sports magazines. The research revealed that most of the boys were in families that had few male role models and those males in their lives generally did not read around them. The boys were also aware of family members or had friends whose family members were incarcerated. When told that men who read rarely went to jail, they were

vehement in their responses indicating that they would do anything to not become incarcerated, even if it meant they would have to read every day and read materials in which they were not interested. One boy was very goal directed and knew what he wanted to be when he grew up and how important reading was to achieving this goal. A discussion of the findings from the interviews and observations along with recommendations for teachers and further research is presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if specific factors could be identified that are contributing to fourth grade failure among African American male students. The focus of inquiry for this research project was guided by the following questions:

1. How do African American 10 to 12 year old males circumvent Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome (FGFS)?

2. Do reading materials of the boys' interests motivate African American males to read more?

3. How will African American males respond to their school districts' required reading material as opposed to reading materials that reflect their own interests?

Acceptance of one's self and others is the foundation of any learning process. The human aspect or quality is present regardless of the endeavor. Each individual is dependent on his/her environment to spell it out, act it out, or as Vygotsky would say, "mediate." Significant others in the environment tell us and show us how to behave, what to think, and what to become.

African American males can benefit enormously from interactional approaches being implemented in the classroom. According to the U.S. Department of Education, African American children are failing to meet literacy standards at state and national levels. Hale (2002), in her book *Learning While Black*, asserted that the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment revealed that the educational gap continued to widen for minority and disadvantaged children when compared to their nonminority peers. She reported that results for three fourth grade ethnic groups indicated that the majority of African American students

(69%) and Hispanic students (64%) scored below the "basic" level in reading compared to 29% of Caucasian students.

Educators need to provide the appropriate literacy experiences to students who are beginning school. According to Reid (1984), teachers can make important differences in students' reading achievement, logical thinking, and writing through the use of best practices. Children who practice literacy skills can develop a skill that can help them achieve success throughout their school career. The other core academic disciplines (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies, art, and music) are dependent on developing literacy skills (e.g., reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Poor readers encounter negative consequences, both academically and socially. Cunningham, Defee, and Hall (1991) found that the poorest readers in a first grade class were less likely to become friends with other classmates when compared with good readers.

The African American male is not an exception to this situation. What he needs is a classroom environment designed specifically with him in mind. Research has revealed that black and brown boys view reading as an effeminate behavior. Other reasons for their reluctance include a lack of interest in reading or a paucity of readers or reading material of any kind in their homes and communities.

African American males are failing at an alarming rate in urban U.S. schools. According to Edelman (2008), "the pathway that starts at birth and ends in prison for African American men--the cradle to prison pipeline--must end." Holland (1990) asserted that "African American boys have limited African American adult male role models that value scholastic achievement. There are too few positive adult male role models in their young lives – school and home" (p. 8).

According to Boothe (2007), African American male children enter life with little chance for success. African American boys have a 1 in 13 chance of going to prison at least once before dying; a 1 in 3 chance of becoming a felon; a 1 in 7 chance of never graduating from high

school; a 1 in 6 chance of graduating from college; and a 50:50 chance of becoming a drug abuser. African American male adolescents are 46 times more likely to be sent to a juvenile detention facility than Caucasian adolescents. According to Noguera (2002), African American males encounter hardships in society that are related to their educational attainment.

The U. S. Department of Education (DOE) examined test scores of all school districts nationally. According to Hale (personal communication, June 18, 2009), the DOE determines the number of African American males who fail the reading section of the test in third grade and use that figure to estimate the number of prisons to build.

Fourth grade is the year that many African American male students begin experiencing failure. The curriculum in fourth grade becomes more focused, with students expected to complete high-stakes standardized tests, teachers become more distant, and students are expected to become independent learners. Many African American male students are not ready for this transition. They may lack the reading skills needed to understand text books for social studies and science, and are deficient in regard to the math skills needed for problem solving. Understanding which factors are contributing to African American male student failure is important, especially in determining if these factors are consistent across the population or are specific to the student.

Methods

This qualitative research study used an ethnographic research design. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) stated that "The emphasis in ethnographic research is on documenting or portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others . . ." (p. 12).

Four of the five African American boys who had completed fourth grade successfully were included in the study. One boy was in fourth grade. After obtaining signed consent from their

parents, the five boys were formally interviewed twice and informally interviewed twice. A structured interview format was used to assure that all of the boys answered the same questions.

Description of the Boys

The five boys, Albert, Benjamin, Carlos, Duane, and Eric, who participated in the study ranged in age from 10 to 12 years of age. The grade levels of the boys were fourth (n = 1), fifth (n = 2), and sixth (n = 2). Albert lived with his mother and his father was incarcerated. Benjamin lived with his mother and father. Carlos was living with his mother and maternal grandmother. His father was in trouble with the law. While Carlos was a Jr., his mother would not let him use this title because she did not want him to be identified with his father. Duane was living with his single mother and two younger brothers. Eric lived with his mother and maternal grandmother. His father who was a presence in his life, lived in another state. The boys were all above average students, with Albert indicating he got all As on his report card and Benjamin reported As and Bs as his typical grade. Carlos received As in mathematics, Cs in science, and Bs in his other classes. Duane was an all B student, while Eric indicated he got mostly As with a B in mathematics and a C in science.

Each boy was formally interviewed twice separately. Their responses were terse and to the point. It was difficult to get them to answer beyond the question. Each interview question is presented in Chapter 4. The survey results were summarized to provide a feeling about each question. In this section, the interview items are used to address the research questions.

Research question 1. How do African American 10 to 12 year old males circumvent Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome (FGFS)?

While not addressed directly, the responses to the five boys in the study indicated that they were good students who came from stable home environments. Only one boy, Benjamin, was living with both his mother and father. In addition, his grandparents also lived with them.

Most of the boys did not have consistent family backgrounds or male role models in their lives, however, they were able to succeed in school. Their grades generally were above average. Four of the boys read what they had to for school, but found the reading assignments boring, with Eric indicating that he was already planning to be a lawyer and understood that reading was an important component in meeting his goal. The boys also realized that reading had its extrinsic rewards beyond good grades. They understood that if they read, they could stay out of jail as adults. As most of the boys either had a father who was incarcerated or had a friend whose father was in prison, they were aware of the stigma and problems associated with being in jail. Based on the boys' responses to the interview questions, three main elements were associated with circumventing fourth grade failure: being good students, having a stable home life, and understanding that reading was important to achieving success in the future and staying out of trouble as adults.

Research question 2. Do reading materials of the boys' interests motivate African American males to read more?

The boys were in agreement that the reading assignments given in school were not what they wanted to read. All of the boys wanted to read about topics that had relevance to them. They wanted the stories to be set in urban areas and be action and adventure oriented. They all enjoyed reading about sports because they could relate to these types of stories. They were not interested in history or stories to which they could not relate. Eric, the boy who wanted to be a lawyer, was open to reading anything because he felt that he would benefit from everything that he could learn. The boys read their assignments even if they did not find them interesting because they wanted to get good grades. However, pleasure reading generally was limited to sports or action and adventure stories.

Research question 3. How will African American males respond to their school districts'
required reading material as opposed to reading materials that reflect their own interests?

The boys read their assignments even if they did not find them interesting because they
wanted to get good grades. However, pleasure reading generally was limited to sports or action
and adventure stories. Some of the boys indicated that they read only for school and did not read
for their own enjoyment.

Discussion

Talking with the five boys was very enlightening. First, interviewing boys from 10 to 12
years of age was somewhat daunting. The boys, while interested in participating in research,
answered the questions in a short response and did not provide any details. Their answers were
short and to the point. They did not add to their responses or make conversation about reading
beyond answering the questions.

The African American boys' responses regarding their perceptions of reading provided
no great surprises. The five boys were in agreement that reading was germane to their lifestyles
and interests. Urban versus western, action versus passive, were stories of choice for all five
boys. What the research revealed that was unexpected was the comment made by one of the boys
that "smart girls like smart boys." This motivation alone could provide motivation for reading
programs in schools across the country. Students of both genders and all races at certain ages are
interested in attracting one another.

The boys were workers, doing all of their classwork and homework assignments
immediately. Their mothers insisted on good report cards. One boy commented about Bill
Whitaker's news report on CBS Evening News program about forming a "nerd herd" like the
African American boys did in a southern Los Angeles high school. He was surprised to learn that
12% of African American males can read on grade level or above in fourth grade compared to

38% of Caucasian males. By the time this same group reaches eighth grade, only 9.7% of African American males can read at or above grade level, while 33% of Caucasian males are reading at or above grade level. Two boys had watched both male and female students in fourth grade who were overwhelmed by the fourth grade work because they were struggling readers. Each boy indicated that his success in fourth grade was due to tenacity, parent involvement, and the ability to read.

Reading materials that meet the boys' interests appear to motivate them to read. They wanted to read books situated in urban settings, had lots of action, and were realistic. They placed emphasis on how the story could be something where they could see themselves involved in the action. The boys said they liked a story that emphasized morals. The length of a story was not of importance as long as it had a good amount of action.

Each boy asserted that the assigned books were boring, and books from school often had pages missing. However, sometimes they were allowed to read books of their own choosing if they were grade appropriate. Three boys indicated that they hurried through the books they did not like, but they did read them. One boy reported that his teacher allowed the students to debate the issues of assigned books, so he read the books carefully to participate in the class discussion.

The study provided confirmation on reading among African American males. The African American male is precocious, street savvy, and critical. His masculinity is very important to him from early in his life. He struggles with the tenets of manhood daily and his perceptions of the rites of passage are somewhat skewed. He recognizes that many of the males in his life have been or currently are incarcerated. He also has few male role models that provide support regarding the importance of reading in becoming a high achiever at various levels of their educational career and making a successful transition into adulthood.

Based on the boys' comments about reading, evidence exists that reading programs need to be designed to incorporate African American males' interests. By making a shift from traditional reading materials to ones that can stimulate boys to read for information and pleasure can result in improved academic outcomes.

Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers need to listen to their students. They need to be more aware of the interests of their students when making reading assignments. One boy in the study liked that his teacher allowed the students to have discussions on their reading assignments. Perhaps these discussions could be a method that would encourage all students in the class to read. The teacher might ask the students to choose the reading materials they would like to debate.

Teachers might want to make reading materials available for students to take home. Many children do not have books or magazines at home. The boys also indicated that some of the books that have been assigned to them have pages missing. Asking parents to donate books could be one way to obtain more books that students could take home to read.

Teachers could also encourage students to visit the library to take out books that they could read for pleasure. The students might want to talk about the books or magazines they have read to their classmates. The dialogue among the students could encourage other students to read as enthusiasm for an action and adventure story could be contagious.

Limitations of the Study

The present study used a qualitative research design to examine African American male students ability to avoid the fourth grade failure syndrome. One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size. The findings cannot be generalized beyond the five boys included in the study. Another limitation is the use of children from an urban school district. The findings may be representative of African American boys attending suburban or private schools.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations should be considered for further research on this important topic:

- Use a quantitative research design to examine a larger group of African American boys' perceptions of reading. An instrument built on the findings of this research could be used to determine why African American boys are not reading and why they are having difficulty in fourth grade.

- Compare African American boys and girls perceptions of reading and its importance for school success.

- Examine the role of parent involvement in academic success for African American boys and girls. Use a survey to determine if parents are reading with their children and how they encourage reading for pleasure as well as for knowledge.

- Use a longitudinal study to examine children's growth in reading. Starting at prekindergarten, children should be followed throughout elementary school and middle school to determine where interest in reading wanes and academic outcomes change.

Thoughts to Ponder

Will the African American male embrace reading for pleasure, as well as for information? Will he find his niche in American society and ultimately, the world?

With the exception of Egypt and her pharaohs, little that is worthwhile has been attributed to the black man. Carter G. Woodson (2008) depicted the African American man's plight quite candidly, when he coined the phrase, "From pharaoh to Negro." The black man has contributed much to the world in fields of medicine, mathematics, engineering, agriculture, and philosophy.

President Barack Obama, on the shoulders of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, Malcom X, Abraham Lincoln, and countless others, has provided a ray of hope to African American male children, as well as children around the world. To be able to visualize a man of color ruling the greatest nation of the free world bears witness to the fact that a great education is a rite of passage for all people. President Obama portrays the ultimate masculine role model, providing for his family and his country. Education is the conduit to the American Dream, and no level of education will ever be attained without a firm grasp on the ability to read.

Educators must make reading more palatable to the student population as a whole, and especially to the African American male. The literature is replete with information apprising educators as to what alienates boys and what engages them. Now is the time to incorporate strategies in the curriculum that can target and remediate their concerns. African American males are not the only students who can benefit from this paradigmatic shift. The educators must change their mindset and recognize that students possibly have as much to teach teachers about how to educate children, as teachers have to teach them.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

In the initial interview the boys responded to the seven questions as follows:

1. Describe the various types of reading materials that you enjoy reading and why do you enjoy reading those types of reading materials?

2. What categories of reading material do you read (e.g., fiction or nonfiction, stories set in western or urban settings)?

3. What length does a story have to be before you consider the story to be a good read and why do you prefer the length you chose?

4. What kind of reading materials do the men in your family read?

5. Can you describe the frequency of the allotted reading time that the boys/men in your family have?

6. Do you think it is cool for boys and men to read publicly and why do you think the way that you think?

7. How important is knowing how to read if you know that men who can read are less likely to serve prison time than those who do not know how to read and what is your rationale for using the response you chose?

APPENDIX B

Sample Transcript

Albert

1. Describe the various types of reading materials that you enjoy reading and why do you enjoy reading those types of reading materials?

   I like action books and books about sports. I like those books because they make me wish I was there – right there in the storyline.

2. What categories of reading material do you read (e.g., fiction or nonfiction, stories set in western or urban settings)?

   I like stories in urban settings. I like nonfiction or realistic fiction. I don't like Harry Potter. The story has to be believable.

3. What length does a story have to be before you consider the story a good read and why do you prefer the length you chose?

   I don't care. I've read stories/books as short as ten or twenty pages and as long as fifty pages. It's all about the adventure or action to me.

4. What kind of reading materials do the men in your family read?
   My uncles read sports magazines and that take about twenty minutes.

5. Can you describe the frequency of the allotted reading time that the boys/men in your family have?

   No, Daddy didn't really read when he was around and my uncles don't come around often enough for me to notice.

6. Do you think it is cool for boys and men to read publicly and why do you think the way that you think?

   Yeah I think it's okay because smart girls like smart boys.

7. How important is knowing how to read if you know that men who can read are less likely to serve prison time than those who do not know how to read and what is your rationale for using the response you chose?

   Very important because a judge came to our school on career day and told a story how a man got arrested for trespassing on a man's property simply because he could not read and did not know the sign read 'no trespassing.'

APPENDIX C

Human Investigation Committee Approval

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

HUMAN INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE
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Detroit, Michigan 48201
Phone: (313) 577-1628
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NOTICE OF EXPEDITED APPROVAL

To: Phyllis Stallings
College of Education

From: Dr. Scott Millis
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

Date: October 29, 2010

RE: HIC #: 102210B3E

Protocol Title: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study on African American Males' Perceptions of Reading

Funding Source:

Protocol #: 1010002881

Expiration Date: October 28, 2011

Risk Level / Category: 45 CFR 46.404 – Research not involving greater than minimal risk

The above-referenced protocol and items listed below (if applicable) were **APPROVED** following *Expedited Review* Category (#7)* by the Chairperson/designee for the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (B3) for the period of 10/29/2010 through 10/28/2011. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required.

- Oral Assent Form (dated 10/22/10)
- Revised Parental Research Information Sheet (dated 10/18/10)
- Coleman A. Young Recreation Center Letter of Support (dated September 28, 2010)

* Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. You may receive a "Continuation Renewal Reminder" approximately two months prior to the expiration date; however, it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. Data collected during a period of lapsed approval is unapproved research and can never be reported or published as research data.

* All changes or amendments to the above-referenced protocol require review and approval by the HIC BEFORE implementation.

* Adverse Reactions/Unexpected Events (AR/UE) must be submitted on the appropriate form within the timeframe specified in the HIC Policy (http://www.hic.wayne.edu/hicpol.html).

NOTE:

1. Upon notification of an impending regulatory site visit, hold notification and/or external audit, the HIC office must be contacted immediately.
2. Forms should be downloaded from the HIC website at each use.

*Based on the Expedited Review List revised November 1998

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS OF READING

by

PHYLLIS MARIE STALLINGS

May 2011

Advisor: Dr. Gerald Oglan

Major: Curriculum and Instruction

Degree: Doctor of Education

African American male students begin experiencing failure when they enter fourth grade. At this grade, the curriculum becomes more focused, students are expected to complete high-stakes standardized tests, teachers become more distant, and students are expected to become independent learners. Many African American male students are not ready for this transformation. They may not have developed the reading skills needed to understand text books for social studies and science, and are deficient in regard to the math skills needed for problem solving. Understanding which factors are contributing to African American male student failure is important, especially in determining if these factors are consistent across the population or are specific to the student.

An ethnographic qualitative study was used to determine how African American male children could avoid the fourth grade failure syndrome. Five African American males who were from 10 to 12 years of age participated in four interviews. They were asked the same set of questions to determine what types of reading materials they

preferred, male role models in their lives that could be encouraging them to read, and reasons why they read.

The boys preferred reading action and adventure stories set in urban areas. They also like to read about sports. These topics had relevance to their lives. They felt that the teachers' assignments were not interesting, but they read them as part of their school work. The boys generally did not read for pleasure, but understood the importance of reading for the future and to stay out of jail.

Based on the findings of this study, it appears that having a family who encourages academic success is necessary for African American boys to succeed in school and avoid fourth grade failure. The parents of the five boys were actively involved in their sons' education. One of the boys was already focused on becoming an attorney and as a result was willing to read anything necessary to attain this goal. Teachers need to be aware of what the boys want to read to encourage them to read for pleasure.

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