What methods have been used to help narrow the achievement gap between African-American students and White students?

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What methods have been used to help narrow the achievement gap between African-American students and White students?

Abstract
The research in this paper provides an overview and analysis of the problems in our nations' schools pertaining to the achievement gap between African-American students and White students, and what interventions and/or supports that have been found to start narrowing this gap. The analysis is based on educational journals, books and my own personal experiences from the stand point of teaching in a school with 60% African-American students. It will reveal some of the factors that may contribute to the achievement gap between African-American and White students, as well as teacher/student relations, classroom management and high/low teacher expectations, parent/teacher relations, testing, gender classrooms, and the influences that poverty may have a role in academic achievement.
What Methods Have Been Used to Help Narrow the Achievement Gap Between African-American Students and White Students?

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"School reform is only one part of the solution for closing the achievement gaps."


Chapter I

Introduction

The research in this paper provides an overview and analysis of the problems in our nations’ schools pertaining to the achievement gap between African-American students and White students, and what interventions and/or supports that have been found to start narrowing this gap. The analysis is based on educational journals, books and my own personal experiences from the standpoint of teaching in a school with 60% African-American students. It will reveal some of the factors that may contribute to the achievement gap between African-American and White students, as well as teacher/student relations, classroom management and high/low teacher expectations, parent/teacher relations, testing, gender classrooms, and the influences that poverty may have a role in academic achievement.

Since I have worked in a predominately African-American school and a school that has been labeled a school in need of improvement based on the ‘No Child Left Behind Act,’ I am interested in the interventions and strategies that have been proven to be effective in schools with low socioeconomic backgrounds and where students have shown an improvement in academic areas as well as test scores. I worked with sixth grade level students so I have observed students continuation into the next two grade levels with very little success in narrowing the achievement gap. Although students who enter the sixth grade are taught different strategies for reading comprehension such as
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inferring, questioning, comparing and contrasting; they do not necessarily transfer it into the next grade level.

The gap between African-American students and White students in the school where I taught is wide, with boys being at the greatest risk. Reading grade levels show the widest gap with approximately 50% below where they should be at grade level. The gap is not as wide in the elementary as it is in the middle school level but continues to widen throughout the following years. The focus of this paper will examine the need to incorporate strategies for teacher consistency, and for understanding the teacher’s important role as a contributor to eliminating the achievement gap.

Statement of the Research Question

*What methods have been used to narrow the achievement gap between African-American students and White students?*

As a teacher who has worked in a low socioeconomic school and one that has been identified as a school in need of improvement, I see the frustrations within the school that administrators and teachers go through on a daily basis. We, as educators, want all students to be successful and reach their fullest potential academically. Unfortunately, the achievement gap between African-American student and White students has widened and has had a long standing history, with the exception of a slight progress in the 1980’s. Educators need to be able to understand this problem and know how to help diminish it if not eliminate it altogether if possible.

If we are reflective teachers, we need to ask ourselves what is working in the classroom and what is not. We need to be aware of any ineffective ways teachers are teaching that may contribute to the achievement gap. Teachers need to understand their
students, not only on an academic level but also socially. They need to be aware of
different cultures and have an understanding of one’s culture. We can-not see students as
all the same; they do not all learn the same. Each student brings in their own unique
experiences and background into a classroom.

Is there social injustice in the classroom consciously or unconsciously?
“Research has shown (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, Bridgest, 2003) that African-
American student’s chances of school achievement increase when they, like their non
African-American school mates, experience education with teachers who understand their
sociocultural knowledge and take into account cultural factors when designing,
implementing, and evaluating instruction” (p. 49).

There are so many factors that have been noted to contribute to the achievement
gap. We need to focus on what will and what has proven to be effective to start
narrowing the achievement gap. Until the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ was put into place,
there was not much pressure or effort to narrow the achievement gap. Students who
couldn’t perform were inadvertently either put into special education placement or left
behind academically either by repeating the grade level or by being passed on to the next
ill prepared. There was really no focus on interventions or strategies that would help
students get caught up and perform to the student’s highest potential. The majority of
students who fall behind are African-American and the percentage of those students is
also high in special education programs. Since these students perform below grade level,
the chances of them entering the special education program are high.

Students who generally fall into the achievement gap are considered “at-risk.”
The designation of at-risk is based on several factors such as those who are unlikely to
graduate from high school, low achievement, and retention in a grade, behavior problems, poor attendance and low socioeconomic status. Another question is why or what is causing these to be the factors? Is it due to their home life? Do we place blame due to lack of motivation on the students part? If students are labeled “at-risk” then schools and teachers need to know how and what can be done to eliminate this. Are the schools or teachers in part to blame?

Although my research question pertains to narrowing the achievement gap between African-American and White students, it seems that the research suggests the majority of African-American students are considered “at-risk.” This, however, does not mean the reason for poor performance has any correlation with any of the “at-risk” factors I have mentioned earlier. Our schools have thrown new and different types of curriculum at teachers hoping that this will have a positive effect and raise the test scores within their schools. Teachers are not adequately prepared to teach new curriculum, thus putting students at risk even more for poor performance.

There have also been new programs that have been put into affect for one year and eliminated the next, before their effectiveness could be evaluated. Pressure is put on teachers and schools for high performance testing. We will see where some of the problems may arise from, what has been proven beneficial and if any gains have been made in narrowing the gap.
Significance of Problem

The average black or Hispanic student compared to the average white or Asian shows depressing results in the education system. The NAEP assessment reports average scores for each racial group and also places individual test takers in one of four different “achievement levels.” The lowest level is labeled Below Basics, where students are unable to achieve even partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that they first need to be proficient in their work. Students with only partial mastery are at the Basic Level. For students to be at the next step, proficient, they must give “solid academic performance” demonstrating competency over challenging subject matter. The highest level is advanced and the performance is “superior.”

NAEP results show a high proportion of all American students leave high school today with academic skills that are “Below Basics,” the lowest level. The figures for whites and Asians are disturbing, but much less so than scores of blacks and Hispanics, which are alarming. In five of the seven subjects tested, a majority of black students perform “Below Basics.” A majority of black students do not have even a “partial” mastery of the fundamental knowledge and skills expected of students in the twelfth grade.

With students leaving high school with such low performance, it is becoming more of a challenge for employers to find people with the basic skills required for certain jobs. Even if students choose to go into college right after high school, they are not prepared for college level work. When Harvard economist Ronald F. Ferguson surveyed middle and high school students (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003) from fifteen affluent school districts he found that 48% of the black students reported that they understood the
teacher's lessons only "half of the time." This is almost double the percent for white students which were 27%. Black students did not fare much better with reading. Fifty-five percent of them said that they did not understand "very well" what they were assigned to read at least half of the time; this was again nearly doubling the rate for whites which were thirty percent (p. 22).

At least a quarter of a century ago, black students were even further behind according to the NAEP data when it was first available. The progress that was shown during the 1980's has come to an end, and there are indications that the racial gap is widening. There are differences of opinions on how and why the decline started. Most feel the decline in public education began when the federal government stepped in and tried to help out the states, the poor, and the minorities. Obviously, they did not know what they were doing.

"NAEP results consistently show a frightening gap between the basic academic skills of the average African-American or Latino students and those of the typical white or Asian-American. By twelfth grade, on average, black students are four years behind those who are white or Asian. Hispanics don’t do much better" (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 12).

In a 2001 report by the U.S. Department of Education stated that "segregation of black and Hispanic students deprived them of the opportunity to learn." This claim is based on the investigation by Gary Orfield, a professor of education at Harvard. Orfield states that attending a segregated school in which the minorities are in the majority, has terrible educational and social consequences. He claims that segregation is a primary, perhaps the primary source of the racial gap in school achievement.
Narrowing the Achievement Gap

Definitions

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is also known as “the nation’s report card.” It was established by Congress in 1969 to regularly test a sample of American elementary and secondary school students in the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades. The tests are administered uniformly across the nation using the same test booklets. The NAEP provides results on subject matter achievement, instructional experiences and school environment for populations of students and groups within those populations.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - is a revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The key components of the new version of the legislation are two goals that are associated with accountability and closing the achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds. The 1965 legislation argued that the law provided federal funding to schools but did not mandate accountability for academic results; NCLB is supposed to do both.

Charter Schools- Charter Schools are nonsectarian public schools of choice that operate with freedom from many of the regulations that the traditional public schools follow. The “Charter” establishing each school is a performance contract detailing the schools mission, program, goals, students attending, and methods of assessment. Charter Schools are usually granted 3-5 years and at the end of their term the establishment granting the charter may renew the school’s contract. The basic concept of Charter Schools is that they stay independent in return for their accountability. They are held
accountable for academics and fiscal practices to the sponsors that grant them which include parents and the public that funds them.

**KIPP Schools**- KIPP is the acronym for ‘Knowledge is Power Program.’ KIPP schools are free, open-enrollment, college-preparatory schools where underserved students develop the knowledge, skills and character traits needed to be successful in high school, college and life in general. These schools provide a safe and structured environment, more time spent in school, and high-quality teachers. KIPP schools share common principles known as the “Five Pillars”: High Expectations, Choice & Commitment, More Time, Power to Lead and Focus on Results. Over 90% of the students are African-American or Hispanic.
Organization

Chapter one consists of the basic introduction of this research paper. It includes my personal experience connected to the research question and why I decided to research the topic. Chapter one includes the research question and the significance of the research to the question as well as listing factors that may contribute to the problem.

Chapter two is the review of the research pertaining to teacher’s perceptions and expectations, racism in the schools and single-gender classrooms. It lists sources from educational journals and authored books. The research will correlate to the factors that are listed in chapter one.

Chapter three is research on school expectations, parental involvement and the curriculum. What, if any of these mentioned are contributing factors to the achievement gap?

Chapter four is the analysis and interpretation of the research and conclusions to the research question. It focuses on the findings and answers the question to some of the factors that contribute to the research question.

Chapter five contains some implications for practice and how the research can help eliminate the achievement gap. The findings are easy enough to incorporate into the classroom on a daily basis.
Chapter II

Introduction

Chapter II focuses on the assumption that teacher's perceptions, expectations, and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes. Too often teachers ignore the significance of race in the classroom. Intentionally or not, it is important to note that racist or biased behavior coming from a teacher could be one factor contributing to the achievement gap between African-American and White students.

This chapter will show that several studies have been conducted on the effects of teacher's perceptions of teaching African-American students and their expectations for them. The way teachers perceive students in the classroom can have either positive or negative effects academically for the student. The classroom environment is a very important aspect of a student's education which seems to be ignored.

Single-gender classrooms are also covered in chapter II. This will show the relevance of race and the positive outcomes when these classes are taught by a teacher of the same race as the students. Research found that the culturally relevant pedagogies of African-American teachers have been effective when it comes to academic success for African-American students. White teachers perceive most African-American students as low-achievers; African-American students state they have higher motivation when their teacher is African-American. These are important points when we are looking at how educators can help narrow the achievement gap between African-American and White students.
Teacher Perceptions and Expectations

How and what teacher's perceptions are of students can have a profound effect academically on them. There are three steps White teachers need to make before attempting to teach African-American students. The first step is to admit that race is a factor. The second step is for teachers to understand race or ethnicity by reading about the history and culture of their students. And last, but not least, is for teachers to appreciate their culture, whether they are Black or White (Kunjufu, 2002, p. 22).

(Delpit, 2006) found the following:

The clash between school culture and home culture is actualized in at least two ways. When significant differences exist between the student’s culture and the school’s culture, teachers can easily misread student’s aptitudes, intent, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns. Secondly, when such cultural differences exist, teachers may utilize styles of instruction and/or discipline that are at odds with community norms. An example: A twelve-year old friend tells me that there are three kinds of teachers in his middle school; the black teachers, none of whom are afraid of Black kids; the white teachers, a few of whom are not afraid of Black kids; and the largest group of White teachers, who are all afraid of Black kids. It is this last group that, according to my young informant, consistently has the most difficulty with teaching and whose students have the most difficulty with learning (pp.167-168).

One of the contributing factors that may contribute to the achievement gap is White teachers who are not willing or do not know how to teach African-American children. If a White teacher is teaching in a school where over fifty percent of the student
population is African-American and that teacher has never had the opportunity to live in a community other than White people, that teacher will have some difficulty teaching in the school environment.

A study was conducted (Bakari, 2003) which included 415 students who were enrolled in teacher education programs at six different universities. They were grouped into three subgroups. *Group 1* consisted of pre-service teachers from public, predominantly White university; the university had no specific requirements related to teaching culturally diverse students. *Group 2* consisted of pre-service teachers from historically Black colleges and universities. *Group 3* included pre-service teachers from private, predominately White universities. The method used to assess pre-service teacher’s attitudes was the Teaching African American Students Survey (TAASS), along with two other supporting instruments. One was used to determine attitudes towards teaching in general and the other measured social desirability. The results of the surveys showed that African-American pre-service teachers were more willing to teach African-American students than the pre-service White teachers. Results also showed the need for teacher education programs to assist pre-service teachers in gaining positive attitudes toward teaching African American students (pp. 644-650).

As noted earlier, if a White teacher has been brought up in a predominately White community, there may be a lack of understanding the cultural differences. People tend to go where their comfort level is best. Teachers need to have an understanding of the student’s culture to teach them successfully.

There are differences in thinking between African-American and White teachers and what may contribute to the achievement gap. Most White teachers perceive some of
the contributing factors for the achievement gap are the student and their home environment. White teachers on the average also seemed to believe that misbehaviors and lack of effort are significant causes of the achievement gap. African-American teachers on the other hand think the focus is more on the teachers, schools and the educational system.

‘Are schools or teachers to blame for this gap?’ An answer to that is one of the contributing factors to the achievement gap is lower teacher expectations. Teachers’ perceptions of low-income and African-American student’s academic capacity are lower than those they hold for middle and upper income students. The research also emphasizes the role of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” through which teachers’ low expectations reduce student’s academic self-image, causing students to exert less effort in school (p. 1). Students need to feel challenged and engaged in their learning. When students see a positive outcome they are more willing to move on to the next challenge in their educational setting (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004).

Another longitudinal study found that teacher’s believed that African-American students who came from low income households lacked motivation and support from their families. (Ulenberg & Brown, 2002). This study shows a correlation with teacher’s perceptions on students and their socioeconomic background.

Teachers who do not know or understand certain student’s cultural movements or actions have a tendency to misread or misjudge a student’s behavior. African-American students have shown academic achievement when their teachers understood their socio-cultural background. These teachers also took into account student’s cultural factors when implementing and designing the curriculum. These teachers encouraged high
If teachers are to teach effectively, they need to recognize the importance of student perception of the teacher’s intent in the classroom. Problems arise from culturally different interactional styles and this seems to disproportionately affect African-American boys. African-American boys exhibit a high degree of physical activity and movement. This usually causes negative consequences in the classroom due to the lack of cultural understanding on the teacher’s part.

Researcher Harry Morgan (1990) documents what most of us who have worked with African-American children have learned; that African-American children, more than White, and boys more than girls, initiate interactions with peers in the classroom in performing assigned tasks. Morgan concluded that a classroom that allows for greater movement and interaction will better facilitate the learning and social styles of African-American boys, while forbidding such activity will unduly penalize them (Deplit, 2006, p. 169).

The disproportionately high number of African-American boys that are being assigned to special education programs could be due to a lack of understanding of how they learn. If teachers were taught how to redesign classrooms so that the styles of African-American boys are accommodated, we could possibly see lower numbers of African-American children in special education programs and those who are expelled or suspended from school.

Kunjufu (2002) finds that it is to a student’s disadvantage that a teacher makes a comment such as, “I see students all the same.” Teachers who have knowledge of
different cultures have an easier understanding of how the student learns. Students do not all act or learn in the same way. "I believe that the most important factor impacting the academic achievement of African-American children is not the race or gender of the teacher, but the teacher’s expectations" (p.17). White teachers who struggle with their teaching environment will not be beneficial in teaching students. They will lower the bar academically as well as socially in the classroom.

It is important that teachers understand the mannerisms and styles of students from different cultures. They may be misinterpreted and this could lead to conflicts between teacher and student. Students who are not understood by their teachers are more prone to be sent out of class and have more disciplinary actions. A teacher’s worst enemy in the classroom is his/her self if they are afraid of the student. Students do not learn from them. Kunjufu (2002) states “African-American males want the teacher to win the showdown, but if they ever notice fear, you have lost their respect and can no longer be an effective teacher” (p. 20).

In a national study which included ten of the largest school districts, African-American students were three to five times more likely than White students to be suspended or expelled from school. A majority of the discipline issues happen in the classroom where the teacher is not in control. Teachers who have structured classroom management and open communication with their students see less of classroom disturbances than those who do not.

Research has shown that reactions of White people to African-Americans do show a subtle discriminatory behavior such as less assistance, greater aggression, and
avoidance. Teachers need to be aware of their subtle racism; it may not be intentional but it still exists in the classrooms and society.

Classrooms should have multicultural bulletin boards, curriculum, library collections and lesson plans that reflect the diversity today’s classrooms have. Teachers need to set the stage before performance. They need to use interesting materials and curriculum to get the students engaged in their learning. Far too often teachers are stuck using the same curriculum, the same methods for years without any change.

The racial gap can be closed only if we acknowledge it and understand why it exists. Students bring into the classroom what they are taught at home about race and cultures. They may bring in views that are racist without understanding the full meaning and how they are to interact with those feelings. Students are now in a classroom full of the people they were taught at home not to trust. It is now that the teacher can bring more awareness of commonality and differences into the classroom. Students can share their families’ history with each other for a better understanding and appreciation. A proactive teacher is an effective teacher when using teachable moments in the classroom. When students feel comfortable in the classroom, it is easier for learning to take place. The relationship between teacher and student should be based on trust.

Hale (2001) states many African-American children do not like school, particularly the males. Many drop out intellectually by the time they are in the fifth grade and make it legal at sixteen. Those who do jeopardize their future and thus have a harder time seeking employment that is stable enough to support themselves or even a family. Children who do not conceptualize a future for themselves do not have the motivation to defer the gratification found in premature sexual activity or substance abuse (p. 43).
Another conflict in the classroom is that teachers assume that students will have everything that teachers have in their homes. Not every African-American home has an encyclopedia set, maps, globes, computers or printers. Teachers need to be careful when giving assignments as homework where these things are required. In a multicultural classroom a teacher needs to be aware of the different types of households each student comes from.

"I’ve heard school horror stories of children receiving extra credit because their reports were typed and included color graphics. This scenario does not evaluate the child’s learning but rather the household’s assets" (Kunjufu, 2002, p.6).

By improving the education system we can help improve society. Better education leads to higher self-esteem and usually better paying jobs. Standards need to be set higher for students and to be challenging and engaging. Teachers who engage students in multicultural education have a higher percent of student involvement and they become part of the educational process and thus feel a connection between themselves and school. Students bring their own unique backgrounds and experiences into the classroom and teachers who build on those and open them up to new experiences help broaden a child’s success in their academic future.

Teacher education programs are offering more multicultural classes at the college level to help better prepare teachers in the classroom. Awareness and understanding of different cultures can help a teacher plan and prepare for the classroom. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds can and will learn if they are channeled in the right direction. Teachers should not set the standards lower due to a student’s home life. Lower expectations are only setting the student up for failure. If the work is too easy
they find it boring which can lead to behavior issues in the classroom. Setting the
curriculum up so that they find it interesting, yet challenging will help the student to
perform at their best ability.

Racism

Unfortunately we live in a society where racism does exist. The civil rights
movement (1968) banned discrimination in federally funded housing, and created legal
equality of opportunity. Some progress was achieved, but institutional racism remains
and the scars of centuries of repression remains. African-Americans still have to struggle
with housing, financial backing and credit markets. This is to a disadvantage to them
considering the majority of good schools are in the better neighborhoods. Better schools
have better teachers and new and updated curriculum. Magnet schools and private
schools are not the answer to low-income African-American students. They need better
schools and teachers in their neighborhoods.

“Students of color and White students carry the burden of dealing with identities
constructed not by themselves but by others based on myth, falsehoods, inaccurate
generalizations, ignorance, and intolerance” (Dilg, 2003, p. 74). A student’s sense of
who they are and how they fit in or will be accepted has an impact on how they explore
or respond to classroom curriculum. Understanding multiple aspects of racial or cultural
identity, teachers as well as students can help us understand and respond to complex
aspects of our own and student’s attitudes and behaviors, and in return creating a more
meaningful classroom experience.
Lee (1995) points out historical legacies limiting opportunities to learn. "The historical legacies of racism that continue to limit opportunities to learn for African American students are

1. Attitudes toward African American English;
2. Assumptions about Blacks' inferiority;
3. A continuing history of under-resourced schools serving predominantly African American populations" (Ferguson, 2004, p. 71).

How teachers interact and the use of their language in the classroom can have either a positive or negative impact on students. Different teaching styles relate to certain ethnic and class groups. For example, African-American teachers are more likely to give directions to a group of disruptive students in a direct and explicit way. They are usually more direct and use a louder tone of voice. This also shows that the teacher displays a higher degree of control and power in the classroom.

On the other hand, middle-class White teachers are more likely to use a softer tone of voice and are more reserved. The types of questions they ask in class are usually yes or no response ones. They are using more of an indirect command which down plays their power over the situation. This may be how the teacher is accustomed to act whether it is in the home or abroad.

The first case includes statements that many African-American children hear at home. The second statement may sound to many of these youngsters like the words of someone who is fearful (and thus less deserving of respect), African-American children are more likely to obey the first explicit directive and ignore the second implied directive (Delpit, 2006, 168).
Teachers need to be conscious of the cultural differences that each student brings into the classroom. Students learn one way in their home environment and they need to be taught in the classroom as well about tolerance and understanding of the different cultures we have in our world. We need teachers in the classroom who are knowledgeable and empathetic to the types of students who enter a classroom. The child's home life should not influence the way he or she is taught. The value of education should be set high for all students regardless of their background or race.

The African American community has been frustrated in seeking quality education for their children in America. Schools teach students the skill and credentials that are needed to be successful in our society. The labor market responds to the schools in providing employment. Employment is the key to income, housing, wealth, and political power. But when African Americans have no other options then to attend inferior schools, they gain inferior skills and credentials and white America maintains the oppression of African Americans, while the myth of freedom and opportunity for all enables them to blame us, the victims, for our status (Hale, 2001, p. 52).

African-American parents have to be cautious (Price, 2002) because racial discrimination is rampant in special ed., despite its supposedly noble intentions. According to an alarming study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, black students were three times more likely than their white classmates to be identified as mentally retarded; almost twice as likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed; and 1.3 times as likely to be identified with a specific learning disability. What's even more astonishing, the Harvard researchers reported that black boys living in wealthier
communities with strong, integrated schools were more prone to be sent to special classes than black students attending predominantly black schools in low income neighborhoods.

A powerful tool for motivating young people to achieve in school is to teach about the accomplishments of one’s people. Teaching the history of African-American’s struggle for education through the personal stories of what many had to endure to even get into schools and colleges can be motivating in itself. It can give students a cultural grounding and a building block of learning (Price, 2002, p. 52). Students need to have some understanding as to why and what they are learning. Teachers who teach directly from the text and have no way of making any connections to it will surely lose the student’s learning. If teachers don’t respect the children’s culture, they are denying the student’s identity.

In addition, teachers should not lower their expectations because a student is African-American, from a low-income household or fatherless. There is still a systematic position that African-American children are genetically inferior. Contrary to this belief, early in life most African-American children can hold their heads up, recognize color, and respond to stimuli sooner than White children. Most African-American children do not enter school disadvantaged, but rather they leave it as disadvantaged.

What can we do to help eliminate any form of racism in the classroom? Be informed educators, be conscious of the differences in all students, and embrace diversity with incorporating multicultural curriculum into the classroom. Negative interaction with students, daily lesson plans, homework, setting lower expectations could be conceived as a form of racism. Teachers can have racist feelings or tendencies without realizing it.
Above all, use high academic standards to design classroom courses and invest heavily in professional development so that the faculty stays on top of their game and focuses on teaching methods that help their students meet tough academic standards (Price, 2002, p. 187).

**Single-Gender Classroom**

In education we look for ways to be more effective teachers. Our goal is to provide equitable education for all students. Regardless of race, sex, or culture, all students deserve and have the right to the best and most appropriate education for each individual. Just as multicultural awareness is important, it is important to recognize the biological differences in the ways that boys and girls think, feel and act. Schools across the country are recognizing the unique qualities of each gender and how they can better accommodate those different needs. Gender roles are also unique in different cultures as well.

Some of the perspectives that educators have teaching African-American students can also have the same affect with gender. Boys and girls learn differently and their brains are even wired differently. Girls have a tendency to be calmer and can sit for longer periods of times whereas boys tend to be more active and may have a harder time sitting and concentrating during instruction time. Girls and boys have different growth timetables, not only in language development but in the “inhibitory capacities” underlying the regulation of emotions. From infancy boys have a higher basal metabolism rate and “are excited by threats, challenges, and competition (Salomone, 2003, p. 103).
In single-gender classrooms (Salomone, 2003) students feel less pressure from peers. It is easier for them to focus more on academics and less on the stereotype they are suppose to live up to. There are some biological differences between females and males that seem to affect learning. Genes do not determine destiny but can define a range of possibilities. It becomes a matter of how to improve the differential performance and maximize the potential of different populations of girls and boys across the schooling experience and across curriculum areas without falling into the pitfall of harmful stereotypes and gender essentialism.

**Single Gender Male Classes**

Certain studies have shown positive effects that include African-American male students in a single-gender classroom. Black boys have a tendency to be reprimanded in the regular education classrooms unjustly. They are also assigned disproportionately to special education classrooms. This would not happen as often if teachers were taught how to redesign classrooms so that the learning styles of African-American boys are accommodated (Delpit, 2006, p. 169).

Schools such as in the Waterloo Community district have started all male-gender and female-gender, predominately African-American student’s classroom in the elementary level with some success. The teachers are African-American which could contribute to the success in the classroom. The school also has a mandatory uniform policy. If even a couple classes show positive outcomes, why not try it in more elementary classrooms? One reason for this may be the fact that there is a lack of African-American teachers available. Positive results have come from classrooms where there is an African-American teacher teaching.
Also, in many cities there are legal controversies as to the benefits to single-gender classrooms. Thus, policy makers are not willing to pursue due to more pressing public issues that need immediate attention.

Arguments in favor of these programs typically address two problems. First, there is the belief that coeducational classes in inner-city school are full of dangerous manifestations of a youth culture characterized by violence, academic “disidentification,” and personal irresponsibility. Second, there is the concern that poor minority males lack positive male role models and that single-sex programs are an effective means for filling that void. Many of these programs have shut down under legal threat despite positive effects on discipline, attendance, and achievement (Salomone, 2003, p. 221).

They have been abruptly ended by the Office of Civil Rights due to violation in federal civil rights laws even in certain school districts where they have seen positive effects with African-American boys and girls in single-gender classrooms both academically and behaviorally.

Single Gender Female Classes

Girls also have shown positive influences in single-gender classrooms. Girls have different outside negative social influences than boys do. Certain studies have shown that race and social class mitigate the schooling experience and influence how students perceive its importance to their future lives. Among disadvantaged minority girls, the gender gap in math, science, and technology is just one of the more compelling challenges that they face.
If females do not feel adequate in the school setting they will look for self-esteem some place else. Many become pregnant to fill the void and to find a sense of competence and significance. Schools need to have a bigger part in letting students know they have better options in society with a good education. Our schools seem to be a system that is failing or has already failed and joined the institutional racist society. When schools fail to educate students they are contributing to the negative affects of racism in our schools.

Girls represent the fastest-growing segment of the juvenile justice (Salmone, 2003) population and two-thirds of that is minorities. Although girls are less likely than boys to become involved in the system, between 1981 and 1997 the arrest rate for female’s age seventeen and under increased by 103 percent, compared with 27 percent increase for males. “For many girls, physical, sexual, and emotional victimization is the first step along the path leading to the juvenile justice system. A high proportion of them enter as runaways seeking to escape abusive homes” (p. 109).

The negative academic affects are even more alarming for minority boys. Almost seven out of ten young people in secure confinement facilities and more than 75 percent of those newly admitted into state prisons are members of minority groups. There seems to be a pattern between school and societal discipline.

There is much controversy in single-gender classes. Cornelius Riordan has played a major role in the debate and stands behind and supports single-gender schooling. He is best known for researching and analyzing the effects of separate schools for African-American and Hispanic students.
In a study, he found that when comparing performance in sophomore and senior years, that white girls and African-American and Hispanic students of both sexes did better in single-gender schools. In contrast, coeducation appeared to be beneficial to white boys. When scores were adjusted for initial ability, school characteristics and home background, both the girls and minority boys attending single-gender schools demonstrated higher cognitive achievement, higher self esteem, better internal control and more liberal attitudes toward working women than that of their peers in coeducational schools. The opposite held for white boys in single-gender schools, who were surpassed by coeducational students on all cognitive and affective measures used in the study. Although the affective differences were not large, the data seemed to indicate that white male developed healthier attitudes in coeducation schools. In the single-gender classrooms, it appeared to provide minority males in particular with an environment and set of school policies that helped the growth of internal mechanisms that in turn strengthened their beliefs that they were in charge of their own destinies.

Published in the mid-1980’s, Riordan’s findings lent theoretical support to a movement that was slowly establishing separate schools and classes for minority boys throughout the country (Salomone, 2003, p. 217).

There is another case (Salomone, 2003) which involves an all male middle school serving twenty at-risk African American boys. This class was also taught by an African-American male teacher. The instruction was based on collaborative learning, and the curriculum incorporated materials on Africa, African-American and good citizenship. Comparing these students to a similar group enrolled in mainstream classes, the data on academic grades and days of suspension favored the single-gender program.
There seems to be no clear cut evidence that single-gender classrooms harm students either academically or emotionally. It appears that it would be more beneficial in the elementary grades and into the middle school. There is evidence that students in single-sex schools and classes develop in more positive attitudes toward certain traditionally male and female subjects, whether math, science, and technology for girls or foreign languages, English, and the arts for boys (Salomone, 2003, p. 235).

There seems to be a growing body of research data that positively states the academic and social benefits for disadvantaged minority students in single-gender classrooms. Both male and females can benefit from single-gender classrooms. It appears that single-gender classrooms not only helps build a student’s confidence and self-esteem but actually contributes to student’s enjoyment of the learning process.

What is a struggle for many adolescents in the coeducational classroom is the chance for students to express themselves without gender bias. Middle school especially is a hard time for adolescents. Single-gender classrooms may be the answer for a more relaxed educational environment. Students in the single-gender classrooms seem to have positive experiences. This will not only keep students in school but also give them better opportunities in society. Single-gender classrooms may help students to focus more on academics. The everyday stresses students face, especially in the middle school could be narrowed down by being in a classroom with the same gender peers.

Adolescents growing up in poor minority neighborhoods often receive harsh messages that make it difficult for them to establish a stable identity. For many of them, following the attitudes and academic practices of the school is negatively equated among their peers with “acting white.” This perception places a heavy burden on boys for whom
successful role models in the profession are rare, causing them to resist academic achievement to avoid rejection from in their own community. They buy into the peer pressure that discourages academic achievement (Salomone, 2003, p. 113).

**Summary**

Teacher's perceptions and expectations have a big impact on student achievement. Teachers' perceptions of African-American students appear to be distorted due to the lack of understanding of their culture. Teachers who lack the cultural understanding of African-American students do a disservice to them. Racism is a part of the educational system, though it may be subtle, it still has a negative impact on student academic achievement.

Research supports the importance of understanding the cultural background of the students they teach. It appears that the greatest challenge lies between White teachers and African American students. Whether it is intimidation or lack of understanding of their culture, research suggests there are many challenges in this area. Education in our multicultural society needs teachers who value diversity and recognize the unique contributions that each student brings into the classroom.

Despite growing popularity supporting single-gender schooling, both the continuing legal and social presumptions against sex separation have restricted implementation of this approach. It promises to be the source of a long debate, and it is currently uncertain how this issue will be resolved. What we do know is that students, who are placed in a single-gender classroom with a teacher of the same race and gender (especially boys) exceed academically in the classroom.
Chapter III

Schools

“For the first time ever, we are looking ourselves in the mirror and holding ourselves accountable for educating every child. That means all children, no matter their race or income level or zip code.”

---Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

“Current demographics show students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds are in the majority in public schools in the states of California, New Mexico, Mississippi, and Louisiana, as well as in most large urban school districts. In addition, there are predictions of increases in these trends. American’s very future depends on how quickly we can end the “savage inequalities,” which produce inevitable achievement gaps resulting from the under education of African-American and other students from diverse backgrounds. Many current school reform policies are causing achievement gaps to widen rather than close. These polices are focusing primarily on high standards and assessment while neglecting issues of access to higher-quality education and curriculum taught by competent and caring teachers who hold high expectations for currently underachieving students.”

Vinetta C. Jones, Ph. D
Introduction

Chapter III addresses the role of school expectations, the curriculum, and parental involvement in the schools. School expectations include efforts to bring about progressive school reform, raising the standards in schools, and schools that are showing academic achievement. Middle-class behaviors of schools and how they affect African-American students are discussed as well. This is important because it addresses an array of practices going on in the schools that may contribute to the achievement gap.

Curriculum is another very important component to helping narrow the achievement gap. In most classrooms though there is no relevant Black curriculum. Teaching based on the learner's culture is important and addresses the cognitive aspect of learning. Regardless of the textbooks, teachers can relate the content with the student's environment. If the curriculum has some relevance to the student and the student understands why they need to learn it, learning will occur.

Parental involvement is always an important aspect to a child's education. Not only do teachers like to see parental involvement, it is important to the student as well. Parents are role models and if they make education a high priority then children will also. But not all parents have the time or even know how they can be more involved in their child's education. The teacher can help in this area by involving the parent at the start of the new school year. Parent involvement does not mean the parent has to be at the school; communication through a planner is just as affective and helps the parent know what is going on with their child's education.
School Expectations

The achievement gap is a matter of race and class. In the United States, there is an achievement gap between minority and disadvantaged students and white students. The NCLB act requires states to set the same performance levels for all students, this includes:

- Economically disadvantaged families
- Limited English proficiency
- Students with disabilities
- All ethnic and racial groups

Schools are considered successful only if they close the achievement gap. Unfortunately, many schools are failing to meet the criteria that have been set before them. In most schools there are students who cannot measure up to the standards that have been put into place. Most states don’t require extra funding and help for those students who will struggle to meet the standards. It surely seems that if students were doing poorly before, they certainly will struggle with the increased demands that are put onto them now.

An important part of meeting higher standards is addressing how the standards are incorporated into the classroom. Schools need to have consistency throughout with classrooms that follow the same guidelines. Communication is also beneficial between all workers in the school, custodians, cafeteria workers, counselors, teachers and administrators. If we talk about “it takes a village” to raise children, we are talking about everyone who comes into contact with the students. Students should be the main focus of the school and they should be able to feel the importance of being in the school.
Schools and teachers should help with getting parents involved with their child’s education. Establishing a good relationship at the start of a new year can be very beneficial to both the student and teacher. Some parents may feel that they do not have anything to offer in regards to their child’s education, but teachers can provide guidance by helping them in the partnership between parent and the school. Teachers should be sensitive to parents with busy schedules and those who may lack the resources.

Curriculum is planned around educational theories and teacher’s educational philosophies. We use curriculum in response to social issues and values of our larger society. Teachers are instructed to use certain curriculum so students can learn to solve social problems, and to master the local, state, and national standards that are put into place in our schools.

The racial gap is evident in suburban as well as inner-city schools, but it is the high-need kids from distressed neighborhoods who are most in danger of reaching adulthood without the basic skills and knowledge they need to prosper. Inadequate schools are not the children’s fault but the solution does lie in part with them and with their parents. School cannot level the playing field without help. They need families and students to meet them halfway (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 271).

Schools in areas where there is a high level of low SES students struggle to find competent teachers to teach in those schools. There needs to be a way to attract more experienced and qualified teachers to teach in those schools. They need a dedicated staff willing to work together and more hours to get accomplished what needs to be done to narrow the achievement gap and improve test scores.
More than half of all African-American children (Hale, 2001) under the age of six live in poverty. This is three times greater than the proportion in the white community. The dropout rate is extremely high with 50 percent in many of the inner-city schools. Children need an outlet through the schools to end the cycle of poverty. It will take everyone to be apart of each child’s education to help him or her achieve to their highest potential.

The achievement gap can vary from school to school and across the country. How do we narrow the achievement gap between African-American students and White students? The racial gap in academic achievement is an educational crisis, but it is also the main source of ongoing racial inequality. Research continues to debate the roots of academic failure and the achievement gap between African-American and White students. Beyond the societal forces, there is much blame on the “residual racism” that continues to characterize many of the public schools. Some of the characteristics of these schools include poor facilities, inadequately trained teachers, and again, as mentioned earlier, low expectations that have historically maintained African-American and Hispanics as an underclass in society. The problems are the highest in inner-city schools but are not limited to them. They also show up in rural areas and even in middle-class and affluent suburbs (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 1).

Efforts to bring about progressive school reform have sometimes floundered because well-meaning administrators or consultants (1) tried too much too quickly, without providing adequate training and support for teachers, (2) didn’t pay enough attention to the kinds of structural changes that support better teaching, such as reducing
the size of classes and the extent of departmentalization in schools, (3) tried to impose change on teachers rather than making them active partners in the process, or (4) merely provided teachers with information (about how and why to adopt new instructional techniques) rather than helping them experience a new way of teaching and thereby make sense of a radically different understanding of learning (Kohn, 1999, p. 183).

Price (2002) talks about raising the bar for public schools, research and practical experience show that black children can achieve as well as other children when the education they receive is on par as well. U.S. News & World Report published a series of instructive articles in October 9, 2000, issue on public schools that have experienced dramatic turnarounds. "Perhaps not surprisingly, they used a pretty similar recipe to improve student performance: committed parents, students, community leaders, and educators working together to define the problem, devise solutions, and implement change" (p. 192).

Hale (1982) mentions that a new approach to the education of African-American children is needed. "Black parents generally want their children to get the best education so they can function in society and be economically viable and contribute to their community. They also want to have their culture to be a part of their children's education, having the teachers respect and have an understanding of their expressive styles. A lack of understanding could be related to academic failure, increased disciplinary problems students face in the classroom" (p.103).

Public high school scores are showing the average African-American and Hispanic students having academic skills that are at about the 8th grade level and on the
NAEP (National Assessment for Education Progress) tests; the majority of African-American students in the twelfth grade have scores below the basics, with Hispanics close to that as well. These scores show a frightening gap between African-American students and those of a typical White or Asian-American students.

What is happening in schools where they are showing academic achievement? What type of schools can educate students and be successful at it? One of the findings Themstrom and Themstrom (2003) found in their search of great schools is KIPP schools. All of the successful schools they found were Charter Schools. The KIPP schools are generally small middle schools with grades 5-8. The students who attend KIPP go to school longer than the average public school. “They need and get more instructional time than regular public schools- at KIPP, an additional 67 percent” (Themstrom & Themstrom, 2003, p.46).

Themstrom and Themstrom (2003) found that parents struggle to send their children to schools where they will get a good education. KIPP schools are a national network of free, open-enrollment, college preparatory public schools with a track record of preparing students of underserved communities for success in college and in life. There are about 66 KIPP schools in 19 states. The schools provide outstanding educators, more time in school learning, and a strong culture of achievement. Every day KIPP students are proving that demography does not define destiny. Eighty percent of students are low-income, and ninety percent of KIPP middle school students have gone onto college preparatory high schools and more than ninety percent have gone onto college (p. 45).

1 KIPP: An acronym for Knowledge Is Power Program
Thernstrom & Thernstrom (2003) talks about some of the charter schools they have gone through in their book, *No Excuse, Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, when they visited North Star, KIPP, and other wonderful schools; they said it is like a trip to a foreign and magical land. Can the extraordinary become the usual—what we expect to see when we walk through the door of the typical urban school? “Most of the best schools are the inspiration of young idealists who want to work with the disadvantaged. They are missionaries with a sense of calling. But if good schools depend on such exceptional people, there won’t be many of them. And thus the question becomes: If we can’t spread magic into every classroom, can we take steps that will make a real difference? For if not, good schools are a hopeless project” (p. 213).

Since it appears that the public schools do not challenge students, charter schools seem to be popping up in certain communities across the country.

Charter Schools are nonsectarian public schools of choice that operate with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to regular public schools. The purpose of a Charter School is to:

- Increase opportunities for learning with quality education for all students
- Create choice for parents/students
- Encourage innovative teaching practices
- New professional opportunities for teachers
- Encourage community and parental involvement
Parents and teachers choose Charter Schools for academic reasons—high academic standards, small class sizes, innovative approaches, or educational philosophies in line with their own. Charter schools serve on average 250 students (US Charter Schools).

Obviously these schools have teachers who are well educated and willing to make a huge commitment in the teaching and learning process. Unfortunately not all school districts have these types of schools for parents to choose whether their son or daughter could attend. What the schools can do is focus on what is happening in the schools and classrooms now.

Hancock, K. (2001) suggests (as cited in Strickland, D. and Alvermann, D. 2004) instead of focusing on poverty and parental education, we should begin to concentrate on what takes place in the classroom that minority students attend (p.9-10). The problems listed by Hancock include:

- Students in high-poverty and high-minority schools are not being challenged
- Minority students are placed in low-level classes with a curriculum that does not prepare them for college
- No provision is made for students who require more time and instruction to get on grade level
- Teachers are often not qualified in the subjects that they teach
- Schools with 90% greater enrollment of minority students have a higher percent of under qualified teachers than predominantly white schools.

African-American children have a tendency to be more kinesthetic than White children and have a high level of motor activity. There is also “medical evidence” that African-American males have a higher testosterone level that White males. "African-
American children, particularly the boys, should not be required to sit for long periods of time without an opportunity to expand energy. Learning activities where there is a sufficient amount of movement as they learn is beneficial (Hale, 2001, p. 118).

Kunjufu (2001) takes a look at schools as an institution and describes some middle-class behaviors of the school which conflict with the values and behaviors of many African-American students. Homework is one way that schools demonstrate middle-school values. Most White teachers assume that there will be a parent at home to assist with homework, which is not always true. A teacher can review in class a certain number of problems and then assign the second half of the assignment for homework. If the second half has an additional step the teacher may be expecting the student to have parent assistance at home. The problem with this is two fold: number one, it is unfair, and two, the teacher is expecting the parent to do the teachers job (p.5).

Another aspect of schools (Kunjufu, 2002) who demonstrate middle-class institutions is tracking. While many schools are trying to divert from this, there are just as many who practice it. Tracking is when students are divided into ability groups. The rationale has been that it’s easier for teachers to work with homogenous groups, and students benefit from associating with their “own kind.” Unfortunately, is only seems to frustrate the lower-achievers and there are many books written that show the negative impact of tracking. Tracking only seems to widen the achievement gap between the haves and the have-nots. Tracking usually begins in kindergarten where the students are labeled as birds, such as, bluebirds, robins or eagles and even chickens. Students soon realize who the superior group is (p. 9).
Hale (2001) states that she observed in the preschool classrooms that African-American males received more disciplinary statements such as, “stop, don’t, cease and desist!” Overall, as mentioned earlier, African-American males do receive more suspensions and expulsions. In conjunction with that they tend to have the lowest grade point averages and the lowest scores on standardized tests (p. 42).

Action is needed to break the cycle of schooling for African-American children. It is not the outer-shell that needs improvement, it is what is going on inside that needs to be changed. The answer to improving the future for African American children is to connect them to academic achievement. To create a new model of schooling that fits the contemporary African American family, we as educators must let go of mantras we have been taught to receive, memorize, and repeat. These beliefs, treasured by educators, excuse us for the disparity in outcomes for African American children (Hale, 2001, pp. 43-44).

Hale (2001) has a model solution that puts the school at the center of the effort to achieve upward mobility for inner-city African-American children. The school is the main focal point because everyone is required to attend school. Not every household is a functional family, nor does everyone attend a church, but one thing that everyone is required to do is attend school. The model has three components with the first one being the foundational component as classroom instruction; the other two components which include cultural enrichment and the instructional accountability infrastructure support instruction in the classroom (p.112).

The first mantra that teachers need to release is the idea that there is something wrong with the children they are trying to teach. Teachers seem to think that students
who are in the category with free or reduced programs have a deficiency in learning. This is often accompanied with low level of instruction that is administered to African-American students. Hale mentions that she was told that this is the best we can do with the population we serve. I am informed that most of our children come from single-parent households (p. 44).

The second mantra is that teachers perceive there is something wrong with the parents. If there is something wrong with the parents then the students will have the same educational outcome. Hale does not dispute charges by educators that lower-income parents do not usually attend parent conferences or sign student report cards. However, Hale points out that if our efforts as educators are based totally on the social and cultural level of the parents, then we will continue to receive the same outcomes. The children who enter school on public assistance will leave school and move onto public assistance. The children who enter school with parents who are incarcerated will leave school and move into the criminal justice system. The objective of upward mobility will be lost (p. 47).

The guiding principles of the model are as follows:

1. Future success requires that children be connected to academic achievement
2. It takes a whole village to raise a child
3. Children learn what they are taught
4. School is interesting
5. Learning is fun

There needs to be changes and improvements in the quality of curriculum. African-American students need to somehow be connected to their academic achievement. Many
African-American children do not like school for a variety of reasons, one being they are bored or not engaged in the curriculum being taught.

Secondly, a village is not just the school but includes the community as well. Students need to experience the community and what it has to offer outside of their own neighborhood. Students benefit from fieldtrips to plays, concerts and museums which they may not otherwise be able to experience.

Children need positive experiences in their education. This not only helps in academic success but gives them the ability to be lifelong learners. They need opportunities to develop talents and interests that will give them choices in careers and make creative contributions to the world.

Some theories have been formulated as to what may contribute to the achievement gap between African-American children and White children. African-American children usually are exposed to a high degree of stimulation through creative arts. They are surrounded by visual arts such as paintings, posters and graffiti and audio arts, such as radio, CD’s and television. Fashion is also a very important aspect of their life, hats, hairstyles and a general orientation toward adornment of the body that grows out of the African heritage (Hale, 2001, p. 115).

Hale (2001) also states that the performance styles that permeate the African-American community are further evidence the affinity for the creative arts. African-American children learn from an early age the importance of perfecting performer roles. “This expressiveness is seen in the behavior of African American preachers, athletes, singers, and dancers and is cultivated in individuals throughout the African American community” (p. 115).
Hale (2001) has come up with a Reform Proposal that she believes would close the achievement gap. It is based on culturally appropriate pedagogy model for school reform that includes three spheres of activities.

1. The model of classroom instruction emphasizes cultural salience in teaching, curricular materials, and assignments. Academic rigor is implemented throughout elementary and middle school so that the students can master honors English and calculus in high school.

2. Through the creation of an instructional accountability infrastructure, the principal or a building-level instructional coordinator functions as an instructional leader, building as infrastructure within the school that assures mastery (moving toward excellence) of academic material for every child.

3. In terms of cultural enrichment, the school is conceptualized as the Family. The school takes the leadership in coordinating the parents and the larger community in planning cultural enrichment experiences for the children. The community is conceptualized as the Village. The school assures that all of the children within the school (the Family) receive the support that is normally provided in middle-class families.

These spheres of activities surpass the typical types of curricular materials that are used by most teachers. The model goes beyond the reading and math programs that are currently being used. It also goes beyond just the basics that are taught with books and other materials. It brings in a much deeper and meaningful values to the school (p. 147).
There has been much controversy on state testing in the schools. There is substantial research that has tried to explain the test score gaps between African-American students and White students. We know that there is a significant gap in vocabulary knowledge as children enter school. We also know that what students are taught is a prime predictor of how well they will perform on achievement tests.

In Resnick’s article, *Closing the Gap: High Achievement for Students of Color*, she states that, Despite policies calling for equal “opportunities to learn,” minority students often do not have a chance to study as rigorous a curriculum as more privileged students, and they also are less likely to be taught by teachers with high levels of experience (p.1). When teachers lower their expectations, it not only puts them further behind academically from their peers, it affects them on their test scores as well. There continues to be a negative trend all through African-American student’s schooling. By the 12th grade, the average African-American student can only do math and read as well as a White student in the eight-grade.

The graph below shows the most recent available NAEP reading levels of 8th graders (2002).
"A recent analysis of late-1990's data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that African American and Hispanic students gained a few more points than Whites between fourth and eighth grade. Nevertheless, much work remains to close the achievement gap" (p.3).

There seems to be no correlation between inadequate school funding and the disproportionately low African-American and Hispanic test scores. Thermstrom & Thermstrom, (2003) found that per pupil spending on America’s elementary and secondary schools (in constant dollars) nearly doubled between 1970 and 2000. Our educational system is not performing twice as well as a result. In fact, on the basis of the evidence NAEP has collected about what American students know, it seems safe to say that the nation’s schools, overall, are no better than they were three decades ago. Black students have improved considerably since 1970, but the rise of a large black middle class and the end of segregated school in the South may account entirely for that change (p. 153).

In 1969, educationist William Glasser wrote *Schools Without Failure*, a veritable handbook (Sykes, 1995) for schools that would fail over the next two and half decades. He criticized objective tests, because they placed all their emphasis on correct answers as opposed to reflecting upon important problems for which there are no right answers. Glasser also argued there is something inherently unfair and undemocratic about homework. Realizing that poor students rarely do homework, he complained, teachers gear assignments to the A and B students who do the homework, thus widening the gap between the successes and failures in school.
Glasser also noted back then that schools needed to redefine their goals. He suggested emphasizing on “thinking skills,” and a more flexible schedule for students to meet the goals that have been set for them by the teacher. He realized that students may need different time frames for completing assignments. After more than twenty-five years later, Glasser’s ideas are now called Outcome Based Education (pp. 71-72).

Outcome Based Education was devised with the vision that no one fails in school. It is based on the provision that ‘competition in the classroom is destructive.’

Skyes (1995) found the following:

Albert Mammary superintendent of New York’s Johnson Central School District, where he developed an “Outcome-Driven Development Model,” which he describes as the “nation’s first comprehensive school improvement model.” The model is built on slogans along the line of “Success for All Students” and “Excellence for All.” For Mammary, the first step to success begins with doing away with failure. “Outcome-based schools believe there should be no failure and that failure ought to be removed from our vocabulary and thoughts,” he wrote in 1991. “Failure or fear of failure will cause students to give up (p. 73).

There are basically two ways to change what happens in schools. The first could be called the support model, the second the demand model. The support model begins with the idea that the role of teacher, administrator, parents, public officials, and the community is to help students act on their desire to make sense of the world. The school should guide and stimulate their interest in exploring what is unfamiliar, constructing meaning, and developing a competence at (and a passion for) playing with words and numbers and ideas.
In the demand model, (Kohn, 1999) by contrast, those outside-and, figuratively speaking, above-the classroom decide what the people in it are required to do. Lists of specific achievement goals are imposed on teachers and students. The methods and ideas of this process are often borrowed from the corporate world, with much talk of results, performance, accountability, and incentives. Children are even described as "workers" who have an obligation to do a better job. Schools represent an "investment" and must become more "competitive," the idea being that test scores in the U.S. ought to be higher than those in other countries. Education is described as though it were a hybrid of an assembly line and a sporting match (p. 93).

Another area of research has been done on reducing the achievement gap with smaller class sizes. Teachers and students prefer smaller classes and they believe that students are better off with more individualized attention. But contrary to belief, decades of research fail to establish that smaller class size has any measurable impact on student achievement. This may seem counterintuitive but it is not. School districts would have to hire many teachers in order to reduce class sizes; they are forced to be less selective since there is a shortage of highly qualified teachers as it is. Teacher quality is more proactive and productive than class size.

Thernstrom & Thernstrom (2003) found the following research upon which the NAACP's 2001 "Call to Action" was an experiment in class-size reduction in the elementary grades in Tennessee in the mid-1980's. The Tennessee experiment was not on a scale that required massive recruitment of more teachers, so that was not a problem, and smaller classes did seem to improve student performance, especially for poor and African-American children. Critics, however, found technical problems with the study,
Narrowing the Achievement Gap

and one concluded that, at best, it only demonstrated “possible small effects of major and costly reductions in class size” in kindergarten and first grade. The children studied were placed in very small classes for four years, virtually all of the observed benefits were in the first year (p. 159).

Price (2002) judges the effectiveness of schools: How can parents evaluate and judge the academic standards of their children’s schools? The Education trust, a highly respected research and advocacy organization in Washington, D.C., released an instructive survey in 1999 of several hundred high-performing high schools across the country that serve minority and low-income children. Many of them outshine even suburban schools on state tests. Educators everywhere could learn a lot from these schools. Parents can use these pointers to compare whether their children’s schools work as well as they should. What characteristics do the schools spotlighted by the Education Trust share in common?

- They devote lots more time than the typical school to reading and math instruction, even if that means lengthening the school day.

- They monitor their students closely and intervene quickly if the students falter. They don’t dawdle during the school year and then impose massive doses of summer school after the students fall way behind.

- They get parents involved, not just with staging bake sales, but also with helping their children to do better in school and meet the standards.

- They place the burden for improvement mainly on the educators, where it belongs.
Without a doubt, there are urban schools serving minority and low-income pupils that operate this way and get the job done—not just a few but for the vast majority of youngsters (p. 127).

What we think about the public schools (Price, 2002) is changing the more we learn what is expected of our children. A National Urban League survey in 2001 reflects the mixed views of African-Americans towards public schools. One-third of the respondents expressed little confidence in the ability of the schools to educate black children well. The same number of respondents had some confidence. Only one-fourth of them indicated they had a great deal of confidence in the public schools (p. 137).

Thus, it is not up to one area to improve the achievement gap. As stated earlier, it takes a village. The schools need to work as a whole and the teacher in the classroom is the important aspect as to how the student will learn. The connection between student and teacher happens in the classroom and what that student learns takes into society. The school and teacher are the connection with the parent and the community. We cannot blame the household for lack of student achievement. We have to stop blaming parents.

Raising standards is a compensation for schools that have done poorly. People believe that the previous standards were too low and that is why students did poorly on testing. If students did not have high test scores with the previous standards, it would appear they will surely fail with the higher standards set.
Curriculum

Questions are being asked as to what can be done to make the curriculum relevant for African-American children. What must we do to give them a burning desire to learn? Kunjufu (2002) finds that teachers and instructors still have a strong belief education is confined to the textbook. Unfortunately, students are receiving inaccurate information about Hippocrates, Columbus, Lincoln, and many others due to the fact that certain textbooks are wrong. There is no relevance to teaching inner-city children about Hippocrates being the first doctor or Columbus sailed to America (p. 82).

The major impact in teaching the curriculum is “Master Teachers.” A Master Teacher has a desire, like other teachers, to help children master skills in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Master teachers (Kunjufu, 2002) can teach skills regardless of the content of the textbook. They relate the content with student’s environment incorporating rap lyrics, cultural videos, TV shows, hip hop magazines, neighborhood billboards, and magazines-whatever does the job the best (p. 83).

Kunjufu (2002) gives an overview of a relevant Black curriculum. There has been a curriculum called SETCLAE (Self-Esteem Through Culture Leads to Academic Excellence). What do your African American students talk about with each other? What they talk about should be the focal point of your curriculum. What are the top five rap CD’s? What are the top five Black television shows? Those shows are not the same for White America. What are the popular Black youth magazines? What are the problems in the community? The discussion and answers to these questions make up the foundation of the SETCLAE curriculum (p.83).
Students’ multiple histories also affect the ways they actually experience materials and what they take from them. A student may connect deeply with a work based on connections (Dilg, 2003) they perceive between material and their own histories, or reject it on the basis of its lack of fit. Many students will connect to material that they find has some connection to their own experiences, somehow tied to their history, family history or even their culture. For some students, connections do not just happen because it reflects their own history but rather it helps them identify and understand more about lives and history of those who are close or has affected their lives in some way in history.

For still other students, texts, films, or discussions in class result in hearing stories similar to those they know exist in their own family histories but that are not being told because the family has chosen to remain silent about that aspect of their lives (pp. 47-48).

Timothy Shanahan’s work (as cited in Dilg, 2003) contends that if your science curriculum emphasizes biology over chemistry, your kids will do well on the life science tests but will probably not do to well when it comes to chemistry. If your social studies curriculum emphasizes American over European studies, your kids will generally know more about the American fight for independence than the French Revolution. It is the same with reading. We need to ensure that secondary schools emphasize the things that matter in reading development.

“I developed a curriculum framework that emphasizes the kinds of things that need to be taught. It is now used in nearly 100 high schools and junior highs. My framework divides literacy instruction into four parts and argues for relatively equal amounts of
teaching time devoted to each component of the framework. Given that I require two hours per day of literacy work, this means that schools would have to devote about 10 hours per week to literacy—roughly 2.5 hours per week devoted to each literacy component” (p. 48).

The four areas of instruction that require attention are word knowledge, fluency, comprehension, and writing. Word Knowledge refers to both word recognition and word meaning, but at the high school level vocabulary teaching fits the bill. Fluency refers to being able to read a text orally with appropriate accuracy, speed, and expression. (If students can read at grade-level-appropriate text with fluency, the time devoted to this can be reduced.) Reading comprehension refers to the ability to compose text effectively for a variety of purpose (p. 48).

To ensure that students have access to this amount of teaching, they had the major academic departments agree on a division of responsibility for accomplishing these goals. The English department might agree that it will provide 45 minutes per week of vocabulary work and another 45 minutes for text comprehension, and so on. What this means is that all academic teachers agree to teach these essentials of literacy for a particular amount of time per week (not per day), equivalent to a total of 2.5 hours per component and 10 hours overall for the week across the departments (p. 48).

Teachers in most schools follow the standards that the district has established. The curriculum is usually already set up in the schools. How teachers teach these standards are crucial for students understanding and mastering them.

In a research study (Kohn, 1999) at the University of Colorado, a group of fourth-grade teachers were told to teach a specific task. About half of them were told that
when they were finished, students must “perform up to standards” and do well on the test. The other teachers were told to just “facilitate” the children’s learning. The results: Students in the “standards” classrooms did not learn the task as well as those whose teachers felt less pressured. A carefully controlled scientific experiment then, confirms that real-life experience: even on a traditional test, the demand model that practically defines contemporary education reform turns out to be counterproductive (p. 95).

**Parental Involvement**

Parents are another very important aspect to a child’s educational achievement. Children from low-income homes (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003) do come to school with a real disadvantage. So, too, do those whose parents do not have much education, an influence many studies have shown to be even more powerful than family income. Where you live is another indicator of social status. And place of residence is particularly important when the subject is education, since suburban schools are generally assumed to be better than those in urban districts. Today, barely a fifth of whites live in central cities, as compared with a clear majority of blacks. Close to 60 percent of whites are suburban dwellers, versus only 34 percent of African Americans. These racial disparities are very large and could explain much of the racial gap in achievement (pp. 142-125).

Thernstrom & Thernstrom (2003) make a good point when it comes to social class, “if those who argue that social class drives academic performance are right, we should have seen a dramatic narrowing of the racial gap in comparing families with similar social and economic status. If poverty is all-important, then white and black kids who qualify for the federal school lunch program should have pretty similar NAEP scores.
In fact, parental education, place of residence, and income all have some impact on academic skills, but less than one might expect—or than many assume” (p. 129).

It appears that parental involvement does play a part in helping to narrow the achievement gap. How much is debatable, but one thing is certain, that children know when their parents or guardians care about them. The more secure they feel in their life, the better they will be able to perform academically. Teachers also need to show their care and concern for a student’s academics. The teacher/student relationship should be one of equal respect and understanding in the classroom environment.

Awareness is a teacher’s best defense. They need to be aware of student’s different learning styles, culture and race. Each student brings into the classroom their own unique personalities and situations. Whatever type of school a teacher is working in, every student can bring something positive into the classroom and it is up to the teacher to open students up to those unique experiences.

Strickland and Alvermann (2004) touch on the socioeconomic status stating, Family income and reading achievement are closely linked. Socioeconomic differences are generally indexed by such variables as household income and parents’ education and occupation, alone or in some weighted combination. Families rated low in socioeconomic status (SES) not only are less affluent and less educated than other families, but they also tend to live in communities in which the average family SES is low and tend to receive less adequate nutrition and health services (p. 6).

In their discussion of SES as a risk factor, Snow, Burns, and Griffin, (as cited in Strickland & Alvermannn, 2004) describe low SES as both an individual risk factor and a group factor. As individuals, poor children attending the same schools as more affluent
children are more likely to become poorer readers than children from high-income families. Children from low-income communities are likely to become poorer readers than children from more affluent communities. However, when achievement scores and SES are measured individually for all children in a large sample, the strength of the association between SES and achievement is far lower. A low-status child in a generally moderate- or upper status school or community is far less at risk than that same child in a whole school or community of low-status children. The effect of SES is strongest when it is used to indicate the status of a school, a community, or school district, rather than the status of the individual (pp. 6-7).

Research indicates that the achievement gap (Strickland & Alvermann, 2004) is already in place before children enter kindergarten. The U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) (2000) for the kindergarten class of 1998-99 is a compilation of data from a nationally representative sample of 20,000 children (and their parents and teachers) that entered kindergarten in the fall of 1998. In addition to numerous family background variables, the data include measures of cognitive skills and knowledge. The ECLS shows that by the time children are five years old, there is a gap in school-related skills and knowledge between African American and European American children, even when their mothers have equal years of schooling. There is no measure in this data of parents' own test scores or the quality of the schools that the parents attended. Nevertheless, the ECLS survey reveals differences in home-learning activities between children whose mothers have different amounts of schooling and also differences between Blacks and Whites within each mother's schooling category. In general, Whites across categories buy more books, records, tapes, and CDs
and engage more with their children in reading and academic enrichment activities than do Blacks. Though the study also indicates that Blacks play and sing with their children more than Whites, these activities may not have the long-term benefits for beginning reading achievement that reading to children provide (pp. 7-8).

In terms of older school age students, Strickland & Alvermann, 2004) point out that, the role that parents can play in the educational progress of adolescents is often neglected and misunderstood. “I am told by parents and teachers alike that parents have no role to play at this stage because of the strong influence of peers and media on teenagers. There just isn’t room for parents to make things happen academically for their children. Some teachers even resist the idea of parent’s involvement, as they fear it will discourage independence on the part of the student” (p. 53).

Strickland & Alvermann (2004) finds that when it comes to raising the achievement level academically, we should consider all the possible resources that would be beneficial. Research has shown that parents play a greater role with helping student progress than is thought. “For example, an analysis of data from 50,000 high school seniors and sophomores nationwide found that even when the differences in achievement due to socioeconomic status were controlled, parent influences were sizable and significant and were greater than comparable statistics for peer and media influences” (Shanahan & Walberg, 1985). Kids might look to one another for the material things that are in style, but they rely on adults for a sense of what matters academically. The amount of time adolescents talked to a parent about school and homework had a positive impact on student’s learning (p.53).
It is important that schools, especially secondary schools reach out to parents and get them involved. Teacher and parent connections can have a positive impact academically for the student. Set up clear homework policies and guidelines to help get the parent involved. Communicating to parents how they can help and letting them know the value of talking to their teens about school are worthwhile. “Even parents who do not understand the academic content of their children’s coursework can play an important role by monitoring homework completion and advising students on what to do if they are having trouble talking to the teacher” (p. 54).

From an article in the *Education and Urban Society*, Williams H. Jeynes (2003) found the following: Parental involvement has emerged as one of today’s most important topics in educational circles. Even though educators suggest that parental involvement has a positive impact on a child’s education, there has been no meta-analysis that examines the effects of parental involvement on minority student’s educational outcomes has ever been published in an academic journal (p. 202).

Research on parental involvement (Jeynes, 2003) has increased during the past two decades. Social scientists are giving parental involvement a special place of importance in influencing the academic outcomes of the youth. An earlier study by (Hara 1998) suggests that increased parental involvement is the key to improving academic achievement of children (p. 203).

Price (2002) says the most influential role models for young people are adults who respect and revere education. As parents and caregivers, we must create a home environment that nurtures a desire to learn, and that encourages and rewards academic achievement. Most of us face the challenge of balancing work and family, it’s a myth that
only the parents who do not work and those with plenty of time can be beneficial in helping their children learn to do well in school. A study published in the *American Educational Research Journal* found that having a supportive adult in who helps a child learn and develop skills after school definitely makes a difference, "even if the adult has no formal training in how to help a child" (p. 93).

After extensive interviews with parents of high-achieving black students (Price, 2002) found six key parenting skills that are instrumental in raising academically successful children. They are:

1. Demonstrating love through active involvement in your youngster's education, providing support and encouragement, and fostering a belief in self.
2. Setting suitable limits on behavior and imposing discipline when appropriate.
3. Establishing high expectations for academic and other success.
4. Developing open and strong communication with your children.
5. Encouraging children to develop a positive view of their gender and ethnicity.
6. Taking full advantage of available community resources that supplement what parent can do themselves (pp.102-103).

On the controversial subject of television watching, the *NAEP* report states that students who watched three hours or less per day scored higher on the national reading test than children who watched more than three hours of TV daily. What's even more disturbing, African-American and Hispanic children who are bringing up the rear when it comes to reading performance watch lots more television—an average of three to four hours *each day*—than white children, who read much better and average just two hours and twenty-two minutes a day in front of the TV (p. 107).
Research shows (Price, 2002) that parents still matter the most. In examining the lessons from the fourth-grade test results in 2000, the authors of the NAEP report found that students who talk about their schoolwork with their parents and live in a home where reading materials are widely available actually read on a higher level than that of other children. The active involvement of parents is the first step in helping their child benefit in their education process. Parental involvement in a school can help turn a failure to a center of excellence. In most cases they can influence the choice of the principal, the type of curricula, the quality of teaching, and the expectations of teachers, along with the provisions for security and safety in the classrooms (p. 19).

According to a study (Price, 2002) published in the *American Educational Research Journal*, parental involvement has been shown to influence children's achievement in language and mathematics, their academic persistence, their behavior problems, and whether or not they remain in school or drop out. Parental interest and involvement reinforce the natural inclination of children to strive to do their best. Lousy schools with apathetic and alienated pupils can improve only if the adults in their lives mobilize to make it happen and refuse to accept any excuses for failure (p. 21).
Summary

Across this country there are failing schools, whether they are in an upscale neighborhood or in the poorer sections of a city, proficiency is low. Students are dropping out of school at an all time high. School reform which is nothing new to the educational scene is being reevaluated in certain schools. Today, many school reforms are driven by the idea the students need to be more competitive-to make it out in the world market place. But many schools are failing to meet the criteria that have been set before them. Standards are set so high that most students cannot achieve them.

Master teachers base their curricula on the student’s needs and interest, although they do need to follow local, state, and national policies that have been set up for them. It is usually not up to the individual teachers to get to choose what they teach. How a teacher teaches that curriculum can make a difference in a student’s education though. They can bring in other interesting ways to teach the subjects they are teaching to make it fit with what is relevant in a student’s life. One aim of a teacher’s curriculum should emphasize diversity, therefore enabling students to appreciate different points of view and to see the contributions that persons from all groups have made to society.

The stress that is placed on families in our complex society today is enormous. All across socioeconomic groups parents face many challenges when it comes to providing the best care and education for their children. For families in poverty, the challenges are even greater. Sometimes when basic necessities are lacking, parents must place top priority on housing, food, and clothing. Educational toys, computers or printers seem like a luxury to them. Parents in these difficult situations may not have the time,
energy, or the knowledge to find innovative and less expensive ways to help their children develop academically.
Chapter IV
Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

Narrowing the achievement gap between African-American and White students is not an easy task, and multiple approaches are usually needed to close it. There is much controversy on how to narrow the achievement gap and has been a challenge for many years. Schools play an important role when it comes to how the achievement gap will be addressed. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the key points made in the literature review presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

As the research points out, there seems to be many factors that contribute to the achievement gap. For example, the study conducted by Rosenna Bakari (2003) found that African-American pre-service teachers were more willing to teach African-American students than the white pre-service teachers who participated in the study. It shows the lack of cultural sensitivity from white teachers when it comes to teaching African-American students.

Lack of Sensitivity

Teachers unconsciously base their expectations of students' performance on factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, prior achievement and appearance. A teacher's expectations, or lack of, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy; students that have more expected of them tend to outperform those who have less expected, regardless of the student's ability.
Teachers and pre-service teachers would benefit from professional development that helps them to understand and incorporate multicultural curriculum in the classroom. The misconceptions teachers may have can negatively affect students academically.

For example, teachers have a tendency to lower expectations for those students who come from a lower socioeconomic home. Diamond, Randolp, & Spillane (2004) study found the reason for lower expectations from teachers and administrators is basically from their beliefs about students. The assumption is if they are African-American, from a low socioeconomic home, they aren’t or can not be very successful. Professional development could be helpful in improving cultural understanding and reducing stereotyping.

Racism

A form of racism still exists in many of the public schools, especially those with poor facilities, inadequately trained teachers and low teacher expectations. Teachers who do not understand different cultures have a tendency to misjudge student behaviors, especially with African-American boys who show a high percentage in special education classrooms. There is a shortage of African-American teachers who could do the education system justice and academically benefit the students. It appears that schools are geared for white culture and taught from white culture mentality. As diverse as the population has become, it is time for schools to rethink the curriculum and how it is presented to students.

Schools can play a role in combating racism. Children who grow-up racist or who are subjected to it in their home have a chance to be reeducated. A curriculum that
promotes racial and ethnic awareness through multicultural education can turn diversity into opportunities.

Improved Schools

It is just not the classroom that needs to be changed, but the schools in general. Schools such as the KIPP schools have proven successful for disadvantaged students. The committed and dedicated staff and the longer school days and hours pay-off. The teachers who teach in KIPP schools do get paid 15 to 20 percent more to compensate for the longer hours. These schools have proven that when they put students first, it makes a difference.

Better Administrators

Schools not only need highly qualified teachers, they need highly qualified administrators as well. Administrators set the pace for the schools. They need to be part of the scene and be willing to support and work with teachers in effort to raise scores and narrow the achievement gap.

Better Curriculum

Research shows action is needed to break the cycle of schooling African-American students are receiving in the classroom. Curriculum needs to be geared to fit the contemporary African-American student. Raising student expectations and making curriculum more challenging will benefit students academically. If the teaching is not relevant to the kids, they will lose interest in it and thus, problems arise in the classroom. Curricula need to be based on the needs and interest of students, but it is also based on a variety of local, state, and national pressures. Unfortunately, there are some who chose
the curriculum without really knowing or understanding what type of school population there is in a particular school.

**Eliminate Tracking**

Tracking has proven to be unsuccessful and is considered to be a form of 'racial profiling.' Tracking is as old as the 'Dick and Jane' reading curriculum of the 1960's. Not all schools partake in this type of teaching, but there are still many that do. This is considered a form of "labeling." What should replace tracking are strategies and high level interest books. Books need to be enjoyable and challenging enough for students to advance in their reading level. There are many reading programs that have proven beneficial in helping students at any reading level.

**Parental Involvement**

Another area of influence in a student's academic achievement is parental involvement. In some cases, parents may feel intimidated with their child's school or teacher, especially in the secondary level. It is important in the beginning of the year to connect with the parent(s). Start out the school year by contacting the parent or guardian, introducing yourself, asking the parent questions about their son/daughter that would help with having a positive teacher/student connection. Parents need to feel they are a welcome part of their child's educational experience. After all, they know their child better than the teacher when entering a new grade level.
Chapter V

Implications for Practice

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the implementation of an evidence-based teaching strategy that has proven to be beneficial for addressing the achievement gap. The program that will be described is called Soar to Success. This program was implemented in a school that was considered, “In Need of Improvement,” which means that tests scores fell below the norm. Thus teachers in the school worked as a team to devise curriculum that would be beneficial a diverse school population.

Teaching Context

In the classroom I taught there were eleven students of sixth graders, seven boys and four girls. These students were in a resource room and were labeled as having a ‘learning disability.’ The average reading grade level when they entered the sixth grade was 3.2. Clearly, reading was not a forte for most of the students and getting them to read a book even of their own choice was a struggle. A research based reading strategy was used in the predominately African-American, low socioeconomic middle school where I taught. The school’s African-American population at the current time I was there was around 60%.

Soar to Success

What we found was a reading program called, ‘Soar to Success’ which was incorporated into the reading program. The program was beneficial in that there is high student participation which lets the student have a major role in their learning. It supports
the fact that African-American students have greater success when there is more interaction in their learning. After incorporating the program for a year, the African-American students I taught showed significant growth in their reading grade level. The main strategy used in the Soar to Success reading program is called "Reciprocal Teaching."

Reciprocal teaching addresses the learning styles of African-American students by allowing social interaction among peers. They also form into cooperative groups in which they become more active in their learning. Students appear to be more intrinsically motivated when they are aloud to take some control of their own learning. The main goal was to achieve higher academic achievement while providing strategies and skills that would allow students a chance for long term school success. The methods proved to be more beneficial than anticipated.

Reciprocal teaching is a structured, interactive method where the student can reverse the role between teacher and student. Instead of sitting and listening to the teacher, the student gets to interact during instruction. This method of instruction has a positive impact on the learner and the progress continues to grow for the students.

Reciprocal teaching includes four components; summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. Posters of theses strategies are displayed in close proximity to where the reading group is held. Small groups of 4-6 students meet once a day. Low grade level, high interest books were used as well as student hand-books. The strategies are pre-taught with students implementing them out loud during instruction. The groups are highly structured with high student participation. Students are very involved in the
reading process. This gives students time to practice strategies while they are actually reading and involves a high degree of social interaction with peers.

Reciprocal teaching is an instructional strategy that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teacher and students regarding different parts of a text. Here is what it can look like:

- Teacher begins by direct teaching and modeling of the four comprehension strategies. Each section does have a time limit but is not forced. Students then should practice them through conversations among themselves. It is important that the process of reciprocal teaching is scaffold to ensure success.

- Teachers direct teach and modeling the four basic strategies; predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. Students need to be made aware of the importance of using these strategies every time they read something. It will help to improve their reading comprehension in either fiction or non-fiction text.

- When students fully understand and can apply all four strategies, they can work independently.

- In a small group, a student is appointed to be 'the teacher' of the group. His/her responsibility is to facilitate the group.

- During discussion, it is important that students can determine where in the text they can incorporate the strategies.

- Students discuss for deeper meaning and understanding of the reading.

- Teacher may ask follow-up questions and lead the whole group into a closure activity for any unanswered questions or just elaborate on the final reading.
Student Achievement

All the students showed a growth in their reading grade levels in an eight month span. The chart below shows the actual growth summary of the eleven students who participated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth Summary</th>
<th>Grade Placement</th>
<th>Scaled Score</th>
<th>IRL</th>
<th>GE</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>NCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Students</td>
<td>Pretest Mean</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post test Mean</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Change</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Reciprocal teaching is easy to administer and interesting enough for students to get them involved in their own learning. These strategies can be used in all classrooms across content areas. This was implemented in a resource classroom which showed enough growth in the eight months to meet the building goal that was implemented in that particular year. The reading program includes the strategy poster, set of books and student workbooks. The student handbook includes a parent-connection letter which aids in communication between the classroom and home. Students and parents can share what the student is doing academically in the classroom. Completion of each book varies, depending on the length of it and letters are sent home before and after a book are completed.

Reciprocal teaching helps students use a higher order of thinking where the instructional activity takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students regarding segments of text. The strategies that are incorporated in reciprocal teaching not
only promote reading comprehension but also provide opportunities for students to learn
to monitor their own learning and thinking. The structure of the dialogue and interactions
of the group members requires that all students participate and build new relationships
between students of different ability levels.

Reciprocal teaching focuses on the development of both cognitive and mega
cognitive reading strategies through cooperative learning with scaffold instruction. The
student learns certain strategies through teacher modeling and as students watch and
learn, gradual fading of teacher support and more student support for one another takes
place.

Students who are poor decoders, second-language learners or non-readers benefit
from reciprocal teaching because it is student centered and individual student’s needs are
addressed better. It is also beneficial for proficient readers by challenging them to read
more difficult text. Reciprocal teaching helps students achieve certain skills that they are
required to master according to certain standards and benchmarks. It is beneficial in
helping students gain self-confidence in their learning and aids in motivating them to
read. It promotes leadership skills, group cooperation and initiative.

The Soar to Success reading program is flexible and versatile and can be applied
in a variety of settings. It is a reading intervention that ensures students receive high-
quality instruction matched to their individual needs. This program is great for students
who may require more intense instruction but without being separated from the main
classroom or placed in a special education setting. The assessments are efficient and
ongoing helping the student, teacher and parents to see where they are.
It offers teachers the instruction, resources and strategies that are necessary in extending the learning experience. By addressing multiple learning modalities it accommodates a variety of learning styles in a targeted and prescriptive form, if needed. Regardless of a teacher’s ability to teach in a multidisciplinary approach, it is user friendly. The program offers professional development before implementing it in the classroom helping to provide effective reading instruction and application. A teacher’s manual is included to assist educators in fostering the best practices in the classroom.

Students gain academically with this reading program. It has proven successful in the classroom I taught in and all over the country, in all grade levels as well. Students can become involved with their learning process and enjoy it as well. Parents are given the chance to be apart of this program too. Informative letters are sent home on a consistent basis and there is also internet access as well. This program allows parents to monitor their child’s progress by a computer from home if they choose.

Every reading class should incorporate the Soar to Success reading program into the classroom. Students can use the strategies they learn in other content areas helping their comprehension of the text they are reading. Teachers who teach other subject areas can incorporate the strategies in their classroom as well. The whole school can promote the strategies that are used in reciprocal teaching making it a community based effort in helping students achieve.
Works Cited (APA)


Additional Readings


