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Factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males: Perceptions of African American male high school students

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FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by
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Dissertation Approved October 9, 2012 by

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Dedication

This has been an incredible journey which I could not have completed without the inspiration and encouragement of the two African American males who mean the most to me, Rod Sr. and Rod Jr. Rod Sr. you are truly a man of strength. You have endured many trials and tribulations over the past several years; yet you were always right there telling me that I could do it and making sure that I had something good to eat and hot tea to keep me going. You are an amazing man and I am so very thankful that God placed you in my life. I love you for true.

Rod Jr., it was because of you that I kept going even when the hour was late and I wanted to give in so many times. You are a successful, handsome, and blessed young African American male. My prayer for you is that you find your destiny, your calling and go for it. Keep the faith and know that God has a plan for you. I am so proud to be your mom and I will always be here for you. Love you little man.

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Matara, you and the divas have always been there for me and seen me through some very dark and trying times. You are fearlessly and wonderfully made; you are truly a virtuous woman. I am so proud to be your big sister.

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all of us on and made sure that we knew you were thinking about us on every occasion in
our lives. It has been nothing less than the hand of God that has kept you and you are
truly an inspiration to us all.
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FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

Much of the literature dedicated to the academic achievement of African American males focuses on failure, obstacles, negative influences and explanations of factors that negatively impact their academic success. This qualitative research study provided an opportunity for African American male students at the high school level to articulate their experiences and speak to the factors that they perceived as contributing to their academic success. The constructs of identity and cultural capital were offered by this researcher as a conceptual framework into the insight of factors that impacted the academic achievement of this student group.

Through interviews, a classroom observation and document review, the perceptions of six African American male seniors from two public high schools located in southeastern Virginia were collected and analyzed. The themes derived from the data showed that these young men were successful due to the support they received from their teachers, parents and peers, their approach to challenging and difficult situations, and the opportunities that they were afforded that led to their use of the educational process to reach their goals and dreams.
FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Historically, minority populations across the United States and the world have dealt with inequities that have included the denial of the right to vote, to own property, to be meaningfully employed, and to pursue an education. In the United States, many of these rights were restored through landmark cases such as Brown v. Board of Education and the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Davis (2005) and Monroe (2005 a & b) suggested that there remains a residual effect of these inequities, which can be seen in education as manifested in issues of achievement, drop-out rates, discipline practices, over-representation of minority student groups in categories such as special education, and under-representation in areas such as gifted and talented.

Data provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for the state of Virginia illustrates the issue of inequities for African American males (Holzman, 2010).

Data indicate that there are approximately 162,679 black males enrolled in K-12 programs in Virginia. The 2007-2008 graduation rate for African American males was 49% while the graduation rate for White males was found to be 73% (Holzman, 2010). The data revealed that out-of-school-suspension rates for Black males was equivalent to 18% of Virginia’s enrollment of African American males while White male students were suspended at a rate equivalent to seven percent of their enrollment. The data also indicated that African American males were expelled at a proportion that was twice that of their enrollment. While significant numbers of African American males are removed
educational setting as a result of exclusionary practices, less than a third of African
American males are admitted to Gifted and Talented programs while nearly three times
as many are classified as having an intellectual disability (Holzman, 2010). The
declining social, economic, and educational status of African American males continues
to be vigorously debated. These debates have led to the development of negative
indicators utilized to describe this group. Garibaldi (1992) suggested that these indicators
include unemployment statistics, homicide rates (as victims and perpetrators),
disproportionate representation of African American males in the criminal justice system,
and a last-place ranking on several measures of educational performance and attainment.
Currently the rate at which African American males are being excluded from the
classroom setting and pushed into the pipeline to prison far exceeds the rate at which they
graduate and demonstrate high levels of academic achievement (Christle, Jolivette &
discipline practices, and dropout have been identified as the key factors in the school to
prison pipeline (Christle et. al., 2005). The No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department
of Education, 2010) has a stated goal of 100 percent proficiency demonstrated by all
students in the areas of reading and math by the year 2014. Yet, there is no concerted
effort at the national, state or local levels specifically focused on the educational or social
outcomes of African American males (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly,
2010).

Significance of the Problem

Much of the literature dedicated to the academic achievement of African American
males focused on failure, obstacles, negative influences and explanations of factors that
negatively impact academic success. "Chronic poverty, early school failure, high rates of school dropout, joblessness, fatherlessness, and increasing urban incarceration have taken a staggering toll on young Black males in America" (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006, p. 209). Education and opportunities for socialization through the school system serve as a primary resource for young African American males as they face these challenges (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). Diminished educational opportunities are the result of exclusionary practices that remove African American males from the classroom at high rates. The dropout rate also plays a role in decreasing educational opportunities for African American males. This issue is further complicated by the Euro-American influences that tend to ignore the background and experiences of others in the presentation of information. These influences are prevalent in school curricula, teaching methods, and course materials (Delpit, 2002; Schmidt, 2005). Education in America is a cultural product of the values, ideology, and ethos of Western civilization (McDougal, 2009).

Teachers play a pivotal role in reversing the negative academic and social behaviors of African American males, but they too, are predisposed to internalizing and projecting the negative stereotypes and myths that are unfairly used to describe these students as hopeless and unsuccessful (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008; Ferguson, 1998; Irvine & York, 1993). To be effective, teachers, who ascribe to these beliefs, must change their subjective attitudes about the success of minority students. Garibaldi (1992) posited that the encouragement of a teacher can greatly enhance the beliefs of all students, especially minority students, of the importance and value of education for long-term success. There is a paucity of research that takes an in-depth
look at the interactions of factors impacting the academic achievement of minority students and the students’ individual identities to shape their attitudes and beliefs about schooling and school behaviors (Carter, 2008). More specifically, there is a need to give voice to African American males in order to develop and implement strategies that will foster positive educational experiences for these young men in an effort to increase academic achievement (Beckles, 2008).

**Conceptual Framework**

The concepts of identity and cultural capital informed the conceptual framework for this study. These constructs provide a frame for understanding factors that impact the academic achievement of African American males. The framework also served as a means to provide a mechanism for giving voice to these young men. A discussion of how the components of identity and cultural capital form the conceptual framework for this study follows.

**Identity.** The concept of identification with academics has emerged as a contributing factor to the achievement gap (Chubbuck, 2004; Howard, 1999; Osborne, 1999; Roderick, 2003; Tatum, 1997). Osborne (1999) posited that the concept of identification is rooted in the symbolic interactionist perspective of self-esteem. That is, individuals seek and receive feedback from their environment, which is perceived. The individual then determines whether or not the perception is valid. If the perception is deemed valid the individual incorporates the perceived feedback into their self-concept. If the perception is not seen as valuable or important, it will have little effect on the individual’s self-esteem (Osborne, 1999; Roderick, 2003; Tatum, 1997).
An individual's identity is shaped by individual characteristics, which include historical factors, family dynamics and social and political contexts (Tatum, 1997). Self-creation of one's identity takes place during the adolescence period of one's life and continues for a lifetime (Tatum, 1997). Tatum (1997) noted that the process involves an individual seeking to answer questions such as: "Who does the world say I am? Who do my parents say that I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, neighbors, and community members such as store clerks? What do I learn about myself in the media? How am I represented in cultural images around me? Am I missing altogether?" (p. 20)

Seven distinct identifiers referred to as "categories of otherness" are used to define or identify people (Tatum, 1997, p.22). These categories include gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, age, socioeconomic status, and physical and mental abilities (Tatum, 1997). Each of these categories has a form of oppression associated with it: sexism, racism, religious oppression, ageism, classism and ableism (Tatum, 1997). These oppressive categories consist of two groups, a dominant group and a subordinate group (Tatum, 1997; Howard, 1999; Chubbuck, 2004). The dominant group is defined as the group, which possesses the power and authority to set the parameters for which the subordinate group operates (Tatum, 1997; Howard, 1999). In America, the dominant group is described as a white, male, land owner which is embedded in the Constitution (Howard, 1999, p. 51). The dominant group is seen as the norm creating a level of privilege, which creates a "sense of rightness and singularity of truth" (Howard, 1999, p.50). Howard notes that the dominant group claims truth as their private domain; the "dominant group doesn't hold perspectives, they hold the truth" (1999, p. 50). This
reiterates what Howard (1999) refers to as the legacy of privilege. Privilege is based solely on the color of one's skin and is unearned. Howard (1999) acknowledges that the privileges for the dominant group are many, but keys in on the concepts of social and psychological insulation and voice in order to bring understanding to how dominance works in an effort to bring about social transformation and healing. Social and psychological insulation refers to how privilege allows the dominant group "not to see, not to know, and not to act" (Howard, 1999, p. 61). Voice equates to the inferred power of the dominate group to control public discourse, which is seen in our country's official written history, owned media, directed flow of funding, disproportionately influenced political climate, occupied seats of power in most social institutions, and established systems of education (Howard, 1999). "The dominance of voice works to silence or interpret other people's voices and cultures" (Howard, 1999, p. 61).

**Cultural Capital.** Bourdieu asserted that privileged groups in society possess or inherit an accumulation of knowledge, skills and networks which are referred to as social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Carter, 2003; Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Garcia, 2007). Social capital is best described as the social networks or connections that one possesses or accesses (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications while economic capital is characterized in the form of money or other material possessions (Bourdieu, 1986). The aspect of capital which informs this conceptual framework is that of cultural capital.

Bourdieu argued that the knowledge of individuals that are identified as upper and middle class is considered capital valuable to a hierarchical society (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005). "If one is not born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed
valuable, one could then access the knowledge of the upper and middle class and the potential for social mobility through education” (Yosso, 2005, p.70). Yosso (2005) suggested that Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is used to explain why the social outcomes for people of color are significantly lower than the social outcomes of Whites. The assumption is that people of color “lack” the social and cultural capital required for social mobility (Yosso, 2005). As a result of this assumption, schools work to structure ways to help “disadvantaged” students whose race and class background has left them lacking the necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital needed to acquire social mobility (Yosso, 2005, p. 70).

Carter (2003) provided evidence that two forms of cultural capital exist and are often ignored by social scientist: dominant and non-dominant. Dominant cultural capital corresponds to Bourdieu’s conceptualization of powerful, high status cultural attributes, codes and signals which can also be stated as providing individuals with an ability to “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” as cultural power brokers (Carter, 2003, p. 138). Individuals often utilize dominant cultural capital to express their intellect or educational backgrounds. Non-dominant cultural capital describes resources used by individuals with lower status to gain “authentic” cultural status in their respective communities (Carter, 2003, p. 138). In other words the individual is said to be “navigating the terrain of ethnic authenticity” (Carter, 2003, p. 138). Dominant and non-dominant cultural capital are interconnected and represent variable cultural currency. For example, in one setting an individual might utilize dominant cultural capital to gain academic and socioeconomic mobility while utilizing non-dominant cultural capital to “express in-group affiliation” (Carter, 2003, p.138).
Carter (2003) utilized a grounded theory approach to study 44 low-income African American youth ages 13-20 who were enrolled in magnet schools in a restructured Yonkers School District. Forty-one percent of the participants were male and 62% of the participants attended classes predominately consisted of African American and Latino students. The participants were interviewed over a 10 month period (November 1997-August 1998). Carter gathered data using semi-structured and open-ended interview protocols to explore the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that pertained to racial and ethnic group relations and identity, beliefs about opportunity structure and pathways to success, achievement in society, academic and career aspirations, “appropriate” ethnic or cultural behaviors among peers and family and participation in various school activities.

The results of the study indicated that although dominant cultural capital played a critical role in one’s ability to attain social, academic and economic status, non-dominant cultural capital plays a critical role in status positioning for socially marginalized groups (Carter, 2003). These groups create codes for authentic membership, which are used to determine whether one is “in” or “out” (Carter, 2003, p.150). The codes are also used to maintain or create a unique identity within the racially hierarchical society (Carter, 2003). Carter’s results describe one form of non-dominant cultural capital, which was based on the cultural practices and meanings for poor youth living in Yonkers, New York. These students achieved racial and cultural authenticity and status position in their school and community through practices they framed as “black” (Carter, 2003, p. 150). The majority of the young people interviewed by Carter referred to identifiers of “black” practices in terms of music, dress, and speech styles. For example, one would be
determined to be “black” if they listened to rhythm and blues and rap as opposed to alternative rock and roll and heavy metal. An example of the type of dress one would associate with “being black” would be baggy jeans and oversized shirts. The speech style that one might associate with “being black” would entail the use of slang and various phrases such as “oh that’s butter” or “oh that’s phat” as opposed to “oh yeah, that’s cool” (Carter, 2003, p.142). These findings support the notion that historically African Americans have sought to create a cultural identity that is not shared with other ethnic groups because of the struggle of African Americans to gain the right to full economic, political and educational participation (Carter, 2003).

**Implications of conceptual framework**

The constructs of identity and cultural capital were offered by this researcher as insight into factors that impact the academic achievement of culturally diverse students and specifically African American males. In order for one to be academically successful, there must be a level of identification with academics (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Osborne, 1999). Academic identification is “the extent to which academic pursuits and outcomes form the basis for global self-evaluation” (Osborne, 1999, p. 59). Students who have high identification with academics will be more motivated to perform academically since their self-esteem is tied to their academic success while a student with low identification with academics is more likely to be detached from academic tasks and more likely to perform poorly (Gordon, et. al., 2009; Osborne, 1999). Black student’s identification has been shown to impact academic motivation, performance and success (Osborne, 1999). For Black males this is particularly relevant as this group disproportionately experiences tracking into low-ability groups, are socially and
economically isolated from classmates, and receive more frequent and severe disciplinary actions (Gordon, et. al., 2009).

The construct of cultural capital presents the assumption that people of color lack the knowledge that is gained through social mobility made available through education (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu’s work has been utilized “to explain why Students of Color do not succeed at the same rate as Whites” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). This researcher proposed that the lack of academic achievement of African American males, as verified by the body of prior research, casts a shadow on those students in this marginalized group who have experienced academic success. There are African American males who are successful in the educational system. Data do not show a 100% drop-out rate or 100% suspension or expulsion rate for this student group. This fact also suggests that African American males who are successful in the school setting identify with academics and acquire cultural capital in the form of knowledge through social mobility that is made available through education. Giving these successful young men a voice and an avenue to share their stories provided them with an opportunity to speak their reality. This reality is often inconsistent with the data provided that shows an overwhelming failure rate for African American males. Giving voice and framing student knowledge, as keys to understanding oppression for groups who are usually silenced by everyday practices of schooling in the United States, brings about an opportunity for educators to gain insights why schooling fails and also fosters democratic participation amongst systemically excluded populations (Knaus, 2009).

Research Questions

The research questions that were investigated in this study included:
1. What factors do high school African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success?

2. What factors do high school African American males perceive as obstacles to their academic success? How are these obstacles addressed?

3. How do high school African American males describe their educational experiences?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males as perceived by African American male students. The purpose in identifying these factors is to assist educational professionals in gaining an understanding of the socio-cultural contexts in which African American students learn in order to better meet their academic needs (Carter, 2008). “An increased understanding of Black student’s attitudes about race, awareness of racism in society, and understanding of the utility of schooling for social and economic mobility can help educators identify and embody pedagogies and practices that foster not only academic achievement but also healthy, positive identity construction in Black youth” (Carter, 2008, p.12).

**Significance of the Study**

The challenge in building bridges that facilitate social transformation and healing lies in our ability to dismantle the deep nature of racism and dominance (Howard, 1999; Tatum, 1997; Chubbuck, 2004). The difficulty is exacerbated by “the unacknowledged belief of White superiority which remains intact and shapes the institutionalized structures that reproduce race based privileges and discriminatory outcomes” (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 302).
The majority of the current research focuses on the obstacles and challenges faced by African American males while there is little to no effort to implement programs to support these students in becoming academically successful. Beckles (2008) noted that the voices of African American males are not often given center stage in empirical studies about their academic challenges or successes. This study provided an opportunity for African American males to articulate their experiences and speak to factors that contribute to their academic success.

**Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms will be utilized throughout this study.

*Academic success* – meeting benchmark criteria on classroom, district-wide, and state assessments and obtaining a grade of C/2.0 or better in coursework.

*Achievement gap* - the disparity that exists between achievement levels in minority students such as African Americans and Hispanics compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Monroe, 2005 a & b; Smith, 2005).

*Culture* - “a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, world views, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others” (Gay, 2000, p. 8).

*Dominant Group* - the group which possesses the power and authority to set the parameters for which the subordinate group operates (Tatum, 1997; Howard, 1999); In America, the dominant group is described as a white, male, land owner which is embedded in the Constitution” (Howard, 1999, p. 51). The dominant group is seen as the norm creating a level of privilege which creates a “sense of rightness and singularity of truth” (p.50).
Subordinate Group- individuals who are members of minority groups which have been marginalized throughout American history.

Home culture- based on the shared beliefs of the students’ parents and other family members, and the surrounding community which may include community organizations such as the church.

School culture- based on the shared beliefs of administrators, teachers, parents, students, and the school's surrounding community.

Factors- influences in the home and/or school that have impacted the learning or academic success of the researched population; they may include but are not limited to instructional strategies, parental support, mentor programs, teacher expectations, relationship building.

Perceptions- cognitive events resulting from information gathered by the senses, such as visual, auditory, verbal and tactile (Kelly, 2006).

Racism- “a system of advantage based solely on race intentionally or unintentionally” (Tatum, 1997, p.10).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are defined by Rudestam and Newton (2007) as “restrictions in the study over which the researcher has no control” (p.90). The limitations of this study were impacted by the data collection and analysis portions of the study. Data were collected from a sample of students at the high school level from two schools located in the Southeastern part of Virginia. The accuracy of the data was contingent upon students honestly sharing with the researcher. The time of the study was limited by the
availability of study participants as well as deadlines imposed throughout the dissertation process.

**Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations of a study are purposefully imposed limitations on the research design (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The scope of the study is limited to African American males, which excluded the voice of African American females. The study also was limited to perceptions of high school African American male seniors, which excluded the perceptions of African American male students at the elementary and middle school levels as well as educational professionals. The perceptions of parents and other stakeholders were not included but may provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated in this research study. Data collection was limited to two schools in the Southeastern part of Virginia, which made the conclusions generalizable only to this sample.

**Summary**

This chapter provided insight into factors that account for the lack of academic success for African American males. This study provided an opportunity for African American males to share their perceptions about factors that contribute to academic success. A conceptual framework based on the constructs of identity and cultural capital was offered as a means of supporting this research study. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review that provides a more detailed discussion concerning disparities that feed the achievement gap and factors that contribute to academic success. The chapter begins with a look at the historical and legal foundation of access to education for African American students in the United States.
CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature

As our society changes economically, racially, linguistically, and culturally and new demands are placed on educators to “leave no child behind”, learning communities face the challenge of effectively educating a very diverse group of learners. There are disproportionately high percentages of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans that are achieving below national standards. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveals that only 19% of Caucasian 12th graders score below basic proficiency on standardized reading tests, compared to 48% of African American 12th grade students and 42% of Hispanic 12th grade students (Schmidt, 2005). Similar discrepancies are seen in standardized math, writing, and history tests (Irvine & York, 2003). Statistics also reveal “dismal” graduation rates for African American and Hispanic youth (Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) noted that the graduation rate for African American males indicated that fewer than 50% of these young men graduate with a high school diploma. Jordan and Cooper (2002) suggested that “Black males cluster at the bottom of the distribution of virtually every indicator of school failure such as dropping out, absenteeism, suspension and expulsion, and low standardized test scores” (p. 2). Jordan and Cooper (2002) posited that these issues along with the decreasing numbers of African American males in higher education, high rates of infant mortality and incarceration as well as short life expectancy have led to Black males being referred to as an “endangered species” (p. 2).
This chapter includes a review of the historical and legal foundation of access to education for African American students in the United States. This literature review explores shared meaning by defining the achievement gap and issues that impact or contribute to the disparity. A more detailed look at factors that contribute to the achievement gap is addressed and followed by a brief discussion of the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males.

**Historical and Legal Foundations of Education for African American Students**

Historically, the American educational system has excluded non-majority student groups from the educational process. Over time various legislation was enacted to ensure that these student groups were granted equal access to the educational process. In 1954, the landmark Brown Decision granted equal educational opportunities and access for African American students. The 1965 enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) gave equal access and treatment to poor and minority students. Title IX of the ESEA, which was passed in 1972, ensured equal treatment of females. The Education for All Handicapped Act of 1974, later re-authorized as IDEA, was put into place to grant equal access and treatment to students with disabilities. In 2002, President George Walker Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The new charge created a focus on subgroups of historically underserved students and public education experienced a shift from ensuring access to the educational process to a focus on universal proficiency of all students. The impact of the Brown Decision of 1954 and enactment of the NCLB Act will be examined in more detail.
Brown Decision of 1954

The Brown Decision of 1954 was a result of several cases being pursued by African American plaintiffs from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, and Virginia (Kusimo, 1999; Verdun, 2005). The parents of these African American students sought access to equal facilities, curriculum, and instructional materials for their children. “They shared the widely held belief that education was the key to opportunity and upward mobility for African Americans” (Kusimo, 1999, p.2). The central question considered by the Supreme Court was whether or not segregation of children in public schools, based solely on race, deprived students of color from an opportunity for equal education (Kusimo, 1999). The Court found that not only was racial segregation harmful, but the separation of minority children from their same aged peers, based solely on race, created a feeling of inferiority that may impact these children for a lifetime (Kusimo, 1999). This decision resulted in mandated integration of public schools.

As a result of being forced to integrate, many communities withdrew support of public schools and established private academies with public funds. Schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia shut down all public schools and public funds were used to fund private schools for whites only (Kusimo, 1999; Verdun, 2005). School systems all over the country followed suit and refused to integrate until mandated to do so. This lead to a long, arduous process that would take another 50 years, as dual school systems were challenged all over the country (Verdun, 2005). Verdun (2005) noted that the Supreme Court’s decision led to a “big disconnect” between the legal and social wrong of segregation and the means of achieving integration (p.68). Verdun posited that the issues that led to the disconnect included the following: 1) the court would not interfere with
individual choices that resulted in segregation; 2) there was no clear mandate in the Brown Decision, as noted by the nebulous language given for a time frame of “all deliberate speed”; 3) failure to include suburban school districts in the remedy for state supported segregation of urban schools; 4) requirement to show intent to demonstrate discrimination without a clear statement of what constitutes discriminatory intent; 5) failure to recognize benign discrimination; 6) difficulty in proving racism and discrimination; and the 7) termination of federal court intervention in school desegregation cases.

NCLB

NCLB legislation was based on the principle of the Brown Decision, which found that “separate but equal” was unconstitutional as it interfered with the educational opportunities for African American students (Knaus, 2007). NCLB signified a shift in the focus of American education from educational access to successful achievement outcomes for all students. Areas that were addressed in the Act included a focus on equity, standards-based reform, accountability and disaggregation and improvement of performance for all student groups (NCLB, 2000). The student groups that were specifically targeted in NCLB Act were disadvantaged, minority, English language learners and students with disabilities. Knaus (2007) opined that while NCLB’s intended purpose was to ensure access for marginalized student groups, it has encouraged a structurally separate from and unequal educational opportunity for African American students. Data indicate that high-minority and high-poverty schools essentially are failing students all across America. Yet, 2007 data from the Department of Education
indicated that 71% of African American students attended high minority schools and 72% of African American students attended a high-poverty school (Knaus, 2007).

Knaus (2007) ascertained that issues, which arose during the NCLB era are contributing to the continued achievement gap between White and African American students. Knaus posited that the simplistic measurements of achievement, graduation rates, and teacher certification took center stage in place of addressing why African American students fail. The emphasis being placed on reading and math proficiency has contributed to the narrowing of the curriculum and ignoring issues that students face daily (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Knaus, 2007). Students are tested more often and though state and district officials report an increase in the number of students demonstrating proficiency on state assessments, it is not clear if students are gaining as much as the rising percentages of proficient scores suggest (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). “NCLB ultimately requires basic, rote educational strategies for failing schools, a requirement that would be thoroughly rejected by elite schools as inadequate methods for engaging students in higher-level critical thinking skills valued by colleges and employers alike” (Knaus, 2007, p. 3).

**Achievement Gap of African American Males**

The achievement gap is defined as the disparity that exists between achievement levels in minority students such as African Americans and Hispanics compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Monroe, 2005; Smith, 2005). A closer look at the achievement gap sheds light on the disproportionality of African American males, who lag behind academically compared to their same age white counterparts. (Davis, 2003). Smith (2005) suggested that the issues lie within the
framework of our educational institutions. Data overwhelmingly show that African American males are identified with disabilities (8.6% of public school students in 2000-01 and in some districts as much as 41% of special education population), suspended and expelled (22% of students suspended and 23% of students expelled are black males), incarcerated (rate is more than three times as high), and drop out (rate is over 50% in metropolitan areas) than their white counterparts (Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) suggested that school officials such as superintendents and board members are aware of these disparities, but choose to label this problem as “the achievement gap” rather than finding a solution.

Table 1. Disproportionality of African American males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National Statistics (Smith, 2005)</th>
<th>Virginia Statistics (Holzman, 2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>African American Males</strong></td>
<td>8.6% of public school students in 2000-2001 and in some districts 41% of special education population</td>
<td>three times as many classified as mentally retarded/intellectually disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>African American male</strong></td>
<td>22% of students suspended 23% of students expelled</td>
<td>18% of Virginia’s enrollment (162,679 African American males enrolled in VA K-12 programs) Expelled at a rate that is twice that of enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspension and expulsion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>rates</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>African American male</strong></td>
<td>3 times the rate of White males; more African American males receive their GEDs in prison that graduate from college</td>
<td>Data not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incarceration rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>African American male</strong></td>
<td>Over 50% in metropolitan areas</td>
<td>Data not given. It is noted that the graduation rate for African American males in VA for 2007-08 year was 49%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dropout rates</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Disparities that Feed the Achievement Gap of African American Males

The status (social, economic, and educational) of Black males has been described as critical because they do not have the same opportunities as their white male and female counterparts (Lewis, et. al., 2010). The lack of opportunity is described in terms of a lack of resources that leave these families socioeconomically disadvantaged (Rothstein, 2008). Data from the NAEP indicated that in 2007, 1 of every 3 Black children (33%) lived in poverty compared to 1 out of every 10 White children (10%; Lewis, et. al., 2010). Poverty impacts this student group in a variety of other ways. Black children 17 and under were 50% more likely to be without private or government-sponsored insurance than White children. Rothstein (2008) noted that this lack of insurance leads to an increase in school absences because these students have no preventive medical or dental care. The lack of proper health care is also evident in infant mortality rates. The infant mortality rate for Black mothers between 2003-2007 was at least twice as high (13%) as that of White mothers (6%; Lewis, et. al., 2010). Black children are three times more likely to live in a single parent household with a female head of household (Lewis, et. al., 2010). In 43% of these households, no parent has full-time or year round employment (Lewis, et. al., 2010). The lack of full-time or year round employment also impacts stable housing for these students as parents are forced to move frequently due to difficulty paying rent and into areas that have high crime rates and drug activity (Rothstein, 2008). Frequent moving contributes to the lack of continuity in instruction which impacts academic achievement (Rothstein, 2008). It is also noted that one third of the parents of Black children hold a high school diploma while 24% of these parents have some college experience and 15% hold a bachelor's degree (Lewis, et. al., 2010).
When addressing the achievement gap that exists between black and white students, the issue of low socioeconomic status has been offered as a factor that plays a key role in why the gap exists. Singleton and Linton (2006) suggested that it is important to consider the “full weight” of the descriptor socioeconomic (p. 31). The authors noted that the primary emphasis of the descriptor is often placed on the financial status or economic part of the descriptor. Equally important is the social status, which relates to the cultural nuances located in a person’s current and previous environments (Singleton & Linton, 2006). The researchers noted that when considering an individual’s socioeconomic status one must look at the cultural and economic background and consider one’s racial identity as an aspect of cultural background. Singleton and Linton (2006) found that an achievement gap existed for students within the same economic strata. The researchers utilized data from a 1998 study completed by the University of California and the College Board. While the data are dated and only include information for the freshmen class, Singleton and Linton noted that there has not been a more recent study that provided a comparison of race, income and achievement. Results indicated that income did not impact achievement and showed the intersection of race and income. The results also indicated that SAT scores for all races improved as family income increased; however, at every income level, White students outperformed students of color. Black students were the lowest performing group at every level (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Other issues that feed the disparity of the achievement gap include but are not limited stereotype threat, the cultural ecological perspective, student culture vs. school culture, and the discipline gap. Each of these areas is addressed in the following sections.
Factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males are also discussed in the following sections.

**Stereotype threat**

Steele (1997) identified the Stereotype Threat as a possible culprit in the academic underperformance of students of color. Steele (1997) noted that minority student groups experience higher levels of anxiety in school situations, which contributes to these students often putting themselves in a position to be seen as foolish. The increased anxiety creates an aversive reaction, which often results in minority students reducing their identification with academics (Steele, 1997). “Images and perceptions of young Black males as lazy, incompetent, unstable, and violent are pervasive throughout American culture” (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006, p. 212). The authors argued that these negative stereotypes or perceptions lead many young Black men to devalue education and school and develop a “macho or hyper masculine posture (hard or thug)” in an effort to protect and define themselves (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006, p.212).

**Cultural ecological perspective**

Ogbu’s (1990) Cultural Ecological Perspective suggested that minority groups are further divided into those who voluntarily reside in America and those who involuntarily became citizens. The voluntary group includes Latino and Asian Americans, who are referred to as immigrants. This group views education as the path to success and a brighter future. They also appear to have an easier time integrating into academics into their self-concept, which is reflected in their ability to excel at school. The involuntary group includes African and Native Americans. Individuals in this group interpret school as a displacement process, which is detrimental to individuals’ social identity, sense of
security and self-worth. Members of the involuntary group may express this response
due to the observation that even those among them who succeed are not fully accepted or
rewarded the same way as whites and face cultural opposition for “acting white” (Ogbu,
1990, p. 48).

Livingston and Nahimana (2006) argued that the ecological perspective must be
investigated through a comprehensive multi-level approach, which addresses the impact
of culture, institutions, ethos, legislation, and institutional policy and practice on the
African American community. The authors suggested that the educational needs of
African American males is best assessed when one understands the impact of
psychological and social factors such as chronic poverty, unemployment, substandard
housing, family instability, and exposure to violence. For example, Livingston and
Nahimana (2006) reported that the unemployment rate of black males is twice that of
white males. “High rates of male unemployment can create a context of fatherlessness,
economic instability, poverty and hopelessness characterized or manifested in children by
low expectations, increased rates of high school dropout, and high rates of delinquency”
(Livingston & Nahimana, 2006, p.211). The high rates of unemployment coupled with a
decreased need for unskilled laborers forces many young Black males to opt for
involvement in drug trafficking and other criminal activity. The authors suggested that
African American males who are reared in this setting often enter “the adult world
economically and politically emasculated” (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006, p.212). In
order to better understand the methods and interventions needed to support the success of
African American males, one must first gain an understanding of the social context and
culture in which these young men exist (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006).
Student culture vs. school culture

The culture found in school systems is based on the shared beliefs of administrators, teachers, parents, students, and the school’s surrounding community. Many K-12 institutions tend to be Eurocentric as a result of the overwhelming large White presence in teaching; and the norms presented are reflective of the majority student populations (Monroe, 2005). Historically, European Americans have been considered the dominant group, which has carried an implied sense of power and privilege (Delpit, 2002); this has led to the institution of public education being built on the ideals of European culture. Thus the "cultural fabric" of our schools, primarily of European and middle-class origins, is so deeply ingrained in the structures, ethos, programs, and etiquette of today's schools that it is considered simply the "normal" and "right" thing to do; and often the "cultural fabric" of schools does not allow for the dynamic weaving of the threads of diversity and ethnicity (Gay, 2000, p.9).

Monroe (2005) noted that low-income African American students seldom receive instruction from teachers who share their cultural framework, creating an increase in cultural misunderstandings based on race, ethnicity and social class. Many of the difficulties encountered by teachers, who are instructing students from a different background than their own, may be related to underlying attitudinal differences in the explicitness of directions and personal power in the classroom (Delpit, 2002). Monroe (2006) observed that classroom behavioral policies are more explicit in nature and tend to control movement and limit opportunities for students to interact with classmates. Implicit rules, according to Monroe, address constructs such as respect, cooperation, vocal usage, interpersonal space, and deference to teacher authority. The issue here is
that the majority of the teacher workforce is made up of middle-class and European-American professionals who develop and implement classroom behavioral policies and expectations that tend to reflect their culturally specific perspectives (Monroe, 2006). Research suggests that limited teacher understanding of cultures outside of their own and unexamined prejudices about people from other ethnic groups are areas that must be addressed in order to implement culturally responsive classroom environments (Delpit, 2002; Gay, 2000; Monroe, 2006).

Congruent alignment between a child’s home and school culture is a good predictor of their academic achievement. Students are more successful when their home and school cultures are similar; they tend to be less successful when the two cultures collide or are incongruent (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2003). There may be a disconnect for many minority and low-income students due to the movement from the familiar environment of the home to the unfamiliar environment of the school. This disconnect may be minimized or eliminated when schools work with students and their families in adapting to the school culture (Walker-Bowen, 2007). Teachers who do not acknowledge race deny experiences of alienation that children of color face daily (Love & Kruger, 2005). “Not perceiving color is also not seeing culture, and not seeing culture is a risk of not seeing the importance of family and family practices” (Love & Kruger, 2005, p. 95).

The subculture of African American males has been described as a culture that “makes unreasonable and coercive demands that its members exhibit a tough persona and deny personal vulnerability” (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005, p.238). Day-Vines and Day-Hairston posited that any displays of academic excellence or engaging in prosocial
behaviors could result in ridicule, ostracism or humiliation from the peer group. The researchers suggested that African American males often express an outward "false bravado" while inwardly harboring feelings of self-doubt, insecurity, and fear due to the absence of a psychologically safe environment that encourages the expression of vulnerability. The misunderstanding of the cultural norms of social interaction of African American males can create a tension and conflict between students and school staff, which leads to over-referrals and disproportionality of infractions (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Townsend, 2000).

The discipline gap

"The discipline gap, or tendency for African American students to be sanctioned more frequently and severely than their peers, is present in virtually every major school system throughout the United States" (Monroe, 2005, p.317). Noguera (2003) opined that the discipline gap is an inverse image of the achievement gap for African American, White, and Asian students in that African American students and specifically males are overrepresented in the area of disciplinary practices and consequences. The issue of the discipline gap raises questions of whether discipline problems contribute to low achievement or whether low achievement contributes to discipline problems (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). Too often schools react to the behavior of students who are not performing at grade-level expectations and fail to meet their instructional needs or respond to the factors that contribute to problematic behaviors which contribute to the marginalization of these students (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Noguera, 2003).

Disproportionality by race and gender. The students who are disproportionately disciplined using exclusionary practices are most frequently African American males.
(Applied Research Center, 2002; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Skiba et. al. (2000) studied all middle school students in a large, urban Midwestern public school district located in one of the 15 largest cities in the United States. The 19 middle schools in the district served 11,001 of the 50,000 plus overall student body. Disciplinary data for the school year 1994-95 obtained from this urban Midwestern public school district were analyzed for the study. Male students comprised 51.8% (5,698) while females represented 48.2% (5,303) of the school population. African American students comprised 56% of the student population while 42% of the students were White and 1.2% Latino. Students receiving free lunch made up 65.3% (7,287) of the school population and 26.6% (2,923) of the students were received lunch for a reduced price. Results showed that males were suspended at a rate of 67.2% (discrepancy of 15.4%), African Americans at a rate of 68.5% (13.5% discrepancy), students receiving a free lunch at a rate of 74.5% (discrepancy of 9.7%) and students receiving a reduced lunch at a rate of 7.1% (discrepancy of -0.9%).

Mendez et. al. (2002) supported the argument that African American students are disproportionately suspended and expelled. This study investigated high suspending versus low suspending schools and utilized 1996-97 data from the second largest district in a county school system in Florida (12th largest school system in the United States). The 142 general education schools that were studied served 138,761 students or 95% of all students. Fifty-six percent of the students were White, 23% Black, and 18% Hispanic. Boys comprised 51% of the student population. Results indicated that males accounted for 70% of suspensions and Black males were suspended more frequently. At the
elementary level, African American males were suspended at a rate of 12.15% compared to 3.08% of White males and 3.36% of Hispanic males. The trend continued and increased across the middle school (48.90% Black males, 25.00 White males, 33.95% Hispanic males) and into the high school level (36.46% Black males, 18.90% White males, and 27.36% Hispanic males). It was noted that African American females also were suspended more frequently than their White and Hispanic counterparts. Mendez et. al. noted that several factors, race being one, act as a correlational and not causal factor when looking at the students who are most likely to be disciplined.

Data obtained from the San Diego City School District for the 2000-01 school year showed a disparity in suspensions for Latino and African American students (Applied Research Center, 2002). These students made up 53% of the total enrollment and comprised 72% of all suspensions and 76% of expulsions. The researchers noted that the 2000-01 data supported data obtained from the 1999-2000 school year. The 1999-2000 data noted that the student population totaled 140,743 and was comprised of 52,361 (37%) Latino, 38,723 (27%) White, and 23,300 (17%) African American (Applied Research Center, 2002). Of the 11,839 suspensions, 45% of these students were Latino (overrepresented by 8%) and 31% African American (14% overrepresented).

Disproportionality based on race and gender was also shown to be a constant over time. Wallace et. al., (2008) completed a study, utilizing data from the University of Michigan’s Monitoring the Future research, found that suspensions and expulsions continue to be highest for African American students. The prevalence of suspensions and expulsions for African American students increased between 1991-2005, while other racial and ethnic groups’ rates increased slightly between 1991-2000 and slightly
decreased between 2000-2005. The suspension and expulsion rate for African American boys was consistently the highest at a rate of more than 50% compared to rates that are lower than 30% for other racial, ethnic and gender groups.

Monroe (2006) argued that one of the factors impacting the disproportionate representation of African American males in exclusionary discipline practices centers around a disconnect between the cultures of students and their teachers. Cultural constructs appear to have a great influence on racial disparities in school discipline (Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Weinstein et. al. (2003) opined that the cross-cultural classroom interactions may lead to culturally based misunderstandings that in end in disciplinary actions.

**Disproportionality byInfraction.** The cultural differences between students and the adults with whom they interact in the school environment influence the way in which minority students are disciplined. Monroe (2005) indicated that this situation occurs because white, middle-class individuals occupy the majority of educational positions of power. These individuals also set and influence the educational expectations, practices, and policies that are then used to make disciplinary decisions. “Given the intensity of a disciplinary action where a student is barred from attending school and the concomitant loss of instruction and academic engaged time, one might think that only the most egregious behaviors would result in school suspension” (Mendez & Knoff, 2003, p.32). Mendez et. al. (2002) noted that the vast majority of suspensions across the country are the result of school rules that involve no dangerous or violent acts. Wallace et. al. (2008) found that African American youth tend to be referred for more subjective reasons such
as disrespect and a perceived threat, while their white counterparts are referred for more objective reasons such as vandalism, smoking or leaving school without permission.

When looking at the differences for students by type of infraction, Rausch and Skiba (2004) discovered that African American students were 4 times more likely to experience out-of-school suspensions for Disruptive Behavior and 5 times more likely to experience out-of-school suspension for the category of Other when compared to their White peers. Expulsion rates for Disruptive Behavior revealed that African American students were 3.38 times more likely to be expelled for Disruptive Behaviors and 2.27 more likely to be expelled for the category of Other than their White counterparts. The researchers also noted that the rates of suspension and expulsion for African American students were higher at all school levels. Though the data indicated that African Americans were suspended at higher rates at the high school level, the researchers noted that disproportionality was greatest for these students at the elementary level (6 times more likely to be suspended).

When considering the possible explanation that African American youth engage in more severe behaviors which require more severe discipline, Skiba et. al. (2000) found that the referrals received by African American students were disproportionate for subjective and nonviolent offenses such as disrespect and excessive noise. Suspensions often occurred as a result of teachers attempting to gain control of the classroom. Frequently suspensions are the result of a teacher responding to multiple disruptive events and singling out a student from a group of many to receive punishment. Vavrus and Cole (2002) suggested that a large number of these disruptions were the result of student questions being ignored or the teacher's indirect response to student questions.
Ignoring students' questions and responding indirectly have been found to be two discursive patterns that were frequently seen as catalysis for suspensions (Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

Mendez et al. (2002) further emphasized the higher rate of referrals for nonviolent behaviors. The results of this study indicated that infractions for disobedience and insubordination for African American students made up 20% of suspensions while 13% of suspensions resulted from disruptive behavior and fighting, inappropriate behavior accounted for 11%, non-compliance with assigned discipline was 7% and weapons and drug possession charges were less than 1%.

Communication differences that have been characterized as cultural differences also have been suggested as a factor that impacts decisions made by teachers to refer African American students for suspension (Monroe, 2006; Townsend, 2000; Wallace et al., 2008). European-American communities can be characterized by interpersonal communication that is "marked by lack of affect, constraint, deference to authority in dialogue, turn-taking and linear conversational patterns" (Monroe, 2006, p. 163). African American communities are characterized as being animated, in favor of overlapping, and emotionally driven in interaction styles. Monroe (2006) noted that the expression style observed in African American communities is one that is frequently accompanied by physical expression, varying vocal qualities and frankness. These differences play a role in the way students and teachers interact.

Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) suggested that communication styles bring about cultural misunderstandings and "misattributions" between African American males and school staff. African American males often communicate in a manner that is loud,
intense, and confrontational even when they are not angry. Onlookers often perceive this style of behavior as volatile, as well as combative, and the onlooker may assume that a fight is impending (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Townsend, 2000). African Americans also may engage in interactive, spontaneous discourse that does not require permission for turn taking for others to respond (Brown, 2003; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Weinstein et. al., 2003). This is particularly problematic in the classroom setting as European cultures dictate sequential versus simultaneous patterns of interaction (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005). This behavior is often addressed by classroom teachers as disruptive or threatening (Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Wallace et. al., 2008). Townsend (2000) posited that teachers over-refer African American males based on stereotypes and unfamiliarity with communication styles that are frequently interpreted as combative or argumentative.

An example given by Wallace et. al. (2008) supports this phenomenon. A White male teacher arrived to class late. An African American male student responded to his teacher’s late arrival with “Man, I was just fixin’ to bounce on you” (Wallace et. al., 2008, p. 59). The teacher responded by filling out a referral form and recommending the student for suspension due to his interpretation of “fixin’ to bounce on you” as a threat of physical violence when in essence the student was saying that he was going to leave since his teacher had not arrived.

**Factors that Contribute to Academic Success of African American Males**

In spite of an overwhelming amount of research that addresses the adversity faced by African American males in school and in society at large, there is a smaller literature base that addresses factors that contribute to the academic success of this group of
students. Factors that positively impact the education of Black males include parental support, mentor programs, teacher high expectations, relationship building, and teacher perceptions (Chretien, 2007; Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008; Kelly, 2006; Kincaid, 2003; Love & Kruger, 2005; Roderick, 2003; Walker-Bowen, 2007).

**Parental support**

Kincaid (2003) completed a phenomenological study using focus groups to investigate factors that contribute to or detract from the academic success of African American males. Kincaid (2003) interviewed nine educators and 30 African American male high school seniors to obtain information about their academic experience and specific factors that influenced academic success. Kincaid (2003) determined that students and educators "strongly affirmed" that academic success for African American males was impacted by support from family and friends. The researcher noted that the support was described in terms of encouragement, resources, assistance, high expectations, and school involvement. Kincaid also noted that study participants emphasized the importance of a home-school collaborative relationship. Study results indicated that the most successful African American males were those whose mothers or extended family members attended school functions and supported a link between home and school.

Uhlenberg and Brown (2002) explored the perceptions of African American and white teachers concerning possible causes and solutions to the achievement gap. The researchers surveyed 54 teachers from 14 different public schools in the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina. The survey was constructed to gather information concerning
home environment, the child, the teacher, and the school system. Initial questions were designed to solicit general information about the participant’s familiarity and concern with the achievement gap. Survey items were followed by forced-choice items that contain one example from each of the four previously listed categories. The researchers found that both African American and Caucasian teachers see the lack of parental involvement as a significant contributing factor to the achievement gap. It was also noted that teachers felt that there was an impact based on the educational level of parents. The results of the study noted that African American teachers put more of an emphasis on the lack of education for the parent than their Caucasian counterparts.

Chretien (2007) compared the perceptions of students and teachers concerning the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males. This qualitative, descriptive case study was conducted at a small, rural high school with six African American male seniors and six of their teachers. Chretien utilized personal interviews, focus groups and observations to collect data. Responses were coded for themes and analyzed for similarities and differences. The findings revealed that a caring school community was identified, by both teachers and students, as a contributing factor of academic success. The researcher noted that the students expressed a feeling of safety within their school environment, which encouraged them to ask questions in the classroom with an expectation of receiving help from their teachers. Chretien noted that this perception was confirmed through observations conducted in the school setting. Chretien described the classroom setting as one in which “teachers displayed a caring approach and seemed to realize that they were the biggest influence over their students, our future society” (2007, p. 112). Livingston and Nahimana (2006) opined that the
school community, made up of the schools, businesses, government, churches, and various community stakeholders create experiences that promote the healthy social and psychological development of African American males.

Roderick (2003) examined the transition to high school among African American males who were part of a longitudinal study in Chicago. Every three months students in 8th-12th grades participated in semi-structured interviews for a total of nine interviews. Students were asked questions about their aspirations and plans. Students also were asked to discuss their experiences with class work, relationships with teachers and peers. Parents also were interviewed to determine parental involvement within and outside of the school setting. Parents were interviewed during the student's 9th grade year. A follow-up interview was conducted at the end of the student's 11th grade year and student progress was followed through official school transcripts and informal contacts. Student interviews, teacher assessments, parent interviews and official school records were utilized to gather the data for study results.

Roderick found that African American male students were most successful in environments that "develop a web of support that combines individualized attention and monitoring of student progress, opportunities for students to develop relationships with adults and safe and orderly learning environments that provide consistent expectations for behavior" (p. 580). Roderick concluded that it is crucial for teachers and parents to work together and to become knowledgeable about the developmental and academic needs of African American males. Roderick (2003) suggested that working together can be achieved by utilizing advisory groups and support groups within high school settings. Initiating student development programs within the school environment has the potential
to provide a medium for African American males to find supportive relationships and opportunities for engagement.

**Mentor programs**

Roderick’s study of the transition of African American males (2003) found that one of the most popular approaches to improving educational support for minority students has been providing mentoring and out of school support programs. The group of African American males that Roderick described as “resilient” were supported by non-familial adults who served in the role of coaches or guides. Roderick credited African American males’ development of a sense of persistence and coping to the time that these young men spent engaged in extracurricular activities. The researcher also called attention to the need to provide access to positive male role models for African American males. Kincaid (2003) noted that positive role models and examples of successful African American males must be pervasive in home and school environments to counter the diminishing messages communicated in media and negative peer and adult influences. The utilization of African American male professionals from within the community as mentors is most influential when implemented during the elementary years and sustained through the middle and high school years (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). A few of the programs that utilize African American males from within the community include the Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI), the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program and the Boys and Girls Club of America.

**The Benjamin E. Mays Institute.** The Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) is a mentoring program that targets eighth grade African American males (Gordan, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). The program is an all-male cluster housed within an urban middle school located in Connecticut. The students are referred for mentoring by
teachers, peers and administrators. The main goal of the program is to impact the intellectual, spiritual, physical and social needs of the students through the use of role-modeling and mentoring (Gordan, et. al., 2009). The students in the BEMI are instructed by male instructors in major subject areas which include English, math, science and history. The student participants are also assigned a mentor who has been selected from surrounding universities and the local and private sectors. The mentors meet weekly with the mentees and the pairs participate in planned activities along with parents and school personnel in an effort for all parties to interact, share and develop common goals around the mentoring experience and support the academic development of the mentee (Gordan, et. al., 2009).

The BEMI was evaluated for effectiveness using data obtained from the Racial Identity Attitude Scale which was used to measure the students’ racial identity attitudes; the Identification with Academics Scale, which was developed to assess the extent to which a student’s self-esteem is connected with and dependent upon academic outcomes, the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), which measured essential reading and mathematics skills that can be expected to be mastered by the end of the student’s previous year, and the student’s grade point average. Data for the CMT were obtained from the student’s academic records. Sixty-one Black eighth grade male students participated in the study. The participants formed two groups; 29 were BEMI participants and 32 students made up the non-equivalent comparison group. It was noted that the 32 students in the comparison group were also students in the eighth grade in the same school with similar backgrounds to the BEMI participants.
The results of the study indicated that the African American males that participated in the BEMI program demonstrated more positive and higher identification with academic scores and lower pre-encounter attitudes and higher internalization scores on the Racial Identity Attitude Scale than the comparison group (Gordon, et. al., 2009). This result demonstrates how Afrocentric principles and mechanisms can be utilized to facilitate African American males’ identification with academic success (Gordon, et. al., 2009). These results also support the effectiveness of an Afrocentric mentoring program in increasing the academic success and achievement of African American males at the middle school level. Implications of the study results include a need to consider and develop strategies that foster a sense of pride in African American males, their culture and the collective unity they experience. This collective sense of unity may also enhance the young men’s ability to re-enter their community and not separate their academic success from who they may need to be within that community context. Another implication of the findings suggest that mentoring programs should be active in exploring with and understanding from the perspective of African American males in respect to how they view their ethnic and cultural heritage and the impact this perspective has on the development of this student group’s academic identity (Gordon, et. al., 2009). The researchers believe that integrating Afrocentric methodologies and pedagogy into the instruction of African American males may further enhance their ability to internalize and use taught materials (Gordon, et. al., 2009).

**Big Brothers/ Big Sisters Program.** The Big Brothers/Big Sisters program was created to provide mentors for young children from single-parent families (Fashola, 2003). The main funding for the program is provided by the U.S. Department of Justice.
The overall goal of the program is to provide young children with positive role models who will “provide the children with positive experiences, teach them to make healthy decisions, and help them to strive for the best in life” (Fashola, 2003, p. 413). Local agencies provide assistance for children who have a desire to participate in the program. Waiting lists are created by the local agencies when slots are full. The adult mentors are provided with training and encouraged to spend four to six hours with their little brothers or sisters monthly.

The program was evaluated by Tierney, Grossman, and Resch in 1995 to compare the effects that the program had on participants versus the children on the waiting list (Fashola, 1995). The study included 959 children who had applied to the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program. The participants were randomly assigned to a treatment group or waiting list (control group = 472 participants). The results showed that students who participated in the program were significantly less likely to engage in drug or alcohol use and aggressive activities and likely to improve their peer relationships (Fashola, 2003). It was noted that the U.S. Department of Justice granted agencies across the United States additional funding based on evidence that the program reduced violence, teen pregnancy, and undesirable behaviors among inner-city youth (Fashola, 2003). Though this program was not specifically designed to target African American males, “the research design for the study and evaluation, using random assignment, suggests that the outcomes can definitely be attributed to the effects of the program” (Fashola, 2003, p. 414).

**Boys and Girls Clubs of America.** The Boys and Girls Clubs of America consist of more than 2,000 neighborhood-based facilities that serve 2 to 8 million
disadvantaged young people yearly (Fashola, 2003). The clubs provide a guidance-oriented character development program for children ages six to 18 years of age. The clubs also emphasize educational achievement, career exploration, drug and alcohol prevention and avoidance, health and fitness, gang and violence prevention, cultural enrichment, leadership development, and community service (Fashola, 2003). The past few years have seen more of an emphasis on academic assistance and more specifically homework help for students attending the program. A study conducted by Schinke, Cole and Poulin in 2000 to determine the effects of homework completion and academic achievement (Fashola, 2003). The results showed that students who participated in the Project Learn program completed significantly more homework than students in the comparison group (Fashola, 2003). Fashola (2003) noted that the study design was not as rigorous as the study completed to evaluate the Big Brothers/Big Sister Program but results are promising. The Boys and Girls Clubs of America have created a national educational advisory committee which has been tasked with looking at better ways to serve the participants and evaluate the effectiveness of the program (Fashola, 2003).

In order to target a specific population or student group, it is important to understand the needs and wants of the targeted population (Fashola, 2003). The author opined that there are three steps that should be implemented when attempting to provide support for a specific population. The steps include understanding the individual feelings of African American males and “the factors that foster feelings of failure and isolation” (Fashola, 2003, p. 417). Fashola (2003) suggest that the second step is to identify factors in the school setting that may or may not create feelings of failure and isolation and the behaviors that manifest because of these feelings. Finally, an effort has to be made to
find alternatives that will bring the targeted group, and more specifically African American males together with service providers and increase positive relationships between this student group and the adults who support them (Fashola, 2003).

The programs that have been discussed in this section illuminate supports outside of the school setting. The same principles could be applied to the adults that work with students within the classroom setting, teachers. As previously stated, the encouragement of a teacher can enhance the beliefs of all students of the importance and value of education for long term academic success (Garibaldi, 1992).

**Teacher high expectations**

Wimberly (2002) noted a positive relationship between teachers’ expectations and student achievement. “Teachers’ expectations can influence the type of information they convey, the opportunities they create for their students, and the values they help to perpetuate” (Wimberly, 2002, p. 15). Too often teachers’ perceptions are that African American students are incapable of learning and therefore academic achievement for these students is marginalized (Douglas et. al., 2008, Roderick, 2003). Chretien (2007) found that in order for African American students to succeed academically, they must be held to the same academic standards as their Caucasian counterparts. Uhlenberg and Brown’s examination of black and white teachers’ perceptions of possible causes and potential solutions to the achievement gap (2002) found that both African American and Caucasian teachers agreed that low teacher expectation creates an issue when addressing the achievement gap. The study indicated that African American teachers saw low expectations as more problematic noting teachers acting in a racist manner and not meeting the instructional needs of African American students as a more significant factor.
(Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002). In order for African American students to be successful in the classroom, efforts must be made by teachers to “push” them towards greater academic achievement (Douglas, et. al., 2008). “The collective belief by teachers that all students can succeed may make a significant difference in their achievement levels when the majority of students are low-income and students of color” (Love & Kruger, 2005, p. 94).

**Relationship building**

Roderick (2003) found that African American males experience the most dramatic decline in support and the quality of relationships and school experiences as they move to the high school level. Results from this 2003 study of the transition of African American males to high school concluded that African American males experienced much more dramatic declines than females between 8th and 9th grades. The researcher also found that the 9th grade teachers of the African American male participants in the study viewed African American males more negatively. Interestingly enough the graduation rate for the males in this study was found to be 40% while their female counterparts graduated at a rate of 80%. Positive teacher-student relationships can affect students’ educational expectations and even their postsecondary participation by providing students with information and learning experiences as well as assisting students with taking advantage of educational opportunities (Wimberly, 2002).

Another aspect of relationship building addressed in the research centered on the type of interaction that takes place between the teacher and their students. Love (2002) observed teachers in a school that primarily served African American students and was noted to be academically successful. Love noted that teachers interacted with students in what was termed as a “parent-like” manner. The researcher described the interaction as
one that made it clear to the students that there was an expectation that students would be responsible and take care of those responsibilities in a manner that is similar to parents expecting family members to contribute to the needs of the household by following through on their respective responsibilities. Love (2002) found that African American students learn better in environments that are relational and personal much like that which is provided by an extended family. The environment is culturally responsive to the needs of the student in that it acknowledges the diversity of the individual (Montgomery, 2001).

**Cultural competency**

A "culturally responsive classroom specifically acknowledges the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find relevant connections among themselves and with the subject matter and tasks they are asked to perform" (Montgomery, 2001, p.4). Howard (2003) argued that teachers must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to the students' social and cultural experiences or realities. “Teachers need to understand that racially diverse students frequently bring cultural capital to the classroom that is oftentimes drastically different form mainstream norms and worldviews” (Howard, 2003, p. 197). It is noted that cultural capital refers to the norms, social practices, ideologies, language and behavior that a part of a given context. Weinstein, Curran and Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) expanded on the characteristics of a culturally responsive classroom by addressing aspects of the curriculum. Weinstein et. al. (2003) stated that the curriculum is integrated, authentic, connected to the student’s real life, incorporates information from the student’s culture to illustrate principles and concepts, develops critical thinking skills, and recognizes
multiple intelligences. Teachers recognize diverse learning styles of their students and develop instructional approaches to accommodate these styles (Howard, 2003; Montgomery, 2001). In making "connections with students' backgrounds, interests, and experiences to teach the standards based curriculum" a win-win learning atmosphere is created in the classroom (Montgomery, 2001, p. 1).

Howard (2003) opined that another aspect of culturally relevant teaching revolves around teachers engaging in honest, critical reflection that "challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either a positive or negative way" (p. 197). Howard noted that critical reflection should include an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students' thinking, learning, and other understandings of the world. There are three essential components in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy: teachers must acknowledge how deficit-based notions of diverse students permeate school thinking and practices, recognize the explicit connection between culture and learning, and be mindful of how traditional teaching is reflective of middle-class European American cultural values.

Another aspect of culturally competent classrooms that has been addressed in the literature centers on culturally responsive classroom management (Brown, 2003; Monroe, 2005; Walker-Bowen, 2007; Weinstein et. al., 2003). Culturally responsive classroom management begins with an understanding of "the self" and "the other" (Weinstein, et. al., 2003). Individuals must first acknowledge that all individuals are cultural beings who possess their own beliefs, biases and assumptions concerning human behavior. Secondly, there must be an acknowledgement that racial, ethnic and class differences exist among people. Finally, teachers must acknowledge and understand that schools "reflect and
perpetuate discriminatory practices of the larger society” (Weinstein, et. al., p. 270, 2003). The authors posited that once teachers develop these fundamental understandings, they can begin the process of reflecting on ways that they can incorporate positive management strategies in order to promote equal access to learning. The strategies that were suggested to enhance culturally responsive classroom management included organizing the physical environment in a manner that communicates respect for diversity, establishing clear expectations of behavior, communicating with students in culturally consistent ways, creating caring and inclusive classrooms, which encourage high expectations, working with families, and dealing with problematic behaviors by examining the ways that race and ethnicity impact the use of disciplinary consequences.

Brown (2003) studied thirteen first through 12th grade urban teachers from several cities throughout the United States and found that all of the teachers utilized strategies that supported classrooms that were managed in a culturally responsive manner. Brown suggested that the task of classroom management in urban schools is more difficult due to the need “to address students’ cultural, ethnic, social identity development, language, safety needs, and academic growth before attempting to build relationships with these students” (2003, pp. 277-278). The three major themes that emerged from this study included caring for students, being assertive and acting with authority, and communicating effectively with students.

When addressing the concept of caring for students, a high school English teacher stated “you’re there to teach kids, not subjects!” (Brown, 2003, p. 278). Teachers in the study noted that they spend a good amount of time getting to know their students on a personal level. “Students’ need for care must be met at school if teachers expect students
to focus on academic tasks during the day" (Brown, 2003, 279). Eleven of the thirteen teachers that were interviewed stated that the use of assertive behaviors was critical in establishing the authority that was needed to create and maintain a positive learning environment. The teachers shared that they demonstrated their assertiveness by establishing and making clear the academic expectations; enforcing the rules, policies and behavioral expectations; and contacting care givers in an effort to gain support. The communication aspect of managing a culturally responsive classroom involved listening as the most powerful tool for establishing effective relationships. Brown noted that urban educators have to be cognizant of the verbal and non-verbal communication styles of their students.

**Summary**

Due to what appears to be a lack of acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity, a disconnect is created between the student’s culture and that of the school culture. Diminished achievement levels and overuse of exclusionary discipline actions that exist for minority students are often impacted by the cultural clash between the students’ culture and the school culture (Monroe, 2005). “When such cultural differences exist, teachers may utilize styles of instruction and/or discipline that are at odds with the students’ community norms” (Monroe, 2005, p.167). The research suggests that although statistics indicate an achievement gap continues to exist for African American students and fewer than 50% of African American males receive a high school diploma, there are factors that can be implemented to provide support for these students to achieve academic success. These factors include parental support, mentor programs, teacher expectations, relationship building, and culturally competent educators.
The purpose of this research study was to identify the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males as perceived by African American males at the high school level. This study serves as a measure to increase the representation of the voice of the African American male perspective as it relates to factors that impact the academic success for this student group.

The three questions that will be investigated in this study include:

1. What factors do high school African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success?

2. What factors do high school African American males perceive as obstacles to being successful academically? How are these obstacles addressed?

3. How do high school African American males describe their educational experiences?
Chapter 3- Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of high school African American male students concerning factors that contribute to their academic success. This chapter addressed the paradigm and strategy utilized to complete the study. Also discussed in the chapter are the participants, research questions, plans for data collection and analyses. The final areas addressed in this chapter focus on the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study.

Paradigm

A constructivist paradigm was selected for this investigation of the perceptions of African American male high school students concerning factors that contribute to their academic success. The constructivist researcher aims to study how and why participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations (Charmez, 2006; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Mertens, 2005). "Constructivism is concerned with the ways in which people construct their worlds" (Williamson, 2006, p.85). The basic guiding principles of the paradigm are that "knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Mertens, 2005, p. 13). Mertens (2005) noted that research that is derived from a constructivist approach is a product of the researcher’s values.

The ontology of the constructivist paradigm holds that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 14). Therefore, multiple realities may be
constructed and those realities may conflict and change throughout the study process (Mertens, 2005). "The constructivist researcher rejects the notion that there is an objective reality that can be known and takes a stance that the goal is to understand multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (Charmez, 2006, p. 27).

The epistemology or link between researcher and participant of the constructivist paradigm is characterized by a more personal and interactive mode of data collection (Mertens, 2005). The data, interpretations, and outcomes are rooted in contexts and study participants. The data originate from sources that can be tracked and "the logic used to assemble interpretations can be made explicit in the narrative" (Mertens, 2005, p. 14). "To the best of their ability, constructivists enter the phenomenon, gain multiple views of it, and locate it in its web of connections and constraints" (Charmez, 2006, p. 187). The objective of this study is to provide an opportunity for African American male students to articulate their experiences and define their reasons for academic success.

Crotty (1998) explained various aspects of constructivist research that should be kept in mind as the researcher acquires, compiles, and interprets data:

1) meaning is not discovered, but constructed (p. 42)

2) meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with the students and the researcher (p. 43)

3) meanings are constructed as human beings engage with the world they are interpreting (p. 43)
The constructivist approach is appropriate for investigating the experiences of African American male high school students because it encouraged interaction between the researcher and the participant. The researcher and study participants interacted to co-construct and bring understanding to the factors that contribute to the academic success of this student group. Emphasis was placed on the study participants working with the researcher to develop meaning or socially construct reality for this student group of factors that increase academic achievement for African American males (Williamson, 2006).

**Strategy**

The strategy implemented to gather data for this study was the case study approach. "A case study is an in depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon in its real-life context that reflects the perspective of the participants"
involved in the phenomenon” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 466). The objective of the case study was to bring understanding to a larger phenomenon through an intensive study of a particular instance of the phenomenon by providing thick descriptions, experiential understanding, and multiple realities (Gall et al., 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The case study is an “exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Data analysis for case studies is characterized by description, themes and assertions or naturalistic generalizations (Creswell, 1998). Naturalistic generalizations are defined as “conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves” (Stake, 1995, p. 85). Stake (1995) provides a checklist with specific criteria for assessing a good case study report (Appendix A).

For this study, the phenomenon of interest or focus was that of factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males at the high school level. The study participants are “expected to have a unique experience and special story to tell” (Stake, 1995, p.65). Data were collected through two in-depth interviews of participants, one observation of participants in a classroom setting selected by participants in which they demonstrated success and a document review which was used to substantiate academic success as reported by participants. This study examined six specific “cases”. Each case consisted of an African American male from a selected high school in a Southeastern Virginia school district that was a predominately white district. Multiple views of factors that contribute to the
academic success of African American male students at the high school level have been portrayed through the case study approach.

Research Questions

1. What factors do high school African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success?

**Data Sources:** Two in-depth interviews; one classroom observation; memo writing by researcher; document review of student academic records.

**Data Analysis:** Interpretational analysis- coding, constant comparison code analysis, meaning categorization and theme identification of in-depth interviews and classroom observation; document analysis for frequencies of letter grades of C or better, passing scores on standardized testing.

2. What factors do high school African American male students perceive as obstacles to being successful academically? How are these obstacles addressed?

**Data Sources:** Two in-depth interviews; one classroom observation; memo writing by researcher; document review of student academic records.

**Data Analysis:** Interpretational analysis- coding, constant comparison code analysis, meaning categorization and theme identification of in-depth interviews and a classroom observation; document analysis for frequencies of letter grades of D and/or F, scores below proficiency on standardized testing.

3. How do high school African American male students describe their educational experiences?
**Data Sources:** Two in-depth interviews; one classroom observation; memo writing by researcher; document review.

**Data Analysis:** Interpretational analysis- coding, constant comparison code analysis, meaning categorization and theme identification of in-depth interviews and a classroom observation.

**Participants**

The purposeful sample of participants for the proposed research study was composed of six African American male high school students. It is noted that the intent of purposeful sampling is not to achieve population validity but to achieve an in-depth understanding of the selected individuals (Gall et. al., 2007). The students were selected from two high schools (grades 9th -12th) in a school district located in southeastern Virginia. The researcher is an employee of in this school district and gained entrance into the selected high schools by permission from the Chief Academic Officer and principals of the selected high schools. The selected high schools (High School A and High School B) were schools within the district with the highest percent of African American male students since this student group was the focus of the proposed study. High schools with a high percentage of African American males were targeted to ensure that the sample size of six was reached. Student participants were high school seniors who graduated in June 2012. This grade level was selected since these students have had a longer educational experience at the secondary level. Three of the young men were 18 years of age and the remaining three were 17 years of age.
Two of the study participants attended High School A which was located in the north end of the district. The class of 2012 at High School A had an enrollment of 258 students of which 16 were African American males. The remaining four participants attended High School B which was located in the northernmost part of the division and is the smallest of the four high schools in the district. The class of 2012 at High School B consisted of 151 students of whom 23 were African American males.

Six students were selected in order to provide a good representation of success as defined by this researcher. The six students who were selected met the following criteria: 1) grade point average (GPA) of a 2.0 or better, 2) a demonstrated level of proficiency (standard score of 400 or better) on at least 4 administered Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments at the high school level, and 3) eligible to graduate in 2012. The SOL criterion was based on the state requirement of six verified credits by the end of a student's grade 12 year. Verified credits are earned by meeting proficiency on SOL assessments and a student is required to have 2 English, 1 Math, 1 Science, 1 History and Social Science and 1 student selected test in order to receive a standard diploma (YCSD, 2011). These criterion meet this researcher's definition of academically successful. The principals of each school were asked for a list of student names that met the criteria. The researcher ranked each list of students by GPA from the highest to the lowest. Two students from High School A and one student from High School B declined to participate. The next students on each list were asked to participate. It is noted that the next two students from High School A did not respond and due to having a total of participants between the two
high schools, the researcher chose to complete the study with a total of 6 participants.

Pseudonyms were used in lieu of the participants' real names to sustain the confidential reporting of their thoughts and perceptions. All participants selected their own pseudonym. Each participant was informed that his answers to any of the researcher's questions would be maintained in confidentiality and protected throughout the study. Material submitted to the researcher for the purpose of the study would also be kept confidential. The participant's identity was protected at all times during the study. All records and tapes of interviews were destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Once the students identified a willingness to participate in the study, gave a commitment to remain active during the duration of the study, and met all the criteria for inclusion in the study, a consent form (Appendix B) was given to each participant and a signature secured. For the three students under the age of eighteen, a parent signature was secured.

Data Collection

An open-ended interview and anecdotal field notes gathered from participant observations in the classroom setting were used to gather data on the factors African American male students at the high school level perceived as contributing to their academic success. An interview protocol (Appendix C) was utilized to conduct interviews with African American male high school students regarding their perceptions of factors that contribute to their success in school. The researcher conducted participant observations in a classroom setting identified by the participants as the class that they perceived as the setting where they learn the most
or considered the class in which the student had the best grade. The observation took place during instructional time. A review of each student’s transcript was completed to obtain descriptive information in an effort to provide information to support settings where student participants experienced success. The criterion used to define success was a GPA of at least 2.0 or letter grade of C or better in the class.

**Interviews.** This researcher conducted two in-depth interviews lasting approximately an hour each with all participants. Each participant was interviewed privately. “The interview is the main road to multiple studies” (Stake, 1995, p. 64). The goal of the interview in a case study is to get the study participant “to give a description of an episode, a linkage, an explanation” (Stake, 1995, p.65).

Interviews were conducted face-to-face which is advantageous because it allows high quality data that includes para-language, such as facial expressions and body language to be captured by the researcher. These meaningful data were utilized add to the rich, thick description of the case study. The interview was conducted in a location agreed upon by the researcher and participant. The interview process began with the researcher reading the student assent form and ensuring that the participant wanted to participate (Appendix D). The interview was audio-taped to ensure that the interaction was accurately transcribed (Appendix E).

In order to ensure co-constructed meaning during the interview process, an interview protocol rather than a list of interview questions was utilized. The interview protocol was developed to include questions that were free from leading terminology and didactic wording. In addition, the questions were composed to be open-ended to encourage a longer and more detailed response from participants.
Information obtained from the literature review was used to inform the questions for the interview protocol. The overarching study questions were also used to develop questions for the interview protocol.

This interviewer looked for and documented key words used during participant responses to encourage the participant to provide specific examples of successful and unsuccessful experiences in high school classroom settings for richer detail and co-constructed reality. Stake (1995) noted that it is imperative that the researcher listen in order to stay in control of the data gathering. Through use of active listening and clarifying statements, this interviewer enabled each individual participant to express his unique experiences and perceptions. An inquiry into the intended meaning of a participant’s statement, or member checking, was utilized to review participant statements for accuracy and completeness. Member checking was done by stating phrases such as the following examples: “I hear you saying....”, and “I want to be sure I understand you correctly.” Member checking was also completed by sending a summary to the study participants, asking them to review and return with corrections (Appendix F). A date and time to complete the observation was discussed during the initial interview. The researcher obtained permission to complete the observation and confirmed a date and time with the building administrator.

A second interview was conducted within 7-10 days of the classroom observation in order to add further explanation to the observe lived experience of the African American male high school senior in a classroom setting that they perceived as successful. Due to the end of course SOL testing schedule and spring sports, some
of the study participants were not readily available within the initial time frame of 2-3 days. The second interview served as a means of gaining insight into the observed interaction between the student participant and the classroom teacher. The interview took place outside of the classroom at a location agreed upon by the researcher and participant in order to provide a neutral setting to encourage the participant to speak freely concerning the observed interaction. The follow-up interview was audio-taped to ensure that clarifications are accurately reported. Each participant will be provided with a summary of both transcribed interviews as a means of member checking and ensuring that the researcher accurately conveys the perceptions of the participants.

The interview process provided a means for the researcher to gather data that answered the research questions Q1 What factors do high school African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success?; Q2 What factors do high school African American male students perceive as obstacles to being successful academically? How are these obstacles addressed?; and Q3 How do high school African American male students describe their educational experiences?

Observation. A classroom observation was completed to bring more clarification and understanding to the case (Stake, 1995). The classroom observation also provided context for the proposed study because interviews took place out of context. This researcher sought to utilize the occasion to tell a story, the situation, the problem, and resolution or irresolution for the problem (Stake, 1995). During this study, this researcher kept “a good record of events to provide a relatively incontestable description for further analysis and ultimate reporting” (Stake, 1995, p. 60).
This researcher considered other contexts when developing the case in order to determine similarities across cases (Stake, 1995).

The observation was completed in the classroom of the teacher who has been identified by the student during the initial interview as the class in which the student had the best grade. The classroom setting may have been perceived by the study participant as their favorite class. The student's academic record was utilized to support the notion that the student is successful in the selected classroom as determined by the GPA or letter grade in the selected class (2.0/C or better).

This researcher took on the role of complete observer. The complete observer "maintains a posture of independence from the setting being studied" (Gall et. al., 2007, p. 275). The classroom observation (Appendix G) was completed through a three stage process (Gall et. al., 2007). The first stage or descriptive stage consisted of an unfocused observation of the classroom setting. During this stage, the researcher documented detailed information about the setting which included the physical appearance and utterances between the teacher and the student participant. Documentation at this stage also included interactions between the student participant and his peers. Specific actions such as the teacher patting the student participant on the back or giving a thumbs up were also documented during the descriptive phase.

During the second stage or focused stage, this researcher took a closer look at the interaction between the teacher-student pair being studied and began to collect deeper information. It was during the focused stage that this researcher looked for specific features that supported the student participant's perception that the class was
one in which the student experienced success. This researcher directed attention to things such as specific conversations or actual artifacts (graded papers) and collected deeper information (Gall et. al., 2007). The final stage or selective stage involved this researcher refining and deepening my understanding of the most essential elements that may be used to identify factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male students that emerged during the observation. These elements were to include concepts such as the presence or lack of culturally relevant practices such as practices that have relevance and meaning to the students' social and cultural experiences or realities (Howard, 2003; Montgomery, 2001; Weinstein et. al., 2003), evidence of the teacher expressing or not expressing high expectations (Chretien, 2007; Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002; Love & Kruger, 2005; Wimberly, 2002) and evidence of or a lack of relationship building characteristics such as "parent-like" expectations for handling responsibilities (Love, 2002; Love & Kruger, 2005).

The observation process provided the researcher with information to corroborate information that was obtained during the interview process. This information was used to provide support for the three research questions of the proposed research study.

**Document review.** Student academic records were utilized to obtain data on each student participant's academic performance. The recorded data consisted of grades and scores on the SOL assessments, which were provided to gain insight into the student's academic performance. The students discipline record was also utilized to gather information and insight into the student's overall school experience. The recorded data from the discipline record consisted of infraction notices. A
document summary form (Appendix H) was developed and included summaries of each document being examined. The form included the type of document, its uses, and a summary of contents and ideas about other documents that should be obtained and studied.

The researcher also conducted a review of each participant’s academic record to obtain data such as grades and test scores on standardized measures (Standards of Learning (SOL) and district-wide tests). A review of each student’s discipline record was conducted to obtain information such as number of infractions, suspensions or recommendations for expulsions. It is noted that the academic record and discipline record or conduct history is provided on one document (Appendix I). Documents often serve as records of activities that could not be directly observed (Stake, 1995). The information obtained from the document review was used to provide more descriptive information when describing each participant.

Data Analysis

An interpretational investigation was conducted to closely examine the case study data in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that could be utilized to describe and explain factors that contribute to the academic success of African American high school males (Gall et.al, 2007). The objective of this researcher was to refrain from interjecting personal experiences and biases and allow the participants to articulate their experiences to define their reasons for academic success. To co-construct with participants their experiences related to factors that contribute to the academic success, the researcher acknowledged and disclosed her individual biases and unique experiences within a Researcher as an Instrument statement (Appendix J). The tools
that were utilized for the data analysis were principles of grounded theory and included: constant comparative coding, developing categories, and memo writing.

Interviews were be transcribed and then coded (Appendix K). "A code is a word or short phrase that captures and signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some more general analysis issue" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.286). The coding process was used to breakdown large amounts of data in a more personal manner in an effort to allow this researcher to stay close to the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This process enabled this researcher to look for commonalities in the data in order to move to categories and then themes that ran throughout the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The initial coding for this study was completed without preset codes. The codes emerged from the data. During the coding process, the unit of analysis of this study was incident to incident. An incident for purposes of the proposed study referred to an occurrence as reported by the student participants of a specific factor that contributed to their academic success. When coding incident to incident, this researcher compared incident with incident in order to "identify properties of emerging concepts" (Charmez, 2006, p. 53). Incidents were examined to determine if the content of the incident responded to the construct or code as it was defined (Appendix L).

The first unit of data was read and a code assigned. Then, the second unit of data was read and a decision made as to how similar the second unit of data was to the first unit of data. If the two units of data were similar, the same code was used; if they were different then a different code was assigned to the second unit of data. This process known as constant comparative analysis was continued for the analysis.
of all units of data. Constant comparative analysis of units of data was used in order to develop categories and themes from the information obtained from individual interviews.

Categories were developed by significantly studying the collected data, comparing the coded incidents in order to determine relationships between the codes, and identifying significant phenomena within the data (Gall, et. al., 2008). Phenomena were compared to determine which phenomena shared sufficient similarities that were considered instances of the same construct (Gall, et. al., 2008). The construct then became a category and was labeled. The segment was tagged and removed and grouped in the appropriate category with other incidents that have been labeled with the same category. Guidelines were developed to determine whether each incident in the database was or was not an instance of the category (Gall, et. al., 2008). This process in the analysis phase was influenced by principles of grounded theory because the categories are being determined by the existing data and not previously developed theories (Charmez, 2006; Gall, et. al., 2008).

The categories developed during the study were analyzed in order to determine relationships between the categories and to create themes. Themes are “salient, characteristic features of a case” (Gall, et. al., 2008, p. 470). Themes represent relevant phenomena and assist the researcher in reducing and combining data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study consisted of six cases which were utilized to determine generalizability of constructs and themes across cases (Gall, et. al., 2008). Looking at cases to determine if themes ran across cases completed this process. The coding process was utilized to analyze data obtained from classroom
observations. Field notes were written to include descriptive information of the physical setting and reconstructed dialogues between the teacher-student pairs being studied. The information obtained from the field notes was used to formulate this researcher's version of what was occurring with the study participants (Gall, et. al., 2007). Data obtained from the student academic and discipline records were read holistically in order to look for information that supported data obtained from interviews (initial and the follow-up to the observation) and the classroom observation. The researcher looked for GPA information and evidence that the student met the criteria for proficiency on administered SOL assessments. This researcher also looked for the number of verified credits that the student had obtained at the time of the study. It is noted that records from the distant past can pose a problem because it is not always possible to interview the author from the time period (Gall et. al., 2007).

This researcher utilized the memo writing process (Appendix M) to analyze data and codes early in the process. Memos provide a space for the researcher to become actively engaged in the data as ideas are developed and later fine-tuned (Charmez, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memos serve as a tool to "construct analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories" (Charmez, 2006, p. 72). This researcher made comparisons between data and data, data and codes, codes and other codes, codes and categories and categories and themes in memos. The memos in this study also were used by the researcher to articulate conjectures, think about data, discover, refine, and develop ideas about data, explore ideas about categories, discover gaps in
data collection, find novel relationships within the data, and begin the writing process (Charmez, 2006).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness and authenticity dimensions are means of addressing the rigor, reliability, and validity of the study. These standards were utilized to ensure that the study is ethically sound. These measures served as a means of ensuring the credibility of the study and its usefulness in improving social circumstances (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Trustworthiness is defined as “research validity” (Glesne, 2006, p. 37). Rossman and Rallis indicate that a trustworthy study “conforms to standards for acceptable and competent practice” and “meets standards for ethical conduct and sensitivity to the politics of the topic and setting” (2003, p. 63). Trustworthiness is measured in four dimensions that include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The credibility of a study addresses how well the findings match the informants’ perceptions. A study meets the criteria of being credible when the participants’ voices are communicated truthfully and accurately. Transferability addresses the extent that the findings of the study can be applied in other contexts or with other participants and confirmability addresses how well the findings of the study report the participants’ perspective. The methods that were utilized to address trustworthiness include: member checking, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, and memo writing.

**Member checking.** The member checking technique was utilized during interviews. This technique involved the researcher synthesizing what is heard and
listening for confirmation from the participant. Member checking was done by stating phrases such as: "I hear you saying"... or "I want to be sure I understand you correctly." Member checking also was implemented by sending a summary of individual interview and observation sessions to participants for verification. The participants were asked to review the summary and make any necessary changes in order to ensure that their perceptions are being conveyed accurately. This technique addressed the areas of credibility and transferability.

**Triangulation of data.** Triangulation of data involves using multiple data sources to corroborate evidence. Multiple data sources were being used in an effort to strengthen the validity of study results. Data for this study were collected through two one-on-one interviews with study participants, two observations which took place in classroom settings selected by study participants and a document review of the students' academic records to be completed by the researcher. The triangulation of data addressed the credibility and confirmability aspects of trustworthiness.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing was used to share information with dissertation committee members to ensure that the data is an accurate reflection of the researcher's work. This technique involved this researcher sharing updates and questions through email and telephone conversations with members of the dissertation committee to gain insight and direction concerning the best methods of reporting data as the process to complete the study continues. This technique addressed the credibility and confirmability aspects of trustworthiness.

**Memo writing.** Memo writing was completed by the researcher to identify researcher beliefs and expectations in an effort to ensure that the data accurately
reflected the perceptions of the African American male high school students in the proposed study. Memo writing provided a space for this researcher to actively engage with the data during the analysis process. This technique addressed the credibility, transferability, and confirmability aspects of trustworthiness.

**Authenticity**

Authenticity referred to the degree that the participants' voices are communicated accurately and fairly. Authenticity is measured in five dimensions which include fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Fairness referred to each of the participants being given an equal voice in expressing their perspectives during the research process. This criterion was addressed through the implementation of member checking and peer debriefing. Ontological authenticity refers to providing growth opportunities for participants through their participation in the study. This criterion was increased through member checking during which time participants were asked follow-up questions. Educative authenticity refers to the participant's understanding of others' perspectives and constructions growing as a result of their participation in the study. In an effort to ensure that this criterion was met, copies of the research findings were provided to each participant.

The final types of authenticity, catalytic and tactical, are closely related. Catalytic authenticity refers to participants' actions and decisions being facilitated as a result of the participants' involvement in the study. Tactical authenticity refers to participants being empowered to action as a result of the knowledge that they gain through their involvement in the study. Both of these criterions were addressed in
this study through member checking or follow-up questions during the interview and distribution of the study results to participants.

**Ethical considerations**

Permission to implement the interview protocol and conduct observations was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the College of William and Mary and from the participating school district. Each study participant was provided with a letter briefly explaining the study and requesting availability to be interviewed. Upon receipt of ethical consent from the IRB and school district, data collection dates for interviews, review of student records, and observations were selected by this researcher and each participant. Participants were informed about the steps to maintain and protect their confidentiality throughout the study. The participant’s identities were protected at all times during the study and all records and tapes of interviews and observations were destroyed at the conclusion of the research study.
Chapter 4- Results

The purpose of the current study was to provide African American male high school seniors with an opportunity to articulate their perceptions of factors that contribute to their academic success. The six participants in this study (Batman, Evan, Hosea, Max Powers, Noir and Scott) were interviewed by the researcher on two separate occasions. The researcher also completed an observation in the class that each participant identified as the class in which they had the best grade. The data was analyzed to find constructs, themes and patterns that could be utilized to describe and explain factors that contribute to the participant success.

This chapter includes a description of each participant through a case study approach and insight into the student's academic performance as well as the supports and resources that the students utilized to successfully complete the academic course schedule that they planned at the beginning of the school year. It is noted that study participants chose their pseudonyms, which were used to protect their identity. Following the introduction of the six case studies is a discussion of overarching themes that surfaced as the data was analyzed.

Case 1: Batman

Batman was an 18 year old student at High School B. He lived with his aunt, two brothers and cousin. Batman participated in many different activities and sports while attending High School B including football, basketball, and track. He was also a member of the Distributive Education Clubs of America, DECA, an organization that prepares
high school students for college and careers, National Junior Honor Society and chorus. He volunteered at a shelter for abused women and their children and at the Humane Society. Batman noted that his aunt supported his extracurricular activities by ensuring that he had a ride to his volunteer sites and attending special events such as senior night, and his games. Batman noted that his aunt also supported his academic efforts by providing transportation to meet his peers for study group at a local eatery. This young man noted that his future plans include majoring in accounting at Old Dominion University. Batman plans to pursue a career as a CPA and own his own accounting firm one day.

**Academic performance**

Batman’s academic success was evident in his grades (i.e., 3.8 GPA; See Table 2), and his scores on the SOL assessments that were required for verified credits (Appendix I). Batman’s scores on the 11 SOL assessments he took ranged from the lowest of a 431 (Chemistry; proficient range of 400-499) to a 556 (World History I; advanced range of 500-600). It is noted that scores from 400-499 fall in the proficient range and scores from 500-600 fall in the pass advanced range. Batman was enrolled in the following classes for the last quarter of his senior year: psychology, anatomy, English 12, marketing, chorus, and gym. He wanted to take an accounting course but because of a scheduling issue was enrolled in a gym class. Batman kept the final version of the schedule because he wanted to ensure that his entire schedule was not interrupted and the classes that he really wanted to take changed.
Successful academic experiences. Batman noted that he enjoyed all of his classes "but like my favorite, favorite class is anatomy". He had his best grade in psychology and he attributed his high grades and success in both classes to his teachers.

Batman described his anatomy (Mr. A.) and psych (Mr. B.) classes.

[anatomy class] The teacher, he’s cool like. Like he makes learning fun. And like he’ll joke around with you. It’s like, it’s not even like a teacher student, it’s like a friend to friend type thing. Mr. A., he’s cool. You can talk to him about anything and I mean anything. He teaches you more than just anatomy… he is technology savvy… he even installed Windows 8 on my computer and that hasn’t even come out yet.

Psych, the interesting thing about psych is you can apply this now because it is telling you why you do some of the things you do and why your body… you know, these two things, anatomy and psych; they’re not that far from each other. Some of it is hand in hand… so you know, it’s, I don’t know maybe it (psych) appeals more to me and that’s why I take more of an interest in it. But anatomy I take an interest in, but some of the stuff is so much information.

Batman articulated what Mr. A. expected from him as a student in the anatomy class.

Of me? He expects you to come to class. Respect, respect. Respect anybody. You know to have respect. He went over a couple of things. He’s like for in class you can have your phone out and stuff because that’s
for taking your notes... he goes through and does a note check and you get a grade just for doing your notes. Voila. Simple.

Batman compared Mr. A. and Mr. B. in terms of how he interacts with each of his teachers.

The teacher (Mr. B.) is cool. Sometimes we’ll go in the class and if we bring up something that is so interesting, he will pull away from that and talk more about; you know it will be a group discussion, the whole class will be talking about that one topic... With Mr. A., he I don’t know, maybe because he is a little bit younger because he is 30 and Mr. B. - he is above 30. He has two daughters, three daughters who are like maybe heading to college. So, there’s not really a difference besides age, but maybe because Mr. A. is more appealing to me because he’s like me. Mr. B. on the other hand, he’s cool too. You can talk to him about anything.

Their teaching styles are pretty similar but also different. They are different but the same.

Batman’s interest in his psychology class is also shared in his description of his teacher, Mr. B. He again expressed an attitude that suggested a positive relationship with a teacher he perceived cared. Batman’s description of Mr. B. is done much in the way that he described his teacher in anatomy class; he compares Mr. B. to his anatomy teacher, Mr. A. Batman revealed that an important aspect of his relationship with his teachers is that he can talk to them about anything. While he did not draw attention to this fact, another similarity between the teachers of Batman’s favorite class and best grade class is
that the teachers are both male. It was noted Batman did not talk about a male figure in his life outside of his teachers and peers.

An observation was completed in psychology class after the initial interview with Batman. The students were divided up into teams and working on presentations for a project that involved individuals who were part of a cult. The observation confirmed Batman’s description of the teacher allowing the class to engage in whole group discussions about interesting topics. An example of this incident was a discussion that the teacher initiated concerning his decision to stop eating chocolate because child labor was used to pick the cocoa beans. The class then engaged in a conversation about the use of child labor to manufacture I-Phones. Batman appeared to be very comfortable in the class and with his teacher as he engaged his teacher several times about the project that he and his partner were working to complete. Mr. B. also engaged Batman in conversations about the project and his thoughts and interpretation of the information that Batman and his partner uncovered in their research. It was noted that Batman and Mr. B. exchanged pleasantries and smiled at each other several times throughout the 45 minute observation.

Batman’s personality also became more evident as he was observed in the classroom setting. He is a very caring and personable individual. He interacted easily with multiple classmates. At one point he was observed asking a female peer, who was sitting behind him with her head down, if she was okay. During his interactions with his project partner, Batman and his partner were overheard making suggestions about what to include in the presentation and the two young men also talked about other things such as the weather and how it would impact track practice for the day. On another occasion a
classmate commented on how nice Batman looked in his new glasses to which he responded “I can see everything now” and laughed.

**Challenging academic experiences.** Batman shared earlier that he had fun in all of his classes. Though Batman stated that he had fun in all of his classes, he did perceive that some of his classes were more difficult than others and these classes presented him with challenges that he had to work through to be successful. Batman’s least favorite class was English 12, and he had his lowest grade in this class which at the time of the study was a B.

Least favorite. Least favorite. Now don’t take this the wrong way... English. With Ms. C. And it’s not that. I don’t have anything against Ms. C. I just, I don’t know. Maybe it’s just me. I don’t feel like I’m good at English. I’m not very strong at writing. My handwriting is sloppy. Sometimes I can’t even read my own handwriting... you know, I guess because of the four by four everything is rushed for me. I don’t have enough time to like process.

While Batman noted this to be his least favorite and lowest grade class, he was quick to say that it was not because of his teacher, Ms. C. Batman explained that he was the issue and his perception was that he was not good at English.

Batman took responsibility for his learning here as demonstrated by his attempts to give insight into why he defines English as his least favorite class. Batman noted that he felt that one of the factors impacting his performance was the rushed schedule due to the hybrid four by four model that was implemented at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year. The hybrid four by four schedule resulted in selected classes being taught in
one semester much like a college course. Students attended the classes on the hybrid schedule daily and at the end of the semester were given the SOL for the course.

Batman described Ms. C., his English 12 teacher, and shared her expectations for him.

Like a motherly figure, kind of like she is very intellectual, very smart. I can see that strictness in her. Very stern. You should know her expectations just by looking at her. You can tell this not someone to play with... you say what does she expect from me? She expects for you to do your work basically. As long as your work gets done and you understand the work, then there is not a problem. I mean, another thing, she wants you to like, if you don’t understand something, ask questions. Don’t ever be afraid to ask questions.

Batman’s description of the teacher of his least favorite class, Ms. C., supported his account of the issue being the subject matter and not the teacher. He spoke highly of Ms. C. and appeared to have a good understanding of who she was and what she expected from him as a student in her English 12 class.

Batman shared his insight into factors that impacted his performance in English class.

I’m not failing her class (English 12). I don’t have a C. I have a B in that class. Like I’ve heard people say that you don’t get a real good understanding of English, the English language until you’re like thirty or above those ages. Maybe it’s just my comprehension skills, like analyzing a book or whatever. For instance, she (Ms. C.) will ask what a theme is. Sometimes it’s just hard. I don’t know what the theme is or what the plot of the story is.
Batman also shared that while English 12 was his least favorite and lowest grade class and he had some difficulty with the subject matter he was not failing the class. He again reiterated the areas that make English difficult for him when talking about the lowest grade class. The area of comprehension presented a difficulty for Batman.

Batman shared an example that took place after the first paper that he turned in and the adjustments he made to improve his performance.

First, first paper we wrote, I wrote it in like two days before it was due. Hit the spell check button on the computer. Of course, it told you that some of the words were incorrect. I correct those. Come to find out, some words were still misspelled. Didn’t really read over it. I felt like it was solid. Turned it in. I got a 50 on the paper out of a hundred. I’m looking over the paper, ready to throw it away. Ms. C. will let you know the things you did wrong on the paper. So, of course my work wasn’t cited correctly. The theme was weak. The things I did was weak. The second time what I did was I spent more time on it. Researched a lot just to make sure it’s correct. Make sure my citings. Even used online resources.

He does not use the fact that he rushed through his work and did not check over it as an excuse for his poor grade on the paper. He took responsibility for his lack of attention to detail and failure to double check his work. Batman worked to improve his grade by asking questions of Ms. C. Batman made it a point to pay attention to the feedback he received from his teacher and tried to implement the suggestions in order to improve his grade.
Batman emphasized that his teachers in all classes whether his favorite or least favorite played a role in his academic success. He had relationships with both Mr. A. (anatomy) and Mr. B. (psychology) in which he felt that he could talk to them about anything. Although he found English 12 to be challenging, Batman also had a relationship with his English teacher, Ms. C. He did not describe his interactions with Ms. C. as being able to talk to her about anything the way that he did with Mr. A. and Mr. B.; but he did acknowledge that he paid attention to her guidance through feedback and used Ms. C.’s insight to improve his performance in English 12. It was also apparent that Batman had more of an interest in the subject matter in anatomy and psychology. His issue with English 12 was the difficulty that he had with comprehending information and writing. Batman did not allow his difficulties to keep him from being successful as evidenced by his grade of a B in the class.

Table 2. Batman’s Transcript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 12</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA &amp; US Government</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trig &amp; Functions</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Bio II/Anatomy</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Ed 12</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing II Co-op</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Vocal II</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*- weighted credit course beginning 02-03 school year ~ grade not available at time of study

Case 2: Evan

Evan was a 17 year old senior at High School B. He lived with his parents and a brother. He participated in several extracurricular activities, which included band, Boy Scouts and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Counsel. Evan shared that he played the trumpet in the band and had been a
member of the high school band since his freshman year. He started in the band program during his middle school years. He noted that his mother is a band parent and travels to competitions with the band and chaperones during football games. He joined Boy Scouts during his 1st grade year and had been a member of the NAACP Youth Counsel since his 6th grade year of middle school. Evan’s mother is an advisor for the Youth Counsel. Evan attended church and is a musician in the church band. He served as a youth usher in his previous church. Evan’s future plans included attending Hampton University, and majoring in music education. He aspired to be a better musician and one day teach music. Evan noted that he was motivated to go in this direction by his middle school band director.

**Academic performance**

Evan’s academic success was evident in his grades (Table 3), GPA of 3.0 and SOL scores on assessments (Appendix I). Evan’s scores on the 11 SOL assessments he took ranged from a 406 (Algebra 1) to a perfect score of 600 (English Reading). Evan’s conduct history showed that he has never had an infraction during his time in high school. Evan was enrolled in two weighted courses at the time of the study. These courses included: trigonometry, AP psychology, music theory, stage band 2, English 12, Spanish 4 (weighted) and physics. It is noted that AP courses are weighted in a manner that impacts the student’s GPA based on the student taking courses that are more rigorous.

**Successful academic experiences.** Evan shared that his favorite class was stage band and the class in which he had the best grade was English 12.
I have to say probably stage band that is my favorite class. I just like playing a lot and I like being able to play with other people and I understand how music theory works and being able to apply it, it’s just something that I love to do.

He shared that he enjoyed playing music and especially liked playing with his peers. He noted that he had a good understanding of music theory and could apply what he learned. It was something that he stated he “loved” to do.

Evan described his stage band teacher. He highlights the characteristics that Ms. D. possesses that inspire her students.

Ms. D. has a lot of energy and her energy kind of I guess, we feed off her energy… like she is very well, I don’t want to say pushy; she has perseverance or whatever so that gives us the same attitude so that anything that we are struggling with we just push right on through and we just become better musicians just because of I guess her so. As a band student she expects us like, if the school were to be doing something a little bit different or a little bit odd or something, she would expect us to be those mature, respectable students and remain like we are because she instills those principles in us. I guess just because in the band she requires discipline from us so she expects that from us all the time. We have to bring her grade reports at the beginning of the year or else we have to for the third quarter of the football game, the band gets off so if you don’t have or say if you have less than a C, you can’t go out and talk with your friends or whatever.

And she knows like for some students they still bring her grade reports because she likes to keep up with her students because she doesn’t want any of us failing.
Evan credited Ms. D. with instilling respect in her students and expecting her band students to be examples around the school community. Evan shared that Ms. D. also set academic expectations for the members in the band and although the requirements are implemented during football season or the beginning of the year, many of the students continue to show Ms. D. grade reports throughout the year. He noted that his grade in the class at the time of the interview was an A.

Evan's grade of an A in the class supports his enthusiasm and hard work in the class. His demeanor while he spoke about stage band and Ms. D. was very light and he smiled often during the discussion. Evan indicated that English 12 was the core class in which he had the best grade.

Well stage band is my best grade and I think for my core classes it would be English. An A right now... it's a lot that you have to do. It, it's not one of those things where you can depend on other people to push you along. You really have to do the work yourself and continue to stay focused to cause you have to earn your grade in that class... we are reading the Alchemist, we just read Frankenstein.

He described activities that the class completed as he talked about English 12. He shared about the different novels that he read and the importance of getting your work done independently in order to earn your grade.

Evan described his teacher, Ms. C., as someone who expressed herself very well and taught more than English 12.

She (Ms. C.) is, she expresses herself really well. Like I don't know rather than English it's like an English and life skills class I guess because everything has like a purpose in her class. And she doesn't do anything just for busy work. It's to
either teach us something that we will need in the future or it’s because I’ll be
testing you on this later. And you’ll need to have this in your mind anyway
because you are about to be adults. Doing the work. She will not give you, she
doesn’t give you anything; you get what you deserve in that class. So if you want
to do A work, you have to put forth the effort even if you’re intelligent. You still
have to, there’s always work to be done in that class.

Evan felt that he not only learned English with Ms. C., but life skills because
everything that she did had a purpose whether it was for a test or just a skill that he would
utilize later in life. Evan was clear about the expectations that Ms. C. had for the class as
he stated in a very serious tone that Ms. C. was not about giving out grades. Evan stated
that the grade students received was the grade that they “deserved”. An interesting note
about Evan’s English teacher is that she is the same English teacher that Batman spoke
about. Both young men noted that she was a teacher who was to be taken seriously and
who set high expectations for her students. Although Batman perceived English 12 to
challenging, both students experienced success in the class.

Evan was observed in English 12. There were 19 students in the class, 12 males
and 7 females. The class was preparing to wrap up their discussion of the book, *The
Alchemist*. Evan spoke about the activities that the class worked on while reading the
book. On the day of the observation, the class completed several activities that included
a 10/20 analysis which involved the students reading a 10 second story “Teachers and
Students” and then giving their perspective on the reading. During another activity, the
students had to write about turning themselves into the wind without using the example
from the story. Evan was very involved in all the group and class discussions. There
were several occasions where Ms. C. acknowledged Evan publically for his efforts. He was also observed asking Ms. C. questions to gain insight and clarity on class assignments. Ms. C. and Evan were observed smiling at each other during their interactions and Evan appeared to be very comfortable interacting with Ms. C. and his classmates.

**Challenging academic experiences.** Evan identified trigonometry as his least favorite class and physics as the class in which he had the lowest grade.

Least favorite, I would have to say trigonometry just because well math has never come naturally to me. For the first time so I have to study a little harder to memorize things and uum you know the class is fine. It’s just something I don’t, doesn’t make sense.

Although Evan defined trigonometry as his least favorite class, he quickly made it known that the reason he felt this way was because he had always struggled with math. Evan noted that he had to work hard to grasp concepts and memorize material.

Evan described Mr. G., the math analysis teacher. He explained Mr. G’s. approach to teaching math.

He’s (Mr. G.) really hard working. Like if we don’t understand something the first time, he will try multiple methods to try to get us to understand it. And the way he gives homework, he gives enough so that it’s not too much but it gives us enough practice and he comes back and we have questions for him and he just answers those… but sometimes if we don’t do well on a test as a class, he will re-do the test and make it the same as the review that he has given us before and the homework assignments. And like one activity about a month ago he would write
a problem up on the board and one person would have to do each part of the problem until it was solved so.

Evan described Mr. G.'s expectation of his students to complete their homework. Just to be respectful and to come to class prepared. You know if you don’t understand something, you would have had to have done your homework. You can’t say that you don’t understand something if you haven’t done the homework. So he expects us to at least attempt the homework and then he’s willing to work with us from there.

Evan described his teacher, Mr. G, as hard working. He noted that Mr. G. utilized multiple methods to support the students when they did not understand a concept in the class. Evan shared that Mr. G. gave the students and opportunity to retest when they did not do well initially on a test. Evan noted that Mr. G. also expected his students to be respectful which was demonstrated by students completing their work and putting forth an effort. Evan stated that when students put forth effort, Mr. G. responded by working with the students to support their efforts to gain a better understanding of the material. Evan perceived that Mr. G. expected students to demonstrate that they were trying in the class by effort by completing their homework.

Physics was the class that Evan identified as the class where he had his lowest grade which was a C.

I think there’s well a lot of disconnect because the teacher she is really polite and Everything. It’s just I can’t a lot of time; I have to have a connection with the teacher. I’ll ask questions and it will be answered but it won’t fully be answered to where I can be able to take something away from it. I definitely study in the
class and I do the work. It’s just that there is some things that I can’t quite get or grasp on to and I feel like she understands that but she doesn’t know exactly what to do about it because it’s not only me that’s feeling this way, it’s a lot of other members of this class… I feel like it’s not really okay to just push along because we are going to have to get it some time or another. I think the problem needs to be addressed and not ignored because people are getting the same problems wrong over and over again.

He felt that there was a disconnect between his teacher and himself which made the class difficult for him. He shared that he felt there had to be a connection between him and his teachers in order for him to be able to ask questions and take something away from the learning experience. Evan’s analysis of the area of concern in this class was the teacher and the lack of support that he felt she gave him and his classmates in understanding the subject matter.

Evan shared the lack of interaction that the physics teacher had with the class as a whole.

The English class there is more teacher, there is more interaction between the teacher and the students. Physics, the teacher can be writing up on the board for 30 minutes and not get any feedback from the class. And it’s like you take this home and apply it to your homework when Ms. C. (English teacher) is saying now how do you feel about this and what can I do to help you understand? It’s just a lot more social interaction in the English class.

Evan also talked about another aspect of this class that impacted his learning environment in physics.
Oh, well I’m the only colored kid in my physics class. But, sometimes I feel like if I ask questions it’s like oh well come on well why don’t you understand or whatever. But I have a lot more colored kids in my English 12 class that I can relate to and talk to things about, and talk with them about things. And you know the environment is just a little bit different. I feel more comfortable in English than I do in physics just because there are people my color… well they’ll bring it up every once and a while like oh I forget, there’s constant joking about it and it’s like that’s cool and all but really I don’t understand why you all can’t just treat me like I’m another kid in here cause really I’m here with you guys and there is no difference, we are all in the same subject but it’s brought up constantly. Well people make black jokes and things like that so you know; they see it as harmless I see it as ok this isn’t ok past a certain point. I couldn’t really tell you, it’s, I’m not even sure. It’s not out loud joking. It’s just like we’ll be in labs or something and they’ll just pop a joke in there and…

He shared that he is the only African American student in the class and it made him conscious about asking questions because some of his classmates made him uncomfortable. He noted that he had experienced being the only African American in AP Euro when he was a sophomore but felt that there was more social interaction in that class. Evan talked about his classmates outwardly joking about him being the only African American in the class and how he directed them to stop. He acknowledged that he was not sure how aware his physics teacher was about what was going on because the students who were making the comments looked for opportunities to say things when they thought they were not going to be noticed.
Like Batman, Evan also credited his teachers (Ms. C. & Ms. D.) in his classes where he experienced success as well as the class that he described as challenging (Mr. G.) with supporting and encouraging him to perform well. He noted that all of these teachers set expectations that included that he do his best, work hard and show respect. Evan also had a great deal of interest in the subject matter in the classes where he did well (stage band and English 12). Evan did not share the same interest in his math class and shared that math had not ever been his best subject area. Evan emphasized that his issue with physics (lowest grade) was the lack of support that he received from his teacher instructionally and socially. He did not sense that she was capable of helping her students though she recognized that they were struggling. Evan emphasized that he needed to feel a "connection" with his teachers in order to ask questions when he did not understand a concept. Evan also endured racial insensitivity in this class. He had not shared this information with his teacher but stated that it was not because he did not feel comfortable. It appears that the fact that he did not feel a connection with the teacher may have played a role in his decision not to make her aware of what was taking place in the classroom. Evan’s strong feelings about his physics class were also evident in the fact that he did not share the teachers name during our conversation.

Table 3. Evan’s Transcript

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<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td>Classes</td>
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<td>Trig &amp; Functions</td>
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<td>*Spanish IV</td>
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<td>Music Theory</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Band II</td>
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</table>

* - weighted credit course beginning 02-03 school year  ~ = Grade not available at time of study
Case 3: Hosea

Hosea was a 17 year old senior at High School B. He lived with his mother and older brother. Hosea participated in several extracurricular activities during his time at High School B. He was part of the swim team for four years. Hosea played tennis for two years but decided that he is most passionate about theatre. He participated in the school musical during his freshman, sophomore and senior years. He shared that he was very proud of being selected for the lead role during senior year. Hosea also played tuba in the band. He started band in middle school during his 6th grade year at which time he played clarinet. During his 8th grade year he played the bass clarinet. He learned to play the tuba during his sophomore year and played the trombone during his junior year. Hosea sang in his church youth choir and also worked at a popular water park in his home town. Hosea made note of the fact that he is very busy. His future plans included attending Old Dominion University where he plans to obtain a degree in nursing. Hosea shared that he also hoped to join the band in college.

Academic performance

Hosea’s academic success was evident in his GPA of 3.375, grades (Table 4) and his scores on the SOL assessments that were required for verified credits in order for him to graduate (Appendix I). Hosea’s scores on the 10 SOL assessments that he took ranged from 432 (algebra II) to a perfect score of 600 (English: Reading). It is noted that Hosea attempted the Algebra II SOL twice before passing. His score on his first attempt at the algebra II SOL was a 398. Hosea’s conduct history indicated that he had never received an infraction during his high school years. Hosea was enrolled in AP literature and
Successful academic experiences. Hosea’s favorite class was anatomy and the class that he had the best grade in was introduction to medical science.

I would have to say anatomy, biology 2 because I feel like I learn the most and it’s a discussion class. So and uum it’s about the body which is one of my main interest. So it’s like we can have a discussion about something that will actually apply to me in college and I can learn things that I need to learn and like there’s bounds of information about the body that you can just talk about and learn so I like that, that class.

He shared that the class was of great interest to him because he had the opportunity to study about the body. Hosea expressed his desire to go into the medical field as a nurse and was excited about being able to learn information that he would be able to apply at the college level.

Hosea described his anatomy teacher, Mr. A.

Okay, Mr. A. is very relaxed and he doesn’t really you know; he pushes work on us and he does uum he teaches using like a PowerPoint kind of system called a Prezi. It’s kind of complicated and I barely know how to use it...he urges us to take notes with our like i-Pods or hand held devices cause there is a note app that he had called Mindjet. And so he uses technology a lot not that I talk about it, I’m like oh yeah he is an all technology kind of person and so I use the internet and it kind of goes nicely with that class... and then when we are done with our work, then we get to socialize so that’s why I like that class.
Hosea described his teacher, Mr. A., as a relaxed type of person who utilized technology a good deal of the time to teach. Hosea acknowledged that he did not always find it easy to use some of the technology introduced by Mr. A. His example was software called Prezi that he attempted to utilize to create a presentation for a class project. Hosea noted that he was comfortable using the internet and had a chance to take notes on the internet. Hosea also liked the opportunity that Mr. A. gave the students to socialize if they completed their work during class time.

Hosea shared his perception of Mr. A.'s expectations of him in the class.

Of me personally? He sees me as person that tries hard in that class and there you know above the bar a little bit. I wouldn't say that he expects you know like 100s or even As because his tests are really hard. But he does see me as someone who tries and I’ve studied and he’s seen me study so he expects like a bit above the everyone else failing yeah so like average.

Hosea perceived that Mr. A. acknowledged his efforts and recognized his attempts to do well in anatomy class. Though he perceived that Mr. A. expected him to be successful academically he did not define his academic success in terms of scoring a 100% in the class.

Hosea also experienced success in his introduction to medical science course. He described this course as the class in which he had the best grade.

Uum out of all my classes probably introduction to medical science. It’s easy and I took medical terminology last semester so it’s like things that I’ve learned in medical terminology. And things have been repeated in anatomy and then right
after anatomy, I go to medical science. And it’s like I’ve heard it 3 times and I can like list the parts of heart and like tell people how to do CPR.

Introduction to medical science was Hosea’s best grade class. He described the class as easy and noted that it was an elective. Hosea liked the fact that he had taken medical terminology and had prior knowledge of a lot of the information that he was learning in introduction to medical science. He also noted that he was able to get in a lot of review of the information in medical science in his anatomy class because there were some similarities in the concepts that he was studying. His anatomy class met after his introduction to medical science class.

Hosea described his teacher in introduction to medical science, Ms. J., as a good teacher and was very excited about the fact Ms. J. had been a nurse in the military which he aspired to be in the future.

Her name is Ms. J. She’s really nice and she’s a good teacher. She gives us a lot of paperwork though which can be overwhelming. Not to the point of being overwhelmed I just have a lot of papers to look through. So we do notes and she talks and we fill in the blanks and that seems to work for me if I like look back at it and study it. And uuh she’s a nurse herself which is what I’m aspiring to be right now, in the military which is also another aspiration of mine. So she’s easy to talk to and she ask me to help her a lot. She’s not good with the computer so I can help her when she is setting up EdLine. She’s a pretty good teacher and relatable. And I learn from her easily so.
Hosea noted that he could relate to Ms. J. and found learning from Ms. J. to be easy. Hosea shared his perception of Ms. J.'s expectations for him in introduction to medical science.

Pretty high, she is like you know stuff so she tells, well like no she doesn't really say anything because she is kind of meek. But she will like tell me with a look that I should've known that question. She will flash a look at me like, oh Hosea, you could have gotten that. So I think that that does kind of propel me forward and want to listen and things, so.

Hosea felt that Ms. J. had high expectations for him and he noted that it was not always in the things that she said but also the way she looked at him when asking a question that he answered incorrectly.

Hosea described a typical day in his introduction to medical science class.

Okay, we come in and sit down and typically we have a do now which is like if we learned parts of some kind of system yesterday then we kind of review it. We are going over careers because there are a lot of freshman in that class and I'm the only senior. So it's an elective and everyone can take it and there are a lot of young people. And they get loud and Ms. W. has to control them and uum so besides the loudness the we would take notes or do a packet. We've had a couple of guest speakers and on Monday we have a man coming in a helicopter in the parking lot. He's flying the Nightingale, yep and he's parking here and I even have to park in a different spot... we visited MCI and different medical campuses and we went to the cadaver lab at William and Mary. We saw dead people.
Hosea was observed in his introduction to medical science class. His description of a typical day in the class was supported by the observation. The class was very busy and loud and Ms. J. spent a lot of time redirecting multiple students. Hosea was observed talking with Ms. J. at the beginning of the class. The interaction took place over several minutes. Ms. J. handed Hosea a paper which was paperwork that he needed for graduation. They were observed smiling at each other as they exchanged pleasantries. Hosea was preparing for a test and working with three classmates to review information for the test. His interactions with his peers was limited to the three young ladies that he studied with and it was noted that his interactions were appropriate and he appeared to be at ease and comfortable with his interactions. When asked in the follow-up interview how he did on the test, Hosea had not received the official score but felt that he had scored within in the A-B range.

**Challenging academic experiences.** Math analysis was the class that Hosea described as his least favorite and the class with the lowest grade, a D.

Least favorite is math analysis. Goodness don’t come to that class. Let’s see, it’s very complicated and like I feel like when I try and wrap my mind around math it’s just too many formulas and numbers going on at once. And like with science you go up by units and you learn a subject and you know it builds on itself. It complicates. I think too hard on some things and some things I don’t think enough. So math really trips me up and it always has.

Hosea shared that he felt the class was very complicated and his problem with the class was that he had difficulty keeping up with all of the formulas and numbers. He described himself as being slow with math. He also noted that he felt that math analysis
was not what he would describe as a relaxing subject. Hosea perceived that he had always found math to be a challenging subject throughout his years in school.

Hosea described his math analysis teacher and shared his understanding of the teacher's expectations for him in the class.

Ok Coach F. is, he teaches, I like think he is a great teacher even though I don't really do well in math. He noticed that and he sees what works for me and he makes me feel like a champion even though when I don’t do great. But he teaches on the board. Uum sometimes I think it’s a little fast for me just because I’m slower at math but uum yeah he’s a pretty good teacher... I think that his expectations sadly are lower than most of the other students just because it’s the end of the year and I’m a senior and I uuh really you know, I could have done better in that class. I think I think at some parts I could have tried harder but at most parts I really just didn’t get the material... he pulled me to the computer and was like Hosea this is the final score that you need to like pass and so that’s where we are.

Hosea noted that he thought his teacher, Mr. F., was great and even made him feel like “a champion”. Hosea described Mr. F.’s expectations for him as being low and perceived that Mr. F.’s goal for him was to pass the class. Hosea still takes responsibility for his academic performance and acknowledged that he could have been more successful had he tried harder.

Hosea pointed out that his teachers in his favorite classes (anatomy; Mr. A. & introduction to medical science; Ms. J.) were a large part of the reason that he was academically successful in these subject areas. He felt that his teachers expected him to
do well and put forth his best effort. Another reason why Hosea was successful in these classes was his high interest in the subject areas. He was planning to become a nurse and saw the benefit of doing well and learning all that he could in these classes because he also felt that the knowledge he gained would benefit him in his college courses as well. While Hosea acknowledged that he liked his teacher (Coach F.) in his math analysis (least favorite and lowest grade class), he struggled with the subject matter. He had struggled with math throughout his school career. Hosea also pointed out that Coach F. made it known to him that his main concern was that Hosea pass the class and Coach F. pointed out to Hosea exactly what score he needed to pass the class. Hosea appeared to be a little offended by this and recognized that it was about doing whatever he had to do to pass the class rather than putting in effort to understand concepts.

Table 4. Hosea's Transcript

<table>
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<th>Classes</th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
<th>Final</th>
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<tr>
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<td>~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*AP US Govt/Politics</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>~</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Math Analysis</td>
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<td>*Bio II/Anatomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intro Health &amp; Med Srv</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical Terminology</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Band II</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evol. of Cinema</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*- weighted credit course beginning 02-03 school year  ~ grade not available at time

Case 4: Max Powers

Max Powers was an 18 year old senior at High School A. He lived with his parents and older sister. He has lived in various places before coming to the area, but has been in High School A since his freshman year. Max has moved several times due to his father being a member of the military. Max Powers was very involved in mixed martial arts (MMA) which is a sport that involves kick boxing and cage fighting for five years.
Max Powers got involved in MMA as a way of relaxing and controlling his anger. Max Powers also participated in track during his sophomore year. He wanted to ensure that he stayed physically fit and exercised. He participated in the 100 meter dash and had some success but decided not to continue with track due to track meets being held on Saturdays. Max preferred to have his Saturdays free and wanted to just relax or hang out with his friends. Max’s future plans included going to college and majoring in business. He acknowledged that his ultimate goal would be a career in professional fighting. He was concise in his answers but articulate in getting his perception about his academic experience across.

**Academic performance**

Max’s academic success was evident with his GPA of 2.75, grades (Table 5) and his scores on the SOL assessments that were required for verified credits in order for him to graduate (Appendix I). Max’s scores on the 9 SOL assessments that he took ranged from a 442, pass proficient (Geometry) to a perfect score of 600 (English: Reading). Max attempted the Geometry SOL twice before passing and scored a 394 on his first attempt. Max’s conduct history indicated that had three infractions written during his high school years. The infractions included classroom disruption, attendance (tardy to class) and defiance. It was noted that he was not suspended for any of these violations of the conduct code but he was assigned alternative to suspension (in-school suspension) on one occasion which took place during his sophomore year.

Max Powers was enrolled in English 12, government, music theory, guitar, tech theatre, and evolution of cinema.
Successful academic experiences. Max’s favorite class was evolution of cinema. He admitted that it was his favorite because it was easy and he was given the opportunity to watch movies during class.

I would have to say either guitar or evolution of cinema. Yeah like studying movies. Umm probably cinema is my favorite because it’s really easy. Yeah well they both are really easy but we get to watch movies in that class. We have to do critiques on the movies but there’re really hard questions. I can barely read them... Batman, Batman Begins, that’s the one we are watching now. Then she (teacher) grades it at the end of the movie.

Max described the activities he completed in the class which, included completing movie critiques. He did not appear to care for these activities because he felt that his teacher, Ms. X., required the class to do college level work.

Max Powers described his teacher, Ms. X.

Ms. X. Well she’s kind of annoying. She’ll like yell at us if we are talking during class for her own reasons. So, she’s a really annoying teacher...well, like she takes college or film study classes at her college. So she pretty much brings her work to us and expects us to do the same thing that she is doing in class. She assigns like college level work but that class is not designed to be college level... they changed the teachers and that’s why last year it was a different teacher and they changed it this year so when I signed up for it I was expecting the other teacher, the easy teacher.

Despite identifying this class as his favorite, Max found the work challenging and consistent with college-level work. He enjoyed the content but did not care for the
teacher. Max appeared to be in the class because he enjoyed watching movies but did not care for the assignments that were part of the class expectations.

Max experienced academic success in his English 12 class. English 12 was the class in which he had the best grade class. At the time of the study, Max had an A in the class.

English. I was always good in English. It’s just one of my good subjects. I’m good with words and I’m good with writing essays and stuff. And all that and vocabulary... we do class projects sometimes, like we have one now. We have to do a senior project. We have to like pick a technology that affects our generation and do a paper on it and we have to make a website... she’s a boring teacher (Ms. R.). She’s really not like a fun teacher. She’s kind of monotone and I don’t really like her as a teacher. I like the class. I just don’t like the teacher.

Max perceived that he was good at English and specifically in the areas of essay writing and vocabulary. He later shared that he felt that this was due to his mother’s love for the subject of English and the things he exposed him to and shared with him. The major assignment for Max at the time of the interview was the senior project. Max described the assignment and was observed in this class working to complete the assignment.

Max shared Ms. R.’s expectations for him as a student in her English 12 class.

I think that they are about medium. She’s really like lenient about our work. Like we really don’t have to put forth much effort into our work and we will still get like a good grade. She doesn’t really mind if you do anything.
Max’s interest in English 12 lies in his interest in the content. He does well with English as a subject. He is successful in the class despite his teacher’s lack of enthusiasm or instructional delivery. Max described a typical day in his English 12 class.

We go in there and she usually has a welcome work thing. We will work on our punctuation and capitalization stuff. And then we’ll, if we are reading a story, we will read the story and answer questions on the story and then she will show us a movie clip from the story that we are reading and that is usually it.

Max was observed in English 12. The observation confirmed his description of a typical day in the class. There were approximately 25 students in the class. There was another adult in addition to the teacher, Ms. R. The students were preparing to go to the computer lab to work on their senior project. Ms. R. was giving directions and modeling how to look for websites and provide website information on the project sheet that she had provided to the students. Ms. R. made her expectations for work completion known to the class and she shared with the class when she would be posting grades on EdLine for their classwork. During this exchange a number of students were observed talking to their neighbor and looking at their cell phones. Max Powers was observed briefly talking to a peer on a couple of occasions in the main classroom. While in the computer lab, Max Powers was observed talking to a peer next to him on a couple of occasions for less than a minute each time.

Max’s interactions with Ms. R. were minimal. During the observation there were only 2 observed interactions. Ms. R. asked Max on 2 separate occasions what topic he selected for his project. The first time, Max stated he was not sure. Ms. R. continued to move around the room to ask other students who had not identified their topic. She later
went back to Max and he jokingly answered that he was going to do “Iron Man”. The students in the English 12 class were tasked with selecting a technology of the 21st century and writing about how it impacted them in their world. Max later shared that he found out that there was an Iron Man project being investigated by the American and Japanese military to create a protective armor for the armed forces. Max continued to work and did not interact with peers or the teacher for the remainder of the observation. Max completed the essay portion of the project but was still working on creating his website at the time of the follow-up interview.

**Challenging academic experiences.** Max Powers’ least favorite class was government. He did not like the class because it was on-line.

Max described the class and his teacher, Mr. K.

Least favorite class, all my classes are really easy actually but I would probably say that my least favorite class is government because it’s on-line and it’s boring. The teacher just assigns work and then you do it. I think that sometimes on special days they have where you can do it through webcam…

Well I had Mr. K. for psychology and I was supposed to have him for government 12. But I had a little problem with him during my sophomore year. I was kind of a delinquent then. Well I was getting into a lot of trouble…I had him (Mr. K.) in psychology in 10th grade year and I got kicked out of his class. He hated me so much that he kicked me out. Throughout the year, he and I became enemies. I guess we always got into arguments and he just really did not like me… I thought I never really liked this guy and it’s been a few years and I’ve really matured so I didn’t think that it would be that bad. I got a call a week before school started
that it was going to change and would be on-line. I didn't really want to do on-line but I thought that it would be for the best. It was either that or I would totally have to give up guitar and music theory and they would totally change everything on my schedule...

Max explained that the class was not initially an on-line class but the change was made because of an issue that he had earlier in his high school years with the teacher. Max felt that he had matured since the incident and was prepared to take the class with the teacher but the teacher had spoken with administration and requested that he be removed from the class. Max felt that it was in his best interest to go with the change and did not attempt to get another government class because he would not have been able to keep his music theory and guitar class. Max had a grade of C in his on-line government class at the time of the interview. The class that he had the lowest grade in was evolution of cinema which was his favorite class.

Oh, uum, cinema right now. I have an F because my friends are in there. We are just talking and I don't do any homework. Like I barely do any work in there.

Well, kinda need English to graduate. You don't really need cinema. So I don't really take it seriously.

While Max defined evolution of cinema as his favorite class because it was easy, he had a grade of F in the class at the time of the interview. The grade of C in Table 5 reflects Max's grade at the end of the first semester. The study took place during the second semester prior to final grades being posted. One of the reasons he gave was that his teacher assigned and expected the class to complete assignments that were college level work. The other reason that he gave was that his friends were in the class so he did
not take it as seriously as he took his English 12 class because he realized that he did not need the credit and cinema was not required for him to graduate.

Max's academic success in his classes is motivated by factors other than his teachers. This makes him a little different from the other study participants. He has the best grade in a class that he perceives as coming easy to him, English 12. Max enjoyed the cinema course despite his low grade because he enjoys watching movies and has some peers in that class that he enjoys spending time with. Max does not identify any teacher as playing a role in his academic success but he does not mention them thwarting his success either. Max also describes many of his classes as boring. This young man displayed more of an internal drive to do well. He did like having low grades and had a good understanding of what he needed to do in order to graduate.

Table 5. Max Powers' Transcript

<table>
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<th>Semester 2</th>
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<td>Evol. of Cinema</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>VA &amp; US Govt</td>
<td>B</td>
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</table>

~ = grade not available at the time of the study

Case 5: Noir

Noir was an 18 year old senior at High School A. He lived with his grandmother. Noir participated in several clubs during his time at High School A. He was a member of the creative writing club. The students in the creative writing club spent time completing writing challenges that were given to them by their president. They also worked on a literary magazine. Students created characters and had their characters competed against
other characters through a story. Noir joined the club during his junior year. Noir also
was a member of the Anime Club. He served as president of the club during his senior
year. He shared that the activities of the Anime club were mostly watching movies,
playing different games and having fun. Noir was also a part of the National Honor
Society.

Outside of his school activities, Noir was very active in his church. He did a lot
of volunteer work for the senior members of the church which included cutting grass and
cleaning up gardens. He also did maintenance work around the church as needed. Noir’s
future plans included completing a program at Full Sail University in Florida on-line and
majoring in game art. He planned to complete college with one of his good friends who
also planned to work toward a degree in the area of gaming.

**Academic performance**

Noir’s academic success was evident in his GPA of 2.4, grades (Table 6) and his
scores on the SOL assessments that were required for verified credits in order for Noir to
graduate (Appendix I). Noir’s scores on the 9 SOL assessments that he took ranged from
410 pass proficient (World History II) to 489 pass proficient (World History I). It was
noted that Noir scored a 399 on his Geometry SOL which is a failing score or below
proficient and would need another proficient score on an SOL to meet the requirement of
passing 9 SOL assessments for graduation. At the time of the study, Noir was preparing
to take the Algebra II SOL. Noir’s conduct history showed that he had no infractions
during his high school years. The resources Noir reported he used to support his
academic success included people, computers, and a study strategy. Noir was enrolled in
the following classes during his last quarter as a senior: chemistry, algebra II, English 12, government, and game design.

**Successful academic experiences.** Noir’s favorite and best grade class was algebra II. Noir described the class as a nice quiet, peaceful class.

As my favorite? I’m going to have to say algebra II. One thing, I get to see one of my old middle school teachers again this year, Ms. T. And it’s a pretty nice class. Nice and not really silent. It’s like one of those peaceful classes. You learn but you also feel you’re not rushed or anything like that. There’s nobody over there making loud noises or something. You just sit there and learn... I think that it’s just how nice she was and simply she put things for me... she kinda put things simply for most of us. We had for most of the year a substitute and I mean some of the stuff she was teaching me, I was kinda struggling... when the teacher came back, everyone kinda like expecting, oh man she’s not going to like us. And I was like no she’s nice and kind and stuff. Now our class is doing better.

He spent time in classes where he felt students did what they wanted to do and talked and did not pay attention; but this was not the case in algebra II. His algebra II teacher was out on leave for several months at the beginning of the year and he struggled with grasping concepts until Ms. T. returned. Noir shared Ms. T.’s expectations and how she supported the class to be successful.

To pass. She offers one-on-one help if we need it after school. She always tells me if I don’t do good on a quiz, she always tells me, you know,
I can study my mistakes and try to overcome those mistakes for the next test. That way, since I already know something on that, I can already make those correct answers to the ones I made before.

Noir likes classes where his teachers have good classroom management. He notes that this enhances his opportunity to learn. Noir really likes Ms. T. as a person and he also likes that she is able to convey difficult concepts in a way that he understands unlike the substitute that he had during Ms. T.'s absence. Noir described a typical day in the class and the observation completed by the researcher confirmed Noir's description. There were approximately 17 students in the class. There were lots of inspirational posters on every wall in the classroom. The inspirational messages included a poster that said, "even Einstein had questions" and "u turn in homework, u get better grades". The class was structured by routines. The students came in and got their materials out which included calculators. Their regular routine included a "do now" which was a warm up activity that was located on the white board. The purpose of this activity was to review previously taught information. On the day of the observation, Ms. T. explained that the class would be reviewing for the upcoming SOL assessment. The class worked on reviewing units 1-4 during this class period. Ms. T. gave out packets for students to complete which consisted of problems for the students to work through to strengthen their skills. Noir explained that packets were a regular part of a typical day's activities.

Ms. T. walked around and checked in on students to see how they were doing and offered help to those who had questions. During the observation, Ms. T. called for the entire classes' attention so that she could explain a problem when she noted that several students had questions or worked the problem incorrectly. She had a material on the
windows in the classroom that permitted her to work problems out on the windows so that she did not have to keep walking back to the white board at the front of the class.

Ms. T. checked in several times with Noir and the young lady that he was sitting with to see if they understood the problems they were working out or needed any help. Noir called Ms. T. over to him to ask her a question. She came over and discussed the problem with him and confirmed that he had the correct answer. Ms. T. also had each student individually come up to her desk so that she could show them their current grade. Noir’s facial expression did not indicate that there was a problem when he viewed his grade. He interacted with Ms. T. for a couple of minutes giving her eye contact throughout the interaction. She smiled at him and nodded in the affirmative and he returned to his seat and went back to work.

Noir was observed talking through problems with the young lady sitting next to him several times. During the follow-up interview, Noir explained that the young lady was a friend of his and that they often worked together. He also shared that his grade in the class was a close to a B and that Ms. T. wanted him to bring it up just in case he did not do well on the final exam. The work that the class completed on the day of the observation was not graded.

**Challenging academic experiences.** Government was Noir’s least favorite class. He acknowledged that the issue was not the teacher, and it was the other students in the class.

My least favorite, I’m going to have to say government. The reason why isn’t even the teacher. It’s just the students we have in there. Just, you know, I’m not going to say their all bad. I mean there’s some pretty cool people, you know, but
like there’s sometimes a little too much clowning around in there. I mean I can deal with like small clowning around. I’ll just go, that’s funny. Haha. But if it’s dragging on throughout class and we’re like missing parts of the lesson and stuff like that, then I think that’s the time when you’re like hey don’t you think you could just simmer down a little bit.

Noir felt that there were a number of students who “clowned around” too much during class. He understood having fun but knew that there was a point and time when the playing around needed to stop because it had gone too far. Noir recognized that the joking around was impacting instruction which caused him to miss out on parts of the lesson.

Noir described Mr. Y, his government teacher.

See, I think Mr. Y., that’s my government teacher, Mr. Y. is like one of those teachers that he’s not weak, but he just doesn’t want to say anything. He’s one of those teachers that’s like, well if you miss it then you’re going to miss it. It’s not that he doesn’t care about us, it’s just that if you don’t care about the class, then he won’t put forth his heart and effort trying so much to put it into you and then you won’t learn it. I don’t fault him…. his expectations are, he’s even told me, “Noir, you’re a bright kid”. He just tells me just do better… he’s also lowering the bar too. Like throwing projects at us. He does current events. He’ll give us extra points for doing stuff like that. I also feel that he’s trying to push us up to that bar where we can pass… I just feel like some of us don’t deserve it at times.

Noir supported Mr. Y.’s unspoken philosophy of if you want to miss out, you just miss out because he felt that his classmates who did not put forth the effort should not get
additional help from the teacher. Noir understood that he needed to pass the class in order to graduate and knew that Mr. Y. expected him to pass as well. Noir perceived that Mr. Y. lowered the bar by giving extra points and assigning projects to support student efforts in passing the class. While Noir did not directly express how he felt about Mr. Y. lowering the bar, he was annoyed by the fact that his classmates impeded his learning which might suggest that he recognized that his teacher lowered expectations for the class but seemed to appreciate the opportunity to improve his grade.

Chemistry was also a class where Noir faced an academic challenge. Chemistry was the class in which Noir had the lowest grade and his teacher was Mr. Z.

Ok, to help us be more successful, he (Mr. Z.) always offers advice. He offers his help after school, you know. One thing, I think is easy to learn from him and I think most students; it’s like, not childish nature, he makes us laugh and stuff like that. He’s easier to get along with than normal teachers and I think when you have a teacher like that, students are more willing to learn you know, from somebody like that. I mean he’s not always clowning around. It seems like it at first, but he’s actually teaching us something while he’s clowning around. He also tells us to do book work sometimes to help us. Of course he assigns homework and you know, he sets up tests like weeks before.

Noir’s perception of Mr. Z. was that he did everything that he could to support the students in the class with being successful. Mr. Z. offered after school help which Noir found to be good because Mr. Z. had other after school obligations which included coaching tennis. Noir described Mr. Z. as funny and noted that it was easy to learn from Mr. Z. because he had views that were similar to the student’s point of view.
Noir’s comparison of his best grade class, algebra II, to his lowest grade class, chemistry, further explains why he perceives that he has difficulty with chemistry. Noir seemed to be somewhat perplexed about his performance.

See that’s what I want to know because chemistry, you have a lot of math in there just like algebra and it’s like I guess I’m more of a numbers person than just a chemical person. Cause here we got all these chemical properties with five, eight and five, three, eight, eight and stuff like that. While in algebra I’m over here just going, hey n equals blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I’m able to say that but when it comes to chemistry I’m just like what?... Mr. Z. is more a laugh a lot teacher whereas; Ms. R. is like a fun loving teacher but she also teaches too. Mr. Z. teaches too, but has more of a clown inside of him.

Noir was confused because he does well in algebra II and there is quite a bit of math involved in chemistry. Noir saw himself as more of a numbers person and noted that the chemical properties in chemistry presented a problem for him. He also compared the two teachers of this course and noted that Mr. Z. laughs and clowns around a lot whereas Ms. T. is “fun loving” but teaches more. Noir appears to have difficulty with the chemistry content and this difficulty does not seem to be helped by Mr. Z.’s playful delivery of instruction.

Noir talked about the opportunity he passed up to not take chemistry.

And I’m like, oh. And I had a choice to not take that class (chemistry). I remember it fresh in my head too. When I first started making my first mistakes in that class, I was having flashbacks like, Noir, are you sure you want to take
chemistry, I'm like yeah. I might as well. I'm pretty confident. And now I was in that class burying my face in my hands going, why, why.

Noir attributed his academic success in algebra II, his favorite and best grade class, to his teacher Ms. T. He noted that she was his teacher in middle school and that she was very supportive of his efforts to be successful by making herself available for additional help. Noir also had peers in the algebra II class that helped him when he had difficulty with concepts. He perceived that his classmates took the algebra class seriously and behaved in a manner that did not interrupt his learning. Noir referred to the class as a "peaceful place". The classes where Noir had difficulty differed in that he felt his classmates caused him to miss out on information which caused him to struggle with his understanding of concepts. He found his chemistry teacher to be somewhat of a "clown" which did not help his attempts to understand the content. Noir felt comfortable with the math aspects of chemistry but struggled with other aspects of the subject. Noir credited his success in academic settings to fewer distractions and teachers who presented challenging information in a manner that he could understand.

Table 6. Noir’s Transcript

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<th>Classes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Algebra II</td>
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<td>~</td>
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<td>Geometry</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>Photo Comm. Design II</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Design I</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>~</td>
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~ = grade not available at the time of the study
Case 6: Scott

Scott was a 17 year old senior at High School B. He lived with his mother and 3 cousins. An interesting fact that emerged during the study was that Scott’s cousin was also a participant in the study, Batman. Scott’s extracurricular activities included being a member of the band and the quidditch team. The quidditch team was modeled after the Harry Potter storyline. Scott shared that until his sophomore year in high school, he had never played an instrument. He played on the percussion line in the marching and jazz bands. Scott’s future plans included attending Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) where he hoped to major in music performance. While Scott was cooperative during the interviews and observation, his answers to initial and follow-up questions were short in nature.

Academic performance

Scott’s academic success was evident in his GPA of 3.5, grades (Table 7) and his scores on the SOL assessments that were required for verified credits in order for him to graduate (Appendix I). Scott’s scores on the 10 SOL assessments that he took ranged from 483 (Biology) to a perfect score of 600 (English: Reading; Writing; World History I & II). Scott’s conduct history indicated that he had received three infractions during his high school experience. It was noted that all of Scott’s infractions were during his 9th grade year. Scott received an infraction in each of the following areas: defiance, obscenity and classroom disruption. The consequences were not noted on the conduct history summary. Scott was enrolled in math analysis, AP government, AP psychology, anatomy, and jazz band at the time of the study.
Successful academic experiences. Scott’s favorite class was anatomy and the teacher was Mr. A.

Probably anatomy, just because it’s different the way the learning style. And like it’s more interactive and more of my friends are in that class. So we get to like learn it together and stuff like that. Well, we use the Mindjet thing. We all take notes on our i-Pods and phones so if you walk in and walk around you would see all of us taking notes. It’s an individual thing so you can see on each person’s iPod what they are doing… he’s (Mr. A.) a real interesting guy, he’s a young guy. He likes technology a lot. He’s just a great guy. He’s just a good teacher and he like understands young people. Uum, I just like talk to him a lot.

Batman and Hosea were also part of this class. Scott noted that this was his favorite class because of the interactive learning style. He also liked having several of his friends in this class. Scott appeared to like Mr. A.’s use of technology and mentioned using iPods and phones to take notes on Mindjet. Scott described him as a “real interesting, young guy”. Scott’s description of his teacher was evidence of why he defined the class as his favorite. He described Mr. A. as “a real interesting, great, young guy who is a good teacher”. Scott perceived that Mr. A. expected him to learn and demonstrate understanding of the material. Scott’s grade at the time of the study was an A.

Scott shared Mr. A.’s expectations for him as a student in the anatomy class.

That I understand and learn the material and I can reciprocated it back to him in a test format. We have projects a lot. You know how there are multiple systems of
the body like the circulatory system and systems like that? Each of us got to do a disease of that system to show what we know about it.

Scott was observed in anatomy class even though he defined AP psychology as his best grade class. He had taken the AP exam in psychology and noted that the class was not functioning in the way that it typically did prior to the exam. Scott suggested that I come in and observe him during his anatomy class. This class was also a weighted class and Scott’s grade at the time of the observation was an A.

The class was preparing to take a test which was covering the concepts of hormones and glands. Initially Scott was seated at a table alone studying. He was observed looking around at the students behind him but he did not say anything to anyone. Eventually another student sat at the table with him and there were very brief verbal exchanges between Scott and the student. It was noted that two other study participants (Batman and Hosea) were also students in this particular class.

As Mr. A. handed out the test he joked with the students about having to know some detailed information that the students made evident by their reaction they were not expecting to have to know. Scott picked up his test and gestured for and stated to Mr. A. to “take it” back. Scott appeared to be comfortable with Mr. A. as evidenced by his joking and smiling at Mr. A. during the brief interaction. Scott worked on his test for approximately twenty minutes and was observed using his phone when Mr. A. gave the students four minutes to use their notes to answer questions. After completing and turning in his test, Scott was observed putting his head down on his desk.

Scott also experienced academic success in his AP psychology class where his teacher was Mr. B.
Probably AP psychology I’m guessing. There are a lot more PowerPoints. He (Mr. B.) teaches with those usually and he gives us notes. Like we can take notes or we can just not take notes. I haven’t been taking notes in that class really. You just sit and you watch and you learn and you understand the material... well you might not want to come to that class because since we took the AP exam we aren’t doing a lot of anything in that class right now. Well, we come and we take notes and that’s about it. Well, it’s not the same; there is some interaction but there are a lot of notes and sometimes there are projects... well there was one on mental disorders and one on like people with theories... we did a project on people who had mental disorders. Charles Manson, he was an interesting guy.

Scott shared that this was the class in which he had the best grade. Scott noted that Mr. B. used a lot of PowerPoints in his instruction. Scott did not take notes in that class; he sat and watched and was able to understand the material. He shared an example of a project that he completed in the class which involved researching an individual with a mental disorder. He chose to research Charles Manson. Scott’s grade in this class was an A and he had taken the AP exam approximately two days prior to the interview. He explained that he felt that Mr. B. expected him to learn the material and pass the AP exam. Scott suggested that the researcher may not want to observe him in this class because there were was very little teaching taking place since the students had completed the AP exam.

Scott briefly spoke about Mr. B.’s expectations of him.

Just to understand the material and do the best that I can with the AP exam.
**Challenging academic experiences.** Math analysis was Scott’s least favorite and lowest grade class.

Probably math. Yeah, it’s like a pre-cal. Mr. F. Well it’s not the teacher. I really like him as a teacher too. But I don’t know, it’s just a different learning style. Well, we started doing this thing were we started watching different videos and there were different people doing different lectures on the subject and I don’t know, it’s not the same…. he’ll (Mr. F.) give us examples of the problem that we are learning about that day and like we’ll do examples of it back and stuff like that and he’ll give us homework.

Scott quickly made it known that the issue was not the teacher, Mr. F. Scott had a B in this class and Hosea was one of his classmates. Scott felt that the learning style was the reason that he labeled this class as his least favorite. Mr. F. started a new procedure for introducing new concepts with videos of different lectures. This technique made the class less interesting for Scott. Scott liked his teacher but acknowledged that he did not talk with Mr. F. as much as he did with Mr. A.

Scott seemed to prefer classes with high expectations and innovative and interactive teaching. Scott also liked having peers in his classes. He preferred the content being taught in anatomy and psychology over math. He appeared to have more success in classes where he could interact with his peers and he also appeared to like having the opportunity to show his understanding of concepts through project based assessment. Scott was very precise in his interactions with the researcher and the researcher would describe him as a shy young man who did not talk as much as his peers though he seemed to like the opportunity to interact.
Table 7. Scott’s Transcript

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<td>*Math Analysis</td>
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<td>~</td>
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<td>Evol. of Cinema</td>
<td>A</td>
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*- weighted credit course beginning 02-03 school year  ~ = grade not available at time of study

Cross Case Analysis

The success of the six African American male seniors in this study was evident in the courses that they enrolled in as well as the manner in which they performed in these courses. Each of the six participants were enrolled in courses that would be described as rigorous in nature. These classes included: anatomy (biology II), biology, chemistry, algebra II, math analysis, psychology (regular and AP), trigonometry & functions, physics, Spanish IV, music theory, AP English 12, and AP government & politics. Batman, Evan, Hosea and Scott were enrolled in at least 2 AP courses during their high school experience. Results revealed that 5 of the 6 young men (Batman, Evan, Hosea, Noir and Scott) were on track to be awarded an advanced studies diploma. The criteria for this diploma required students to obtain 24 credit hours in the areas of English, history and social science, math, laboratory science, world languages, and health and physical education (YCSD, 2011). Grade point averages (GPA) at the time of the study for the participants ranged from 3.8 (Batman) to 2.75 (Max Powers and Noir). The academic success of each of these young men was evident in their GPAs, grades, and performance on the Standards of Learning assessments (SOLs).

A cross case analysis of the data was completed by examining areas that supported the overall study focus and the three study questions posed by the researcher.
which addressed: factors that contributed to the academic success of African American male high school students, the obstacles that they faced and how these obstacles were addressed and their description of their high school experience. The three themes that emerged from the analysis of the data were: 1) these young men perceived their success to be a result of the support that they received from their teachers, parents, and peers; 2) these young men strategically faced the challenges that confronted them and utilized the educational process to achieve their goal of being successful in life; and 3) these young men took advantage of opportunities to further themselves academically as well as socially and described their high school experience in terms of the experiences and opportunities that they were afforded. A discussion of each of the research questions and the themes follows.

Research Question One: What factors do high school African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success?

The success these young men experienced academically was largely related to the support that they received from people resources, which included their teachers, parents, and peers. In Evan’s case, a mentor and role models also played a role in his academic success.

Teacher support. Study participants noted that the teachers who made a difference for them academically were those who showed an interest for their subject area and a sincere attitude about wanting their students to do well. These teachers also expected their students to learn the material and demonstrate an understanding of the material. These teachers held their students to high expectations.
Supportive teachers as described by study participants also shared insight into their field by making themselves available to students for extra help or just as a person that the student could talk to about any topic. This interaction may be viewed as relational in nature as one participant actually referred to his relationship with his teacher as a “family type thing”.

Hosea’s English teachers played a big role in his academic success. Ms. H., who also attends the same church as Hosea, and Mr. L. who was his English teacher provided an opportunity for him to gain information through reading which Hosea viewed as a way to learn “a lot of information” that he could use outside of his English class. Hosea shared that in both Ms. H. and Mr. L.’s classes he felt that he was encouraged to better himself as a student. Ms. J., the introduction to medical science teacher, also impacted Hosea’s drive to do well. He again mentioned that she had already achieved the success that he wanted as a nurse in a military.

Yes, when I look back at the teachers, I would say Ms. H who went to my church. But because she went to my church and uum not because she went to my church but because I feel I learned a lot from my English teachers. Like uum Mr. L. this year. Then English just always seemed like the class where you just kind of better yourself. You read a lot and you like take in a lot of things. So English, like Mr. L. and Ms. H. are both very good. And Ms. W. because she has done what I want to do with being a nurse and already gone through medical school and training so I can look up to her.

Hosea continued to talk about the impact and role that his teachers played in his academic success. When he talked about his band teacher, Ms. D., the reason shifted to
the relationship that he had with his teachers. Hosea shared that his relationship with Ms. D. was more than just a student/teacher “bond”. He referred to it as a “family type thing”. Ms. D. was a part of his life outside of school as was Ms. H. Earlier, Hosea referred to his relationship with Ms. J. as a friendship type of relationship.

Ms. D. also just because it’s like a relationship. It’s more than just a student teacher bond. It’s like outside of school and stuff too. So that’s more like a family type thing and you can really confide in her and stuff like that.

Batman felt that all of his teachers were approachable and would not “shun” him away if he had a question. His perception of his teachers was that they all wanted to see him succeed and would contribute in any way possible to ensure that he did succeed. Batman was confident that if you just asked your question it would be answered.

Any teacher I have, I can go to them and ask them a question. So it’s not like nobody’s shunning me away. Like there’s nobody here for me to ask questions. It is a matter of me asking the question. I will get an answer. There’s nobody here that doesn’t want to see you succeed. They all want to see you succeed. So they’ll contribute any way they can to help you. As long as you ask the question, there is no question that can’t be answered.

These characteristics were supported in the discussion that students shared concerning their favorite and best grade classes as well. Batman, Hosea and Scott were enrolled in anatomy class with Mr. A. during the time of the study. Batman and Scott mentioned that they could talk to Mr. A. about anything and found him to be a “cool” teacher. I observed Mr. A. in anatomy class and noted that he was very approachable. When I came into the classroom for the observation, he was interacting with Batman. I
noted that Batman was smiling and the interaction lasted for approximately 5 minutes as the other students were coming into the classroom. Scott's interaction with Mr. A. was one that I would describe as playful. Mr. A. was handing out a test and made a statement that the students had to know all of the abbreviations for the subject matter and quickly noted that he was joking. Prior to his announcing that he was joking, Scott attempted to hand his test back in a playful manner and stated while smiling “take this”. That interaction was the first time that I had seen Scott smile and behave in a relaxed manner throughout the time that we spent completing the study.

Batman and Max Powers noted that the teachers that they found to be supportive were interactive in their teaching style and made learning “fun”. Batman mentioned being inspired by teachers who made learning fun for him. He viewed his teachers as being successful just by virtue of having a job at High School B. Batman also felt that his teachers inspired him to do more than learn but to also become interested and have fun with his learning. Batman's teachers were able to get his attention by providing him with opportunities to interact and move around in the classroom. This young man described himself as a “social” being that needed opportunities to talk.

Seeing as everybody here who works in the building is successful enough to even have a job here, that inspired me. Just for higher learning, as I was saying, just wanting to know things because you want to know them. You're actually interested in them and not just memorizing. I guess that was just kinda pushed on me. Teachers will tell you like, this is fun and going back to I like fun things to do, so this is fun. It got my attention. It all depends on how it is taught to you, if it's made fun, interaction. A lot of people don't want to be in a class that's taking
notes. They want to interact, to move around. Most of the classes here have that in them. They make things fun for you. You actually do group work. People like to talk. We’re social humans. Social animals. We like to talk. Class is based on you going around, asking questions talking, and that’s what made it fun.

One of the teachers that played a role in Max Powers’ academic success was a history teacher that he had prior to his senior year. Max Powers noted that Mr. P. taught the class in a “fun way”. Mr. P. played his guitar during class and Max shared that he liked this interactive approach.

I would say that Mr. P. for World History II was really interactive and stuff and he would play his guitar and sing and stuff. And he taught the class in a fun way and made learning better. Yeah, he was a pretty cool guy and he was also one of my track coaches for track the year that I did track.

Noir credited his academic success to past and present teachers at High School A. He spoke about teachers earlier on in our discussion that helped him in his classes by providing him with after school support and in-class opportunities to ask questions. Ms. T, his algebra II teacher and Mr. X., Noir’s chemistry teacher were two examples of teachers who supported his academic success.

And you know, people in the school also want to help me. Ms. Q., she works here. Her office is in the library, but she helps me out a lot. She’s been to my church and we’ve known each other for a long time. So she helps me out when there’s senior stuff coming up like, you know, remember I told you to turn this in or remember you gotta do that. .. oh, definitely, a lot of teachers helped me on my way. She isn’t there anymore, but Ms. G. helped me out and you know, my first
photo class because I didn’t do well in there. I was just like, ahhh. And she’s like, you know, you’ve gotta do this and this.

Scott was very concise in sharing what factors contributed to his academic success. Scott noted that parental involvement and teacher support were the main factors impacting his success. Scott noted that his anatomy teacher, Mr. A., and his math analysis teacher, Mr. F contributed to his academic success. Scott described both of these gentlemen as “cool, interesting, good teachers”.

Just the people that are around me like my mom and my teachers and stuff like that. It’s just like with some teachers. It’s just like their attitude that helps you to reciprocate the same type of learning toward, like they really care about their own subject and that makes you care about the subject as well.

Evan’s teacher support was seen in his description of one of the teachers in his high school as a role model. Mr. W. is an African American male teacher at High School B. He attended Hampton University which is the college that Evan now attends.

Yes, well actually I met a teacher this year, Mr. W., he’s a government teacher and he’s new and he goes to Hampton and I’m going to Hampton in the fall. And I saw that he went to Hampton and I saw how polished he was when he came to teach our class. And he seemed like a good person to look up to so I look up to him just because he has a good way of presenting himself. Things like he knows how to deal with kids even though they might disrespect him. He knows how to handle it without disrespecting the student.

The teachers that the study participants found to be supportive and contributors to their academic success created an atmosphere where these young men felt that they could
ask questions and get the help that they needed when they struggled. These teachers shared a passion for their subject matter that sparked an enthusiasm in these young men that ultimately lead them to want to do well in class so that they could reach their goal of going on to college. Supportive teachers also made learning fun and encouraged these young men to have fun with their learning. The interaction between 5 of the 6 of these students was described as a relationship. The relationships were perceived to be “friendships” and in one case “family” like.

The supportive teachers also implemented instructional strategies that encouraged these young men to work collaboratively with classmates and explore concepts in a manner that was relevant and interesting to them. Three of the study participants shared that they were given opportunities in the classrooms of supportive teachers to use their own technology to complete classwork and projects.

**Family support.** The theme of family support was another integral factor that all study participants noted as contributing to their academic success. Family support looked different for each of the young men. Batman lived with his aunt, two brothers and cousin. Batman’s cousin, Scott, was a study participant as well. Evan lived with his younger brother, mother and father. Hosea lived with his older brother and mother and spent a lot of time with his grandmother. Max Powers lived with his older sister, mother and father. Noir lived with his grandmother and interacted with his father over the phone and through email. He also had an older brother and spent time with extended family members that included his aunts. Noir’s mother died when he was in third grade.

Each of the participants talked about their family members supporting their extracurricular activities as well as their academic endeavors. Batman shared that his
aunt had an accountant background and he sought her out for help with his math. He also
shared earlier in our discussion that his aunt attended his sporting events. Batman’s aunt
also checked in with him concerning his grades. Batman described his aunt as very
“strict”. He also considered her to be a “mother figure”. It is noted that Batman did not
speak about this biological mother and father and the researcher did not feel that it was
appropriate to inquire as to why he lived with his aunt.

If I, for instance, my aunt, she has an accountant background. I ask her
information on that. Like if it’s math or anything like that, I ask her… she takes
care of me. She’s the mother role. Yea. She’s very, very strict. Very, she’s very
stern.

Batman’s aunt is Scott’s mother. Scott spoke briefly about his mother’s support.
He noted that his mother was involved and was a big part of his life. Scott shared that he
knew that his mother wanted him to be successful and she encouraged him to study.
Scott briefly mentioned that his grandmother also supported him but she passed away.

When asked if he worked or studied with his cousin, Batman, Scott replied, “no, not
really”.

We (Scott and his mother) just talk a lot, like she motivates me and stuff like that.
Like my grades and my future, college and stuff. My grandmom used to be but
she passed away a couple of years ago.

Evan spoke about the support that his parents gave him throughout the discussion.
He spoke about his mother staying in touch with his teachers and also supporting him in
his extracurricular activities. He also acknowledged that his father was supportive. Evan
shared earlier that he tried to ensure that his dad did not have to get involved in his
academics as his dad was tough. He preferred that his mother handle any situations that arose academically. Evan credited his parents with creating positive programming and opportunities for him.

And just having positive things like my parents. They put me in all these organizations just because they knew that I didn’t need any negative stuff and to surround me with everything positive. All that can do is good for you. So I think that’s the reason why I think.

Hosea frequently spoke about the support that he got from his mother and grandmother and the impact that it had on him academically. Hosea’s perception was that success started at home. His mother and grandmother did not go easy on him when he brought home a report card with Cs at an early age. This expectation encouraged him to want to do well as he grew older. Hosea came from a family that supported education and this was evident in the number of family members that attended college. Hosea shared those details when talking about academic support and resources earlier in this chapter.

Okay well, uum I would say it started at home. Like I said with my grandma and my mom and they would if I did badly; then they wouldn’t make it easy. So if I had like Cs they just weren’t really cool but with harder classes they realized that things were harder like math. It’s hard to get for me. But uuh it starts there and starts with uum you just don’t want to bring home bad grades so I try harder.

Noir mentioned his family (grandma, aunts, father, and older brother) several times throughout the interview. He continued to credit his family with supporting him and doing any and everything that they could to ensure that he was successful. He knew
that his grandmother worked hard to provide for him and he wanted to do what he could
to make things easier for her. It was more than evident that he loved them and was
thankful to have them as a support.

And my parents, of course. They’re always helping me. My family, everyone
always offers their spine to help me out. I definitely feel the love there... like my
grandma had to work days in and days out, striving for what she had and here we
can get anything on our cell phones and stuff like that. Sometimes I feel like
maybe I should have done some of that. Carry off the burden too. I know she
works hard and stuff like that. So I try to ease her burden at home by doing some
of the cleaning and stuff like that.

When directly asked about the factors that contribute to his academic success,
Max Powers did not specifically mention the support that he received from his parents.
He shared earlier that his parents supported him with his MMA endeavors. He also
shared that early on his school experience, his parents utilized EdLine to monitor his
progress, but as he got older they expected him to self-monitor which he preferred.

While each of the study participants had different family make-ups, they each
were supported in their academic and extracurricular endeavors by various family
members. The support was also implemented in a variety of ways which included face-to-
face interactions as well as phone calls. All of the young men were held accountable for
their grades by family members asking what was going on and inquiring as to whether
the study participants needed help (i.e. tutors, more rest, more study time, conferences
with teachers) when grades were low. Grades were monitored by family through the use
of EdLine which is a software that alerts parents to grades being posted so that they have
access to their student's academic transcript. These parents and guardians placed an expectation on these young men to do well and pass classes. Family members like the supportive teachers of these young men encouraged them to be successful academically and made themselves available to these young men as a resource.

**Peer support.** The theme of peer support was mentioned by Batman, Hosea, Noir, and Scott. Peer support was evident in the form of study groups and direct encouragement and assistance. The young men would often seek out the input or support of peers that they perceived better understood a concept with which they struggled.

Batman shared earlier when asked about resources that he utilized to support his academic efforts that he participated in study groups. Batman also spoke about seeking out people that he described as being "bright and gifted" in the subject area where he had difficulty understanding a concept. One of the individuals that he sought out when he needed help was his cousin, Scott. Batman described his cousin as "very smart". Interestingly enough, Scott noted that he did not work with or study with Batman.

Hosea spoke about specific friends that he relied on for encouragement and assistance. Hosea admired his peers and he was inspired to want to do better by his friends. Hosea's friend JH is a member of the national honor society. Hosea was impressed with JH being selected as senior on the month which resulted in JH's senior picture being placed on the wall were the student body could see it. JH encouraged Hosea to work harder and study more. Hosea considered having smart friends to be a factor that impacted his academic success. He spoke of another peer, HK who kept him on track by pointing out to him that it was not the time to slack.
And then JH is a really good student and he’s in the National Honor Society. And he’s on the wall for senior of the month. And he’s my best friend and I hang out with him. So he’s like a lot of times; when I’m like I don’t know how I did on that, he’s like well then you need to study more. Then and so he’s a really good influence. And he’s on of those kind of friends that keeps on track. Let’s see, I have smart friends that you can kind of like compare yourself to. It makes it harder to slack off because. I mean sometimes you want to slack… HK, she’s a very go get it kind of person. She will tell me don’t slack. It’s not that time to because you will regret it later.

Noir also shared how his friends played a role in his academic success. They supported him in several classes and in his overall experiences. The classroom observation also was evidence of the supportive interactions that Noir had with his friends.

I’m going to say my friends; they really have been supportive of me, you know. They’ve been supportive in my art, they’ve been supportive in whatever, I’m doing in school you know… and also my friends, M.L., she helped me out too. K., helped me out… K. is really smart and she is one of my friends. She’s helped me out a lot in that class (algebra II)... I was trying to study on my own. I was finding it a little bit more difficult the way I was doing it. She found my problem. Like we’ve been friends for a long time… B.W., yes I have a long list. S. H. helped me out in Mandarin Chinese. That was last year though.

Scott like Batman participated in a study group with some of his classmates from anatomy. He noted that he worked with his peers “sometimes” and that anatomy was the
only class where he utilized this strategy. He shared this information when asked about
the resources that he utilized to support his academic efforts but did not specifically
mention peers as a factor that contributed to his academic success.

The support that these young men received from their peers was positive in nature.
It was not a form of peer pressure in the sense that the study participants were being
coerced into doing something that they did not want to do by their friends. The peers of
the study participants encouraged them to do well by encouraging them along the way to
do better and by working collaboratively in study groups in a few cases. In some cases,
the peers were sought out by the study participants specifically because they were
perceived by the student as having a better understanding of concepts that the student
found to be challenging. These young men surrounded themselves with peers who had
similar goals and perceptions of doing well academically.

**Mentor.** Evan differed from the other study participants as he was the only
participant to talk about having a mentor. He like Noir had support from members of
their church. Hosea also shared that one of his English teachers was a member of his
church though he did not directly link that commonality with his teacher to his success.
Evan perceived one of the ministers from a church that he previously attended as a
mentor. Reverend C. is an African American male who has known Evan since his middle
school years. Evan credited Reverend C. as the individual who set the foundation for
building his confidence. Reverend C. helped Evan to realize that being a good athlete
was not the only way for an individual to excel.

Yeah, well at my old church, his daughter goes to school here but Reverend C.; he
would always, he was kind of a mentor for me when I was in middle school. And
he kind of set the foundation for having confidence because I used to be like I used to not have any confidence in myself or whatever. I couldn’t, I used to feel like I couldn’t do anything because I wasn’t good at sports or whatever and he said you know if you don’t excel here you can excel here because it is twice as important. So he set that foundation for me to have the mindset that I do so.

Evan noted that there were two other people in addition to Mr. B. that he defined as his role models. The individuals were older male cousins who were college students at the University of Virginia (UVA) and George Mason University (GMU). Evan esteemed each of these individuals.

Well, my cousins. My cousins attended UVA and George Mason and I always thought, I always looked up to them as they were successful and they continue to stay disciplined and they didn’t have any side tracks or anything. So I always looked up to them and I didn’t feel like I had to meet that same, I guess set bar. But I always felt like I should try my best to be like them because they are good role models.

While only one student directly spoke of having a mentor whom he felt contributed to his success, all of these young men spoke about teachers that they looked up to and went to for help for a variety of reasons. The young men highlighted many of their male teachers when talking about their successful academic experiences. They frequently spoke about how “cool” these teachers were and the fact that they could talk to them about anything. Hosea spoke about a mentor type of relationship with Ms. J. Ms. J. had gone through a college program that would be very similar to what Hosea would
complete and worked in the field that Hosea was pursuing. He found her to be very helpful as he made plans for completing a nursing program.

Mentors played a role in the academic success of the study participants. They were teachers, outside community members and family members. Mentors encouraged these young men to be successful by serving as an example of being successful through their accomplishments. In Evan’s case he witnessed the success of two of his male cousins who attended college. Their discipline and the way that they carried themselves served as an example for Evan. The discussions with study participants about their teachers also shed light into mentor like relationships. Five of the six study participants spoke about teachers that they could talk to about any topic and who had already accomplished many of the things that they hoped to accomplish such as earning a degree from college.

Research Question Two: What factors do high school African American males perceive as obstacles in being successful academically? How are these obstacles addressed?

Each of the study participants were faced with challenges that included having difficulty with reading comprehensions and writing, comprehending chemistry and math concepts, fear of public speaking, and ensuring success in order to avoid poverty in the future. These young men were successful academically because they were able to recognize challenging situations and find solutions and resources to aid them in working through the difficulty in order to move closer to achieving their goal. In each of the cases presented in this study, these young men wanted to graduate from high school and further their educational career at the collegiate level. All of the participants planned to attend college and pursue careers in their areas of interest. At the time of the study, Noir was
the only participant who was still in the process of finalizing his college plans. All of the other participants had been accepted into four year institutions.

The challenges with academics that Batman faced and worked through during his high school years were evident in how he handled working through English class which he labeled as his least favorite and lowest grade class. Batman shared that he looked at his teacher's feedback and then took more time with his remaining written assignments. He was clear that he did not like to write and had difficulty with writing throughout school. Batman also shared that he had difficulty comprehending material and required more time to understand read material. His discussion about Biology, a time when he felt successful, also included insight into working through the obstacle of improving his grade.

Anytime you go into a science class the straight information being thrown at you at one time. You can't even comprehend. You're not even ready. Just come in there blank minded already because I came in there (biology class) and he lost me five seconds into him talking. He let you know it's going to be a lot of information. You're going to go home with a lot of information. At first, of course in the beginning because you're not used to it. It's been like a whole couple of months before you've been out of school. You're not prepared. So your first quarter grade should be your lowest. That's how I look at it. Came in there with a C and I'm like what can I do to improve this. Study a little bit more, ask some questions during class.

Evan's obstacles included overcoming his fear of public speaking. He also worked through his difficulty in physics class which included feeling uncomfortable due
to the lack of racial sensitivity displayed by his classmates. He overcame his fear of public speaking in AP Euro by ensuring that he was prepared for a presentation.

Well, I knew that I was afraid of public speaking before I had some of my classes like AP Euro. I had to give a presentation and I was scared to death to do it but I had come prepared and I just learned to continuously talk in front of people time and time again. And now I still get a little nervous but I can do it and still be able to get my point across. So I feel like that’s an area that I have grown in since I came to high school.

Evan shared that he utilized peers who understood concepts as a means of working through his issues in physics. He also worked to independently gain understanding because he recognized that he may not always have the resource of going to someone else for support.

I go to someone who is doing well in the class and see what they are doing because I need to see what I’m doing differently you know. For minor things really I’m one of those people that has to get it myself to be able to keep doing it. I can’t keep going back to somebody to rely on them for everything. So I want to be more independent I guess.

Hosea shared his approach to overcoming academic challenges when discussing how he handled himself in math analysis which he defined as his least favorite and lowest grade class. Hosea shared earlier that it was not the teacher but his struggles with the subject of math. Hosea worked through this issue by asking his teacher questions. While he did ask questions in class, Hosea was conscious about the number of questions that he asked because he did not want to hold up the rest of the class. He utilized his book and a
classmate to bring clarification to information that was not clear to him. He decided that the best approach to take when dealing with homework was to look at the material and not give up if he still did not initially understand what he was being asked to complete. Well I'm making sure that if I don't get something, I'm looking at it. And like if I get homework and I go home and I don't get it then, I don't put it away. I just keep looking at it until I realize that something or I look back in the book. And I really just have to teach myself it like a second time because really I think Coach F is a little too fast for me and I don't want to be like hey slow down, slow down and stop could you tell me this and like teach me. You know and let me hold up the whole class. So when I get home then I can take my textbook and do problems and look back at it for myself and reteach what I learned that day usually and then I'll get it....I'm definitely comfortable asking him (Coach F) questions. Like any questions that I'll ask he can answer well. But I just feel like I have a lot of questions because I'm not great at it. Well S., he's in that class with me and we usually sit next to each other and I ask the people around me so that I'm not holding up the class.

Max's approach to handling academic challenges was motivated by the fact that he did not want to be poor. Max also did not like to have failing grades because he felt that he could do better if he applied himself to his work. He wanted to have nice things. He also wanted to be able to take care of the family he planned to have in the future. Max's dedication to improvement was evident in his discussion about his plan to improve his grade in his evolution of cinema class.
I don’t want to be poor. I want to be somewhat successful and I don’t want to have to repeat any of the grades. I think it’s internal (motivation). No, I think it’s more self-motivated. I like nice things. Yeah, and I like to look ahead. I’m going to have a family one day eventually.

Max also had a plan to improve his grade in his evolution of cinema class.

Yeah, I’m trying to do an extra credit thing which we have to go see a movie and bring back the ticket and write a summary of the movie. I don’t like looking at the F on my report card. It makes me feel like I’ve done something wrong and I’m being unsuccessful. I don’t like not being at my full potential. I started out with an A and I had a B for a while and then it just went downhill.

Noir shared his approach to overcoming obstacles when discussing how he handled himself in chemistry. He also later shared insight into overcoming some of the obstacles that he dealt with in life in general. He lived with his grandmother because his mother died when he was in third grade. Noir’s philosophy was one of you are in control of your life so do not let anything get in your way. You decide whether you are going to use your problems as an excuse or do something about it. He did not have a lot of respect for people who always tried to place the blame for their failures on other people.

I’ve tried doing more and more homework because not doing homework wouldn’t help me. So, you know, I wasn’t completely giving up on myself. I’m always believing that if you’re going to go down you might as well go down fighting. Well, in better context for chemistry, I’m going down kicking and screaming. Like I want to do a study group but most of my friends live a long way and it’s
like, oh. Well I don’t really have a car I wish I did so I could just go, hey, could you help me with chemistry.

Noir talked about not being a victim.

I just get tired of when they act like the victim all the time. It’s just me. I’m tired of when they always act like the victim. You don’t know how my life’s been.

Well change it then. And then people ask me, well, change is not that easy. I’ve done it myself. When I was nine, uh eight years old, yea, my mom died. I was a pretty gloomy kid. Look at me now. I’m still happy that I’m still alive because she tried everything for me and I’m not going to give up on that chance just because she’s gone... you know I always kept doing bad in school. I kept blaming it because I kept running away from it. I kept saying, “my mom died and I’m still feeling sad”. And it wasn’t any of those things. It was me, myself. And I feel bad because I was blaming it on what happened in the past. But I can’t blame it on her anymore. Ok. It’s time to grow up as they say. You’ve got to take things on your own shoulders now... the only thing that is holding us back is ourselves. It’s not the school, it’s not our parents, it’s ourselves. If you have enough guts to tell that to yourself, I guarantee you, that person’s going to do better because it’s yourself. It’s not anything else. You’re the one picking up that i-Pod 24/7 and listening to and doing whatever. You’re the one hurting someone else. You’re the one doing this. It’s not anyone else’s fault. It’s yours.

Scott did not go into detail about what he did to overcome obstacles. Scott’s difficulty with math analysis was similar to Hosea’s. It was noted that they were in the same math analysis class. He did briefly address what he did to improve his grade in
math analysis. Scott tells himself that his grades are important and that it is a big deal. He also shared that he tries harder but does most of these things independent of any support from anyone. Scott did share that he did not hesitate to ask his teachers for help if needed.

I just tell myself that it’s a big deal; like my grades are important... I try harder, but I do a lot of stuff by myself though. I know when to ask for help.

There is a level of internal motivation indicated here by the young men in this study. They did not allow their challenges to keep them from being successful. They were in tune with the subject matter that gave them the most difficulty but they did not shy away from the subject matter because of their issues. They developed and implemented plans to address their difficulties and were successful in making improvements. These young men wanted to do well and made it clear that it was important to them to be successful. They wanted to go to college and pursue careers. They did not as Max Powers explained want to be “poor” or “victims” as expressed by Noir.
Research Question Three: How do high school African American males describe their educational experiences?

The study participants’ description of their high school experiences ranged from Noir’s description of “the greatest time in his life” to Max Powers’ description of “a roller coaster ride”. The focus was on the academic successes they experienced as well as their participation in extracurricular activities in which they participated.

Batman enthusiastically talked about his overall high school experience. He noted that while there were times that produced stress he had a good experience. Batman shared that he worked his stress out through his extracurricular activities that included participating in sports. He also talked about a time that he felt he did well in high school which involved being successful in Biology class. When he shared this event, his smile became wider and his voice went to a higher pitch. He made a fist with one hand and pounded it into his other hand while he talked.

A good experience. Extracurricular. Getting involved in clubs; doing track you meet a lot of people. Physically fit. Sometimes school is stressful and you know one way to kill the stress is to stay physically fit. You want to work out and relieve stress. So I did basketball, I did football, I did track.

Ok, let’s see. I’ll never forget Mr. D. Oh, let’s go. Biology. 10th grade year. I came in there first quarter got that nice C and I was pretty low. And I was like, alright. And next quarter, got my B so I was like ok, keep working, keep working… I did get an A in there but my final grade was a B and that was Biology with Mr. D.
Evan described his high school experience as “dynamic”. He shared insight into who he was when he first came to high school and how he changed. He credited his peers and teachers with being a part of his growth process.

It was dynamic. I had, like I came in a little timid and now I feel like since I’ve had all these experiences with people and students and teachers and adapted to their teaching styles; I feel like I’m ready to do whatever college has to offer me.

Evan shared a time during his freshman year as a time that he felt that he did well. Evan described himself as being “timid” and noted that he was so focused on grades that he did not initially take notice of the other things that high school had to offer.

I say it was my freshman year because I came in and I thought it would be really hard trying to get used to high school and I just found that every class that I was taking it seemed a little too easy and you know I had to learn that I had to work. But I one time, I didn’t, I guess I wasn’t introduced to everything else in high school and all I was focused on was grades and I was doing really well then.

Hosea described his high school experience in terms of academic and social successes. The academic highlight of his high school experience took place during his junior year when he was a member of the safety counsel. He shared that he had an opportunity during the spring to participate in an awareness training geared toward not drinking and driving. His non-academic highlight was being selected for the lead role in the school musical.

I really can’t think of like a really great moment. Okay, there were like 2 things that happened last year. We had safety counsel and there were 2 people from every grade. And ET and I were chosen for the juniors. So we had fairs where
we would teach about Uum you know like drunk driving, like how it’s not worth it
and stuff like that. And how you can try and cheat the system... like there were
times when all the juniors and seniors came and watched the fairs and uum I just
felt like they kind of made a difference. Like it was around this time last year
where we drove the go-carts that had like a drunk button... and like this year
getting the lead in the play and like it was a romance. And it was a
lot of acting and a lot of singing. And once I got all the stuff down and
memorized all my lines and it felt like a really big accomplishment. Then I put it
out there for people to see and it was just very fun working hard for something
and seeing it do very well.

He went on to say that he felt that his high school experience was good one though it felt
like it went by fast. Hosea acknowledged that there were times throughout his senior
year when he had “senioritis”. He went through ups and downs and experienced changes
socially outside of school which he did not go into detail about during the interview.

It was a good one and it feels like it went really fast. Like the whole way through
I could feel it going fast but now it’s like oh one month and we’re done. It’s like
seriously was going as fast as I thought it was. So uuh, it’s had ups and downs
and academically stayed the same all the way through. Maybe a little senioritis
this year but. It’s been academically pretty steady. And then outside of school
it’s just been a lot of changes. Like friends and social life and different drama.
But then looking back at it, it didn’t really change anything in school and it was a
good experience. You learn a lot about yourself and I’m ready for college. Yeah,
School B is a good school.
Noir summed up his high school experience as the “greatest time” in his life.

Noir described his high school experience in terms of the classes that he enjoyed the most. He talked about several of his classes that were geared towards art. Noir was proud of the opportunities that he had to meet new people and impact negative environments by bringing something positive to the situation.

If somebody had to sum up my high school experience, I’m just gonna say, I had the greatest time ever in my life. I mean it won’t happen again. But I’m just saying it was one of the greatest experiences in my life. Meeting new people, you know, talking to people that I thought wouldn’t like me. Now they are like, Noir, what’s up? and stuff like that. And it’s like see, it’s not that hard... basically, if there’s a negative environment, I can turn it into a positive.

Noir shared classes where he did well.

Where do I begin? First, there was Photo II. I was doing well in there, tests and all. Photos and all. Art class, of course, I was doing excellent in there... and when I was in art class, that was just free range for me, I mean and one of the things I was happy with, why I love this art class so much cause Ms. L. helped. It’s not only that she helped me with drawing and improving, she also made me find out other art skills. I had unique and you know, I put those in the projects.

Max Powers described his high school experience as a roller coaster ride. He did not take school seriously during his freshman and sophomore years and got himself into trouble. Max noted that the people he was hanging around with were an influence on him but that he and his friends had matured. Max considered some of the things he did as “stupid” but felt that he did not do anything that was considered “serious”. Max shared
an incident that took place during his sophomore year which involved dancing on the café tables.

It’s been like a roller coaster for high school for me. I didn’t like my few years when I was really bad. I’m starting to turn around now and I was hanging out with some friends who had some negative effects on me. Yeah, we’re still friends but they kind of matured a lot too. Like for instance with Mr. E. there was a student in that class, M. and we both liked to mess with Mr. E. a lot too. He was one of the reasons why I had a lot of fun in high school I guess. We used to always act crazy especially in the café. Freshman year wasn’t so bad, but my sophomore year was; I did some stupid things. Well one day at lunch I stood up on the table and was dancing on the table. So I got written up for that and got detention for that. I never did anything serious. Like I wasn’t smoking in the bathroom or anything like that.

Scott was very concise when he spoke about his high school experience. He shared that his experience was “pretty good” and added that nothing “bad” happened during his time in high school. When asked to describe what he meant by nothing “bad” happened, Scott was not able to give more detail and stated he did not really know what he meant by the statement.

Pretty good; I can’t really complain. Just nothing really bad happened I guess. I’m not really sure. I’ve not really seen like bad things happen. I don’t know.

The high school experience for these young men was a positive one in which they felt that they had fun and learned a lot from their teachers. The study participants do acknowledge that there were difficult or challenging times but they were able to
overcome those. Evan shared how he grew from the time that he was a freshman to his senior year. He gained the skills that he needed to go onto college and felt that he was prepared to be successful at the next level. Each of these young men took on class schedules that included rigorous courses while also involving themselves in extracurricular activities that included sports and clubs. They were able to maintain their grades while balancing their academics and extracurricular activities. When they encountered challenges with courses, they sought out teachers, parents or peers to assist them in order to improve their performance. The idea of not allowing past mistakes impact future actions was brought up by Max Powers. Max noted that he made “stupid” decisions early on in his high school experience but learned from his mistakes and matured in the way that he handled himself.

Summary

The six African American male seniors in this study spoke to the factors that they perceived as contributing to their academic success in terms of the support that they received from their teachers, parents and peers. These young men also demonstrated their success as they strategically addressed their academic areas of difficulty and did not give up on their goals to graduate and further their education by attending college. These young men took advantage of the opportunities that they were given to further themselves academically and socially by becoming members of sports teams as well as academic organizations and clubs.
Chapter 5- Discussion of Findings, Implications, and Conclusions

The predicament of African American male students in the K-12 educational system has and continues to be a concern for parents, educators, administrators and local, state and federal government officials. This student group continues to be the least likely to read on grade level, most likely to be suspended or expelled, more likely to be referred for special education services and more likely to drop out of high school (Christie, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Holzman, 2010, Jordan & Cooper, 2002, Noguera, 2003, Smith, 2005). These concerns have intensified as evident in the No Child Left Behind Act and reauthorization focus on the achievement of specific student groups including African American students (NCLB, 2002). While the achievement gap between African American males and their white counterparts continues to exist, there are African American males who succeed academically. There is a need to gather more information through research to take a more in-depth look at the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male and how their individual identities shape their attitudes and beliefs about school and school behaviors (Carter, 2008).

Although previous studies have focused on the failure, obstacles, negative influences and explanations of factors that negatively impact the academic success of African American males (Christle, et., al., 2005; Gordon, et. al., 2009; Noguera, 2003; Osborne, 1999), this qualitative study sought to investigate the perceptions of high school African American male students concerning factors that contribute to their academic success. Such research will add to the body of research that focuses on African American
males who are successful and aid educational professionals in developing insight into how to support classroom teachers and administrators in their efforts to positively impact the academic progress of this student group. The current study provided a means for African American males to give voice to their perceptions of what they need to be successful academically.

**Summary of findings**

The objective of this qualitative study was to provide an opportunity for African American male students at the high school level to articulate their experiences and define the factors that contribute to their academic success. The goal of the study was to give voice to these young men in offering their perspective on factors that impacted their academic success. The literature suggested that even though an achievement gap continues to exist for African American students as a whole and less than 50% of African American males graduate from high school, factors can be implemented to provide support for these students to achieve academically (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Holzman, 2010; Monroe, 2005, Smith, 2005). The factors shown to support the academic achievement of African American males noted in the literature are parental support, mentor programs, teacher expectations, relationship building and culturally competent educators (Chretien, 2007; Kincaid, 2003; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Love & Kruger, 2005; Roderick, 2003; Ulenberg & Brown, 2002; Weinstein et. Al., 2003; Wimberly, 2002). This study extended previous research by interviewing academically successful males about what they perceived as factors that contributed to their academic success. The young men highlighted many of the supports noted in other studies (i.e. teachers, parents, peers) but also discussed the importance of education in meeting future goals.
More specifically, participating young men all mentioned support from teachers and peers as essential to their academic success. In addition, although all of the young men acknowledged challenges, they perceived education as important to achieving their short and long term goals.

**Support from teachers, parents and peers.** Participating African American students' noted that their academic success was positively impacted in environments that are relational and personal much like that which is provided by an extended family (Love & Kruger, 2005). Each of the study participants spoke about the positive impact that teachers, who showed a love and deep interest for their subject matter and sincere attitude for their students' progress, had on their academic efforts. Supportive teachers as described by study participants shared insight into their field by making themselves available to students for extra help or just as a person that the student could talk to about any topic. Love (2002) referred to this phenomenon as teachers interacting with students in a “parent-like” manner in which the expectation for the student to be responsible and take care of their responsibilities was made clear. The study participants preferred classes in which the teacher’s instructional approach was interactive and the teacher demonstrated a caring and approachable demeanor. The students favored the use of technology, opportunities to work in cooperative groups and to demonstrate an understanding of what they had learned through a project type of assessment.

Student participants noted that teachers they described as approachable shared information about who they were as a person and could easily be approached to talk about or answer any question that they were asked. Hosea described this interaction with his band teacher as a “family-type” relationship. Batman, Evan, Hosea, Noir and Scott
noted that this type of teacher support helped them to be more successful in classes that they perceived as challenging due to subject matter or a lack of interest. It was noted that several of the teachers that the African American male students preferred were men that they described as “young”. Only one of the male teachers was African American and he did not directly instruct any of the participants. Evan referred to that particular teacher as a role model and the teacher also attended the college that Evan planned to attend.

The relational and personal support in the learning environment for 5 of 6 the African American males in this study was also evident in their perception of the support they received from their families. Each of the participants spoke about their family members supporting their extracurricular activities and academic endeavors. When immediate or extended family members show support and interest by attending school functions, providing encouragement and support, and holding high expectations, African American males demonstrated a high level of success academically (Kincaid, 2003). All of the study participants were supported by their parents or guardians through discussions about their grades and academic performance and assistance with devising plans and providing resources such as tutors to make improvements. Each of the participants shared a time when they were encouraged to do their best or to do better by their parent or guardian.

Each of the young men shared instances when peers provided support. Participants formed study groups with peers, or informally asked for help from peers who appeared to grasp a concept that they were having difficulty with for help. In addition, participants noted instances when peers encouraged them to work harder to improve
grades. They even discussed holding each other accountable for getting assignments completed.

**Facing challenges to achieve goals.** The conceptual framework informing this study proposed that African American males who are academically successful identify with academics and acquire cultural capital in the form of knowledge through social mobility made available through education (Bourdieu, 1986; Gordon, et. al., 2009, Osborne, 1999). Bourdieu (1986) suggested that the knowledge obtained through social mobility was considered capital valuable for individuals identified as upper and middle class. While there was not an in-depth look into the socioeconomic background of the study participants, participants were asked about their participation in the free and reduced lunch program. Batman was the only one of the six participants who had participated in the free and reduced lunch program.

All of the study participants identified with the importance of doing well in their classes in order to have a successful future. Each of the young men had future plans that they were attempting to reach through education. All of the participants had plans to attend college and then to work in their field of interest. Five of the six had been accepted into an institution of higher learning and were planning to begin school in the fall of 2012. Each of these young men developed an approach to dealing with challenging situations (difficulty with reading comprehension and understanding of math concepts, difficulty with physics concepts, overcoming fear of public speaking) and they took personal responsibility for their situations and the problem solving aspect of correcting their challenge (forming study groups, working with teachers one-on-one, seeking out a peer that understood the concept, paying attention to teacher feedback).
These young men were focused on their goals and strategically worked to achieve them. This finding supported the concept that students who identify with academics are motivated to be successful (Gordon, et. al., 2009; Osborne, 1999). Max Powers summed this idea up well when he shared that he was self-motivated to pass his required classes because he did not want to be poor and knew that someday he would have a family and need to support them.

Success through opportunities. All of the study participants reported that they took advantage of the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities which included becoming a member of a sports team, the band and/or academic and social clubs and enrolling in AP or advanced classes. These young men participated fully in their high school experience. By taking advantage of these opportunities, these young men furthered themselves academically and socially. The young men described their high school experience as “dynamic”, “good”, “the greatest time in my life”, and a “roller coaster ride”. These students expressed a humble attitude in that there was an underlying feeling of thankfulness for the opportunities made available to them. The opportunities that were shared included: being a part of the school musical in the lead role, participating in extracurricular activities that included sports teams, as well as social and academic clubs, taking higher level courses such as AP psychology and learning to overcome fears through class presentations. These young men worked hard to achieve academically as evidenced by their grades, scores on the SOLs, and the attainment of their high school diploma. Five of the six participants earned an advanced studies certification indicating that they successfully completed 24 standard units of credits in the areas of English, math, history, laboratory science, world languages, health and physical
education and electives (YCSD, 2011). All of the African American male participants in this study graduated with their class in June 2012.

The two constructs used to frame the study where identity and cultural capital. In Chapter 1 of the study, the researcher noted that students who have a high identification with academics are motivated to perform academically because their self-esteem is tied to their academic success while those with low identification with academics are more likely to be detached from academic tasks (Gordon, et. Al., 2009; Osborne, 1999). The construct of cultural capital focused on the acquisition of education qualifications that one then uses to be socially mobile. Yosso (2005) suggested that people of color lack the knowledge that is gained through social mobility made available through education. The young men in the current study demonstrated a high identification with academics as evidenced in their success in the classroom. While all of the study participants graduated with the class of 2012, five of the six of the study participants graduated with an advanced diploma, grade point averages ranged from 3.8 to 2.75 and all of the study participants met the criteria for passing the required number of Standards of Learning assessments (SOLs) in order to graduate.

All of the study participants acquired education qualifications that made them eligible to attend college in order to pursue the career fields of their choice. At the time of the study, only one participant had not completed the application process and been accepted into the college to which he applied. This group of young men defy Yosso’s notion that people of color lack the knowledge gained through social mobility which is made available through education. They were academically successful to the point that they expressed excitement about being asked to participate in the current study. These
young men were made aware that the purpose of the study was to give a voice to African American males in an effort to increase the academic success of this student group. They each enthusiastically agreed to be a part of the study and were dedicated to the tasks they were asked to complete during the study while preparing for final examinations, advanced placement tests, SOLs and participating in extracurricular activities.

**Implications for teachers**

The findings from this study have implications for teachers, school leaders and future research. The lack of academic achievement for African American males is heavily documented in the literature (Davis, 2003; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Holzman, 2010; Monroe, 2005; Smith, 2005). This lack of achievement casts a shadow on members of this marginalized group that have been successful in the classroom. The African American male high school students in this study were given a voice to bring understanding to factors that contribute to academic success and assist educational professionals in gaining insight into how to utilize socio-cultural contexts in which this student group learns in order to better meet these academic needs (Carter, 2008).

Kafele (2009) suggests that in order for educational professionals to meet the needs of African American males in the classroom in a manner that encourages academic success, several areas need to be explored to determine if a professional understands their specific needs. These areas include asking oneself what you know about the student’s need for inspiration, goals and aspirations, and challenges, obstacles and distractions (Kafele, 2009).

**Need for inspiration.** An inspiring teacher sets out to build strong relationships with their students (Kafele, 2009). Students sense how a teacher feels through the
teacher’s words and actions. An inspiring teacher demonstrates genuine interest in individual students by providing encouragement, asking questions, listening to needs and concerns, and offering feedback and suggestions. Kafele (2009) also noted that in addition to building relationships, these teachers ensured that learning was fun, stimulating and engaging. The teacher has to bring a degree of enthusiasm, energy and passion to the subject matter in order to ensure academic success for African American males (Kafele, 2009). All of the participants in the current study noted that their teachers played a major role in their academic success. The students shared that they were inspired by the passion that their teachers showed for their subject matter and emphasized being able to talk to and approach the teachers that they saw as supportive about any topic. Study participants also noted that they felt comfortable going to their teachers for help when they found concepts or specific subjects to be challenging.

**Goals and aspirations.** It is important to have an idea about the goals that African American male students have set for themselves, as well as know what they aspire to do with their lives (Kafele, 2009). This information can be ascertained by asking questions that include: “What are your goals? Do you have concrete academic goals? What do you want to do with your life beyond high school? How much of a commitment are you willing to invest in yourself?” (Kafele, 2009, pp. 13-14). The role of the educator is to assist students in setting goals, developing a plan to reach the goals, and holding them accountable for reaching the goal throughout their school career (Kafele, 2009). Kafele noted that the idea of going to college needs to be instilled during the elementary years for African American males and they need to be exposed to educational professionals who will continuously instill this value in them. The premise
behind having an understanding of the goals and aspirations of these students is to utilize the information to motivate them to succeed. This process is made easier when one has a clear understanding of where they want to go and what they want to do with their lives early on the educational process (Kafele, 2009).

All six of the African American male participants in the current study set goals to be successful in their academic endeavors. They devised and implemented plans when they struggled in classes in order to improve their grades. Five of the participants had already been accepted into a four year institution and the remaining young man was in the process of applying to a college that he was hoping to attend. These young men clearly set goals and then worked to reach their goals with the support of teachers, parents/guardians and peers. They also had aspirations as far as the career field that they planned to work in after college. The career choices included certified public accountant, nurse, music teacher and professional musician, and game designer.

**Challenges, obstacles and distractions.** Many of the challenges that African American males face are unknown and misunderstood by educators. One such challenge for many African American males is the ability to let down their guard and demonstrate how intelligent they are (Kafele, 2009). This construct was discussed in the literature review when looking at Steele’s (1997) stereotype threat. This student group often operates from the perception that it is not “cool” to be smart or it is thought of as “acting white” (Kafele, 2009, p. 18). Kafele (2009) opined that we must do whatever is necessary to expose these young men to positive black male role models. It is important that African American males are made aware that black men have “played prominent roles and made significant accomplishments in all walks of life, well beyond the worlds
of sports and entertainment” (Kafele, 2009, p. 20). It is also important that professionals make an effort to be cognizant of these possible unique challenges in order to provide the appropriate support for these young men. This support may be provided by working with these young men to focus on their goals and aspirations. The support may look like face-to-face interactions during which the student is required to provide evidence that they are working towards their goal. The support may also come through a venue in which the students are taken on field trips to college campuses or businesses and given the opportunity to interact with successful African American males on a consistent basis.

While the young men in the current study where able to independently ascertain their challenges, obstacles and distractions, they looked to individuals around them to support their efforts in working through their adversities. The study participants were not pulled in or distracted by students who caused disruptions in class. This particular group of young men defied the stereotype threat because they were not afraid to be seen as successful or smart. They surrounded themselves with people who set similar goals. The study participants also expected their teachers to set high expectations for them and did not appreciate teachers who dumbed down classes so that they could just make a passing grade. These young men welcomed meaningful and engaging learning experiences in their classes.

**Implications for school leaders**

The purpose of this study was to give a voice to African American male high school students in an effort to have them provide insight to educational professionals concerning the factors that lead to their academic success. The results of this study provide valuable insight into the factors that contribute to the academic success of
African American males for school leaders. School leaders must participate in and provide professional development opportunities for teachers and other educational professionals such as guidance counselors to gain an understanding concerning the information that they should focus on obtaining from these young men to inform teachers’ instructional practices but also to provide support to this student group as they plan for their future. There needs to be a focus on providing rigorous learning opportunities for these young men by enrolling them in advanced courses and courses that are of high interest to them. These efforts should also focus on removing barriers such as scheduling issues in an effort to ensure that the students have access to these courses. School leaders can monitor this process by working with school guidance counselors and parents to encourage students to enroll in and ensure that resources and support structures are in place to assist the student in their academic endeavors.

Providing support for African American males at the elementary level is key (Kafele, 2009). Exposing these young men to information that draws their attention to attending college and pursuing careers that are of interest to them on a consistent basis and at an early age helps to create a motivation to succeed for these young men (Kafele, 2009).

School leaders must work with guidance counselors, other school personnel, parents and community organizations to recruit positive male role models and mentors to work with students African American male students beginning at the elementary level. Programs, such as BEMI, that utilized role models to meet with students on a consistent basis and also collaborate with parents and school personnel to develop and share common goals were found to increase African American males' identification with academics (Gordon, et. al., 2009). The development and implementation of mentor
programs is a strategy that can be utilized to support and monitor the efforts of these young men as they work to reach their goals and move towards their aspirations. Mentors would also serve as accountability partners for these young men by assisting these students with checking grades, evaluating their progress towards goals and assisting them in making changes to plans as needed. The school leader’s role in organizing these mentor programs would be to reach out to teachers, parents, and community members to serve as mentors and provide resources to include meeting places and training for the mentors. The young men in the current study all shared that they had teachers, peers, and community members that worked with them to support their efforts in areas where they faced challenges. Teachers that were highlighted in the study also provided an avenue for the study participants to talk through issues that they faced by providing a listening ear. The young men in the study were supported by their parents and/or guardians in their academic efforts by monitoring grades and in their extracurricular activities by cheering for them or just being there to let them know they were supported.

Educational professionals must also be afforded opportunities to work with the families of these students in non-traditional ways. Traditional parental involvement, which involves the parent coming to the school for conferences or to volunteer in the student’s classroom, may not happen for various reasons that may be culturally driven rather than a blatant lack of parental concern (Kafele, 2009; Weinstein et. al., 2003). Support to address these issues and gain understanding of cultures that differ from that of school personnel are essential in assisting teachers with acknowledging and accepting the unique needs that this group of young men.
The implications for school leaders, as the call to increase the academic achievement of African American males moves forward, requires school leaders to operate effectively and efficiently in the role of instructional leader (Kafele, 2009). In this role, school leaders must effectively and consistently communicate the vision and mission of the school to the faculty and staff, students, parents and community in an effort to move the learning community toward the overall goal of teaching all students. Efforts to educate teachers must continue within the school setting to provide educators with insight into how to work with diverse student groups to better meet their educational needs. The educational system links failure and socioeconomic status, failure and cultural difference, and failure and single-parent households. This makes it difficult to look past the deficits to identify a student’s strengths. “Not knowing students’ strengths leads to our ‘teaching down’ to children from communities that are culturally different from that of the teachers in the school” (Delpit, 2002, p. 167). Although educators continue to identify contributors to the gaps that exist between minority and non-minority students in discipline and achievement, there needs to be an increased emphasis on implementation of strategies and practices to address these issues that plague our schools.

Instructional leaders must lead by example by prioritizing student achievement and improvement in instruction for all students. This measure calls for school leaders to be more visible in classrooms and protecting the instructional time by limiting interruptions to the school day. Instructional leaders also must look for ways to motivate and keep the staff and student body excited about learning (Kafele, 2009).
Recommendations for Further Study

The current study focused on the perceptions of six African American high school students about the factors that contributed to their academic success. Further research is needed to address the perceptions of African American male students at the elementary and middle school levels concerning these factors. The perceptions of such student groups, along with those of teachers, parents and other stakeholders, would also provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of academic success for this marginalized student group. The literature should also be extended and provide deeper understanding by giving voice to successful African American female students. This information could be compared and contrasted with that of African American males to provide more insight into instructional practices that lead to achievement and academic progress for both student groups. The sample size in the current study was small and limited to a small suburban area. There is a need to increase the sample size in future studies to investigate a broader sample of successful African American males.

While the construct of race was investigated to some extent in the literature review when considering areas of disparity that lead to the achievement gap, there was no investigation into how race impacted the success of the study participants. Therefore, further research in the area of the role that race plays into the phenomenon of academic success for African American male students in the K-12 setting is needed from the perspectives of the students and teachers.

Finally, the current study took place of a time period that focused on the senior year of the students. Further research needs to be conducted to follow a group of African American males through their entire K-12 experience to look at trends and patterns that
might emerge as students were observed and interviewed to gain insight into factors that contributed to their successes, their approaches to overcome challenges, and the opportunities that they were afforded to meet their goals and dreams.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study provided an opportunity for African American male students at the high school level to articulate their experiences and speak to the factors that they perceived as contributing to their academic success. The constructs of identity and cultural capital were offered by this researcher as a conceptual framework into the insight into factors that impacted the academic achievement of this student group. Through the use of interviews, a classroom observation and document review, the perceptions of these students were collected and analyzed. The themes derived from the data showed that these young men were successful due to the support they received from their teachers, parents and peers; their approach to challenging and difficult situations; and the opportunities that they were afforded that led to their use of the educational process to reach their goals and dreams.

Meeting the academic needs of all students should be at the forefront of a school’s vision and mission. We as educators must put forth a concerted effort to impact the academic achievement of all student groups and specifically student groups that have been marginalized throughout the history of education. We begin the process by forming relationships with our students and interacting with them to set goals, plan strategies and commit to accomplishing their dreams. It is time for educators at every level to act on and not just discuss the strategies and interventions that are needed for these young people to be successful.


Howard, G.R. (1999). *We can’t teach what we don’t know: White teachers, multiracial*.
Decision. ERIC Digest. (ED425050)


Skiba, R.J., Michael, R.S., Nardo, A.C., & Peterson, R. (2000). *The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment (Report #SRSI)* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana Education Policy Center).


registration and information guide grades 6-12.

Appendix A
Critique Checklist for a Case Study Report

1. Is the report easy to read?
2. Does it fit together, each sentence contributing to the whole?
3. Does the report have a conceptual structure (i.e., themes or issues)?
4. Are its issues developed in a serious and scholarly way?
5. Is the case adequately defined?
6. Is there a sense of story to the presentation?
7. Is the reader provided some vicarious experience?
8. Have quotations been used effectively?
9. Are headings, figures, artifacts, appendixes, and indexes used effectively?
10. Was it edited well, then again with a last-minute polish?
11. Has the writer made sound assertions, neither over-nor under-interpreting?
12. Has adequate attention been paid to various contexts?
13. Were sufficient raw data presented?
14. Were data sources well chosen and in sufficient number?
15. Do observations and interpretations appear to have been triangulated?
16. Is the role and point of view of the researcher nicely apparent?
17. Is the nature of the intended audience apparent?
18. Is empathy shown for all sides?
19. Are personal intentions examined?
20. Does it appear that individuals were put at risk?
   (Stake, 1995, p. 131)
Appendix B
Consent Form

Consent for Participation Form
Factors that Contribute to the Academic Success of African American Males: Perceptions of High School African American Male Students

I, ____________________________________, agree to participate in a case study of high school African American male students. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how high school African American males perceive factors that contribute to their academic success. I understand that the researcher has selected 6-8 high school African American males. I understand the researcher is conducting this study and will be reporting on the lived experiences and perceptions of participants as part of a doctoral dissertation at the College of William and Mary.

As a participant, I understand that my involvement in the study is purposeful in that I am currently a successful high school African American male student. I was chosen for the purpose of gathering varied perspectives concerning factors that impact the academic success of African American males. Further, I understand that I will be asked to participate in two individual interview sessions and two observations, and that honesty and accuracy of my responses are crucial for this study. The interview sessions will last between 45-60 minutes and the observation sessions will last between 45-60 minutes. Additionally, I agree that I will read and review summaries of information that is generated during the sessions and observations to check for accuracy.

The researcher has informed me that information obtained through the interviews and observations will be audio taped to ensure accuracy of the information I supply. To ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym, of my choosing, and a corresponding key linking me to the pseudonym will be used to protect my identity. All audio recordings and the key linking my name to the pseudonym will be stored on a password-protected computer, which will be accessible only by the participating researcher. Once recordings have been transcribed, they will be erased and no longer available for use. At the conclusion of the study, all pseudonyms and other identifying information will be destroyed. I understand that all efforts will be made to conceal my identity in the study’s report of results and to keep my personal information confidential.

Through participation in this study, I may be increasing my awareness and furthering the awareness of others’ about the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male students. My input in this study may assist in creating the foundation for community outreach and serve as a catalyst in bringing all stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, students, administrators, businesses, community members and policy makers) together to discuss the importance of making sound decisions that will meet the needs of African American male students.

I understand that there may be minimal psychological discomfort directly involved with this research. I also understand that I do not have to answer every question, and may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time by informing
the researcher by telephone or email. My decision to participate or not participate will not affect my relationships with my teachers or with my school district in general. If I have any questions, I should contact Dr. Michael DiPaola, the dissertation chair at 757-221-2344 or mfdipa@wm.edu. If I have problems or experience dissatisfaction, I understand that I may contact Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the School of Education Internal Review Committee at (757) 221-2348 or tjward@wm.edu or Dr. Lee Kirkpatrick, chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary at (757) 221-3997 or lakirk@wm.edu.

My signature below signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, and that I consent to participating in this phenomenological study and the tasks outlined above. I understand that if I am under the age of 18 years of age, my parents must also sign the consent form.

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2012-03-23 AND EXPIRES ON 2013-03-23.

__________________________
Date
__________________________
Signature of Participant

__________________________
Date
18)
__________________________
Signature of Parent (for students under 18)

__________________________
Date
__________________________
Investigator
Appendix C
Interview Protocol for Student Participants

1. What extracurricular activities are you involved in? Please include sports, clubs and community organizations.

2. Talk about your family’s involvement with your school activities both academic and extracurricular.

3. Address resources that are available to the student i.e. access to a computer at home, help with homework either by parent, tutor, or another means. Ask the student if they have ever qualified for free and reduced lunch.

4. What classes are you currently taking?

5. What is your favorite class? Why is it your favorite? – If needed, tell me about the teacher? What does the teacher do? What does the teacher expect from you?

6. What is your least favorite class? Why is it your least favorite? Tell me about that teacher? What does your teacher expect from you?

7. In what class do you have the best grade? (Favorite and best grade may differ as some kids really like challenging teachers) if needed, tell me about the teacher? Tell me about a typical day in this class? What does the teacher do? What does that teacher expect from you?

8. What class do you have your lowest grade in? Why do you think you are less successful in this class? How does this class differ from the class where you are doing well?

9. What did you do to overcome your poor performance? Who were some of the people that helped you to overcome this situation? What are you doing to improve your grade in X class?

10. Describe a time when you feel that you did really well in a class as a high school student.

11. Identify factors that contributed to your success in the class(es).
   ✓ What does the teacher do in those classes? How does that contribute to your success or to what extent do you think that contributes to your success?

12. Describe your overall high school educational experience. Be sure to include the people who impacted you (positively or negatively).
13. Talk to me about your plans for the future. What happened during your K-12 experience that leads you to these plans? The goal here is to encourage the young man to share what inspired him to take the path that he has planned for his future. May ask who inspired him to go in this direction. Also ask who has helped him to formulate his plan.

14. Is there any additional information that you would like to share about your educational experience?
Appendix D
Assent Form for Student Participants

This explanation will be read to all student participants. An affirmative agreement must be granted before proceeding with data collection.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are an African American male high school student who has been academically successful. I am interested in gaining an understanding of how you perceive factors that contribute to your academic success. This is not a test and there is no right or wrong answer. You do not have to answer a question if you do not want to do so. I will ensure that your answers are confidential. You will be asked to give me a pseudonym to protect your identity and your name will not appear on the interview protocol.

All audio recordings and the key linking your name to the pseudonym will be stored on a password-protected computer, which will be accessible only by the participating researcher. Once recordings have been transcribed, they will be erased and no longer available for use. At the conclusion of the study, all pseudonyms and other identifying information will be destroyed. All efforts will be made to conceal your identity in the study’s report of results and to keep your personal information confidential.

The study will consist of the following activities:

➢ You will participate in an initial interview that will take 60-90 minutes to complete.
➢ I will come and observe you in a classroom setting that will be determined by the items that we discuss during the initial interview. The observation will take 45-60 minutes.
➢ You will then participate in a follow-up interview that will take place within 3 days of the observation and last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Through participation in this study, you may be increasing your awareness and furthering the awareness of others’ about the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male students. Your input in this study may assist in creating the foundation for community outreach and serve as a catalyst in bringing all stakeholders (i.e. teachers, parents, students, administrators, businesses, community members and policy makers) together to discuss the importance of making sound decisions that will meet the needs of African American male students.

Though you and/or your parents/guardians have given permission for you to participate in this research study, I want to make sure that this is something that you want to do. If you decide you do not want to participate, just tell me. This will not affect you in any way if you do not want to participate.

Is it okay if I ask you some questions now?
Appendix E  
Transcribed Interview 1  
Evan  

I: let's start by having you tell me about the extracurricular activities that you are involved in here at School B. It can include sports, clubs and any other organizations in or outside of school.
E: okay well here at School B, I'm part of the band and uuh i do boy scouts and i in the NAACP Youth counsel
I: ok, how long have you done boy scouts because you said that you are working on your eagle scouts, so you've done that for a while?
E: uum, yes ma'am I've been in since i was in 1st grade
I: really? how about the NAACP youth counsel
E: since 6th grade
I: and band?
E: band has been uuh from freshman year to senior year
I: ok, what instrument do you play?
E: uuh trumpet

I: ok, now i want you to talk a little bit about your family's involvement with both your academics and your extracurricular activities
E: ok, uum well my mother participates a lot with band and NAACP she is actually a band parent for the band and an advisor in the NAACP and she is part of the reason why I stayed so involved in those organizations. and then as far as academic my mom always tries to keep in touch with my teachers. just uum you know in case there's anything slips or anything like that. so
I: so, does she follow you on edline?
E: yes
I: what kind of conversations do you guys have about that?
E: she just if I ever have like uum a short coming she'll ask me well why did it happen and what can we do to fix it next time or uuh things like that. And then she'll say uuh do you need a tutor if I'm not understanding something or you know, she's just that supportive
I: so it's mainly mom
E: uum my dad is tough too but he never it never gets to him hopefully for that kind of stuff
I: ok, alright so, when you think about, i want you to think about outside of school ok, i want you to think about resources that are available to you; uum that help support your academic effort and you just kind of sort of mentioned that if you are having difficulty that your mom will get you a tutor; so like a tutor would be a resource but how about like access to computers and things like that?
E: oh uum well there's the library and then at my church uum, we have computers like say i needed a job we have like places that you can apply like they'll set up your interview and everything for you and and they'll set up your on-line application so that you can pick a time to come in there and you just go in there and apply for the job and then they'll like follow up for you
I: ok, so library which library do you go to?
E: the williamsburg one
I: ok, so the local library, how often
E: uum i would say like every other month uum if i need like resources for a
project i'll just go there and get my book sources and then sometimes my mom
she'll stop by there to read a lot so i'll pick up a book if she is in there or whatever
and we just do that on Sundays
I: do you ever participate in study groups?
E: not really, yeah we just do it in the band we just study with each other
I: ok
E: yes, Ms. T does not play around
I: i've heard that, ok now have you ever qualified for free and reduced lunch?
E: no ma'am
I: alright so let's talk about this semester, your current semester; what classes
are you taking?
E: taking trigonometry, AP psych, music theory, stage band 2, Eng 12, Spanish 4,
physics
I: what a schedule, you are loaded, ok so what's your favorite class?
E: i have to say probably stage band, that is my favorite class
I: ok, why
E: i just like playing alot and i like being able to play with other people and I
understand how music theory works and being able to apply it, it's just something
that i love to do
I: tell me about your teacher
E: Ms. T has a lot of energy and her energy kind of I guess, we feed off her
energy so you know we just able to keep going; like she is very well i don't want
to say pushy she has perseverence or whatever so that gives us the same
attitudes so that anything that we are struggling with we just push right on
through. and we just become better musicians just because of i guess her so
I: what do you feel like her expectations of you are?
E: as a band student she expects us like if the school were to be doing
something a little bit different or a little bit odd or something she would expect us
to be those mature, respectable students and remain like we are because she
instills those principles in us i guess just because in the band she requires
discipline from us so she expects that from us all the time
I: what kind of things does she do to make you accountable? like how does she
know what you are doing when you are outside the band room?
E: well we have to bring her grade reports at the beginning of the year or else we
have to for the third quarter of the football game the band gets off so if you don't
have or say if you have less than a C you can't go out and talk with your friends
or whatever and that's it. and she knows like for some students they still bring
her grade reports because she likes to keep up with her students because she
doesn't want any of us failing or so
I: ok, what grade do you have in that class?
E: i have an A
I: i'm not surprised, ok so stage band is your favorite.
E: yes
I: what's your least favorite?
E: least favorite, i would have to say trigonometry
I: why is trig your least favorite
E: just because well math has never come naturally to me for the first time so i have to study a little harder to memorize things and uum you know the class is fine; it' just something i don't, doesn't make sense
I: it's the subject?
E: right
I: talk about the teacher in trig, describe that teacher and the things that the teacher does in the class
E: he's really hard working, like if we don't understand something the first time, he will try multiple methods to try to get us to understand it and the way he gives homework, he gives enough so that it's not to much but it gives us enough time to practice and he comes back and we have questions for him and he just answers those
I: so you just talked about you said he uses multiple methods to help you to understand?
E: yes
I: talk a little bit about those different methods, what are some of the things that he does?
E: well like on the test i know he will, if we don't if one test sometimes he will switch up the test i guess to see if we can apply the things that he has taught us to maybe a different variation of that problem, but sometimes if we don't do well on the test as a class he will re-do the test and make it the same as the review that he has given us before and the homework assignments and like one activity about a month ago, he would write a problem up on the board and one person would have to do each part of the problem until it was solved so
I: ok, what do you think his expectations are for you in that class?
E: just to be respectful and to come to class prepared you know if you don't understand something you would of had to of done your homework you know you can't say that you don't understand something if you haven't done the homework. so he expects us to at least attempt the homework. and then he's willing to work with us from there
I: who is your trig teacher?
E: Mr. G
I: ok, in what class do you have the best grade?
E: well stage band is my best grade and I think for my core classes it would be English
I: what do you have in English
E: an A right now
I: ok, is your A in stage band higher than your A in English
E: yes, i think so
I: who is your English teacher?
E: Ms. V
I: ok, i will be visiting you in your class that you have your best grade in, i'm going to come your core class with the best grade. the teacher will know that I am observing but I will not tell her exactly who I am observing. talk to me about Ms. V, tell me about her as a teacher?
E: she is, she expresses herself really well; like I don't know rather than English it's like an english and life skills class I guess. because everything has like a purpose in her class and she doesn't do anything just for busy work. it's to either teach us something that we will need in the future or it's because I'll be testing you on this later and you'll need to have this in your mind anyway because you are about to be adults. and that's pretty much it.
I: so, if I say that I'm coming to english class and I want you to get me prepared for the class, what or describe what a typical day would look like in that class from the time you enter the door until you leave that class
E: well Ms V will always have an opening activity and it can be anything, it can be anything from a group discussion or you know writing down a journal entry or she gives you a prompt and you analyze the prompt and talk with your group about it or what you are doing and you expect to do a lot of reading when you enter the class. it's a lot of you have to do it it's not one of those things where you can depend on other people to push you along your really have to do the work yourself and continue to stay focused to cause you have to earn your grade in that class.
I: what are you doing now?
E: we are reading the Alchemist
I: what did you read before the Alchemist?
E: Frankenstein
I: what do you think, or what would you say Ms. Vs expectations are for you?
E: doing the work, she will not give you she doesn't give you anything you get what you deserve in that class so if you want to do A work you have to put forth the effort even if you're intelligent you still have to there's always work to be done in that class.
I: how do you feel about that?
E: oh the class?
I: yeah, like how do you feel about that expectation?
E: I think that that's totally like I feel right about that because I feel like I'm earning my grade
I: ok
E: and I feel like I'm getting the education that I'm supposed to
I: what class do you have the lowest grade in?
E: physics, probably
I: what's your grade in physics?
E: a C right now
I: what do you think makes that, what do you think is the reason for that?
E: I think there's well a lot of disconnect because the teacher she is really polite and everything it's just I can't a lot of times I have to have connections with the teacher. I'll ask questions and it will be answered but it won't be fully answered to where I can be able to take something away from it. I definitely study in the
class and I do the work it's just that there are some things that I can't quite get or grasp on to and I feel like she understands that but she doesn't know exactly what to do about it because it's not only me that's feeling this way it's a lot of other members of this class.

I: now, you started to answer this a little, I was going to ask you what kinds of things you do to overcome the issue that you have with that class and you started saying it, you said you study. What other things do you do to try to get the help that you need?

E: I go to someone who is going well in the class and see what they are doing because I need to see what I'm doing differently you know.

I: do you feel like that helps?

E: for minor things really I'm one of those people that has to get it myself to be able to keep doing it. I can't keep going back to somebody to rely on them for everything so I want to be more independent I guess.

I: you talk about, you said with that teacher you feel like she gets that there are things that all of you are not getting but it appears that she doesn't know how to help you get it, how do you feel about that?

E: I feel like it's not really okay to just push us along because we are going to have to get it some time or another. I think the problem needs to be addressed and not ignored because people are getting the same problems wrong over and over again. You have to try something different to get us to understand it.

I: is that frustrating?

E: a little bit, it's not a subject of my interest but to keep getting less than what I want.

I: you say english is where you have the best grade in core classes and you would say physics that's the class that I'm not doing as well as I want to, compare the 2, how are they different?

E: the english class there is more teacher, there is more interaction between the teacher and the students. Physics the teacher can be writing up on the board for 30 minutes and not get any feedback from the class and it's like you take this home and you apply it to your homework when Ms V is saying you know how do you feel about this and what can I do to help you understand. It's just a lot more social interaction in the english.

I: what I hear you saying, what I think I hear you saying is that it comes down to, correct me if I'm wrong; there is something about relationship that I hear as I listen to what you are saying. You talk a lot about social interaction and that that works for you and that you like that and you're successful when that happens.

E: yes.

I: so you get that with Ms V because one of the first things that you said is that she will ask you how you feel and then how can I help you to better understand it and now what I think I hear you saying also about her is then she helps you to understand it but when you look at physics it's just kind of like well she's up there writing on the board there's not alot of interaction going on.

E: right.
I: and you would probably like to see more and then you already are at a place where you feel like well when we feel like we don't understand it, she understands that we don't get it but she can't help us understand it, ok
E: right
I: ok, is there anything else that is different about the classes?
E: oh, well i'm the only colored kid in my physics class so that's like i don't know if i'm held back to ask questions but sometimes i feel like if i ask questions it's like oh well come on well why don't you understand or whatever but i have a lot more colored kids in my english 12 class that i can relate to and talk to things about, and talk with them about things and you know the environment is just a little bit different. i feel more comfortable in english than i do in physics just because there are people my color.
I: do you think that the teacher play a role in that as well?
E: yes
I: you feel like Ms. V makes you feel that level of comfort?
E:yes, yes
I: have you ever had other classes where you were the only AA?
E: my sophomore year i was in AP Euro and it was just me and this other girl
I: how did you feel in that one, is there a difference in how you felt in that class and the physics class?
E: yes
I: why?
E: there was still more social interaction in the AP Euro class, i guess it was because of the subjects. history requires a lot more interaction i guess you know like talking things out. physics is kind of just straight you apply the formula and if this isn't it this isn't it i guess history requires more discussion. i don't know
I: but it sounds like, what i hear you saying is when you have that social interaction teachers are making you comfortable and you are feeling like hey they see me, this is pretty cool, this is working out. whereas with that physics you know you don't have that social interaction and your already conscious of the fact that you are the only AA in the class and there are some things playing into it, this isn't my favorite place to be; my grade is different than what i want it to be and you're not helping me
E: yeah
I: so, do you feel like your peers realize that you are the only AA
E: they know, they know for sure
I: do you talk about it
E: yeah
I: talk about that conversation
E: well they'll bring it up every once and a while like oh i forget, there's constant joking about it and it's like that 's cool and all but really i don't understand why you all can't just treat me like i'm another kid in here cause really i'm here with you guys and there is no difference we are all in the same subject but it's brought up you know constantly well people make black jokes and things like that so you know; they see it as harmless i see it as ok this isn't ok past a certain point so
I: do you express to them
E: yes
I: this is not ok
E: yeah
I: do they receive that, or do they continue to
E: they receive it; well there are different ones you know they some of them take it like seriously and others will like cut it out and that hasn't been a problem but some of them you know you just can't tell them anything it's just that whole mindset from you know it's what they've had like it's just funny to them i guess so
I: do you feel like the teacher is hearing what is going on?
E: i couldn't really tell you, it's , i'm not even sure. it's not out loud joking it's just like we'll be in labs or something and they'll just pop a joke in there and
I: what do you do, do you think that you could approach her about it?
E: yeah, i think so
I: do you think that she would be helpful
E: yeah, i think so
I: have you run into that a lot throughout your high school years?
E: oh yeah, yes ma'am just because i haven't had classes; ever since i've been moving up i don't have as many classes with AA kids so
I: what do you think that's about?
E: you know, not understanding that they can apply themselves just not being driven to do anything because they don't see what it can do for them if they are trying at being successful
I: interesting, do you feel like there are undertones of race throughout the school, like do you feel like the race relations is acceptable or do you see issues?
E: i do. i you know, sometimes it gets mistaken for humor i guess the whole things about race. are you asking as far as like issues with races among each other?
I: yes
E: you know, i've had times where i have questioned it with teachers but i have never seen it from any of my teachers. but probably a few times i guess i've recognized it but never thought anything about it
I: ok, describe a time when you feel you did really well in high school; a time that stands out to you
E: i say it was my freshman year because i came in and i thought it would be really hard trying to get used to high school and i just found that every class that i was taking it seemed a little too easy and you know i had to learn that i had to work but i one time i didn't i guess i wasn't introduced to everything else in high school and all i was focused on was grades and i was doing really well then. so
I: so, freshman really stands out to you
E: yeah
I: ok, so you are successful; think about all the factors that have played into your success, could be situations negative or positive; what factors do you say play into why you are successful?
E: always having something positive to look forward to. I've always had people around me to tell me you can do whatever you put your mind to pretty much. i've always had like something that i wanted to achieve like i've always wanted to get
you know where I want to go just goals; as long as I set a goal I always have that drive to keep going towards it and I'll do anything to get there and just having positive things like my parents they put me in all these organizations just because they knew that I didn't need any negatives stuff and to surround me with everything positive all that can do is good for you. So I think that's the reason why I think

I: Who are some of the other people because you said people and I know you said your parents but there are always people around you positive people who tell you that you can do it, who are some of those people?

E: Yeah, well at my old church I, his daughter goes to school here but Rev. C he would always, he was kind of a mentor for me when I was in middle school and he kind of set the foundation for having confidence because I used to be like I used to know have any confidence in myself or whatever and I couldn't I used to feel like I couldn't do anything because I wasn't good at sports or whatever and he said you know if you don't excel here you can excel here because it is twice as important so he set that foundation for me to have the mindset that I do so I: you talked to about you have goals for yourself and that you set goals for yourself and you set out to reach your goals, where do you think that that mindset comes from?

E: Well, I say my cousins. My cousins attended UVA and George Mason and I always thought, I always looked up to them as they were successful and they continue to stay disciplined and they didn't have any side tracks or anything so I always look up to them and I didn't feel like I had to meet that same I guess set bar but I always felt like I should try my best to be like them because they are good role models. So

I: How about teachers, do you feel like there were teachers along the way?

E: Yes, well actually I met a teacher this year, Mr. B, he's a government teacher and he's new and he goes to Hampton and I'm going to Hampton in the fall and I saw that he went to Hampton and I saw how polished he was when he came to teach our class and he seemed like a good person to look up to so I look up to him just because he has a good way of presenting himself, things like that he knows how to deal with kids even though they might disrespect him he knows how to handle it without disrespecting the student.

I: Are you going to march in the band at Hampton?

E: Yeah

I: Think about your entire high school experience and describe it

E: It was dynamic I had, like I came in a little timid and now I feel like since I've had all these experiences with people and students and teachers and adapted to their teaching styles, I feel like I'm ready to do whatever college has to offer me.

I: Give me some examples of the experiences

E: Well, I knew I was afraid of public speaking before I had some of my classes like AP Euro I had to give a presentation and I was scared to death to do it but I had come prepared and I just learned to continuously talk in front of people time and time again and now I still get a little nervous but I can do it and still be able to get my point across so I feel like that's an area that I have grown in since I came to high school.
I: do you feel like you've made friends and that contributed to your dynamic experience?
E: yeah
I: what do you think contributed to making friends?
E: just having or sharing the same interest and goals and just the classes i took, i've kind of had the same set of friends from beginning to end just because of the slot that i fell in
I: talk about your future plans, i know that that is going to include HU, talk about what you are planning to do?
E: ok, well i'm looking to probably be a band director so i'm going to attend Hampton for music education and hopefully i can get some connects there to just meet and interact with people to see if i can get some more opportunities to learn some more and just be a better musician be able to teach people.
I: what in your k-12 experience influenced your plans?
E: Mr. P at the middle school that i attended, i always thought it was so cool how he would just have the baton and he would just; band has always been cool to me and Mr. P the first time i saw him lead the band i thought that that was probably what did it.
I: so Mr. P as far as music and then you said Mr. B that really made you, have you visited Hampton?
E: yes
I: last question; so if i called you up and gave you an opportunity to come and speak to a group of people who are educators coming from all over the country for a forum; and i want you to come and talk to them and i want you to talk to them about how to help AA males to achieve; if i asked you to do this, what would you say to this group of people?
E: well i would just say if you have to try to relate to the students, this is black males?
I: the people are mixed but you are speaking to them specifically about increasing the achievement of black males.
E: ok, try to relate and don't put yourself above them, try to make yourself as humble as possible and try to i guess if they don't understand at first, continue to try to help them to try to understand and give them the reason behind the understanding because we have a right to know. and i guess i'm not really sure.
I: it sounds like what i hear you saying is you went right back to relationship
E: yes
I: also what I heard in that as well was don't give up
E: right
I: see them for who they are; see what that they need and get it to them
E: yeah
I: ok, i will be coming to visit you in your Eng class and i will let you know when i am coming so that you won't be totally surprised when you see me. I won't interact or give away why i'm there so just relax and do you.
Hi Evan,
Hope that you are enjoying your summer! Congrats on your graduation. I am attaching the summary of our interviews. Please take a moment to read over the summary. If you need to make corrections or add information, you can do that on the document. Just change the font color for your comments and then email the document back to me. Thanks so much for your participation. Good luck at XX! I plan to come and watch you march.

Best wishes,
Mrs. Swanson

Attachment:
Summary of Interview
Evan

What extracurricular activities are you involved in? Please include sports, clubs and community organizations.

You noted that at school you are a member of the band which you have done since freshman year and you play the trumpet. Outside of school, you have been a member of the boy scouts since 1st grade and on the NAACP youth counsel since 6th grade. You are also active in your church as a member of the usher board. You shared that you were a musician at your previous church and want to be a musician at your new church.

Talk about your family's involvement with your school activities both academic and extracurricular.

You stated that your mom is a band parent and so she spends a lot of time with you as you do games and competitions. You mom is also an advisor for the NAACP youth counsel so she shares in a lot of your activities with the organization. Academically, your mom keeps in touch with your teachers and if she notes that you are having difficulty she inquires about may include tutors. You noted that your dad is involved but you try to make sure that he doesn't have to get involved with the academics too much because he is tough.
Address resources that are available to the student i.e. access to a computer at home, help with homework either by parent, tutor, or another means. Ask the student if they have ever qualified for free and reduced lunch.

You shared that you have used tutors. You also noted that you utilize the public library and the computer lab at your church. You stated that the computer lab at church was used to set up job opportunities and follow-up. You noted that though you didn’t consider yourself to participate in study groups, you did work with other band students because your band director, Ms. T did not play around when it came to making sure to take care of academics.

What classes are you currently taking?

Your classes at the time of the interview were: trigonometry, AP psych, music theory, stage band 2, English 12, Spanish IV and physics

What is your favorite class? Why is it your favorite? – If needed, tell me about the teacher? What does the teacher do? What does the teacher expect from you?

You noted that your favorite class is stage band because you love playing and being able to play with other people. You shared that you like understanding how music theory works and being able to apply it.

You described Ms. T as having a lot of energy that the entire class feeds off. You noted that Ms. T has a high level of perseverance which also rubs off on her students so that if you are struggling with something you just push right through and become better musicians. You noted that her expectations for you are that as band students you are to me good examples around the school and not take on the characteristics of what other students are doing around the school. She requires discipline and wants you to show that you are disciplined. She makes you accountable through grade reports and if you have less than a C in any class you cannot have free time during the 3rd quarter of the football game. Students continue to turn in grade reports after football season just because Ms. T shows such concern for academics. Your grade in that class was an A.

What is your least favorite class? Why is it your least favorite? Tell me about that teacher? What does your teacher expect from you?

You stated that trig was your least favorite class. You shared that this is the case because math does not come naturally for you. You noted that you have to study a little harder to memorize things and sometimes things just do not make sense. You stated that your
teacher is Mr. G. and that he is really hard working. He attempts to help you understand concepts by doing them differently when you don’t pick it up the first time. He gives just the right amount of homework and he helps with questions on homework. You shared that a method that Mr. G uses to help you dealt with test and that he switches up tests to see if you can apply things or gives you a different variation of a problem that you have seen before. Sometimes if the class doesn’t do well on the test, he gives a revised version of the review as a retest. He also did an activity where he wrote problems on the board and each student did a part of the problem until it was solved up on the board.

You stated that Mr. G’s expectations for you were to be respectful, come to class prepared and complete your homework. You shared that if the homework was completed you couldn’t really say that you didn’t understand it because you did not try. Mr. G is very willing to work with you if you just try.

In what class do you have the best grade? (Favorite and best grade may differ as some kids really like challenging teachers) if needed, tell me about the teacher? Tell me about a typical day in this class? What does the teacher do? What does that teacher expect from you?

You shared that you had the best grade in stage band but in your core classes, English 12 with an A was your best grade. Your teacher was Ms. V. You described her as a person who expressed herself very well. You describe the class as more than an English class; it’s an English and life skills class. Everything that Ms. V has purpose and she doesn’t give busy work. The work is to teach you something that you will need in the future of material that she is going to test you on later. All material is relevant to becoming a good adult.

You described a typical day in that class as coming in and having an opening activity. The activity could be anything from a group discussion to a journal entry or a prompt to analyze and later discuss with a group. There is an expectation that you will do all of the reading and there was a lot. You could not depend on others to push you along in that class you had to actually do the work and stay focused to earn your grade.

Ms. V’s expectations for you were that you did the work and earned your grade. You noted that you had to put forth effort. You agree with this philosophy because you felt like you were getting the education that you were supposed to get.
What class do you have your lowest grade in? Why do you think you are less successful in this class? How does this class differ from the class where you are doing well?

The class that you had the lowest grade in was physics with a C. You shared that you felt that there was disconnect. You noted that the teacher was nice but that you did better when you had a connection with the teacher and you didn’t with this teacher. You noted that you would ask questions in the class and they would be answered but not fully answered in a way that you could get anything out of it. You noted that you studied hard in the class, did the work but still had difficulty grasping concepts. You stated that you felt the teacher knew you were having difficulty but did not know how to explain it in a way that you and others who were struggling could understand the material.

What did you do to overcome your poor performance? Who were some of the people that helped you to overcome this situation? What are you doing to improve your grade in X class?

You noted that you study hard and do all the work. You shared that you go to someone who is doing well in the class to see what they are doing differently from what you are doing. You stated that this works for minor things but you really felt you have to understand the material in order to be able to do it for yourself and not rely on others for everything. You shared that you did not feel that it was okay for people to be pushed along when they did not understand information because students continuously got the same things wrong because the issue wasn’t addressed. You did acknowledge that you were a little frustrated because you work hard and keep getting less than what you want.

When you compare English and physics, you note that a big difference is that there is a lot more interaction between Ms. V and the entire class where as your physics teacher may write on the board for 30 minutes before saying anything to the class. The physics teacher expects you to go home and do the work with no feedback throughout the class. Ms. V ensures that you understand what she wants you to do through discussion and asking questions. You acknowledged that you find relationships and specifically social interaction to be important to your success in a class and you get that from Ms. V.

You also shared that another difference between the classes is that you are the only AA in physics. You shared that sometimes you feel like you are being looked at by your classmates because you ask so many questions and it’s like well you should know the answers. You stated that you felt more comfortable in your English 12 class with
more AA students. You also noted that Ms. V made you feel more comfortable in the classroom setting as well. You noted that you were the only AA in your AP Euro class in 10th grade but felt that there was still more social interaction in that class. You shared that the fact that you are the only AA in the class is noticed by peers and they at times make jokes that are racial in nature. You have let them know that it was unacceptable but you are not sure if the teacher (physics) is aware of what is going on because the other students make attempts to say things quietly. You did acknowledge that you thought you could approach the teacher about this and she would be helpful. You noted that you haven’t really seen a lot of racial overtones throughout the school but that there have been times that you questioned things that teachers have done or said.

Describe a time when you feel that you did really well in a class as a high school student.

You shared that your entire freshman year was cool because you thought that high school was going to be really hard but every class that you had was easy. You felt that you focused solely on grades and had not been introduced to other things that happened in high school.

Identify factors that contributed to your success in the class(es).

➢ What does the teacher do in those classes? How does that contribute to your success or to what extent do you think that contributes to your success?

You noted that always having something positive to look forward to has helped in your success. You noted that you have always had people around you who told you that you could do whatever you put your mind to. You have always set goals and had something that you wanted to achieve. Your parents exposed you to good organizations because they knew that you didn’t need a lot of negative influences. Other people who have contributed to your success include a preacher at your church and your cousins who you describe as positive role models. Mr. B a teacher at your school who attended Hampton U also contributed to your success. You watch the way he carries himself and how “polished” he is.

Describe your overall high school educational experience. Be sure to include the people who impacted you (positively or negatively).

You describe your overall high school experience as “dynamic”. You talked about how you came in timid but over the years have developed into a young man who is ready to handle college. You shared your experience with dealing with your fear of public speaking and doing that through having to present in classes. You also noted that meeting and dealing with other students as well as your teachers prepared you. You shared that having friends with the
same interest was great. You liked being able to take classes with your friends.

Future plans: You will be attending Hampton U this fall and majoring in music education. You hope to one day be a band director. You are hoping to make connections during your time at HU that will lead to good opportunities and you want to become a better musician. You noted that Mr. P at your middle school influenced this decision. You talked about watching him direct the band with his baton and wanting to do that.

If I gave you an opportunity to come and speak to a group of educators from all over the country at a forum who want to learn how to increase the academic achievement of AA males; what would you tell them? What advice would you give them?

You would tell them that they have to try and relate to these young men and not put themselves above them. You stated that you would tell them to humble themselves and if these students don't understand the first time, don't give up try other ways to help them to understand. You acknowledged that teachers need to see these students for who they are, not give up and form relationships.

Interview 2 Summary
Follow-up to Observation

1. Have the student describe in detail the observed lesson. Was this a typical day in the classroom?
The class was completing the final discussion on the last 2 chapters of the "Alchemist". The class started out with the 10/20 activity where they read a short story by Paulo Cuelo. These stories are actually blogs and they teach morals or lessons. The students read the stories and then answer questions or dissect what they read to get the lesson being relayed. They got into small groups to discuss the piece. You were with 2 other young men that you noted you were comfortable with. The story was about a student who tried to make everything his teacher said incorrect. There was another activity which involved students completing a writing about turning themselves into the wind and writing out the process. Ms. V came over to your group which she called "type A" because you were over thinking things. There was a lot of group discussion and larger group discussion as well. You noted that what I saw was a typical day in class.

2. Have student discuss the observed interactions between the student and the teacher.
There was a lot of interaction between you and Ms. V. You noted that there is a connection with her where she can just about fill in your sentences. She also makes everyone very comfortable to share even if they disagree
with what she is saying. You acknowledge that she is accepting and she respects you all.

3. Have student discuss the observed interactions between the student and peers.
   You noted that you were very comfortable interacting with your group because you have known these guys for a long time which made it easy for you to talk and share. You did a lot of talking and sharing in group.

4. Have student share how they did on the assignment that they received during the class and add any other information about the observed lesson that they find to be of importance to understanding what took place.
   Your grade had not been posted at the time we did the follow-up

5. What if anything would you do to change this class? The school?
   You noted that if you could change the class, you would make it longer and have it meet every day. It's a good class and you learn more than just English literature. You noted that you liked the set-up of the school and wouldn't change anything about it.

6. How do you describe yourself/ how do you want people to see you when they look at you and see that you are an African American male (as a student as a person)?
   You want people to see you and not see you with preconceived notions of what they think about AA males based on society's view. You do want them to see that you are AA and not go negative. You want them to see you on the same level as them. You describe yourself as an AA male who is trying to find himself and who is trying to go in the right directions and learn.
Appendix G
Completed Observation Form

Observation Form

Student: Evan
Class: English 12     BEST GRADE CLASS

Date/Time: 05/22/12   9:00-10:00

Stage 1: Descriptive Stage: Documentation of the setting to include the physical appearance; interactions between teacher and student; interactions between student and peers

Physical setting: There were 19 students in the class (12 males/7 females; 6 AA males total) there was an additional adult in the classroom; Seats are set up in groups of 4 desks and chairs; teacher had an area where she displayed pictures of her family; lots of movie posters i.e. Becoming Jane, Star Wars, Frankenstein posters created by students; movie quotes, the writing process. Teacher used PPT slides to introduce activities; she also used a timer to bring students back after small group discussions. The class was discussing the end of the “The Alchemist”. Teacher went around and checked to ensure that all students had their book and gave credit for having materials.

Teacher/Student Interaction
Assignment

Interactions: The class participated in several activities and discussions throughout the class. It is noted that we went out for a fire drill during this class. The first activity was called a 10/20 analysis in which the students had to read a 10 second story “Teachers and Students” and give their perspective of the reading; another activity involved the students writing about how they would turn themselves into the wind; students were given 20 minutes and could not use the example given by the character in the book but told that they had to think about what “turning yourself into the wind” was symbolic of.

Assignment

Teacher/student: Evan shared insight on the 10/20 analysis piece for his group. His group consisted of himself and 2 other young men. It took Evan a while to get going with the “turning yourself into the wind” activity; he got clarification from his teacher about how he planned to handle this activity. After writing down the plan and obstacles that they might face, all students were directed to share out with their groups. The written piece was placed in a basket on the table for a grade.

Teacher/Student Interaction
Student/peers: Evan shared with the other members in his group with no problem. They each contributed to small group discussion each time that they were directed to do so. They smiled and laughed frequently. Evan could be heard sharing and asking questions of his group members throughout each discussion.

Stage 2: Focused Stage: closer look at interaction between teacher-student pair; look for specific features that student’s perception that this class is one in which they experience success (specific conversations/artifacts such as graded papers).

There was a lot of interaction throughout the entire class. Evan spoke with his group members and then during one activity a couple other groups were added to Evan’s group to form an even larger group and he still continued to contribute to discussions by sharing his ideas and asking questions of other members in his group. Evan had done some other research on the author of the book which played a part in a conversation that the teacher was having with the group as a whole. She asked Evan to share his thoughts and insights into various questions that she posed about the author.

Stage 3: Selective Stage: refine and deepen understanding of most essential elements; look for presence of culturally relevant practices; evidence of teacher expressing high expectations; evidence of relationship building.

Evan’s comfort level seemed to be high in this class. He participated frequently when called upon or when a volunteer was sought out by the teacher. There also were several times when the teacher gave him positive feedback verbally and in front of the whole class “yes, very good”.

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<thead>
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<th>Type of document/ Name</th>
<th>Uses of document</th>
<th>Summary of contents</th>
<th>Additional documents needed to clarify/provide more information</th>
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<td>Official Transcript for Batman</td>
<td>To obtain grades for high school classes (9th-12th); SOL scores for all attempted SOL assessments during high school experience.</td>
<td>Grades for grades 9th-12th (grades for 12th grade incomplete at time of obtaining document; GPA for all years noted as well as attendance and SOL scores.</td>
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<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official Transcript for Max Powers</td>
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<td>Conduct History for Max Powers</td>
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<td>Official Transcript for Noir</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official Transcript for Scott</td>
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Appendix I
Academic Record/Conduct History

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<th>Student</th>
<th>GPA (Grade)</th>
<th>Conduct History</th>
<th>High School SOL Scores</th>
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<td></td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>11th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batman</td>
<td>3.2857</td>
<td>3.571</td>
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<td>Evan</td>
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<td>Hosea</td>
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<td>2.6429</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
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<td>2.571</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
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<td>3.214</td>
<td>3.5714</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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A - Attendance
CD - Classroom Disruption
D - Defiance
DD - Disruptive Demonstration
DS - Disrespect towards Staff
O - Obscenity
Appendix J
Researcher as an Instrument

As the instrument of my study, it is important to address my experiences, values, and beliefs in an effort to acknowledge the influence that my perspective may have on the generation, comprehension, reduction, analysis, interpretation and reporting of the data that will be collected to inform the outcome of this study. The focus of this study centers on the academic success of African American males. This study will specifically focus on high school African American male students' perceptions of factors that contribute to their academic success.

Experiences, Beliefs, Values

As the older sister of two African American males, I have memories of incidents that my brothers experienced that were unique to my experiences in school. One of my brothers was referred to as “being slow” in a conference my parents had with his teachers. I found this to be an interesting statement as my mom was also an educator. She later expressed to me how offensive she found the statement to be though she felt that the teacher “showed her true colors”. My brother went on to get his master’s degree at Radford University where he majored in physical education. He is now a personal trainer and holds a world’s record in weight lifting. I have often wondered what affect that teacher had on his academic performance though I have never asked him.

My second brother often spoke about how he felt about the way his teachers made him feel throughout high school. He often spoke of being made to feel like he was a “second class citizen”. He wrote about his feelings and his thoughts concerning the way that African American males were treated as individuals. Some of his poems were later published. My perception of his actions was that he took that frustration and anger and
worked hard to show that he is an intelligent young man of African American descent who had something to say as well as to offer society.

In high school, I volunteered as a tutor and the majority of the students that I worked with were African American males. One student who comes to mind was a young man that I worked with when I was in elementary school as well. He could not read and was very sensitive about this. Interestingly enough, he was often called on to read aloud which caused me to hold my breath because I knew that he struggled in this area and it was embarrassing for him. He often spoke to me about not wanting to be in school. He expressed how difficult it was and the fact that because he struggled academically, he was never able to participate in sports which was a dream for him. During our graduation ceremony, he was one of the students that were recognized as a student who would graduate in summer school.

My latest experience with African American males and education rests heavily in my role as mother to a high school African American male. For as long as I can remember, I have had conversations with his teachers concerning his academic performance and what he needed to be successful. The further along in school he has come the more conversations I have found myself having with him concerning how he feels about his academic opportunities. I have asked many teachers what instructional strategies they find to be most effective in their effort to support my son’s academic success and unfortunately I have not been given many answers. Many teachers insist that there is a personality conflict. This is so disheartening and in many ways devastating for me as an educator with a good foundational understanding that student needs have to be assessed on an individual basis and strategies implemented based on those outcomes. I
also understand that educators have been charged with the task of supporting subgroups of students who have traditionally been unsuccessful academically and ensuring that they are highly proficient academically.

My son often expresses his frustration with teachers. He makes statements such as “they don’t care” or “she was very disrespectful to me”. There have also been instances when he has asked for help and the help did not amount to much more than staying after school and working on an assignment while the teacher worked on other work or talked with colleagues. I have attempted to utilize other resources in his school such as the guidance counselor to find programs that support student efforts to improve academically and have been unsuccessful. I eventually found a tutoring service, which as one might imagine came with a cost. The tutors were certified teachers who taught in a neighboring district. The one on one and small group opportunities proved successful for my son. The issue for us was that I could not afford to have him tutored in more than one subject at a time and the school staff had not offered effective strategies or opportunities outside of the classroom to help him in his efforts to improve his overall performance. His dream was to graduate and go on to college as a student athlete. As a senior in high school, his time to improve was limited and his post-graduated options would be strongly impacted by the opportunities that were made available for him to improve his academic performance. There were times that I felt so helpless and found it difficult to communicate my frustrations. I continued to make attempts to work with teachers in an effort to develop a plan to support my son. It appeared to me that the perceptions of my son’s teachers played a vital role in why there was a lack of support and intervention.
As an administrator, I have experienced and can relate to the feelings of concern and frustration shown by parents who seek my input or assistance with their African American male student. I attempt to act as a facilitator between the parent and teacher in order to begin the process of support for the student by building a relationship between the two parties. This is a difficult task given that many teachers have developed negative perceptions of parents and vice versa. In most cases the only communication that has occurred between these parties was negative in nature. The parents have never had a conversation with the teacher about the strengths of the student or a positive action that the student has displayed. I have had teachers make statements to me that insinuated that the parents did not care and the students were just “simply lazy”. I find it interesting that many of the same teachers are among the small group who often refer these very same students for discipline issues or academic failure. When asked what instructional strategies have been implemented, the teacher responds with strategies that are implemented for a class in its entirety rather than on an individual basis.

*Study Expectations*

The focus for this particular study originated from a question concerning the perceptions of high school African American males about factors that contribute to their academic success. I anticipate that student perceptions will vary based on the personal experiences they have had during their K-12 education. I also anticipate that the adults that have played supportive roles in their lives such as parents, grandparents, community members, coaches and teachers will impact their experiences. I anticipate that their emphasis will be geared towards African American students as a whole. I also anticipate that their concerns will be geared more towards teachers that they perceive as caring and
respectful to them as a person first. I also anticipate that they will describe obstacles as
teachers who did not care or times when they felt that their potential was not recognized
and their attempts to advocate for themselves was seen as hostile and disobedience.

I am willing to discover that African American males recognize that they can be
successful with the right supports in place and actually see themselves as academically
successful. I am also willing to discover that these students feel that being successful is
difficult and find a need for educators to be trained concerning the different strategies and
interventions that promote positive outcomes for them in the classroom. I am not willing
to discover that African American males feel that their destiny is to fail and that there are
no interventions and strategies that can impact them to be successful academically.

**Outcomes**

It is the hope of this researcher that this study will provide a means for the voice
of the African American male perspective to be heard in the educational arena concerning
factors that impact the academic success for this student group. The second anticipated
outcome of this study is to obtain information that could be utilized to design professional
development materials to support classroom teachers and building administrators in their
efforts to positively impact the academic progress of African American males while
acknowledging and accepting the unique needs that this group of young men brings to the
table. More specifically, the data gathered would be used to inform effective
instructional strategies that could be implemented with this group of students to increase
academic performance.
okay well here at School B, I'm part of the band and uuh i do boy scouts and i in the NAACP Youth counsel
I've been in since i was in 1st grade since 6th grade band has been uuh from freshman year to senior year uuh trumpet uum, yes ma'am we just switched churches but I'm on the usher board and uuh i used to be a musician at the old church
ok, uum well my mother participates a lot with band and NAACP she is actually a band parent for the band and an advisor in the NAACP and she is part of the reason why I stayed so involved in those organizations and then as far as academic my mom always tries to keep in touch with my teachers just um you know in case there's anything slips or anything like that. So yes she just if I ever have like uum a short coming she'll ask me well why did it happen and what can we do to fix it next time or uuh things like that. And then she'll say uuh do you need a tutor if I'm not understanding something or you know, she's just that supportive uum my dad is tough too but he never it never gets to him hopefully for that kind of stuff oh uum well there's the library and then at my church um, we have computers like say i needed a job we have like places that you can apply like they'll set up your interview and everything for you and and they'll set up your on-line application
so that you can pick a time to come in there and you just go in there and apply for the job and then they'll like follow up for you.
the williamsburg one
uums i would say like every other month
uum if i need like resources for a project
i'll just go there and get my book sources
and then sometimes my mom she'll stop by there to read
a lot so i'll pick up a book if she is in there
or whatever and we just do that on Sundays

not really, yeah we just do it in the band
we just study with each other
yes, Ms. T does not play around

taking trigonometry, AP psych, music theory
stage band 2, Eng 12, Spanish 4, physics

i have to say probably stage band, that is my favorite class
i just like playing alot and i like being able to play
with other people and I understand how music theory
works and being able to apply it,
it's just something that i love to do

Ms. T has a lot of energy and her energy kind of I guess,
we feed off her energy so you know
we just able to keep going;
like she is very well i don't want to say pushy
she has perseverance or whatever
so that gives us the same attitudes
so that anything that we are struggling with
we just push right on through
and we just become better musicians
just because of i guess her so
as a band student she expects us like
if the school were to be doing something a little bit different or a little bit odd or something she would expect us to be those mature, respectable students and remain like we are because she instills those principles in us i guess just because in the band she requires discipline from us so she expects that from us all the time well we have to bring her grade reports at the beginning of the year or else we have to for the third quarter of the football game the band gets off so if you don't have or say if you have less than a C you can't go out and talk with your friends or whatever and that's it. and she knows like for some students they still bring her grade reports because she likes to keep up with her students because she doesn't want any of us failing or so i have an A least favorite, i would have to say trigonometry just because well math has never come naturally to me for the first time so i have to study a little harder to memorize things and uum you know the class is fine it' just something i don't, doesn't make sense
he's really hard working, TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
like if we don't understand something the first time, TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
he will try multiple methods TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
to try to get us to understand it TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
and the way he gives homework, TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
he gives enough so that it's not too much TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
but it gives us enough time to practice TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
and he comes back and we have questions TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
for him and he just answers those TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS

well like on the test i know he will, TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
if we don't if one test sometimes TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
he will switch up the test i guess TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
to see if we can apply the things that he has taught us TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
to maybe a different variation of that problem TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
but sometimes if we don't do well on the test as a class TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
he will re-do the test and make it the same as the review that he has given us before TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
and the homework assignments TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
and like one activity about a month ago TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
he would write a problem up on the board TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS
and one person would have to do each part of the problem until it was solved so TEACHER LEAST FAV CLASS

just to be respectful and to come to class prepared TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
you know if you don't understand something TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
you would of had to of done your homework TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
you know you can't say that you don't understand TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
something if you haven't done the homework TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
so he expects us to at least attempt the homework. TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
and then he's willing to work with us from there TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Mr. G TEACHER LEAST FAVORITE CLASS
well stage band is my best grade BEST GRADE CLASS
and I think for my core classes it would be English BEST GRADE CLASS
an A right now BEST GRADE CLASS
yes, I think so BEST GRADE CLASS
Ms. V TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS

she is, she expresses herself really well TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
like I don't know rather than English TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
it's like an English and life skills class I guess TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
because everything has like a purpose in her class TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
and she doesn't do anything just for busy work. TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
it's to either teach us something TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
that we will need in the future TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
or it's because I'll be testing you on this later TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
and you'll need to have this in your mind anyway TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
because you are about to be adults. TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS
and that's pretty much it. TEACHER BEST GRADE CLASS

well Ms. V will always have an opening activity BEST GRADE CLASS
and it can be anything, BEST GRADE CLASS
it can be anything from a group discussion BEST GRADE CLASS
or you know writing down a journal entry BEST GRADE CLASS
or she gives you a prompt and you analyze the prompt BEST GRADE CLASS
and talk with your group about it or what you are doing BEST GRADE CLASS
and you expect to do a lot of reading BEST GRADE CLASS
when you enter the class BEST GRADE CLASS
it's a lot that you have to do BEST GRADE CLASS
it's not one of those things BEST GRADE CLASS
where you can depend on other people to push you along BEST GRADE CLASS
you really have to do the work yourself BEST GRADE CLASS
and continue to stay focused to BEST GRADE CLASS
cause you have to earn your grade in that class. BEST GRADE CLASS

we are reading the Alchemist ASSIGNMENT
Frankenstein ASSIGNMENT

doing the work, TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
she will not give you she doesn't give you anything TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
you get what you deserve in that class TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

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so if you want to do A work you have to put forth the effort TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS
even if you're intelligent TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS
you still have to TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS
there's always work to be done in that class TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS

oh the class? TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS
i think that that's totally like i feel right about that TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS
because i feel like i'm earning my grade TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS
and i feel like i'm getting the education TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS
that I'm supposed to TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS

physics, probably LOWEST GRADE CLASS
a C right now LOWEST GRADE CLASS

i think there's well a lot of disconnect LOWEST GRADE CLASS
because the teacher she is really polite and everything LOWEST GRADE CLASS
it's just i can't a lot of times LOWEST GRADE CLASS
i have to have connections with the teacher. TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP
i'll ask questions and it will be answered LOWEST GRADE CLASS
but it won't be fully answered LOWEST GRADE CLASS
to where i can be able to take something away from it. LOWEST GRADE CLASS
i definitely study in the class LOWEST GRADE CLASS
and i do the work LOWEST GRADE CLASS
it's just that there are some things that i can't quite get LOWEST GRADE CLASS
or grasp on to and i feel like she understands that TEACHER LOWEST GRADE CLASS
but she doesn't know exactly what to do about it TEACHER LOWEST GRADE CLASS
because it's not only me that's feeling this way TEACHER LOWEST GRADE CLASS
it's a lot of other members of this class. TEACHER LOWEST GRADE CLASS
i go to someone who is doing well in the class and see what they are doing because i need to see what i'm doing differently. for minor things really i'm one of those people that has to get it myself to be able to keep doing it. i can't keep going back to somebody to rely on them for everything so i want to be more independent i guess.

i feel like it's not really okay to just push us along because we are going to have to get it some time or another. i think the problem needs to be addressed and not ignored because people are getting the same problems wrong over and over again. you have to try something different to get us to understand it.

a little bit, it's not a subject of my interest but to keep getting less than what i want the english class there is more teacher interaction between the teacher and the students. physics the teacher can be writing up on the board for 30 minutes and not get any feedback from the class and it's like you take this home and you apply it to your homework when Ms V is saying you know how do you feel about this and what can i do to help you understand.

oh, well i'm the only colored kid in my physics class but sometimes i feel like if i ask questions it's like oh well come on well why don't you understand or whatever but i have a lot more colored kids in my english 12 class.
that i can relate to and talk to things about, and talk with them about things and you know the environment is just a little bit different. i feel more comfortable in english than i do in physics just because there are people my color.

my sophomore year i was in AP Euro and it was just me and this other girl there was still more social interaction in the AP Euro class i guess it was because of the subjects. history requires a lot more interaction i guess you know like talking things out. physics is kind of just straight you apply the formula and if this isn't it this isn't it i guess history requires more discussion. i don't know well they'll bring it up every once and a while like oh i forget, there's constant joking about it and it's like that 's cool and all but really i don't understand why you all can't just treat me like i'm another kid in here cause really i'm here with you guys and there is no difference we are all in the same subject but it's brought up you know constantly well people make black jokes and things like that so you know; they see it as harmless i see it as ok this isn't ok past a certain point

they receive it; well there are different ones you know they some of them take it like seriously and others will like cut it out and that hasn't been a problem but some of them you know you just can't tell them anything it's just that whole mindset from you know it's what they've had like it's just funny to them i guess so i couldn't really tell you,
it's, i'm not even sure. it's not out loud joking it's just like we'll be in labs or something and they'll just pop a joke in there and

RACIAL INSENSITIVITY
RACIAL INSENSITIVITY
RACIAL INSENSITIVITY
RACIAL INSENSITIVITY

oh yeah, yes ma'am just because i haven't had classes; ever since i've been moving up i don't have as many classes with AA kids so you know, not understanding that they can apply themselves just not being driven to do anything because they don't see what it can do for them if they are trying at being successful

RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT

i do, i you know, sometimes it gets mistaken for humor i guess the whole things about race.

RACIAL IMPACT
RACIAL IMPACT

are you asking as far as like issues with races among each other? RACIAL IMPACT

you know, i've had times where i have questioned it with teachers but i have never seen it from any of my teachers. but probably a few times i guess i've recognized it but never thought anything about it

RACIAL INSENSITIVITY
RACIAL INSENSITIVITY
RACIAL INSENSITIVITY
RACIAL INSENSITIVITY
RACIAL INSENSITIVITY

i say it was my freshman year because i came in and i thought it would be really hard trying to get used to high school and i just found that every class that i was taking it seemed a little too easy and you know i had to learn that i had to work but i one time i didn't i guess i wasn't introduced to everything else in high school and all i was focused on was grades and i was doing really well then.

HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE
HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE
HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE
HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE
HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE
HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE
HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

always having something positive to look forward to. I've always had people around me to tell me

GOALS
PEOPLE
SUPPORT

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you can do whatever you put your mind to pretty much. PEOPLE
SUPPORT
i've always had like something that i wanted to achieve GOALS
like i've always wanted to get you know GOALS
where i want to go just goals; GOALS
as long as i set a goal i always have that drive GOALS
to keep going towards it GOALS
and i'll do anything to get there GOALS
and just having positive things like my parents PARENTAL
INVolvEMENT
they put me in all these organizations PARENTAL
INVolvEMENT
just because they knew that i didn't need PARENTAL
INVolvEMENT
any negatives stuff and to surround me PARENTAL
INVolvEMENT
with everything positive all that can do is good for you. PARENTAL
INVolvEMENT
so i think that's the reason why i think PARENTAL
INVolvEMENT
yeah, well at my old church i , MENTOR
his daughter goes to school here but Rev. C MENTOR
he would always, he was kind of a mentor for me MENTOR
when i was in middle school MENTOR
and he kind of set the foundation for having confidence MENTOR
because i used to be like i used to not have any confidence MENTOR
in myself or whatever and i couldn't MENTOR
i used to feel like i couldn't do anything MENTOR
because i wasn't good at sports or whatever MENTOR
and he said you know if you don't excel here MENTOR
you can excel here MENTOR
because it is twice as important MENTOR
so he set that foundation for me MENTOR
to have the mindset that i do so MENTOR

well, i say my cousins. ROLE MODEL
my cousins attended UVA and George Mason ROLE MODEL
and i always thought, ROLE MODEL
i always looked up to them as they were successful ROLE MODEL
and they continue to stay disciplined ROLE MODEL
and they didn't have any side tracks ROLE MODEL
or anything so i always look up to them ROLE MODEL
and i didn't feel like i had to meet that same ROLE MODEL
i guess set bar but i always felt like i should try my best ROLE MODEL
to be like them because they are good role models. ROLE MODEL
yes, well actually i met a teacher this year, Mr. B, he's a government teacher and he's new and he goes to Hampton and I'm going to Hampton in the fall and I saw that he went to Hampton and I saw how polished he was when he came to teach our class and he seemed like a good person to look up to so i look up to him just because he has a good way of presenting himself, things like that he knows how to deal with kids even though they might disrespect him he knows how to handle it without disrespecting the student.  

it was dynamic i had, like i came in a little timid and now i feel like since i've had all these experiences with people and students and teachers and adapted to their teaching styles, i feel like i'm ready to do whatever college has to offer me.  

well, i knew i was afraid of public speaking before i had some of my classes like AP Euro i had to give a presentation and i was scared to death to do it but i had come prepared and i just learned to continuously talk in front of people time and time again and now i still get a little nervous but i can do it and still be able to get my point across so i feel like that's an area that i have grown in since i came to high school.  

just having or sharing the same interest and goals and just the classes i took, i've kind of had the same set of friends from beginning to end just because of the slot that i fell in
ok, well i'm looking to probably be a band director. Future plans so i'm going to attend Hampton for music education. Future plans and hopefully i can get some connects there. Future plans to just meet and interact with people. Future plans to see if i can get some more opportunities to learn some more. Future plans and just be a better musician be able to teach people. Future plans

Mr. P at the middle school that i attended, Motivation i always thought it was so cool. Motivation how he would just have the baton and he would just; Motivation band has always been cool to me. Motivation and Mr. P the first time i saw him lead the band. Motivation i thought that that was probably what did it. Motivation

well i would just say if you have to try to relate to the students, this is black males?

ok, try to relate and don't put yourself above them. Teacher support try to make yourself as humble as possible. Teacher support and try to i guess if they don't understand at first, Teacher support continue to try to help them to try to understand. Teacher support and give them the reason behind the understanding. Teacher support because we have a right to know. Teacher support and i guess i'm not really sure. Misc
### Appendix L Codes/Definitions/Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples from data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Resources</strong></td>
<td>computer resource</td>
<td>access to a computer to support academics outside of the school day; off-campus support</td>
<td>&quot;cause I'm not really good at computers and stuff&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>people resource</td>
<td>a person who supports participant in any manner; to include but not limited to parent, teacher, tutor, peer</td>
<td>&quot;I have a lot of computers at home. We got, I have my own laptop... we have two desktops in the house&quot;-Batman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>peer influence</td>
<td>the impact that peers or other students have the participants decisions to act</td>
<td>&quot;I would probably say that the best resource is other people&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>peer support</td>
<td>peers of participant making an effort to do something that helps the participant to be successful i.e. study, work a problem, get missing work</td>
<td>&quot;I was hanging out with some friends who had some negative effects on me&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>peer interaction</td>
<td>participant talking with or completing an activity with a peer</td>
<td>&quot;Friends, other students. If I need help with something and a kid picks up on it more than I did, I ask him the question that I need to be solved&quot;-Batman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SES</strong></td>
<td>SES</td>
<td>socioeconomic status as determined by receiving free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>&quot;never got free lunch&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I've been on welfare. I've been on some stuff man&quot;-Batman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Support</strong></td>
<td>parental influence</td>
<td>the impact that parents have the participants decision to act</td>
<td>&quot;my mom has a love for history too; well it was kind of the same thing with English too though my mom loves English&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parental involvement</td>
<td>parents support of the participant in areas of academics or extracurricular activities</td>
<td>&quot;well when I was younger they were a little bit more involved and stuff and would encourage it more&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>increased independence</td>
<td>parent allowing the participant to be responsible for grades; academic performance</td>
<td>&quot;but as I got older they would say it's on you and whatever you decide and stuff like that&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family</td>
<td>includes parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles; anyone related to the</td>
<td>&quot;I don't know why because no one in my family works in business well my cousin does&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Examples from data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>MMA</td>
<td>mixed martial arts; form of cage fighting; extracurricular activity</td>
<td>&quot;So it doesn't have to be school related? Well ok. I do MMA.&quot; - Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anger</td>
<td>strong feeling of resentment</td>
<td>&quot;When I get really angry, I hit the punching bag&quot; - Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>punched</td>
<td>to hit or physically come into contact with someone or something missing classes without permission from a parent or teacher</td>
<td>&quot;it was girl related and I got really angry and that time I punched a tree&quot; - Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skipping</td>
<td>school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>track</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; sports</td>
<td>&quot;Well I did track my sophomore year&quot; - Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>band</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; musical</td>
<td>&quot;Well, here at High School B, I'm part of the band&quot; - Evan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>swimming</td>
<td>church</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; faith based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; social</td>
<td>&quot;and I'm in the NAACP Youth Counsel...since 6th grade&quot; - Evan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>counsel</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; social</td>
<td>&quot;and I do Boy Scouts... I've been in since I was in 1st grade&quot; - Evan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boy scouts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>job</td>
<td>work that results in payment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tennis</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>theater</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; arts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>football</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>basketball</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quidditch</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anime club</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>creative</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; academic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>writing club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>national jr honor society</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; academic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DECA</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>volunteering</td>
<td>extracurricular activity; social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example from data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>academic</td>
<td>work completed to earn a grade; completing a task in order to demonstrate understanding of subject matter</td>
<td>&quot;we are just talking and I don’t do my homework&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>performance</td>
<td>work that teacher assigned to be completed by participant in any class (best grade, least favorite, favorite, lowest grade classes)</td>
<td>&quot;I have an A in marketing, an A in chorus. I have an A in psychology&quot;- Batman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td>motivation for participant to perform well due to a current grade</td>
<td>&quot;we will work on our punctuation and capitalization stuff&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade impact</td>
<td></td>
<td>classes that participants were enrolled in at time of the interview</td>
<td>&quot;yeah because I don’t like looking at the F on my report card&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current classes</td>
<td></td>
<td>the class identified by the participant as the one they enjoyed and looked forward to attending</td>
<td>&quot;English 12, music theory, guitar, tech theatre, and evolution of cinema&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorite class</td>
<td></td>
<td>instructor in the class identified by the participant as the class they enjoy or look forward to attending</td>
<td>&quot;cinema is my favorite because it's really easy&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>instructor in the class identified by the participant as the class they enjoy or look forward to attending</td>
<td>&quot;My favorite class, well I have fun in like nearly all my classes but like my favorite, favorite class is anatomy&quot;- Batman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorite class</td>
<td></td>
<td>the class identified by the participant as the class in which they had the highest score as indicated by grade</td>
<td>&quot;Ms. D, well she's kind of annoying, she'll like yell at u if we are talking during&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>best grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>the class identified by the participant as the class with the highest score as indicated by grade</td>
<td>&quot;I was always good in English, it's just one of my good subjects&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td></td>
<td>instructor in the class identified by the participant as the class with the highest score as indicated by grade</td>
<td>&quot;she's a boring teacher, she's not really like a fun teacher&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher best</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;but I would probably say that my least favorite is government because it's boring and on-line&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I think sometimes on special days they have where you can do it through webcam&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>least favorite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher least</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorite class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have a great interest in attending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lowest grade class</th>
<th>the class identified by the participant as the class in which they had the lowest score as indicated by grade</th>
<th>&quot;cinema right now because my friends are in there&quot;-Max Powers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teacher lowest grade class</td>
<td>instructor in the class identified by the participant as the class in which they had the lowest grade</td>
<td>&quot;well I wouldn't say that I think some play a role, I would say Mr. M. for World History 2 was really interactive and stuff&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher impact</td>
<td>an act that is initiated by the teacher that impacts the participants decision to act (to like or dislike a class/learning)</td>
<td>&quot;I think they are about medium, she's like really lenient about our work&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher expectations</td>
<td>an idea of clear statement of what is to be done or happen in the classroom in terms of behavior and/or assignment completion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher support</td>
<td>teacher of the participant making an effort to do something that helps the participant to be successful academically i.e. one-on-one tutoring; additional help with an assignment; encouraging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student/teacher relationship</td>
<td>participants perception of what the teacher thinks about him</td>
<td>&quot;he hated me so much that he kicked me out&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student/teacher interaction</td>
<td>any discussion/interaction that takes place between the participant and teacher</td>
<td>&quot;Max Powers, have you selected your topic yet?&quot;-observation for Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schedule change</td>
<td>a change to courses that were to be taken</td>
<td>&quot;I got a call a week before school started that it was going to change and would be on-line&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school experience</td>
<td>a specific time or event that took place at a time outside of the time frame of the interview; identified by participant as a special time or a difficult time</td>
<td>&quot;I had a lot of fun in high school I guess&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future plans</td>
<td>college education that takes place post K-12 (at university, trade school, junior college)</td>
<td>&quot;it was dynamic, like I came in a little timid and now I feel like since I've had all these experiences with people and students and teachers I've adapted&quot;- Evan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future plans</td>
<td>activities that will take place after graduation</td>
<td>&quot;they wanted me to go to college and be a success&quot;-Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I'm going to have a family one day eventually&quot;- Max Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>overcoming</td>
<td>strategies that the participant implements to improve academic outcome or to improve their overall success in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>obstacles</td>
<td>the effect that race has on the participant's decision to act; acts that are motivated by the race of the participant or others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>racial</td>
<td>the lack of sensitivity for the race of another; this may be seen in the actions of a person which may solicit a feeling of inferiority or possibly anger from the person being targeted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>impact</td>
<td>changes to the class which observations were completed by researcher; the class was identified as the best grade class by the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sensitiv</td>
<td>changes to the school that the participant verbally expressed would enhance their overall experience in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ity</td>
<td>misbehavior behavior displayed by the participant that might result in an infraction or disciplinary response of some kind from a teacher or administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors of</td>
<td>study</td>
<td>strategies that the participant implements to prepare for a test or other assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic success</td>
<td>strategy</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>motivation</td>
<td>reason for acting in a particular manner</td>
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Appendix M
Memo Writing

August 11, 2012
The process to group codes into like areas and categorize has led to several observations. There are a group of codes that are academic focused and include the following initial codes: favorite class, least favorite class, best grade class and lowest grade class. Each of these groups includes information on the teacher (expectations, support) and assignments. The observation phase of the study was completed in the best grade class and codes used for the observations include: teacher/student interaction, teacher/student relationship, peer interaction, assignment, teacher support, and peer support.

In working through preparation for writing chapter 4 and presenting the results, consideration is being given to looking at the interviews, observations and document review (transcripts, conduct history and SOL scores) as a method of introducing each case. This may include insight into how each of the participants defines himself as well. This question was asked during the first interview.

Intro: academic background (transcript/include diploma type; SOL scores); future plans; how each participant defines himself; info on classes (favorite, least favorite, best and lowest grade).

The cases would be introduced and followed by a cross case analysis which would look at the categories and compare and contrast the data as well as note the themes that were uncovered during the data analysis process.

Some of the concepts or themes that have been noted during the data analysis process to date include:
~4 of 6 study participants are enrolled in higher level courses
~5 of 6 were on track to be awarded advanced study diplomas
~all have met the SOL requirements for graduation
~5 of 6 participants note that the issue they have with their least favorite class and lowest grade class is not the teacher, it is the subject matter.
~4 of 6 have male teachers in the class that they note as their favorite classes
~a number (double check) of study participants speak about the need for interactive opportunities and note that the teachers that are more interactive are their favorite teachers
~all participants are involved in several extracurricular activities
~all participants are involved in some type of music (band and/or chorus)
~all participants have some degree of parental involvement and peer support that they acknowledge/point out as a factor in their academic success
~one participant mentioned role models and a mentor
~3 participants mentioned being active in their church and some support from church members was mentioned by at least 1 participant
one participant shared about the role that race (his being African American) played in his academic experience

When considering the disparities that feed the achievement gap (stereotype threat; cultural ecological theory; school vs. student culture and the discipline gap), the participants did not discuss the issue of race with the exception of one student. When defining who they are the participants do acknowledge that they want the fact that they are African American to be acknowledged and do not want to be viewed in a stereotypical manner. There were strong convictions from the participants as evidenced by their responses:

“an African American male who is trying to find himself right now but is uum going, trying to go in the right direction” Evan

“I want them to see that it’s not all about just based on my color; I want them to see a respectable, talented young man trying to succeed in life” Batman

“I want them to know that I’m a person just like anyone else. It doesn’t matter that I am an African American male or anything” Scott

“ok. I am a black male. I was born a black male and that did come first but I’m an educated black male and I have aspirations” Hosea

Conduct history: This information was provided. A chart was created to include this information. A theme in this area was the level of infraction. Three of the participants received infractions (totaling 10 infractions) that included disruptive demonstrations, attendance, defiance, classroom/campus disruption, disrespect, and use of obscene or inappropriate language or gestures. Consequences included: warning, afterschool detention, and Alternative to Suspension (ISS). None of the participants had infractions during their senior year.

The research questions will be addressed in chapter 5 and are:
1) What factors do high school African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success (addressed above and tied into the literature review)?

~factors that contribute to academic success included: mentor, role models, setting goals, parental involvement (all noted), people resources, teacher support, peer support, motivation (by teacher who is interested in subject area), one student was motivated by not wanting to repeat classes and wanting to graduate, teacher impact, teacher/student relationship,
band (music/ 1 student noted this). Areas that were addressed in the literature review (chapter 2) of the study as being factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males were: parental support (mentioned by all 6 in some form or another and included mother, father, grandmother, and aunt/ there was a father present in 2 of 6 homes; 1 father who is active lived in another state; another father was mentioned as having a little contact and 2 students did not mention a father at all); mentor programs (one participant mentioned a mentor in his life); teacher high expectations (expectations are discussed by the participants and they are very in tune to what their teachers expect from them/ranges from doing their best to passing the class and the SOL to an expectation that they know the material, function at a level of respect that is different than that of the members of the student body as a whole; and relationship building (each participant seems to mention this in some form or another; participants talk about being able to talk to their teacher about anything; one mentions being on a "friendship" level or relationship with at least 2 of his teachers [his perception], students refer a lot to teachers demonstrating or showing that they care not just about them as a person but also about the subject that they teach which gets students excited and wanting to do well to please the teacher because they feel that it is important). All participants mention one of these aspects.

2) What factors do high school African American males perceive as obstacles in being successful academically? How are these obstacles addressed?

The participants were asked about their lowest grade class and also asked what type of things they do to overcome their academic performance in that class.

Evan: You noted that you study hard and do all the work. You shared that you go to someone who is doing well in the class to see what they are doing differently from what you are doing. You stated that this works for minor things but you really felt you have to understand the material in order to be able to do it for yourself and not rely on others for everything. You shared that you did not feel that it was okay for people to be pushed along when they did not understand information because students continuously got the same things wrong because the issue wasn’t addressed. You did acknowledge that you were a little frustrated because you work hard and keep getting less than what you want.

Batman: You noted that you set goals to overcome your obstacles in English. You will be going to college and you know that you need English
12 to graduate. You noted that you have ambitions and you want to reach your goals. You noted that Ms. V. has established teamwork in the class. You go to Ms. V. for help and you are not afraid to go ask another classmate who is actually excelling in the class. You shared an experience you had with the first paper that you turned in. You noted that you got it done 2 days before it was due; used spell check but there were still things misspelled and you had not correctly cited work. Ms. V. shared with you were your errors were and you used all that information and spent more time on the second paper and researched some things to make sure that you had done things correctly. You shared that you learn from your mistakes.

Hosea: You noted that when you don’t understand you take a good look at it.
Vita

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