

ABSTRACT

ASHE, TANESHA FAYE HENDLEY. Practices and Beliefs that Influence African American Students' Success in English Language Arts Classrooms: A Qualitative Case Study. (Under the direction of Carl A. Young)

The racial inequity of literacy acquisition has been widely documented, with many studies showing that African American students consistently receive lower standardized test scores than students of other races. However, an examination of student test scores reveals that many African American students are indeed successful in scoring at or above national averages on standardized reading tests, as is the case with a charter school in southeastern North Carolina. The purpose of this qualitative, single-instrument case study is to discover the instructional beliefs, strategies, and practices of a school's administration, teachers, parents and students to gain insight that can inform future research and policy-making on the reading standardized tests, as well as the design of learning environments and related instructional practices.

The theoretical lens for this study is Critical Race Theory, widely used by researchers to investigate structural and institutional racism and its effects. The researcher used the five tenets of Critical Race Theory to analyze qualitative data collected from the administration, teachers, students and parents. Critical Race Theory also helped the researcher understand the constraints the school within the school operated that enabled African American students to succeed on the Reading standardized tests. The five tenets are the permanence of racism, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, whiteness as property, and counter-storytelling. The specific research questions that guided this inquiry were as follows: (1) What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students, and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences of African American students? (2) How do these beliefs influence the middle-

school ELA teachers' instructional strategies and practices? (3) What beliefs, strategies and practices have had the most impact on African American students' achievement? Some of the findings are teachers' beliefs influence student success even though the parents, students, and teachers work in a system that extends racial inequities. Parent involvement, differentiated instruction and student acceptance of academic responsibility also garnered positive student achievement. However, the researcher found that factors such as high middle school teacher turnover rates, administration disorganization and the unexpected issues met by expanding to high school were taking a negative toll on the student body. The study shows the successes in families working with schools and the dangers in destabilizing charter schools.

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Practices and Beliefs that Influence African American Students' Success in English
Language Arts Classrooms: A Qualitative Case Study

by
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DEDICATION

For Keyon, Abby and Baby Ashe #2

BIOGRAPHY

Tanesha Hendley Ashe was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, to an evangelist/French teacher and a factory worker. Tanesha's parents were both singers and musicians; so much of her childhood was at church and concerts. Because she did not attend preschool or daycare, public school was an intense culture shock in which she went home in tears the first day. Her teachers calmed her and soon she found solace in literature. Although Tanesha began to struggle in school in 3rd grade, she always excelled in English Language Arts. The later elementary and middle school years were riddled with issues at home and school. To complicate matters, Tanesha was a bit socially awkward and did not feel comfortable enough to ask for help when she needed it. She made the common mistake of assuming she could fit in with the wrong crowd. However, Tanesha knew that she didn't have the same life goals as her friends and in 10th grade decided to do well enough to attend college. Tanesha joined the Educational Talent Search program, which partnered with HBCUs to help low income or possible first generation college students attend a HBCU. Around this time, Tanesha joined a mentor group with Alpha Kappa Alpha, Sorority Inc. She was expected to keep good grades as she participated in community service and Cotillion ball. Tanesha was accepted to her dream HBCU, Hampton University, but financial issues prevented her from going. After pressure from her mother and the Educational Talent Search counselor, she decided to attend the local HBCU, Fayetteville State University. It was one of the best decisions of her life. She grew out of her social awkwardness (somewhat) and served in the SGA and student leadership association. The student body elected her class queen and was initiated in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. She met great people who are still a part of

her life. Tanesha had no idea what she wanted to do after graduation and decided to teach as a last option. The school district she attended school hired her. Even though she had a bumpy start, she enjoyed helping students who had similar backgrounds as she did. She began to facilitate school wide and countywide professional development courses on technology integration and standardized test preparation. Tanesha decided to get her masters as she had aspirations to become a lead teacher or specialist and later a professor at a HBCU. In 2009, NCSU accepted her in the doctoral program and she and married her college sweetheart. Since she was still working she decided to attend school part-time. In 2009, Tanesha was appointed as an academic team leader, ELA department chairperson and parent involvement correlate co-chairperson by her principal. She held on to these positions until she decided to leave the school in 2012. In 2012, she had a baby and transferred to an international middle school with a more diverse population. Although Tanesha decided to leave the public school systems to focus on education and motherhood, her passions for education did not waver. In 2013, she obtained an LLC so that she could tutor students and facilitate professional development seminars in English Language Arts. So far, she has established a partnership with one private school and a healthcare solutions company for at risk students. In 2014, Tanesha's piqued interests in emergent literacy influenced her to begin volunteer work with several home school co-ops. She continues to teach preschool children literacy skills in church and secular sponsored home school co-ops. In addition to goals of completing school and becoming a published author, Tanesha felt compelled to start ministerial training at her church. She finished in July of 2015 and serves the church as a Christian educator director, overseeing the educational opportunities for adults and children. She is also passionate about

social justice issues and volunteers for groups that address police brutality and educational inequities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A wide racial disparity exists in literacy acquisition, as shown by disparate scores on standardized reading tests. African American students consistently receive scores lower than students of other races on standardized reading tests, which measure standards of English Language Arts (ELA) skills. Research suggests that the causes lie in structural and institutional racism, as students of color are disproportionately placed in special education and remedial academic settings and subjected to disciplinary action. Research also suggests that the achievement gap between African American and White students (Delpit, 1988; Marshall & Ryden, 2000) on standardized reading tests may show bias among some ELA teachers, who may hold “deficit” views of African American students.

Strong advocates of charter schools believe that the environments in these schools have the potential to close the racial achievement gap. Charter schools are viewed as vital in closing the achievement gap because in most cases they can implement reforms to address students’ needs better than public schools. Charter schools are also free to choose their own teaching approaches, class sizes, and lengths of school days and years (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). A 2007 report by the Department of Education included seven charter schools that were outperforming their state’s public schools by meeting or exceeding test averages in Reading and Math (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Yet the academic research on charter schools has shown mixed results. Nelson, Rosenberg, and Meter (2004) reported that the charter school students had lower achievement than students in regular public schools in both Reading and Math in fourth and eighth grades. The percentage of students performing at or above grade level was also lower than students who attended public schools (Nelson, Rosenberg & Meter, 2004). Bifulco and

Ladd (2007) found that North Carolina's system of charter schools increases racial isolation and widens achievement gaps. As recently as 2015, reports showed that charter schools in North Carolina increasingly catered to the needs of able, White students in racially imbalanced schools (Ladd, Clotfelter, & Holbein, 2015). An op-ed in the *Raleigh News & Observer* revealed that only 71% of charter school students achieved proficiency on standardized tests, at a time when schools in North Carolina predicted 80% of students would achieve proficiency (Eisen & Ladd, 2015).

Although the data on charter schools caused some alarm, examinations of student test scores revealed many African American students in public and charter schools in fact score at or above national averages on standardized reading tests, thereby demonstrating ELA proficiency (Maul, 2015; CREDO, 2013, Chenoweth, 2009). A few instances have been recorded of teachers being successful in influencing African American students to succeed on standardized tests (Flowers, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Yet the successes of these students have not been widely reported and analyzed. This qualitative case study sought to fill this gap in knowledge by reporting on the achievement of African American students in ELA at a charter school. Specifically, I planned to analyze the beliefs, strategies, and practices of administrators, teachers, parents and teachers where African American students have been successful on state reading standardized tests. Ultimately, the findings of this study benefit other public and charter schools by informing of effective strategies and practices to use with African American charter school students in ELA courses.

Background of Study

Although literacy technically consists of both reading and writing skills, educational researchers today typically focus on reading comprehension as the primary literacy skill.

According to Willis and Harris (2000), “Reading performance has been kind of a barometer of school and individual success throughout the 20th century” (p. 79). Students’ performances on reading assessments have been and continue to be a deciding factor in educational practices in the United States (Willis & Harris, 2000). Thus, this study focuses on reading comprehension and performance.

Ample research has shown the literacy challenges of African American students. According to Ogbu (1992), African Americans and other minority groups persistently experience literacy challenges at disproportionate rates. The Achievement Gap Institute at Harvard University (2013) reported that, compared to Whites, African American and Hispanic students lag in measures of understanding ELA content. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009) reported that African American and Latino students perform, on average, two to three years of learning behind White students of the same age. In this study, reading scores of 48% of African American and 43% of Latino students were below basic level, with 17% of White students below basic level.

Similar gaps exist in other states. In 2013, North Carolina Public Education report stated that fewer than 60% of African American and Latino fourth-grade students were proficient in reading in North Carolina (The State of North Carolina Public Education, 2013). These numbers remained stagnant when the students were in eighth grade, which meant, “that over four years of instruction, our students of color are being continuously left behind by their White and Asian peers” (The State of North Carolina Public Education, 2013). According to this state’s standardized test scores, 14% of African American students were proficient in reading in 2013 (The State of North Carolina Public Education, 2013). In fourth-

grade Reading and Math, African American students are about two and a half times as likely as White students to lack basic skills and about one-third as likely to be proficient or advanced (The State of Education for African American Students, 2014). In 2014, the achievement gap widened in all areas except for fourth-grade Math and Reading (Bonner, 2015).

Both historically and now, the lack of literacy achievement of African American students indicates teachers' beliefs, strategies, and practices are not effective in racially diverse classrooms. Singham (1998) warned that teachers' focus on increasing test scores could cause them to use low-level rote curriculums, which disproportionately disengages African American students. By contrast, engaged learning has been proven to decrease the achievement gap (Singham, 1998). According to Willis and Harris (2000), the reason that racially diverse students have low literacy skills is that their literacy needs are overlooked as teachers urge students to assimilate to mainstream culture. Teachers have an unprecedented role in the success of the students they teach, but the oppressive historical and social context of African American students often intensifies the negativity of this effect.

A few researchers have explored why some African American students, despite the troubling long-term racial disparity in literacy skills, are not lagging behind in reading comprehension, instead excelling on reading comprehension tests. Halle et al. (1997) reported that African American students achieved in reading when parents had positive beliefs about their children's performance and were active in supporting their children at school. The teacher's role in student success is most notably exemplified in the seminal study Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted of eight teachers who successfully taught reading skills to African American students. Ladson-Billings (1994) reported that the teachers who

participated in the study “had a strong focus on student learning, developing cultural competence and developing a sociopolitical awareness in their students” (p. xi). This research highlighted two teachers who had distinctive teaching styles. Even though the styles were different, the students achieved on standardized reading tests and classroom assignments because “culturally relevant teaching transcends the material and instructional strategy” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. xix). Teachers’ roles in student success can also be predicted by the homework they assign. Data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 revealed a positive correlation between the number of hours students spent doing homework and their level of reading comprehension (Flowers, 2008). Teachers could also encourage supplementary reading as a means to improve standardized test scores.

In analyzing African American students’ reading skills, it is important to consider the historical and social contexts of race and the influence of these contexts on literacy acquisition. In the present study, the tenets of Critical Race Theory will provide the lens for understanding the constraints on teachers as they work to help African American students acquire literacy skills. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of Critical Race Theory and its five tenets.

Context of Study

This study was conducted at a charter middle school located in a southeastern U.S. city, whose racial and socioeconomic diversity is partly attributable to its large military community. The school, which is identified by the pseudonym Ace Academy, experienced an increase in enrollment due to its reputation as a “second chance” school for African American students and academic performance. The 2012 NC School Report stated that the school had 406 students, with the average ELA classroom ranging from 20-25 students

(Education First NC School Report Cards, 2012). The administration had to employ an additional seventh/eighth-grade ELA teacher and ninth-grade ELA teacher. The state's Department of Education awarded the school its School of Distinction honor for the 2012-2013 school year, with students in the school scoring 52% above other schools in the state (Education First NC School Report Cards, 2012).

Ace Academy was only school in the city where middle-school African American students were recognized for their achievement on the state reading standardized test. At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, the school was also recognized as a School of Distinction. A nonprofit education research and policy organization that convenes education leaders statewide to provide statistical data on academic performance (North Carolina's Best Schools in 2013, 2013) recognized the school. However, after an upward trend from 2009 to 2014, the school experienced a decrease in Reading scores at the end of the 2015 school year. Still, even with the decrease, 56.3% of the African American students passed the Reading standardized tests, in comparison to the statewide proficiency of 37.9%. These significantly above average test scores provided the initial impetus for this study. A remarkable phenomenon is that African American students are excelling in reading comprehension given the dire statistics on African American student literacy and performance of charter schools.

The school's vision statement states that its mission is to "be one of the most successful schools in the world," and that success is to be measured "by our service to the community while helping students graduate, obtain successful careers, and become model citizens of the world" (Ace Academy, 2013). In pursuit of this vision, the school provides students a plethora of opportunities to become involved in academic clubs, sports, and community service events. At the time of this study, Ace Academy had recently relocated

into a new facility where each grade level had its own hallway. The facility was not complete during the study, so teachers and students did not have access to a library, lunchroom, or certain classrooms. Students ate lunch in the classrooms and then had silent reading for 30 minutes. The ninth-grade classes and some elective classes were in huts and small office rooms in a shopping center that the school rented. By the time the data collection phase completed, the ninth graders were able to take a tour of their new hallway. The school's long-term plan was to add one grade level per year until it housed grades K through 12.

Initially, the focus of this study was on middle school ELA teachers, but due to the small size of faculty and staff, I extended the research to all ELA teachers in the school. I intended to offer a glimpse into innovative practices being employed with wider range of African American students. The study included analyses of interviews, observations, artifacts and professional documents (i.e. administrative observations). The interviews explored the teachers', administrator, parents', and students' understandings of how they perceive African American students and themselves. The observations examined whether or how the teachers' beliefs influence classroom practices. Artifacts provided evidence of how the teacher addresses the needs of African American students. The professional documents provided an objective and alternative perspective to how the teachers address diversity in the classroom.

Statement of the Problem

Given educators' increased technology use, differentiation of instruction and attention to multiple diverse needs in instructional planning, one could argue that today's teachers, in their efforts to increase student achievement, are integrating more innovative strategies than ever before. However, despite all of these improvements, teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders are continuously perplexed at the frequent reports of under achievement among

African American students. Curriculum specialists struggle to find ways to make learning ELA accessible for all students.

Although an overwhelming number of research documents the low achievement of African American students on standardized reading comprehension tests, not all African American students are underperforming. The study site, a charter school in the southeast, was recognized for its African American students, performing above the state average on the state reading standardized test. The problem that this study sought to discuss is the assumption that African American students cannot score at or above average on reading standardized tests. This assumption is supported in the literature aforementioned and in the literature review. The successes of some students are obscured by overabundance of reports on African American students' low literacy rates and low standardized test scores.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to discover the instructional beliefs, strategies, and practices of a school's administration, teachers, parents and students to gain insight that can tell future research and policy-making on the reading standardized tests, as well as the design of learning environments and related instructional practices. Until now, little attention is given to the teachers of African American students who are successful in reading comprehension. Thus, studying the ELA teachers lends insight that can inform future research and policy-making on standardized testing, as well as the design of learning environments and instructional practices. The following research questions guided the collection of qualitative data:

1. What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students, and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences of African American students?

2. How do middle school ELA teachers' beliefs influence their middle-school ELA teachers' instructional strategies and practices?
3. What beliefs, strategies and practices have had the most impact on African American students' academic progress?

Chapter Summary

This chapter set forth the widely known problem of racial inequity in literacy acquisition, and introduced a charter school where in the southeastern United States where many African American students are successful in scoring at or above national averages on standardized reading tests. In gathering and analyzing data, I was informed by the tenets of Critical Race Theory. Studying at a charter school where African American students have achieved average or above-average scores on standardized reading tests provided insight that can inform future research and policy-making on standardized testing, as well as the design of learning environments and instructional practices.

The following chapter provides context for this study by describing the relevant literature on English Language Arts (ELA), on the experiences of African American students with literacy (specifically in ELA education), and on Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework. CRT shapes the researcher's perspective throughout this investigation into the beliefs, strategies, and practices of ELA teachers, administrators, parents and students who have been successful at helping African American students achieve on standardized reading tests.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative case study investigates teachers, parents and students at a charter school whose African American students had achieved average or above-average scores on standardized reading tests. The purpose of the study is to discover the instructional beliefs, strategies, and practices of a school's administration, teachers, parents and students to gain insight. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical lens, this study seeks answers to the following questions: (1) What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences African American students? (2) How do these beliefs influence the middle-school ELA teachers' instructional strategies and practices? (3) What beliefs, strategies and practices have had the most impact on African American students' achievement?

This chapter provides context for the study by reviewing the relevant literature on (a) ELA as an academic discipline and content area; (b) African American students' experiences with literacy education and assessment; and finally, (c) the CRT conceptual framework that will help the researcher to analyze the systemic and institutional factors that shape the experiences of teachers and African American students in the middle-school ELA classroom.

ELA as an Academic Discipline and Content Area

ELA is both an academic discipline and a content area in the U.S. education system. As a discipline, or set of skills to learn, ELA entails reading, writing, and communicating effectively. As a content area, or subject to be studied, ELA involves understanding the purposeful use of language. The subject as taught in sixth through ninth grade, referred to, as "middle-grades ELA," is the focus of this study. Teachers of ELA, especially in the middle grades, play a pivotal role in the U.S. education system because of the role literacy has in

developing self-sufficiency. Proficiency with ELA liberates and empowers those who possess it. Indeed, ELA has become a way to measure and check a broad range of ideals, from academic and professional settings to economic and political arenas. Although ELA proficiency is measured through both reading and writing skills, this study focuses on reading comprehension skills because researchers generally consider reading comprehension skills the useful barometer of ELA proficiency (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001). As such, most ELA local and state standardized tests focus on reading skills.

History of ELA

According to Soltow and Stevens (1981), in the 1860s, students who regularly attended summer and winter school from the ages of 5 to 11 received approximately 1100 hours of formal reading instruction, which the researchers assumed was enough to assure literacy. At that time, oral expression, specifically elocution, was a vital component in reading instruction; students practiced articulation, inflection, accent, and managing voice. In Hobbs and Berlin's (2001) exhaustive historical account of literacy coursework in the U.S. education system, they explained that, up to the early 20th century, English studies focused on teaching students how to read and interpret classical rhetoric and literature. According to Hobbs and Berlin (2001), when English classes reorganized around 1917, during World War I, the emphasis of English classes shifted from preparing students for college to meeting their social and personal needs. Changes in the economy forced higher education to emphasize practicality. The relative personal prosperity after the wars and economic strife caused ELA classes to become sites where students were encouraged by teachers to engage in creative writing and in fictional conversations. In the 1950s, the launch of Sputnik made many to believe the U.S. was behind in technological advances. The focus of education shifted to

preparing students for employment in corporate America (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001). Reading became increasingly important (Yancy, 2009), and in 1956, the International Reading Association was founded to improve the quality of reading instruction, disseminate research about reading, and encourage people to become lifelong readers. Structural linguistics also gained prominence in the 50s because many believed the study of grammar would increase reading comprehension skills (Gold, Hobbs, & Berlin, 2012). During the 1960s and 1970s, literature was increasingly emphasized due to the beginning of new critical approaches and increasing sense of professional identify with literature teachers (Gold, Hobbs & Berlin, 2012). The push for literature in texts marginalized writing instruction. In 1983, with the report *A Nation at Risk*, the U.S. government declared that American public schools were failing and called for widespread reform (U.S. Department of Education, 1983).

In the aftermath of *A Nation at Risk*, and with the dawn of computer accessibility, education became more data-driven. In the 1990s and 2000s, ELA studies struggled to respond to the concerns of the public. Over time, literacy education became focused on interpreting literature for answering questions on standardized tests. The consequences of this movement are still felt today as ELA courses have come to neglect open-ended writing and critical thinking in favor of preparing students for standardized tests. This trend toward data-driven assessments based on standardized tests are highly significant to the present study, which investigated the instructional beliefs, strategies, and practices of middle-grade teachers who are successful in preparing African American students for these tests.

Techniques for Formal Reading Instruction

Over the decades, a plethora of frameworks and methods were developed for the purpose of instructing students in reading comprehension. In Venesky's (1986), seminal

account of the history of reading instruction, he referred to reading as a “neglected area of curriculum history” (p. 1). He described three distinct approaches to developing reading curricula: the evangelical approach, exemplified by reformers such as Horace Mann, driven by ideals that they felt duty-bound to advocate; the “all for the best” perspective, which was practiced by relatively objective and unselfish parents and teachers who were motivated by a sincere desire to do what was best for the children (p. 133); and the childhood perspective, which emphasized children’s own perspectives on the process of learning to read and on the content of the texts being read (Venesky, 1986). As Venesky’s (1986) narrative illustrates, there has long been a wide variety in approaches to developing reading instruction methods and curricula.

Variation can also be seen in the broad set of techniques from which reading teachers select as they adapt their instruction to changing student needs. Teachers can make sound instructional decisions by drawing upon a variety of techniques that are more or less accepted by the broader educational community. Carr (1969, Vogt and Shearer (2011), and Barry (2008) have identified three different themes that are in the debates on reading instruction techniques: (1) the use of the alphabet method, which focuses on spelling; (2) the use of phonics versus sight words, which phonics focuses on how sounds corresponds to letters and site words focuses on students memorizing words read by teacher; and (3) the use of basal readers, which teachers use anthologies of shorter texts to teach reading skills. Many variations and modifications exist for each of these techniques. This section discusses the themes in chronological order by when each one was historically most popular.

The alphabet method (Barry, 2008), which was a precursor to phonics, was an oral, spelling-based approach to reading. Under this system, children (Barry, 2008; Monaghan,

2005) named the letters in a word, spelled the syllable, and spelled and recited each word of a printed prayer, provided to students in a primer. American Colonists, who employed primers not only to educate their children but also to convert Native Americans to Christianity, used this method. However, after the American Revolution, the public deemed primers inappropriate because they originated in England (Barry, 2008). With motives that may seem questionable by today's standards, (Barry, 2008) White Christian missionaries modified reading instruction by using the letters and words from Native American texts in British primers to persuade Native Americans to convert and conform.

The second theme in the history of reading instruction techniques is the debate between the uses of phonics versus the use of the “look-say” method or sight words. The use of phonics (Raham & Hubert, 2013) involves explaining how letters correspond to sounds to foster spelling skills that will help students learn to read. Pollard (1997) developed a version of phonics called the synthetic method, which included intensive drills on sound and symbol correspondence isolated from text. By contrast, under the look-say method (Farham, 1995), students repeat what the teacher reads. An early literature-based approach used classic texts, assuming that students had prior knowledge of the printed text. The term “sight word” (Levin & Ehri, 2009) refers to words that the student, using a look-say method, learns to recognize by accessing them in memory. Teachers who use this method of instruction provide students with age and grade-level appropriate words to memorize. Horace Mann, an educator, is credited with expanding the growth of whole-word instruction. In the seventh annual report to the Massachusetts Board of Education, Mann (1844) explained,

When put to learning the letters of the alphabet first, the child has no acquaintance with them, either by the eye, the ear the tongue, or the mind: but if put to learning

familiar words first, he already knows them by the ear, the tongue, and the mind, while his eye is unacquainted with them. (p. 57)

Even today, educators disagree on whether teachers should use phonics or sight words when teaching reading to preschool and elementary students. However, some resolved the issue by using a mix of approaches. The Common Core, the most widely used standards in the U.S., include sight words and phonics in the curriculum.

A third technique for formal instruction in reading comprehension is the use of basal readers. Basal readers (Goodman, 1986) are the most universally available instructional materials for teaching reading. They are essentially anthologies of many shorter texts. Basal readers (Nistler, 1996; Yoakam, 1951) have long been controversial in ELA classrooms. Some educators believe that basal readers are essential because of the vocabulary control, guided practice with words, selected content, and teaching aids they provide, while others argue that basal readers misrepresent literary processes and use inappropriate standards for reading. In a reaction against this method, Rudolf Franz Flesch (1993) published the book *Why Johnny Can't Read*, in which he advocated the need for phonics and influenced its resurgence in reading instruction.

Since Flesch's (1993) argument for phonics in the 1990s, three new approaches have emerged for working with phonics and sight words today: the linguistic approach, the language experience approach, and the whole language approach. The linguistic approach uses reading materials that focus on word families; the language experience approach involves having students read their writing materials; and the whole language approach focuses on writing and literature, assuming that children have prior knowledge that informs printed text. In 1998, the National Research Panel published *Preventing Reading Difficulties*

in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), which suggested that researchers focus on early literacy and teachers emphasize verbal interactions with text, explicit instruction on summarization, predicting outcomes, drawing inferences, and monitoring coherence and misunderstandings.

Today, various reading instruction methods continue to oscillate as popular media, politicians, and the public influence classroom decisions. Because illiteracy is the cause of many social ills, many people feel obligated to hold and voice strong opinions on how children are taught to read. However, according to Nichols (2009), the danger in politicizing education is that when one party is found wrong, the tendency is to swing to the other party. Research documents how the inconsistencies in reading instruction affect students. Nevertheless, Nichols (2009) asserts that students cannot only survive inconsistencies in teaching methods, but also “be at the center of our metaphors, skipping in time to the beat” (p. 4). Although, some students suffer due to the changes in reading instruction, some flourish because of the changes. Educators have the difficult task of determining how to offer change and stability to their instructional methods so that both types of students can succeed.

A common thread through all the methods and approaches described above is that they are all concerned with reading comprehension. Researchers are unsure of when comprehension became a part of reading instruction. Some scholars (Venesky, 1986) believe that the emphasis of reading comprehension in instruction was direct result of the standardized movement in the 20th century, while others support the notion that reading comprehension was always a focus of education, but hidden beneath other concerns such as oral expression. Venesky (1986) pointed out that even though *The Teaching of Reading: A Second Report* (Gray, 1937) mentions that reading comprehension was a focus of reading

instruction, there is little research to support the historical existence of reading comprehension instruction (Venesky, 1986). In any case, at present, reading comprehension is the primary focus of reading curricula.

Emergent Literacy as a Precursor to Reading Comprehension Skills

Researchers have identified two factors that are integral to students' success in acquiring reading comprehension skills: the reading of appropriate genres of literature, and acquiescing emergent literacy. According to the literature, if teachers consider these two measures in the ELA classroom, literacy rates and an overall appreciation of literacy will ensue. Genres for classroom use will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter; the present section is concerned with emergent literacy.

The term “emergent literacy” refers to the ability, information, and attitudes children have in reading and writing before they start their formal education (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2008). Reading is vital to a student's ability to achieve academically and professionally. Literacy emerges from a child's ongoing understanding of his or her surroundings and text (Leu, 2002). Researchers (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997) found that children who had early literacy skills were more apt to develop as lifelong readers. When emergent literacy is not fully formed (Chall & Jacobs, 2003), students fall further behind their literate peers in other academic areas. Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002) concluded that students without emergent literacy skills are most likely identified for special services in high school, drop out of high school, and have criminal records. Because of the poor academic progress of students with low emergent literacy, studies have focused on comparative analyses of students' emergent literacy, effective measures to cultivate emergent literacy, and the evaluation of government and private fund programs geared to develop emergent literacy.

The demonstrably profound effect that emergent literacy has on student success has inspired studies that look at how and why children develop emergent literacy. The literature reports (Teale, 1987) that two causes of literacy development in children include exploration of written language and active construction that internalize social interaction. Parental attachment also influences how young children connect with print and non-print texts. Zambo and Hansen (2007) explain that how children attach to their parents during story time determines how they connect to language and reading later in life. One study reports that when children showed attachment to their parents, they paid more attention to reading instruction, engaged more in proto-reading (children's attempts to spell words, name letters, and point out the symbolic function of written language), and scored higher on emergent literacy measures (Bus & Ijzendoorn, 1988). Home literacy (Barron et al., 2000), defined as the literacy activities that families engage in at home, includes maternal connections. Studies show that home literacy directly influences a child's emergent literacy skills. Roberts et al. (2005) reported that the home literacy of children contributed over and beyond literacy practice measures predicting children's literary development. Moreover, home literacy is used to predict differences in early childhood literacy (Griffin & Morrison, 1997). Other factors that influence emergent literacy include the home literacy environment, adult literacy activities, adult-child verbal interactions, and word games (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2001).

African American Students and Literacy

The History of Literacy Among African Americans

In pre-Civil War America, many southern states passed “slave codes” that forbade enslaved persons from learning to read and write. Slave codes defined the status of slaves and

their masters for each state (Sambol-Tosco, 2004). In 1740, the state of South Carolina specified that anyone who taught a slave to read and write would be fined 100 pounds, current money, for every offense (Sambol-Tosco, 2004). Virginia revised its slave code in 1739 to say that no one could teach slaves how to write (Sambol-Tosco, 2004). Initially, attempts to educate African Americans were supported by African Americans and religious groups such as the Quakers, Puritans, and Anglicans (Woodson, 1919). By the end of the 18th century, 15 to 20 percent of slaves were literate. Several schools in the north taught slaves how to read and write (Sambol-Tosco, 2004). Many slave owners also provided education for their offspring. Despite the many obstacles, African Americans made significant gains throughout this period by developing schools and obtaining degrees. In 1890, 39.8 percent of African American children aged 10–14 were literate, and by 1930, only 5.3 percent of the same age group was illiterate (Margo, 1985). However, after African Americans wrote and published texts that encouraged slavery insurrections and celebrated the triumph of literacy, support for African American literacy decreased.

African Americans' dedication to pursuing literacy is clear in their establishment of makeshift schools, historically black colleges and universities, and publications that examined the potential of African Americans to improve their ways of life through literacy (Harris, 1992). In addition to makeshift schools, from 1912 to 1931, nearly 5000 schools were constructed as part of the Rosenwald Rural Schools Initiative (Aaronson & Mazumder, 2001). The initiative, designed to decrease the “schooling gap,” was the result of collaboration between Booker T. Washington, a proponent of industrial education, and Julius Rosenwald, a Chicago businessman and philanthropist (Aaronson & Mazumder, 2011). Booker T. Washington argued that African Americans would gain social and political

equality once they gained economic independence; he also believed that African Americans should receive basic instruction in reading, writing, composing and computing, but most importantly, the training that would help them secure jobs (Moon, 1972). The schools launched by Washington and Rosenwald were innovative in that they improved accessibility of literacy and the quality of literacy education. Schools were built using modern designs, and students and teachers were granted resources to ensure a comfortable and productive learning environment (Aaronson & Mazumder, 2011). Aaronson and Mazumder (2011) found the racial gap declining to under a year and literacy rates improving dramatically. During this time, some African Americans, especially in the North, preferred segregated schools because they believed these schools protected students from racism and falling behind because of under-preparedness (Stakeman & Stakeman, 2012).

During this period (1900–1939), the first golden age of African American intellect, the voices and ideas of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, and Carter G. Woodson prevailed. Their voices influenced how many approached the curriculum and instruction of African American students. The influence of Booker T. Washington is evident in the Rosenwald schools. Students learned cooking, canning, carpentry and sewing in addition to reading, writing and math (Heller, 2005). W.E.B. Dubois had a different approach; he asserted that African Americans should achieve the highest level of education to improve racial equity. Specifically, Dubois developed a curriculum where African Americans would learn reading, writing, and counting, during the first four years of life (Moon, 1972). Primary schools would cultivate these skills so that students could read for information and practice writing for communicating and expression. Dubois promoted literacy for emancipatory purposes through texts such as *The Brownies Book*, a children's periodical, *Unsung Heroes*, a

biography for children, and the *Crisis*, the official journal for the National Advancement for Colored People. Significantly, Dubois believed that the education African Americans should obtain was more industrial. Carter G. Woodson was a prominent African American scholar who was influential in the education of African Americans. He was one of the first to study African American history. He also had issues with the education of African Americans. Woodson believed that the education of African Americans was more advantageous to the oppressors, so he published texts designed for literacy instruction. His books for children emphasized the cultural contributions of African Americans and fostered children's development of positive racial identities.

Still, the judicial system worked against African Americans' pursuit of literacy education. Literacy tests (Brandt, 2004; Kates, 2006) were not only used as a tool to prevent people of color from voting but registering in the military also. Even though Blacks established their separate schools to teach literacy and other skills, the passage of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) showed that African Americans believed that perhaps their educational experiences were sub par. As early as 1934 (Stakeman & Stakeman, 2012), Charles Houston, the dean of Howard Law School, filmed a documentary on the disparities of Black schools in the south. This video was shown at the 1935 Annual Conference of the NAACP (Stakeman & Stakeman, 2012). According to America's Black Holocaust Museum (2012), segregated schools were inferior because White schools received more money, enrollment was lower in rural areas because Black children worked on farms, Black schools were overcrowded, Black teachers were under-qualified, books were sparse, and limits existed as to what could be taught in school. Margo (1985) conducted a study using data from school systems in Alabama from 1930–1940 and found a 75–85% wage gap between

African American and White teachers. The researcher (Margo, 1985) reported that expenditures in teacher salary directly related to student achievement, regardless of race. Ironically, research shows that many African American students experience the same disparities in integrated schools today.

In 1958, Citizenship Schools provided basic literacy and political education classes to adult African Americans (Levine, 2004). Septima Clark, Myles Horton, and Andrew Young were instrumental in developing the curriculum and criteria of these schools that challenged the unjust social order of the south by overcoming illiteracy (Levine, 2004). According to Levine (2004), “By the time the project ended in 1970, approximately 2,500 African Americans had taught these basic literacy and political education classes to tens and thousands of their neighbors” (Levine, 2004, p. 388). The Voting Act of 1970 (Brandt, 2004) prohibited the use of literacy tests in voter registration and wars and technological advances influenced the military to fund adult education programs.

In the 70s and 80s, after public schools desegregated, serious debates were waged in academic publications over whether African Americans were to blame for their own illiteracy and low achievement in education. These debates tended to ignore the sociopolitical contexts of African American literacy education. Researchers such as Smitherman (1993), Slaughter-Defoe and Rubin (2001) and Heath (1989) supported the notion that African Americans could achieve literacy at higher rates if issues such as teacher quality and preparation, resources, and parental support are addressed. Laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Department of Education, 1965) aimed to ensure equal equitable education for students in poverty.

In 1979, the case of *Martin Luther King Jr Elementary School vs. The Ann Arbor, Michigan, School Board* exposed the inequities of literacy education. The attorney for the plaintiff, several African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, argued that the students under the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1974 should be taught English as a second language (Yellin, 1980). The rationale for this position was that African American students spoke in a dialect, which presented a language barrier and thus prevented their success in reading and writing. Even though Ann Arbor teachers argued that they were already modifying instruction for these students, a judge ordered them to attend dialect sensitivity classes. Some 17 years later, in 1996, the Oakland Unified School District passed a resolution declaring Ebonics the primary language of African American students (Baron, 2000). It also declared Ebonics to be its own language and not a dialect of English (Baron, 2000). This resolution sparked controversy across the country, as many argued that this resolution would hinder the progress of African Americans.

Throughout the 1990s, concern over African American literacy surged, as “a significant number of African American youth [were declared] uneducated or, as many have observed, mis-educated so that they leave schools functionally illiterate” (Harris, 1992, p.283). Scholars such as Madhubuti (1978, 1994) and Holland (1996) suggested developing separate schools focused on African American culture and the standard curriculum. Taylor (1993) recommended strengthening the familial and educational contexts to develop literacy skills. Many religious groups, government organizations, and individual school districts attempted to address the need using the later recommendation by developing programs that support literacy.

More recently, through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the government attempted to address literacy inequities in public education by instituting standardized testing. This law, reauthorized during the Bush administration, reports the achievement gaps of racial minorities in literacy skills. In 2009, when the act reauthorized as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the government resolved to furnish funds for reforms in teacher quality and principal effectiveness, provide families information to evaluate and improve schools, implement college and career ready standards, and improve student learning and performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Both acts failed due to standardized testing marginalizing the learning experience for teachers and students, standards varying from state to state, and goals were not made by deadlines.

Presently, to complicate matters, recent studies report that some public schools are just as segregated as they were prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Childress, 2014). UCLA researchers attribute this to a decline on the legal attacks of legal desegregation orders and the 1991 decision in *Board of Education of Oklahoma City vs. Dowell* (Breslow, Wexler & Collins, 2014). In this case, the Supreme Court's rule freed school districts from an injunction to desegregate if it can demonstrate compliance in other ways and show that it will not re-segregate (Breslow, Wexler & Collins, 2014). As expected, school districts began to show compliance to halt desegregation sanctions. Over, 200 medium- and large-sized school districts released from court-ordered desegregation orders from 1991 to 2009 (Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, & Greenberg, 2012). Segregation gradually increased in these districts, and became especially pronounced in the South (Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, & Greenberg, 2012). Some scholars argue that charter schools have had a role in increasing the racial divide in public schools. Ladd, Clotfelter and Holbein (2015) found that more than two-thirds

of charter school students attend schools that are segregated. Segregated schools affect the literacy rates of African American students because they associated with lower per-pupil spending and higher teacher–student ratios (Breslow, Wexler & Collins, 2014). As politicians are increasingly aware and held responsible for academic performance and literacy rates, they address disparities in legislation. In 2016, President Barack Obama unveiled the “Stronger Together” grant program, designed to integrate schools by income. The proposed program will reward school districts or groups of districts that make efforts to break up school poverty concentrations (Meeting Our Greatest Challenges: Opportunity for All, 2016). As this account has shown, it has been difficult to address the literacy needs of African American students without equalizing their access to resources.

Emergent Literacy Among African American Students

Some scholars argue that socioeconomic status is a better predictor than race in identifying children who are at risk of low emergent literacy acquisition. Others couple socioeconomic with adult illiteracy to determine or predict literacy rates. In 1985, Margo found that adult illiteracy decreased relative to the number of years of schooling of African American children fewer than 10 in the 1930s. Adult illiteracy was associated with lower family income, and poverty, in turn, hindered student achievement (Margo, 1985). The data also suggested an intergenerational linkage between adult and child literacy in the 20th century (Margo, 1985). Chaney (1994) reported that children in poverty are at a risk of failing to learn how to read. One study (Korat, 2005) found that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds had poorer contextual and no contextual knowledge in emergent literacy. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have limited opportunities for experiences that would develop their emergent literacy skills (Ming & Powell, 2010). Among

children who live in poverty, emotional stress and lack of literacy resources (Manz et al., 2010) contribute to low emergent literacy. When the parents are not afforded experiences in literacy (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003), they cannot support their children's literacy or pass on positive attitudes about reading.

Although parental education level is a determining factor in a child's reading skills (Washington, 2001), African American students from middle-class backgrounds also underperform in reading, which leads many to believe that socioeconomic status is not the primary factor affecting emerging literacy. The home literacy of children of color is not congruent to the home literacy of White children. For instance, Raikes et al. (2006) found that White caregivers engaged their children more in storybook reading than people of color. This poses a problem for children of color because (Heath, 1989) academic norms are based on White, middle-class standards. The theme of incongruence in the literacy experiences on White children and children of color can also be extended to learning skills; as Matthew et al. (2010) found, learning skills hindered the literacy development of African American boys. To complicate matters, the ability of students of color (Manz et al., 2010) to acquire emergent literacy skills is threatened by many social risks such as the perceived cultural validity of exposing children to literature and the perceived cultural validity of literacy intervention programs. Manz et al. (2010) found that in many cases, families of color believed schools were primarily responsible for fostering literacy, believed their children were too young to begin cultivating literacy skills, and associated literacy with the social power of the dominant culture, and therefore undesirable. These findings point to the causes of the low emergent literacy skills among children of color. Some researchers argue the structure of the family structure in the Black community directly influences the literacy rate.

Heath (1989) warns that constant changes in Black families continue to raise issues in literacy, Manz (2010) argues that emergent literacy skills will increase as families of color continue to adapt to higher education.

Teachers may have a role in the low literacy rates among African American students. Research has indicated that some ELA teachers may teach students of color from a deficit model. The deficit thinking paradigm (Valencia, 1997) posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies linked to the child's perceived racial dysfunctions and deficits. For example, Dudling-Marling and Lucas (2009) found that literacy programs that aimed to fix literacy deficiencies in poor or families of color such as strategies suggested in Ruby Payne's Framework for Poverty only influenced deficit-thinking teaching. In some cases, ELA teachers systematically teach students of color from a deficit model via the instructional strategies they choose to use. For instance, the five-paragraph essay, a formulaic instructional assignment that some teachers use to teach composition, perpetuates deficit thinking because, in order for teachers to use it, the assumptions must be made that students of color are deficit in independent thinking and decision making (Brannon, et al., 2008). Because students have to be proficient in a specific mold of writing when learning the five-paragraph essay, students of color end up "blaming themselves for not getting it right, or hating writing, or believing they aren't measuring up" (Brannon, et al. 2008, p. 19). If students do not write an essay that fits the formula of the five-paragraph essay, they believe they are wrong because they've been taught the correct way to write the essay. These students seek other outlets for their beliefs and ideas, because their thoughts do not fit the mold (Brannon, et.al, 2008).

Another theory that supports the teacher's role in low literacy rates of African American students is the notion White ELA teachers teach from a perspective of colorblindness and, therefore, negate the experiences of students of color. Johnson (2002) found that "the handful of research studies that have been conducted have found that White teachers often claim color blindness" (p. 154). In a study analyzing the narratives of 6 White teachers, the results reported participants realized they had to overcome colorblindness and a dialogue of failure associated with students of color in order for all students to be successful (Johnson, 2002). It is a widespread belief that colorblindness is good, but as aforementioned it ignores the complexities of the students' experiences. This limits instructional practices and professional development.

Another plausible explanation for low achievement in racially diverse classrooms is the Pygmalion effect, wherein the teacher's expectations influence student behavior (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). The Pygmalion effect also supports the theory that teachers influence low literacy rates. Cotton (1989) published a meta-analysis that reveals teachers with students from ethno racial backgrounds tended to have low expectations for those students. This document was based on 22 studies and evaluations and 23 reviews and meta-analyses.

Admittedly, some studies do not identify race as a predictor of emergent literacy. Baker (1996) did not report any differences between the home literacy environments of African Americans and European Americans. Some studies also present a bias as to what is considered a literacy environment by comparing literacy practices to White homes. For this reason, Gadson (1998) warns that many studies dichotomize the literacy practices of low-SES parents and children as deficit or asset. Gadson (1998) found "poor parents, poor parents

of color, and nonnative speakers of English engage their children in a variety of critical literacy experiences" (p. 35).

Because the literacy practices of students of color and families of low socioeconomic status differ from the literacy practices that contribute to academic success, programs funded by the government and by private organizations to assist with emergent literacy intervention. Justice and Pullen (2003) list the following key components in emergent literacy intervention: (1) activities addressing written and phonological awareness, (2) activities with naturalistic and explicit components, and (3) evidence-based practices. The Neumors Bright Start Dyslexia Initiative (Bailet et al., 2009), for example, funded a study that provided universal emergent literacy screening and differentiated instruction to at-risk students. The intervention consisted of eighteen 30-minute lessons facilitated twice per week for nine weeks. The researchers focused on teaching critical emergent literacy skills in small groups. The participants gained more phonological awareness, vocabulary, and print and letter knowledge. An emergent literacy intervention (Whitehurst et al., 1994) integrated in the Head Start curriculum showed growth in the participants' writing and print concepts. Another kind of support developed is the intervention of speech pathologists that correct low emergent literacy skills by fostering early phonological awareness, collaborative book reading, alphabetic letter knowledge, experiences with written materials, and modeling literacy activities. Roth and Baden (2001) encouraged parents and stakeholders to invest in speech pathologists who provide direct services to students with low emergent literacy skills. One early intervention program developed in New Zealand, Reading Recovery (Pinnell, 1990), implemented in Ohio schools with success. Although the benefits of emergent literacy

have been proven through research, fostering emergent literacy does not automatically guarantee equitable literacy experiences for all students.

Literary Genres and African American Students

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one factor that influences student success in developing reading comprehension skills is the use of appropriate literary genres in the classroom. In the case of African American students, two genres that have significant importance are young adult literature and multicultural literature. In the 80s when young adult literature was introduced, scholars in the teaching of English believed young adult literature content was frivolous and that it "watered down" the cultural heritage (Rybakova, Piotrowski, & Harper, 2013; Tchudi, 2003). Some English teachers thus continued to use classic novels in their classes and not young adult literature. Other scholars believed that adolescent literature was a subgenre of children's literature. Hunt (1996) found that, over a 15-year period, no theorists analyzed children's literature as a separate genre from young adult literature. The contentiousness over the existence of young adult literature as a distinct genre is (Hunt, 1996) caused in part by the novelty of adolescence as a stage in its own right.

Tchudi (2003) reveals that most English scholars and teachers of English agree that young adult literature is a legitimate genre, that it is valuable, and that exposure to it enhances the literacy of adolescents. Tchudi (2003) argues that young adult literature provides the teacher with materials that involve the students in their reading and writing skills, bridge the gap between school life and life outside of school, and validate the students' experiences. This genre is appropriate for teens because they can usually relate better to the characters and plot than in novels written for adults (Bushman, 1997). Young adult literature nurtures teenagers' emotional and social development (Hebert & Kent, 2010). Although the

use of young adult literature in ELA remains a contentious issue for some, the expansion of young adult literature in popular culture illustrates its wide appeal with teenagers.

A second literary genre that is important to African American students is multicultural literature. Writing in this genre, authors such as Sandra Cisneros and Christopher Paul Curtis retell stories of racial minorities in ways that captivate adolescent readers. The increased popularity of this subgenre has resulted in more publications about racially diverse minorities and more African American students reading independently (Banks, 1994; Godina, 1996). Bishop (1994) defines multicultural literature as “literature that reflects the racial, ethnic, and social diversity of our society and our world” (p. 2). As classrooms become increasingly diverse, more educators are beginning to explore the potential of multicultural literature. The goal of using multicultural literature in the ELA classroom is to present opportunities for all students to identify, learn, and respect differences (Norton, 1990). Multicultural literature can interrupt prejudice by revealing unacknowledged bias and intolerance (Landt, 2005). When multicultural literature becomes a part of the English Language Arts classroom, teachers engage students in discussions that allow them to cross cultural borders and create academic and social equities (Dietrich & Ralph, 1995). A study with pre-service teachers reports that multicultural literature opened their eyes, helped them find themselves, broadened the scope of their cultural awareness, and caused them to realize their responsibilities as teachers (Colby & Lyons, 2004). This literature also can be used to facilitate developing an authentic voice in writing assignments. Blair (1991) reports that after allowing students to pick a multicultural book of their choice and respond to questions about the books in their reading logs, their narrative voices became powerful tools

in the students' autobiographies. Tighe (1994) reported that most students had positive reactions to reading multicultural literature.

Although multicultural literature is promising in how it benefits ELA classrooms, there are issues that hinder its potential. Specifically, multicultural literature can have adverse effects on African American students because of its association with multicultural curriculums. Multicultural curriculums refer to antiracist basic education for all students that permeate all areas of schooling, characterized by a commitment to social justice and critical approaches to learning (Nieto, 1996). The approaches for multicultural curriculum range from educators implementing small changes such as holidays to a fully revised social justice approach (Banks, 1998). Critical race theorists, who were created to address institutional inequities, argue that multicultural curriculum thwarts its main purpose. In multiculturalism (Kirova, 2008), cultures defined in terms of their differences from the dominant White culture, often conflating the individual with his or her culture. The differences with the dominant culture extend Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), with Whiteness predicting privilege and possession of property in America. Thus, educators who wish to represent the United States' diversity in literature classes (Ladson-Billings, 2004) must consider how dominant discourses appropriate multicultural curricula and how the materials selected for classroom use may misrepresent reality.

Hence, the inclusion of multicultural literature in English Language Arts may or may not be beneficial to diverse classrooms. Fang et al. (1999) noted that teachers trivialized multicultural literature in English classrooms. For instance, in some multicultural books, Native Americans described as happily at one with nature and wearing traditional clothes (Wilkins & Gamble, 1998). These descriptions diminish the complexities of how Native

Americans currently live, and conflate many tribes into cultural conglomerates (Wilkins & Gamble, 1998). Antiracist theorists (Kirova, 2008) emphasize that multicultural curricula ignore racial difference and fail to challenge institutional forms of discrimination. In a study of race in literature, Chaudhri and Teale (2013) surveyed 90 novels featuring mixed race characters and found the books depicted stereotypes and provided little opportunities for critique of racism, and that race was not functional in the characters' interactions. ELA scholars (Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, & Coleman-King, 2015) inspired by 2014 and 2012 deaths of African American teens Tamir Rice and Jordan Davis, began to examine whether the use of multicultural literature fails to extend the privilege of adolescence to children of color (Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, & Coleman-King, 2015, p.35). They found that teachers continue to hold deficit thinking and a "Westernized" view of adolescence, as many scholars believed adolescence emergence was rooted in racism. Adolescence developed "based on discursive practices that are always implicated in relations of power" (Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, & Coleman-King, 2015, p 35). Adolescence is the phase where "primitive" children matured to "civilized" adults by rejecting authority and resisting normalcy (Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, & Coleman-King, 2015). These views can lead to the criminalization and dehumanization African American adolescents, further reinforcing the school to prison (or death) pipeline.

Influence of Instructional Practices on the Success of African American Students

Today, literacy remains an emancipatory tool in the lives of African Americans because it has the potential to relieve their oppression. Ogbu and Simons (1998) found that society gives minorities little or no rewards for education, especially in employment and

rates. African American students do not accept the correlation between literacy and economics because success in school is not relevant to economic and social success and threatens the cultural identity of African American students (Fox, 1994). Taylor (1989) contends that in order for all students to be successful, teachers and researchers must “spend time observing children in families and in classroom settings, [and watch] different patterns of reading and writing emerge” (p. 193). The evidence-based instructional strategies for teaching literacy to African American students build upon this premise.

Recently, scholars such as Patricia Schmidt (2005) have encouraged culturally responsive teaching in ELA classes to promote literacy in increasingly diverse schools. Culturally responsive teaching employs cultural knowledge, prior knowledge, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for diverse students (Gay, 2002). When integrated in literacy classrooms, culturally responsive teaching increases student engagement and achievement. Ladson-Billings (1992) conducted an in-depth study of culturally responsive teachers and discovered that they were able to support the development of literacy with African American students for several reasons: students’ experiences validated through the curriculum, teachers and students participated in a broad concept of literacy that incorporated literacy and oracy, teachers and students engaged in a collective struggle against the status quo, and teachers were aware of their roles as political beings. Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson, and Tlutsy (2000) reported, “culturally responsive reading instruction bridges the gap between the school and the world of the student” (p. 2). Another study found that nurturing environments and high expectations, two components of culturally responsive teaching, contributed to increases in the literacy achievement of African American males (Noguera, 2009).

Teachers who embrace culturally responsive literacy instruction build the foundation for improved reading achievement among students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Multiple forms of literacy, early reading success, culturally responsive pedagogy, and skills, reading for meaning and multicultural literature are useful tools in this endeavor (Callins, 2009). Racial literacy, a genre of literacy that examines the power of a text as it relates to race, has been encouraged in ELA classes so that students can reflect upon how race effects their meaning-making processes (Johnson, 2009). This practice also directly relates to culturally responsive teaching, where teachers encourage critical cultural consciousness and cultural competence.

The use of multicultural literature is a popular way to address the literacy needs of African American students in ELA classrooms. As an instructional practice, the use of multicultural literature is effective but is not a panacea. Studying multicultural literature makes African American students visible in the classroom, but it does not guarantee improvements in literacy. However, researchers have found that some methods are better than others for benefitting African American students integrating multicultural literature into the classroom. For example, in one seminal study Young et al. (1995) encouraged teachers to discuss values and various points of view when reading multicultural literature. Critical pedagogy integrated with multicultural literature (Nieto, 2004) affirms without trivializing, challenges hegemony, and encourages dangerous discourses that challenge school structures. Because transitional reader response theory acknowledges the social, cultural, and political factors on the individual reader, Cai (2008) argued that it is most applicable when reading multicultural literature. Glazier and Leo (2011) recommended an inclusion of "Whiteness" studies with multicultural literature to affirm all students. Similarly, researchers Jay and

Jones (2005) argued that literature by White authors should be included with multicultural literature because one cannot comprehend the social construction of race without analyzing its basis in White hegemony.

Another strategy that has received support for use in ELA classrooms with African American students is Afro-American literary theory. This theory had its beginnings in the 20th century, when African Americans wrote and read texts to counter the traditional European characterizations of African Americans as barbaric (Napier, 2000). According to Fox (1994), Afro-American literary theory provides,

... Strategies of reading and interpreting African American student writing that are free from a narrow understanding of dialect "interference," strategies free from the residue of deficit theories of language that still govern the reading of American student writing, strategies that instead see American literacy in social, economic, and historical contexts. (p. 292)

One other strategy that bears mentioning in this discussion of teaching African American students literacy is encouraging non-school literacy. Heath (1989) pioneered the research about non-school literacy by examining the literacy practices of White and Black working communities. He ultimately revealed a variety of reading and writing traditions that African American students successfully engaged in at home, but that were not as successful at school. For instance, the African American community in the study did not value the individual acclamation of skills needed for proficiency in literacy, as they could rely on others who were strong (Heath, 1989). However, a lack of value does not mean non-existence. According to Mahiri (1994), some African American children have significant competencies

with a variety of literacy practices, and the connection is improved between school and home literacies.

Teachers can bridge home literacy and school literacy is through cultural scaffolding. Flood, Lapp, and Heath (1992) explained that cultural scaffolding is when teachers use a text or skill indicative of African American culture, such as African American dialect, and connect it to a school literacy skill. For instance, these researchers explain how African American literature through the use of African American Vernacular English illustrate African Americans challenging, criticizing, and praising in conversation, which is used to teach summarization, inferences, and figurative language. The use of African American dialect in school instruction not only connects home literacy to school literacy, but also affirms the academic identities of African American students. According to Reed (1973), the advantage of using African American dialect is that African Americans' "attitudes concerning language appropriateness, linguistic insecurity, and self-denigration (that is to say, their notions of being "non-verbal" and speaking "broken English") should be ventilated, and, hopefully, eliminated, in the light of valid linguistic principles" (p. 298). When teachers use African American Vernacular English in the classroom, it validates and extends home literacy to school literacy.

Influence of Teacher Beliefs on the Successes of African American Students

A plethora of research has examined the correlation between teacher perception of racial background and student performance (Brophy & Good, 1974; Good, 1987, Hoge & Butcher, 1984); however, researchers have only recently recognized how important the racial factor is in teacher perception. Although there are many options for teachers to improve the achievement of African American teachers, many times success is hindered by teacher

beliefs and perceptions of African American students. This section will briefly discuss the studies that examine the role of teacher perceptions in African American students' achievement.

Research indicates that many teachers have negative perceptions of African American students. In a study that analyzed how teachers responded to videos of Black and White students answering questions, race became a predictor in teachers' evaluations of the students. Teachers used a system of high, middle and low to rate students' physical attractiveness, personality, quality of response, and current and future academic abilities. The researchers found that teachers rated Black students lower (DeMeis & Turner, 1978). Orange and Horowitz (1999) conducted a study in which they discovered that the White teachers who participated did not engage with connect to male African-American and Mexican-American students when assigning literacy tasks, such as oral reading and essay writing. The teachers reported thinking that the students were disengaged from the assignments, and the students reported believing that the teachers did not care whether they, the students, completed the assignments. The study indicated that the students experienced boredom in the classroom and that the teachers felt frustrated.

In a meta-analysis of 16 studies that dealt with race, Baron, Tom, and Cooper (1995) found that in nine of the studies, teachers had higher expectations for White students. Ferguson (2003) found in a survey of teacher expectations that teachers had lower expectations for Blacks than Whites, teacher expectations had more impact on Black students than White students, teachers expected less of Blacks than Whites because of past performances and behavior issues, and teachers perpetuated racial disparities by focusing on past behavioral issues. Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, and Jennings (2010) studied the beliefs

of teachers and school administrators about African American students, and found that both teachers and school administrators blamed African American students, their families, and their communities for the achievement gap between Black and White students.

Yet, despite these trends, positive teacher perceptions can also work in the opposite direction. In 2013, the American Psychological Association published three studies online that showed African American students excel in classes once the teachers communicated that they believed in the students' abilities (Yeager, Cohen, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, Apfel, Brzustoski, Master, Hessert, & Williams, 2013). With these studies, the researchers conducted randomized experiments that examined teachers' feedback to writing assignments. The teachers used a strategy called wise feedback, where teachers emphasized high standards and beliefs in students (Yeager, Cohen, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, Apfel, Brzustoski, Master, Hessert, & Williams, 2013). African American students benefited from the strategies (Yeager, Cohen, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, Apfel, Brzustoski, Master, Hessert, & Williams, 2013). Still, there remains a gap in the literature in regard to the perceptions that ELA teachers have toward their African American students. The literature also lacks an interpretative measure used to analyze the causes and effects of teacher perceptions within a historical context. In the face of this uncertainty, one theoretical framework that can lend insight is Critical Race Theory. In this study, CRT is used to understand successful ELA teachers' beliefs, strategies, and practices. Specifically, CRT shed light on the institutional and structural features that constrain the experiences of both African American ELA students and of the ELA teachers charged with preparing these students for standardized reading tests.

Critical Race Theory

The theoretical lens for this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is widely used by researchers to expose structural and institutional racism and its effects. In analyzing the qualitative data on teachers' instructional beliefs and methods, the researcher used CRT to understand the affordances and constraints within which the teachers are operating as they work to provide students with the instruction that will enable them to succeed on standardized tests. CRT evolved from critical legal studies in the 1970s. According to Derrick Bell (1995), a pioneer of CRT, the theory developed because although researchers applauded the focus of Civil Rights scholarship on race, they were deeply critical of the commitment to color-blindness and focus on intentional discrimination in critical legal studies, rather than a broader focus on the conditions of racial inequality.

The five hallmark tenets of critical race theory are the permanence of racism, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, Whiteness as property, and counter-storytelling (DeCuir and Dixon, 2004). The permanence of racism is based on Bell's (1995) claim that racism is a permanent fixture in the social and political structure of the United States. Interest convergence is the notion that when racism advances elite and working class Whites, there is little motivation by them to end racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), critical race scholars were discontented with liberalism because many liberals believe in color blindness and neutral principles of law, which bolstered the status of the White middle class. Liberals' stance concerning "rights" also separated them from critical race theorists who believed that rights are apt to do the right-holder much less good than we would like to think (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Whiteness as property, a second tenet of CRT, has its origins in American history, as for centuries; race was the predicator for

whether property was attainable (Harris, 1993). Now, Whiteness as property takes more subtle forms, where legal expectations of power and control enshrine the status quo as the baseline, while masking their maintenance of White privilege and domination (Harris, 1993). The property functions of Whiteness include rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoy social, political and institutional control, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude other ethnic and racial groups from privileges (Harris, 1993). Whiteness as property is a norm that explains and interprets the experiences of many.

Delgado (1989) explains that the narrative of the dominant group solidifies its superior position in society to other groups. Critical race theorists believe that people from varied racial backgrounds are more likely to have different life experiences, experiences that are difficult to convey to people of dissimilar backgrounds. These stories subvert the realities of the dominant group (Delgado, 1989). Thus, critical writers use counter-stories, the stories of marginalized groups, to challenge, displace, or mock pernicious narratives and beliefs that perpetuate negative stereotypes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

CRT In Education

CRT is an approach that educators, scholars, and teachers can use to unpack the layers of inequities in the classroom. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) situate the usefulness of CRT in education by emphasizing the role that race and property has in perpetuating inequities. As aforementioned, race determines what type of property you will have access to. Tanesi Coates (2014) documented the theft of Black owned land, excluded African Americans from the housing market, and the consistent income gap. These issues decreased the value of property African Americans had. Property determines the quality of education a child will receive; as in most school districts children attend the schools closest to their

property. “Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States—is easily documented in the statistical and demographic data” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48). Educational researchers disaggregate data by race so that stakeholders can examine the strengths and weaknesses of education. The dismal standardized test scores of African American students is one example this documentation. Critical race theorists perceive that standardized testing is a way to validate the deficit thinking upon which curriculum and instruction are based (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The culture of the United States has always been based on assuming property rights; “from the removal of Indians (and later Japanese Americans) from the land, to military conquest of the Mexicans, to the construction of Africans as property, the ability to define, possess, and own property has been a central feature of power in America” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 53). Property indirectly relates to education in that families owning higher-value property experience better education; this is because these families can afford to pay higher taxes, which benefit the schools in the area. Often the quantity and quality of education are first afforded to the schools located in areas with higher property values (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because obtaining property was historically determined by race, the linking of property to education has functioned as a way of excluding African Americans from high-quality education.

CRT is applicable to an analysis of educational inequities because the five tenets of the theory reveal, in many ways, the racism upon which the educational institutions are founded. By applying CRT, educational researchers and educators can offer solutions to improve the academic experiences of African American students. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2001), the tenets of CRT used in education when scholars identify the role that racism has played and continues to play in the structuring of schools and schooling practices,

study the system of education as part of a critique of societal inequality, commit to social justice that eliminates racism and sexism, challenge traditional historical texts by situating racism in historical and contemporary texts, and recognize the stories and experiences of people of color. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) use the tenets of CRT to explain school desegregation, the lack of African American voices and experiences in educational research, student performances based on “Whiteness,” material differences between schools with predominantly African American versus White students, and re-segregation tracking. Ladson-Billings (1998) notes that CRT is applicable to curriculum because “it is not just the distortions, omissions, and stereotypes of school curriculum content that must be considered; it also is the rigor of the curriculum and access to what is deemed enriched curriculum via gifted and talented courses and classes” (p. 18). CRT is useful in assessing instructional practices because traditionally instructional methods have presumed African Americans defiance. New research in CRT gives counter-pedagogical moves that provide students of color with instructional experiences that empower and affirm.

CRT and ELA

ELA extends the emancipatory efforts of CRT because its content and instructional strategies are most flexible to integrate diversity and social justice reform. Tenets of CRT are related to language/linguistics, bilingual education and ESL education to elucidate how racial identity connects to one’s experiences of using, comprehending and communicating. Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson (1988) indirectly and directly connects language to several CRT tenets as she explains how racism is maintained through research about language and African American dialect. For instance, she explains that race relations went through a period of denial where Whites denied any differences with Blacks. This action influenced an overall

negative reception to seminal research explaining the differences in African American dialect and Standard English. This denial most connects to the CRT tenet colorblindness.

Smitherman-Donaldson (1988) also mentions that in the 1950s and 1960s, some were beginning to believe that the differences of speech attributed to social and biological differences. However, these differences are based on deficit thinking and whiteness as property, as scholars believed that impoverished environments of African Americans limited their language acquisition or that verbal responses reflect cognitive structures conditioned on White, mainstream norms. As Smitherman-Donaldson (1988) stated, “a deficit is a deficit by any other name, at bottom, there was little difference in the racism inherent in the discourse of social and cognitive based theorists (p.156).” Smitherman-Donaldson (1988) also documents that most of the work she evaluated about Black speech was by White scholars. In bilingual research, researchers such as Cummins (1994), Flores (2016) and Valedes, MacSwan and Martinez (2000) use CRT tenets to illustrate how bilingual education reinforces institutional racism. For instance, when bilingual education implemented, Latinx students were given tests in English and Spanish (Flores, 2016). Many students were not successful as the content of the tests were not relatable to their experiences (Flores, 2016). Scholars used deficit thinking to explain why students were not successful instead of looking at the tools of assessment (Flores, 2016). Valedes, MacSwan, and Martinez (2000) explain that labeling is also used as a way to continue to marginalize Latinx students who are not successful, as the terms non-nons and clinically disfluent are used to describe these students. Cummins (1994) notes that the issues in ESL classrooms exist because scholars refuse to address policies that discriminate students. He also explains that the curriculum used reflects the values and experiences of White, middle class, English-speaking people, which connects

to whiteness as property. Deficit thinking also had a centralized role in how pre-service Latinx and African American teachers viewed their abilities to teach (Haddix, 2010). In a study conducted with an African American teacher and a Latinx teacher, Haddix (2010) found that initially the teachers were apprehensive about their interactions with diverse students due to their respective dialects. However, towards the end of study the teachers were more accepting of the possibilities their cultures could bring to the classroom because they had an opportunity to examine how they perceived their cultural experiences (Haddix, 2010). On the other hand, when Haddix (2008) studied the perspectives of White, preservice teachers, she found that colorblind ideologies persisted when students encountered dominant ideologies on diverse English dialects.

However, there is a literature gap in the research that directly connects ELA to tenets of CRT. As Rogers and Mosley (2006) have noted, “There is a pervasive silence in literacy research around matters of race, especially with both young people and White people” (p. 463). Although many studies do provide evidence of the racial disparities in literacy performance, few literacy studies have confronted the race issue exclusively. Greene and Abt-Perkins (2003) reported that professional meetings on race at the National Council of English Teachers conferences failed to address race because English teachers avoided the conversation—and this avoidance are equally evident in published literacy research.

Even amidst this widespread silence on racial issues in literacy education, however, some research on this subject is published. Many of these collected in a volume edited by Green and Abt-Perkins (2003), aimed to make race visible in literacy research by providing examples of racial issues in literacy education. The following studies are examples of some of the studies included in the volume. Cazden (2003) examined the stories of teachers who

reflected on their instructional practices with African American students, noting that teacher reflections on deficit thinking and perpetuation of class stratification are necessary for changes to occur in the classroom. In another study, Willis (2003) documented the challenges she faced in her own classroom while teaching pre-service teachers the skills they needed to work with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Willis found that White students remained silent about race as the students of color exposed their experiences in anger.

Another researcher who has taken up the subject of race in the literacy classroom, Appleman (2003), examined how she constructed images about students when teaching a multicultural literature class; she did so by analyzing her own basic assumptions about White privilege. Enciso (2003) argued that by attending to social discourses about discrimination when teaching reading to racially diverse classes, a culturally relevant content and pedagogy enacted that fosters interest and understanding among diverse members of society. Sperling's research (2003) reported that parents of tenth-graders were troubled in urban classrooms when their children were not taught White middle-class values. In Daiute and Jones's study (2003), they proposed a novel method for reading racially diverse student writing objectively; they created the method upon realizing the complexities they faced in separating the political and subjective in their perceptions of the students. This diverse array literature emphasizes the role that teachers have in the reading and writing experiences of racially diverse students. The research indicates that examining race not only assures teachers' professional and personal growth, but also cultivates the reading and writing skills of all students.

The results of research that use tenets of CRT to address ELA curriculum and pedagogy are promising. Knauss (2009) found that by using CRT in a high school writing class, students could sharpen the authentic voices in their writings. When Corkley (2009) noticed the lack of his students' racial awareness, he developed an effective writing curriculum that focused on race. The use of historical moments to exemplify how racial definitions were asserted and defended allowed students to explore their constructed racial identities in a nonthreatening lens; Corkley's program improved students' rhetorical skills (Corkley, 2009).

Other researchers (Barron & Grimm, 2002) showed that writing centers are an effective way to combat colorblindness in literacy education because writing center workers encourage students' use of their authentic voices, and because in writing center work, the experiences of students of color are identified (Barron & Grimm, 2002). Gay (2000) argued for the practice of culturally responsive teaching, which draws upon the cultural distinctiveness, unique experiences, and points of view of ethnically diverse students as means for effective teaching. Hill (2009) reported on his observation of a culturally responsive teacher who, using code-switching pedagogy, allowed his writing class to embrace racial dialects and Standard English; the students spoke in their own dialects while the teacher facilitated the use of Standard English through meaningful contexts. These studies illustrate the use of CRT in investigating current practices in literacy education and purposefully developing effective new ways of engaging students of diverse backgrounds in the ELA classroom.

Although, as Ladson-Billings (1998) explains, the potential of CRT in education is only in its infancy, scholars of ELA have established the foundations that researchers and

teachers can expand upon. By acknowledging colorblind texts and practices that are salient in ELA classrooms, scholars and teachers provide students with learning environments that celebrate and empower all students.

Chapter Summary

The preceding literature review contextualizes this qualitative case study by reviewing the relevant literature on ELA as an academic discipline and content area; African American students' experience with literacy education and assessment; and finally, Critical Race Theory (CRT), the conceptual framework that illuminates the systemic and institutional factors that shape the experiences of teachers and African American students in the middle-school ELA classroom. The purpose of the study is to discover the instructional beliefs, strategies, and practices at a charter school whose African American students have achieved average or above-average scores on standardized reading tests. The following chapter describes the research design, including the procedures for data collection.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study focused on middle-grades ELA teachers who taught African American students that were successful on the state's End of Grade Reading test. I chose the case study methodology because it allows the researcher to fully examine the phenomena in its context. However, the beliefs and instructional decisions revealed in this research will extend to other contexts, by informing the field of English Language Arts education and how it can be adapted to better serve the needs of African American students. The purpose of the study is to discover the instructional beliefs, strategies, and methods of stakeholders at a charter school in order to gain insight that can inform future research and policy-making on reading standardized tests as well as the design of learning environments in charter schools and related instructional practices. I structured the study so all of the data collected would inform if beliefs correlate to practices. The following research questions are addressed:

1. What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences African American students?
2. How do these beliefs influence the middle school ELA teachers' instructional strategies and practices?
3. What beliefs, strategies and practices had the most impact on African American students' academic progress?

I used the results of reading EOG standardized tests, quantitative data, to determine what I wanted to know about a school. Since I wanted to examine the reasons for the quantitative data, qualitative research was the most applicable choice. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to study motives, interpretations, and understandings. There are five approaches in qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, case

study and ethnography (Creswell, 2007). After much consideration, the researcher realized the case study approach best fits the purpose and goals of the study.

The Appropriateness of the Case Study Approach

The single-instrument case study method is most appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to closely examine a phenomenon within a bounded system. Creswell (2007) explain that in a single-instrument case study, the researcher focuses on a single issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue. In this study, the single issue is the success African Americans experience in ELA classrooms. The researcher discovered a charter school whose middle-school African American students performed above average on the state's reading EOG test. This case, which includes the school and all stakeholders (administration, teachers, parents, students), offers an alternative perspective and may give a new outlook on the relationship between teacher perception and student performance. Single case studies (Yin, 2003) not only represent a critical case that confirms, challenges or extends a well-formulated theory, but also represents a unique case or revelatory case in which the investigator observes and analyzes a phenomenon that was otherwise inaccessible. The present study is a revelatory case, which means the phenomenon was not previously accessible to scientific investigation (Yin, 2003). The study site is the only middle school in the city where African American students achieved above average scores on the state standardized tests. Previous reports about standardized test scores were published in the newspaper of the city of the study site. However, they omitted the successes of the school.

Case studies are appropriate when researchers investigate causal links (Yin, 2003). In this study, I explored the causal links between administrators, teachers', parents' and

students' beliefs and practices and African American students' performance over time by collecting qualitative data. It is also appropriate for case studies to have propositions because it "increases the likelihood that the researcher will be able to place limits on the scope of the study and increase feasibility with completing the project" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 551). A proposition focuses the data collection, determines direction and scope of the study, and develops the foundation for a conceptual framework (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Research referenced in the literature review supports the notion that teacher beliefs and practices directly caused the student success or failure. As Willis and Harris (2000) and Orange and Horowitz (1999) report, the negative and often biased beliefs some teachers have about African American students cause low achievement. This finding assisted in developing the proposition that positive beliefs about African American students will result in successful students. Since administrators, parents and students also influence students' performance, I included data collected from them. Due to the prominent role race and racism have in the study, Critical Race Theory is the conceptual framework that grounds the proposition. A student's race could determine the progress he or she experiences in ELA classrooms and on standardized reading tests. Mainstream society undervalues the cultural capital of African American students. These views carry over to the classroom. The expectations and experiences of African American students are often overlooked in textbook development, lesson planning, standardized test development and instructional practices. Critical race theory will not only give a historical context to the experiences explored in the study, but also provide opportunities to give rationale to certain perspectives and occurrences. The case study is the most applicable research method because it allowed me to explore a deeper connection between teacher beliefs and the progress of African American students.

Site Selection and Sample

The state of North Carolina published an official report about their state of education in 2013. From this report, a combination of confirming and disconfirming cases and opportunistic sampling methods were used to choose the site of the study. Confirming and disconfirming cases occur when the researcher “elaborates upon initial analysis, seeks exceptions, and looks for variations” (Punch, 2006, p. 51). The proposition of this study is the negative beliefs of teachers in some English Language Arts classrooms influenced low achievement of African American students. I based the proposition on the claim teachers influenced low standardized test scores of African American students, since the literature base (Willis & Harris, 2000; Orange & Horowitz, 1999) reports it. Exceptions to this proposition were the schools in the report that had statistical data illustrating the achievement of African Americans. To determine which school to use, I used local knowledge of an area. This is called opportunistic sampling, where the researcher “uses the knowledge and attributes of the researcher to identify a sample, for example, using a researcher's local knowledge of an area on which to base a study or using a researcher's past experiences to contact participants or gatekeepers” (Jupp, 2006, p. 133). I chose the school because it was the only middle school in the city recognized for the successful performance of African American students.

The charter school chosen as the site for the study is in the southeastern part of the United States. I gained access to the school because I offered a condensed version of the research proposal and question and answer session to the school administrative team. Then, I provided the administrative team with letters of consent. Although everyone on the board and administrative team approved the study, the assistant principal was the only administrator

that consented to participate. The goal of the school is to provide students with the best education possible, by exceeding common core expectations. The mission statement reads, “Ace Academy will prepare students to become leaders and motivate them to strive for their greatest potential through exceptional character and achievements.”

The school serves students from kindergarten to ninth grade. As of 2016, 606 students enrolled and 27 teachers were employed. The staff was required to take a pledge to aspire and model excellence and professionalism in all that they do through honesty, respect, giving, and caring. The school had six middle school teachers, each of whom was responsible for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students in their specific content area. However, at the end of the study, the school had to hire another seventh-grade ELA teacher and a ninth-grade ELA teacher. In the previous school year, the school did not have an ELA teacher for eighth grade. The administrators had the literacy coach teach Reading classes until they hired another teacher. The literacy coach continues to provide support for all of the teachers. The sixth- to ninth-grade ELA teachers collaborate weekly to work on lesson plans and goals. I conducted this study at an interesting time in which the seventh-grade teacher was out for most of the first semester on sick leave and the ninth-grade teacher was trying to get acclimated to the school and students. However, I was able to collect data (conduct pre and post interviews, collect artifacts, and observe classes with the literacy) as the literacy coach and ELA teachers attempted to give students a stable learning environment by working together to develop lesson plans and provide feedback to student work.

Descriptions of Participants

Table 1.1 Summarized Descriptions of Participants

Member of Administration	Miriam, assistant principal	Older, African American female, only assistant principal, oversaw daily operations at school
Elementary Teacher	Barbara, 3 rd grade teacher	Middle-aged, African American female, seasoned teacher, taught elementary, middle and high school, well organized
Elementary Teacher	Misty, 4 th grade teacher	Middle-aged, White female, first year teacher at site, classroom disorganized
Middle School Teacher	Diane, 6 th grade teacher	Middle-aged, White female, seasoned teacher, preferred teaching in low SES schools, organized classroom
Middle School Teacher	Joyce, 7 th & 9 th grade teacher	Older, African American teacher, retired and returned to education, worked as school literacy coach/parent involvement coordinator
Parent Participant	Allyson, mother of two boys who attended school	Middle-aged, African American, female, recently widowed, teacher's assistant in adjacent county
Parent Participant	Linda, mother of one boy and girl who attended school	Young, African American, female, single parent, full time student
Student Participant	James, 9 th grade student	African American, tall, athletic, articulate, openly expressed opinions
Student Participant	Courtney, 8 th grade student	African American female, hesitant to answer some questions, very bright, appreciated adults

The principal, an African American male, was the initial contact of the study. He served as the CEO and head principal of the school for sixteen years. He obtained his bachelors and masters degrees from the local HBCU. He is currently in a doctoral program at

an online university. The principal is also a founding member of a special interest group seeking to address unique challenges c--harter schools ran by African Americans experience. This year he was vocal in advocating improved communication with the State Board of Education and the Charter School Advisory Board. According to the principal, increased state regulations of charter schools infringe on their freedoms and funding. He hopes that the state seeks more input from charter schools on regulations. The principal consented and supported the study, but did not interfere or participate.

After approval, I requested to attend a faculty meeting and parent involvement meeting to give brief synopsis of study and pass out letters of consent. I attended a faculty meeting in September and parent involvement meeting in October. After the faculty meeting, the assistant principal told me to check with the school's administrative assistant to collect letters of consent. I scheduled a time to pick up the letters and begin to contact the assistant principal and teachers to schedule interviews and observation times. After the parent involvement meeting, I was able to schedule interviews with parents. The teachers were able to collect consent letters from middle school students and turned them into the front office. After I received consent letters, I picked the first available to participate in study. Including the assistant principal, I ended up with 15 consent letters but only 9 participated in the study. The following will provide background information about each participant that I gleaned from the school's resources and data collection methods.

School Administrator. The school administrator, referred to as Miriam in the study, worked as the school's only assistant principal. She was an older African American female. She had prior experience as assistant principal in the public school system. She commuted about 2 hours a few times out of the week to go to work. Miriam oversaw the day-to-day operations

of the school. Most times, she was the only administrator on campus. Many times she seemed overwhelmed and busy, but she was always friendly and amicable. She mentioned to me “I don’t mind the hard work here because I believe in the school and I believe in our staff. I believe in our students. We have a good thing going”. Miriam seemed to have a good rapport with most of the teachers. I am not sure construction in the administrator’s office was complete because she always worked or conducted business in the hallways, conference rooms or classrooms.

3rd Grade Teacher. The third-grade teacher in this study was a middle-aged African American female who will be referred to as Barbara. She dressed very professional. Barbara had previously taught me in high school, but she did not remember me at first. I didn’t want to compromise the study so I didn’t mention anything to her until after the interview. Her classroom was very neat. She had class rules, student work, and motivational posters on display. Barbara preferred teaching at charter schools because she had the liberty to creatively address students’ needs and wants. She believed that the school worked with students more so that they were successful.

4th Grade Teacher. The fourth-grade teacher was a middle-aged White female, referred to as Misty. It was her first year teaching at the school, so she was not sure about some of the school’s culture. Misty had at least 10 boxes on student desks. It appeared that she may have been in the process of switching classrooms. She had lots of classroom materials. The desks were not arranged in any sort of order. Misty was the most apprehensive of all the participants when it came to discussing race-related issues. She jokingly asked, “You had to ask a White girl to do this one?” Misty told me although she had biracial children, it was hard to discuss questions about African American culture. At the end of the interview, she

explained that both of the school's principals were African Americans and most of the African American teachers at the school had advanced degrees. So, she believed race relations and progress were better.

6th Grade Teacher. The sixth-grade teacher was an older White/Native American teacher who is referred to as Diane. She was an experienced teacher who had taught in diverse academic settings. Diane's classroom was extremely organized. She had bins for students to put homework and school work. Displayed on the board were the daily objectives, homework, and a quote or pun. She was extremely empathetic to students living in poverty because of her background. Diane explained, "I was raised in the Appalachian mountains area. There is nothing. We all struggled. I share that with a lot of the kids here." She tried to not allow her biases, the belief that African American or Latino culture may not support education, to influence her as a teacher. Diane explained that she did not believe that her students liked her very much because she challenged them and had higher expectations than other teachers. However, observations led me to believe that students had a great rapport with her. Most of the students felt comfortable enough to respect her and laugh with her. For instance, the Diane made a joke that the students were glad to get rid of her during lunchtime. The students laughed with her and reassured her they enjoyed her conversation.

9th Grade Teacher. The ninth-grade teacher was a middle-aged African American woman who is referred to as Joyce. A veteran teacher, she had retired from the school system and later returned as a literacy coach. Joyce then left the school system and went to the charter school as a literacy coach. When the school did not have a ninth-grade teacher to start the year, she took on the job. Then, the seventh-grade teacher became ill shortly after the beginning of the school year, and Joyce took over his classes as well. Meanwhile, she still

worked as a literacy coach and parent involvement coordinator. Joyce was extremely passionate about teaching and literacy, seeming to have the respect of all of her colleagues as she was assisting or encouraging teachers during most of her interactions with me.

Parent Participant, Allyson. One parent, who is referred to as Allyson, was a former teacher's assistant in an adjacent county. She was a middle-aged African American female. She was dissatisfied with the school system and transferred her sons to the study site. Her family experienced a loss as her husband died in 2013. She wanted her sons to be around more African American males. This also influenced her decision to enroll her children in the charter school. She had some regrets in enrolling her sons because she thought some of the faculty lacked empathy, and she did not approve of some of the mentoring techniques or of how many times the school suspended her sons. However, she kept her sons enrolled because "I believe in what they are trying to do. I think the key is getting your children who are accustomed to being in a public school accustomed to the expectations at this school". The parent believed that the rules and guidelines were stricter in the charter school than the public school system.

Parent Participant, Linda. The second parent participant was eager to arrange a time and place to schedule the interviews. This parent, referred to as Linda, had a kindergarten and ninth-grade student attend the school. Linda was a young African American female who was also a student at the local community college. She explained that her older daughter's positive experiences influenced her decision to enroll her younger son in the school. Although initially nervous in the interview for this study, she began to open up about her views when discussing her experiences at the school. She explained that she believed the school considered the students' best interests; her only complaint was that the school

“overdid it with parent involvement with the automated voice system. Some days the school calls me three times a day through the system. They won’t give me a chance to forget anything, which I guess is a good thing.” The parent emphasized the positive experiences she had with the school throughout the interview.

Student Interview, James. I conducted the first student interview with an eighth grade, African American male, referred to as James. He was very tall and was respectful. This interview was slightly different because we had a casual conversation about sports prior to starting the interview because he seemed to tower over everyone. He was open about issues he had with teachers and administrators. Overall, his dissatisfaction in the school was due to teacher turnover rates and the belief that the administrative team could do more to address the African American students. The student was also articulate and would ask questions if he did not understand a question in the interview.

Student Interview, Courtney. The student who participated in the school was a ninth-grade African American female who is referred to as Courtney. She didn’t really elaborate in her responses like the other participants, even when I asked questions to clarify. However, she eagerly shared her goals to pursue higher education. She told me her mother was currently pursuing a degree, and she wanted to do so as soon as she graduated high school. Courtney also attended the school with a younger brother. She was very friendly and articulate. The local early college program accepted Courtney into a program so her mother withdrew her from the school later in the school year. The student’s descriptions of her experiences ranged from, “a lot going on with the school at the time so I couldn’t keep up” to “the teachers tried to help whenever they could”. She would also ask questions when she did not understand.

Data Collection

The researcher addresses research questions through various sources of data collection. This case study follows a qualitative methodology where exploration of the phenomenon is conducted within its context using a variety of sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2003) notes that a hallmark of the case study approach is the use of multiple data sources, which increases credibility. As Baxter and Jack (2008) explain, “potential data sources may include, but are not limited to: documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations and participant-observation” (p. 554). Since this study is essentially based on the literacy experience of African American students at a charter school, data were collected from an administrator, ELA teachers, students, and parents so that I could gain a holistic perspective. I initiated contact with the principal in August and began collecting data in September. I scheduled teacher interviews two weeks apart. In October and November I observed classrooms and collected artifacts and teacher evaluation tools. I conducted both parent interviews and one student interview in December. The last student interview as conducted in January. I spent a total of 6 months in the field. Data collection consisted of direct observations of middle school ELA teachers, interviews from elementary ELA teachers, pre- and post-observation interviews from middle-school ELA teachers, professional documentation from the middle-school ELA teachers’ administrative evaluations with teacher comments, artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, special certifications from professional development courses), parent interviews, and student interviews. Data were collected and stored in a file cabinet locked with a key. I stored transcriptions in Word documents that could only be accessed by password. I used pseudonyms on all the data collected to protect the identity of the participants. Personal reflections were documented

after each interview and classroom observation. I made the personal reflections on regular notebook paper and transcribed them into Word documents. Presently, I am the only one who has access to the transcriptions. I used various types of coding throughout the process to keep track of emerging themes. The sections that follow briefly discuss each data source and collection method.

Interviews. After I received the letter of consent from the assistant principal, I scheduled a semi-structured interview with the assistant principal. I visited with potential teacher participants during planning periods and distribute letters of consent. The willing participants returned the letters of the consent to the school secretary who contacted me. I first scheduled an interview with a third-grade teacher. Then, I scheduled an interview with a fourth grade teacher. These interviews occurred two weeks apart. The administrative team told me that I should use the literacy coach as a point of contact to schedule interviews and other data collection dates with middle-school ELA teachers. I collected letters of consent from the sixth-grade and seventh/ninth-grade teacher. I conducted a semi-structured pre-observation interview with the sixth-grade teacher. I exchanged phone numbers with the participants to schedule data collection dates. After the last observation, I conducted the semi-structured post observation interview. Next, I met with the seventh/ninth-grade teacher to conduct an interview. It is significant to note that at this time the literacy coach was teaching both classes. She covered for the seventh-grade ELA teacher who was on sick leave and did demo lessons for the ninth-grade ELA teacher. I only observed the ninth-grade classes before she scheduled the post-observation semi-structured interviews.

I was able to talk to parents about the interviews and give out letters of consent during a parent involvement event. The administrator contacted me with signed letters of consent. I

conducted all interviews at the study site. I recorded the interviews using an audio device. Copious notes were taken about the environment and the participants, including the participants' non-verbal cues during the interviews. The school sent home consent forms for both students and parents to read and sign together. The students returned signed forms to school. The administrator contacted me so that they administrator could contact the parents of students to schedule an interview time. This was the most challenging aspect of data collection. Some parents did not want their children interviewed without them. I addressed this issue by asking parents to give written permission to conduct interviews with their children during study hall time. During all interviews except the post-observation interviews, I used a research guide to ask questions about the teachers' beliefs about African American students. The questions in the research guide were based on the *Working with Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students* discussion prompts (Hawley, Irvine & Landa, 2009). These discussion prompts were developed by the organization Teaching Tolerance. This organization was founded in 1991 by the Southern Poverty Law Center (About Us, 2014). Their goals are to reduce prejudice, improve racial relations, and support equitable school experiences (About Us, 2014). After collecting all data, all participants reviewed data analysis of the sections they participated in through a PowerPoint presentation.

Direct Observation. I observed the sixth-grade teacher and the seventh/ninth-grade teacher teaching 2 ELA classes. I took copious notes using an observation form before, during, and after the observations. The observation form was based on the observational protocol in *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Creswell, 2002). I noted any similarities and differences in instructional methods across grade levels. References to African American culture, the contributions of African

Americans and any differentiation in the interactions with African American students were noted as well.

Professional Documentation of Teaching Evaluations. The charter schools in the state are required to evaluate teachers using the statewide teacher evaluation system. This is a valuable source because it provides an alternative perspective on the teachers' instructional beliefs and practices, and it also evaluates how the teacher addresses racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom by using a Likert-scale score. Administrators evaluate most teachers 2 times a school year. The most current evaluation forms were collected from the middle school teachers.

Artifacts. Artifacts provide evidence of instructional practices and beliefs. Administrators require teachers to develop written lesson plans each week. I collected copies of lesson plans to investigate if they corresponded with beliefs and practices. I was also able to collect samples of student work for this same reason. Teachers in North Carolina keep artifacts of each standard on which they are evaluated to meet requirements. One of the standards, standard 2, addresses how the teachers incorporate racial, ethnic, and language diversity in the classroom. This standard is expounded on in Table 1.1. I collected the artifacts from the teacher evaluations that addressed diversity.

Data Analysis

According to Yin (2003), analyzing case study evidence is one of the most underdeveloped and complicated aspects of conducting case studies. For this reason, I used traditional qualitative data analysis methods to handle the data records from each method of data collection. According to Richards (2009), records of qualitative data should address the following: 1) accuracy; 2) context; 3) thick description; 4) usefulness (has all important

information about the research event, respondent, setting, and all knowledge gained including my personal reflections); and 5) reflexivity (make myself a part of the study and the written account). This section discusses how I handled and analyzed the data records from each source.

CRT and Data Analysis

I used tenets of Critical Race Theory to examine the role of race as the perspectives and practices of the study participants. When data connected to a race related issue, I revisited the literature to determine if they were applicable to any tenet. I simply asked myself “How does this theme relate to... each tenet of CRT?” If they were, I notated it the data analysis. I discovered that when racism was present, it was often the products of racism being endemic to society, whiteness as property, colorblindness or deficit thinking.

Data Analysis Procedures for Interviews

I recorded interviews on an audio device. I listened to the audio multiple times while transcribing to ensure accuracy. Then, notes about the setting, body language, context and tone of the respondent and researcher were summarized. Detailed descriptions of what was heard and observed in the interviews were included in the notes. I completed short personal reflections at the beginning and end of each interview session. Then I used topic and analytical coding to reveal themes. Topic coding (Richards, 2009) is when you label text according to categories and analytical coding is when the researcher is able to ask interpretative questions about the data to identify themes.

Some of the categories chosen for topic coding and interpretative questions were based on tenets of CRT that emerged from the data, which included colorblindness, racism, storytelling, and whiteness as property. These categories were also aligned with the questions

from the interview guides. Other categories such as disorganization, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with school, and personal reflections also emerged from the data, but not necessarily relative to CRT. For each interview I went line-by-line and coded each time I read the words African American, parent involvement, success or standards, and instructional practices. I chose the words *African American* because it identified the race discussed, *parent involvement* because the participants discussed African American parents, *success* and/or *standards* because participants of the study related the terms to the performance of African American students and *instructional practices* so that I could examine what influenced the learning environment. I also used synonyms of these terms such as *mom and dad* for parent involvement, and *Black* for African American. After noticing a reoccurrence of certain topics, I went line-by-line and coded each time I read or saw the words or synonyms of *disorganization*, *teacher changes*, *satisfaction with school*, *dissatisfaction with school*, *communication with teachers or administration*. I color-coded these terms manually, using a highlighter on the interview transcripts. Then, I asked questions such as, “What is this participant saying about African American parents?”; “How does this participant define the success of African American students?”; and “What instructional practices address African American students?” For the terms that I color-coded after noticing a reoccurrence across data, I asked questions such as “Why does this participant mention think the school is disorganize?”; Why is this participant satisfied or dissatisfied with the school?”; and “What role does communication have in the relationship with all stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, administrators)? I also connected the codes to tenets of critical race theory if it was applicable. All of the codes were then compiled into

themes. The following subsections details responses from the data analysis interpretative questions and themes across data sources.

Table 1.2 Coding Terms and Related Themes

Coding Term(s)	Related Theme
African American/Black, White	Race having a role or role minimized in student success; student responsibility
Parent(s), mom, dad	Importance of parent involvement; collective responsibility
Success/standards	Race not having a role or minimized role in student success; all students having the same academic standards
Instructional practices/teaching practices	Student responsibility

Data Analysis Procedures for Direct Observations

I took notes before, during, and after the teacher observation of study participants. The notes included descriptions of the classroom and teacher interactions with African American students. In the 6th grade classes, the students were from multiple ethnicities and with the 9th grade classes the students were African American with 2 that were of other racial backgrounds. The 6th grade teacher was Native American/White and the 9th grade teacher was African American. To stay consistent, I used the same codes as the interviews for the class observation notes. However, some codes involving classroom organization, teacher/student rapport, and student participation emerged from the observations. So, the interpretative questions for the analytical coding were different. I asked questions such as “How did the teacher engage African American students during instruction?”; “Did the teacher encourage progress of African American students?”; and “Were parents indirectly involved in the classroom?”

Data Analysis Procedures for Teacher Evaluations and Artifacts

To analyze the teacher evaluations and artifacts, I used content analysis. Content analysis is an examination of forms of communication in which the text is broken down into categories (Given, 2008). In this study, I broke down the teacher evaluations and artifacts through topic coding. However, Silverman (2001) posits that when analyzing texts, the researcher focuses on how and for whom the text or artifact is created, what is included and omitted from the document or artifact, and how it is used. For this reason, I addressed these issues and attached my interpretations (background information on the document or artifact) to the evaluations and artifacts prior to the coding process. I included these interpretations throughout the methodology. I collected teacher evaluations, lesson plans, and a few samples of student work (and omitted participant identifying information). Teachers provided their most recent teacher evaluation. The administration had only conducted one for each teacher so far. I had little input on the types of student work and what students it came from. Since, teachers were aware that I needed to collect student work, they either offered it after interviews or class observations. The only input I had was in requesting that the work was not graded by the teacher, because I didn't want the teacher to choose all the papers with passing grades. I also preferred student work from African American students. In analyzing the teacher evaluations, I used the terms *diversity*, and *instruction*. I used these terms because teacher evaluation forms did not include racial identifiers. I used the term *diversity* to encapsulate various races and cultures. The terms *developing*, *proficient*, *accomplished*, *distinguished* and *not demonstrated* were also used because these terms measured how well teacher address the needs of diverse students in the evaluation form.

For analytical coding, I asked questions such as “How does the evaluator perceive the teacher’s instructional practices?” “How does the evaluator determine that the teacher meets the needs of African American students?” With lesson plans, I used the words *diverse*, *African American*, and *standards* to capture how the teacher addressed the achievement of African American students. For analytical coding, I asked questions such as, “Does the lesson meet the needs of African American students?” and “How will the teacher determine if the student learned the standard?” For student work, I simply looked for various types of student work. I also looked to see if the student was successful in completing the assignment.

I also connected the rubric and results of the teacher evaluations with the CRT tenets *whiteness as property* and *colorblindness*.

Research Validity and Reliability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), reliability and validity in qualitative research is based on trustworthiness. Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability (shows findings are consistent and can be repeated) and conformability (a term used in preference to objectivity) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I considered the terms of Lincoln and Guba (1985) in addressing the reliability and validity of my study.

Credibility is established by prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking and thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used triangulation, peer debriefing, and thick descriptions of participants to increase the credibility. I address the study’s generalizability through replication and multiple-case studies. According to Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010) replication strategy is considered throughout the research design by selecting “least likely” cases and allowing cases to differ as much as possible. I selected a case that disconfirmed what is statistically

supported with most African American, middle school students in ELA classrooms. This case disconfirmed the notion that African American middle-school students underperform on standardized Reading test scores. Transferability is established by thick description whereas conformability is established by keeping audit trails, process notes and raw data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I kept all of the raw data and process notes kept in a digital folder with password.

Finally, reliability (Yin, 2003) is addressed in case studies by investigators developing case study protocols or case study databases. I included a preliminary case study protocol in this research. Case study protocols provide an overview of the study, explain how the researcher will contact stakeholders to gain access to the study site, discuss how human subjects are protected, explore questions that may arise, and inform participants and stakeholders of the tentative final outline of study (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010).

Subjectivity Statement

In case studies, as with all of qualitative research, data collection and analysis depend on the researcher's interpretation. For this reason, it is not possible to fully separate the researcher from data collection and analysis. In this study, my lifelong history with the region and the school district where the research was conducted shaped my questions and interpretations. I attended elementary, middle, and high school in the school system that included the site for my research. My involvements in these schools were bittersweet. I enjoyed some of my peers but believed the academic interactions were subpar after the first grade. Differentiated instruction was seldom used, and in middle school, there was a high teacher turnover rate during the school year. In high school, the schools had two school administrations and high teacher turnover rates as well. However, I had several positive

experiences in high school, one being my English I Honors class. The teacher in this class influenced my decision to become an English teacher. This teacher is also one of the study participants of the charter school. My 9th grade Earth Science teacher was also the 3rd grade teacher that participated in the study. Although most of the schools in the school system improved since I was in grade school, I believe these schools lack the support from local and state policymakers to increase student achievement. These issues may have heightened my sensitivity to participants' views. Moreover, it is advantageous that even though I attended schools in the county of the study, I did not attend the school in the study. This unfamiliarity increased the study's validity and reliability because I do not have any knowledge or memories of the school that skewed my interpretation of data.

My choices as an adult are relevant as I went on to work in the school district where I conducted the study. By the time of this study, I had worked for my entire professional career in the district. I developed professional and personal rapport with teachers and administrators throughout the district, facilitating professional development for the county's ELA teachers on topics such as digital storytelling and Web 2.0 tools. This study site does not directly relate to the district because it was conducted in a charter school; however, because the county's professional development opportunities expanded to charter schools, I may have interacted with the participant in a leadership capacity. If this is the case, the participant may have been privy to my bias in regard to curriculum, instruction, students of color, and the ELA classroom, as the professional development courses I facilitated were influenced by personal experiences and beliefs. However, because the probable exposure to this bias was at least 6 years ago, I doubt it had have any bearing on the research results.

Subjectivity is not only developed because of where I worked, but also due to the content of my job description. Throughout my professional career, I worked with increasing the standardized test scores, specifically the scores of students of color, as I worked in a school where African American students were the dominant group. I attended mandatory seminars, professional development courses, and professional learning committee (PLC) meetings designed to increase student achievement. Each year, excluding the students identified academically or intellectually gifted (AIG), these students experienced low to moderate success. When I relocated to a more racially diverse school (in the same district), the performance of African American students was the same. Many teachers in both schools were overwhelmed in addressing the needs of students, and were often penalized by administrators or the school system if students didn't perform. In many cases, teachers were held responsible for things out of their control. The teachers were not the only ones overwhelmed. African American students struggled with meeting performance goals on standardized testing, and in many cases, had stopped putting forth efforts by 8th grade. It was demoralizing to witness students embrace negative influences such as illegal activities due to feelings of failure on standardized testing (as they realize testing is an opportunity to enlist in the military or obtain higher education). The personal observations of the struggles of teachers and African American students in ELA classrooms fueled the desire to search for successful teachers of these students. I desperately want to find solutions to a problem that has ruined hope and possibility for African American students. This passion fuels my desire to empower teachers with tools to develop successful students of ELA regardless of racial background.

At the beginning of the study, I explained to each participant what my former role was in the county's public school system so that participants could distinguish between my role in the county and my role as researcher. I also emphasized how the study would benefit all students. I allowed participants to member-check the data that I collected from them to ensure accuracy. I was able to use the triangulation method with data and sources to ensure a deeper understanding. I used several methods of data collection and I investigated the research questions with different stakeholders in the school to gain a holistic perspective. I included various forms of data collection methods were used through triangulation so that various perspectives were in the study.

Ethical Issues

As with any research, this study had risks associated with it. First, power differential existed in the study because one of the subjects is my former high school teacher. She also served in a leadership position in literacy for the school district when I was a teacher. At the study site, she served as a literacy coach and classroom teacher. I was not aware of her roles at the school until I began the study. I asked her to not inform the participants of our previous interactions so that she would not influence how the participants responded to the study. She agreed. However, she did introduce me as a former student to the new 9th grade teacher and students. Fortunately, those students did not participate in the study. It also helped that she had to relinquish her leadership role due to an ELA teacher taking an extended sick leave.

In addition, the study had the potential to cause stress and overwhelm the participants due to the amount of commitment involved in completing the study. Participants were required to spend a time with the researcher reflecting on practices in interviews. At one point in the study, I had a difficult time contacting one of the middle school teachers for

observation times. Anytime I asked her if she wanted to withdraw participation from the study she would decline but there was always a reason an observation time wasn't a good time. I finally shared with her that I wasn't expecting a perfect classroom, just a functioning classroom. I believe I alleviated some of her stresses and we agreed on a schedule. I also had this issue with the parents of student participants. After they gave consent they wanted to listen to the interview. I assured them that there were no right or wrong answers and that their teachers or principals would not have access to their responses. I was aware that some teachers may have been uncomfortable with me taking notes during observations, but it became a bigger issue when observing the 9th grade classes. The teachers were apprehensive because the classroom management was not the best, but I assured them that I understood the complexities of the changes in the school that caused some of the misbehavior and that it would be included in my write up.

There was also a risk of the teachers directly or indirectly violating the confidentiality of minors whose student work I collected for data. To safeguard against these risks, I informed participants of them and emphasized that the students' work would not have any of their identifying information on it. Also, I informed the participants in the letter of consent and throughout the study that they had the choice to leave the study at any time. The study also posed some benefits to participants; they had the opportunity to reflect on which of their beliefs and instructional practices were successful in meeting the needs of the African American student. Even though the research participants were not anonymous or confidential to the participant, researcher, or school administration team, I used pseudonyms to protect their identity in my notes and the dissertation.

Chapter Summary

This study explored the instructional beliefs, strategies, and methods of middle-grades ELA teachers who taught African American students who were successful on the state standardized reading exam. The findings can inform future research and policy-making on standardized testing, as well as the design of learning environments in charter schools and instructional practices. This chapter gave a detailed account of the purposes of the research methodology, site selection, and data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter then discussed the study's validity and reliability; the researcher's subjectivity; and the ethical concerns and limitations of the study. The following chapter discusses data analysis in detail the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to discover the instructional beliefs, strategies, and practices of a school's administration, teachers, parents and students to gain insight that can inform future research and policy-making in English Language Arts, as well as the design of learning environments in charter schools and related instructional practices. This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the themes emerged from the data analysis, how each theme related to tenet(s) of CRT and corresponds to a research question(s).

Theme 1: An Absence of Race

Race was minimized when participants expressed their beliefs about the learning experiences of African American students. Throughout the interviews, most of the participants explained that race didn't have a role in student success. Miriam, the school's only assistant principal, was anxious to sit and participate as she was completing a study of her own. She emphasized the successes of all students by noting that regardless of racial background, all students were expected to adhere to the school's culture, which involved striving to achieve academic standards. Barbara, the 3rd grade teacher, posited in the interview that all students had an equal ability to learn and "cognitively all children are on equal footing." Misty, the 4th grade teacher stated that all races, students had the same opportunities to succeed. Diane, the 9th grade teacher, tried really hard not to see race or consider race when building relationships with students. Joyce, the 9th grade teacher extended the perspective of standards by stating, "We have standards and the standards have to be met. So I define the success of African American students as I would anyone else when it comes to success." She did not believe that race had a role in developing an opinion about a student before she taught them. The teachers believed that African American students had the

potential to be successful. Courtney, one of the student participants, told me that she did not pay attention to race and considered all of her peers as just students.

Race was also minimized in the practices of the middle school ELA teachers. I observed that race was not a factor directly or indirectly considered during instructional planning or practices. In the lesson plans collected, Diane, the 6th grade teacher, did not mention racial or cultural integration. In the classes I observed, Diane failed to integrate race in the lessons and class discussions. In the 6th grade classes, students were required to complete the same assignments. The materials used for the assignments (grammar worksheets, Competitive Edge excerpts, and vocabulary words) did not address or affirm racial diversity. Hence, the Competitive Edge assignments collected as student work were not inclusive of diverse racial experiences. In the lesson plans collected from Joyce, her objectives did not differentiate according to racial diversity either. Perhaps, this absence is most reflective of teachers' expectations, as the instrument used to evaluate teachers does not specify race or culture. In both evaluations I collected, the rubric only used the term diversity to indicate race. Miriam, the assistant principal who evaluated both participants, indicated proficiency in diversity based on indicators not exhibited in classroom instruction. For instance, she documented that Diane and Joyce were proficient in diversity based on standardized test scores. She also noted that Joyce was accomplished in diversity because of her work with the parent involvement committee.

CRT Connection to Theme 1

I connected the absence of race to the CRT tenet *whiteness as property* (Harris, 1993) and *racism being an endemic part of society* (Bell, 1995). Although the teachers did not believe race had anything to do with African American students' ability to achieve, people

treat students as race though race is a factor. Unfortunately, this treatment perpetuates racism because it makes the student's racial identity an issue because they actively chose to not consider race in the examining the successes or abilities of African American students.

The use of standards in the evaluation tools, lesson plans and Competitive Edge assignment extended whiteness as property because the standards reaffirm White, mainstream norms as the status quo. The diversity standard on the evaluation tool were based "others" the existence of people from different racial backgrounds. For instance, one of the indicators is that teachers should acknowledge how diversity influences the globe. By focusing on global influences, the teachers distance and alienate the impact diverse cultures have in the classroom. Since, standard courses of study often reflect standards and practices of the status quo, lesson plans are normally written the same. I was not surprised that Diane's lesson plans did not address racial or cultural integration. Her lesson plans focused on how she planned to address the day's objectives. Some teachers also focused on standards when defining the successes of African American students. As Joyce stated, all students are expected to excel according to the same standards, regardless of race, so she measures success the same. The assistant principal, Misty, the 3rd grade teacher, and Barbara, the 4th shared these sentiments. Standards were also used on the Competitive Edge assignments, where students read selections and responded to comprehension questions. The teacher did not have a way of gauging if the students had prior knowledge to the topics in the selections before assigning the work. This assumption ignores how diversity can influence the classroom and bolsters the advantage others have with prior knowledge. The verbiage in the teacher evaluations, lesson plans, and assignment all assume that African American students

will have mainstream educational experiences. By doing this, teachers ignore institutional and systemic practices that hinder the successes of African American students.

Theme 2: Parent Involvement is Integral to Student Success

All of the participant expressed strong beliefs in the role parent involvement have in student success. Miriam, the assistant principal, explained to me that she encouraged all teachers to contact parents to establish relationships. She also noted the importance of parent involvement in the school when she explained, “Parents are our partners, period. Absolutely, 100% our partners. We let our parents know everything. They expect it. If something is going on or happening we make contact so that our parents know.”

Barbara, the 3rd grade teacher, created a quarterly newsletter and she also called parents often. Barbara posited that parents are especially important in elementary school because if a student knows that their parents are concerned early on, they will work harder in school to succeed because they are still at the ages where they desire to please their parents. Barbara gave a scenario where she communicated with parents when students did not turn in homework, and many times the parents came to the school to make the students write and turn in their assignments. However, she noted that in African American homes there is a culture that “may or may not prioritize reading.” I noted that Misty made the following statements about African American parents:

Parents have got to encourage their children and stick behind the teachers when something is going on within their educational background. Parent teacher conferences, they need more of them to know where their children are standing and a lot of parents because they work 1, 2 3 jobs it’s hard for parents to be involved in their child’s education in the sense of that. Especially those single parents because

when you see single parents helping and doing all that they can do and they can only do but so much and it's off to work they go, they really don't see what's going on.

Then it's like, well, what can I do. If they say that parents are striving, then they are going to strive. If you see friends and family striving, then I would hope that the gap will close up and they will be able to merge even more.

Diane, had set up an Edmodo account so that parents could see if their child classwork and homework assignments. She also used the account to inform parents of current events. Diane cancelled one of our interview sessions due to a parent teacher conference. Misty, the 4th grade teacher, and Joyce both believed that parents should do more to initiate conversations with teachers. When a student had behavioral issues in class, I also witnessed Joyce contact a parent and talk with the parent and student. Joyce's dual role as classroom teacher and literacy coach required her to spend more time as a parent liaison than most teachers. In addition to personally contacting parents of the students she taught through phone calls and emails, she also directs the parent reading campaign and "Love a Library" drive. She advised teachers to continuously communicate with parents so that there are no surprises once a student brings home their report card. Both student participants attributed their academic successes to their parents. Linda, one of the parent participants, stressed the role of parents in the encouragement and success of children. She believe that parents were the biggest part of the child's educational foundation but once they are at school they have to have supportive teachers. She also thought the school contacted her more than enough.

The ELA middle school teachers also supported the belief that parent involvement was an integral component to student success. Parent involvement was often used to facilitate, reinforce and encourage instructional strategies and practices. Teachers not only

contacted parents when they were misbehaving but also to update and encourage. Barbara sent out quarterly newsletters to inform parents of their children's learning objectives. One of the observations was scheduled at a time where I had to wait because of Diane's parent teacher conference. She told me she had to inform the parent of missing assignments. Joyce informed me that she encouraged parents to volunteer and keep their children involved in reading. Her focus at the time was to get parents to participate in the "Love a Library" campaign where parents take their children to the library to check out books. She believed in having ongoing conversations with parents. I was able to witness her call her parent, although it was due to a behavioral incident that prevented instruction. The parent seemed amicable with the teacher. It seemed that all teachers had open-door policies, as I observed that parents were consistently checked in to meet with parents, observe their children, or drop off lunch (the school did not have a lunch room). While waiting for interviews, I was able to casually talk with parents about the school. Since I did not initiate these conversations, I believe the parents thought I was a parent of a child at the school also.

Parent involvement also had the most impact on the success of African American students success at the school. Since the administration, teachers, parents and students strongly believed in parent involvement, they all included parents in their children's education. The school has a plethora of opportunities where parents stay involved and contribute to the learning environments in the school. When I was first granted access to the school, administrators invited me to a parent night where the administrative team and literacy coach discussed standardized test scores and what parents could do to help their children improve at home. The administration and literacy coach advertised on posters throughout the school, flyers and the schools webpage. Many parents attended, made connections with the

literacy coach and discussed implemented strategies at home. Each time I went to the school, there were at least three parents in the building for various reasons.

The administration encourages teachers to initiate contact with all students within the first month of school. As Joyce explained, “You have to convince parents that you work on a team with them and student. That way they are not defensive every time you call.” Barbara said, “I have parents come in and say what’s going on? Let me look in your and see if you have any work you haven’t turned in. That really affects a child.” Although the parents who saw me in the offices were not involved in the study, many were interested to know what I was doing at the school. I observed two instances where students were sent to the office to call parents. One instance was the disruptive behavior incident aforementioned, and another was when a student forgot his lunch (the school doesn’t have a lunch room so the students bring lunch unless it is catered). With the behavioral incident, the ninth-grade student returned to class in tears and began to comply with the teacher’s request. One parent who was not directly involved with the study told me that she had to come to the school because “sometimes my daughter doesn’t tell me everything that’s going on. Today her teacher called me. I am going to pull her out and talk to her first and then I am going to talk to the teacher. I hope she has time to tell me what happened.” This parent later had an emergency conference with the administration and teacher. This actually resulted in delaying a scheduled data collection appointment. Allyson explained her sons’ grief over their father’s death:

I tried to reach out to the other teachers there... to tell them that sometimes grief would interfere with a child’s education because they’re not able to focus you know the memory is short you know it’s not that they don’t want to do the work or that they are being defiant. He’s going through something.

With this information, the school provided the student with mentors and a support system so that he could focus the best ways he could.

The parents also had responsibilities with the “Love a Library” and “Read to Achieve” programs. The “Read to Achieve” program was a federally funded remediation program. If students were not proficient on their Reading standardized tests, they had to attend a summer reading camp at school. Parents were responsible for making sure their children attended the camp. With the “Love a Library” program, parents were responsible for making sure their children checked out and read books. According to the Parent Task Force newsletter, parents were also responsible for volunteering to work both of the yearly book fairs. If parents worked at the book fairs they were able to get a discount on books. I observed one sixth-grade asking about her parent volunteering at the book fair so that he could get a book. If parents volunteered, students received incentives such as extra points on class assignments and homework exemptions.

Parents were also expected to take recommended students to the Saturday Academy. Certain students in third through ninth-grade attend Saturday Academy to strengthen their literacy and math skills. The school sponsored frequent events outside of formal parent teacher conferences where teachers conversed with parents. Each month the school hosted a family dinner at a local restaurant as fundraisers. Families received a discount on their meals. They were able to interact with their children’s teachers. The school also hosted quarterly fun nights. When the school hosted skate night students were exempt from homework if they attended. Since the school did not have a cafeteria, the parent association volunteered to sponsor free “hot dog lunches” periodically. Parents also came to eat with their children during these days. I observed this activity. The front office buzzed with parents coming in

with treats for students. Each grade level was assigned different times. Even members of the school board volunteered. Because parents were involved, they advocated and protected their child's best interests in the classrooms.

CRT Connection to Theme 2

Parent involvement connected to the CRT tenets *racism being a central focus in our society* (Bell, 1995) and *deficit thinking* (Ladson-Billings, 1998) due to some of the participants' views about African American parents. Barbara, the 3rd grade teacher, believed that in some African American homes, the adults did not value education or literacy. Diane stated that some parents may not know how to help their children read. These sentiments relate to deficit thinking as the teachers assumed that African American parents have some sort of deficiency in knowledge that hindered student success. Misty believed that African American parents, especially single parents, could not stay current with their children's academic progress because they have so much to do. She believed the children would strive more if their parents strived more. Allyson, one of the parent participants, supported these claims by mentioning if students were not participating in school, it was the parents' fault. These views connect with the CRT tenet racism as endemic to society because it perpetuates negative stereotypes about African American parents that may prevent them from positive educational experiences.

Theme 3: Racial Influence in Academic Success

It was difficult for study participants to ignore the influence race had in academic success. Most believed that racial inequities influenced the educational experiences of African American students. Miriam, the assistant principal, explained that race has a prominent role in African American students' education because "we know all of the

statistics that's out there already and all of the negative things that students have to encounter." Diane also mentioned that society had negative stereotypes about what African American children's abilities were in the classroom. She explained that this is why she tried to not think of race before teaching students. Misty believed African American students discouraged each other from participating in class by teasing each other. Barbara stated

I've also had colleagues of different races ask me about addressing kids who are my race. I've had problems because sometimes I see colleagues of other races harder on African American kids than others. They may correct an African American student about something that they may let another slide. I had an issue with this with some of my colleagues. Sometimes they don't see it unless you say something. Sometimes they disagree with me and say they don't see color.

Joyce believed that racial injustices, such as police brutality, influenced African American students' actions in the classroom. Allyson, one of the parents, explained that one reason she transferred her sons to the school was because the school "worked with our kids." James, one of the student participants, explained some racial tensions he believed existed in the school.

The belief that race had a role in academic performance influenced the ELA teachers' instructional practices and school wide programs. During the interview with Barbara, I observed a display of African American inventors and mathematicians on the bulletin board. Diane had a diverse classroom library with books by African American authors. She also explained "middle school was crucial time for African American boys to experience success so she makes sure to give them positive reinforcement." Diane used writing journals where students were able to free write and she would respond. I perused some of the journals as artifacts and realized that some of the writings students gave their lived African American

experiences. I observed a discussion some African American students had with the Diane about a book she bought from the book fair. The book was by a popular African American author and students were anxious to get the teacher's feedback. To address the academic needs of African American students, Joyce used a variety of strategies. She thought it was important for African American students to know what their culture contributed to society to counter the negative media reports. She used biographies and historical fiction to do this. Joyce also advocated laughter in the classroom because,

“Historically and tribally, in Africa, the person who could make you laugh was highly esteemed. And even during slavery. Because when times are tough, they look to someone to break that monotony, that weariness and that sorrow. So the comedian was respected. When you get some, I believe it's called “call of the nines” or the “your mom” jokes, it was something to laugh about; it wasn't negative. The purpose was to make someone laugh. There are some teachers who don't understand that that is a part of African American culture; humor is what healed us and helped us get through rough times, so when they bring it in to the classrooms, some teachers are so quick to judge it as misbehavior.”

Joyce encouraged African American participation by allowing students to tell jokes or riddles at the end of classes. I was also able to observe the ninth-grade teacher recite a poem by an African American poet to introduce the poetry unit. While teaching the unit, Joyce also used the song *Reasons* by Earth Wind and Fire. She explained the significance of this song to African American culture. However, it is important to note the demographic make up of the ninth grade was mostly African American students. When I analyzed the teacher evaluations for the ELA teachers, the administrators documented that the all teachers met “at standard”

requirements for integrating diversity in the classroom. The administrator used lesson plans, artifacts, and student rapport as indicators.

CRT Connection to Theme 3

The experiences the study participants show *racism as a central focus in our society* (Bell, 1995). Misty's opinions on African American students were problematic as she judged the interactions of her students without context. Even though the school participants functioned using a colorblind approach to education, they could not ignore the implications historical and institutional racism had on African American students. The study participants realized this and attempted to counter the negativity by offering second chances and affirming their culture.

Theme 4: Student Desires Influence Achievement

Many of the participants believed students' desires or goals would influence their achievement. Misty stated that if students desired to achieve badly enough, they would find a way to overcome obstacles. Joyce also mentioned that she believed students had to have goals that wanted to achieve. Allyson, one of the parent participants, encourages her children by telling them "I just think, well, I just tell my boys we can't allow people to determine their success. And each person has their own definition and journey to it." Linda explained the achievement of African American students as follows:

But I will say a person who doesn't have a dream or vision just kinda start to perish, and they fade away because they don't have anything to work towards. So that is why I would think it is important for them to do and push themselves at being successful.

The student participants also mentioned the importance of having personal goals. Courtney believed that it was difficult for others when her peers didn't care about education.

James encouraged his friends to work towards goals so that they will have something when they get older. Student desire isn't something that you can gauge in class observations, but all the classes I observed had student participation, which means they had desires to achieve in class.

Student desire influenced the instructional practices as many of the teachers used a variety of instructional methods to engage the students in the learning environment. I collected lesson plans and student work as artifacts. I saw that teachers had plans in place to differentiate instruction (as mandated by administration) to ensure all students were able to complete work. The journal entries, test prep exercises and poetry assignments were all graded as completed. During one observation, I noticed the sixth- and ninth-grade teacher graded each other's essays. It looked like the majority of the students completed the essays. It seemed all teachers prepared and planned to address all students; however, the observations and student work showed that the results varied. Artifacts also revealed that teachers used a variety of student work. A popular activity was flipbooks in Diane's class (which is when students fold and staple several sheets of paper into a horizontal pamphlet). During observations, I watched some of her students work on completing their flipbooks and saw that completing them required movement and drawing. The students also quizzed each other to prepare for an upcoming vocabulary test. During observations, the Joyce allowed students to use the lyrics to popular songs to illustrate figurative language. The teacher asked for students to sing or rap the lyrics, but most of them asked to read the lyrics. Joyce mentioned in the post-observation interview, "I hate that we aren't in our classes yet. It is hard for me to move around, so I can't expect the students to move. It's just inconvenient."

CRT Connection to Theme 4

Although altruistic, this theme that students determine their success because of their desire to succeed extends *whiteness as property* (Harris, 1993). With whiteness as property, there is an expectation of value associated with those who identify as White. This value allows them to alienate and enjoy many of the privileges associated with whiteness such as being considered the “norm”, more opportunities to obtain higher paying jobs and property, and the ability to alienate to maintain status. The notion that all students can achieve if desired to is based on a faulty premise that all students have the equal amounts of cultural capital and value that would give them access to succeed. Also, this idea relates to deficit thinking because an assumption is made that those who aren’t successful choose not to, ignoring the racial realities that prevent many from aspirations.

Theme 5: Student Responsibility

Most participants voiced the belief that students were responsible for learning. Miriam explained that even though African American students may have different experiences than other students when they arrived at school, everyone was the same. She also informed that parents enrolled some students in the school because they could not attend a school in the local school system or were on the trajectory to alternative school. Because these students believed the school was their last chance in a traditional learning environment, they were more responsible for their learning. Diane stated “she had very high expectations for all of her students and she pushed her students to be responsible for assignments”. Joyce also believed that students’ beliefs in them selves correlated to the achievement gap, but explained, “A great teacher will inspire a child to want to improve.” She also explained to me student perception could be a factor that influences achievement. Allyson, one of the parents,

said that she problems getting her sons to take responsibility in reading more. She encouraged them to take responsibility by recognizing the importance of race in stating

And as Black men they have to understand that the road is not going to be easy for you. And although you have problems you going to have situations in life where you feel like you can't deal with it but as an African American man you have to do everything in your power to get this thing right.

James, one of the students, believed that African American students had a responsibility to push themselves more in the classroom. Courtney defined student success as “working to the best of her ability”.

The ELA teachers' beliefs on student responsibility were exemplified in their instructional strategies and student expectations. Barbara explained that students were expected to have their materials and homework at the beginning of class. All students were expected to have the correct materials from their lockers after each designated class change. Diane had work bins where students had to turn in homework. I also observed the students come in the class and immediately start working on answering the writing prompt on the board. The students also knew to write about what they thought the pun of the day meant. All of the students had a good understanding of when they were supposed to work on their vocabulary flip books during class time and if they did not know how to spell a word or needed a definition they had to look it up. I observed a student asking a teacher to borrow a dictionary to look up a word. I saw all of sixth-grade students complete a test prep activity where they read a selection and answered questions out of the competitive edge workbooks. They turned these activities in once a week so that they teacher could grade them. In the ninth-grade classes, all students had materials prepared in the beginning of class and took

responsibility for their learning. This actually ended up being a negative for the classroom because the students tried to tell the new teacher what to do. During the ninth-grade class, some of the students asked Joyce about a previous assignment. They wanted to know when she was going to take up the assignment for grades. The students also took responsibility for each other's learning. James shared,

Well, I have this one friend sometimes I be like, he don't try and sometimes I have to let him know that he have to do what he have to do. Sometimes I don't take the classroom seriously myself but at a certain point you have to know when to put your foot down and do what you got to do and sometimes he just be slacking in class and stuff like that and I'll just say you pick your head up and do your work and stuff like that because nobody else does that. So if nobody else does that it means that they don't care and they want you to fall in your place too so if you are a true friend you gone help your friend and tell them to do what they gotta do so they can make it.

Courtney simply noted, "It's really tough for teachers when students don't care." I also observed two young ladies assist a young man in the sixth-grade class. He was off-task and did not know where the class was in reviewing a grammar exercise. However, he thought he was right and was going to argue with his peers. The young ladies pointed out on the paper where he was wrong so that he could follow along with the class. Student responsibility empowered African American students in a historically non-supportive environment.

CRT Connection to Theme 5

This theme connected to *racism being endemic to society* (Harris, 1993) as teachers realized that due to racist stereotypes, some do not have high expectations for African American students. Teachers consciously worked to counter that by having instructional

plans and activities in place that counters stereotypes by holding African American students accountable. However, this theme also extends whiteness as property because all students may not have access to meet expectations.

Table 1.3 Connecting Themes to CRT Tenets and Research Questions

Theme	CRT Tenet	Research Questions
Racial Influence in Academic Success	Racism as an Endemic Part of Society	1. What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences African American students? 2. How do these beliefs influence the middle school ELA teachers' instructional strategies and practices?
Student Desires Influence Achievement	Whiteness as Property	1. What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences African American students?

Table 1.3 continued

<p>Absence of Race</p>	<p>Whiteness as Property Racism as Endemic Part of Society</p>	<p>1: What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences African American students? 2.How do these beliefs influence the middle school ELA teachers’ instructional strategies and practices?</p>
<p>Parent Involvement is Integral to Student Success</p>	<p>Racism as Endemic Part of Society Deficit Thinking</p>	<p>1. What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences African American students? 2.How do these beliefs influence the middle school ELA teachers’ instructional strategies and practices? 3. What beliefs, strategies and practices had the most impact on African American students’ academic progress?</p>

Table 1.3 continued

<p>Student Responsibility</p>	<p>Racism as an Endemic Part of Society Whiteness as Property</p>	<p>1. What beliefs do administrator(s), teachers, students and parents at a charter school have about the learning experiences African American students? 2. How do these beliefs influence the middle school ELA teachers' instructional strategies and practices? 3. What beliefs, strategies and practices had the most impact on African American students' academic progress?</p>
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Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter discussed how I coded and analyzed each data source. I used interpretative and analytical questions after coding to extend knowledge that ultimately resolves the research questions and connects the student to CRT. I found that the beliefs and instructional practices at Ace Academy are complex, affirmative but contradictory. The teachers' beliefs may or may not reflect the instructional practices in the classroom.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the instructional beliefs, strategies, and practices at a charter school whose African American students had achieved average or above-average scores on standardized reading tests. This chapter presents a discussion of the study and main findings. Then, it details the significance of the study, implications of study, limitations of study and recommendations.

In this study, I used a case study approach because it allowed me to examine middle grade ELA teachers in a charter school who taught African American students who were successful on the state standardized reading exam. I conducted interviews from the assistant principal, 2 elementary teachers, 2 ELA middle school teachers, 2 students, and 2 parents to obtain a holistic perspective about the study site. I observed the 2 middle school teachers who participated in the interviews. I also collected teacher evaluations and artifacts from the 2 middle school teachers. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. I developed topic and analytic codes to analyze the data based on tenets of CRT, the interview data and information that emerged from the data. I went line by line to analyze the transcriptions and asked interpretative questions to compile the codes into themes and analyze the connection to CRT tenets. I took notes before, during and after the classroom observations. To remain consistent, I used the same codes that I used for the interviews, but some emerged from data (that were specific to classroom observations). I asked interpretative questions, compiled the codes into themes, and connected to CRT. For the teacher evaluation tools, lesson plans and artifacts I used content analysis to analyze the data. I developed codes based on the evaluation tool rubric and used interpretative questions to connect to themes and some CRT tenets. For the lesson plans, I used codes based on

standards and emerged data. I used interpretative questions to connect to themes and some CRT tenets. Due to the diversity of the student work, I used interpretative questions to analyze the data and connect to themes. The five themes emerged from the data: an absence of race, parent involvement is integral to student success, racial influence in academic success, student desires influence achievement and student responsibility. Then, I discussed each theme's relation to a CRT tenet(s).

The findings also show that the administration, teachers, students, and parents operate in a system that perpetuates racism systemically and institutionally. However, the school has found ways to counter some of the racist ideologies, which has been integral to its success. In this chapter, I will discuss the main findings, significance of study, implications of study and recommendations for future research.

I found the study participants to minimize race when discussing their beliefs on student success. The assistant principal affirmed that all students were to adhere to the same rules and academic standards regardless of race. Most of the teachers echoed these sentiments in the interviews and observations. However, the study participants were keenly aware of the role race has in student achievement due to stereotypes, discursive practices, and racial injustices. The administrative team addressed the needs of African American students by hiring African American male teacher assistants and partnering with the local HBCU. Teachers attempted to counter this role by not considering race when discussing student ability, using diverse instructional practices, and finding innovative ways to connect to African American students. The parent participants were aware of role of race and had unique ways to motivate their children.

I also found that teachers' beliefs about students influence student success. The administration encouraged teachers to have positive beliefs about all students regardless of race. The teachers in the interviews believed all students had the ability to learn. This perspective influenced lesson plans and instructional practices that targeted diverse learners. More than half of the African American students were proficient on their reading standardized tests. The notion that teachers' beliefs influence student success extends what the literature supports in regard to teacher beliefs and student success. According to Archambault, Janosz, and Chouinard (2012) found teachers' self-reported beliefs directly influenced students academically. The researchers also recommended that teachers in low-performing areas be exposed to how their attitudes influenced student achievement. In this study, I was able to extend this notion by offering the assistant principal and teacher participants a chance to examine their beliefs and attitudes about African American students.

The administration, teachers, students and parents highly valued parent involvement. All believed that it was essential to student success. The school encouraged parent involvement on a school-wide level by offering many opportunities to volunteer, be informed, and have a role in the decision-making processes. These findings support the literature that affirms the correlation between parent involvement and student achievement. Henderson (1994) compiled an annotated bibliography that documents parent involvement efforts that integrate parents into school programs, improve the parent-child relationship in their families, and build strong relationships with the school, family, and community. Henderson (1994) found that all efforts improved student achievement.

I found that students' acceptance of responsibility positively affected student progress. Most of the students observed were aware of the school and classroom

expectations. Students were cognizant on the importance of classwork and asked teachers questions for clarification. Although I did not examine how students' acceptance of responsibility influences progress, I later discovered that it extends the literature.

The school's culture had a role in student achievement. The administration, teachers, parents, and teachers worked together to support students. I found that this type of support identified in literature as collective responsibility. Collective responsibility is when everyone takes responsibility for student success instead of blaming students for underachievement. Lee and Smith (1996) found higher student achievement in schools with collective responsibility. A gap in the literature exists in regards to how student successes correlate to collective responsibility.

The school experienced a lot of changes throughout the study. Some of the changes were due to the school's expansion, teacher turnover rates and disorganization. Construction on the building was not complete and the school just admitted 9th graders. One of the classes observed had three teachers before the end of the year. At the end of the study, the main principal resigned. The study site's board also decided not to add another grade level. Research (Survey of America's Charter Schools, 2014) shows that charter schools typically take a couple of years to establish smooth operations. With the school entering a new building and adding a new grade level during the study, the school was not stable in operations.

Significance of Study

This study addresses a gap in the literature concerning the beliefs and practices of teachers of African American students who are successful on reading standardized tests. This study contributes to scholars and practitioners' understanding of teachers' beliefs and

instructional practices; it also gives insight into how African American students can be successful in ELA courses. Finally, the study provides an example of the application of Critical Race Theory. Because this study focuses on individuals of a specific, marginalized race, Critical Race Theory provides a lens to situate and analyze teachers' beliefs about race in a historical and social context.

Success and achievement in American society is predicated on basic skills covered in ELA classrooms. Thus, by increasing the accessibility of ELA to African American students, and particularly of high-quality ELA instruction, this study can make possible the achievement of other academic and professional opportunities by African Americans. This study has the potential to inform how policy-makers, researchers, and teachers approach race in ELA classrooms and charter schools. These individuals could become more cognizant of how the learning experience is perceived by students.

Implications of Study

The implications of this study can influence the academic and professional decisions of teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and parents. The participants' understandings of their educational environment provide a holistic conclusion on how stakeholders can improve the educational experience of African American students. The following sections detail the implications for: administrators, teachers, parents and teacher educators.

Implications for Administrators. The study revealed that all teachers did not understand the school's vision in addressing the needs of African American students. The administrative team must communicate the vision of the school and ensure that all teachers can implement it. The administration also advocated the use of diverse instructional practices to address the needs of African American students. However, some of the teachers implemented strategies

not supported by research. The administrative team should implement research into their instructional planning days to ensure the teaching strategies are effective. The school also experienced changes in staff, schedules and location. The administration needed to consider how changes could have affected student behaviors and academic progress before implementing them. Some of the study participants expressed concern that the administration was not involved enough in the school. The administration needs to make sure they are visible to parents and teachers and assure them of support.

Implications for Teachers. The study reaffirmed the correlation between teacher beliefs and student performance as the students were successful and most of the teachers believed that their students at the abilities to be successful. However, there were some instances where teachers reaffirmed negative stereotypes about African American students and parents. Teachers should use methods to remain conscious of their beliefs because it not only determines their relationships with parents but also the success of students, specifically African American students. If and when negativity influences a teacher's beliefs, they should actively create ways to counter it. Some of the teachers did not formally integrate culture diversity and opted to focus on standards. Teachers should purposefully consider how they are going to integrate African American culture in the classroom to increase impact and effectiveness. During the class observations, I noticed the difficulties teachers had in keeping students engaged in instruction and assignments. Teachers should use active engagement strategies or chunk lessons into smaller sections so that students are actively listening and participating in classes.

Implications for Parents. One of the parent participants mentioned that she felt that the teachers made too many contacts about the same event whereas another parent complained to

me about not being informed. The other parent mentioned the school not contacting her when her son had academic and behavioral issues. Teachers and parents need to make meaningful contact so that they are not only welcomed in the classroom, but also empowered to interact with their teachers and children academically. Parents should also be aware of the stereotypical views associated with African American parenting and education so that they are proactive in building teacher student relationships.

Implications for Teacher Educators. The study exposed the preconceived notions that teachers had about African American students prior to teaching them. Teachers revealed that they addressed this issue by ignoring race or equivocating all races. This practice is damaging to the classroom environment and African American student achievement. In teacher education courses, teacher educators should prepare students to deal with diverse populations by not only exposing teacher bias but also exploring effective ways to counter it in the classroom. The study also exposed teachers were ill equipped in addressing the needs of African American students, as some were not engaged in observations and some of the classwork was incomplete. Teacher education programs should expose the student teachers to effective strategies to teach diverse populations such as culturally responsive pedagogy and active engagement strategies.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the convenience sampling used in the qualitative phase of the study, the researcher cannot say that the sample was an adequate representation of the population (Creswell, 2002). The “n” was too small to make any generalizations that would contribute to the general body of knowledge. With the sample selection process, the research targets ELA teachers at a school because the state recognized African American students for high

performance on the reading standardized tests. This choice limited the sample size and the diversity of the study's participants. For this reason, it was necessary to saturate the data collection with thick descriptions. I included detailed descriptions of the study participants, settings of data collection sites (where applicable), and tone of interviews and observations.

The limitations of the study extend to data collection methods. The structure of the interview guides were not broad enough to include some of the participants' true reflections on their understanding because the participants could not relate to the questions in the interview guides. The data in the qualitative studies was also subject to various interpretations. It is also significant to note that because I completed the interview transcriptions, researcher bias is an additional issue that could affect how I interpret the transcriptions.

The time constraints of this study did not only limit the data saturation but the research process of case studies. Case studies are known to be lengthy because of long narratives and the depth of data collected (Yin, 2003). However, because dissertations are inherently time-restricted, data collection and the written report of the case study were limited. I addressed this limitation by offering suggestions for further research.

I encountered serious issues when scheduling data collection. Initially, I believed that the administration team wanted to control that participated in the study. The assistant principal asked to know who volunteered and even volunteered to choose the parents and students to participate. I explained that it would complicate the results of the study. I think that this was one of the reasons why it was so hard to gain access to teachers and students even with the principal's permission. Although I reassured all stakeholders that the data collected would remain anonymous and explained how the use of pseudonyms will protect

the identify of the school and participants, I recommend reassuring stakeholders that the results of the study would not negatively affect the school. I should have also offered alternative modes of conducting interviews with the parents and students. It was difficult scheduling times to meet the parents face to face. Also, some parents wanted to listen in on the student interviews. Although, the parents ended up not sitting in on the student interviews, in future research I will have to consider how to make parents comfortable with the interview. I also found some that of the teachers were apprehensive about discussing race. I suggest initiating more dialogue about race to increase comfort when introducing the study to prospective participants. It is extremely difficult to schedule classroom observations and student interviews when schools have mandatory standardized testing to prepare for the annual state standardized testing. I recommend requesting a school-testing calendar so that the researcher can consider test prep when scheduling interviews and observations.

Since the study revealed that collective responsibility could possibly have a role in African American student achievement on standardized testing, I recommend future studies that closely examine collective responsibility in predominately African American populations (charter schools and traditional settings) to gauge its effectiveness.

Recommendations for Future Research

The administrative team, teachers, and parents were hesitant about participating in the study out of fear of negativity backlash. The principal confirmed access to the school after several email conversations, two phone calls and a face-to-face meeting. Initially, the assistant principal wanted to control whom participated in the study. Teachers were eager to explain what they believed went wrong in their classes during the post observations sessions. I reassured both parent participants one of the student participants that their opinions would

not influence grades. I would recommend reassuring stakeholders that the results of the study would not negatively affect the school, their careers, or grades. I had a difficult time scheduling face to face interview times and places for parents. For future research, I suggest offering alternative modes of conducting interviews with the parents and students. I also found some that of the teachers were apprehensive about discussing race. I suggest initiating more dialogue about race to increase comfort when introducing the study to prospective participants. I would also encourage researchers to implement this study as a participatory action research because it liberates the researcher to interact with participants in a way where you could ensure participants understand the study, maximize quality data collection and enrich the academic environment. This study was also limited due to time constraints and the number of participants. I would suggest replicated studies with an extended time frame and participants to greater inform the consistencies and inconsistencies in instructional practices and school wide programs. I used the data from standardized test scores to determine if African American students were successful in ELA classrooms. However, my professional teaching experiences and data from this study leads me to conclude that reading standardized test scores alone are not the best method to determine success. Future studies should consider grades, reading levels and writing test results in examining the success of African American students. Collective responsibility is a principle that emerged from the data. Since, I had not researched prior to conducting the study, I also recommend studies that closely examine collective responsibility in diverse school settings (charter schools and traditional settings) to gauge its effectiveness. Since, I focused on the success of a specific racial group of students, I used tenets of critical race theory to frame and analyze the data. However, I also collected

data from more than African American students. For future research I would expand the study to include tenets of Whiteness studies to compare the effects on academic experiences.

Chapter Summary

The findings of the study inform professionals in education, educational leadership, charter schools, and ELA. After using CRT to analyze themes in findings, the intrinsic role race has in influencing ELA classrooms are revealed. The study reminds ELA teachers that their beliefs about students translate into instructional practices and student achievement. The study also reinforces the importance of using effective instructional practices in the classroom. Student responsibility (engagement) is affirmed as a positive indicator of student success. Since a literature gap exists in research that correlates collective responsibility and student success, the study fills a void by examining the advantages of collective responsibility in the school.

Initially, I believed that this study would present opportunity that supports the notion that charter schools offer the opportunity that public schools lack. The positive accolades the school received locally and statewide piqued my interests. However, the most promising practices at the study site can be implemented at any school. Charter schools have their own set of complexities in operation. This study demonstrated the dangers of destabilizing charter schools. High teacher turnover rates, disorganization, and an expanding student body disturbed the learning environment for many of the students. In a political environment that encourages school choice, the limitations of charter schools could be detrimental to our school systems if not addressed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

This consent information is valid June 16, 2015 through June 16, 2016

Title of Study: A Case Study Describing the Beliefs and Practices of a Middle School Language Arts Teacher of Successful African American Students

Principal Investigator: Tanesha Hendley Ashe

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carl Young

What are some general things you should know about this study?

You are being invited to participate in a study about the relationship between the beliefs and practices of English Language Arts teachers and the achievement of African American students. I am Tanesha Hendley Ashe and I am a former Cumberland County Schools' middle school teacher and North Carolina State doctoral student. I am conducting this study as part of my dissertation. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

What is the purpose of this study?

The objective of this study is to describe the teaching beliefs and practices of an English Language Arts teacher of African American students who achieved above average in literacy skills. Research shows that the negative beliefs and practices that English Language Arts teachers have about African American students result in dismal results. Because this case study illustrates an alternative, it will inform the research community of effective beliefs and practices by using critical race theory as an analytical lens.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview about your racial beliefs concerning African American students. The researcher will also ask questions about your beliefs about the school, innovative ways you believe your school addresses academic inequities and the culture of your school. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. An audio device will be used to record the interviews. This will ensure the accuracy of the information collected by the researcher.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The topic of race in education can be sensitive, and researchers are taking steps to protect the confidentiality of your responses. The researcher will identify participants with pseudonyms on the interview guides and notes. The researcher will also use pseudonyms during the interview. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning selected interview participant coding to use throughout the data analysis and ensuring that all data is kept in a data collection system secured with a password. Recorded interviews will be destroyed after they are transcribed and coding will be used to identify topics and themes during data analysis. Because there is a small number of administrators in this study, it is possible that you may be indirectly identifiable to people who know you in reports about this research, even though a pseudonym will be used.

Benefits

Some of the benefits of this study are that you will get time to reflect on practices that should be extended or modified. There are not any monetary costs for participating in the study. The collected data may not benefit you directly, but it will provide important information about teaching African American students English Language Arts. You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Tanesha Ashe, Principal Investigator, at tfhashe@gmail.com or (910) 551-4613 or Dr. Carl Young, Faculty Sponsor at carlyoung@ncsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator, at 919-515-4514 or debra_paxton@ncsu.edu.

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Subject's signature _____
Investigator's signature _____

Date _____
Date _____

APPENDIX B

North Carolina State University

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What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview about reflecting on your teaching practices and beliefs of African American students. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. An audio device will be used to record the interviews. This will ensure the accuracy of the information collected by the researcher.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The topic of race in education can be sensitive, and researchers are taking steps to protect the confidentiality of your responses. The researcher will identify participants with pseudonyms on the interview guides and notes. The researcher will also use pseudonyms during the interview. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning selected interview participant coding to use throughout the data analysis and ensuring that all data is kept in a data collection system secured with a password. Recorded interviews will be destroyed after they are transcribed and coding will be used to identify topics and themes during data analysis. Because there is a small number of teachers in this study, it is possible that you may be indirectly identifiable to people who know you in reports about this research, even though a pseudonym will be used.

Benefits

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Date _____

Investigator's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH
This consent information is valid June 16, 2015 through June 16, 2016

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Principal Investigator: Tanesha Hendley Ashe

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carl Young

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What is the purpose of this study?

The objective of this study is to describe the teaching beliefs and practices of an English Language Arts teacher of African American students who achieved above average in literacy skills. Research shows that the negative beliefs and practices that English Language Arts teachers have about African American students result in dismal results. Because this case study illustrates an alternative, it will inform the research community of effective beliefs and practices by using critical race theory as an analytical lens.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview about their racial beliefs concerning African American students. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Then, the researcher will ask you to participate in observations. The researcher will observe you teaching a lesson and take notes on the lesson, your interactions with students, the environment and tone of the classroom. Next, the researcher will request that you submit all administrative evaluations and observations. The researcher will use these tools to analyze your beliefs and practices. Finally, the researcher will ask you to participate in a final interview where she will ask for opinions and clarity on the themes she interpreted from the data. An audio device will be used to record the interviews. This will ensure the accuracy of the information collected by the researcher.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The topic of race in education can be sensitive, and researchers are taking steps to protect the confidentiality of your responses. The researcher will identify participants with pseudonyms on the interview guides and notes. The researcher will also use pseudonyms during the interview. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning selected interview participant coding to use throughout the data analysis and ensuring that all data is kept in a data collection system secured with a password. Recorded interviews will be destroyed after they are transcribed and coding will be used to identify topics and themes during data analysis. Because there is a small number of teachers in this study, it is possible that you may be indirectly identifiable to people who know you in reports about this research, even though a pseudonym will be used.

Benefits

Some of the benefits of this study are that you will get time to reflect on practices that should be extended or modified. There are not any monetary costs for participating in the study. The collected data may not benefit you directly, but it will provide important information about teaching African American students English Language Arts. You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

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Consent To Participate

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Subject's signature _____
Investigator's signature _____

Date _____
Date _____

APPENDIX D

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH
This consent information is valid June 16, 2015 through June 16, 2016

Title of Study: A Case Study Describing the Beliefs and Practices of a Middle School Language Arts Teacher of Successful African American Students

Principal Investigator: Tanesha Hendley Ashe

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carl Young

What are some general things you should know about this study?

You are being invited to participate in a study about the relationship between the beliefs and practices of English Language Arts teachers and the achievement of African American students. I am Tanesha Hendley Ashe and I am a former Cumberland County Schools' middle school teacher and North Carolina State doctoral student. I am conducting this study as part of my dissertation. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

What is the purpose of this study?

The objective of this study is to describe the teaching beliefs and practices of an English Language Arts teacher of African American students who achieved above average in literacy skills. Research shows that the negative beliefs and practices that English Language Arts teachers have about African American students result in dismal results. Because this case study illustrates an alternative, it will inform the research community of effective beliefs and practices by using critical race theory as an analytical lens.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview about the school your child attends. You will evaluate how the school addresses the racially diverse needs of your child (ren). This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. This will be a group interview with other parents. An audio device will be used to record the interviews. This will ensure the accuracy of the information collected by the researcher.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The topic of race in education can be sensitive, and researcher is taking steps to protect the confidentiality of your responses. The researcher will identify participants with pseudonyms on the interview guides and notes. The researcher will also use pseudonyms during the interview. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning selected interview participant coding to use throughout the data analysis and ensuring that all data is kept in a data collection system secured with a password. Recorded interviews will be destroyed after they are transcribed and coding will be used to identify topics and themes during data analysis.

Even with the researcher's efforts to protect your confidentiality, other parents in the group interview will know your responses, as you will know theirs. We ask that you respect each other's confidentiality.

Benefits

Some of the benefits of this study are that you will get time to reflect on practices that should be extended or modified. There are not any monetary costs for participating in the study. The collected data may not benefit you directly, but it will provide important information about teaching African American students English Language Arts. You can choose whether or not to be in this study. Your participation or lack thereof will not influence your relationship with the school or your child's access to resources or their grades. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Tanesha Ashe, Principal Investigator, at tahashe@gmail.com or (910) 551-4613 or Dr. Carl Young, Faculty Sponsor at carlyoung@ncsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator, at 919-515-4514 or debra_paxton@ncsu.edu.

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Subject's signature _____

Date _____

Investigator's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

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Title of Study: A Case Study Describing the Beliefs and Practices of a Middle School Language Arts Teacher of Successful African American Students

Principal Investigator: Tanesha Hendley Ashe

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carl Young

What are some general things you should know about this study?

I am Tanesha Hendley Ashe and I am a former Cumberland County Schools' middle school teacher and North Carolina State University student. I am doing a study to learn about how your English Language Arts teachers helped you learn. I am asking you to help in this study because you represent a portion of the school which was successful on the state standardized test. You do not have to participate in this study, it is voluntary and your choice to participate or not.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to understand more about African American students and how they learn best. What we will learn in this study may help other African American children excel in English Language Arts classes and on state standardized tests.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your experiences as a student. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. I will record the interviews on an audio device so that I can remember all of your experiences.

Risks

It is possible that your identity may be exposed by participating in this study. I am taking steps to protect your identity by using made up names throughout the study. Any documents that reveal your identity will not be exposed unless I have parental permission or if I am required by law. I will also protect your identity by using special codes and using a password to secure all documents.

Benefits

You get a chance to think about your experiences in the classroom and what ways you can improve as a student. You can also help other students just like you. The questions we ask are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test. You can choose whether or not to be in this study. Your participation or lack thereof will not influence your relationship with the school or your access to resources or grades. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't sign the paper, or if you change your mind later.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Tanesha Ashe, Principal Investigator, at tahashe@gmail.com or (910) 551-4613 or Dr. Carl Young, Faculty Sponsor at carlyoung@ncsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator, at 919-515-4514 or debra_paxton@ncsu.edu.

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Parent/Guardian/Legal Representative Signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX F

Pre-Observation Interview Guide

Investigator:

Participant:

Time:

Date:

Description of Setting:

1. What role does race have in developing your opinions of African American students?
2. How do you define the success of African American students? How do you measure it?
3. What caused the achievement gap that exists amongst African American and White students?
4. How could teachers ensure that their instructional practices affirm African American culture?
5. In what ways are African American students encouraged and discouraged from participating in class within their culture?
6. What role does parent involvement have in the success of African American students?
7. How do you encourage parent involvement in your classes?
8. How would you encourage African American students who try hard, even if they are not performing well? Explain answer.
9. Why is it necessary for African American students to experience success?
10. What strategies do you use to address the needs of African American students?
11. Why should teachers integrate experiences of African American students into teacher-student relationships and instruction? How would you accomplish this?
12. What are the benefits and drawbacks of discussing race with colleagues?

Adapted from the *Working With Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students* discussion prompt developed by Teaching Tolerance on www.tolerance.org.

APPENDIX G

Post Observations Follow-Up Interview Guide

**This interview will take place after all data has been collected. The researcher will present the data and data analysis results to presenter. This interview will also be a way for the researcher to member check the data.*

Investigator:

Participant:

Time:

Date:

Description of Setting:

1. What are your opinions on the themes that emerged from the data collected?
2. Do your interpretations align with the researcher? Explain why or why not?
3. Do you believe that the researcher misinterpreted anything?
4. What did you mean by_____?
5. What would you like to see gained from this study?
6. Are there any significant teaching strategies or beliefs that was omitted from data collection and analysis?
7. What recommendations would you offer in regards how the success of African American students are defined and measured?

APPENDIX H

Interview Guide for Elementary ELA Teachers

Investigator:

Participant:

Time:

Date:

Description of Setting:

1. What role does race have in developing your opinions of African American students?
2. What role does emergent literacy have in the success of African American students?
3. How do you define the success of African American students? How do you measure it?
4. What caused the achievement gap that exists amongst African American and White students?
5. How could teachers ensure that their instructional practices affirm African American culture?
6. In what ways are African American students encouraged and discouraged from participating in class within their culture?
7. What role does parent involvement have in the success of African American students?
8. How do you encourage parent involvement in your classes?
9. How would you encourage African American students who try hard, even if they are not performing well? Explain answer.
10. Why is it necessary for African American students to experience success?
11. What strategies do you use to address the needs of African American students?
12. Why should teachers integrate experiences of African American students into teacher-student relationships and instruction? How would you accomplish this?
13. What are the benefits and drawbacks of discussing race with colleagues?
14. How does the school's contribute to the success of African American students?

Adapted from the *Working With Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students* discussion prompt developed by Teaching Tolerance on www.tolerance.org.

APPENDIX I

Interview Guide for Parents

Investigator:

Participant:

Time:

Date:

Description of Setting:

1. What made you choose this school?
2. How do you define the success of African American students? How do you measure it?
3. In what ways are African American students encouraged and discouraged from participating in class within their culture, at school, and at home?
4. How does the school encourage you to stay involved in school?
5. Why is it necessary for African American students to experience success?
6. What are the benefits and drawbacks of discussing race with other parents, teachers, and administrators?

Adapted from the *Working With Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students* discussion prompt developed by Teaching Tolerance on www.tolerance.org.

APPENDIX J

Administrative Interview

Investigator:

Participant:

Time:

Date:

Description of Setting:

1. How does the culture of the school support African American students?
2. What role does race have in developing your opinions of African American students?
3. How do you define the success of African American students? How do you measure it?
4. How could teachers ensure that their instructional practices affirm African American culture?
5. What role does parent involvement have in the success of African American students?
6. How does the administration foster the success of African American students?
7. Why is it necessary for African American students to experience success?
8. What are the benefits and drawbacks of discussing race with the staff?

Adapted from the *Working With Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students* discussion prompt developed by Teaching Tolerance on www.tolerance.org.

APPENDIX K

Interview Guide for Students

Investigator:

Participant:

Time:

Date:

Description of Setting:

1. Does race help shape your opinions about your classmates or yourself?
2. Did your experiences in preschool and at home help you when you started school?
3. What makes you a successful student?
4. Do you think different races of students are more successful than African American students?

If so, Why?

5. Why is it necessary for African American students to experience success?
6. How could teachers make the classrooms more positive for African American students?
7. In what ways are African American students encouraged and discouraged from participating in class?
8. What role does your parents have in your success?
9. How would you encourage your peers who try hard, even if they are not performing well?

Explain answer.

10. How do you learn?
11. What are the benefits and drawbacks of discussing race in the classroom?
12. How does the school's contribute to the success of African American students?

Adapted from the *Working With Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students* discussion prompt developed by Teaching Tolerance on www.tolerance.org

APPENDIX L

Observation Note Sheet

Length of Class: _____

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

**Based on the Observational Protocol in Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* Sage.