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An Exploration Of The Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy And Locus Of Control Of Urban Students With Learning Disabilities

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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERCEIVED ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY AND
LOCUS OF CONTROL OF URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES**

by

OLUKAYODE ABIMBOLA NUGA

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2013

MAJOR: SPECIAL EDUCATION

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

To:

J. Ayo Nuga (aka Dad)

&

F. Kofoworola Nuga (nee Ipaye), (aka Mom)

- Oh! And the last time I checked, still the greatest mother of all time -

(my very first teachers and both of blessed memory);

Not to forget

Folurin & Obaf

Both of whom are currently bringing up the rear

This dissertation

is

gratefully dedicated.

“If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” – W.I. Thomas (1863-1947).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many years ago, as a young military psychologist and Lieutenant in the Nigerian Air Force, I had the singular opportunity to go abroad to Britain for an in-service doctorate degree in psychology. At the instance of my wife who was not particularly excited at the idea of leaving her alone with the little children, I thought it was a wiser idea to relegate my personal desire to the back burner.

And now, almost four decades later, that burner has regained its front position. Those “little kids” who were the cause of deferring the program at the time have been a great source of inspiration to me as I set out on this project. So, here’s my big “thank you” to That lil’ Boy aka Ore Or; Poor Lil’ Lol’; Poor Lil’ Tiri and the baby of the family, The Pew herself!

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Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you are right - *Henry Ford*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Enmeshed as it is in a history of slavery, institutionalized segregation and racial discrimination, the cultural past of African Americans has shaped and continues to shape their present realities and experiences while, at the same time, exerting palpable influences on their future. As a result, African Americans, who constitute one of the largest minorities in the country today (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010), are beginning to move out of the large urban areas into surrounding suburbs. Nevertheless, the urban environment, with which they have been identified for so long, still provides the context in which a large proportion of African American students lives and pursues their academic goals. Cities, such as Detroit, continue to experience extreme poverty and infrastructural dilapidation, with the percentage of people living in high poverty areas increasing from 11.2% in 2000 to 15.1% in 2010 (Levister, 2011).

What is an Urban Area?

The U. S. Census Bureau (2001) has defined an urban area as all territory, population, and housing units located within an urban cluster that consists of blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile, with surrounding blocks of overall density of at least 500 people per square mile. Although as an ethnic group, African Americans are not the sole inhabitants of large urban areas of the country; however, they constitute one of the largest of any ethnic group to be found there. Crosby (1999), in an appraisal of the multiple, extra-academic roles that urban schools are forced to play, described the urban areas as inhabited by minorities, economically disadvantaged, predominantly African American and, to a lesser degree, non-English speaking immigrants.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force on Urban Psychology (2005), the urban community presents the image of “concentrated poverty—neighborhoods composed of the poorest poor—and typically, minority poor”. Some other scholars have described it as representing a “cultural trauma” – the traumatic loss of identity and meaning – that has shaped African Americans’ perceptions of themselves, as well as their perceptions by others (Akhar, 2006; Woodson, 2006). As a result, living in an urban area has put them far below other ethnic groups in terms of their contributions to society. Wyatt (2000) has surveyed the literature on Black males in urban centers in the country and came to the conclusion that the development of Black males has been influenced by racism, socioeconomic status, and oppression. Furthermore, scholarly literature has indicated that African Americans living in urban centers have a definite perception of their present day ecology. Thus, they define this ecology by a myriad of psychosocial challenges that include: violence, male aggression, suicide, psychiatric symptoms, chronic health disorders, mental retardation, illicit substance use, absent fathers, teen pregnancy, youth incarceration (Baumeister, Kupstas, & Klindworth, 1990), high unemployment rates, limited cognitive growth (Rumberger, 1987), substandard housing, deteriorating neighborhoods, chronic crime, and inadequate health facilities (Bowman, 1989).

Other researchers (Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle, & Williams, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) have described this kind of environment as one consisting of a high level of “neighborhood disorder”. Neighborhood disorder, according to Copeland-Linder, Lambert, Chen, & Ialongo (2011), is “the degree to which neighborhoods are characterized by such incivilities as crime, danger, drug use, and abandoned and poorly maintained buildings.” Ross and Mirowsky (1999) asserted that neighborhood disorder is associated with the lack of social controls and poor social organization.

The U. S. Department of Justice (2009) indicated that this environment is plagued with greater numbers of violent crimes, sexual assault, robbery, and theft than the suburban or rural parts of the country. Brouillette (1999) surveyed 10 inner city high schools and reported that 20% of students had experienced direct violence (e.g., being shot at, stabbed or being hurt with a weapon) at school, on the way to school, or on the way home from school. Coinciding with this rate of violent crimes is the incidence of traumatization. Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1998) found that between 50% and 96% of urban children have witnessed a violent crime in their lives. Such exposure to violent crimes represents a major challenge that adolescents must overcome to survive and succeed academically as these observations can be traumatic, with multiple exposures or even frequent discussions of similar scenes putting the child at risk for desensitization towards violence that may reinforce children's tendency or inclination toward similar behavior. According to Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1998), some students who have been exposed to violence may encounter problems with academic performance at school.

The Influence of the Urban Environment

Researchers (Curry & Spergel, 1992; Gill, 1992; Gray-Ray & Ray, 1990; Mincy, 1994; Ogbu & Wilson, 1990; Wyatt, 2000) have also documented the fact that as a result of continuous exposure to the contextual stressors of a disadvantaged environment, urban black youth may respond by engaging in antisocial behaviors that have been negatively linked with academic competence. They believe that as a consequence, urban youth are more likely to be involved in illegal use of drugs, early sexual activities, criminal behavior, and poorer academic performance than their non-urban counterparts. In addition, Colder et al. (2000) found that frequent exposures to violence in the urban environment were linked to positive beliefs regarding the effectiveness of aggression, which in turn can only result in increased aggression. He found that among Black adolescents, violence and substance abuse rank as issues of major concern.

Also, African American students were found to be one or more times more likely to be engaged in a physical fight in the 12 months before a Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention in 2007. The survey was intended to measure behaviors resulting in intentional, as well as unintentional injury to the youth. The YRBS measured behaviors associated with intentional and unintentional injury; use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs; sexual activity; diet; and exercise. In addition, the CDC (2006) findings indicated that homicide remained the leading cause of death among African American adolescents from 10-19 years of age.

Other scholars have been quick to point out that the reasons for these behaviors are not really so much the consequence of an impoverished environment as they are the product of the media and the approach of the scholars. The scholars maintained that both of these factors tend to focus on the negative elements of the urban environment. Although some other scholars refer to these behaviors as deviant and maladaptive, these scholars counter by saying that this view of the African American is skewed since it focuses only on a small proportion of the population. It also ignores the larger population whose positive behaviors go unnoticed and unannounced and who are relatively under-researched. Gordon (1997) agreed that the focus of scholarly literature is on a minority of African American males to whom the negative picture belongs, with concerns regarding age, class, gender, and geographic differences being largely ignored. Spencer, Swanson, and Cunningham (1991) have suggested that this view is distorted and unbalanced and has influenced “the types of research questions pursued, the specific scientific studies conducted, the interpretation of empirical data made, and the policies initiated from research findings”.

But Gordon (1995) considered the negative descriptions of Black males as an artificial or, at best, manufactured problem. Referring to them, he asserted that while some African American males are in trouble, the general status of the African American male cannot be construed as

universal failure. When properly situated in context, said Swanson (1994), these negative, maladaptive behavior patterns could be seen as coping responses or “strategic adaptation.” Furthermore, Swanson stated that all the maladaptive behaviors attributed to the Blacks are skewed as the full range of behaviors attributable to them is often ignored. She also observed that positive and adaptive behaviors that characterize the majority of African American males often go unreported because of their lack of news appeal.

Nevertheless, it can safely be surmised that the low socio-economic, inner-city neighborhoods and schools that constitute the environment of the urban African American student remains daunting, challenging, and replete with opportunities that promote a wide array of deviant, undesirable or pathological behaviors inimical to high academic performance. More importantly, however, even African American adolescents themselves rate their own environment as more violent and more threatening than adolescents of other racial groups, even when allowances have been made for socioeconomic status (Aneshensel & Sucoff, 1996).

The urban environment in which most of these African American students - with and without disabilities - are to be found does influence their academic behavior negatively. This is further buttressed by a study of sources of academic motivation of middle school students who live and attend school in urban areas of this country. In the study, the students characterized their neighborhoods as low income, with negative social support, and negative role models. They further indicated that these factors interfered with their development because they acted as barriers to their academic performance at school (Jackson & Nutini, 2002). A study by Miller, Wasserman, Neugebauer, Gordon-Smith and Kamboukos (1999) of predominantly African-American and Hispanic youth found that 35% of them had witnessed a stabbing, 33% said they had seen someone get shot, while 23% had seen someone lying dead in the neighborhood. These

are conditions which, according to House (2005), “create a negative synergy that can relegate students to the ash heap”.

Other studies confirm that the background characteristics of African American adolescent males have the potential of putting them at increased risk for low educational achievement as well as inability to succeed at school (Bemak, 2002; Bemak & Chung, 2003; Dryfoos, 1994, 1998; Jagers & Mock, 1993; Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997).

In sum, we note that urban students with disabilities grow up in neighborhoods that are considered disadvantaged because of poverty, high unemployment, under-employment, teenage pregnancies, absent fathers, lack of resources, poor housing, homicides and high crime rates (Attar, Guerra, and Tolan, 1994). We also note that this kind of environment is of such a psychologically stressful nature that they interfere with important developmental tasks including the ability to learn and succeed academically (Gonzales et al., 1996; Halpern, 1990); Tolan et al., 1997).

Aneshensel and Sucoff (1996) found that the more threatening the neighborhood, the more the youth are likely to develop behavioral, anti-social, as well as mental health symptoms. This study is concerned with students whose disadvantages in an academic environment as a result of their being learning disabled are further exacerbated by the socio-pathologies of the environment in which they live.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of academic underachievement by inner-city African American students has held the interest of scholars and stakeholders for quite a while. It has also been the focus of studies of some major organizations with strong academic performance orientations. (College Board, 1999a, 1999b; Education Trust, 1998; House & Martin, 1998).

While these studies and concerns have focused on the performance deficits of urban African American students by comparing them with their white counterparts, this study takes an approach consistent with that of the emerging field of developmental psychology known as positive youth development (PYD). This is a perspective based on the developmental systems approach and the potential plasticity of the development of the adolescent as a consequence of the mutual relationship between the developing organism and the multiple levels of the ecology within which the organism is nestled.

The PYD perspective is strength-based, being concerned more with the strengths and positive experience of the adolescent rather than with their weaknesses. Thus, consistent with this perspective, the focus of the study is on the students' positive attributes rather than their deficits, on the student's strength rather than the weaknesses, on what works with African American students' academic achievement rather than on the problems and dysfunctions. This approach represents a paradigmatic shift, one that is at once as empowering as it is life-fulfilling in comparison to the traditional deficit paradigm that merely compares one group of students with another of different circumstances. The result is that one group must end up feeling disempowered, inadequate and humiliated. When youth are involved in a reprehensible act, therefore, PYD sees this as only one in a series of activities that may include very positive and admirable ones. And by drawing attention to the positive and desirable actions and experience, we increase the likelihood of it being repeated.

What this means therefore is that, from the perspective of PYD, youth are not necessarily the victims of psychosocial forces, nor do they need repair, neither are they problems to be managed (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Rather, all youth are seen as resources to be developed (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a, b).

In sum, the statement of the problem therefore represents an attempt to present the approach to this study in a manner consistent with the perspective of positive youth development.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of perceived self-efficacy and locus of control on the academic achievement of urban African American students with learning disabilities to understand how these variables affect the academic performance of urban African American students.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their academic self-efficacy?
2. Is there a difference between the perceived academic self-efficacy of these students and that of their counterparts in general education?
3. How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their responsibility for their own academic achievement?
4. Is there a difference in the perceived responsibility for academic achievement of these students with learning disabilities and that of their counterparts in general education?

Significance of the Study

Although extant studies show the urban student to be at risk for a number of factors, the role of self-efficacy or locus of control beliefs in coping with these elements of their environment has not received much scholarly attention. While some studies have directly investigated the effect of self-efficacy or locus of control on students in general, there is a

paucity of literature with a focus on the urban African American students with learning disabilities. This study intends to fill this gap in the literature.

The study will contribute to the study of student academic achievement through an emerging approach in developmental psychology known as positive youth development. This is an approach whose focus is not so much on the individual's deficits or negative behavior as it is on what works to enhance human development, self-fulfillment and, ultimately, human happiness. This approach may well produce the insight needed for what has hitherto been an intractable situation.

The study may contribute to policy formulation with regard to African American student academic achievement. It will also help in policy implementation to the degree that it will then offer much needed data capable of driving curriculum as well as providing resources for decision-making by all the stakeholders in student academic performance.

The study will also contribute to the insight related to the solution to the problem of academic underachievement that characterizes at-risk, low socio-economic, urban Black youth. This study is important because educators can begin to develop strategies by which academic performance of urban, low income, at-risk African American students with learning disabilities can be improved. Improving these students' academic performance can help reduce the academic achievement gap between them and students in general education classes. As a result, their self-efficacy will be enhanced and they will develop a more internal locus of control orientation. All of this can only result in student empowerment not only of the urban student with learning difficulties but of all students across the board as well.

In deciding upon the method of study, this researcher has decided to make a direct appeal to the very students themselves in recognition of the fact that the best method for obtaining what meaning the academic experience holds for the student can only be to elicit the information from

the students themselves. This is the more so considering the fact that the beliefs of the target population of this study have not been sought after as much as they should be. In her study of the perceptions of students with disabilities, Deinhart (2008) showed a preference for the voice of these students as her source of primary data in her own study. As one labeled as learning disabled herself, she came to realize that studies about students with disabilities obtained data from everybody but the people they are supposed to study. A similar orientation informed the use of this direct approach by other scholars (Beteta, 2009; Getzel & Thomas, 2006; Miller, 2008; Wong, 2008; Yates, 2009), whereas this conspicuous absence of the voice or perspectives of the youth in the media, in adolescent discourse or scholarly studies systematically marginalizes and disempowers them (Checkoway et al., 2003; Fine et al., 2003; Zimmerman et al, 2004). This method of study, therefore, is significant in that it restores relevance and due dignity to these students in place of neglect. It is also empowering in that these students come to understand that their opinions do matter after all and that they are, at least for the moment, in control of the situation.

Finally, this study has the capacity to advance this university's efforts towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In his landmark work on CSR, Bowen (1953) asked the question: "What responsibilities to society may businesses reasonably be expected to assume?" He then went on to answer his own question by saying business organizations have obligations "to pursue those policies, to make those decisions or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society." Ten years later, McGuire further clarified this position by saying that the idea of CSR "supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations, but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations." Davis (1960) said CSR refers to the decisions and actions of the organization "taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firms' direct or technical interest." The concept is

succinctly put by Drucker (1984) who adroitly said of CSR, it is “the compatibility of profitability and responsibility.”

Because this university is located in the urban mid-west of the United States - an area that is predominantly African American - this study, which aims to examine urban African American students’ academic behavior, can therefore be seen as advancing, alongside its profit motive, that compatibility with responsibility that the university owes to that society in which it finds itself. As a matter of fact, figures obtained from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (2012), show that in the past two years alone, of all the 531 doctoral dissertations approved by this University, only 44 (less than 10%) had, as their subject matter, anything related to African Americans.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations are acknowledged for this study:

- The study will be limited to African American students with learning disabilities who are attending school in urban areas. The findings may not be generalizable to African American students with disabilities in suburban or rural areas or to African American students in general education classes.
- The study is limited to high school students. The findings may not be relevant to students in elementary or middle school.

Definition of Terms

Students with learning disabilities: Students meeting one or more classifications as set forth in federal legislation establishing special education, to wit: The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990, PL 101-476. Although there are 13 categories subsumed under the Act, this study is, however, concerned only with those students classified as learning disabled.

- Positive Youth Development:** A strength-based approach to the study of the adolescent derived from the developmental systems theory. This approach is said to emerge “when the potential plasticity of human development is aligned with developmental assets” of the individual (Lerner et al. 2005).
- Self-efficacy:** Perceived self-efficacy refers to “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1991, p. 257).
- Locus of Control:** The extent to which people differ in the way they view rewards, punishments, or other events in their lives as caused by their own actions or by factors beyond their control.
- Internal Locus of Control:** A personality trait that describes the extent to which an individual views rewards, punishments or other events in their lives as being caused by their own actions.
- External Locus of Control:** A personality trait that describes the extent to which an individual views rewards, punishments or other events in their lives as being caused by the actions of other people or of capricious factors beyond their control such as luck.
- Achievement gap:** The disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates

among other success measures. (Corwin Common Institute, Oct 18-19, 2012)

Status dropout rate:

The percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential. (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

This review of literature provides both an empirical and a theoretical basis for this study. This chapter aims to provide a critical review of literature of ideas and concepts pertaining to the self-efficacy and the locus of control (LOC) orientation of African American students particularly the urban, at-risk student with disabilities. Because the literature regarding this category of students is limited, much of the review relates to the urban African American student in general of which students with disabilities are an integral part. The study looks at both concepts in terms of academic achievement and since education is, in itself, a social process, the chapter reviews major factors that influence students' academic achievement within the context of the community, the family, the school and, most importantly, the student himself or herself.

Academic Achievement

The issue of academic achievement among African American students with and without disabilities is one that has received the attention of scholars and stakeholders in the educational system alike. In the process, the level of academic achievement of these students came to be compared with that of their typical colleagues in the educational system. In so doing, the issue became a matter of great concern to all stakeholders in education. This concern was highlighted by the revelation of a disparity in the academic achievement between minority students (i.e. African American and Hispanic students) on the one hand, and their Caucasian and Asian counterparts on the other. McWhorter (2000) observed that, "Almost 40 years after the Civil Rights Act, African American students, on average, record the poorest academic performance of any major racial or ethnic group in the United States, at all ages, in all subjects, regardless of class level".

Scholars have framed the academic performance of the urban African American students only in terms relative to the academic performance of their typical peers, specifically the non-urban Caucasian. Thus, they generally refer to the difference in academic performance between the two groups as an “achievement gap”. Empirical evidence undoubtedly indicates that urban African American students consistently lag behind their suburban, Caucasian counterparts (Barbara & McCandless, 2003; National Urban League, 2006). In fact, the achievement gap between the two categories of students continues to be a major focus of scholarly attention, the purpose of which is to find solutions that would permanently eliminate or significantly bridge this gap. According to Ford and Thomas (1997), the academic underachievement of African American students has been so longstanding and pervasive that it calls for urgent solutions. Although there is an abundance of literature that addresses this problem, no consensus has yet been reached regarding its causes and its ultimate solution.

This problem is so pervasive that some scholars think it has risen to the level of a national crisis (Cabrera, 2010; Haycock, 2001), and that the need to find a solution is as critical as it is urgent. The urgency is further underscored by the fact that African American students with and without disabilities continue to perform more poorly in school than their White counterparts regardless of the interventions that have so far been put in place. For instance, Viadero and Johnston (2000) noted that in spite of interventions (e.g., enactment of the Elementary and Education Policy of 1965, reduction in class sizes, creation of smaller schools, aggressive expansion of programs such as early childhood education, and encouragement of minority students to register in more academically demanding courses), the solution to this problem continues to elude scholars and practitioners alike. This situation prompted Roach (2004) to observe that “though the achievement gap gets considerable attention these days, no clear-cut, comprehensive road map to the closure of the K-12 education has yet to emerge”.

In recognition of this academic achievement gap among various ethnic groups, the Federal Government established a panel to investigate this problem with the goal of finding ways to bridge the gap. “The Equality of Educational Opportunity Report” (Coleman, 1966) was the first in-depth study that examined differences in the educational opportunities offered to African American and Caucasian students and the resultant differences in academic achievements between these students. Coleman (1966) acknowledged the existence of an achievement gap first in segregated schools across the country and then between Caucasian middleclass students on the one hand and minority and/poor students on the other. This study was completed at a period when African American students’ academic achievement was far poorer than it is at the present time. Federal government interventions, in the form of educational and social programs that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, have resulted only in a gradual narrowing of this achievement gap.

The Coleman Report suggested that schools should monitor the performance of the different ethnic groups within the student body (Hoxby, 2005; US Department of Education, 2002). The outcome was the creation of programs focused directly on minority students (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000; Hunter & Bailee, 2003; Kober, 2001). More recently, however, government efforts aimed at eliminating this gap took the form of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB was intended to close the achievement gap among various ethnic groups by linking rewards for teachers and school administrators, as well as other educational professionals to Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). The AYP is meant to measure the progress that schools are making towards eliminating the achievement gap by the year 2014

Instances of African American students’ academic underachievement pervade scholarly literature. Fenkell (2011) referred to this underachievement as “a familiar refrain in American education.” For example, a recent study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP) indicated that the average African American student who graduates from high school has the academic skills of the average Asian or Caucasian 8th grade student. House (2006) found that inner-city high schools that serve predominantly African American students with and without disabilities graduate less than half their students. The United States Department of Education (USDOE) statistics of 2006 reported a White high school graduation rate of 67% nationwide compared to a Black graduation rate of 13%. The Schott Foundation reported that in 2008, the graduation rate for African Americans was 48% in contrast to 78% by Caucasians. The Schott Educational Inequity Index (2006) showed that 47% of African American students graduated high school nationwide.

Rodney, Crafter, Rodney, and Mupier (1999) found that nationally, male African American students' standardized test scores were the lowest of any ethnic group. Furthermore, African American students were three times as likely as their Caucasian colleagues to be placed in a special education classroom. African American students also are retained in grade more often than their Caucasian counterparts (Jackson, 1975; Ohio Office of Black Affairs, 1990). The reason most often given by teachers for retention was low academic achievement (Rodney et al., 1999).

Ferguson (2002) conducted a survey of 34,000 students in grades 7-11 in 15 school districts across the country. These 15 districts comprised the Minority Students' Network of upper and middle income districts committed to bridging the achievement gaps in their respective schools. The results showed "persistent racial and ethnic performance gaps" in these schools with the hint that achievement gaps are not restricted to urban African American students with and without disabilities but include the well-resourced suburban upper and middle class public schools as well.

Achievement Gap: Urban African American students

As already indicated, scholarly literature as well as education stakeholders refer to the achievement gap as that between African American and other minority students on one hand and their Caucasian counterparts on the other. As a result, scholarly and academic efforts continue to be made regarding the appropriate interventions necessary to bridge the gap. And although this gap continues to be considered as the approach for understanding and evaluating the academic performance of African American students, this study questions the wisdom of such an approach and of using the academic achievement of students from one ethnic group as a frame of reference against which the academic achievement of another ethnic group was to be evaluated. Consequently, this study believes that this traditional approach is responsible, in part at least, for the pervasiveness of the problem and why, in spite of all the interventions so far, the gap is yet to be bridged.

In their landmark studies of the academic achievement of African Americans, Hispanics and Caucasian students, Carpenter, Ramirez & Severn (2007), using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study to study the nuances of achievement gaps including, among others, the achievement gaps not only between ethnic groups but within groups uncovered the existence of “unique patterns and multiple achievement gaps, both between groups and within groups.” More importantly, their results “indicated within-group gaps were often more significant than gaps between groups” and that “achievement gaps within groups show a clearer picture of the achievement gap”. Simon (2011) reported a study conducted at Heritage Oak School in Placer County, California. Judging by their results in the standardized California Standardized Tests, the school had consistently attained a very high level of academic achievement over the years. However, a research team made up of the school principal, the special education teachers, the reading resource teacher and the classroom teachers from all

grade levels conducted a detailed study of the school results. An analysis of the data by groups showed that all the students were not progressing at the same rate. More importantly, the data revealed the existence of “a large achievement gap between the overall school population, socio-economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities” (Simon, 2011). Lee (2002) analyzed the literature and studied the key factors that seemed to be responsible for a narrowing of the gap between African Americans and Caucasians in the decades between the 1970s and 1990s and a return to a widening of the gap thereafter. He came to the conclusion that “the conventional measures of socio-economic and family conditions, youth culture and student behavior, and schooling conditions and practices might account for the achievement gap trends only for a limited time period or for a particular racial or ethnic group”, adding that they “do not fully capture the variations.” Available statistics on the academic performance of students with disabilities confirm that students of any ethnic group are, indeed, not homogeneous academically. For further example, Carpenter et al. (2006) using a total sample size of 17,613 in their study aimed at finding the predictors of academic achievement between the two minority groups – African American and Hispanics –and Caucasian students. They concluded that crafting educational policy initiatives purely on the assumption that all minority group students can be compartmentalized into a monolithic whole would amount to a great error. Thus, this study took the position that it must be considered an error, as was assumed currently, to group all African American students into a monolithic whole. Some studies have established a gap between student with learning disabilities and their regular education counterparts. Yet this gap has nothing to do with intellectual capacity. A United States Department of Education (USDoE) survey of 1994 found that students with learning disabilities performed more poorly in school compared with their typical peers as indicated by their post-school adult adjustment. Yet, it must be pointed out, in connection with this, that students with learning disabilities, the focus of this study, are not

intellectually inferior to their typical peers. In this sense, they are different from those other special needs students such as those with emotional disturbance or sensory handicaps. According to the national definition, learning disabilities refer to “a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information” even though they have average or higher than average intelligence.

Walcot-Gayda (2004) has pointed out that while students with disabilities possess average intelligence, it is important to note that their disabilities are “distinct from global intellectual deficiency.” Thus, students with learning disabilities possess normal intelligence, but are distinguished by the fact that they receive information, process learning, store and retrieve what they learn differently from regular education students especially in the areas of reading, language and mathematics. Therefore, students with learning disabilities do not constitute a category defined by intellectual or emotional deficits, as is the case with the other categories of non-general education students. Rather, they are an example of the developmental phenomenon of individual differences. “Individual differences are thus a key part of adolescent development, and are caused by differences in the timing of connections among biological, psychological, and societal factors--with no one of these influences (e.g., biology) acting either alone or as the ‘prime mover’ of change” (Lerner, 2004).

And while students with learning disabilities are not intellectually inferior to their typical peers, yet there is an academic achievement gap between the two groups. This gap is exemplified in their post-secondary school outcomes of college and careers.

In a study conducted in 2006 by two Ontario Universities in Canada, it was found that students with learning disabilities had difficulties gaining access to higher education due, in part, to the fact that they were ill-prepared: “access to education is impeded by their lack of preparation.” Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2010) conducted a study using two cohorts

of high school students (with and without disabilities) from three school districts in northwestern United States over a five consecutive years. In this longitudinal study, they conducted interviews with high school graduates or their credible informants over the entire five years. The study showed that “students with learning disabilities revealed that graduates with LD were significantly less likely to have attended any form of postsecondary school and were less likely to have graduated from postsecondary programs throughout the first 10 years following high school”.

Still another criterion indicating the existence of an academic achievement gap between students with learning disabilities and their typical peer pertains to post secondary school employment. Scholars have shown that students with learning disabilities lag behind their regular education counterparts. In a systematic analysis and synthesis of published articles between the years of 1985 and 2000 on the postsecondary adult outcomes for students with learning disabilities, Mull, Sitlington and Alper (2001) reported that all the articles that discussed students with learning disabilities exhibited a consensus “that students with LD come to postsecondary education with low academic skills and lack of preparation for the academic work required”. Other scholarly work found that although the number of students with learning disabilities gaining admission to college has been increasing steadily over the years, they are still fewer than the number of their regular education counterparts (Adelman,1993; Edgar, 2000; Greenbaum, Graham & Sales,1995; Murray et al., 2010). Studies have similarly showed that standardized test scores, “relative numbers of students who take advanced placement examinations; enroll in honors, advanced placement and “gifted” classes; and are admitted to college, and graduate and professional programs” do show the existence of the academic achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In sum, while academic achievement gaps exist between groups as within groups, the significance of the gaps within groups has not had the kind of scholarly mention it deserves, especially for African American students that are the focus of this study. This study extends the literature in that regard.

Contextual Variables and Academic Achievement - The Community

The variables within the student's community represent another group of factors identified by scholars as impacting their academic performance. Scholars have found that when children are exposed to a number of stressful life situations within a relatively short period of time such as is the case with inner-city students, the children are at-risk not only for behavioral issues or social incompetence but for academic underachievement as well (Sterling, Cowen, Weissberg, Lotyczewski & Boike, 1985; Wertlieb, Wergel, & Feldstein, 1987). A large body of scholarly work indicates that inner-city youth are more likely to engage in criminal behavior, early sexual activities, substance abuse and poor academic performance on account of the nature of their environment (Curry & Spergel, 1992; Gill, 1992; Gray-Ray & Ray, 1990; Mincy, 1994; Ogbu & Wilson, 1990; Wyatt).

Datcher (1982) concluded from her studies of "not only the effects of the socio-economic status of an individual's parents, but also the effects of the characteristics of the individual's community of origin", that Black underachievement can be explained by the community or neighborhood factors as well as by the urban neighborhood at least to the same degree. A similar finding was reported by Steinberg, Dornbusch and Brown (1992) when they concluded from their studies of the factors that influence academic achievement that community factors can influence not only family factors but academic performance as well.

In their exploration of how community-based truancy prevention can provide effective intervention against truancy, Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) found that such community-based

intervention was critical in combating not only truancy but the alarming drop-out rates of urban students as well. Interviews with the students showed that the program had a significant effect on their academic achievement as a result of its effect in successfully combating social and academic failure.

Contextual Influences on Academic Achievement - The Family and Social Factors

There are many perspectives by which one may look at the influence of social factors on the academic achievement of adolescents including students with disabilities. This section of the survey of literature focuses on the family and social support. Weller-Clarke (2002) found that social support for students with disabilities “is especially critical in high-poverty, high crime neighborhoods,” while Garmezy (1993) found that enhancing the academic achievement of these students is very effective within a context that includes a component of social support. He identifies this component as consisting of family status variables (i.e., what constitutes a family) and family process variables (i.e. what families specifically do).

The effect of the family status variable has been found to be an important factor in academic achievement. Empirical studies show that a family structure that consists of a two-parent family is more often associated with superior academic performance. Barton (2004) has found that only 38% of African American students live in a two-parent home. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) identified some of the risk factors in academic underachievement to include “single-parent households, birth to a very young mother”, noting that African American children with this kind of background “not only arrive in school less academically prepared; they also tend to be less ready to conform to behavioral demands”.

In a study of the relative importance of family status and family process variables on students’ academic and non-academic outcomes, Xia (2009) found that family process factors “can have significant impacts on both academic and nonacademic outcomes”. She found

multiple dimensions of family process factors such as parental expectations and beliefs, learning structure, resources availability, home affective environment, parenting and disciplinary practices, and parental involvement as exerting a significant influence in this regard. Furthermore, she found several family process variables (including doing homework more frequently, having home Internet access, and owning a community library card) had higher returns in terms of student achievement for African American children or children from low socio-economic families than for their counterparts after controlling for demographics, school inputs, parental expectations and beliefs, learning structure, resources availability, home affective environment, parenting and disciplinary practices, and parental involvement.

After surveying the literature, Nettles, Mucherah and Jones (2000) concluded that the literature supports the effect of family process variables. They said that the literature suggested:

access to social resources such as caring parents who have high expectations for their children and are involved in their children's schooling, participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., after-school sports), and supportive relationships with teachers have positive benefits for students' academic performance. (p.25)

A study of a novel parental process known as parental monitoring was done by Kliever et al. (2006). In this study which had for its sample, Central American immigrants to the United States, Kliever et al. found that parental monitoring buffered the effect of the exposure of the inner-city adolescent to community violence or neighborhood disadvantage but it was unable to continue to offer this protection with increasing occasions of witnessing such violence.

Social support, defined by Cobb (1976) as "information leading the individual to believe that he or she is cared for, loved, esteemed and valued and is a member of a network of communication," has also been identified as an important factor mediating the impact of stressful events in the environment on the behavior of students. Cauce, Felner and Primavera (1982) examined 250 ninth and eleventh graders to determine the structure of social support each of them had and how this related to their academic achievement. They identified the different

dimensions of social support and the relationship of each to academic achievement as well as other factors. The support dimensions were classified as family, formal and informal. They discovered that the perceived effect of each support dimension on the academic performance of the student was a function of age, gender, ethnic background and the relationship of each support source to the student's academic performance.

Dubow, Edwards, and Ippolito (1997) examined 315 inner-city fourth, fifth and sixth graders to find out the contribution of stressors and resources to academic and other kinds of adjustment. They found through hierarchical regressions that neighborhood disadvantage and stressful events uniquely contributed to antisocial behavior on their part as well as to poor academic performance. However, they also found that whereas peer support only exacerbated antisocial behavior and academic disengagement, family support diminished the untoward effect of the environmental and social stressors.

In another study of third to fifth graders in which Dubow and Tisak (1989) sought to find out the role of social support and problem-solving skills in buffering the effects of stress in the environment, the 361 participants in the study completed measures of social support and social problem solving. While their parents provided ratings of stress experienced by these children, their teachers provided ratings of behavioral and academic adjustment. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed that although behavior problems were reduced as a result of social support from parents, social problem-solving skills served to improve their academic performance.

Behavioral problems, as well as academic performance, are mediated by social factors in the inner-city students' experience. Although no specific studies were found that targeted inner-city African American students with disabilities, it can be inferred from the studies cited above that, under the circumstances, these social supports also act as mediating factors between the

stressful life events of the inner-city African American student whose life must be made even more stressful by the sheer fact of his disability on the one hand and the demands of academic achievement on the other.

Other social variables such as discrimination, racial prejudice and low socioeconomic status have also been shown to affect the academic performance of urban African American students with disabilities. Amor (2002) has reiterated that the present level of academic achievement of African American students is rooted in their historical past – slavery, racial prejudice and discrimination. Crocker (1987), for his part, opined that the influence of these social factors on the poor academic achievement of urban African American males has been underestimated.

Conversely, some scholars who have identified such social factors as poverty, crime and other distinctive characteristics of the neighborhood disadvantage as having an influence on the academic achievement of the urban African American student have come to the conclusion that the consequences of underachievement far exceed the power of the individual to counter, although this study takes quite the opposite view.

Lee and Madyun (2009) studied 79 disadvantaged neighborhoods using social theories as explanations for the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students. The descriptors for neighborhood disadvantages were set as crime and poverty. They found that individuals developing within this context, whether learning disabled or not, are at-risk for “self-replicating underdevelopment” more so than individuals with at-risk labels other than crime and poverty. In addition – and this is very significant for this study – this neighborhood disadvantage impacted these students’ academic outcomes. The other at-risk labels referred to included “single parent, persons of color.”

In an attempt to explain the high crime waves in Chicago and other large urban areas with a high population turnover, Shaw and McKay (1942) developed what was to become the foundation of what came to be known as the social disorganization theory. This theory holds that family structure (and in this case, single parent households) was one of the more important barriers to social organization with consequences for criminal behavior, academic disengagement and other types of negative behaviors. Other “exogenous factors” such as poverty, a high degree of diversity, and a high rate of population turnover or residential mobility were also found to stand between the community and its ability to pool resources or social capital necessary to implement social norms and ensure the socialization of its members (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003). This social disorganization worked through a set of factors – the endogenous factors – to thwart community efforts towards socialization. Sampson and Groves (1989) refer to factors, such as supervision of peer groups, friendship networks, and organization participation as social ties. These endogenous factors are the relationships that enhance the ability of the community to act effectively as agents of socialization for its young members.

Elias and Haynes (2008) interviewed 282 minority elementary school children from an urban Northwestern community in an attempt to test the hypothesis that resilience was the consequence of social-emotional competence and social support. Not only did they find this to be true, but their prediction that the students’ end-of-year academic outcome would vary in proportion to their improved social-emotional competence and perceived teacher support was found to be true regardless of the prior academic competence of each student. Their final conclusion was that “social-emotional competence and social support were hypothesized to have strong influences on academic trajectories during the critical period of academic skill acquisition.” Therefore, the acquisition of these social skills must be sufficiently powerful to

overcome the negative effects of the at-risk, social and economic hardships of the urban environment on the academic performance of the urban student with disabilities.

Thus, the literature confirms that the family composition, the family process as well as the social environment of the student are some of the contextual factors within which the urban African American student with learning disabilities is situated and that these factors exert a significant influence on the academic achievement of these students.

Contextual Variables – School Factors

The third category of factors considered by this study as providing the context for academic achievement relates to the school. School factors take a variety of forms and this review can only consider a few of them. Bridglall and Gordon (2003) conducted a study funded by the Department of Defense (DoD) to examine the academic achievement among Black and Hispanic students in the DoD Education Activity Schools system. This system is important for our consideration because its environment is not unlike that of the public schools. The study reports that the National Assessment of Educational Progress ranks the academic achievement of the entire school system as high. What is even more important is that in this system “the performance of African American and Hispanic students is among the highest in the nation.” Apart from the military context which is unique to the system, the schools share the same ecology as urban African American schools including the fact that students of color constitute 40% of the student population which is the same as New York. It is also regarded as “an education system with significant outcomes that may be pertinent to raising academic achievement among minority students.” The study identified the elements of the successful school context to include:

DoD commitment and expectations; establishment of goals; effective resource deployment; a culture of high expectations; small school size; flexibility of organization; data driven decision making; teacher quality and professional development; preschool and after school professional programs; community

involvement; alignment between central direction and local decisions; and focus on, and expectations of high achievement. (p.2)

The strategy that has come to be employed by many schools is the outcome of research studies that studied the effect of school-family partnerships (SFP). Rohland (2003) conducted a study and found that “when schools and families cooperate closely, the children benefit.” The findings also indicate that the more supportive links are forged between the school and family, the more potential there is for imparting benefits to the children. Consequently, SFPs have captured the attention not only of researchers over the years but also of policy and practice efforts.

School counseling has also been shown to assist the urban African American student in academic achievement. Bemak, Chung, and Siroskey-Sabdo (2005) advocated a group counseling approach with a multi-cultural perspective as an intervention strategy to help at – risk, urban youth. The participants were seven 10th grade African American girls in a Midwestern High School. These girls were identified by school by their teachers, school administrators and school counselors as students “at the highest levels of risk for suspension, academic failure and school dropout”. The result of this new intervention type of group counseling that the researchers developed was that the goal of resolving the students’ difficult interpersonal and personal issues was resolved. Consequently, the students’ rate of attendance at school and their academic performance improved significantly. The researchers were subsequently led to search for social and personal factors capable of protecting these students from the stresses they experience in their environment.

School-based programs have also proven capable of providing context for students’ academic achievement. In a school-based program for the improvement of the English Language Arts skills of middle school students, Elias and Clabby (1992) used literature analysis together with a social decision-making paradigm to attempt to enhance the decision-making and problem

solving skills of these students. The result was that an improvement in these skills actually enhanced the academic performance of the students. Similarly, Elias and Tobias (1990) devised a school-based program based on the premise that improving social decision-making and problem solving skills was essential to developing students' academic skills and enhancing not only academic success but also success "in the family, with friends, in the world of work, and in the exercise of the privileges and obligations of citizenship in a democracy." It is significant to note, however, that this program did have the effect of improving the students' academic skills. The influence of contextual school factors are also well documented in an investigation of the relationship between school climate and the academic achievement and social skills development of elementary school children by Esposito. In 1999, she did a study in which she obtained longitudinal data from 324 first and second graders from kindergarten to second grade. She also gathered data from the families of these students who came from minority, low socio-economic parents and who lived in "chronically poor urban neighborhoods." Allowing for maternal education and the resources available to the families, she found that while school climate was predictive of social skills for both first and second graders, it was, however, a predictor of academic achievement for second graders only though it was not the same for first graders. Similarly, in their studies on the effect of various school factors on students with disabilities, Tobin, Tippins and Gallard (1994) concluded that the special education teacher, rather than the curriculum, is the key source of self-efficacy in the student with disabilities as was once thought.

In summary, extant studies show that a variety of school factors including teacher preparedness, teacher expectancy, SFAs and counseling also provide a contextual background within which the student is nestled and which exerts a significant effect on his or her academic achievement.

The Approach of Positive Youth Development (PYD)

All of the reviews above, however, point to the fact that scholars have approached the study of the academic achievement of minority students largely by adopting the traditional deficit approach. Thus, we arrive at an incongruous situation where African American academic achievement is framed only in deficit terms by comparison with suburban Caucasian students. As an attempt to extend the literature on academic achievement, therefore, this study has turned to the approach of Positive Youth Development (PYD). PYD, an emerging field of developmental psychology is concerned, among other things, with assisting the youth make a successful transition to adulthood and in the process ensure developmental continuity. While the traditional approach to the study of the youth has been to focus on their deficits and negative aspects, PYD is characterized by the refusal to think of youth and their development in negative terms. Thus while traditional scholarly works have concentrated on the performance deficits and the psycho/socio-pathologies of urban African American and other minority students by comparison with their suburban white counterparts, this study takes an approach consistent with that of positive youth development. It focuses rather on a positive, if proactive approach that emphasizes their strengths. Thus, it is not as preoccupied with fixing their weaknesses and as it is with promoting their strengths. Accordingly, this study focuses on the students' positive attributes rather than their deficits, on the student's good points rather than their weaknesses, on what they are doing right rather than what they are doing wrong, on what works with African American students' academic achievement rather than on the problems and dysfunctions of their academic behavior. Within the developmental systems theory in which PYD has its roots, the concerned is not so much with a reductionist paradigm of ascribing behavioral and social behavior to fixed or genetic influences but rather on the relative plasticity of mutually influential relationship between the developing adolescence and the multiple levels of the

ecology within which the student is nestled. These multiple levels of the ecology may be biological, cultural, psychological, family, historical, community (Lerner, 2002).

Furstenberg (2000) found that more than half of the articles he reviewed from leading research journals on adolescent research focused on youth maladjustment and problem behaviors. He found only a few articles on youth resilience and successful transition to adulthood. Bodies of professional literature are focused on the negative and at-risk behaviors of young adolescents including teen pregnancy, illicit drugs; teenage problems such as recklessness and violence; and internalizing disorders like depression, anxiety and suicidal behaviors (Damon, 2004; James and Prout, 1990; Kelly, 2000). But PYD, on the other hand, attempts to identify and emphasize the strengths of the student and how these strengths enhance their developmental needs in making the transition.

A major priority of PYD has been the identification of the variables that constitute the positive elements or strengths of the youth. Benson et al. (1997; 1998) in their work with the Search Institute, an organization that seeks, through research and partnering with parents, to “understand what kids need to succeed and to take action based on that knowledge” identified 40 such strengths or assets which they further categorized into seven. Catalano et al. (2004) identified 18 such assets and said that a positive youth development approach should be able to enhance one of these 18 strengths or assets.

In a study of 149 urban Black fourth and fifth graders aimed at finding out the determinants of underachievement as perceived by these students, Ford (1996) found that “psychological factors played the greatest role in underachievement or poor achievement motivation.”

Dirkes (1985) reported some of these psychological or cognitive factors to include self-esteem, self-image and external locus of control.

Jackson and Nutini (2002) studied career learning aspirations of 21 culturally diverse, impoverished, inner-city middle school students using qualitative analyses of the students' interviews. They offered the students a range of possible support resources to help them in their academic pursuits. What they found was that the students identified psychological approaches as preferred support resources for enhancement of their educational achievement and career development.

Similarly, in his study of the determinants of academic achievement of middle school and high school students, Ferguson (2002) was led to believe that researchers must look beyond race and socioeconomic status of students to determine which factors could be contributing to academic underachievement. He arrived at this conclusion after studying students in 7th through 11th grades in 15 suburban school districts across the country to determine factors that were contributing to their academic achievement. These findings revealed that student achievement was not as strongly related to socioeconomic levels or racial backgrounds as is so often thought.

The psychological factor also featured in a study by Robert (2001) in which she tried to determine the factors responsible for the successful academic performance of two at-risk African American students in the fifth grade. She identified a supportive home and family environment, a positive school culture, and the personality of the individual student as the factors responsible for their success. About the last factor, the personality of the student, she said it was “an inner drive that keeps them focused on the future.” Furthermore, she concluded that “the individual student must be considered as a key piece of the puzzle of success in the face of poverty.”

The influence of the personality variables of the student is similarly highlighted in the research by Somers, Owens and Piliawsky (2008) whose study of 118 urban African American high school students in a mid-western United States school district was for the purpose of examining the factors that were responsible for the academic success of this class of students. In

this study, the researchers found that although all the variables studied contributed to the academic achievement of these students, nevertheless, “educational intentions and personal persistence (were) the strongest contributors.”

In recognition of the contribution of these personality or cognitive factors to the academic achievement of the student, this study has chosen two personality variables to focus on: perceived self-efficacy and locus of control of urban high school students. In examining the influence of these two factors by comparing the extent of their influence within urban African American students rather than with suburban urban Whites, the study is adopting an approach that is consistent with that of positive youth development (PYD). According to Bandura (1994), a strong feeling of self-efficacy enhances human achievements, accomplishments and well-being. These are major concerns of PYD.

The section that follows reviews the literature of two major psychological attributes of the student. The first is an important one that has received considerable scholarly attention since it was first put forth by the Stanford psychologist, Albert Bandura. It represents a positive, human strength at work in influencing, among other things, academic achievement.

The Social Cognitive Theory of Albert Bandura

Bandura developed the social cognitive theory in 1909 as a modification of the extant theory of learning put forth by the Associationists led by Dollard and Miller (1941). In response to the stimulus-response (S-R) theorists, their theory of learning had interposed certain characteristics of the organism between the stimulus and the organism’s response. However, even these intervening cognitive processes were unable to account for how individuals initiate new behaviors or how they imitate the behavior of other people or models especially when those models are not directly reinforced for so doing. In a classic example of the structure of what Thomas Kuhn (1975) would later characterize as a scientific revolution, Bandura and Walters

(1963) advanced their own theory to explain how organisms learn under these circumstances. Kuhn (1962) had said that “scientific revolutions” were the natural outcome of an inability of an existing scientific theory or paradigm to explain a new phenomenon. Thus, when a scientific law or paradigm was no longer capable of explaining a new phenomenon, the route of normal science was such as to throw up a new paradigm that, in replacing the old one, would expand the field of knowledge in a way that would thoroughly explain the new and hitherto inexplicable phenomenon. Kuhn (1962) referred to this as a “paradigmatic shift”.

Thus, Bandura and Walters’(1963) new theory was set to address the concepts of modeling, observational learning and vicarious reinforcements which the extant social learning theory was unable to address. The new theory explained how learning can indeed occur without the individual directly performing an act and without the administration of any reinforcements whatsoever, positive or negative.

This theory, the social cognitive theory not only emphasizes the social origins of thoughts and actions but also stresses active cognitive processes, as well as the human capacity for self-regulation (Bandura, 2004). This new theory effectively interposed the attributes of the organism between the stimulus and the response in understanding the social world. For, if human behavior were governed solely by S-R theory, opined Bandura (2004) that would only serve to make humans passive actors in the learning process and people would not be any different from weathervanes. But then again, he reasoned, people are not driven solely by internal cognitions.

Therefore, between the thesis of passive reaction or passive learning and the anti-thesis of the total control of one’s actions, thoughts and feelings, Bandura (1986, 1997) ultimately arrived at a synthesis that explained human behavior and learning as the product of a dynamic relationship between behavioral, cognitive and environmental factors. These factors all influence one another, so that just as one-factor influences all the other factors, so is it influenced by them.

In this dynamic relationship, the human is as much an agent as an object in his world. This process of reciprocal interaction between these three factors Bandura (1986) calls reciprocal determinism.

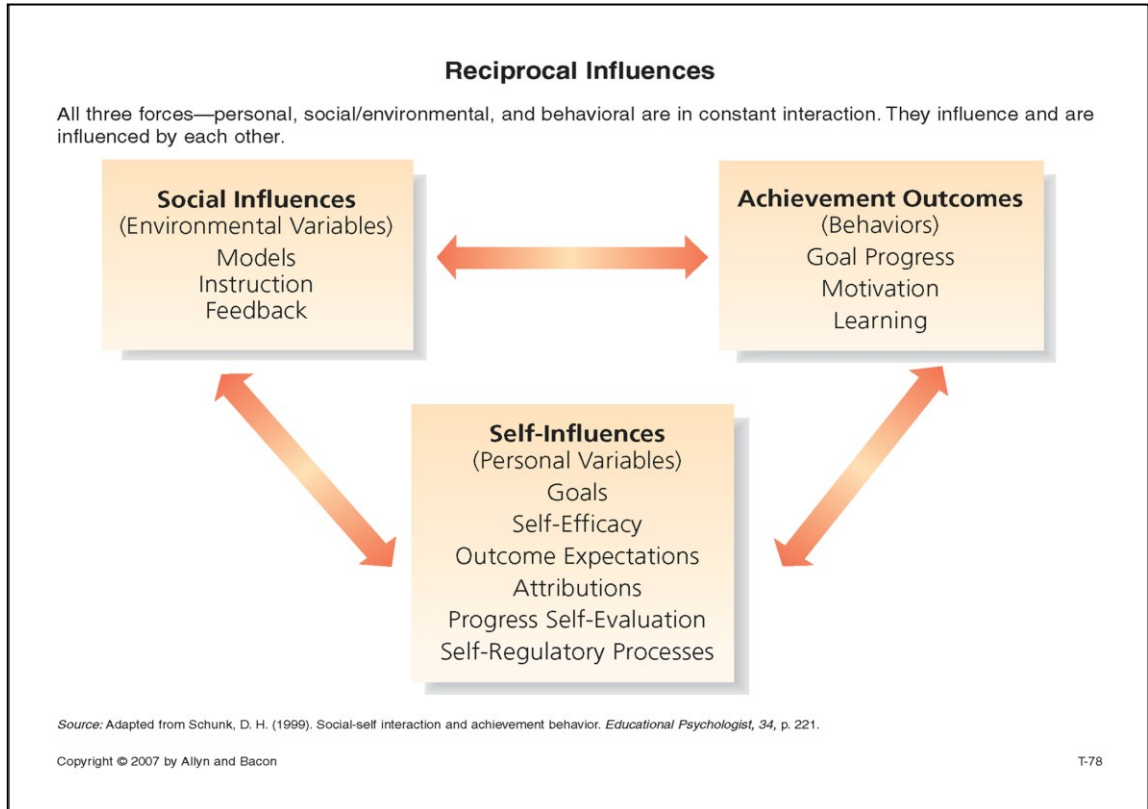


Figure 1: Reciprocal Influence

According to this principle, therefore, our thoughts influence our environment and actions and our environment in turn influences our thoughts and actions. Our actions, on the other hand, influence the environments we choose, our thoughts and so on in an endless circle of reciprocity. The process is also referred to as the triadic model of reciprocity. It is the bedrock of Bandura's theory whereby the individual has the sole responsibility (and, one might add, privilege) of shaping his own actions through the beliefs that he holds and the thought processes that he entertains. A second characteristic of the triadic model is that it allows for behavior to act as a feedback mechanism that can influence or shape future actions. Thirdly, the model is concerned with environmental or socio-cultural factors. Thus, within the triadic model, the

individual is free to act in a way that is influenced by external factors and his own willingness to act.

The Concept of Self-Efficacy

The origins of the concept of self-efficacy are to be found in the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura alluded to above. The fact that one's conscious thought processes in different situations strongly influence one's action is the principal thrust of the social cognitive theory (Cervone, 2004). Bandura (2004) said that the most critical internal factor influencing the self-system is this capacity to use one's beliefs and thoughts to shape one's actions. He refers to this as self-efficacy and defines it as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986). It is the belief one holds regarding one's capability to successfully pursue a determined course of action. It is a belief one has about one's ability to perform certain tasks or the degree to which one is convinced of one's ability to meet the demands of a particular situation effectively (Bandura, 1993, 2006).

In other words, it is "an individual's belief in his or her capacity to cause an intended event to occur... these beliefs that people hold about their capabilities and about the outcomes of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they behave" (Bandura, 1997). Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) defined self-efficacy as "the belief in one's effectiveness in performing specific tasks", while Jackson (1975) says "it refers to a set of beliefs regarding a person's competence to formulate and carry out a particular course of action." As the cognitive or internal factor that mediates the organism's response to its external environment, self-efficacy has been the recipient of most of the attention of empirical research on Bandura's social cognitive theory. Years of empirical studies support the idea that perceived self-efficacy does indeed influence

personal cognitions, and feelings as well as goal-directed actions (Pajares, 1996 and 2001; Zimmerman, 2001).

Academic Self-Efficacy

Bandura conceived of self-efficacy not as a “global personality characteristic” (Jason, 2002). Rather, he conceived of it in “microanalytic” (Bandura, 1977) or task-specific terms. This fact that efficacy beliefs differ depending on domain is responsible for Zimmerman (2000) describing them as “multidimensional.” This study is concerned with the study of self-efficacy specifically in the academic domain or academic self-efficacy. Bandura (2005) said academic self-efficacy involves an individual’s belief in his or her capability to achieve a given outcome in learning and academic tasks that, according to Pajares (2005), is related to optimism about academic prospects.

Bandura (1997) found that if one perceives oneself as having a high self-efficacy, one would be prepared to face a difficult situation or a difficult task as a challenge to be mastered rather than a problem to shrink from. One would also exert strong motivational effort, persist in the face of obstacles and look for creative ways to overcome them. He said that people’s self-efficacy beliefs are responsible for shaping their view of future consequences. Thus, a student with low beliefs about his or her self-efficacy at participating in a basketball game during the physical education class will see a future consequence of his dragging down his team and contributing to their loss.

Self-efficacy beliefs help determine the choices people make, the settings they pick, the tasks they approach, the effort they put forth, the persistence they display in the face of difficulties, and the degree of anxiety or serenity they experience as they engage in the myriad tasks that constitute their life (Bandura, 1977: Pajares and Miller, 1995). Bandura (1989) also said that people tend to avoid challenging situations or tasks that they believe exceed their

capabilities. People who have higher levels of perceived self-efficacy are more motivated to work to achieve their goals. Conversely, individuals with lower levels of self-efficacy, the more they tend to avoid potentially enriching environments and challenging activities. They tend to be hindered from moving toward their potentials and are thereby shielded from corrective change. He observed that “learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their actions to inform them what to do” as the behaviorists imply.

Thus, simply being skilled or being knowledgeable about something is not enough to elicit that skill or knowledge from the individual and Bandura’s (2004) social cognitive theory addresses the importance of this belief in one’s ability to be a primary motivator of one’s own behavior and to be persistent on the path to a goal one has decided for oneself. For, interposed between the possession of a skill or knowledge and the application of that skill or knowledge is the belief in one’s ability to apply that skill toward some end or some pre-determined goal. “People’s level of motivations, affective states and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, self-efficacy can actually be a far more powerful determinant of the choice of what activities to embark upon than sheer skills or even outcome expectations that are concerned about “perceptions of possible consequences of future behaviors and are based on causal beliefs.” Simply put, self-referent thoughts like self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1986), are the intermediary between knowledge and action. And, as Markus and Nurius (1986) have added, it is these subjective convictions about oneself and one’s beliefs about one’s capabilities that play an important role in one’s growth and development.

As a psychological factor with which this study is concerned, therefore, the scholarly findings on self-efficacy hold much interest. However, scholarly works that focus on the self-

efficacy of African American adolescents are rare. Rarer still are the studies that concentrate on the self-efficacy of African American students with disabilities and their levels of academic achievement.

In summary, we find that scholars have uncovered a direct link between the general education student's cognitive variable, to wit, perceived self-efficacy and academic achievement. However, there is a paucity of studies in that regard with respect to students with disabilities. This study expects to bridge that gap.

Self-efficacy and the Urban Student with Learning Disabilities

The need for a careful study of how self-efficacy impacts the performance of students is thus considered by this study as a way to better understand the problem of achievement gap between different categories of student and a possible source of strategy for addressing the problem of the achievement gap between urban students with learning disabilities on one hand and their typical peers on the other. This has become very necessary considering the fact that self-efficacy has proven to be a more reliable and consistent predictor of academic and behavioral outcomes than any other motivational construct (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele 1998; Graham & Weiner, 1996; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). Additionally, and as mentioned above, enhanced self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to be responsible for the ability of adolescents to exhibit a wide range of positive outcomes including social behavior, risk negotiation, greater orientation towards the future and high academic achievement. Some scholars think that identifying and promoting factors that diminish and enhance the self-efficacy of the urban student would be a great step in addressing this situation. As Ochs and Roessler (2001) asserted, the development of such personal resources as competencies, self-beliefs of efficacy “expand freedom of action, and enable people to serve as causal contributors to their own life course by selecting, influencing and, controlling their own circumstances.” This then begs the question:

How best do we identify and promote those factors that enhance the self-efficacy of these students especially those with learning disabilities?

Locus of control

The locus of control (LOC) represents another positive, psychological influence on academic achievement that this study intends to focus on and enhance in line with the concept of positive youth development. Since its introduction into the field of social learning by way of theorists (Crandall, Katovsky, & Crandall, 1965; Rotter, 1966; Shore & Young, 1984), the psychological construct of locus of control (LOC) has received much attention from scholars. Rotter's (1966) theory on social learning originated the phrase "generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcements" as a description of this concept. As a personality construct, LOC seeks to explain how the individual perceives the consequence of his or her action. More specifically, it proffers an explanation for the perceived sources of reinforcement of the individual's behavior. In other words, the concept of locus of control is concerned with whether reinforcement is perceived by the individual to be contingent upon his efforts and actions or whether, in fact, reinforcement is perceived to be contingent upon capricious forces external to the individual (Specter, 1982). Phares (1976), on the other hand, has said that it refers to a person's attributional tendency regarding the cause or control of events and to the general tendency on the part of the individual to think that reinforcements, especially positive reinforcements, are under one's own control. It is the "generalized beliefs about the relationship between one's actions and the outcomes of such actions" (Mercer and Snell, 1997).

Thus, while Rotter, in his social learning theory of 1996, conceives of the locus of control as referring to the degree of control the individual believes he or she has over their environment or the world around them, he said that people can generally be put into two distinct categories

viz: Internal and External LOC orientation. Thus, locus of control, according to him, refers to the self as against environmental responsibility for outcome of behavior. Students with an internal LOC orientation, he said, see a contingent or direct link between their action and the consequences of their action. In other words, the individual with an internal LOC orientation believes that reinforcements are the direct consequence of his efforts and ability whereas those who have an external LOC orientation see no reliable or causative relationship between their behavior and the outcomes of such behavior. As a result, those who have an external LOC orientation believe the reinforcement for their behavior to be due to such things as social structures, luck, caprices of nature or sheer happenstance (Lefcourt, Miller, Ware, & Sherk, 1981; Rotter, 1966). Rotter (1966) considered the LOC orientation to be a relatively stable personality trait that once formed, is not subject to change. Students with an internal locus of control tend to take responsibility for their actions and behaviors. They are aware that their actions are contributing to their performance in school and their academic achievement. Students with an external locus of control tend to blame others or outside factors for their lack of school achievement. According to Rotter (1966), when a student fails a course, the student's self-perception of the reasons for the failure is reinforced. If the student thinks his/her failure is due to the teacher, the weather, or any other outside influence, his/her locus of control will be external. In contrast, if the student takes responsibility for the failure (not studying, not understanding, failing to do homework, etc.), his/her locus of control will be internal. The influence of locus of control on academic achievement for students diagnosed with disabilities has not been the focus of much research.

Following the categorization of LOC orientation into two by Rotter (1966), psychologists have come to define the LOC along a continuum with internal LOC orientation on one end of the continuum and external LOC orientation on the other. Individuals at one end of this continuum

(internal) perceive themselves to be responsible for their experiences, never pointing at someone else as being the cause. Such people believe they have the power to control events in their own lives by their own actions. Individuals at the other end (external), on the other hand, hold the belief that things, people or events external to them (luck, fate, chance, and powerful forces such as parents, teachers and peers) hold the key to their experiences. More significantly, they tend to blame others for their experiences and do not accept responsibility for their actions (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973; Rotter, 1954, 1956).

As a logical consequence of the construct, Rotter (1966) said that “those at the internal end of the scale would show more overt striving for achievement than those who felt they had little control over their environment.” Scholars have demonstrated a link between internal LOC orientation and positive student outcomes. These positive outcomes have been defined as high academic achievements and employment (Bar-Tal and Bar-Zohar, 1977; Lefcourt, 1976). Students who hold an external LOC orientation, on the other hand, have been linked with negative outcomes. These outcomes include academic under-achievements as well as poor decision-making skills and difficulties with impulsivity (Wehmeyer, 1994b).

However, some studies have often made the assumption that students with disabilities, at-risk and minority students as well as students of low socio-economic status are likely to feel that they have little or no control over their experiences. Rabinowitz (1978) for instance argued: “individuals who are restricted by societal barriers and by limited access to opportunity are generally characterized by external control expectancy. On the other hand, persons who are able to attain socially valued outcomes are much more likely to have an expectancy of internal control.” There is, nevertheless, a considerable body of research that indicates a positive correlation between an external LOC orientation and academic under-achievement. These studies further show an internal LOC orientation to be predictive of academic success (Clifford &

Cleary, 1972; Johnson & Kanoy, 1980; McGhee & Crandall, 1968). Furthermore, an internal LOC orientation has also been correlated not only with a positive academic achievement; it has also been linked with enhancing behaviors such as social maturity and “independent, striving, and self-motivated behavior” (Nowicki-Strickland, 1973). An internal LOC orientation has been correlated with the tendency to engage in more achievement-oriented behavior than an external LOC orientation. Buck and Austin (1971) found that students with an internal LOC orientation also obtain high ratings from their teachers for positive classroom behaviors. The students were found to be very active in the classroom, to show persistence while engaged in goal-directed behavior and to exhibit desirable classroom behaviors (Buck & Austin, 1971).

Some scholars have implicated students with disabilities in external LOC orientation. McInerney (1999) has shown that students with learning disabilities are poorer academic achievers when compared to their typical peers and furthermore that they attribute their success to external forces such as luck and sheer chance while they attribute failure to internal factors of ability and competence or lack thereof. He found, on the other hand, students with a high academic ability attribute their success to internal and more stable factors of ability and competence. The result is that for this category of students, this may further improve their academic performance which again may enhance their self beliefs and so on and so forth in an unending spiral of enhanced achievement.

Another study that sought to determine whether there exists a pattern of locus of control orientation among students with disabilities was conducted by Mamlin, Harris and Case (2001) who carried out a methodological analysis of 22 studies that were done on this topic. They dismissed the findings linking an external LOC orientation with students with learning disabilities on methodological grounds. They thought the method of participant selection, the description of participants and the instruments used for measuring LOC orientation were

seriously flawed. Their conclusion was that there were really no empirical studies linking students with disabilities with an external LOC orientation. Williams and Barber (1992) examined the literature on the relationship between the LOC, academic achievement and learned helplessness among special needs students. In that study, the researchers took a look at whether students with special needs exhibited more of an external LOC orientation than their typical peers. They concluded that a majority of studies “support the idea that special education students have difficulty with establishing an internal locus of control and respond with learned helplessness. This confirms what Rotter (1996) had said that the feeling of helplessness regarding one’s ability to influence reinforcements that follow from one’s action or learned helplessness is the key factor in locus of control and results in children’s academic success or failure. This is because children learn less from an experience they feel they cannot control (Morgan, 1986). As a result, these students learn less than their peers who, on the contrary, feel that their actions influence outcomes (Crandall, Katkovsky and Crandall, 1965). In students, an external LOC orientation can generalize to learned helplessness characterized by passive behavior, a disinclination to exert oneself or to be persistent and a general feeling of hopelessness (Luchow, 1985).

To summarize, this chapter makes significant allusion to the fact that this study is a departure from the well-worn path of previous enquiries on academic achievement of urban African American students. It draws from the conclusion reached by Schwarzer (1999) that perceived self-efficacy “mirrors a sense of control over one’s environment. It reflects the belief of being able to control challenging environmental demandsIt can be regarded as a self-confident view of one’s capability to deal with certain life stressors.” It also draws from the results of many studies that show that academic self-concept or locus of control may be highly influenced by the student’s perceived relationship between effort and academic achievement

(Andrews & Debus, 1978; Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Diener & Dweck, 1978, 1980; Dweck, 1975; Dweck & Repucci, 1973; Frieze & Snyder, 1980; Licht & Dweck, 1984; Pysh, 1982; Seligman, 1975). This is why this study wishes to extend the literature by examining what relationship, if any, exists between the concepts of perceived self-efficacy and locus of control with particular focus on the academic performance of urban African American students.

Especially is this so as the focus on the achievement gap between African American students and their Caucasian counterparts has directed scholarly efforts away from the within-group achievement gap which, as pointed out earlier, has been found to be more significant than between group achievement gap.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study to collect the data necessary for obtaining answers to the questions that the study aims to investigate. It describes an appropriate methodology consisting of research design, instrumentation, setting, participants, and procedures for the collection and analyses of data all of which are discussed below. To do this, this chapter explored the method by which participants for the study are identified. It also described the instruments administered to these participants so that data may be obtained that would assist in answering the questions the study seeks to answer. The data so obtained would subsequently be processed by using the statistical and qualitative analyses appropriate to the method of study thus yielding necessary information that directly addresses the study questions.

Restatement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the concepts of perceived self-efficacy and locus of control among urban African American students with learning disabilities. As already stated, the basis for such examination stems from the need to study the academic achievement gap within urban African American students - that is between African American students with learning disabilities on the one hand and their typical peers on the other (Walker & Shinn, 2002; US Department of Education, 2005). This is the more so as there is no known intellectual difference between students with learning disabilities and their typical peers. Students with learning disabilities have normal intelligence but function well below their potentials. Some of these students, it must be noted, are not just of normal intelligence but are actually intellectually gifted but suffer, as all learning disabled students do, from a neurobiological disorder that is not the result of environmental factors, cultural or social pathologies or even economic

disadvantages but that do prevent them from receiving, storing or responding to certain kinds of information (Hammill, Leigh, McNutt, & Larsen, 1988).

The study seeks to examine the nature of the gap in academic performance between high school students with learning disabilities and their typical peers by focusing on how the perceived academic self-efficacy of these students rates in comparison with that of their typical peers. The study further examines the nature of the gap by investigating the locus of control orientation between these students with learning disabilities and their typical peers.

Research Questions

The following research questions will therefore be addressed in this study:

1. How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their academic self-efficacy?
2. Is there a difference between the perceived academic self-efficacy of these students and that of their typical peers in general education?
3. How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their responsibility toward their own academic achievement?
4. Is there a difference in the perceived responsibility for academic achievement of these students with learning disabilities and that of their typical peers in general education?

Research Design

A hybrid research design combining both quantitative and qualitative components was used in this study. According to Creswell (2003), a hybrid or mixed method design provides diverse types of data that can result in a better understanding of a problem than either a quantitative or qualitative research design alone. Milacci (2003) further adds that qualitative research is concerned with the interpretation of experiences from the perspective of the experiencer. It is, therefore, an approach that is naturalistic and that seeks to understand human

behavior in settings that are context specific and “where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2001).

The quantitative aspect of the study consisted of a non-experimental method. This type of research design is appropriate when the independent variables are not manipulated and no intervention or treatment is provided for the students. Three surveys were used to obtain data from students with disabilities on their personal characteristics, academic self-efficacy, and locus of control.

The qualitative design, on the other hand, used a face-to-face interview of students chosen after a review of the quantitative responses. In this regard, this researcher believes the best method for obtaining what meaning the academic experience holds for the student is to make a direct approach to the student himself. Especially is this so considering the fact that the target population of this study is one that has not been as well researched as their relative representation in the larger special needs population demands. This is in recognition of the fact that not the experience itself, but the meaning constructed from and attributed to the experience is what matters. their consequences As W. I. Thomas of The Chicago School (1863-1947) once asserted: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” He went on to elaborate his idea in “the definition of the situation.”

Setting

The setting for this study was two high schools located in an urban school district in south-eastern Michigan. One of the schools is a charter school and the other a self-governing high school.

The Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) research study, sponsored by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, was concerned about the nation’s high schools that Gates referred to as “obsolete.” The EPE reported that the graduation rate in this school district was 21.7%, ranking

as the 11th poorest among the nation's 50 largest school districts. The included district was one of 3 with a graduation rate less than 50%.

Participants

Participants in this study were made up of two groups of high school students – one group consisting of students with learning disabilities and the other group consisting of general education students in the school district in question. The school district uses 13 categories (i.e., learning disabled, emotional impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical impairment, other health impairment, speech & language impairment, early childhood developmental delay, severe multiple impairment, autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury and deaf-blindness) in which students with disabilities are placed. The students with learning disability and students in regular education classes have been identified as the target population of this study.

Sample.

To be included in the study, students with learning disabilities were identified by the school psychologist as having been referred for special education services. They were known to have a current individual education plan (IEP) in place. A total of 15 students with learning disabilities participated in the study. Twenty-four students enrolled in general education classes were also included in the sample.

For the qualitative portion of the study, a convenience sample of five students from each of the two groups was selected randomly. Five general students and one student with learning disabilities ultimately participated in the face-to-face interviews. The researcher asked questions meant to obtain in-depth responses regarding their academic behavior being careful to make notes only of the responses as well as to ensure the absence of any identifying markers.

Instrumentation

The study was conducted using the following instruments:

1. Student Demographic Survey
2. Self-in-School Survey
3. The Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire (Crandall, Katovsky & Crandall, 1965).
4. A face-to-face interview questionnaire.

Copies of these instruments are included in Appendices D-G.

Student Demographic Survey

A demographic form was specifically developed for this study and given to students to complete at the beginning of the study. The form is meant to collect biographical information pertinent to the study and contains items using the forced choice technique. The purpose is to ensure a pattern of consistency in the students' responses. (See Appendix D).

Self-in-School (SIS).

The SIS is used to assess academic self-efficacy. The scale, originally developed by Smith (1988), included 19 items to measure academic self-efficacy in adolescents and young adults. Downs (2005) further refined the SIS to develop an assessment of academic self-efficacy that was more accurate. He modified the scale by removing four items and changing the response format from 9 to 7, with the response options ranging from 1 for completely false to 7 for completely true. The 15-item scale was used in the present study. (See Appendix E)

Scoring. The rating scale for this survey ranged from 1 for completely false to 7 for completely true. The ratings for each of the 15 items were summed to obtain a total score that was divided by 15 to develop a mean score for each participant. The mean scores reflected the original scale of measurement.

Reliability. The scale was tested for internal consistency and stability as measures of reliability. The Cronbach alpha for the original scale was 0.89, with a test/retest reliability coefficient of 0.85 at a 10-day interval, providing assurances that the instrument had adequate reliability. Bryan (2003) used a sample of 687 high school Navajo American Indian students to confirm the internal consistency of the instrument. He obtained an alpha coefficient of 0.89, which was the same as for the original sample. The internal consistency for the 15-item instrument increased to 0.91 and was considered adequate. The internal consistency for the present sample was tested using Cronbach alpha coefficients. The obtained alpha of 0.87 provided support that the instrument had good internal consistency with the students included in the study.

Validity. Downs tested the instrument for criterion validity by correlating the scores on the SIS with the students' grade point averages and SAT scores. The obtained correlations were statistically significant, indicating the instrument had good criterion validity.

Readability. To ensure that the instrument and the instructions would be comprehended by the students, the readability was tested using the Flesch-Kincaid readability index. The readability was found to be at a 4.5 grade level that should be easily comprehended by the high school students who participated in the study. As some of the participants in the present study have been referred for special education services, the items on the scale was read to them. The reading of the items in the scale provides assurances that the reading level of the students, as an extraneous variable that could affect the outcomes of the study, is adequately taken into consideration.

The Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire (IAR).

The IAR (Crandall, Katkovsky, & Crandall, 1965) was used to measure beliefs in internal versus external reinforcement responsibility within intellectual-academic achievement situations.

Crandall et al. asserted that external causes of academic achievement frequently are in students' immediate environment (e.g., teachers, parents, and peers). The IAR uses 34 forced-choice items, with each item describing a positive ($n = 17$) or negative ($n = 17$) achievement experience. Two alternative responses follow each item: one that relates the item to the student's actions (internal) or the other indicating the situation was the result of an external cause in the child's environment (external). (See Appendix F)

Scoring. The IAR produces three scores, one for internal responsibility for success (I+), one for the responsibility for failure (I-) and a total score is obtained that assesses internal or self-responsibility. I+ scores are obtained by counting the positive events for which the participant assumes credit, with the I- scores obtained by counting the total of I-responses on negative events for which the student assumes blame. The total I score is the combination of the I+ and I- scores. Possible scores could range from 0 to 17 on the positive or negative scales, with possible total scores ranging from 0 to 34. Higher scores are more indicative of an internal locus of control.

Reliability. Reliability has been assessed on the IAR for both stability and internal consistency. Crandall et al. (1965) administered the IAR to 70 ninth grade students twice at two month intervals. The stability coefficients of 0.65 for I total, 0.47 for I positive, and 0.69 for I negative were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. While these measures of reliability were somewhat low, the length of time between completing the two tests may have been a contributing factor. The correlations did not differ significantly between male and female students. The Spearman-Brown split Prophecy Formula was used to test for internal consistency. The coefficients for both the I+ and I- scales were 0.60 for high school students.

The responses from the students in the present study were tested for internal consistency using the Spearman-Brown split half test. The resultant coefficient of 0.45, while lower than that obtained in previous studies was considered adequate for the present study.

Validity. According to Crandall et al. (1965), the IAR scores were correlated with intelligence as a measure of criterion validity. Correlations of 0.16 for Total I, 0.14 for I+, and 0.14 for I- were obtained for high school students. These low correlations provided support that the IAR was able to measure academic responsibility regardless of the intelligence level of the students. The results were similar when ninth grade students' academic achievement was correlated with IAR scores. The resultant correlations of 0.10 for I+ and 0.24 for I- provided additional support for the criterion validity of the IAR. Additional support for the criterion validity was obtained by correlating IAR scores with family social class as determined by the Hollingshead two-factor index of socioeconomic status (Crandall, 1965). The low correlations for Total I ($r = 0.11$), I+ ($r = 0.04$), and I- ($r = 0.14$) and socioeconomic status provided support that students' academic responsibility scores were not associated with their socioeconomic status.

Readability. Based on the Flesch-Kincaid readability scale, the IAR is written at a 3.5 grade level. This finding indicated that the IAR could be easily comprehended by the students who will be participating in the study. However, to assure that reading ability does not confound the results further, the items on the scale were read aloud to the students.

Procedures for Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from the study sites and Wayne State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher made an appointment to meet with the principals of the schools that have agreed to participate in the study. The purpose of this meeting was to design a strategy for recruiting participants for the two groups required for the study. The researcher

inquired when next a school event requiring the attendance of parents in the school premises would take place. The researcher then asked for permission to set up a table along with other teachers at these events which, included a Parents/Teachers' Conference. The researcher used the occasion of this event to recruit participants for the study without the influence of the teachers or the administrative staff.

At this event, therefore, armed with a flyer (see Appendix A), the researcher briefed parents about the study – the purpose of the study, the role the students would play in it, the fact that it would not interfere with the instruction of the students and the need to have a parental approval for their child's participation. Parents' questions were entertained at this point. For those parents who were willing, right then, to allow their children to participate in the study, a consent form was given to them to sign. Those parents who needed more time were given the forms to take home to be returned to the researcher via the school later bearing in mind that a date had been scheduled for the study. This was made clear to the parent.

The researcher also decided on another school event that would require the attendance of parents of students with learning disabilities. At this occasion, the researcher employed the same strategy to recruit this category of students into the study. For those students, minors and students with learning disabilities alike, whose parents agreed to the participation of their children in the study, they were offered the consent form to complete while the learning disabled students were right then given an assent form to complete after its contents had been explained to them. The students with learning disabilities were also offered the questionnaires right there to complete. In this way, the study avoided the possible embarrassment of calling out this group of students and assembling them in a room for the study as was the case with the regular education students. The study thus avoided calling undue attention to these students. Because these are

students with specific learning disabilities, the consent forms were given to their parents even for those of them who have attained their majority.

In the case of regular education students who have attained their majority, however, they were given a combined Consent/Assent form when they agreed to participate in the study. In every instance, however, before the students signed the assent form, the researcher briefed the potential study participants about the study acquainting them with the nature of the research, the topic of the study, what was expected of them by way of completing the surveys and the amount of their time all this would possibly take. The researcher then answered any questions that arose. They were told that all this would be done during non-instructional time and that participation was voluntary even if their parents had consented to their participation. Furthermore, they were given to understand that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time during the process no questions asked. They owed no one any explanation for their decision. In addition, their decision would have absolutely no consequence for either their school report or their academic careers. The participants also were informed that there would be no material reward for their participation but that they would have the inner satisfaction of knowing that they were advancing the cause of academic performance of inner city students and that their contribution could be of help to those students coming after them. The absence of any instructional or administrative staff during this process was carefully enforced so as not to put the students under undue, if subtle, pressure or coercion.

For most students, this marked the end of their participation and, as already pointed out to them from the start, they would not be expecting any compensation. No surveys were allowed out of the testing center and students were enjoined not to discuss the surveys with other students. Students who were absent when the surveys were distributed and who still expressed interest in participating in the survey nevertheless were allowed to participate in a make-up date.

Data Collection - Qualitative:

This is a face-to-face questionnaire designed by the researcher the contents of which are contingent upon the responses obtained from the two quantitative instruments mentioned above. (See Appendix G). Not only were the questions prompted by the responses of each student; they were also open-ended to afford the students the opportunity to elaborate on the points as freely as they choose as well as to confirm them as being in control of the interview process. This was a phenomenological approach and the purpose of the interviews was to explore, in greater depth, some of the responses to the questions in the two quantitative instruments. In formulating these questions however, this study adhered to Glesne's (1999) rules for posing semi-structured questions or for modifying the questions when it is clear that the subject has strayed from the subject matter or when more information is needed to understand the subject's responses. The rules include the following:

1. There should be some consistency in the order of the questioning;
2. The opinions of the researcher should not be voiced nor should it in any way be evident;
3. The interviewer should prompt the interviewee by asking, "Could you give me more detail(s) on that point?" or by simply repeating the question;
4. Notes of the participants' responses to the questions were taken during the process.

Assuring Fidelity and Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data is essential to the validity of the findings and Lincoln and Garba (1994) have indicated that this factor needs to be addressed in a research study. The design of the study, in so far as it was meant to help in obtaining data about what the participants report concerning what actually occurs in the classroom, assisted in highlighting the emerging

patterns or themes, and, according to Tellis (1997), increased the trustworthiness not only of the data but of the conclusions as well.

Data Analyses - Quantitative & Qualitative

Since the data obtained from the surveys do not lend themselves to interpretation by students, a positivist analytical approach would be appropriate. Accordingly, these data were entered into a computer file to be analyzed using IBM-SPSS ver. 21. The quantitative data analyses were divided into three sections. The first section used frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and measures of central tendency and dispersion to provide a demographic profile of the participants. The second section of the analyses used descriptive statistics to present baseline statistics on the levels of self-efficacy and locus of control. Finally, inferential statistical analyses were employed comprising of a two-sample independent t- test to determine if there were any significant differences between the total mean scores of the students with learning disabilities on the one hand and their general education students on the other on both the SIS and the IAR surveys. Also, a Pearson product moment correlation was run for the scores of the students with learning disabilities on the SIS and the IAR to see if there is any relationship between the scores on these tests. All decisions on the statistical significance of the findings were made using a criterion alpha level of 0.05.

Since the data obtained from the face-to-face interviews of the selected students do lend themselves to interpretation by the students, the participants' responses were approached from constructivist analytical point of view. Therefore, the data were further subjected to a rigorous qualitative analysis involving the review of the responses. The researcher scanned the responses, looking for themes and categorizing them according to their relationship to the research questions or by connecting the raw questions to the research questions. This successive analysis of data to obtain categories, referred to as category construction (Merriam, 1997), is a major

feature of the qualitative phase. The selected categories that guided this study were self-efficacy, locus of control and academic achievement.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSES OF DATA

This chapter presents results of the data analyses that were used to describe the sample and address each of the research questions developed for this study. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section uses crosstabulations and descriptive statistics to provide a profile of the participants. The second section provides the baseline statistics used to describe the scaled variables, with the results of the analyses used to address each of the research questions presented in the third section. The fourth section provides the results of the qualitative analyses of the student interview responses.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of perceived self-efficacy and locus of control on the academic achievement of urban African American students with learning disabilities in order to gain an understanding of how these variables affect the academic performance of urban African American students.

Forty students participated in the study - 15 were students with learning disabilities and 25 were students in general education classes. These students were drawn from two schools: a charter high school and an empowered high school in a large urban school district in southeastern Michigan. Empowered schools are schools which are granted a great deal of autonomy in their curriculum, management, instruction and budget.

Description of the Sample

Participating students completed a short demographic survey. Their responses to the survey items were summarized by group (students with learning disabilities in one group and students in general education in the other). All forty students completed the demographic survey although one of the students with learning disabilities did not complete all the items in the survey.

Mean age of students with learning disabilities was 17.13 (sd = .99) years. The age range of students with learning disabilities was from 16 to 19 years. One student with learning disabilities did not provide a response to this question. Students in general education had a mean age of 18.00 (sd = .72) years. Students in this group also ranged in age from 16 to 19 years. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics – Age of Students by Student Category

Group	N*	Mean	SD	Median	Range	
					Minimum	Maximum
Students with learning disabilities	15	17.13	.99	17	16	19
Students in general education	24	18.00	.72	18	16	19

* Sample sizes reflect the number of students who responded to all the questions

Two (13.3%) students with learning disabilities were in the ninth grade, with none of the general education students in ninth grade. The largest group of students (n = 28, 71.9%) was in the twelfth grade. This number included 6 (40.0%) students with learning disabilities and 22 (91.6%) students in general education classes. Table 2 shows the gender of students by group. Twenty-one (53.8%) students were male, with 10 (66.7%) students in the learning disabilities group and 11 (45.8%) students in general education. Of the 18 (46.2%) female students, 5 (33.3%) were in the learning disabilities group and 13 (54.2%) were in general education classes.

Table 2

Student Gender by Student Category

Gender	Category					
	Students with Learning Disabilities		Students in General Education		Total	
	n*	%	n*	%	n*	%
Male	10	66.7	11	45.8	21	53.8
Female	5	33.3	13	54.2	18	46.2
Total	15	100.0	24	100.0	39	100.0

* Sample sizes reflect the number of students who responded to all the questions

Two (13.3%) students with learning disabilities were in the ninth grade, with none of the general education students in ninth grade. The largest group of students (n = 28, 71.9%) was in the twelfth grade. This number included 6 (40.0%) students with learning disabilities and 22 (91.6%) students in general education classes.

Table 3

Grade Level by Student Category

Grade Level	Category					
	Students with Learning Disabilities		Students in General Education		Total	
	n*	%	n*	%	n*	%
Ninth	2	13.3	00	0.0	2	5.1
Tenth	1	6.7	1	4.2	2	5.1
Eleventh	6	40.0	1	4.2	1	17.9
Twelfth	6	40.0	22	91.6	28	71.9
Total	15	100.0	24	100.0	39	100.0

* Sample sizes reflect the number of students who responded to all the questions

Nineteen (48.7%) students, including 7 (46.7%) students with learning disabilities and 12 (50.0%) students in general education, had participated in research prior to the present study. The remainder of the students (n = 20, 51.3%) reported they had not participated in research; among these, 8 (53.3%) were students with learning disabilities and 12 (50.0%) were students in general education. (See Table 4).

The preponderance of twelve grade students in the sample size is due to the fact that these are all students who had attained a majority and consequently are easier to recruit as participants than minors

Table 4
Prior Participation in Research by Student Category

	<u>Category</u>					
	Students with Learning Disabilities		Students in General Education		Total	
	n*	%	n*	%	n*	%
Yes	7	46.7	12	50.0	19	48.7
No	8	53.3	12	50.0	20	51.3
Total	15	100.0	24	100.0	39	100.0

* Sample sizes reflect the number of students who responded to all the questions

The students were asked to use a 5-point scale where 1 meant “not at all” and 5 meant “like very much” to indicate the extent to which they liked school. (See Table 5). The largest group of students (n = 13, 32.5%) indicated that they either liked school somewhat or neither liked nor disliked school. Among the students who liked school somewhat, 6 (37.5%) were students with learning disabilities and 7 (29.2%) were in general education. Both categories of students were about equally in this group probably because, as earlier indicated, the students with learning disabilities wanted to put up a front and appear just like regular education students. Five (31.3%) students with learning disabilities and 8 (33.3%) students in general education reported that they neither liked nor disliked school. Among the 10 (25.0%) students who liked school very much, 4 (25.0%) were students with learning disabilities and 6 (25.0%) were in regular education.

Table 5

Extent to which Students Like School by Student Category

Extent to which students like school	<u>Category</u>					
	Students with Learning Disabilities		Students in General Education		Total	
	n*	%	n*	%	n*	%
Not at all	1	6.3	0	0.0	1	2.5
Dislike somewhat	0	0.0	3	12.5	3	7.5
Neither like nor dislike	5	31.3	8	33.3	13	32.5
Like somewhat	6	37.5	7	29.2	13	32.5
Like very much	4	25.0	6	25.0	10	25.0
Total	16	100.0	24	100.0	40	100.0

* Sample sizes reflect the number of students who responded to all the questions

The participants were asked to rate their comfort at school using a five-point scale ranging from “not at all comfortable” to “very comfortable”, (See Table 6). Eighteen (45.0%) of the students reported they were very comfortable at school. Included in this number were 9 (56.2%) students with learning disabilities and 9 (37.5%) students in regular education. Three (18.8%) students with learning disabilities and 7 (17.5%) students in regular education reported that they were comfortable at school. Of the 4 (10.0%) students who were very uncomfortable at school, 2 (12.5%) were students with learning disabilities and 2 (8.3%) were students in regular education.

Table 6.

Extent to which Students are Comfortable in School by Student Category

Extent to which students are comfortable in school	<u>Category</u>					
	Students with Learning Disabilities		Students in General Education		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not at all comfortable	2	12.5	2	8.3	4	10.0
Somewhat comfortable	0	0.0	2	8.3	2	5.0
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	2	12.5	4	16.7	6	15.0
Comfortable	3	18.8	7	17.5	10	25.0
Very comfortable	9	56.2	9	37.5	18	45.0
Total	16	100.0	24	100.0	40	100.0

Description of the Scaled Variables

The two instruments, Self-in-Scale (SIS; Smith, 1988) and the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire (IAR; Crandall, Katovsky & Crandall, 1965) were scored using the author's protocol (See Table 7).

Table 7

Summary of Scaled Variables

Variable	n*	Mean	SD	Median	<u>Range</u>	
					Minimum	Maximum
Self-efficacy						
Students with learning disabilities	16	5.64	.95	5.81	3.50	7.00
Students in regular education	24	6.02	.73	6.14	4.40	7.00
IAR – Positive						
Students with learning disabilities	13	12.15	3.13	13.00	5.00	16.00
Students in regular education	21	12.14	2.52	12.00	7.00	16.00
IAR – Negative						
Students with learning disabilities	13	10.38	2.79	10.00	6.00	15.00
Students in regular education	21	10.43	3.19	11.00	5.00	15.00
IAR – Total						
Students with learning disabilities	13	22.54	5.36	24.00	15	31
Students in regular education	21	22.57	5.12	22.00	14	30

* Sample sizes reflect the number of students who responded to all the questions

Self-efficacy. Students with learning disabilities had a mean score of 5.64 (sd = .95) for self-efficacy, with a median of 5.81. The range of actual scores on this scale was from 3.50 to 7.00. The students in regular education had a mean score of 6.02 (sd = .73), with a median of 6.14. Actual scores ranged from 4.40 to 7.00. Possible scores for self-efficacy ranged from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-efficacy.

IAR – Positive. Students with learning disabilities had a mean score of 12.15 (sd = 3.13) on the IAR – positive subscale. The median score was 13.00, with a range from 5 to 16. Students in general education had a mean score of 12.14 (sd = 2.52), with a median of 12.00. The range of actual scores was from 7 to 16. Possible scores on this subscale could range from 0 to 16, with higher scores indicating a more internal locus of control related to intellectual academic responsibility.

IAR – Negative. Students with learning disabilities had a mean score of 10.38 (sd = 2.79), with a median of 10.00 on the IAR – negative subscale. The range of actual scores was from 6 to 15. Students in regular education had a mean score of 10.43 (sd = 3.19), with a median of 11.00. Actual scores on this subscale were from 5 to 15. Possible scores could range from 0 to 17, with higher scores indicating that students thought external forces were responsible for their intellectual achievement.

IAR – Total. The mean score for the students with learning disabilities was $m = 22.54$ (sd = 5.36), with a median of 24. The range of scores was from 15 to 31. Students in general education had a mean score of 22.57 (sd = 5.12), with a median of 22.00. Actual scores on this scale ranged from 14 to 30. Possible scores could range from 0 to 34, with higher scores indicating that the students had high levels of intellectual responsibility.

Research Questions

Four research questions were developed for this study. Each of these questions was addressed using inferential statistical analyses. All decisions regarding the statistical significance of these analyses were made using a criterion alpha of .05.

Research Question 1. How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their academic self-efficacy?

Students with learning disabilities had a mean score of 5.64 (sd = .95) for self-efficacy. The midpoint of the 7-point scale was 4, with scores greater than 4 indicating higher levels of self-efficacy than average. This results indicate, therefore, that these students with learning disabilities perceive themselves as having a slightly more than average level of self-efficacy.

Research Question 2. Is there a difference between the perceived academic self-efficacy of these students and that of their counterparts in general education?

The scores for self-efficacy were compared between students with learning disabilities and students in general education using t-tests for independent samples. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

t-Test for Independent Samples – Comparison of Self-Efficacy between Students with Learning Disabilities and Students in General Education

Group	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-Value	Sig
Students with learning disabilities	16	5.64	.95	38	-1.43	.160
Students in general education	24	6.02	.73			

The comparison of the mean scores for self-efficacy between students with learning disabilities (m = 5.64, sd = .95) and those in general education (m = 6.02, sd = .73) provided no evidence of a statistically significant difference, $t(38) = -1.43, p = .160$.

Research Question 3.

How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their responsibility for their own academic achievement?

The students with learning disabilities had a mean score of 12.15 (sd = 3.13) for the IAR – positive while their mean score for IAR – negative was 10.38 (sd = 2.79). Their total IAP mean score was 22.54 (sd = 5.36). These results were above the midpoint of 8.5 in both the negative and positive IAR scores indicating that the students with learning disabilities exhibited an internal as well as an external locus of control. That means they were accepting of responsibility for both successful academic experiences as well as unsuccessful academic experiences. However, they tend to accept responsibility more for successful academic outcomes than they do for not so successful academic outcomes.

Their IAR total of 22.54 also fell above the midpoint of 17, indicative of a somewhat higher than average level of both an internal and external locus of control. This confirms that they tend to accept responsibility for both successful and unsuccessful academic achievements.

Research Question 4. Is there a difference in the perceived responsibility for academic achievement of these students with learning disabilities and that of their counterparts in general education?

The scores for intellectual achievement responsibility were compared between the students with learning disabilities and their typical peers in general education, using t-tests for independent samples. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

t-Test for Independent Samples – Comparison of Intellectual Achievement Responsibility between Students with Learning Disabilities and Students in General Education

Group	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-Value	Sig
IAR – Positive						
Students with learning disabilities	13	12.15	3.13	32	.01	.991
Students in general education	21	12.14	2.52			
IAR – Negative						
Students with learning disabilities	13	10.38	2.79	32	-.04	.968
Students in general education	21	10.43	3.19			
IAR – Total						
Students with learning disabilities	13	22.54	5.36	32	-.02	.986
Students in general education	21	22.57	5.12			

The comparison of the positive IAR mean scores between students with learning disabilities ($m = 12.15$, $sd = 3.13$) and those in general education ($m = 12.14$, $sd = 2.52$) was not statistically significant, $t(32) = .01$, $p = .991$. When negative IAR mean scores were compared between these students with learning disabilities ($m = 10.38$, $sd = 2.79$) and their typical peers in general education ($m = 10.43$, $sd = 3.19$), there was no statistical significance either, $t(32) = -.04$, $p = .968$.

The results of the t-test for independent samples comparing the mean scores for IAR total between students with learning disabilities ($m = 22.54$, $sd = 5.36$) and those in general education ($m = 22.57$, $sd = 5.12$) was not statistically significant, $t(32) = -.02$, $p = .986$.

Qualitative Analysis

The following assumptions are pertinent to the qualitative data collection procedure:

- That the self-reported data collected from the instruments were true and that they reflect participants' beliefs;

- That the participants responded with all honesty;
- That the researcher's bias was minimized.

The following limitations are also recognized:

Researcher's bias – Since the method of selection of participants was not random, the results cannot be generalized. However, as already stated and in accordance with the post-positivistic tradition, trustworthiness was ensured as a way of enhancing reliability and as an attempt to avoid other forms of bias.

As previously indicated, the participants were high school students in an urban school district in south-eastern Michigan. One of the schools is a charter school while the other is an empowerment public school. Participants in the quantitative study consisted of 13 students with learning disabilities and 23 general education students out of which 1 LD student participated in the face-to-face interview while 5 general education students participated (See Table 10).

As a result of the limited sample size of students with learning disabilities, the single participant in the qualitative study turned out to be a case study. The paucity of participants in this category has already been noted as being consequent upon the approved method of participant recruitment.

Table 10

Types of School as Site

School type	
Charter	Empowerment
1	1

Table 11

Types of Participants.

<i>Participants</i>	Number
LD	1
Gen Ed	5
Total	6

Table 12

Types of Questions Asked.

	Question Number	Total Number of Questions
Self-efficacy questions	1-8	8
Locus of control questions	9-14	6
Total number of questions	1-14	14

The data were obtained through oral interviews based on participants' earlier responses to the survey questions (see Appendix G). Responses to the face-to-face questions will be found in Appendix H.

In analyzing these qualitative data, it is important to point out that, as in all interpretive approaches, these data are a reconstruction of what transpired, or the interaction between the researcher on the one hand and the participants on the other. In addition, following Goetz and LeCompte (1981), the researcher scanned the data for "categories of events or phenomena and for relationships among these categories."

Thus, the researcher identified and categorized key concepts either with regard to their relationship to the research questions or by connecting the raw responses to the research questions.

Efficacy beliefs:

Table 13.

Words Associated with “I” – Questions 1, 2 and 3.

Participants	Frequency	Associated Key Concepts
1	2	Best; rightly; and neatly.
2	1	On time.
3	2	On time; all my work
4	3	Best; ahead of others; all my work.
5	1	Study
6	2	Asking for help; use of available resources

The first category identified in responses to the SIS survey relates to the pronoun “I”. This category is defined by the use to which the pronoun was put or the words with which the pronoun was associated. In other words, the student’s linking of his or her identity with achievement efforts was found to be associated with certain words. This category appears in five different questions on the SIS. For example, in response to question 1 (Describe some of the efforts you make in class), Participant #1 (P1) linked her efficacy-beliefs to the word “best”, thus the use of the pronoun “I” in this response is indicative of the student’s construction of a direct connection between herself and her ability to do, or to achieve academically. This is indicative of the efficacy belief of the student. What is even more noteworthy is that the participants’ efficacy belief is linked not just to doing; but to a superior kind of doing, to doing “all my work” as is evident when she added further, “I try to do all my work the best I can.” The use of this category by the participant is thus indicative of the high degree of the participant’s efficacy beliefs in her ability for academic achievement.

A similar link with the word “I” is found with P4. This participant used the exact same word “best” but in addition, and is if by way of emphasis, he is using other words that

unequivocally convey the idea of a strong link between himself and a superior academic performance. He also used more of such words while P1 uses only 2 words. The other descriptors with which P4 links his ability are “being done before everyone else” and getting “all my work done”. All this shows that this participant, and to a lesser degree P1, strongly believes himself to be causative, that is, that he is very capable of academic achievement at a fairly high level. This idea of being quite capable academically, as expressed by this participant, of doing, not some of the work, but “all my work” is also shared by some of the other participants. Other words that convey the same idea is echoed by participants: “on time”, and “rightly and neatly”. This signifies the idea of not requiring more than the appropriate time or the given time to do what is required to be done; or the ability to go over and above the basic requirement – these represent strong efficacy beliefs.

The response of the participant (P6) is, however, quite different from all the others in that it seems to span not just the student’s efficacy beliefs but his locus of responsibility orientation as well. In saying that he does solicit help from the teacher and colleagues alike as well as making a recourse to such available resources as textbooks, the internet and the calculator, this participant is at once emphasizing his self-efficacy beliefs while at the same time underlining his internal locus of control by his ability to exercise control over some external event that takes place in the classroom environment with the purpose of bringing about learning. This must be what Mercer & Snell (1997) meant when they defined the locus of control as referring to the degree of control the student or individual believes he possesses over his own environment. This may also be a pointer to the possibility of a relationship between the concept of self-efficacy and that of locus of control and a possible indication that these concepts are not confined to tight compartments; but rather that there exists an overlap between the two. Overall, 4 out of all 6

participants (or 67%) used strong efficacy words 2 times or more to qualify themselves using the pronoun “I”.

Table 14

Can student still do better? –Question 3

Participant	Yes	No
1	X	-
2	X	-
3	X	-
4	X	-
5	X	-
6	-	X

Another category of events identified in response to the SIS survey has to do with whether, with the entire efficacy skills they believe they possess; participants felt they could still perform better. This is considering the fact that in the previous questions they felt their efforts in class were very good. All but one – the LD student - felt they could still do better. This could mean that while they believe they have the ability to exert themselves towards a desired academic goal, they feel they could still go on and strive for even greater academic achievements. This is consistent with Bandura’s (1997) findings that a high level of self-efficacy causes an individual not only to exert strong motivational effort towards a desired goal; but also to persist in the face of obstacles and to look for creative ways to overcome these obstacles. However, the negative response from the LD participant is notable considering she had responded to a previous question that her efforts help her only most of the time. It might be that she feels she is already at the peak of her ability and she believes there is no room for improved academic performance. In other words, she is at the limit of her perceived self-efficacy.

Table 15

Outcomes

Part	1	2	3	4	5	6
Reason	Classes are easy	Good outcomes; good grades	Teachers' approval	Self-motivative	They help me	Produce desired results.
	My best efforts are good enough			Resistance of peer pressure not to "act white"		

Another category identified in the responses to this survey is "results" or "outcomes" of efforts. Participants equate the strength of their self-efficacy to the outcome of their own efforts. Thus responses to question #2 (And why do you think your best efforts are very good?) include statements to the effect that the classes are so easy that they do not require any serious efforts anyway (P 1), although this then provides the serendipitous information that casts aspersion on the nature and quality of teacher training in this part of the country.

Other responses, however, are different and confirm the positive results of their efforts as excellent indicators of their academic self-efficacy. Examples of these positive results are expressed in statements such as "good grades", "they help me" and "they give me (good) results" or good academic performance. Outcomes of participants' efforts took such other forms as self-motivation and the ability to withstand peer pressure. For example, P4 believes his efforts are productive because he "puts his mind to it." In other words, he is self-motivated as a result. His statement to the effect that "no one can stop me from what I think I should be doing" is an allusion to being academically smart or what urban African American students refer to as "acting white," something at which they seriously frowned upon.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that many urban African American students deliberately refuse to show themselves to be smart and, in fact, make efforts to look dumb

academically because of peer pressure. The studies show that urban African American students consider good academic performance an attribute of white students with the result that even a smart urban African American student is under peer pressure not to show himself to be smart for that would be “acting white”. Thus P4 appeared poised to resist such peer pressure as well as to be self-motivating when he stated, “no one can stop me from what I think I should be doing.” P4 is therefore measuring the goodness or effectiveness of his academic efficacy by his ability to withstand this external/peer pressure.

The ‘acting white’ phenomenon is not restricted to urban Blacks; middle-class Blacks are also subject to this attitude. Although equipped with more material and financial resources, they often feel that excelling in academic work while their counterparts in the lower socio-economic level do not, suggests they are betraying their identity (Shaffer, Ortman and Denbo, 2002).

Dubow, Edwards and Ippolito (1997), examined 315 inner-city fourth, fifth and sixth graders to determine the contribution of stressors and resources to academic and other kinds of adjustment. They found through hierarchical regressions that neighborhood disadvantage and stressful events uniquely contributed to antisocial behavior on their part as well as to poor academic performance. However, they also found that whereas peer support only exacerbated antisocial behavior and academic disengagement, family support diminished the untoward effect of the environmental and social stressors.

In a similar vein, teacher’s approval, as external validation, comes across in statements such as: “The teacher looks differently at me like I am one of the good students in the class.” Other forms of external validation besides teacher’s approval include: “I get good grades,”; “They give me results,” and “I always have good grades.”

Table 16

Relevance and Duration of Efficacy Skills – Questions 5, 6 and 7

Participant	Skills possessed	Usefulness of skills at present	Usefulness of skills in the future
1	Good memorization skills; ability to read & easily retain information	Helps to do well in tests and especially the more difficult classes	Will be useful in succeeding in the hard work of college.
2	Good attention span	Paying attention in class	Enough focus to get things done beyond high school.
3	Good attention; participation in class activities.	Motivative	Will lead to success
4.	Doing all class assignments	Staying focused	Self-improvement, study well and good grades.
5	Good literary skills – reading, spelling and a good vocabulary	Reading	Will be useful for job interviews
6	Good reading & handwriting	Reading & Writing in ELA classes	Reading & Writing

Another category identified in the data is the students' concept of the skills they possess and how relevant they think these skills are for academic achievement. In this category, students describe the skills they possess relative to how they believe these skills are efficacious in academic achievement (question #5), both now (question #6) and beyond high school (question #7). The academic self-efficacy skills identified include: good handwriting and reading skills which were thought by the LD student to be important whereas the regular education students' list is more detailed and it includes the following: memorization skills, ability to retain information, attentiveness, class participation, following directions, doing the work assigned to them to do and specific skills such as, for example, reading, spelling and acquisition of a large vocabulary.

In connection with this is the question of the duration of these skills. This is shown in the response to questions 6 and 7 regarding how the skills help in school now and how they will help in the future. Just how long do participants expect these academic efficacy skills that they possess to serve them? Are these self-efficacy skills only good for the present academic environment or do they believe their usefulness to extend beyond high school? In addressing these issues participants express their confidence in the usefulness of these skills for academic achievement to extend beyond the confines of high school. This is shown in responses such as: the skills help to perform very well in class now “especially the harder classes”. Similar ideas are expressed by the fact that they are able to “pay attention even while others are busy fooling around”. Other statements along this vein include the fact that the possession of these skills is a source of motivation and it is very useful in mastering English classes which are, presumably, very difficult classes.”

As for the future use of these skills, the general impression is a confidence in their ability to help in academic achievement. This is contained in statements that declare that these skills will help attain a successful academic career, or that they will help in improving oneself, in studying better and attaining better grades. Other similar statements are to the effect that these skills will help in assisting them to be well focused in the future resulting in an improvement in academic performance and in obtaining desired good grades; they will also help in self-improvement, in facing job interviews, and generally lead to success in the future. All seemed to agree on the future use of their self-efficacy skills beyond the demands of the high school.

The reasons given for the perceived future efficacy of these skills, as shown in the responses to question #8 that could be interpreted as a different wording of question #7, include a confidence in the permanent or, at least, long time effect of these skills. Statements like “because I do well in school now” indicate an expectancy of the effect of these skills extending

well beyond the present. In fact, none of the participants believes that the academic skills only last through high school and that they may not serve any purpose beyond it. They all subscribe to the idea that academic skills outlast the present demands of high school. It is an evidence of the permanence of the skills that in their responses, the participants are certain the skills they currently possess are the same skills that will serve them well beyond high school. Examples of how they think these skills will survive beyond the present are statements such as: “these skills will help me in college as the work becomes much harder” and these skills “will help in the future by making me to improve myself and they will make me study better” Some participants even construct the meaning of the future use of the skills to extend not just beyond the high school but also to even extend to their future careers: “these skills will help me in the future by making me to improve myself” Or, “these skills will help me to be successful. I think they will lead me to success in the future.” However, a similar kind of assurance of the duration of these skills is not evident in the responses of the LD student.

Locus of Control:

Six questions were taken from the IAR questionnaire (questions #9 – 14) for use in the interview. As was the case with the SIS survey, the responses to these questions were also subjected to an examination for common themes. The examination revealed (questions #9 - 14) that overall a greater ratio of General Education responses exhibited a higher degree of an internal locus of control orientation than the LD responses.

Table 17

Overview of Locus of Control Orientation – Questions 9-14

Question	% of LD responses	% of Gen. Ed responses
Accept responsibility for ability to change other's mind (#9)	100	100
Accept responsibility for poor academic performance (#10)	100	89
Accept responsibility for good academic performance (#11)	100	100
Attribute performance as due to chance (#12)	0	57
Accept responsibility for poor understanding of class work (#13)	0	33
Accept responsibility for poor understanding of class work (#14) (framed differently)	0	60

Judging from their responses, not all the participants indicated that they do take responsibility for the outcome of their actions as shown in the last two questions (questions 13 - 14). All of them attribute their academic failure to anyone other than themselves. However, with regard to influencing others around them regarding their own academic performance (question #9), the responses of both categories of participants indicated that they all think they can bring this about – a strong internal locus of control responsibility. Concerning the acceptance of the effect of their action on the outcome of their own academic performance both good and bad, there is a greater ratio of responses for the LD participant than is the case for the general education participants. But this may be explained by the extreme difference in sample size between the two groups. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while the LD participant accepts responsibilities for both good and bad academic performance (100%), the figure for the regular education group is slightly less for poor academic performance. Although this may be interpreted to mean that the LD group has more internal locus of control orientation than the general education group, the last three questions under this theme (#s12, 13 & 14) show the LD group with a consistent score of zero indicating a negative locus of control. The regular

education group, on the other hand, has much higher figures. Nevertheless, the regular education participants accepted more responsibility for more of the items than did the LD student. But it is still possible that the LD group size has an effect on these data.

The absence of a consistent pattern seems to indicate other forces at work. This could be the interpretation of some questions as being rather threatening or the need for self-protection, to show that one is in control.

Table 18

Influencing Change/Affecting Outcome – Questions 9 and 10

Participant.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Y/N	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reasons	Because I do well in school, in my homework & in tests.	Doing well in class.	Just by showing them by my actions.	I can show better than I can tell them.	Do not conform to peer's expectations; rather he is a source of support.	Convince them what I've got – talents & skills.
	Because of something I did.	Not relevant	Must be because I was never good in the subject, anyway.	Only if they give the answer before I did.	Don't generally do fine in the subject.	Unless due to an error of comprehension or of hearing.

In demonstrating an acceptance of responsibility for influencing others to change their position (question #9), a clear indication of an internal locus of control, P1, P2 and P3 used words like “doing well” (3 times) and “I can show them,” or “I will show(convince) them” (5 times).

More specifically, all the participants seem to accept a direct responsibility for poor academic behavior with responses (to question #10) such as, “It's really not because of someone else.” “It's really because of me,” “It's hard for me to follow or understand math,” “Maybe

because I was never good in Math, anyway.” All of which are indicative of an internal locus of control.

Conversely, some responses that showed the attribution of causation to factors outside of the student gave sentences such as the situation not being relevant to one participant. Or, “I think that may be because I misread the direction or probably didn’t hear them correctly.” Thus, poor academic achievement is attributed, not to something the participant did, but to extraneous factors external to the student, an indication of an external locus of orientation.

Yet another indication of an internal locus of control orientation, or the willingness to accept responsibility for one’s own academic achievement was brought out in response to question #11. When asked if the participant gave an answer they weren’t sure of to a question they were asked and the answer turned out right anyway, the question presented the opportunity to ascribe the correctness of the answer either to sheer to an extraneous factor or to the participant’s efforts. The question elicited responses such as, “I knew it; but it just wasn’t sure,” “I gave my best efforts,” “I would think it was because of what I did and because of what I know. I would think it was because I gave the best answer I could think of.” Or “It was because I gave the best answer I could give.”

Table 19

Who’s Responsible – Y (Chance) or N (Self)? – Question 12

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6
Y/N	No	No	Yes	Sometimes	Sometimes..	Sometimes
	I make efforts to do all that is required of me, leaving nothing to chance				But only when I am slacking. Even so, I still get grades. Grades I know I don’t deserve	

On the other hand, indications of giving over the responsibility for one's learning to someone else is again shown in the response to question #12, to wit: "Yes, they are." Or, "Sometimes, not all the time", or "Yes, sometimes when I'm slacking off. . ." and "Sometimes", while a positive locus of responsibility response to the same question came off as "I don't leave anything to chance," and "No, no chances". Another response was "sometimes, not all the time."

Table 20

Trouble Understanding Schoolwork - Questions 13 and 14

Participant	Y/N	Difficulties Understanding
1	Y	Because the teacher did not explain it clearly
2	Y	Because it was not taught clearly by the teacher
3	Y/N	Split between self (I wasn't paying attention) and teacher (did not explain clearly)
4	Y/N	Sometimes
5	N	No, it is because of me
6	Y	The teacher – certainly

The next question (#13) was concerned with the responsibility for lack of understanding what is taught in school elicits an unequivocal "yes" from 67% of all the participants including 60% of the regular education students indicative of an internal locus of control orientation. Two of the responses are a mix of both "Yes" and "No". Such responses include that which places the blame for academic understanding of what is taught in class squarely on the teacher. The teacher, it was who did not teach clearly or did not explain the material clearly. In this case, the participants shifted the responsibility for their lack of understanding of the subject matter definitely upon the teacher. This was certainly the case with the participant with learning disabilities whose response was an unequivocal "Yes, certainly!" But another response, in a slightly similar vein, splits the responsibility evenly between the teacher, who he says, did not do a good job of explaining the subject matter, and himself for not paying attention. A similar

strategy is indicated by the response that says “sometimes.” Only one respondent to this question accepted that failure to understand what is taught in school as his responsibility. The last question is actually this same question only asked in a different manner. It is asked in a direct manner of placing the responsibility directly at the doorstep of the respondent. The responses were generally consistent with their responses to the last question except for the LD participant who split the responsibility at this time.

In sum, statistical analysis has been used to describe the attributes of the participants and to address the research questions. The qualitative analysis has also obtained participants’ interpretation of their concept of self-beliefs and how these self-beliefs influence their academic performance. Although extant literature shows that students with disabilities tend to demonstrate an external locus of control or a readiness to attribute the source of reinforcement to an external factor, this study is unable to confirm such findings mainly because students with disabilities have been shown to over-calibrate as a way of hiding their supposed disability (Pajares, 1996),.

In the next chapter, we shall see how the findings in this study and the lessons derived from it should change the way we see academic achievement in the urban population and what may be done to reduce the academic achievement gap between students with learning disabilities and general education students as well as raise academic achievement generally.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All that a man achieves and all that he fails to achieve is the direct result of his own thoughts.” — James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*

This study has been driven by the pervasive concern about the academic underachievement of African American students and the enormous desire to formulate strategies to raise academic performance. Such is the level of concern that no less a body than the National Governors’ Associations in 2005 commented that “a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts”, adding, “this is one of the most pressing education-policy challenges the states currently face.”

Scholars have contributed to an examination of this problem by framing the question in a manner that defines their Caucasian counterparts as the frame of reference against which to make a comparison. These suburban Caucasian counterparts are put forth as the academic standard. Because all the other ethnic groups especially the African American are compared against the Whites, this strategy may, without intending it, have a lot of potential for humiliating the minorities and this could be counter-productive. Scholars have consequently expended a tremendous amount of resources in unwittingly developing a number of interventions for bridging this achievement gap between urban African American students and their sub-urban Caucasian counterparts in a way that implies the idea that an achieving African American student has to think like the White student to achieve identical results. These interventions failed to take into consideration studies that now show that none of the ethnic groups is homogeneous academically (Carpenter et al., 2006). These studies also state that it would be a great error to craft policies upon the assumption that minority groups can be put into monolithic compartments. Is it any wonder then that the problem, to date, has defied a solution? Which then begs the question: “Why has this problem defied a solution so far?”

In the first instance, it is important to realize that when we ask the wrong questions, we are sure to come up with the wrong answers? So, right away, it appears as though we are not getting the right answers simply because we are asking the wrong questions. Effectively, we are asking why African American students are not behaving like White students academically. We are asking why people in widely different developmental systems characterized by widely different ecologies are not coming up with the same end result? Put this way, the point becomes obvious – we can never find an appropriate solution to this kind of question following the same old approach as we have hitherto followed. The old paradigm of the linear approach did not embody these ideas in formulating its questions. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to showing that the question of African American students' academic achievement needs to be reframed for a start.

Research Questions

In order to better examine the problem, therefore, this study adopted an intra-group approach in preference to the traditional inter-group approach in the manner it framed the question. Rather than compare the urban African American student to his sub-urban Caucasian counterpart, the study reframed the question by comparing urban African American student not with any group of students regardless of how highly achieving they might be. Instead, it chose to compare the African American student with himself. And, how does it do this? It does this by an intra-group comparison. Thus, the study compared urban African American students with learning disabilities with their typical peers consistent with those studies that show that the intra-group model of the study of academic achievement gap yielded far more significant results than the traditional inter-group model (Lee, 2002; Carpenter, Ramirez and Severn 2007; Simon, 2011). Since that is the case then, we need look no further than within the urban African American students themselves to pose the question. A look within the African American group

should therefore give us a more significant result than a comparison of the African American group with another group even if that group were suburban Caucasian students. This step therefore allows us to reframe the question as appropriate. It effectively posits the problem of the achievement gap as between the African American student with learning disabilities and his typical peers. Thus reframed, the answer to the problem immediately looms large in the horizon.

Research Question 1.

How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their academic self-efficacy?

The results of this study show the students with learning disabilities exhibit a level of self-efficacy immediately to the right of the mid-point, an indication that they have a level of perceived self-efficacy just above average. Other studies have shown that students with learning disabilities have a less than average level of self-efficacy. It is noteworthy that this may be explained by the method approved for carrying out the study. The title of the study was required at the top of every page of the consent letter and, almost to a student, this provoked a reaction from every participant while it turned them off. Many would complain that they were “not LD”. Some of them would observe that the study was for “retarded students” and they were “not retarded.” The researcher almost always had to placate them and go to elaborate lengths to explain the purpose of the study before they would, somewhat condescendingly, change their minds and take a further look at the consent letter. There is every indication that the reaction of the student affected not only their temperament but their responses to the questions as well. All this is exacerbated by the fact that students with learning disabilities have been found by Alvarez and Adelman (1986) to be prone to over-calibration – the tendency to over-estimate their responses.

Research Question 2

Is there a difference between the perceived academic self-efficacy of these students and that of their counterparts in general education?

Although the mean self-efficacy scores of the regular education students are slightly higher than the mean scores for students with learning disabilities, the difference is not statistically significant. Other studies have found that high school students with learning disabilities tended to exhibit lower self-efficacy beliefs than their typical peers (Clever, et al., 1992; Kurtz & Hick-Coolick, 1997; Schunk, 1989). A statistically significant difference may have been identified in the perceived self-efficacy between regular education and learning disabled students in this study if the process of recruiting participants and administering the tests had not provoked some degree of antagonism and disbelief on the part of the students. In addition, the recruiting process may also have provoked in the students with disabilities a concomitant desire to show that they are “not LD” by completing the surveys in a way that would show them in a more favorable light. Thus, they would be more likely to check the answers they expect regular education students would check.

Also, it is worthy of note that scholars, policy-makers and stakeholders alike have all approached the question of the academic achievement of urban African American students from a linear perspective. This perspective makes the assumption that the relationship between the developing individual and the factors responsible for his academic performance is linear. Such an approach, being reductionist, is inconsistent with the facts. There are far too many variables, each one having an effect on everything else, to inform the adoption of such a reductionist approach.

The developmental systems view of lifespan development was first put forward by Baltes (2006). Borrowing from the General Systems Theory of the Austrian biologist Ludwig von

Bertalanffy (1901-1972) who had proposed that the systems theory of thermodynamics also applied to closed systems, Baltes (2006) extrapolated this to developmental science by suggesting that the developing individual and the context within which that individual is nestled may be considered as a system with each of the contextual variable acting as a subsystem within the entire system. Thus within the context or ecology of the developing individual, according to this model, are multiple levels of organization. These multiple levels are concerned with stimulating and maintaining the developmental process at any stage of the individual's lifetime. In this case, the urban student is nestled in the multiple levels of his or her ecology.

According to the developmental systems theory, all the components of the of the organism such as the genes, the cells and organs of the individual function in a bi-directional, reciprocal or "dynamic interactional" relation with these multiple contexts with which the organism is nestled (Lerner, 2006). In referring to the adolescent at this period, Lerner (2002) noted: "the systematic relations that adolescents have with key people and institutions in their social context – family, peer group, school, workplace, neighborhood, community, society, culture and niche in history" constitute the multiple levels of the adolescent's ecology. He elucidated this further by stating that this period, as indeed the entire lifespan of the individual is "a relational one involving mutually influential relations between the developing individual and the multiple levels of the ecology of human development." The multiple levels of the ecology are thus influential during adolescence as well as throughout all of the lifespan. This means therefore, that far from being the product of a linear relationship between the student on the one hand and the elements of his or her ecology on the other, the students' trajectory of academic achievement may be considered as being the outcome of the mutually bilateral relations between the student on the one hand and the multiple levels of his or her ecology on the other.

Yet, of all the units of the developmental system, the student alone is a unique. While it is true that the student, like all the other units of the system, act upon and are acted upon by every other units as an illustration of the bilateral relations; the student and the student alone has the capability of choosing the response to make and, in the process, of influencing his own developmental or, as in this case, academic trajectory. The uniqueness of the student is found in none of the other sub-units or components of the developmental system. Furthermore, it is conferred upon him by his cognitive and personality characteristics.

It might also be pointed out here that the uniqueness spoken of earlier is celebrated by exemption, rather than by conformity to Newtonian first law of motion that declares that the body or entity continues in a state of rest or uniform motion unless acted upon by impressed forces. It is this same uniqueness that prompted Albert Bandura (1997) to declare that the human being could not possibly be likened to a weather vane to be buffeted here and there by the forces in his environment.

In sum then, this researcher is of the opinion that a developmental systems approach is more appropriate to the study of the academic achievement of the urban African American student precisely because of the possibility of “adaptive developmental relations between individuals and their contexts and the potential plasticity of human development that is a defining feature of ontogenetic change within the dynamic, developmental system” (Baltes, et al., 2006; Gottlieb, et al., 2006; Thelen & Smith, 1994). This approach takes account of all the external variables such as the school climate and the socio-economic situation of the student in a way that a linear perspective cannot.

In terms of the urban African American student therefore, the developmental trajectory toward academic achievement is the consequence of the bilateral interaction between the student and the multiple levels of the ecology within which the student is nestled. This developmental

trajectory is consequently unique for each student depending, as it does, on how each student chooses to interact with each successive level of his ecology. Going back to the model of comparing academic achievement between group, this argues against it.

Furthermore, the approach to the study of the urban African American academic behavior has always stressed its negativity. By comparing their academic behavior with the urban Caucasian counterpart as standard, the framework is established by which African American students are defined in terms of underachievement. This focus on African American students' relatively poorer academic performance then emerges as a negative or broken attribute that needs to be fixed. But a more positive approach would not compare one group to another. Such an approach, being positive oriented would be more empowering, less humiliating and, above all, would directly address the issue at hand. More importantly, a positive approach is a more proactive approach as opposed to the traditional approach that merely reacts to an imagined problem.

As an emerging field of developmental psychology which is concerned with the development of adolescents and the young adult, PYD aims to study those factors that promote positive or desirable behaviors among adolescents rather than concentrate on their undesirable behaviors. Too many studies and too many stakeholders in education have harped on the undesirable behaviors of Black violence, absent fathers, teen pregnancy, drug use and abuse as well as suicide for too long. PYD offers a more positive if constructive view of the problems.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) emerged as an element of positive psychology which came into existence in reaction to the work of H. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) who initiated the study of adolescence and emerging adulthood. In 1904, Hall described the adolescent phase of human development as one characterized by "storm and stress". Since then, this period of human development has been described as one that is "broken" or in danger of being broken

(Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma; 2006), or as replete with “problems to be managed” (Roth, Brooks-Guna, Murray & Foster, 1998). Positive development, on the other hand, believes “the negative bias prevents psychologists from perceiving many important human processes, outcomes, and strengths” that the adolescent simultaneously possesses (Sheldon, K. M., & King, L. 2001) and that “the normal functioning of human beings cannot be accounted for within purely negative (or problem-focused) frames of reference.” (Myers, 2000). Therefore, it advocates that the youth should not be defined in such purely deficit terms that is essentially the absence of negative or undesirable behaviors (Benson, et al., 2006). Thus for example, a youth who was exhibiting desirable or acceptable and positive behavior should not be one that was not using alcohol, not taking drugs, not engaging in illicit or unsafe sex and not participating in violence or criminal activities. Rather, the youth should be described on a “strengths-based approach to the promotion of positive outcomes for adolescents” Tebes et al. (2007).

Positive youth development (PYD) thus came to view adolescent behavior from a purely positive perspective. Another example relates to the very definition of students with learning disabilities. Since Hall’s landmark study of adolescent behavior already alluded to, it has been the practice to consider this as a deficit condition or a developmental error. Another example refers to the description of troubled youth. Whereas troubled youth are usually referred to as “at risk” youth, positive development sees nothing but “at-promise” youth. “At-promise” youth is defined as one who is “filled with capacity, realized or unrealized, for healthy transformation and change.” (Marshall et al.,2004). Accordingly and consistent with the concept of positive youth development, this study suggests that research, policy and practice do not view students with learning disabilities as students with a deficit condition or as children inflicted with a developmental error. Therefore, learning disabilities came to be understood in terms of diversity as one of many possible outcomes of the developmental process. This is backed by the

developmental science approach that sees the student with learning disability as one possible outcome of the bilateral interaction between the developing organism and the multiple levels of his or her ecology. Because the interaction is plastic, the possible outcomes of the interaction must be many. For, even from a developmental science perspective, individual differences or diversity are a key part of adolescent development, and are caused by differences in the timing of connections among biological, psychological, and societal factors--with none of these influences (e.g., biology) acting either alone or as the "prime mover" of change (Lerner, 2004).

Consequently, it is possible to say that new thinking in PYD complements the developmental systems view in lifespan development, particularly as it concerns the developing adolescent, in a way that requires us to think of the developmental trajectories in terms that are not only positive and empowering but in terms of multiplicity or diversity as well.

And so, because positive development views the youth from an asset-based model rather than a deficit-based model in its study of adolescent behavior this study considered two such assets relevant to the study of academic performance of urban African American students, to wit: self-efficacy and locus of control. As this and other studies have now shown, psychological assets such as self-efficacy beliefs and responsibility for academic achievement have proven to be the most significant factors in academic achievement. Their significance lies in the fact that their influence far outweighs the influence of all the other factors in the student's environment.

A look at the second academic asset, the locus of control, would serve to illustrate this:

Research Question 3.

How do urban African American high school students with learning disabilities perceive their responsibility for their own academic achievement?

The results indicate that the mean scores of the students with learning disabilities were well below the midpoint, indicating that these students do not perceive reinforcement for

learning to be contingent upon their own efforts; thus, they tend not to accept responsibility for their own education and exhibit an external locus of control.

There is, nevertheless, a considerable body of research that indicates a positive correlation between an external LOC orientation and academic under-achievement (Rotter, 1996). However, this study suggests that these studies underline the fact that the asset-model deserves more research attention than it is currently receiving from scholars, policy-makers and stakeholders alike. In their study of post-high school outcomes involving students with learning disabilities with high IQ, Holliday, Koller and Thomas (1999) found that students with learning disabilities function at levels consistent with their disabilities rather than at a level consistent with their IQ and that even these students have problems making the transition from postsecondary education to college and careers. This is an indication that these students' beliefs about themselves trumped what their real abilities.

Research Question 4.

Is there a difference in the perceived responsibility for academic achievement of these students with learning disabilities and that of their counterparts in general education?

Looking at Table 9, it is clear that the students with learning disabilities are slightly higher for IAR positive, and are lower for both IAR negative and IAR total. If you would like to examine these data for a practical trend by looking at mean score values you need to run a Cohen's *d* to measure effect size and analyze those findings. Results from this study indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean IAR scores of students with learning disabilities and their general education peers.

Although this study did not identify any statistically significant difference between the type of students with respect to Positive, Negative or Total IAR, Bandura (1997) concluded that "it is these subjective convictions about oneself and one's beliefs about one's capabilities that

play an important role in one's growth and development". Also, Clever (1992) found that gifted students with learning disabilities who had a high IQ had the lowest academic self-efficacy because they perceived themselves and their colleagues also perceive them as being far less efficacious than their typical peers or even their counterparts with average ability (Baum & Owen, 1988). It is in this sense and to the extent that people arrive at their sense of self as a result of their interactions within a social context, that Dudley-Marling (2004) referred to the identity of the student with learning disabilities as a social construct.

Consequently, in the case of the urban African American student especially their counterparts with disabilities, this study confirms that it is the LD students' perception of themselves that hinder the full expression of their academic skills and potentials. It is the sense of self and the self-beliefs they construct from their social interaction with their colleagues, the expectations from their teachers and colleagues, the general differential treatment that they are given as "LD" or as "Special Ed", that provide the social context by which the student identifies and believes himself to be academically inferior even when the IQ does not say so. Their self-beliefs therefore become barriers that set the limit not only to their academic performance but even beyond to college and careers (Mitnick (2008). Unless this process is halted and deconstructed through the appropriate intervention, the student gets to hear these negative comments day in day out resulting in the student settling for these negative beliefs and reinforced through what Seligman (1975) refers to as "learned helplessness. In students, an external LOC orientation can generalize to learned helplessness characterized by passive behavior, a disinclination to exert oneself or to be persistent and a general feeling of hopelessness (Luchow, 1985). It is these self-beliefs, developed and reinforced through social interaction that eventually contributes academically to this "learned helplessness" and under-achievement.

Conclusion

While scholarly attention has focused on those variables such as the environment, the family, or the organizational climate of the school as the factors to consider in the study of the academic achievement gap, this study agrees with these findings to some degree. In looking further, however, it recognizes that there are other factors and these factors have received far less attention than they should. These are factors that have more to do with the student's personality and cognitive characteristics.

In other words, these other variables, important though they may be in influencing the student's academic behavior, do not define the student. The goal of this study, therefore, has been to show that the student's beliefs about himself or herself trump all of these external variables powerful though they may seem and that these psychological variables of self-beliefs, more than any of the other social and environment variables, stand as the single most important barrier to the academic achievement of the urban African American student. Allowing for such extraneous variables as over-calibration and attempting to save face, this study therefore confirms some of those scholarly studies that show academic achievement to be the product not only of the skills the students possess but rather the self-beliefs that they hold about themselves. The existence of the academic achievement gap is due largely because the student believes himself to be not only an academic underachiever but also someone who lacks the skills to cope with novel adverse and situations or the efficacy to set and reach their goals. Put bluntly, nobody or no thing defines the student as well as himself or herself. Ultimately, and whether the student is aware of it or not, the student defines himself or herself against his or her peers.

Finally, and in view of all the foregoing, this researcher is of the opinion that the African American student as well as scholars must learn to measure academic achievement not relative to the academic achievement of another ethnic group even if that ethnic group were Caucasian.

Rather, the African American student needs to assess his or her academic achievement within the context of personal advancement and personal growth fully conscious that it is well within his ability, to rise to the highest level of academic achievement of which he is capable regardless of unpleasant external variables or circumstances. Nor does he need to be compared with anybody or any group of persons for this to happen. Then will it emerge that urban students in general are not incapable of rising to the highest level of self-efficacy and locus of control. After all, even that group against which he is currently compared did not achieve their level of academic performance by being compared to African American students or, for that matter, to any other ethnic group whatsoever.

Suggestions for Further Research

In view of the foregoing, this study has highlighted the importance of viewing the way we look at academic performance in students. This should henceforth serve to provide a distinctive reason for adopting a different strategy, a different set of methodological choices regarding the design, measurement, sampling, and data analytic techniques for approaching the issue of academic achievement among the urban African American students. Beginning with the importance that this study gives to the self-beliefs of the student in contradistinction to the multitude of variables external to the student and which may be thought of as constraints to his ability to achieve. But as has been shown in this study, human behavior is more easily predicted by evaluating an individual's beliefs than by looking at that person's true capabilities (Bandura, 1986). This is usually the reason for the disconnect that often exists between knowledge and performance, between how academic performance and actual academic skills. Therefore, this study suggests that further studies should be focused on modifying the cognitive skills or belief systems of the student.

It is also suggested that, consistent with the principles of PYD, further studies on academic behavior of the urban African American student should adopt an asset-based model rather than a deficit-based model. In addition, they should be person-centered rather than variable-centered approach to human development. Only by taking these into consideration would it be possible to reverse the question of academic underachievement among urban African American students.

One strategy which may be suggested in this regard is the technique of narrative psychology. In 1986, Harvard psychologist Jerome S. Bruner in his treatise on Narrative Psychology averred that humans organize experience in two ways: the logico-scientific method and the narrative method. He was quick to point out, though, that these two methods, far from being mutually exclusive, are in fact complementary. While the logico-scientific method is concerned with “tight analysis, logical proof, sound arguments and empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis” or what may be called well-formed, well-reasoned argument, the narrative is nothing but “good stories that try to convince us through their lifelikeness. Narrative psychology, therefore, is concerned with the use of narratives in the construction of self-identity or self-beliefs through a process known as accommodation (Piaget, 1963). It is, I believe, the use of the narrative, in its informal if relaxed form, providing as it does, a means of escape from the logical scrutiny of the rational, objective mind in order to subtly deposit efficacy and other positive ideas in the fertile soil of the subconscious, there to germinate, grow and reach toward its potentials. This is the more so since these students have learned to construct their present levels of self-beliefs mainly through social interaction. Narrative psychology, especially if it adopts the PYD approach, will serve to dismantle these unhelpful constructs replacing the negative, deficit-based paradigms with positive, asset-based and empowering ones that are more

suited to enhancing the level of the student's beliefs of his or her own self-efficacy and locus of control.

In addition, scholars may want to complement this with a study of the importance of Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD) on academic performance. First described by Louv (2013), as "a lack of routine contact with nature", NDD has been implicated in "stunted academic and developmental growth". This unwanted side-effect of the electronic age, according to him "draws the child indoors, restricts outdoor play" and that the nature-wired agrarian brain is not ready for the burst of urban over-stimulation that we witness today. As Filppu noted, today's children, "glued to video screens and searching for electrical outlets, may be losing touch with the natural world". Therefore if, according to Louv (2013), NDD makes a significant but negative contribution to academic achievement, then it should command scholarly attention.

Further research should also look into ways of making it possible to obtain a larger sample from the target. The present study was handicapped by the fact that recruitment of participants was made especially difficult by the arduous process outlined by the IRB. Rather than the former method of obtaining parental permission by default, the present method requires of urban parents to give a positive signal of their consent to have their ward participate in the study. Further research should take care of the relatively fewer number of students with learning disabilities. This could be brought about by eliminating the added layer of consent required for this category of students. Whereas regular education students did not need a parental permission if they were 18 years and above, students with learning disabilities needed a parental permission regardless of age. Also, the fact that the title of the study is very conspicuous on every page of the permission slip did not help matters. Students were miffed by the very idea that they were being approached for a study about students with disabilities. Almost all the students had a

negative reaction to the very idea of being approached for the study as soon as they were told about the study or were handed the permission slip.

Finally, although this study focuses on the academic achievement of urban African American students as indeed do many scholarly studies on the academic achievement gap, more research attention needs to focus on a different kind of within-group approach – urban African American students and other non-urban counterparts. Focus could also be within other urban minorities as well as Caucasian students who also happen not to live in urban centers. In this way, a more complete picture of the academic performance of children in our schools would emerge for the ultimate benefit not only of education policy makers and stakeholder; but of the entire society as a whole.

In sum, the foregoing points provide sufficient rationale for making a different set of methodological choices from the current reductionist or split approaches to the study of the achievement gap. Therefore, when the focus of future research in academic achievement is person-centered rather than variable-centered as suggested above, then scholarly attention may include the use, among other things, the narrative intervention in response to the question: “Why are urban African American students not achieving academically as best as only they can?”

On that day, it would be possible to consider a measure of self-beliefs such as self-efficacy and locus of control, not race nor even socio-economic status, to be predictive of the student’s academic achievement.

APPENDIX A- Flyer**ATTENTION PARENTS & STUDENTS**

My name is Kayode Nuga. I am a doctoral candidate in Special Education at Wayne State University, College of Education. I am conducting a research study on the experiences of special needs students in the classroom. The title of my study is:

“An exploration of the perceived academic self-efficacy and locus of control of urban african american students with learning disabilities.”

ELIGIBILITY: As a high school senior in DuBois Preparatory Academy or Cody High School, your child is eligible to participate in this study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to describe student perceptions about their ability to be successful in school and their ability to control barriers that might get in the way of learning. All students will complete a survey. Some may be invited to participate in an interview.

WHEN: The study will be conducted in the school premises during non-instructional time. The total time involved will range from 1-2 total hours, over a maximum of two meetings.

BENEFITS: There are no stipends or rewards of any kind for participation nor will there be any punishment for non-participation.

PARTICIPATION: Participation is voluntary and confidential.

I am ready to answer your questions!!

For further information please contact:

Mr. Kayode Nuga at: 313 XXX-YYYY

APPENDIX B

Parent Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: An Exploration of the Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control of Urban Students with Learning Disabilities

Parental Permission/Research Informed Consent Template

An exploration of the perceived academic self-efficacy and locus of control of urban students with learning disabilities

Purpose:

You are being asked to allow your child to be in a research study at their school that is being conducted by Olukayode Nuga from Wayne State University to study how students' academic behavior is affected by certain psychological factors such their self-efficacy and the extent to which they believe they are in control of their learning outcomes. Your child has been selected because he is a senior and therefore quite capable of articulating those things that influence his performance as a student.

Study Procedures:

If you decide to allow your child to take part in the study, your child will be asked to

- Indicate his/her willingness to participate in the study;
- To complete two questionnaires and a demographic sheet which seek to know how well he/she feels he is doing academically and what psychological factors he/she feels influence this academic performance; he/she may also be one of the few students who will participate in an interview. The responses will not be taped.
- Participation is voluntary. Refusal to continue the study or to answer any of the questions has absolutely no bearing on his/her school report or academic career.
- The study will take one visit by the researcher lasting about one hour. This will not be instructional time. Only the students who will be interviewed will require a second visit of about half an hour. Again, this would not be instructional time.
- Copies of the questionnaires are available for review with the researcher. All answers are confidential and are not linked with student names. No names are written on the questionnaires.

Benefits:

- There may be no direct benefits for your child; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

Risks:

- There is small but possible risk of the loss of confidentiality if inappropriate access to study documents occurs. However, all study materials will be secured in locked and password protected files accessible only to the study team.

Costs

There are no costs to you or your child to participate in this study.

Compensation:

- You or your child will not be paid for taking part in this study.

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Parent/Guardian Initials

HIC Date: 08/11

Form date: 11/12

Title of Study: An Exploration of the Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control of Urban Students with Learning Disabilities

Confidentiality:

All information collected about your child during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your child will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies your child personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.] may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your child's identity.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to allow your child to take part in this study. Your child is free to only answer questions that they want to answer. You are free to withdraw your child from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, your child's school, teacher, or other services you or your child are entitled to receive.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Olukayode Nuga or one of his research team members at the following phone number (313) 282-6716. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

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Parent/Guardian Initials

HIC Date: 08/11

Form date: 11/12

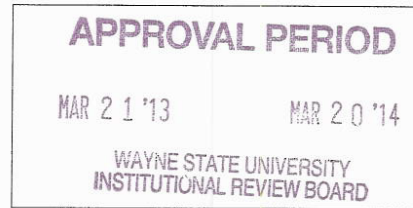
Title of Study: An Exploration of the Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control of Urban Students with Learning Disabilities

Consent to Participate in a Research Study:

To voluntarily agree to have your child take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to have your child take part in this study, you may withdraw them at any time. You are not giving up any of your or your child's legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____ Name of Participant	_____ Date of Birth
_____ Signature of Parent/ Legally Authorized Guardian	_____ Date
_____ Printed Name of Parent /Authorized Guardian	_____ Time
_____ **Signature of Witness (When applicable)	_____ Date
_____ Printed Name of Witness	_____ Time

** Use when parent/guardian has had consent form read to them (i.e., illiterate, legally blind, translated into foreign language).



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~~_____~~

Parent/Guardian Initials

HIC Date: 08/11

Form date: 11/12

APPENDIX C

Adolescent Assent/Consent Form

An exploration of the perceived academic self-efficacy and locus of control of urban students with learning disabilities

[Behavioral] Documentation of Adolescent Assent/Consent Form (ages 16-18)

An exploration of the perceived academic self-efficacy and locus of control of urban students with learning disabilities

Study Investigator: Olukayode Nuga
Teacher Education, College of Education
Wayne State University

Purpose of the study

This is a research study. This study is being done to find out if certain psychological variables influence your academic performance. Only students who offer to take part are permitted to participate in this study. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a high school senior and therefore better able to answer the questions than if you were not a senior. Please take time to make your decision. Talk to your family about it and be sure to ask questions about anything you don't understand.

Study Procedures

If you choose to take part in this study:

- * You will be given 2 questionnaires to complete. Fill them out as best you can. Your responses are designed to tell us about how you think you are doing in school and about some things that may have an effect on your academic performance. A few students will also be asked a couple of questions orally. Their answers during this interview will not be taped.
- * Your participation will be purely voluntary. You can decide to quit at any time you so wish. You don't even have to give anyone any reason for wanting to quit. And nothing will happen to you because of that.
- * The study will take only about an hour. This will not be class time. Only the few students required for the second interview will receive a second visit from the researcher. The second visit will last about half an hour. Again, it will not take place during class time.
- * You will not have to write your name or state anything that identifies you on the questionnaires you are given. In this way, no one can find out what you said or did during this study.

Benefits


You will receive no financial benefits as a result of your participation in this study; however the information you provide may help other students coming behind you achieve a level of success they might not otherwise achieve.

Risks

As far as it is possible to tell, there is absolutely no risk involved in participating in this study. However, there is a potential risk of the confidentiality of your study records being compromised in the unlikely event they are accessed by unauthorized persons.

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HIC Date: 11/12

An exploration of the perceived academic self-efficacy and locus of control of urban students
with learning disabilities

Costs

Participating in this study will not cost you anything. You will not be asked to pay for anything whatsoever.

Compensation

You are not going to be paid anything for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality

All information collected from you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Furthermore, all of the information will be stored without any identifiers you will be identified in research records by a code number only.

Voluntary Participation/ Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change anything about your relationship with your school, your teachers, your classes or Wayne State University. No one will be angry if you decide to stop being in the study.

Questions?

For questions about the study please call Mr.Kayode Nuga at (313)577-0902. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

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~~X~~ Participants Initials _____

HIC Date: 11/12

An exploration of the perceived academic self-efficacy and locus of control of urban students
with learning disabilities

AGREEMENT TO BE IN THE STUDY

Your signature below means that you have read the above information about the study and have had a chance to ask questions to help you understand what you will do in this study. Your signature also means that you have been told that you can change your mind later and withdraw if you want to. By signing this assent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights. You will be given a copy of this form.

Signature of Participant (13 yrs & older)

Date

Printed name of Participant (13 yrs & older)

Time

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Time

APPROVAL PERIOD

MAR 21 '13

MAR 20 '14

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

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X Participants Initials _____

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APPENDIX D

Student Demographic Survey

Personal Info

Gender:

Age:

Grade Level:

1. Have you ever participated in a research study before? Yes/No

2. Why did you choose to participate in this research?.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. Overall, how much do you like school?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Like very much

4. How comfortable do you feel at your school?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all comfortable				Very comfortable

(Five point scale, 1 = not comfortable at all, 5 = very comfortable)

APPENDIX E

THE SELF IN SCHOOL (SIS) SCALE

SELF IN SCHOOL

© Steven A. Smith

Directions: Circle the *number* that tells how true or false each of these statements is.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely False						Completely True

Place a check mark (✓) in the column that most closely how true or false each statement is about you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I have the ability to do well in my school work.							
2. I put forth my best effort in all of my classes.							
3. I know how to study for each of my classes.							
4. I am a good student.							
5. I expect to gain a great deal from my school experience.							
6. I am as capable of succeeding as most students.							
7. I have the skills I need to do well in school.							
8. I am doing a good job in my classes.							
9. I expect that school will be rewarding to me.							
10. I am confident I will do well when I take tests.							
11. I am confident that I will succeed in school.							
12. I expect that I will graduate from school.							
13. I am confident that I will reach my academic goals.							
14. I am the type of person who does well in school.							
15. School is a good experience for me.							

APPENDIX F

The Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire

Place an X in front of the statement that best describes you. Please answer all questions and be as honest as possible.

+	1. If a teacher passes you to the next grade, would it probably be ___ a. because the teacher liked you, or ___ b. because of the work you did?
+	2. When you do well on a test at school, it is more likely to be ___ a. because you studied for it, or ___ b. because the test was especially easy?
-	3. When you have trouble understanding something in school, is it usually ___ a. because the teacher didn't explain it clearly, or ___ b. because you didn't listen carefully?
-	4. When you read a story and can't remember much of it, is it usually ___ a. because the story wasn't well written, or ___ b. because you weren't interested in the story?
+	5. Suppose your parents say you are doing well in school, is it likely to happen ___ a. because your school work is good, or ___ b. because they are in a good mood?
+	6. Suppose you did better than usual in a subject at school. Would it probably happen ___ a. because you tried harder, or ___ b. because someone helped you?
-	7. When you lose at a game of cards or checkers, does it usually happen ___ a. because the other player is good at the game, or ___ b. because you don't play well?
-	8. Suppose a person doesn't think you are very bright or clever ___ a. can you make him/her change his/her mind if you try to, or ___ b. are there some people who will think you're not very bright no matter what you do?
+	9. If you solve a puzzle quickly, is it ___ a. because it wasn't a very hard puzzle, or ___ b. because you worked on it carefully?
-	10. If a boy or girl tells you that you are dumb, is it more likely that they say that ___ a. because they are mad at you, or ___ b. because what you did really wasn't very bright?
-	11. Suppose you study to become a teacher, scientist, or doctor and you fail. Do you think this would happen ___ a. because you didn't work hard enough ___ b. because you needed some help, and other people didn't give it to you?

+	12. When you learn something quickly in school, is it usually ___a. because you paid close attention, or ___b. because the teacher explained it clearly?
+	13. If a teacher says to you, "Your work is fine," is it ___a. something teachers usually say to encourage pupils, or ___b. because you did a good job?
-	14. When you find it hard to work arithmetic or math problems at school, is it ___a. because you didn't study well enough before you tried them, or ___b. because the teacher gave problems that were too hard?
-	15. When you forget something you heard in class, is it ___a. because the teacher didn't explain it very well, or ___b. because you didn't try very hard to remember?
+	16. Suppose you weren't sure about the answer to a question your teacher asked you, but your answer turned out to be right. Is it likely to happen: ___a. because she wasn't as particular as usual, or ___b. because you gave the best answer you could think of?
+	17. When you read a story and remember most of it, is it usually ___a. because you were interested in the story, or ___b. because the story was well written?
-	18. If your parents tell you that you are acting silly and not thinking clearly, is it more likely to be ___a. because of something you did, or ___b. because they happen to be feeling cranky?
-	19. When you don't do well on a test at school, is it ___a. because the test was especially hard, or ___b. because you didn't study for it?
+	20. When you win at a game of cards or checks, does it happen ___a. because you play real well, or ___b. because the other person doesn't play well?
+	21. If people think you are bright or clever, is it ___a. because they happen to like you, or ___b. because you usually act that way?
-	22. If a teacher didn't pass you to the next grade, would it probably be ___a. because the teacher "had it in for you," or ___b. because your school work wasn't good enough?
-	23. Suppose you don't do as well as usual in a subject at school. Would this probably happen ___a. because you weren't as careful as usual, or ___b. because somebody bothered you and kept you from working?

+	24. If a boy or girl tells you that you are bright, is it usually ___ a. because you thought up a good idea, or ___ b. because they like you?
+	25. Suppose you became a famous teacher, scientist, or doctor. Do you think this would happen ___ a. because other people helped you when you needed it, or ___ b. because you worked very hard?
-	26. Suppose your parents say you aren't doing well in your school work. Is this likely to happen more ___ a. because your work isn't very good, or ___ b. because they are feeling cranky?
-	27. Suppose you are showing a friend how to play a game and he has trouble with it. Would it happen ___ a. because he wasn't able to understand how to play, or ___ b. because you couldn't explain it well?
+	28. When you find it easy to work arithmetic or math problems at school, is it usually ___ a. because the teacher gave you especially easy programs, or ___ b. because you studied your book well before you tried them?
+	29. When you remember something you heard in class, is it usually ___ a. because you tried hard to remember, or ___ b. because the teacher explained it well?
-	30. If you can't work a puzzle, is it more likely to happen ___ a. because you are not especially good at working puzzles, or ___ b. because the instructions weren't written clearly enough?
+	31. If your parents tell you that you are bright or clever, is it more likely ___ a. because they are feeling good, or ___ b. because of something you did?
+	32. Suppose you are explaining how to play a game to a friend and she/he learns quickly. Would it happen more often ___ a. because you explained it well, or ___ b. because she/he was able to understand it.
-	33. Suppose you are not sure about the answer to a question your teacher asks you, and the answer you give turns out to be wrong. Is it likely to happen ___ a. because the teacher was more particular than usual, or ___ b. because you answered too quickly?
-	34. If a teacher says to you, "Try to do better," would it be ___ a. because this is something she might say to get students to try harder, or ___ b. because your work wasn't as good as usual?

APPENDIX G

The Semi-structured face-to-face, follow-up Interview Questions.

(A) SIS – Self-efficacy Questionnaire

Item1 I put forth my best effort in all of my classes

1. Describe some of the efforts you make in class.
2. And why do you think they are very good?
3. Do you think you can still do better?

Item 2 I am a good student.

4. What does it mean to be a good student?

Item 3. I have the skills to do well in school

5. Can you tell me the skills you think you have?
6. How do these skills help you do well at school?

7. How do you think these skills will help you in the future?

Item 4. I am confident I will do well at school.

8. Why do you think you will?

(B) Locus of Control (IAR Questionnaire)

9. Suppose a person doesn't think you are bright or clever, do you think you can change their mind?
10. When you find it hard to do arithmetic or math problems at school, do you think it is because of what someone other than you did?
11. Suppose you weren't sure about the answer to a question your teacher asked you - but your answer turned out to be right - is it likely to happen because she wasn't as particular as usual or because you gave the best answer you could think of?

12. Is chance always working in your favor at school?
13. When you have trouble understanding something in school, is it usually because the teacher didn't explain it clearly?
14. Or is it because you didn't listen carefully?

APPENDIX H

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

SIS – Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

Item #1**I put forth my best effort in all of my classes****#1 Describe some of the efforts you make in class**

Participant 1: I try to do all my work (schoolwork and homework) the best I can. I make sure I understand what I'm doing and I do it right and neatly. 3/3

Participant 2: Asking questions, paying attention and getting there on time. 3/3

Participant 3: I come in on time, actively participate in class work and do all my work. 3/3

Participant 4: I try my best to finish all my work. I try and make sure that I'm done before everyone else so the teacher knows I'm serious. I do all my work. 3/3

Participant 5: I ask my teacher for help as well as my classmates and I use all the resources you can have like school textbooks, the internet and, in some cases, a calculator. 2/2

Participant 6: I follow directions, I study and I do my work. 1/1

#2 And why do you think they are very good?

Participant 1: Not all of them. Not the classes I don't like. Some I don't have to because they are easy and my best efforts are good enough. 1/2

P2: Because I always have good grades 1/1

P3: I think they are good because the teacher looks differently at me like I am one of the good students in the class. (Teacher's approval) 1/1

P4: I think they are good because I put my mind to it. No one can stop me from what I think I should be doing. 2/2

P5: Yes, because most of the time, they help me. 1/1

Participant 6: I think so because they work. They give me results

#3 Do you think you can still do better?

Participant 1: With studying, yes. 1/1

P2: Yes 1/1

P3: Yes, I think I can do better because I just know that I can. 1/1

P4: Yes, I think I can try a little bit harder. 1/1

P5: Honestly, I don't see anything more I can do besides what I already do.

P6: Yes, I think I can. 1/1

Item #2**I am a good student.****#4 What does it mean to be a good student?**

Participant 1: By paying attention in class. By doing all my work no matter what.

Checking my grades to make sure I am doing OK. 3/3

P2: I try my best and get good grades. 2/2

P3: You have to be respectful, gentle and nice.

P4: It means to listen, to pay attention in class and not disturb the teacher while he is talking. You raise up your hands if you want to ask a question. You do not disturb anyone in your class. And you don't make trouble.

P5: Being attentive, respectful, obedient and participating in class activities.

P6: Be respectful, be on time to class and prepared to do my class work.

Item #3

I have the skills to do well in school

#5 Can you tell me the skills you think you have?

Participant 1: Good memorization skills and I retain information easily after reading. 2/2

P2: Because I have good teachers and good attention span. 1/1

P3: I think I pay attention and I participate in the class activities. I do well at what I am asked to do. 3/3

P4: I am able to do all my work. 1/1

P5: I have great literary skills – I read well, spell well and have a great vocabulary. 1/1

P6: I have good handwriting and I like reading a lil' bit. 1/1

#6 How do these skills help you do well at school?

P1: Helps me do better on my tests especially the harder classes. 1/1

P2: I am able to pay attention even while others are busy fooling around. 1/1

P3: These skills help me do well at school because they are motivative. They motivate me to do my work and to do what I need to do to do well. 2/2

P4: They help me because I am able to do my work step by step, I take my time and I am really focused.

P5: They help me in my English class because I do well in English. I am a very good reader. 2/2

P6: They help me especially in reading in my ELA classes or writing. My teacher recognizes the fact that I read well 2/2 .

#7 How do you think these skills will help you in the future?

P1: These skills will help me in college as the work becomes much harder.

P2: I will probably be able to do everything I participate in and then be able to get enough focus to get things done. 2/2

P3: These skills will help me to be successful. I think they will lead me to success in the future. 2/2

P4: They will help me in the future by making me to improve myself and they will make me study better to get the grades I really want. 2/2

P5: These skills will be of help to me when I go for job interviews. They will also be of help to me in future job interviews as a screen writer for that is what I want to be. 2/2

P6: In the future, you need to know how to read and write to get along, to do well in school.

Item #4

I am confident I will do well at school

#8 Why do you think you will do well?

P1: Because I do well in school now. 1/1

P2: Because I pay attention, I study and I do my homework assignment. I listen to the teachers. 4/4

P3: I know I will do well because I am not a bad student. I don't get complaints about my performance from my teachers. 2/2

P4: I think I will do well because I work very hard and no one can stop me from doing what I want. I'll prove it to my parents I am the best I can be. 3/3

P5: Because I am confident in my intelligence, I am persistent and I try my best most of the time. And now, I do well in school as a result. I expect nothing less. 4/4

P6: Because I study well. If I study well, I should do well. 3/3

B. Locus of Control (IAR) Questionnaire

#9 Suppose a person doesn't think you are bright or clever, do you think you can change their mind?

P1: Because I do well in school and do my homework and people see I do well on tests. 3/3

P2: By doing well in class. 1/1

P3: Yes, I can by just showing them. My actions (performance) will show them By being bright, I'll show them I can be bright.

P4: Yes, I can show them better than I can tell them.

P5: I really don't fit into anything with my peers so I ignore them because within the next 5 minutes, they are going to ask me for help. They are going to need something from me anyway.

P6: I'll convince him. I'll show him my talents, what I learn and what kind of skills I have.

#10 When you find it hard to do arithmetic or math problems at school, do you think it is because of something you did?

P1: It's really not because of someone else. It's because of me, what I do. 3/3

P2: Not relevant.

P3: Oh yes! Because I was never good in Math anyway.

P4: Only if they give the answer before I did.

P5: I don't generally do fine. This is because it is hard for me to follow or understand math. It is just too complicated for me.

P6: I think that may be because I misread the direction or probably didn't hear them correctly.

#11 *Suppose you weren't sure about the answer to a question your teacher asked you – but your answer turned out to be right – is it likely to happen because she wasn't as particular as usual or because you gave the best answer you could think of?*

P1: Probably because I knew it; but just wasn't sure. 1/1

P2: Because I give my best efforts but maybe I forget or whatever. 1/1

P3: I would think it is because of what I did and because of what I know. I would think it is because I gave the best answer I could think of.

P4: I gave the best answer I would think of. There's no other way of putting it!

P5: It would be because I gave the best answer I could think of.

P6: It's because I gave the best answer I could give.

#12 *Is chance always working in your favor at school?*

P1: No, because I make efforts – I study and do the things I am expected to do. I don't leave anything to chance. 3/3

P2: No, no chances. 1/1

P3: Yes, they are.

P4: Sometimes, not all the time.

P5: Yes, sometimes when I'm slacking off, I still get good grades that I don't really deserve.

P6: Sometimes.

#13 *When you have trouble understanding something in school, is it usually because the teacher didn't explain it clearly?*

P1: It is often because the teacher did not explain it clearly

P2: It is usually because it is not taught clearly by the teacher.

P3: I think it would be either that or I wasn't paying attention.

P4: Yes, sometimes.

P5: No

P6: Yes, it is. Certainly.

#14 *Or is it because you didn't listen carefully?*

P1: No, it's the first one. Because the teacher did not explain it properly

P2: No, it is usually because the teacher did not explain it clearly.

P3: Yes, it will be because I wasn't listening carefully.

P4: Also, Yes sometimes.

P5: I think it is because I don't listen carefully

P6: Yes, sometimes.

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ABSTRACT**AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERCEIVED ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY AND
LOCUS OF CONTROL OF URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES****by****OLUKAYODE ABIMBOLA NUGA****December 2013****Advisor:** Prof. Marshall Zumberg**Major:** Special Education**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

The search for an answer to the intractable question of the academic achievement gap between African American and other minority students on the one hand and their Caucasian counterparts has attracted much scholarly attention. What has not attracted an equal amount of attention is the focus on African American students with learning disabilities.

This study reframes the question of academic achievement gap not by using the Caucasian student as a frame of reference against which to make comparison but by using the African American student in regular education classroom. Drawing upon some scholarly work that found that ethnic groups were really not homogeneous entities and that studies of academic achievement within ethnic groups yielded far more significant results than between groups (Carpenter, Ramirez & Severn (2007). the study focused on a comparison of the academic achievement between urban African American students with learning disabilities and their typical peers. The choice of what variable to examine was suggested by scholarly work that indicated certain psychological factors influence academic performance (Jackson and Nutini, 2002). Two of those variables were the focus of this study - perceived academic self-efficacy and locus of control.

Participants consisted of 40 students (15 students with learning disabilities and 25 general education students) from two high schools in an urban school district in southeastern Michigan. The results confirm those studies that show that students with disabilities are disabled not so much by their skills or lack of skills, but by the beliefs they hold about their own abilities with implications for policy makers, education professionals and other stakeholders. Also, it is likely to provide the long-sought answers to the question of academic performance in minority groups with the added benefit that the student is spared the possibility of the humiliation and embarrassment that accompany comparison with another group.

Keywords: academic achievement gap, corporate social responsibility, developmental systems theory, hybrid research design, locus of control, narrative psychology, nature deficit disorder (NDD), perceived self-efficacy, positive youth development, self-beliefs, students with learning disabilities.

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