

CONFRONTING THE BARRIERS TO UNDERSTANDING TEACHING AND
LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN PUBLIC
SCHOOLS:
CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH CENTERED ON THE VOICES OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATORS

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by

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The achievement gap between African-American and European-American students in U.S. public schools is a problem with no simple explanation, and one that leaders struggle to correct. The researcher's central premise is that there are many ways to improve education for African-American students and that the racial achievement gap is inexcusable. African-American women may offer a unique perspective on this topic, by virtue of their status as women and as African Americans, as well as their experiences as students and teachers. The researcher set out to conduct research exploring the perspectives of African-American female teachers with respect to perceived and actual barriers to the effective education of students, specifically African-American students, teachers' coping strategies, and teachers' recommendations for change. However, major obstructing factors prevented the necessary collection of data for that research.

In the dissertation, the researcher describes the current climate of education reform in the United States and critiques current reform efforts. She conceptualizes reasons for the structural factors that contribute to and explain the difficulty in collecting data on the experiences and perspectives of African-American teachers in

U.S. public schools. Factors that may have prevented schools from allowing access to interview and observe African-American teachers are analyzed. Additionally, the researcher explores the question of why, in the rare cases in which schools did grant permission for the research, African-American teachers may have been uncomfortable participating in interviews about and observations of their experiences and practices.

In theorizing about these factors, the researcher discusses the nature of the proposed research, her orientation, and the rationale for the proposed study. Major factors potentially influencing the decisions of school leaders and teachers not to participate are also presented. These include the nature of the public school teaching profession; race relations and history in the United States; education and experience in the United States; and laws, policies, and practices applicable to public education. In evaluating these elements, the researcher brings to light several factors that may prevent such research. The researcher concludes by presenting similar research initiatives and theories on how comparable research goals may be met, and by discussing areas for future research.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christy Michelle Dodge earned a Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs/German with distinction from the University of Maine, in 1991, at the age of 20. She also earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education, Summa Cum Laude, from the State University of New York at Cortland in 1993. While working as a middle school special education teacher, she attended Johns Hopkins University, where she earned a Master of Science in Special Education in 1998.

At Cornell University Christy earned a Master of Science in 2002. She has focused on Curriculum and Instruction and African-American Studies, as a result of her experiences teaching in public schools. While pursuing her studies, Christy was involved in the Graduate Field of Education, serving as the Treasurer and then President of the Cornell Education Society. She was also involved at the university level, working as a Graduate Assistant in the Office of Publications and Statistics, acting as a Fellow for Faculty Interaction Programming at the Big Red Barn Graduate Student Center, and serving as a Student Representative on the Judicial Hearing Board. As part of her studies she spent a year as a Scholar Exchange Student at Harvard University in the African-American Studies program. While writing her dissertation, she has taught education at the kindergarten through twelfth-grade levels. Over the years Christy has also taught regular education and adult education; and she has taught in learning centers and in an after-school program, and has provided independent tutoring services. Christy currently teaches many indigenous Australians at the high school level in a rural community of New South Wales.

To the many wonderful African-American teachers of yesterday, today, and the future

IN MEMORY OF

Ramon Daniel Dodge

George Clyde Dodge

Mary Elizabeth Dodge

Mildred Rathbone Jencks

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CHAPTER I:
**NARRATIVE OF THE INITIAL FIELDWORK CHALLENGES AND
EXPERIENTIAL FACTORS**

Research Objectives

As a Ph.D. student in search of a topic for my doctoral dissertation, I set out to conduct research in the United States public school system. I strove to interview and observe African-American female educators in a traditional public school district. I planned to interview principals and administrators as well, in an effort to provide a context for their voices and experiences. Three questions were to guide my line of inquiry:

1. What barriers, if any, do African-American female educators perceive they face, or indeed face, toward effectively teaching students?
2. What coping strategies do they utilize to manage the barriers they face?
3. What recommendations do they have toward improving education, and specifically education for African-American youth?

I believe that the answers to my questions will contribute to a better understanding of the diverse perspectives and experiences of African-American female educators, and would eventually help to improve their professional conditions in schools. It would also provide insight into more effective methods for instructing students, most specifically, African-American students. The intended audience for my research was policymakers at all levels of the system, teachers, administrators, and even the general public. Though themes on the questions I identified above have been addressed within the literature and will be elaborated on in Chapter II, few have focused directly on any of these questions through the variety of experiences and perspectives of African-American female teachers.

Traditional public schools in the United States are funded by local, state, and federal funding and must follow regulations set at the state and federal levels. They are required by law to educate all children living within school district borders. When students have disabilities for which the school district cannot provide, the school district is held responsible for paying for that child's education in a private school.

Unfortunately, from 2005 to 2009 I encountered considerable challenges in the system that made it impossible to conduct this research. I sought to conduct my research in the state of New York, because I lived and taught in this location. I knew that my research results would benefit from the fact that I am familiar with the system and people there due to my years of teaching in New York State and having been a student within the system as well. New York State has many school districts, especially in urban areas, with large populations of African-American students and African-American teachers working in them. I determined that if a school district had a total of 25 or more African-American educators teaching within their system, that would be a sufficient number for conducting my research. My goal was to interview and observe 10 of them within one school district. I explain my reasoning for the selection of these numbers in Chapter II. I found approximately 30 school districts that met the requirements and applied to each for their consent to perform my research. Of those 30 school districts, only four responded to my request. Of the four, only two were viable. For purposes of confidentiality, I refer to these two districts as District A and District B.

In 2005 I began my research in District A. The leaders in District A made it mandatory that I have a form signed by those who would participate and that I submit it to him. My initial visits in District A were with the principals. The principals who agreed to meet with me were all African Americans. It is alarming that not a single White principal was interested in the research I was proposing to conduct within

District A. Each principal who accepted my invitation to listen to my research proposal was willing to participate in my study and signed all of the consent forms, including the form I was given by the school district. Each participating principal also agreed to help me get in touch with teachers. A small number of teachers expressed an interest and agreed to meet with me. All seemed to be going well in this district initially.

Most teachers who expressed an interest in my research were from the same school, and I was able to meet with them as a group. They were very kind to me from the outset. They seemed to understand the research I was trying to conduct and welcomed the effort. They talked to me about how they knew what the problems were. They wanted to know whether I knew that an African-American organization had become involved in the district due to the achievement gap that existed and other racial issues in the area. They seemed to want to talk and to share.

I spent time explaining to the teachers how I planned to conduct the research, told them a little about myself, and each seemed satisfied with my plans. Next, I showed them and explained the paperwork that I needed signed due to federal laws and my affiliation with Cornell University, regarding human subject participation in research. Then, I showed and explained the form that the school district required each participant to sign as well. As they looked over all of this paperwork, each teacher eventually told me that he or she was not willing to participate. Teachers specifically expressed frustration with the paperwork the district required and stated that they could not understand why the district needed this information. The fact that the district wanted them to sign paperwork was a problem with the teachers.

As we further discussed the paperwork, I got the impression that the teachers no longer trusted me. One teacher used an upset tone of voice to inquire how I could consider this research to be confidential if they had to sign the paperwork. I clarified

that the research would be confidential in that I would report all data in aggregate, so that there would be no way for the district leaders to know who had said what to me. Additionally, with the observation component it would have been difficult to observe in complete anonymity, as I would clearly be seen coming in and out of classrooms. However, I was prepared to make every effort to observe in as much confidentiality as possible (see Appendix B). I also explained that I understood their feelings, but that the district leaders insisted that the form must be signed. For them, that was not enough.

Because the paperwork upset the teachers so much, I tried to persuade leaders within the school district that this form was not necessary. However, they refused to change their policy. An administrative assistant reported back to me and claimed that they needed the paperwork on hand for state inspections. I followed up with each teacher via telephone and each told me that they would not participate. Some teachers were more upset about the paperwork than others, and some made me feel as though they thought I was dishonest by not being upfront about the paperwork from the start. Since I presented it to them the first time I met them, I am unclear about what they meant. Still, I moved forward with a different approach, which I discovered did not work either. As I concluded my efforts in this district, one teacher apologized for not participating and let me know that if I ever decided to conduct these interviews “off of the record,” she would be happy to talk with me and believed that others would as well. In combination with the required paperwork I presented, the required disclosure of the list of participants by the school district constituted a major hindrance.

At this stage, I did not give up. I sought out other teachers in the school district and also contacted some via phone who had shown interest previously. Each declined to participate. As I understood that teachers were upset that I did not inform them of the paperwork up front, with each new teacher I made sure they were aware that

paperwork was involved in my initial inquiries and toward the beginning of my phone conversations. By doing things in this manner, I found that teachers were not interested in the first place, and I was never able to meet with them.

Principals agreed quickly to participate and to sign the paperwork, but the teachers in this school district felt uncomfortable participating. I believe that principals were more comfortable because I was interviewing them only to gain additional information about the district as a whole. Furthermore, principals are more experienced and trained at being politically correct when speaking to outsiders, and they may have known they would be guarded in their responses to me. Or, because they had more power and authority in the school system, they may not have felt vulnerable. They may also have been more comfortable with the paperwork because they may have had more research training. From teachers, on the other hand, I was seeking more in-depth interviews about their perceptions, and I planned to observe them. Therefore, they likely felt more vulnerable. Some of them may also have been untenured teachers and felt more vulnerable for that reason as well.

In the school system, public school teachers typically spend three years as untenured teachers. During this time these teachers are considered probationary and can be more easily dismissed. Untenured teachers also must work harder to prove that they are effective teachers. They most often must demonstrate their effectiveness through additional paperwork and observations. The onus is on untenured teachers to prove themselves. With tenured teachers, the onus is on principals to prove that they are ineffective, and the process to dismiss a teacher can be costly. An untenured teacher would likely feel more vulnerable in talking to me because they did not have the same level of job protection as that of a tenured teacher.

In District B, where I hoped to conduct my research, I had a contact. She knew the teachers and the district well, and in late 2007 spoke to teachers to seek people

whom I could interview. It is my understanding that they told her explicitly that they felt the research was controversial and that they did not feel comfortable participating on the record. However, teachers were willing to talk with me on an informal basis. In early 2008, I did meet with many of the teachers on an informal basis. I learned at this time that I truly could not get them to agree to sign the paperwork so that I could conduct the research according to university standards. They were still willing to share their thoughts with me, but I would not have been able to legitimately use this information without the signed consent forms.

Other than District A and District B, only two additional school districts of about 30 that fit my research criteria granted me initial permission to conduct my research. Each district was at least a four-hour drive from my home, necessitating a move in order to conduct the research. This was a tough decision for me, as I had already invested much time and funds to obtain my Ph.D. At the same time, I also held a tenured teaching position, had a spouse with a secure job, and had a small child to consider, making temporary relocation for the proposed research difficult. I decided that it did not make sense for me to try, as neither district could guarantee that teachers would be willing to participate. I had already spent two years driving, up to two hours each way, to the other school districts in many attempts to convince teachers and administrators to participate in my research. This experience locally had already taught me that I was likely to fail elsewhere to obtain the permissions my research required.

I discovered through a newspaper about a year later that one of the two school districts mentioned in the previous paragraph had become a community school. I explain the implications in Chapter VI. For now, suffice it to say that the school system was no longer operating and funded as a traditional public school system. Community schools receive funding from private philanthropists and function quite

differently from public schools. It would not have been an acceptable school district in which to conduct my research based on the objectives I had established. I was in fact relieved that I had not quit my job, lived separately from my husband, and temporarily moved there.

I know that many research studies occur in schools. I also work in schools and know that there are certain studies that school districts truly endorse. There are people who are given the full support of administration to get their research done, when that research is considered to be of benefit to the district. I did not receive this kind of support. More importantly, there is commissioned research from the federal and state government that gets conducted and that is then utilized when forming policy. I clearly was not presenting this type of research and could not offer assurance that my research would be used. Rather, I was an individual attempting to conduct research. I was not part of an institution, and definitely not part of an institution commissioned by government. These factors affected my research efforts as well.

I have spent much time in self-reflection analyzing why I was not able to conduct this research. I can only hypothesize why teachers felt wary of my research, and why leaders were not unequivocally willing to allow me to conduct my research. It may have been what some perceived as the dissonant nature of the research itself. Or, it may have actually been a variety of other factors. A critical perspective on these factors has become the focus of this dissertation.

Fieldwork Challenges and Revised Research Objectives

Faced with such difficulties and as substantial time passed, an understanding of the nature of the obstacles became increasingly a worthwhile topic for my dissertation. Thus, in 2009, this dissertation changed after extensive deliberation with my thesis committee members, to an examination of the institutional policies and regulation of research. Of primary importance is an analysis of the policies that regulate permission

to interview and observe teachers, when there is a focus on African-American teachers' perspectives regarding educational practice and the achievement gap. Furthermore, I now examine institutional factors that govern professional contexts, power, and authority as I reflect upon the system. In addition, I explore the social climate that exists that influences teachers' trust of researchers and the school systems in which they teach. This dissertation thus seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Why are schools not allowing access to interview and observe African-American teachers?
2. Are these restrictions applicable to African-American teachers only?
3. In the rare case that schools do grant permission, why are African-American teachers uncomfortable participating in research that involves interviews and observations of their experiences and practices?
4. Are they uncomfortable as teachers and/or as African Americans in the system?

To answer these questions, I have identified four main areas as the determinants to be explored, which have become the focus of Chapters II through VI. Ultimately, there may be a wide variety of reasons why the teachers felt uncomfortable with my research goals and with the paperwork I presented. They are 1) the methodology of the proposed research and the orientation of the researcher, 2) the theories and practices that have proven effective for African-American students, 3) the general practice of being a public school teacher, 4) the history of African-American education, and 5) the laws that affect research, schools, and public school policy. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I review studies that are similar to the one I had proposed, and also answer a fifth question: "What options exist so that research involving African-American teachers' perspectives may more easily be conducted?"

Before I proceed further, I find it pertinent to explain a key decision I made that affects the research I have proposed and the theories within this dissertation. Throughout this thesis I focus on the achievement gap between European Americans and African Americans rather than that, which exists between social classes. When discussing the achievement gap, I am referring to what Meier (2002) describes as “. . . the gap in achievement on almost all standard measures based on socioeconomic class and income, and also the gap that is evident when race is viewed as a separate category” (p. 137). Although the income gap is indeed a problem that must be addressed, it is not my focus. Meier further explained the achievement gap:

The apparent achievement gap, as measured at least in terms of test scores, based on color and holding income and years of parental schooling constant, is shocking and significant. That’s important to keep in mind. But it is also important to state right up front that the gap is not nearly as significant as it appears when income is ignored—and it usually is, when the statistics are presented to the lay public. And the gap would be even less so if we took into account real wealth—not just annual income—and accumulated family assets, both financial and social. The gap between social classes is today somehow a somewhat more comfortable one for many Americans to accept than the gap between races, and there is no organized constituency to demand that it be closed as well. So the economic gap is rarely regarded as a serious concern for reformers and politicians. . . . But all that said, race remains a crucial category. The gap in measurable data—and more important perhaps in dropout rates, graduation rates, college attendance, and graduation from college—remains after we correct for income and years of parental education (the only measure we have of class). (pp. 137–138)

While some people regard the income gap as part of the same issue as the racial gap, and it often is, that is also often not the case. When comparing Whites and minorities at the same income levels, the racial gap in educational outcomes still exists. Additionally, where the income gap does affect African Americans, it is a result of historical circumstances and is in fact not a result of a capitalist society. I show this in Chapter V.

The race issue is obvious when we look at the statistics for African Americans in the United States prison system. When one looks at a population, if everything were equal, statistics should show a distribution of ethnicities relative to that which exists in the population. In 2005, the incarceration rate per 100,000 people in New York State was 174 White people, 1,627 Black people, and 778 Hispanic people. During this same year, about 2.2 million people were incarcerated in the United States. The national numbers per 100,000 were 412 White people, 2,290 Black people, and 742 Hispanic people (Mauer & King, 2007). Those figures exist despite the fact that African Americans make up only about 13% of the U.S. population, and about 18% of New York's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Clearly, something is not right in our society.

I also chose to focus on the racial achievement gap, because this is a gap we cannot just accept as part of the natural order of a capitalist society. Instead, it is a gap that is not acceptable and a gap that can be fixed. In a study that I review in the last chapter, Noguera and Wing (2006) explained:

. . . Berkeleyans, like many other Americans, prefer to attribute the causes of the achievement gap to the effects of poverty and the unfortunate influences of family background—that is, parents who are presumed to have less education and know-how when it comes to raising their children. Such explanations are eminently more palatable than ascribing the cause to some form of discrimination or racial injustice. By attributing the cause of minority student underachievement to a lack of student effort or deficient family background, we can comfortably dismiss the problem as sad and disturbing, and reject the possibility that something more pernicious might be at work. (p. 6)

Although the income gap is real, often disparities in income are not the problem and income is used as an excuse. It gives leaders a reason to accept that the gap is an unfortunate matter, and one people can do little about until larger changes occur in society. But the income gap does not explain all disparities between races, and racism

is occurring in our schools in many subtle ways. We need to be doing more to fix that problem.

We can make changes so that an achievement gap no longer exists and there is greater equity in schooling for African-American children. It is only right and humane that we do so. African-American children should not be forced to contend with racism when they attend mandatory schooling. Furthermore, they deserve a high-quality education. Moreover, our society will benefit greatly from a more educated, diverse workforce. I review much of what we do know about providing this high-quality education in Chapter III.

Thus, although the income gap is of great consequence, it is not the gap I chose to focus on. Still, at times racial disparities and socioeconomic factors intertwine because historical dynamics have resulted in this situation. Although it is not my focus, it would be impossible to ignore socioeconomic status as a factor for many African-American students.

Professional Background of the Author

Along with many, I believe that research is affected, both consciously and unconsciously, by the background and belief system of the researcher in spite of the effort to respect objectivity. I know that my experiences and biases affect the choices I have made and the way in which I view the world, and the resulting knowledge I have gained led me to pursue this research. Additionally, I believe that my 15 years of a wide variety of experiences working in public education provide me with the authority to voice a professional opinion on areas and topics related to teaching that will help drive home the importance of my research efforts and goals. Thus, I will now describe my personal experience as it relates to this research. I provide my perspective based in part on memory, but also on documentation I kept and saved. The details I provide are intended to provide the necessary background to understand the research I had

originally planned to conduct, the lenses through which I view the world, and the theories I elaborate on later.

I have a diverse background and experience. I have taught full-time public school in a town, a small city, and a large city in the United States. I had these teaching experiences in Maryland and New York. My mom taught in schools in Oregon, Michigan, New York, and Maine as I was growing up, and I was exposed to these settings and her perspectives as well. My mom was also a principal in a rural community in Maine, and many of my family members attended a rural school in New York State. In fact, my grandmother was once a kindergarten teacher there, and my grandfather was a principal there as well. I learned much about rural schools from them and am currently teaching in a rural high school in Australia, where over three quarters of the student population are indigenous Australians. I have also taught adult basic education that was housed in a public school in Massachusetts for a year, and I have taught adults in a maximum-security prison in New York State. At one time I applied for jobs in private schools in New York and learned a great deal through the interview process. Growing up, I attended high-quality public schools in towns in the states my mom taught in. I also attended a year of an all-girls' Catholic school in Germany at the age of 16, and sent my son to a Catholic school in the United States for preschool as well. I plan for him to attend Catholic school for his elementary school years in Australia. All of these experiences and decisions affect how I view education today. I elaborate on many of these events in the following paragraphs and throughout the dissertation.

As a middle-class White female who had lived a fairly sheltered life, it wasn't until I moved to a large city, at the age of 23, that I fully learned that race differences could be a problem with far-reaching consequences in the lives of individuals and groups of people. Today many of these issues are addressed on television or in

movies, but growing up I did not see them. I was ignorant. I had friends who were ethnically different from me throughout my childhood. Yet, we had never discussed race, and I was scarcely aware of the politics involved or of my own privilege.

I had unknowingly come to teach in a large city at a time when tensions there were high. White educational leaders were hiring White people who were not trained in the field of education to teach in the city, rather than hiring Black teachers with four years of teacher training from the local historically Black colleges or universities (Delpit, as cited in Foster, 1997, p. X). While I was not one of these teachers and I did have a four-year degree in education as well as another four-year degree, the teachers with whom I worked likely did not know this. Even if they did know it, they still may have believed that I was given preferential treatment. Though it did not feel that way to me, the possibility exists. Regardless, African-American educators did have a right to feel upset about the situation and to doubt the value of my presence.

The city I moved to was foreign to me. It was a brand-new experience. There was a large population of African-American people. It was very different than anywhere I had ever been. Just going into a public school in this new city was different for me too. I perceived the schools as large and uninviting. I remember walking around a building once, feeling dumb and out of place, because I just could not figure out how to get in. I was relieved when a kind soul noticed me wandering around and helped me. Though it is normal now, back then I had never been to a school that kept the doors locked and required people to ring a bell to gain access.

I soon learned that my race was an issue for many people, and that a different culture existed along with race. Despite my choice to be there, I found that it was not easy to adjust to a new culture, especially when many people in that culture were resistant to having me there. I had an entire interview about my race, rather than about education, and actually got the job. In fact, in every interview I had, race was a major

factor discussed. I also learned that dating across racial lines was a problem too, even though I am of a generation that I thought generally accepts that as normal. In addition, some people just simply did not want to be associated with me and would not work with me because of the color of my skin. I even became accustomed to students calling me a “White bitch” on a regular basis with little consequence, as I was limited in the scope of consequences I could provide without administrative support.

I am not complaining after the fact and I have no right to complain, although historical factors may make it appear as if I am. The fact is I have always received privileges because of the color of my skin. African-American people did have a right to mistrust me and my intentions. I had little knowledge of many of the issues faced by people in the city, and I lacked an African-American perspective. I had much that I needed to learn. I also always reminded myself that this was a situation I could walk away from. African Americans can never escape racism. It is always lurking around one corner or another and influences their daily lives. They had been handling it for centuries, so it was time for me to handle some of that too.

I had moved to the city in January of 1994 and found a long-term substitute position that began in April. I was assigned a class of only seven boys. I learned later, after reading a letter that was left in the classroom, that I was the seventh teacher assigned to these boys. The first was a full-time teacher who left her career entirely, and then no substitute after was willing to stay. I was the only one unwilling to quit. These boys demonstrated no interest in learning. They found it funny to do whatever they could to attempt to upset me. I remember days of them rudely making fun of me, throwing spit balls, and shooting rubber bands. And, while I never let them know that any of this bothered me, I went home every night and cried. This wasn't what I had expected when I signed up to teach, and I felt frustrated because I did not know what to do. In other school systems it is normal to write a referral for such behavior and to

know that the principal will address it. It is also normal to call home and know that the parents will address it. Here, I seemed to lack that support. After-school detention was also not an option.

I felt very limited in the consequences I could provide on my own, with students who did not seem to care. I also felt limited in terms of providing ideas to motivate them and make them want to learn. I certainly never felt like the woman portrayed in the movie *Dangerous Minds*. I wasn't a White teacher who came in and saved the "poor" minority students. Nor could I be Marva Collins, the model Black woman teacher who believed that there was no such thing as an uneducable child and proved it through the transformational school she operated (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990). But, the truth in this city was that mainly African-American teachers were doing that every single day. It was, in fact, mostly African-American teachers who helped me through and helped me to succeed. I could not have done it without them.

Slowly, things did improve within my classroom, and I found ways to get through to the students. However, the situation was still not good. One day near dismissal time, the boys all ran to the windows at the same time and pulled the blinds down. They then charged me, yelling, "Rape the teacher!" I remember standing against the wall and being very thankful when they just ran into the wall on each side of me. I was relieved that the dismissal bell rang immediately after. Thus, I opened the door nearby and told them all to get out. I was very glad that they complied. I handled it calmly, but I was scared. The fact is that they could have done it. I did not feel confident that they would not hurt me in the future. Upon telling the principal of my building, she simply told me that I had to make the choice to either "sink or swim." I believe there was no action taken regarding the boys, though it is possible she did speak with them. I needed the job, and therefore I chose to "swim."

Our class did progress to completing work and even going outside to make kites as a science project. Still, sometime later there was an incident in which I was kicked by one of the boys. Shortly after, another classroom teacher in the building agreed to integrate the boys and me into her class. I believe that the school principal was instrumental in this.

The teacher I began working with seemed to have a type of knowledge, influence, and support that I lacked. I remember that some of those original seven boys did get dealt with, as not all remained in class. Though I do not know the mechanisms by which that occurred, I began to learn from this teacher as I saw how she handled the children and the type of lessons she taught. I began to gain self-confidence with this new knowledge, from taking my turn teaching the class, and through this teacher's support. Though I had attended college and student-taught previously, I know that I learned a lot from this African-American woman about what it meant to actually teach. In this environment, I felt that I had learned very little while in college. I am forever thankful to that teacher for accepting my students and me into her room.

When June arrived, I was not hired to teach at the same school for the upcoming year. However, I did persevere in the city and found a full-time job in another city school. I was certified to teach primary school and early secondary German. However, I agreed to accept a position teaching middle school special education. Though I was not certified in special education, I do not believe that I took the job of a trained teacher, as there was a shortage of special education teachers in the city schools. Rather, it was my understanding that I was willing to take a job that others did not want. After about a year there, I began to work on my master's degree to gain certification in this area. At that point I was fortunate that the school district helped significantly to pay for coursework.

At my new school I was given a completely empty classroom and no supplies. Therefore, I sought assistance in obtaining some. I remember an administrator telling me that there were no books for my class. She said that we would have to look through the closets to see if we could find any old books that would be suitable for my class to use. Because my emotions tend to show on my face, I appeared to be upset. I may have even looked as if I would cry. Truthfully, this was unheard of to me. Immediately I was told that I would have to toughen up if I was going to make it there. Apparently, I was not permitted to be unhappy about the prospect of having no books with which to teach. I was scared and felt that I must become a miracle worker. I had learned that it was important to always have appropriate work for my students. Ultimately we found some materials, and I invested what I could of my own money just to have something with which to teach.

At this school, my job was very challenging. I was teaching special education and had about twelve students in my class. One was eventually moved to a more restrictive placement outside of the school building. Others were involved in gangs, some were emotionally disturbed, and all were low-functioning students. It was difficult for me in many ways.

Some adults I taught with assumed that I could not handle my job based on the way they perceived me, and simply refused to help in any way. I remember my first day at this school. An assistant principal brought a teacher to my classroom to help me. This teacher took one look at me and said, "I'm not working with her." She then walked out, and without a word, the administrator followed. I found that I had to prove myself to be accepted there, though certainly there were people like her who never accepted me and others who readily helped me. Fortunately, over time, I made many friends, and other teachers and administrators were willing to help once they saw that I was staying.

Many children did not immediately accept me either. It seemed that some students saw me as a target. It took much bonding time for us to develop a relationship that would foster learning. It became normal for me to be called curse words, racial terms, and other derogatory names throughout each day. Also, as time went by, some of my students taught me how to hurt them without leaving bruises. I believe they thought I needed to know this information for survival as they likely thought it was a discipline tactic I could use. Though they learned to accept me, those students knew that others did not and recognized that I lacked support from the administrator in my community.

This school was a large school. As such, it was divided into four communities. A head principal was assigned to the school, and four vice-principals were assigned to each community. The vice-principal in my community did not support me. I am unsure of the reasons why, but it may be that she did not know how to handle the special education students.

In time, I developed a strong relationship with a special education teacher assigned to another community. We agreed to work together, and we were given the support of her community vice-principal to trade classes during the day, so that she taught math and science to both classes and I taught English and social studies. Her community vice-principal and another man in that community who assisted him with discipline agreed to support me and to help with my students. They did the best they could, but we were separated by space and they were not always accessible.

The teacher with whom I worked was an African-American female teacher and acted as an angel to me. She was supportive, worked directly with me, and showed me how things worked around there. Another kind African-American intern became close friends with this teacher and me. She was wonderful as well. There was also one male African-American teacher who showed me everything I needed to know about the

special education process and devoted much time to training me. He also included me in a fun group of people with whom to socialize. All of these people acted as my support network, and I am grateful I had them. There were a few White people who came to my aid, too, and whom I greatly appreciated. Yet, they are ultimately not my focus here.

At this second school, I felt that I was in an unsafe and chaotic teaching situation. Perhaps this was in part because I taught special education, and perhaps it was in part because I was not qualified for that position. Likely it was also a factor of my own personality and experience. Regardless, chaotic things happened to me and around me.

Once I had to be rushed to the hospital after having my finger slammed in a door by an angry student who appeared there. He had been suspended and did not belong in school. Additionally, he was transitioning to a placement elsewhere for high-needs emotionally disturbed children. Once injured, I called the office and was bleeding all over the floor. When I stated what happened, the secretary told me that no one could help me. I remember my students yelling and cursing at the secretary, screaming that their teacher was hurt and bleeding. Fortunately, after that, help did arrive. I was taken to the hospital and received stitches.

Another time, the classroom intern and I stood at the two room doors to hold detention, as this was the way things were done at this school. Otherwise, students would leave and the school administrators were unlikely to do anything about it. One afternoon, a student I did not know wanted to enter my classroom while I was holding detention. I told him “no,” but a friend of his got the door open around me. This put us face to face, and this middle school child punched me in the face. It hurt, and I was in tears. I was quick, though, and removed the hood from his jacket. That and student input enabled me to identify him with the help of administrators. People in the

building convinced me to press charges for that, as I believe they felt it would help to prevent students from doing something similar to me in the future. Therefore, I went to the local police station and later showed up in court for the trial. I felt a bit guilty, because he was a boy in need of help. I can only hope that incident got him the help he needed. Sadly, to this day, I have my doubts.

On yet another occasion, a sweet girl from my class innocently told me that one of our students had exposed his private parts to her in the hallway. I felt unsafe for myself and for my students. I was not able to fully protect them or myself within this school setting.

I witnessed violence directed at other teachers, too, from time to time. One European-American woman was transferred to our school and had an awful time with her classes. She seemed to be having experiences similar to mine, but with a larger class, as she was a regular education teacher. In that school there was a long metal pole that ran across the lockers as part of the locking system. On one occasion it was not locked and a girl removed the pole. She used it to break the glass on that teacher's door because she was in a rage. I believe it occurred while a class was being taught and was thus quite dangerous and scary for everyone involved. Occasionally things like this happened, but fortunately not too often. Most frequently, classes ran smoothly, teachers were teaching, and children were learning.

I also witnessed staff at the school directing violence at students, and I believe that some teachers earned respect that way. I witnessed students being thrown up against walls and being pushed into closets or tiny rooms where they would be "handled." I saw this "handling" myself as I once entered the closet with a teacher and student, because the teacher was my friend and wanted me to enter. Although that was unacceptable in my experience, I perceived that other teachers there had parental support and that the culture was different from the one I knew.

I believe I may have saved a student's life once when I went out to my car during the school day to get my lunch. I describe this incident because it traumatized me and taught me more about the environment I was in. I believe that God placed me in that location at that time for a reason, as that was the only time I ever left the school building during the day.

On my way back into the school building, I passed a group of boys for the second time. I knew one of them and asked why he was outside. The group stared at me, and the boy did not answer. I tried one more time to get a response, but again they all stared. Because their behavior made me nervous and many of them were taller than me, I decided to keep walking. Moments later, the group tossed one of the boys down onto the ground and began smashing his head into the cement with their feet. I saw that I was near an open classroom window, which enabled me to feel safe. Thus, I began screaming for the boys to stop. The boys dispersed and ran away. As I took in the situation, I saw that all of the people that had been outside suddenly disappeared from sight.

Within seconds, the boy on the ground had been severely beaten. I ran to him and found him unconscious. His face was bruised and badly swollen. I was thankful that help came quickly from the school building. At that stage I was sent away and went back into school. I was never given any follow-up information about the boy. I choose to believe that he was okay because I hate to think otherwise. Still, given what I saw, I shudder to think of what may have actually happened to him. Most certainly, though, it would have been much worse had I not been there and had open windows not been nearby.

Much to my dismay, the perpetrators of the crime returned to school shortly after the incident. One of the boys even made a comment to me for having told on him and his friends. In some environments, I believe that what those boys did would have

been considered attempted homicide. Where I was, it wasn't even cause for a long suspension.

After witnessing this child being brutally beaten, I sought a nonteaching job and also requested a transfer to a different school. That and another situation had resulted in my feeling more unsafe than ever. The emotionally disturbed student who had slammed my finger in the door was returning to school, getting into the building, finding me, and telling me that he would "kick my ass." He had gotten into the building and found me more than once. I felt uncomfortable given that he had hurt me before, and other adults in the building told me that I was indeed unsafe.

Truly, I wanted out of teaching, but financially I could not afford to leave without another job lined up. I also had no luck in finding alternative employment. Perhaps it was because of my limited time, and perhaps it was because I needed a job in which I could earn a similar income. I was living a humble life, but I had health expenses to factor in. During that time in my life, I felt I could not leave my job, and I felt stuck.

Another challenging aspect of teaching at this school was that the school had been reconstituted by the state. An aspect of this reconstitution meant that teachers had to provide a tremendous amount of documentation to prove that we as teachers were doing our jobs. Since teachers have a limited amount of time in which they can plan lessons, talk to parents, and handle routine paperwork (behavior referrals, Individualized Education Plans, progress reports and report cards, for example), this extra paperwork resulted in teachers having less time for those duties. I am unclear as to how government leaders thought the documentation was helpful, when from my experience it was obviously detrimental to the quality of the education students received.

I saw teachers not teaching and simply giving students dittos so that they could work at their desks on documentation. I know many of us did not do that. Still, we did have to sacrifice somewhere in our lives to complete all of this extra paperwork. For me it was a benefit to still be single and to have no children. I took the extra paperwork seriously and managed to complete it all. It consumed much of my life, and I still had lesson planning for five different subjects to complete. My plans were monitored by the school administrators. I was untenured and had to be observed, too. To this day I have saved one of my many notebooks of plans, just because I am still amazed that I ever used to handle that much work for my job and it reminds me of what I used to do. I literally wrote or typed out detailed plans on five different subjects for every day of mostly five-day weeks, documented my daily services for each student, and documented in detail the behavior and accomplishments of my students. The time I spent on school duties was immense. Though I managed to accomplish everything in a way that I felt wasn't short-changing students, in hindsight I realize that my students were negatively affected because I was an exhausted teacher. I also left the school when I had the chance.

I was fortunate that at the end of my second full-time year I was invited to teach in another school. The assistant principal who had given me his support was becoming a principal at that school and invited me to come there. I took the opportunity, and in many ways things were better there. That principal was a strong leader, and I believe he made a difference. When it was decided that he would leave at the end of that year to lead another school, I decided I did not want to be there without him. That and other factors led me to leave teaching in these city schools.

I had read books about city schools. I knew the experience would not be easy. But I had not realized just how different schools could really be. The schools to which I was assigned to teach lacked many resources that I had previously taken for granted,

such as a high-quality curriculum and books. I was also not prepared for the lack of discipline. It was not that administrators were purposefully not doing their jobs. Rather, I believe, they too were overwhelmed and overworked. In addition, because of the conditions in homes and neighborhoods, many children came to school with extraordinary needs. There was no way that administrators and staff could address them all.

I truly believe that the majority of employees in this large city school district were absolutely doing the best they could and did their jobs out of love for the children. The schools were lacking in many privileges, though. For example, based on my experience of privilege, I was not prepared to teach with few books and only a ditto machine with which to make copies. I was not prepared for the excessive hours I worked outside of the contracted school day. I was unprepared to be called racial terms and curse words on a daily basis, or to be made fun of because of my appearance and my name. I was not prepared to work with staff members who questioned why I was there and seemed to distrust my motives. I was surprised by the size of the school district and by the size of many of the schools. Clearly, the district and the schools could not run as effectively as the small schools and school districts to which I was accustomed. I also had little knowledge of the lives that many of my students lived. For example, I was in neighborhoods where gangs and gang activity were normal, and I knew nothing about them. I was truly naïve about the environment I had entered. It was a culture shock in many different ways.

I am a “make the best of things” kind of person, however, and I knew I was there for the time being. Thus, I came to know and enjoy my students, even beyond the classroom. A friend often spent time with his students outside of school. I began to do the same. At that stage in my life I did not worry much about the potential consequences. Today I would fear something going wrong and not take the risk. Back

then, I was more carefree. I took them places to expose them to different environments, and at times I took them to places like Pizza Hut, just as a reward.

I also learned a lot about the lives of my students and the various ways in which poverty affected them. For example, one year I volunteered through the school to help deliver turkeys and other food items for Thanksgiving. They were to be delivered to families in need who had children attending the school. I still have not forgotten the house I delivered one to, as it was empty except for a chair. It breaks my heart to know that there are people who have to live that way and that a child was going home to that house. Yet, I know that far worse occurs, as I have also observed people living in boxes and have known of children who are homeless. Still, all of this was new to me at the time. I had somehow remained ignorant of such issues until I witnessed it in real life.

I learned at this time more than ever that people are just not born into a fair world. Not all homes and families are created equally. Not all neighborhoods are created equally. Furthermore, our public schools are not equal. I elaborate on these educational issues of inequity in Chapters IV and V, after discussing them briefly in the next few paragraphs.

Just as tiers of schooling have been created by the array of private school options available to children whose parents have the resources to allow them to attend, public schools also exist on a tiered system. The quality of education one receives in the United States largely depends on one's income and wealth. People generally send their children to the best school they can afford. But some people cannot afford much and are left with limited options.

The wealthy can afford to send their children to private schools that I saw sometimes cost \$30,000 a year or more. Even many of us middle-class parents can send our children to lower cost private schools, such as Catholic schools or other

religious institutions. Again, these are a privileged option, as they cost money, and the schools will not allow children to stay there if they do not perform or do not behave according to their standards.

The quality of individual U.S. public schools varies greatly and is often affected by the wealth (or lack thereof) of the area in which they are located (Darling-Hammond, 2001, 2010; Kunjufu, 2006; Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2006; Ratteray, 1992). The quality of education is also affected by the cultural background of the students, as school policy in our country privileges the dominant culture (Anyon 1997, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Kunjufu, 2006; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Oakes, 1985). Public schools are not equal in our country.

This unjust world certainly creates challenges for many of our public school leaders, when they have such diverse needs that must be met. Yet, federal public school laws and policies are developed for all public schools, despite the enormous differences that exist among schools and the children they service. This simply does not make sense, except that it is an extremely complex issue in our society. I discuss school policy in further depth in Chapters V and VI, and issues of equity within each chapter.

In any case, I did persevere in the city schools, and I stayed for over three years, leaving after I completed my third full-time year. I wish that I could have made a more powerful difference or that I could have stayed longer. However, I was drained and felt that I was beginning to just go through the motions. I did not want to be a teacher who quit caring, and in many ways I felt numb. It was a very difficult job, and I admire those who do it. Those feelings, combined with the fear of my principal no longer being there, prompted me to move on.

I left to teach in a county school approximately one hour from the city. My teaching experiences there also contributed to my knowledge of the problems that

exist for African-American students in the public school system. I continued to be a special educator and also took on the role of Special Education Department Chair. The school population was majority European-American, yet a high percentage of the students placed in special education were African-American.

I began to pay close attention to the daily events and attitudes. I started to hear and see negative attitudes and actions toward African-American students by some of the teachers. Beyond that, cultural differences played a role in how even well-intentioned teachers interacted with African-American students, sometimes leaving both parties upset. I always felt fortunate that I didn't experience the same troubles. African-American students may have had a different perspective of me based on my previous experiences and the types of things I taught. Yet, I also believe that I understood and related to cultural norms, norms that were not understood by many European-American teachers.

After two years of teaching in the county schools I left. I was ready for a change. I had secured a teaching position in California. However, I had also applied to doctoral programs and was accepted into two universities. Ultimately, I knew I wanted to approach the problems in schools from a different position. Thus, I left to work on my Ph.D. and withdrew from my job offer in California.

While at Cornell University, I found myself driven to pursue research on African-American female teachers' perspectives. I found the literature lacking. After having worked with and learned from many wonderful African-American female teachers, I knew there was a need for their voices to be heard. Through my teaching experiences, I had come to see that many wonderful educators existed in less than ideal environments. Despite the many social barriers to equal education for African-American students, things I elaborate on later in this dissertation, many fantastic people were making a difference in the lives of children. Many teachers stayed in this

environment and persevered year after year after year and were successful with the students. Thus, within these large schools that lacked resources and that would often seem chaotic, many teachers were finding ways to challenge their students and the barriers imposed on them.

While teaching, I also saw that curriculum materials and methods of instruction deemed most appropriate by educational leaders for educating students were not necessarily appropriate for the students within this environment. I came to understand that what works for one group of students does not always work for another. I realized that many educational research studies were directed at the White middle class. The lessons learned from this research were simply not appropriate for the Black lower class in an urban school system. I present a few examples of this in the next two paragraphs.

It was my belief that the history being taught was not appropriate because it largely excluded the viewpoints of people of color and/or women, and the textbooks clearly presented a Eurocentric perspective. In fact, all materials did not include the diverse perspectives and accomplishments of African Americans. Agyeman (2008) noted this as a common fact and stated, “Not bringing black and other ethnic histories into the school curriculum, is not simply an omission but, I would argue, another way of making ‘invisible’ the culture and contributions of black people” (p. 78). It was surprising to me that even Black students were denied their own history. I worked hard to find Afrocentric resources to present to my students.

In planning my lessons, I also spent much time documenting the dimensions of learning and the multiple intelligences I was addressing, while feeling that my efforts were taking much time and I was in fact doing nothing new within the classroom. There was a big push for me to use these methods, without a strong emphasis on how they would be used most effectively in a way that was different than what I was

already doing. All in all, multiple intelligences seemed like common sense to me, and yet not broad enough. Dimensions of learning did not seem to address all of the many dimensions I saw in my students. While I trust there may be much value in these approaches to education that do in fact benefit African-American students, the current research for that did not exist at the time, and we were still learning how to use it effectively in our context.

I also believe that schools tend to defeat the purpose of multiple intelligences and dimensions of learning by continuing to measure success through standardized assessments that do not reflect these many forms and dimensions of intelligence. During my time teaching in city schools, I was being taught to teach to the test and to improve test results. We did not learn how to use multiple intelligences and dimensions of learning so that each approach worked effectively in the classrooms we were in and translated to higher test scores. It is also now understood by some that these approaches may be broadened or used differently (Gardner, 2006; Parrish & Linder-VanBershot, 2010) and that African-American children really do have different ways of knowing and learning (Boykin, 1983; Kincheloe, 2004; King, 2005; Shade, 1986).

The research I proposed was intended to represent a small piece of the puzzle for understanding the needs of a Black educational community. As I have explained, my focus on African-American teachers, and indirectly on African-American students, resulted from my experiences and training. I taught in schools where more than 99% of the student population was African-American. My experience and my knowledge confirm the general fact that African-American students score lower on standardized tests and drop out of school at higher rates than European Americans (Meier, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). During my years of teaching, I developed a determination to make a difference on this level.

I chose to focus on the African-American population in my course of studies and for my research. More specifically, I sought to explore the thoughts and ideas of a group of people for whom I gained a great deal of respect and appreciation, considering the historical and ongoing challenges and daunting tasks they must face to live, work, and learn. I aimed to go directly to a source of people who could speak to issues of both racism and sexism. I greatly looked forward to hearing the voices and perspectives of African-American women and of working with them and learning more from them. I also strongly believe that their voices and experience need to be documented. My course of studies shaped my understanding and approach. Unfortunately, I failed to realize the magnitude of the barriers that still existed for me.

Oddly enough, a summer spent teaching in maximum-security prisons also shaped my understanding of the issues at hand. I learned more about the lives with which many of my students coped and would experience as their future. I learned more about an unjust institution that has an intense influence on the lives of many African Americans. This experience has an additional influence on how I view the world and how I view education. It has direct implications for the education of many African Americans. I will describe this experience by explaining how I came to teach in a prison and then depicting the lessons I learned as a result.

During the course of my Ph.D. work, I returned to teaching in New York State. I was assigned to educate emotionally disturbed students in a small city school district and given little in the way of support. Though this was nothing new for me, I had not wanted to return to such a situation. I had also misunderstood that administration wanted change and began to work toward that to strengthen the program. The truth was that the special education director wanted change, but that the principal did not. He wanted the program gone. Eventually he succeeded, and years later I learned that the program no longer existed. The position was not a good fit for me because of the

circumstances. In addition to the natural challenges of working with emotionally disturbed children, it was made clear to me that I was not wanted there. I became very unhappy with my job.

I applied to other school districts and to private schools and had no success finding a suitable position. Thus, I chose to apply directly to the state for a position in education. I secured and accepted two jobs in maximum-security prisons. I began in one on a part-time basis, and shortly after switched to a different one to accept a full-time position. I believed that would be better than staying in the public schools in the situation I had found myself.

I worked in the prison full-time during the summer and planned to stay. I delayed giving my resignation to the school district so that I could maintain my health insurance through the summer. In late July, I had my letter of resignation written and ready to submit, when I received a call from an administrator and was offered another position at a different school. For safety reasons, I decided to leave the prison after that summer and stay in the school district. I have always been very thankful fact that I was able to stay in that school district. Yet I also appreciate that I had the experience in a prison. It further opened my eyes to the future many of my students knew might exist for them and to a life many of them experienced through visiting and knowing family and friends.

One in five Black men will spend time in prison (Mauer & King, 2007). African Americans are heavily disadvantaged by laws that disproportionately affect them, and by the racism that exists within our criminal justice system. African-American men are more likely to be caught, incarcerated, and sentenced to lengthy prison stays (Mauer & King, 2007).

While working in the prisons, I also came to realize that many businesses and people benefit greatly from this system. There are businesses that send their catalogs

directly to prisons, and it is inmates who support their wealth. Additionally, many people work in prisons, and inmates help to support their livelihood. Food suppliers are also financially involved. Clothing suppliers are involved. Judges, lawyers, and police officers are involved. It is a system that supports and creates wealth for many. It is deeply ingrained in our society. As a result, the system is extremely difficult to change. Yet, it is something we must look at, if we wish to improve education. The conditions that create this situation are the same conditions that affect our children. These conditions often result in African-American boys going to prison, and it affects girls, women, and children, too, who must cope with fewer boys and men in their neighborhoods and a lack of support in homes. It takes away from children seeing the importance in education, and it takes away from children being able to focus on their education.

Before teaching in the prison system I recognized that this is where many of my former students would spend time. I knew them as children who were not bad people but who were disadvantaged. I have also spent time with adult prisoners when they were out of prison, because a group of my African-American friends had known them as former students and were there to help them. I remember once being disturbed by the fact that a person my friends and I spent time with had returned to prison. I asked why. It was explained to me that for some people this is a way of life. It is the world they know, and it is also where they have many friends. Incarceration affects African-American children and families tremendously. Given that this is a reality for many children and their families, I wonder how we expect the majority of these children in our schools to overcome these circumstances, unless our society provides the proper support and encouragement.

Without changing the prison system and the lives and outlooks that many of our children endure, how can we expect to change education? How can we truly

expect that all children will want to succeed in school while living these life conditions? How can school districts, district leaders, and teachers make a large-scale difference in these situations? Despite my questions, I do believe there is hope and progress to be made. I discuss this throughout this dissertation. But there are changes that must occur within society as a whole, too. School districts cannot make all of the needed changes in isolation, and should not be penalized for not doing what they are unable to do. Many schools need funding and support, not consequences.

Because I decided to stay in the small city school district in New York State, I taught there from 2003 to 2011. I was mainly a special education teacher and taught students from kindergarten through the eighth grade. I also taught general education for two summers and for two years in an after-school program. In this district there were a small percentage of African-American students (about 12%) and few African-American teachers. I did not find it appropriate to conduct my research in my school district, because if the few African-American teachers who taught there did agree to participate, administrators would have known who participated, and confidentiality would have been compromised.

When I moved to this area, to be with the man who is now my husband, I applied to teach in a school district with a large percentage of African-American students and teachers. However, I was never called for an interview. I can guess that my years of experience and education had made me too expensive to be considered. Or, as administrators in another school district blatantly told me, they may have thought I'd be "off to the next best thing" at the first opportunity. Regardless of the reason, I was unable to be hired in a district with a large population of African-American students and teachers. I believe that if I had obtained a position in one of these school districts and if the school district had been willing, I could have conducted my research. I believe that if these teachers had an opportunity to know me

and vice versa, trust would have been established, and I could have conducted my research. This was not meant to be, however.

The research I had hoped to conduct, and the research I present here, is largely influenced by my experience. I have experience teaching students from kindergarten through adulthood. I have taught and had experiences with schools in a rural setting, the suburbs, small city school districts, and a large city. I have taught students of diverse backgrounds with a variety of needs. These needs include many disabilities, the difficulties that children in poverty face, and the needs of children for whom English is a new language. I have taught in several different states and observed my mom teaching in many others. I have also attended school in Germany and currently work in a school in Australia. Everything I have done influences the way I view education today.

I am admittedly passionate about many things and could have taken my studies in other directions. Yet, most profound for me was what I witnessed African Americans experiencing in their lives and in schools. This experience was shocking, and the history I have learned since is even more astonishing. I wasn't taught the depths of racism in school or the full story of what occurred in U.S. history. Instead, as so many people believe, I thought it was a horrible aspect of our past and had no idea of the implications today. More so, I know that a difference can be made and needs to be made. In doing so, there is the potential to create positive outcomes for other disenfranchised groups and even for the dominant group as well. I have a strong drive and passion to do the work I am doing. I believe that we must fight for change and eradicate the achievement gap between African Americans and European Americans. I know that with effort we as a nation can do this, and it is a gap for which there is simply no reasonable excuse.

I learned from my experiences that African-American women have much to offer our leaders in terms of knowledge and ideas for bridging the achievement gap. I also know that it is important to document their ideas and experiences from a historical standpoint alone. Thus I pursued this work. When that became a challenge, I discovered that it would be a worthwhile effort to explore the nature of my obstacles, as there appear to be a very complex set of circumstances that affect the research I had hoped to conduct. I also know that we must do more to facilitate research inclusive of disenfranchised voices so that more positive changes can be created for them.

I now turn to describing the research I had hoped to conduct, the research I have chosen to pursue here, and the relevant literature review. I then proceed with a discussion of what we already know about improving education for African-American students, as it is important to understand that there are many things we can do in schools today, and focusing on the things that can be done was an aspect of my goal. My proposed research could have benefited the school district studied and could have had implications for other districts as well. I then turn to the many complex factors that affected my research outcomes, before reviewing several similar studies that will lead me to further research recommendations. As a result of my variety of experiences and my studies, I also have many ideas of my own for educational change that will be included within several of the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER II:

METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE RESEARCH INITIALLY PURSUED

So that my research goals can be better understood, in this chapter I begin by explaining the planned methodology of my original research proposal. Next, I present my theoretical approach and a literature review of African-American female perspectives. Then I review current trends in the education of African Americans and the research that facilitates our knowledge of the improvements that can be made within the current system. In the following chapters I analyze the reasons why I may have been unsuccessful in my efforts.

The Original Methodology

I was initially seeking to conduct 10 multiple in-depth, semi-structured interviews of African-American female teachers in a region of the northeastern United States. I determined that 10 would be a sufficient number to gain in-depth data on the variety of viewpoints and experiences of African-American teachers in the school system being studied. I based this decision on a variety of factors that I explain below.

One reason I sought 10 interviewees was based on my review and knowledge of other qualitative studies. For example, in “My Sister’s Keeper: A Qualitative Examination of Mentoring Experiences among African American Women in Graduate and Professional Schools,” Patton (2009) described and analyzed her research involving eight interviews she conducted with African-American women on campuses. Through interviews that lasted from about 45 minutes to 90 minutes, she was able to obtain rich data as each described her mentoring experiences on campus. In another case, Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita (2008) published “Factors Affecting the College Choice of African American Gay Male Undergraduates:

Implications for Retention” about a study they conducted that yielded a wealth of data, and involved seven subjects with interviews lasting between 1 and 2 hours. These are just two studies among many that involved interviews with a small number of participants. Mason (2010) supports my experience in reading research, in that he studied the sample sizes of 50 Ph.D. studies involving interviews. Mason (2010) found that over a third included small samples of less than 20, with at least one study involving as few as 5 participants.

The number of subjects I selected also seemed to be a reasonable number of teachers to expect to be willing to participate, and a reasonable number for me to be able to interview on multiple occasions in addition to the administrators I would interview and the additional data I would collect. This number was also selected because I wanted to make sure that the information from the teachers I interviewed could be presented in aggregate, with little chance that people within the district could determine which voice belonged to whom. It was important to me to protect the teachers. In my pilot interviews I found that teachers wanted assurance and reassurance that no one would know that they had shared specific information.

The school district was to be selected based on the area in which I live, on where I was able to obtain permission, and on the fact that the school district must have a sufficient number of African-American female educators. I initially sought to conduct my research within two hours of my home. Aside from the convenience, proximity provided a familiarity with the broader and local characteristics and dynamics that influence the schools and its African-American teachers, especially the females, and which help enrich my analytical research. When that did not work out, I broadened my research to include all African-American educators, widened my search for a district to the entire state of New York, and determined that the district should have at least 25 African-American teachers teaching within it in order for me to pursue

my research there. I believe that this would have provided sufficient teachers so that I could find 10 who would be willing to participate, while not greatly restricting the number of school districts in which I could conduct my research.

Statistical evidence shows that in school districts where there are large numbers of African-American teachers, there are also large numbers of African-American students (Kirkland, 2009). Thus, I conceptualized that if I interviewed African-American teachers about educating students, we would mainly be talking about African-American children. Moreover, it was my intention to clarify within the interview process when we would be discussing children in general and when we would be specifically discussing African-American students or other students of color. As we are living in an increasingly multiracial environment and have become a global society, I also believe that many strategies that would benefit African-American students would benefit all students. It would have been my goal to clarify teachers' perspectives on these thoughts as well. Given that the final goal of education is to benefit society, my research would have benefited society as well.

In planning my research, I recognized that representativity is a key issue. That is why I designed the study to focus largely on context, so that no matter where I conducted my research, I would have analyzed the school district and area in which the schools were located in order that the voices of my subjects could be understood from within their specific environment. A person's experiences in a small city school and in a large city school would be different, as would the experience one has in a city school versus a suburban or a rural school. Within New York State, the experience can be very different living downstate versus upstate. I know this from my personal living experience, as I have not only lived in states ranging from Oregon to Maine and from Maryland to Colorado, but I have also lived and attended schools in northern New

York and southern New York. The fact is that people experience life and school differently, depending on the area in which they live.

My study would have contributed to the dialogue specifically on strategies for just one school district and the people within it. However, it would have had implications for students and school districts elsewhere. Aspects of it could provide insights for other school districts and could be studied in other school systems. Ultimately, I sought small city school districts because they offer the complexities of a large school district but on a smaller scale; additionally, small city school districts were the districts that fit my criteria and where I found permission to conduct my study.

The interviews I sought to conduct with teachers were to take approximately 1 hour each on two occasions. Additionally, a 1- to 2-hour focus-group discussion was to be conducted at a mutually agreed-upon time in which the participants who were willing and able to attend would discuss important topics that emerged from the individual interviews and from observations.

I intended to use a focus group so that the teachers could use each other's ideas and knowledge to discuss problems they identify in their district and to seek potential solutions together. I believed that I could gain a deeper understanding of the issues and hear a broader discussion than I could obtain in individual interviews. As Morgan (1996) stated,

Investigators' reasons for combining individual and group interviews typically point to the greater depth of the former and the greater breadth of the latter (Crabtree et al 1993). . . . This strategy has the advantage of first identifying a range of experiences and perspectives, and then drawing from that pool to add more depth where needed. (p. 134)

I planned for the focus group to add depth to the information I gained in individual interviews.

The initial interviews were to delve deeply into teacher perspectives. Information specifically about individual schools, the district, and the state, as well as teacher recommendations for change, were to be sought. My goal was to understand how student test scores and graduation rates may be improved while documenting teacher perspectives and ideas for change in education. I also sought to understand what they perceived as barriers and how they coped with their frustrations.

The study would require that participants review my transcripts to ensure that I had recorded their words correctly and that I understood what they meant to say. This would have required additional time on their part. These methods were chosen to give the participants the opportunity to correct and/or have input in the data I collected. To the extent possible, I wanted to represent the individuals in the manner in which they wished to be represented, without influencing the scientific procedure and rigorous analysis. I thought that this process would help me to accomplish this goal, as teachers would be given the opportunity to clear up issues if they believed I had misunderstood them, or to clarify something they felt needed more clarification.

The teachers whom I hoped to interview were to be selected from the African-American female teachers in the school district who volunteered to participate, as random selection was not an option. This proposed methodology would have led to skewed representation of perspective. There simply was no way I could randomly select people, as I relied on the willingness of individuals to participate. Doing this imposed a limitation on the study. My data could not have been generalized. Rather, aspects of my research would have provided insights for other school districts and those involved in education, and may have led to further studies in other districts. Boyce and Neale (2006) explained,

When in-depth interviews are conducted, generalizations about the results are usually not able to be made because small samples are chosen and random sampling methods are not used. In-depth interviews however, provide valuable

information for programs, particularly when supplementing other methods of data collection. (p. 4)

I intended to supplement my interviews with other sources of data, as I explain in the following paragraphs. My research would have provided valuable information for the programs within the school district where I conducted my research.

After receiving permission from the school district, I had planned to send letters requesting participation in the study to all African-American female educators in the school district. Next, I would approach potential subjects on a one-to-one basis so that their confidentiality would be respected. I intended to introduce myself, answer any questions asked, and review the consent form. Once I received consent for participation, I was prepared to administer a confidential interviewee basic questionnaire (see Appendix A) in order to document basic information about each teacher. From that point forward, I would use a pseudonym on this form and on all written work regarding each of the teachers.

I selected multiple in-depth and semi-structured interviews to ensure that I would have a guide to facilitate conversation. I wanted to be sure that the topics important to my research questions would be addressed, and that sufficient time would exist for the interviewees to comfortably answer each question. My overall goal was to have a “pleasant” and informative conversation with each of the teachers. Thus, I hoped to adapt my questioning and style, but not the substance of my questions, according to individual needs and the trends that would emerge in the data. Interviews were to be recorded for later transcription and analysis.

In addition to the teacher interviews, I proposed to interview seven administrators in the district for approximately 30 minutes each. It was my goal to interview the superintendent of schools, an assistant superintendent, a curriculum coordinator, and four principals. I planned for the interviews to last approximately one

hour. It was my intent to contact district administrators through phone calls or through email. This was all information I could obtain through websites or district offices. I would also use pseudonyms in my documentation on administrators.

The purpose of the administrative interviews was to gain a better understanding of the context. However, I recognized that the information to be gained from administrators might have been lacking due to unintended misinformation, poor knowledge, guarded responses, and/or dishonesty. Triangulation with my other sources of information and the interviews would help to provide a more thorough understanding of the context of the school district. As Jonsen and Jehn (2009), citing Greene et al., stated regarding triangulation,

The primary purpose is to eliminate or reduce biases and increase the reliability and validity of the study. . . . The secondary purpose is to increase the comprehensiveness of a study, and thus to provide qualitatively derived richness and achieve a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study, thus it entails complementarity. (p. 126)

I planned to use triangulation to gain more solid information about the background of my study, and to achieve a better understanding of the environment in which my study took place.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) provided important reasons for using multiple research sources as she described the value of triangulation:

Using triangulation, the researcher employs various strategies and tools of data collection, looking for points of convergence among them. Emergent themes arise out of this layering of data, when different lenses frame similar findings. (p. 204)

The use of multiple research strategies and tools for collecting data would help in identifying important themes and in highlighting exceptions. The use of the history of the area and the school system, and publicly available data about the school system, would help provide a context for the perspectives and ideas presented by teachers.

Observation would further contribute to the understanding of context and might have provided insight into the practices of African-American female educators.

Observations reveal what is occurring, and interviews strengthen this information by providing an opportunity for elaborations and explanations for why strategies are being implemented. Thus, triangulation would provide more complete and verifiable data.

In addition to interviews, I was to obtain state-level and school district documentation, newspaper articles, historical data, and other relevant sources so that I could better document the study setting. I also required teachers to accept that I would conduct classroom observations throughout 2 days each, to occur in between the first and the second interview.

I ascertained that it was imperative to observe teachers, rather than to rely on interviews alone. As Bernard (1995) stated, “. . . many research problems simply cannot be addressed adequately by anything except observation” (p. 142). Observing African-American women through their own cultural context and experience would help me become more accustomed to the culture and language and thus the meanings of my data (Bernard, 1995). Observations might also have provided additional information, as teachers might forget to talk about aspects of their practice that are routine and normal for them.

Although conducting observations would provide rich data on the perceptions of African-American educators, it meant that the level of confidentiality I could provide would be limited. The people who saw me in these classrooms and knew of my research would also know who participated in the research. In terms of confidentiality, I promised the following:

Your answers will be confidential. Your name will not appear on anything other than the consent forms. At no time will anyone’s real name be utilized. In addition, the name of the school district, any of the schools, and of the state

will not be utilized in documentation or in publication. Relevant quotes will be published using pseudonyms and any personal data will be presented in aggregate so that your individual contributions will not be identified.

Thus, I did not promise that no one would know of each person's participation. I made this decision in order to gain a more complete understanding of the research subjects and of the context from which their voices emanated.

My second interview was to provide me with the opportunity to ask questions about the observations, in addition to any follow-up questions I had from the interview. This process would enable me to gain additional information. It would also give each teacher an opportunity to discuss what they perceived occurred in their classrooms while I observed. I recognize that the decisions I made to ensure a thorough study may in themselves have prevented some teachers from feeling comfortable about participating. It may be that the study required too much of their time. It may have risked confidentiality too much. Or perhaps they thought it was too invasive of their thoughts and experiences. They may even have been concerned that I would be critical during the observations. Still, I did the best I could to ensure both thoroughness and peace of mind.

Due to the nature of the research and the limited number of studies focused on the perspectives of African-American female teachers, I chose to use a modified grounded theoretical approach. Grounded theorists emphasize the discovery of theory rather than working to prove or confirm already established theories. Charmaz (1988) described grounded theory:

The grounded theory method stresses discovery and theory development rather than logical deductive reasoning which relies on prior theoretical frameworks. . . . They do not rely directly on the literature to shape their ideas, since they believe they should develop their own analyses independently. (p. 100)

Those who use grounded theory do not have to find ways to make their data fit with already established theories, but instead may conduct research and allow the data to lead to the theories. In this process, original theories may emerge and established theories may be modified or extended.

Nevertheless, this project was to be slightly different from the grounded theory approach in that I have a core theoretical framework and I established the purpose for my work. I intended to take my theories and literature review into account, as it would be impossible for me to remove these from my thoughts and from consideration. They influence the questions I sought to ask and what I intended to observe. It was my goal to focus on patterns in the data that inform my research questions. However, I also expected to take a step back to seek additional patterns in my data as they emerged, and to potentially broaden or change my theoretical standpoint.

The following steps, paraphrased from the description provided by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995, pp. 143–166) of a modified “grounded theory” approach, were to be used in the data analysis: (1) Transcriptions would be read systematically and analytically and I would seek patterns, themes, and variations in the data. The data would be read slowly and carefully, line-by-line. (2) Questions would be asked about the transcriptions, focusing on the practical considerations of everyday life as experienced by the interviewee. Codes would be written in the margin to summarize these experiences in a brief phrase. Through analytical thinking, general theoretical dimensions or issues would be captured. (3) Initial memos would be written based on “rich” themes that emerged from the data. These memos would serve the purpose of theoretically exploring the themes. (4) Themes that are interrelated would be sought from among the many themes discovered, and “unimportant” themes would be set aside. (5) The data for each core theme would be read line by line as sub-themes were sought. These would be trends within the broader topic. (6) Integrative memos for

each core theme would be written, linking codes and data from the sub-themes together. This is an analytical process of creating theoretical connections from excerpts of the data. In summary, Emerson et al. (1995) described this process:

The process is thus one of reflexive or dialectical interplay between theory and data whereby theory enters in at every point, shaping not only the analysis but how social events come to be perceived and written up as data in the first place. (p. 167)

Theory is created and refined as it emerges from the data and findings.

Theoretical Approach

My research was to be founded upon a core theoretical approach. It is what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms “Black feminist epistemology.” This epistemology has four primary dimensions: 1) “lived experience as a criterion for meaning,” 2) “use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims,” 3) “the ethics of caring,” and 4) “the ethic of personal accountability” (Collins, 2000, pp. 257-265).

This dimension of “lived experience as a criterion for meaning” is the belief that one must live an experience to know it (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is the reason that I had determined to interview participants in the study. I realize that I cannot know their experience just by observing. I can’t even know it just by listening. Rather, I sought to interview the women and analyze their words, but as a whole I would allow their words to speak for themselves.

“The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims” is the basic belief that new knowledge is most frequently not developed in isolation, but rather is derived from dialogues with others (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Collins (2000) and hooks (1989) described the necessity of dialogue as a conversation between two subjects, rather than the talk of a subject and an object. I too, hold this fundamental belief. Dialogue is a central aspect of my research. My research is based

on the premise that through dialogue, connectedness and meaning are created. Only through dialogue can I come to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Through dialogue, my ideas, visions, knowledge, and goals can be expanded. Furthermore, my decision to hold a group interview was based on this necessity of dialogue for knowledge validation. I believe that through dialogue with others similar to themselves, the participants would have their thoughts and feelings validated and that in this process I would gain a deeper understanding of their beliefs, experiences, and perspectives.

“The ethics of caring” as described by Collins (2000) embodies three components: 1) “individual uniqueness”, 2) “the appropriateness of emotions in dialogue”, and 3) “developing the capacity for empathy” (p. 263). Although most women possess this ethic of caring, a strong ethic of caring has been particularly present in African-American women's lives as a result of African-American social institutions such as the church that support and validate this form of knowing (Collins, 2000). I would surmise that this ethic of caring is particularly strong among them, too, as a result of a form of racism that has been exclusive to them. This ethic of caring was the foundation for my research. It is my belief that teachers agreeing to be a part of this research would be teachers who possess this ethic of caring and thus could make a positive contribution to improving education. I trusted that my commitment to education and to conducting this research, as well as the participants' commitment and desire to be a part of this research, would be indicative of this ethic of caring. Additionally, this ethic of caring is present in that individual uniqueness is valued and that emotions in dialogue would be expected, heard, and noted. Moreover, I believed that the participants and I, regardless of background, would develop empathy for one another in the process of the group interview.

Through the “ethic of personal accountability” people are held accountable for the knowledge claims they make. People are expected to have clear positions and to take responsibility for these positions. Through knowledge claims, people simultaneously appraise a person’s character, values, and ethics. Thus, it is implicit that in order to understand another person’s viewpoint, one must also identify with that person’s background and experiences. One does not make judgments regarding knowledge claims based solely on what one hears or sees, but instead more information is needed to truly understand what a person means (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Therefore, Collins (2000) explained, “Knowledge claims made by individuals respected for their moral and ethical connections to their ideas will carry more weight than those offered by less respected figures” (p. 265). This belief is also upheld within my proposed research.

I found it pertinent to engage in dialogue and stray from the interview questions I had composed. I believe that it would be necessary for me to understand the participants at a deeper level and that I value their experiences. Additionally, I consider it important that they understand me as well; therefore, I was willing to answer personal questions that were asked of me. This is also why I wished to observe the teachers in the natural setting of their classroom. Observations would give me a chance to know the women in a different way and them to observe me in a different setting as well. Furthermore, this is the reason that I believe a group interview would have been necessary. Through the give and take of the conversation with their peers, I trusted that a more in-depth understanding for us all would occur. Rather than having me as the researcher telling them what questions to answer, a general dialogue likely would have emerged in which the women had an opportunity to feel validated and to validate one another. It could have provided an opportunity for each of us to build on the ideas and thoughts gained from one another.

In summary, I had intended to conduct a comprehensive study in a small city school district within New York State using a modified grounded theoretical approach. This meant that while I had a theory guiding me, I also would allow the data to guide me and new theories to develop. I had planned for in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers on two occasions each for approximately one hour both times. Teachers were to review the transcripts of these interviews to ensure they said what they meant to say and that I had recorded things properly. In between the two interviews, I intended to observe teachers throughout two days each. My teacher observations were to provide more information regarding their language, culture, teaching strategies, and ways of doing things. A focus group was to be scheduled as well, with as many teachers as were willing and able to participate. My goal was to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of their perceptions as they chatted with one another and heard each other's ideas.

I had also planned to interview seven administrators within the district in order to gain a better understanding of the school district as a whole. Each interview was to last about thirty minutes. Last, I sought to obtain public records and historical data regarding individual schools, the school district, the small city, and the areas the schools encompassed. Through this process of triangulation, I anticipated gaining a thorough understanding of the context in which the teachers taught so that their perspectives could be better understood from within their own environment. Representativity was an important aspect because schools in the United States can be very different depending on where they are located. In the next sections I explain an additional perspective I would have held in relationship to the research, and then I review the existing literature on African-American female teachers' perspectives.

An Outsider-Within Perspective

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) documented the importance of an outsider-within perspective as it relates to African-American women's points of view within a White-male-dominated society. She wrote of the significant contributions that this unique standpoint has brought to sociology. Collin's concept offers a flexible application to other context and subjects, and enables me to use it in the framework of my proposed research. I cannot offer the same viewpoint that Collins (1986) presented, as I am not an African-American woman. However, I do observe my outlook to be that of an outsider within in the context of my research, as I am a European-American woman who sought to interview and observe African Americans.

Collins (1986) described the outsider within as someone who is on the inside but who will never truly belong as a result of observable differences, and who thus remains an outsider. She also described an insider, stating, "One becomes an insider by translating a theory or worldview into one's own language until, one day, the individual converts to thinking and acting according to that worldview" (p. 14). Essentially, an insider is someone who comes to think and act like the others and is accepted by the group. An outsider within, however, has access to the information of the others, but is not able or is not willing to become like the others. The outsider within either may not accept the perspective, or may not be accepted based on observable differences.

I am an outsider within as a European-American female in an African-American community. My white skin makes me an outsider, as does the fact that I can never fully know the experience of African Americans. Yet I am also within, because my worldview did change as a result of my teaching experiences, and I have been acting in accordance with this worldview ever since. Improving education for African-American students and about the African-American population has been the focus of

my studies and research. My goals have remained committed to the African-American people and have recently broadened to include more people within the African Diaspora. Still, I can guess that I appeared to be, or in fact am, an outsider to the African-American educators I met. I may have been an insider as a fellow teacher. But I appeared to be an outsider when it came to race, and there is a negative history to be associated with that perspective (Callender, 1997). They had no way of knowing that my worldview is more on target with their race than with that of my own in terms of the power systems established on racial foundations.

I was also an outsider within the school system itself. Like the participants I sought to study, I am a teacher and thus an insider in this sense. Yet I was also on the outside because I did not teach in the same school district and I am the researcher, a Ph.D. candidate at Cornell University. Thus, in that context I am also an outsider within, as a result of my multiple roles as researcher, student, and teacher. As a teacher I have most often been an outsider within as well. I am a fellow teacher, but I am not a general education teacher like the majority of teachers in the school system. Rather, I am a special education teacher. My training, role, and experience are different from that of the majority.

It would have been impossible for me to be a true insider within an African-American community no matter what I did, because I am European-American and a Cornell University graduate student and researcher. Although I can imagine the experience and I can empathize, I can never know what it is like to be an African-American female. Additionally, the reality is that the experience varies. Still, my perspective is unique in that I am a European-American woman and I hold a perspective similar to that of many African Americans.

Literature Review on the Perspectives of African-American Female Teachers

In this section, I review much of the relevant literature pertaining to the research I hoped to conduct. My initial research sought to identify the barriers African-American women perceive, the coping methods they use, and their ideas about and perspectives on change and making improvements within the public school system. African-American women may have insight into these conditions and into the coping methods both from the perspective of being African-American and from the perspective of being women. It is important that their ideas and perspectives on educational practice be documented.

If people deny the disadvantages that African Americans face, blame will be misplaced, further contributing to the problem. By learning more about how racism and oppression continue to fester within the educational environment, we can take strides toward improvement. Teachers do have the power to make a significant difference. African-American women, because of their unique experience, may have insights into the inequities that exist, and may offer new ways of seeing and understanding our educational system. It is important to document and analyze their perspectives so that individuals and reformers may learn from their ideas and experience. That is because individuals and reformers may be the ones to get their ideas into wider practice.

African-American women have been an integral part of the educational system in the United States since the postbellum period when, following the Emancipation Proclamation, it became legal for former enslaved Africans to receive an education and enter the teaching profession. For example, the 1890 census reported that there were 25,000 colored teachers and that 15% of African-American college graduates were teachers (Du Bois, 1901). Indeed, after emancipation, teaching was one of few careers available to educated African Americans (Foster, 1997, 2001). The importance

of teaching as a profession within the African-American community has been well documented, especially in the South (see Foster, 1997, 2001). Despite these facts, few studies have focused on African-American teachers and their practice (Foster, 1993, 1997, 2001; Henry, 1998; King, 1993).

Recent research exists to signify the importance, value, and contributions of African-American female teachers (Foster, 1993, 1997, 2001; Irvine, 1989; King, 1993; Kirby & Hudson, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The literature is abundant with the perspectives of European-American educators on issues of diversity in the education system (Ladson-Billings, 2001). The viewpoints of African-American teachers on the same issues have been documented on a much more limited basis (Foster, 1993, 1997, 2001; Henry, 1998; King, 1993). Henry (1998) stated, “Educational research in the United Kingdom and in the Americas has confined Black teacher practice to the margins of knowledge. In fact, there seems to be no significant discussion in the mainstream of black teachers’ educational critiques whether male or female” (p. 8). This is very unfortunate, as the unique points of view that African-American teachers frequently possess should be heard.

Based on their experience and interests, African-American teachers may be in a distinctive position to provide insights into why the achievement gap exists and what the barriers are to effective instruction. They may offer an exceptional standpoint on the processes for change and effective methodologies within the current system. They may also possess ideas for culturally relevant methodology and materials, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be a minority within the United States (Foster, 1993, 1997, 2001; Irvine, 1989; King, 1993; Kirby & Hudson, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Any effort to improve education for African-American students must include the perspectives of African-American female educators. Collins (2000) stated, “It is

more likely for Black women, as members of an oppressed group, to have critical insights into the conditions of our oppression than it is from those who live outside those structures” (p. 35). African-American women are oppressed not only by virtue of their skin color, but also because they are female. Frequently, they have been oppressed due to low socioeconomic status as well. They often possess a distinctive insight and perspective as a result of their double, sometimes triple oppression, and as a result of their commitment to teach and reach out to disenfranchised youth.

African-American perspectives must be valued in seeking to understand the educational experience for African-American youth, and the type of improvements that can and should be made. Henry (1998) also stated, “Black women’s experiences with and in educational systems offer potent critiques of the mainstream” (p. 8). African-American women’s thoughts need to be explored and need to be heard because they may offer a different critique of the system. Leaders may then be better able to incorporate their contributions into educational practices. As well, their voices need to be documented so that they may contribute to a diverse understanding of African-American female educators and their practices.

A number of recent dissertations and several books, some of which are critically examined below, have begun to explore the diverse perspectives of African-American educators. The literature shows that African-American women teachers have much to contribute toward an understanding of the problems prevalent throughout the educational system in the United States, and to ways of overcoming and adapting to these circumstances so that students may obtain an effective education. It is clear that many African-American female educators perceive a variety of factors that are contributing to the low achievement and high dropout rates of African-American students.

African Americans face factors that range from societal inequities to racism, in trying to gain an effective education. They also frequently lack school district effort in gaining and retaining African-American educators, who tend to be more aware of the needs of African-American children. Given the small percentage of African-American educators teaching in public schools, an insufficient number of teachers are culturally responsive to student needs and feelings (Copeland, 2001; Elliot, 1996; Foster, 1997; Mitchell, 1996). These are just a few of the problems that exist. Within this section I describe that African-American female educators have many ways of overcoming the obstacles and of coping with the injustices, which are effective for both themselves and their students (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Copeland, 2001; Elliot, 1996; Foster, 1997; 2001; Johnson-Farr, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Taylor, 1997). I also show that African-American female educators have many ideas for improvement, including some that are easy to implement and others that will take much more effort in order to be realized (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Copeland, 2001; Elliot, 1996; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Not only do many African-American female educators act as role models for African-American children and other disenfranchised youth, but they also may act to fulfill the needs of many students that might not otherwise get met (Elliot, 1996; Foster, 1997; Mitchell, 1996). For example, African-American educators can best help students cope with racism (Delpit, 1995; Elliot, 1996; hooks, 1989; Mitchell, 1996). One significant factor expressed within the literature is that racism continues to be a serious problem within the public schools (Elliot, 1996; Johnson-Farr, 1998; Mitchell, 1996). One of the ways in which it manifests itself is through the treatment of African-American students. Another way it exists is through policies directed at the White middle class and through the dilapidated buildings and a lack of supplies experienced

in their communities (Mitchell, 1996). Unfortunately, it can have a negative impact on student achievement.

Paula R. Elliot (1996) conducted a study in the Boston area and was told of instances of racism. Her study involved ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews with eight African-American educators who participated in a 54-hour staff development experiment to change teachers' attitudes about African-American students. Through her study, she found that Whites did not understand, but needed to understand, their White privilege if they were going to address racism effectively. Elliot (1996) was told that most often White people just "don't get it." For example, a social worker for 23 years wondered if Whites were from another planet, since from her perspective it was impossible not to understand racism. Another educator told the researcher directly that she believes racism is the biggest problem. She clarified that she thinks that the White teachers are good people but need more training about racism (Elliot, 1996). Another educator described how she helps her students move forward positively despite the racism they encounter. She acknowledges their negative reactions and feelings as valid. However, she also attempts to teach that their reactions can actually be self-destructive. Although she agrees that they have every right to be angry, she tries to help them find a more positive way of proceeding, in an effort to help ensure their success despite the injustices of racism (Elliot, 1996). Sadly, African-American educators still see racism occurring regularly in educational settings.

Not only does racism have an impact on children, it can have a negative impact on educators as well. In her research that involved interviews, journals, classroom observations, and focus-group meetings of seven K-12 African-American educators in Nebraska, Marilyn Johnson-Farr (1998) found that many African-American educators experience feelings of loneliness, anger, and isolation. These teachers worked or had worked in isolation, as the sole representative of their race in their school buildings.

They described feeling invisible yet on display. They also believed that they must work much harder than others for the same recognition. In piloting the study, Johnson-Farr (1998) was told by a White teacher that her feelings of experiencing racism were the same as the feelings of stereotyping that blond people experience. This teacher thus made it clear that she thought they were actually having similar experiences of discrimination. In this case, Johnson-Farr (1998) was not only faced with a lack of someone who understood her experience, but also with a complete misunderstanding of her experience.

African-American female educators also frequently expressed that the lack of African-American educators in the school system is a barrier to effectively educating African-American students (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Elliot, 1996; Foster, 1997; Johnson-Farr, 1998; Taylor, 1997). In a study on African-American educator recruitment and retention in Springfield, Massachusetts, Celeste Budd-Jackson (1995) administered a Likert rating scale to 92 teachers, which involved four open-ended questions. She also conducted interviews of four central office administrators. She discovered that the recruitment and retention of African-American teachers who serve as role models and better understand the culture and needs of students such as themselves was lacking. The teachers also believed that universities did not do enough to attract African Americans into the field and that policymakers were discouraging them through biased testing requirements. Teachers who participated in Elliot's (1996) research felt much the same way. They wanted to see more recruitment of African-American teachers and became frustrated with promises over the years that never resulted in an increase in African-American teachers.

Although a lack of recruitment and retention of African-American teachers is of great concern, African-American female teachers in other parts of the country focused on different issues negatively affecting African-American youth. Antoinette

Mitchell (1996) documented the oral history of eight African-American female educators in Washington, DC, who had recently retired. Four of the educators whom Mitchell (1996) interviewed had been in the Washington, DC, public school setting for many years and explained that lower teacher morale and negative student attitudes were barriers to effectively educating the students. They felt that an influx of drugs into the community had brought about more crime and violence and that this filtered into the school environment. The drugs mentioned included marijuana, cocaine, pills that the teacher could not identify, and LSD. A social studies teacher from 1959 to 1992 described feeling that things changed around 1988. It was about that time that the murder rate increased. She felt that children were less concerned about school and more worried about just surviving. School was no longer the priority for many students. She even expressed that she herself had suffered a loss of hope. During this time, homelessness and AIDS had become a problem. In one school building, three of the teachers had died of AIDS. These societal changes resulted in a climate that affected students significantly.

The African-American female teachers Mitchell (1996) interviewed also believed that parents were no longer around as much and that students no longer respected their elders as they had in the past. This change in climate brought about a change in teacher attitudes. Many articulated feelings of depression and exhaustion. They expressed that their efforts were not providing results and that they sensed that their students had somehow been lost. Adding to the burdens from the change in community climate, the school administrators began providing services they had not been responsible for in the past. An African-American junior high school English teacher noticed that schools had become much more than educational institutions, as originally designed. Schools began to take on a more parental role, ensuring that students were fed and kept healthy. Educators also acted as caregivers, and provided

students with money for bus fare, food, and even clothes. All in all, Mitchell found that school personnel were feeling the impact of the changes in society on a number of levels. Along with the district-wide changes in the schools, she learned that African-American educators felt their own roles were changing (Mitchell, 1996).

Mitchell (1996) stated that there was one exception to this rule. A history teacher of advanced placement students told of improvements in the 1980s as a result of programs such as Upward Bound. Mitchell (1996) noted that this teacher may have had a different perspective because she was a teacher of high-achieving students. Upward Bound is a federally funded program supported by the U.S. Department of Education. It supports high school students with their preparation for college who are from low-income families and from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. The program provides instruction in composition, foreign language, laboratory science, literature, and math. It may also provide services such as lessons in other subjects necessary for college, counseling, tutoring, mentoring, exposure to academic and cultural events, work-study positions, providing information on postsecondary educational opportunities, and assistance with a variety of applications related to college entrance (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

African-American female educators in several studies also mentioned a number of instructional practices they believed hindered the instruction of African-American students. African-American female teachers in Chicago, Virginia, Washington, DC, Connecticut, and Florida felt that many White teachers held low expectations for African-American students because their home environments or community issues were being rationalized as reasons to not challenge these students (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Foster, 1997; Mitchell, 1996). In conducting 20 life-history interviews, Michele Foster (1997) spoke with a teacher in California who holds a doctorate. That teacher stressed the need for White teachers to emphasize the

positives of Black accomplishments. She recalled her experiences in education as she was growing up. She stated that the accomplishments of her ancestors were brought to her attention regularly. She noticed that this was no longer the case. As a consequence, African-American students only gained knowledge of the accomplishments of Whites. Teachers did not present an awareness of the goodness and strengths of African-American people (Foster, 1997).

Another barrier mentioned by several African-American female educators is that not only were their voices not heard, but they faced being fired or transferred for not inappropriately elevating students' state test scores by helping them to cheat, and for not passing students who did not deserve to pass (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Mitchell, 1996). Their frustration with this situation is quite understandable. Rather than teachers and administrators doing more to ensure that their African-American students succeed, they simply expected teachers to cheat for the students or allow students to pass when they had not earned it. Because these teachers opted to behave ethically and professionally, they suffered unjust penalties.

African-American educators have identified a variety of other barriers to effectively educating African-American students. They have stated that low salaries for educators are a factor (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Foster, 1997; Taylor, 1997). There is also a lack of incentives and awards (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Taylor, 1997). Teachers and students experience many interruptions in the school day (Copeland, 2001). Some educators also expressed that they did not feel well prepared to teach African-American students (Foster, 1997) and that there was poor professional development and university training (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Elliot, 1996). A lack of technology was also a problem (Copeland, 2001). Educators felt unsupported, too, and frustrated by not being included in the decision-making process (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Elliot, 1996). Across the United States, African-American educators have had to cope with many

barriers to provide an effective education for African-American students, as a group with special needs amidst the dominant system.

African-American female educators expressed many ways of coping so that they could overcome the barriers they perceived against themselves and their African-American students. Some teachers mentioned that they taught what they wished to teach, rather than the prescribed curriculum. They created their own lesson plans, as they felt that the curriculum needed to be based on student background and/or needs. Additionally, they often disagreed with the ways in which textbooks or workbooks presented materials (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings 1994: Mitchell, 1996). African-American female teachers explained that sometimes they altered their instruction by providing a more accurate history that included the accomplishments and contributions of non-Whites. Other times, African-American female teachers would discuss the underlying structure in the United States that supported the notion of exclusion of non-Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In most instances, the teachers were honest with their administrators about their instructional practices; and, because the students' test scores were good, the teachers were left alone and allowed to proceed as they wished (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

In a two-part survey study of 139 teachers that also involved a 2-hour focus group with representatives from seven high schools, Angela Copeland (2001) measured African-American educators' perspectives on multicultural education. Her study confirmed that African-American educators were more aware of multicultural practices, issues of diversity, and culturally responsive forms of instruction (Copeland, 2001). African-American educators coped with the injustices they perceived by teaching their own materials, in their own style, and by advocating for change. They continued to do what they believed was right, even when it conflicted with the

majority opinion and the curriculum they were told to teach (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Copeland, 2001; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mitchell, 1996).

Many African-American female teachers stressed the need to respect and challenge students (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990, Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Marva Collins and Cilvia Tamarkin told Collins's story in *Marva Collins' Way: Returning to Excellence in Education* (1990). Collins and Tamarkin stated that Collins, who taught in Chicago, coped with injustices by becoming more engrossed in teaching and less concerned about other school issues and people. She recognized that her students' success was her ultimate goal and that she could assure student achievement despite what she perceived as a poor school climate and inadequate policies. Her teaching retained a traditionally Eurocentric approach, but with a strong ethic of caring and high expectations. It meant believing in students' abilities. Often African-American female educators also expressed a desire to give back to the community and the need to teach this value to children. They were able to persevere because they knew they were fulfilling a valuable need within the community and for their race. Teaching was not merely a job; it was also a mission. Along with this focus on community, many teachers expressed the importance of gaining and maintaining healthy relationships with parents and community members (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Copeland, 2001; Foster, 1997; 2001; Taylor, 1997). Kinship bonds with their students and families were important, and they felt that these relationships possessed a form of reciprocity.

Other forms of coping and helping students also existed for African-American female teachers. Some stated a belief in using multiple forms of assessment to evaluate students. These teachers did not support testing as the only measure of success. Additionally, these teachers believed in valuing individual differences in their students (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Others commonly mentioned a need to

focus on providing praise and helping students improve their self-respect. They found it necessary to counter current societal practices that valued White concepts of beauty and achievement (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Mitchell, 1996; Taylor, 1997).

African-American female teachers also discussed ways in which they themselves coped and managed to remain effective teachers despite the many barriers they faced on a daily basis. A teacher in Boston mentioned the need to have a life outside of school. She witnessed many teachers overextending themselves and thought that this created stress and was not healthy for either the teacher or the students. She feared that these teachers would become drained and boring (Foster, 1997). Some teachers consistently mentioned that family and God served as their support. In other words, their family and churches provided them with a life and support outside of school (Johnson-Farr, 1998).

Other teachers stated that they made excuses for the behavior of their White colleagues (Elliot, 1996; Mitchell, 1996). For example, a teacher in a suburban Boston-area middle school described making up excuses for people's acts of racism and choosing to ignore it. She found ways of rationalizing the behavior of others, so that she could cope positively. Otherwise, she expressed the fear of "going crazy" because of it (Elliot, 1996). Additional teachers acknowledged feeling the same way and called their excuses "sugar coating" (Elliot, 1996).

Still other teachers had a wide range of methods for coping. A fourth- and fifth-grade teacher from Nebraska stated that she coped through silencing her voice, and no one ever asked why. She felt isolated and burdened by being the only one to represent her race. Rather than deal with resistance from her colleagues and supervisors, she learned not to speak up about the injustices that she saw and felt. She relied on the support of her family to help her through it (Johnson-Farr, 1998). Other coping strategies ranged from working many extra hours to reducing one's effort for

lack of support (Elliot, 1996; Johnson-Farr, 1998). Collins even went so far as to find a new job and then to start her own school (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990).

African-American women expressed numerous recommendations for improving the education of African-American students. They stressed the need for professional development activities, especially ones that create an awareness of and sensitivity to the varying learning styles and opportunities to learn how to more effectively teach African-American students (Lloyd, 1997; Saulter, 1996). In addition, schools should consider that Black and White teachers might require different forms of training on some topics (Saulter, 1996). Also, in some instances African-American educators feel ill-equipped to meet the needs of African-American students (Lloyd, 1997; Mitchell, 1996). Professional development activities should be based on varying teachers' needs.

As with any group of people, there are African-American educators who are good, average, and bad at the art of teaching. Lloyd (1997), in a study of 21 African-American elementary school teachers, noted that although the majority of African-American teachers are committed and enthusiastic, some African-American teachers are simply not good at teaching. An African-American teacher in New York City also stated that one should not assume that a commonality of skin color is sufficient in itself to enable people to understand each other (Foster, 1997). After all, there are many other factors involved. Teachers recommended that varying levels of ability be taken into consideration when planning for teacher training as well.

Within the literature reviewed above, African-American educators also offered many more recommendations. They wished to see increased efforts toward the recruitment and retention of African-American educators (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Elliot, 1996; Taylor, 1997), links between the schools and universities (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Taylor, 1997), support groups and networking activities for African-American

educators (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Henry, 1994, 1998; Taylor, 1997), higher teacher salaries (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Taylor, 1997), providing teachers with a voice in the decision-making process (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Elliot, 1996), recognition and rewards or praise for individual efforts (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994), and opportunities for advancement (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Taylor, 1997). African-American teachers had many ideas for how school leaders could provide better support.

Regarding students, African-American educators recommend not using testing as a measure of intelligence (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1997), valuing the knowledge children bring to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994), collaboration and cooperation with others and among students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), stressing the value of lifelong learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994), use of strong discipline (Foster, 1997; Mitchell, 1996), holding high expectations that challenge students (Collins & Tamarkin 1990, Copeland, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mitchell, 1996), use of high-level vocabulary (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Collins & Tamarkin, 1990), use of critical thinking (Ladson-Billings, 1994), use of rewards such as special lunches (Ladson-Billings, 1994), having relationships with the students that extend beyond the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and the need for teachers to be up and active within the classroom (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990). However, many of the teachers expressed the need to refrain from rewarding work that was below standards. Instead, they recommended trying to find something that each student could do well and for which they could be rewarded (Budd-Jackson, 1995; Mitchell, 1996; Taylor, 1997). African-American teachers knew that schools could be doing much more to support children.

One teacher mentioned the need for teachers to educate students about their use of language. An English teacher in California strongly believed that students must

to be taught about the ways in which they speak and write. She was well aware of the assumptions that people make about others based on the way they communicate, and found it important to teach this to children. She thought of her students as being bilingual and needing to be able to use both Standard English and the African-American vernacular. As a result, she helped the students to be fluent in the usage of both (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Although the research on African-American female educators' perspectives has been limited, a range of information on the barriers that hinder the effective education of African-American students is available. Additionally, teachers throughout the literature reviewed above use a variety of coping mechanisms and have many suggestions for improving education. This review of the literature including the voices of African-American female teachers shows that they have varied perspectives and experiences and make important contributions toward improving the education system. African-American women offer valuable insights, ideas, and suggestions for providing an effective education for African-American students. There is much more that school leaders and educators can do.

I wanted my study to add to this growing body of literature, by thoroughly focusing on one school district and delving deeply into teacher perspectives, while at the same time providing an understanding of the context from which these voices would emerge. African-American teachers face many barriers in providing an effective education in U.S. public schools. The extent to which each barrier affects teachers in specific regions is unclear because of the limitations of available research. More studies need to be conducted in a variety of regions within the United States so that we may gain a better understanding of the degree of these problems, coping strategies for handling them, and ideas for improvements that would most benefit our teachers and, more important, our children.

I had hoped to contribute toward improvements in education for African Americans by providing an analysis of African-American teachers' perspectives on the barriers they face within a school district in New York State. New York State has long been a leader on the educational forefront, through its educational standards and Regents exams (Steiner, 2009). At the high school level in New York State, many students also have the option of several challenging routes to a college-preparatory education. They may study a Regents curriculum that is college preparatory, or they may choose an honors program that is considered to be an enriched Regents curriculum, or they may take Advanced Placement courses, which are considered to be more challenging than the former two options (Fuerstenau, 2000). Thus, the leaders of New York State offer students an array of opportunities to be educationally challenged and New York serves as a model for other states. Therefore, conducting the study within New York could have had important implications for other schools and state educational leaders. It is essential to know how schools within New York could lead even better, so that diversity is valued and the achievement gap is closed. African-American women offer a unique experience and background to add to our understanding of these issues.

In Chapter III, I proceed by reviewing the literature relevant to the main facts on which my proposed research was based, that is, that a difference can be made for African-American students through educational training and effective classroom instruction. Multicultural and Afrocentric scholars have conducted a plethora of research and have advocated for changes to the public school system. I review much of that relevant literature. In the remaining chapters I cover the factors that affected my research, and similar research from which I can make further recommendations.

CHAPTER III:

PURPOSE OF EDUCATION, VALUE OF DIVERSITY, AND POSITIVE METHODS OF SCHOOLING FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

There is much our school leaders and educators can do to improve educational outcomes for African-American children and for our disenfranchised youth. It is also important that all educators be taught the value of diversity, considering the global world we live in. Applicable theories as they relate to education, and proven methods of interaction and instruction for children of a different culture and language, do exist and through additional research can be further refined and improved. This chapter covers the purpose of education, the need for valuing diversity, and many of the things we know about improving our educational system and bridging the achievement gap specifically for African Americans. This information is important, as it demonstrates the value of cultural awareness research in education. It also shows that improvements can occur within schools despite the many constraints teachers and administrators face.

The Purpose of Education and the Value of Diversity

One of the many purposes for education is to prepare our youth for the workforce (Dreeben, 1968; Nussbaum, 1997). Other purposes of education include education for liberation (hooks, 1994), education for the enrichment of life, education to participate in local and national society, and education for world citizenship (Nussbaum, 1997). Children also learn many norms of our society. Dreeben (1968), in his sociological analysis of what is learned in schools, depicted the many norms that children learn while in the school setting, to prepare them for the workforce and to function successfully in society. He described the many facets of independence,

achievement, universalism, and specificity that are taught to children in schools. Children learn much more than academics in school.

While one can argue that the norms learned in schools are necessary, one can also argue that different cultures experience different norms, and that the norms taught in schools could disadvantage members of a society who are not of the majority culture (Apple, 1995). The United States is a pluralistic country that must interact on a global scale (Nussbaum, 1997). We must teach norms that are not only accepting of differences, but also value and utilize these differences to the benefit of all.

In today's society, the need to begin teaching about diversity at an early age is becoming increasingly apparent (J. Banks, 2001; Steele, 1997). Interventions in response to negative racial and gender attitudes are best put into practice while students are young (J. Bank, 2001). Studies have shown that African-American children enter school earning standardized test scores on a par with their European-American counterparts. Yet, with each year they are in school, African-American students fall further and further behind (Steele, 1997). If we are to counter this effect, we can begin with altering school practices and be more supportive of diversity through cultural awareness.

Within the work environment, diversity is beneficial (Cox, 1994; Joplin & Daus, 1997). Increased cultural diversity, when managed appropriately, leads to higher levels of creativity and innovation, as well as better problem solving skills (Cox, 1994). These same benefits are likely to exist in the well-managed classroom environment as well, thus increasing the quality of education by developing student's problem-solving skills, creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. Organizations have spent millions of dollars on discrimination lawsuits and on diversity training for their employees (Cox, 1994). Much of this spending could be avoided if schools taught students to understand cultural differences and to appreciate diversity. Not only

can children benefit from working with a diverse population, but they also need to learn how to work well with others of different backgrounds and perspectives, so that they will be better prepared for employment in a global economy. There is nothing like children's play to help break the racial confines that develop in segregated schools.

In the news, within the literature, and throughout school districts, the achievement gap that exists between European Americans and other racial groups seems to be of great concern. Leaders claim to want to bridge this gap. Fortunately, there is a growing body of literature on theories, methods, and experiences that do work for African-American students, from which these leaders can draw. Instructional techniques, teacher perceptions, and school climate can have a positive impact and can effectively erase the achievement gap. Educators and leaders can make a positive difference in the educational attainment of children who are not European-American.

First, it is important to understand that African-American students have succeeded in a variety of educational environments, as indicated by test scores and graduation rates (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Irvine & Foster, 1996). Yet, most educational institutions can and should do better. African-American students face a variety of obstacles in the school setting, including stereotyping (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Steele, 1997, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995), tracking into lower level classes (Anyon, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Oakes, 1985), harsh discipline (Dupper & Evans, 1996; Ferguson, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994), and an environment that does not value their language and culture (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999; Valdés, 1996). It is imperative to right these injustices, not simply from a moral and ethical perspective, but also because of the impact on society. The United States is made up of people from many different cultures, and many speak different languages. Our country benefits from this diversity in numerous ways and has so much more to gain from it.

Respect should be shown to all. We can start to more forcefully pursue this process through education, beginning with teacher education.

In 1995, 35% of the public school population was composed of students of color. By the year 2020, their proportion is expected to rise to 48% (Anyon, 2001). Despite the large number of students of color in this country, our teaching force is approximately 85% European-American and female (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Several researchers have documented the fact that African-American educators are systematically discouraged from teaching (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999). In addition, teacher preparation programs offer only minimal training in multicultural education (Gollnick, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001), and many educators are not trained to understand the depths of racism (Elliot, 1996; Gollnick, 2001; Sleeter, 1992). Most are also not trained to understand different cultures or to be sensitive to individual needs (Gollnick, 2001; Sleeter, 1992). Faculty at universities and colleges, teacher educators, and administrators must all begin to alter their practices (Comer, 1997; Sleeter, 1992). Teachers can be trained to effectively provide instruction to a diverse population in culturally sensitive and anti-biased ways, and more people of color can be encouraged into the profession. These efforts can and will make a difference.

Education has long been valued deeply within African-American communities, and many parents have been struggling to find positive educational environments for their children (Foster, 1992; Jones-Wilson, Arnez, & Ashbury, 1992; Ratteray, 1992). The type of school that children attend is dependent on family values, belief systems, and financial resources. These factors vary widely among African Americans. Sadly, a history of underfunded and neglected urban and rural schools has resulted in many of today's African-American students attending schools in poor condition that lack adequate resources (Anyon, 1997, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Kozol, 1991). However, many African-American students have attended private schools (Ratteray,

1997) and suburban schools (Hawkins, 1999) as well. African Americans value education and most often do the best they can for their children.

One way to improve student performance in all environments is to improve cultural awareness and practices in education. Although schools are highly linked to societal factors and it is difficult to change the overall system, improving practices within education will make a difference (Delpit, 1995; Sleeter, 1992). African-American female educators, based on their background and experiences, are positioned to contribute important insights into how school leaders and districts leaders can better improve cultural awareness. They may also contribute important insights and advice to the reforms that governmental leaders are creating and enforcing. In addition, committees within the school can be formed to address and enforce cultural awareness in schools and help with school staff training. Increasing cultural diversity among the teacher population within a school, along with training educators more effectively in diverse perspectives, will help encourage a culture change needed within the school system. Not only can all children be treated with respect and a valuing of their culture, but also educators can become advocates against racism. We must each do our part so that circumstances may change.

Current Educational Movements in Cultural Awareness

Much of the recent educational research and debate has developed from the multicultural education movement. The main focus of this movement is to establish equal access to education for all students despite race, ethnicity, gender, creed, or disability. It has historical roots in the African-American scholarship that emerged in the late nineteenth century and the intergroup scholarship of the 1940s. In its most recent form, multicultural education research and practice has come to the forefront as a result of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As the population in the United States continues to grow more diverse, and as a greater demand for cultural

awareness in society is needed, more and more people are hearing this message. This can be seen in the wave of research and publications, the court cases, teacher education, and the policy efforts affecting school systems. Yet, even with the many efforts being made, multicultural education is still an emerging field and must advance much further before reaching its ideals (J. Banks, 2001).

Multicultural education seeks to increase educational equity for all children. It strives for systemic change as well as change in instructional practices and curriculum. Through such changes, it is believed that student achievement will increase and become more equalized. James A. Banks (2001) identified content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and the empowering of school culture as dimensions of multicultural education. He explained:

Content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples, data, and information from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject or discipline. . . . The knowledge construction process describes the procedures by which social, behavioral, and natural scientists create knowledge, and the manner in which the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways that knowledge is constructed within it. . . . The prejudice reduction dimension of multicultural education describes the characteristics of children's racial attitudes and suggests strategies that can be used to help students develop more democratic attitudes and values. . . equity pedagogy exists when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse, racial, ethnic, and social-class groups. . . . The concept of empowering school culture and social structure. . . describes the process of restructuring the culture and organization of the schools so that students of diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality and cultural empowerment. (J. Banks, 2001, p. 5)

Multicultural education has broad-based goals aimed at improving the educational experience for all students. It strives toward creating equality in school and society. Multicultural education is clearly important in a diverse and global society.

Afrocentricity and African-centered pedagogy constitute another significant movement within education. Both terms defy a single definition. Each term has been utilized in many different ways and misinterpreted by many (Bekerie, 1994; Marable, 2000). However, in each case, the main focus is the need to teach about cultures from their indigenous perspectives. In relation to Africans and African Americans, this translates to teaching about Africa from an African perspective, and teaching about the African-American experience from an African-American perspective. Afrocentricity and African-centered pedagogy differ from multicultural education in that they also stress the need to deconstruct the hegemonic forces inherent in Eurocentric thought. Ultimately, they call for a transformation in the way one views the world (Asante, 1980, 1987, 1990, 1997; Karenga, 1993).

Within the school system, Afrocentricity has resulted in an African-centered curriculum for educating African-American students, and for instructing European-American students about African and African-American culture. It involves instructional practices and curriculum with an emphasis on “centering the children, treating each person’s heritage with respect, and studying to learn about each other as a way to knowledge about self and the world” (Asante, 1991, p. 31). Children become centered through acquiring knowledge that originates from their own ethnic groups. Information about African-American students is thus derived from African-American studies (Asante, 1991). Afrocentric curriculum and instruction have been highly valued by many African-American parents, and many students now attend schools with an Afrocentric curriculum (Foster, 1992; Johnson & Anderson, 1992; Kabugi, 1997; Shujaa, 1994). It is believed that Afrocentric education can empower students of all cultures (Asante, 1991/1992, 1998).

I agree with these movements. It is important that all people learn that history and experiences can be understood through a variety of perspectives. The Eurocentric

view is not the only way to look at things, and not the “right” way. Rather, it is merely one of many perspectives. In a global economy, indigenous perspectives are very important and they require understanding and respect. We must all learn to get along so that we may benefit from each other! We all have much to contribute and much to learn.

Educational Theories Focused on Bridging the Achievement Gap

Several major theories lend ideas and methods to how we can solve the achievement gap between races. These theories provide important insight into understandings and techniques that may be used in bridging the achievement gap. Each contributes toward an understanding of the negative experience our African-American children encounter within our public schools.

John Ogbu spearheaded one of those theories in education, the cultural-ecological theory. He attributed the school failure of disenfranchised youth to systemic and community factors (Deyhle, 1995; Pena, 1997). Ogbu (1978, 1993) posited that three types of minorities exist in the United States: autonomous minorities, caste (pariah) minorities, and immigrant minorities.

Autonomous minorities are different from the dominant society based on their ethnicity, race, religion, culture and/or language (Ogbu, 1978, 1993). While they may experience some discrimination, they are not relegated to inferior status, and they may or may not be economically or politically subordinate to the dominant group. Jews are one example of autonomous minorities in the United States.

In contrast, caste minorities are considered to be inferior to the dominant group, are affected by the ideology of the dominant group, and are relegated to a subordinate economic and political role (Ogbu, 1978, 1993). African Americans and Native Americans are examples of caste minorities in the United States. They stand out as different in appearance and in culture. They experience discrimination and are

generally treated as subordinate to the dominant group. Caste minorities tend to compare their conditions with those of the dominant culture and find the work and pay to be unequal and unfair. Caste minorities frequently resist the dominant culture and seek alternative means of success (Cummins, 1986; Ogbu, 1978, 1993).

Last, immigrant minorities, such as the Chinese and Japanese, are those who have moved into the United States by choice after the current dominant group gained power (Ogbu 1978, 1993). Immigrant minorities may face similar subordinate positions as caste minorities and may also be perceived as inferior. However, their response to this treatment is much different than that of caste minorities. Immigrant minorities often compare their situation in the United States to the conditions of their home countries. As a result, they find their work and pay here to be acceptable. Thus, immigrant minorities tend to persevere and attempt to please (Cummins, 1986; Ogbu, 1978, 1993). Immigrant minorities perform better than caste minorities; yet, as a group they still do not perform as well as the dominant class.

An interesting example of the differences between Ogbu's (1978, 1993) immigrant minorities and caste minorities is the experiences of Africans who have willingly come to this country. The first generation of immigrant Africans are what Ogbu would term immigrant minorities. However, future generations who become acculturated to the African-American culture of the United States often have the experience of what Ogbu terms the caste minorities. They frequently resist the dominant culture and find alternative means of success (Ogbu, 1978, 1993).

Ogbu also documented the inferior education that caste minorities receive and the job ceiling that exists for employment. He verified that these conditions are real and do in fact act as barriers to upward mobility (Ogbu, 1978, 1994). Caste minority membership is determined at birth and can only be changed through "passing" as a dominant member of society or possibly by emigration. Although education is

officially an “equalizer,” the class and ethnic discrimination inherent in the school system and society at large significantly limits the power of education. Moreover, the social and occupational roles available to caste minorities are determined by their caste membership and do not relate to education and ability, except in a small percentage of cases (Ogbu, 1978, 1993).

In summary, Ogbu (1978, 1993) attributed the underachievement of African-American students to several factors. He identified caste membership as the initial problem. This membership results in structural barriers and organizational practices that prevent African-American students from achieving on a par with their European-American peers. These barriers and practices then result in coping mechanisms of resistance, which may further hinder achievement.

Ogbu (1978) identified a number of ways in which resistance may surface for caste minorities. For example, African-American students may not be as motivated in school because they are aware that their prospects for jobs and future education are limited. Furthermore, their efforts may decrease as they face curriculum that does not include their experience, that demeans their language, and/or with which they disagree as a result of their experience and history. This resistance may further limit their opportunities. Thus, meaningful ways of addressing school practices and forms of resistance must be sought (Ogbu, 1978, 1993). The concepts of multiculturalism, Afrocentricity, and African-centered pedagogy help to address this problem.

Claude Steele, on the other hand, created the stereotype threat–disidentification theory to explain why African-American students begin school at the same level as their European-American peers, but then fall increasingly behind with each new school year. He found that the problem could not be attributed solely to financial resources, skill or preparation deficits, or culturally irrelevant instruction. Furthermore, he discovered that even poor African Americans highly value school.

Thus, Steele sought another reason for African-American underachievement (Steele, 1992, 1998).

Stereotype threat–disidentification theory postulates that stereotype stigma and devaluation result in vulnerability for anyone placed in a situation that is important to them, and in which a negative stereotype applies. For example, when African-American students believe they will be judged or unfairly treated based on their social category, they feel threatened and perform poorly as a result. Rather than merely fearing an individual failure, they fear they will be confirming a negative stereotype of their race. In addition, they fear being treated unfairly (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Steele, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Within the school system, stereotype threat often results in African-American students being placed in special education or other lower tracks (Anyon, 1997, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Oakes, 1985). African-American students also are punished more often and suffer more severe consequences (Dupper & Evans, 1996; Ferguson, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). African-American students may disassociate their self-esteem from school success as a consequence of the threat of such judgments and treatments being imposed on them. They develop a defense mechanism of not caring, and their efforts decrease. Thus, these students frequently have high self-esteem despite school failure (Cohen et al., 1999; Steele, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

In order to alter the circumstances in which stereotype threat leaves students, it is important that teachers enable children to feel valued and invulnerable within the school setting. Cohen et al. (1999) termed these strategies “wise strategies”; they stated, “Wise strategies for assisting minority students are those that assure the students that they will not be judged stereotypically—that their abilities and ‘belonging’ are assumed rather than doubted (Steele, 1992, 1997)” (p. 2). These strategies are still being researched, but include such things as holding high

expectations, helping students to forge strong relationships at school, giving positive feedback along with stating the belief that the student has the potential (Steele & Aronson, 1995). When teachers and mentors use these strategies that help demonstrate that stereotypes are not being used against students, many barriers can be overcome (Cohen et al., 1999; Marx, Brown, & Steele, 1999; Steele, 1992, 1997, 1998).

Tied closely to stereotype threat–disidentification theory is the self-fulfilling prophecy theory. It was initially formulated by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968. Extensive additional research has confirmed that teacher perceptions may have a significant impact on students (Brophy & Good, 1974; Cooper & Tom, 1984; Cox, 1993, 1994; Grant & Tate, 2001; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Jussim, 1986). When teachers expect students to perform well, they most often do achieve. However, when teachers expect students to perform poorly, they indeed tend to do poorly. For example, labeling or stereotyping students results in a change in expectations that is reflected in teacher behavior and reinforced in students (Cox, 1993, 1994; Grant & Tate, 2001; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Steele, 1997). Students tend to respond by fulfilling the expectations they are given. Teachers can be taught to learn about and value different cultures and to respect language differences so that they hold high expectations for students who are different from themselves.

When teacher expectations are low, their negative perceptions have a damaging impact on student achievement levels. Grant and Tate (2001) reviewed the research on teacher–student interaction and its influence on students’ academic performance. They found that teachers’ perceptions of students affected interactions and reinforced stereotypes. White middle-class males benefited the most within instruction, while females and people of color were negatively affected. Indexing students in this manner began early and may contribute to students’ feelings of

stereotype threat and/or lack of self-confidence in the school setting. Teachers can be taught to change their own perceptions and to alter the way they interact with students.

Cultural difference theorists offer yet another perspective. They view children of various backgrounds as experiencing a cultural mismatch when they enter school (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999, 2000; Valdés, 1996). Suddenly they may find that a different language is spoken and taught, and that different skills are expected and valued. More so than curriculum or specific instructional techniques, the values and belief systems that teachers convey within the classroom significantly influence the achievement of students (Cohen et al., 1999; Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rosenthal, 1969; Steele, 1992, 1997, 1998).

Once in school, many students begin to learn about what W.E.B. Du Bois termed the double consciousness. In reference to African Americans, Du Bois (1903) wrote:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American and a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (*The Souls of Black Folk*, as cited in Ladner, 1995, p. 279)

Du Bois articulated a feeling that many African Americans continue to experience (Collins, 2000; Ladner, 1995). Often African Americans feel as though they are living two lives (Collins, 2000; Delpit, 1995). Through instructional practices that value diversity, the process of learning how to negotiate two different cultures can be facilitated, resulting in less resistance and higher achievement (Steele, 1992).

A culturally relevant teaching pedagogy is extremely important for the achievement of students who are not European-American (J. Banks, 2001; Delpit,

1995; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Although multicultural and Afrocentric curricula are highly important, students have been very successful in environments that have not deviated from the Eurocentric curriculum (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Collins & Tamarkin, 1990; Irvine & Foster, 1996). In addition, students have succeeded despite different approaches to instruction (Foster, 1997). As part of a two-year ethnographic study, Ladson-Billings (1994) defined culturally relevant instruction:

. . . culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. . . . Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (p. 18)

Culturally relevant teaching begins with the students' knowledge base and builds from it, empowering students to achieve within the classroom.

Ladson-Billings (1994) identified 10 aspects of culturally relevant teaching practices. Paraphrased, these are: (1) being part of the community and giving back to the community; (2) considering themselves artists and their instruction, art; (3) believing that all students can succeed; (4) helping students to understand their identities in relation to the community, national, and global environment; (5) drawing knowledge from students' knowledge base; (6) developing relationships between the students and the teachers much like that of a family—natural, accepting, and encouraging; (7) extending relationships beyond the classroom; (8) creating individual connectedness between each student and the teacher; (9) striving for a community of learners; and (10) teaching students to help one another rather than to compete with one another (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 38–76). Overall, these components mean that teachers value the knowledge students already have, create a safe environment of

collaboration and cooperation, develop a relationship with individuals and with the community, and hold high expectations for everyone. Similar components of effective teacher practice are acknowledged throughout the literature (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Mehan, Okamoto, Lintz, & Wills, 2001; Nieto, 1999; Noddings, 1992; Shor, 1992). In addition, it is important to teach children about cultures from their indigenous perspectives (Asante, 1991; J. Banks, 2001).

Similarly, cultural difference theorists recognize the rich culture with which disenfranchised children enter school (J. Banks, 2001; Baratz & Baratz, 1970). They write in direct opposition to the cultural deprivation paradigm, which upholds the belief that children who experience difficulty in school are culturally deprived. Rather than viewing the culture of disenfranchised children through the Eurocentric notion of deficiency, cultural difference theorists stress that the culture is in fact significantly different (J. Banks, 2001; Baratz & Baratz, 1970; Cummins, 1986). Children of low-income and ethnic minority groups have a culture that is in opposition to the cultural expectations of schools (J. Banks, 2001). Rather than blaming children for their difficulties in school, teachers and administrators need to be taught to adapt their teaching and interacting styles (Cummins, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999, 2000; Sleeter, 1992; Steele, 1992, 1997, 1998). Moreover, textbooks and curriculums need to be broad and inclusive of the perspectives and styles of diverse groups.

Since the 1970s, much empirical research has been conducted in this area, with a focus on learning styles, teaching styles, and language differences (J. Banks, 2001; Heath, 1983). Caution, however, must always be taken when considering cultural differences. Not all children behave according to group norms, and individual differences must be acknowledged (J. Banks, 2001). Despite this word of caution, cultural difference theorists and practitioners have begun to have an impact on the

ways in which schools function. Students and parents have begun to experience a difference in how their culture and language are addressed within schools (Pena, 1997). With strong teacher training programs and professional development, more progress can be made in this area.

Methods and Strategies Leading to Success for African-American Students

Racism can occur in very subtle ways and is often not recognized as such by the very people performing it (Barnes, 2000; Landsman, 2001; Paley, 1979). Despite their best intentions, teachers may unconsciously send the wrong messages to students because of their own educational background and biases (Delpit, 1995; Landsman, 2001; Paley, 1979). As a result, it is extremely important to train teachers on even the very basics of equal instructional techniques. Teachers must be taught to hold the same expectations for all students and to grade each student based on the same standard (Barnes, 2000). Teachers must provide equal eye contact, pay very similar attention to all students, call on each student the same number of times, and provide equivalent amounts of attention and praise to students who complete good work (Barnes, 2000). In addition, each student's work should be displayed about the same amount throughout the classroom and school building (Barnes, 2000). It is important to treat all children comparably in every aspect of instruction.

Low expectations may be demonstrated to students in a variety of ways. One such way is letting African-American students get away with things that teachers would not allow for other students. While it is acknowledged that all teachers can be manipulated, some feel that it is easier for African-American students to deceive European-American teachers (Foster, 1997). Leroy Lovelace explained, "But it's often easier for black students to con white teachers because the teachers will pity them, feel sorry for them, and make excuses that these students can't do this, can't do that or that there is a problem at home" (as quoted in Foster, 1997, p. XLVI). Ladson-Billings

(1994) provided an example in which a student teacher openly admits to letting her African-American students have an extra chance because she feels sorry for them. Ladson-Billings (1994) stated, “In her own words, she allows them [African-American students] to ‘get away with murder’ because she feels sorry for them and wants them to know that she ‘cares’” (p. 20). Low expectations result in teachers making life “easier” for many African-American students, and thus not providing them with the same challenges and expectations other students receive. On the other hand, it should still be recognized that this is not often the case regarding behavior. Studies have demonstrated that African-American students are punished more often and with more severe consequences (Dupper & Evans, 1996; Ferguson, 2000).

Paley (1979) wrote extensively about her experiences teaching in integrated schools, and the learning process she underwent in discovering how best to cope with diversity. Her interpretations are interesting, as she was able to draw parallels between her experiences as a Jewish girl and the experiences of African-American students in a mainly European-American school. In addition, she was reflective, concerned about issues of race, and unafraid to discuss it and learn from others.

Paley (1979) explained how she discovered subtle ways in which low expectations were entering into her own teaching experience. She noticed that she either did not allow or did not encourage particular students to try certain activities. Gradually she came to realize that she was basing this decision on her expectation that certain students would fail. She also noted that on occasions when she had been allowing students to try activities she thought they could not do, she was stopping them at any sign of a problem. She stated, “Somehow the children who excel were given practice in excelling. The children who begin slowly receive very different experiences” (p. 70). Teachers must be extremely careful in how they direct students’

activities. It is important to allow and encourage all students to try everything and even to fail.

Paley (1979) also described other important and subtle ways in which she perceived African-American students differently from her European-American students. She noticed that she was very familiar with European-American children and thus little things said and done by them gave her information about their intelligence and thinking processes. Yet, because she knew so little about African-American culture she came to realize that she was likely missing clues. There was simply a lot she could not pick up on because she was unfamiliar with these students' culture and language.

Lee and Slaughter-Defoe (2001) described how students can be misunderstood. They stated, “. . . the African-American children told stories in what Michaels called a topic-associative style, whereas the White children used a more linear narrative style that more closely approximated the linear narrative style of writing and speaking into which the school was attempting to apprentice the students” (p. 358). This resulted in a negative perception by some White teachers:

White adults were much more likely to find the episodic stories hard to follow and they were much more likely to infer that the narrator was a low-achieving student. Black adults were more likely to evaluate positively both topic-centered and episodic stories, noticing difference, but appreciating both. . . . (Cazden, 1988, p. 17, as cited in Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2001)

When teachers lack knowledge about a student's culture, they can often miss clues to the student's intelligence and misinterpret his or her academic efforts.

A colleague also criticized Paley (1979) because she referred to a group of African-American females as “the Black girls” but did not refer to any other group of students in her class as a collective like this. For example, she did not say “the White girls” or “the Jewish girls” to refer to other students in her class. This criticism

enabled Paley to realize that she was not recognizing individual differences. She vowed never to do this again. Teachers must be careful not to conceptualize a group of students in this manner. All students have individual strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics. Every child should be valued as a unique individual.

Paley (1979, 1995) had to learn many things the hard way as she learned how to talk about race and how to effectively teach African-American students. Through student observations and discussions with colleagues, Paley (1979) learned that race should be discussed and that cultural differences should be valued. Though she made mistakes, she was never intentionally racist. Rather, she seemed very concerned about her actions and words. She had never been taught how to discuss race or how to teach students from various cultural groups. This is the case for many European-American teachers (Landsman, 2001; Paley, 1979, 1995; Sleeter, 1992). They simply do not know anything different. Thus, it is the responsibility of those with knowledge to teach them. We can make a difference for African-American students by properly training their teachers and administrators.

Several other techniques emerged from the literature as important ways to promote equality. Classroom seating permitting students to save seats should never be allowed. This has the potential to turn into stark racism (Barnes, 2000). Moreover, schools should structure classes so that African-American students are seated with at least six other African-American students in a class. A colleague of Paley's tells her:

The value of the black students' experience in a class with half a dozen or more other black children far outweighs any other consideration. Every minority teacher I've met agrees with me on this point. Look, you asked me the other day about kinship feelings. Well, they can't develop with minority children so fragmented in each class and with so few minority teachers. (Paley, 1995, p. 138)

It is important for students to be with other students of the same ethnicity. However, this does not mean that segregation should be encouraged. Friendships across racial

lines ought to be promoted. Cooperative learning strategies can be utilized for this purpose.

Cooperative learning is a recommended strategy for promoting success, especially within ethnically mixed classes. It involves students working with one another toward a common goal. Students are expected to contribute equally and to help and support one another. Slavin (2001) recommended that students be placed in groups with children of other ethnic backgrounds. Cooperative learning encourages cross-race friendships, thus leading to less well-defined peer-group boundaries. Cooperative learning has also been shown to have positive effects on student achievement across racial lines (Slavin, 2001).

Anti-biased instructional techniques are very important for the success of all students. Through this type of instruction one is expected to be an advocate, challenging any form of discrimination. One is expected to confront and intercede against any form of oppression (Derman-Sparks, 1989). Since employees in education are often unaware of biased tendencies and may not be conscious of their own negative actions, anti-biased training may need to occur on the job. This can be accomplished through observations, recommendations, and directives. It may even require increasing sanctions for a lack of improvement. Educational training may also occur during staff development.

Education is a complex process. Multicultural education, Afrocentric education, culturally relevant instruction, and anti-biased instructional practices do not come naturally for many people. As a result, education for school leaders must not stop once college training has been completed. Administrators are responsible for ensuring that school employees uphold instructional techniques that value and appreciate cultural differences.

Parent involvement in the schools can also have a significant impact on student success (C. Banks, 2001; Frazier, 1999; Henderson & Berla, 1994), and teachers have the power to encourage parent participation. When parents are involved in schools, children perform better (C. Banks, 2001; Frazier, 1999; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hidalgo, Siu, Bright, Swap & Epstein, 2001; Moore, 1992). In addition, the schools become more effective learning environments, thus increasing the quality of students' education (Frazier, 1999; Moore, 1992; Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2001). Hidalgo et al. (2001) stated:

Partnerships between families/communities and schools provide continuity between the child's home/community and school environments . . . a factor that is crucial in the case of economically and socially disadvantaged African American children who may lack a secure home-school link. . . . Collaborative efforts among families, communities, and schools can extend the resources available to the school and broaden opportunities for children's learning. . . . Even more compelling, higher levels of parental involvement in the school have been found to be associated with higher levels of academic achievement in African American children. . . . (p. 507)

While increasing student achievement, parent (and community) partnerships with schools can help bridge home culture and school culture. It can also provide students with more learning opportunities and higher levels of achievement.

Parents can become involved in schools in many ways (C. Banks, 2001; Frazier, 1999; Henry, 1996; Hidalgo et al., 2001; Moore, 1992). Parents can be encouraged to participate in school activities through parent letters, newsletters, phone calls, and invitations to many different events. Some of the possibilities for encouraging school involvement are holding open houses, having a spaghetti dinner with the principal, providing workshops and seminars, offering child care, requesting classroom assistance, inviting engaged participation on school committees, and encouraging parents to join students on field trips or to see concerts and plays. Parents may also wish to become teacher's aides, offer teacher support with administrative

tasks, be involved in a Parent Teacher Association and/or fundraising events, or sit on other school committees such as a site-based decision-making team. It is important for school leaders and educators to encourage participation through a variety of methods and to allow parents to participate in ways they are comfortable with.

There are many ways to encourage participation and many ways in which parents can become involved. The important component is that parents must be made to feel a part of the school environment and not merely be assigned to menial tasks (Henry, 1996). There is much that parents and teachers can learn from one another (Delpit, 1995; Henry, 1996; Paley, 1979, 1995). Parent participation provides schools with the opportunity to gain from parents' ideas and to learn about their cultures and values (Delpit, 1995; Henry, 1996; Paley, 1979). This can have a huge impact on efforts toward cultural relevancy (Delpit, 1995; Henry, 1996; Paley, 1979).

Language is another major factor that influences students' educational experiences. It affects communication and instruction, and transmits culture. Language is a primary method through which socialization occurs, and teachers have much influence over how language is used in the classroom and while at school.

Children are socialized to use language, and they also learn how to socialize through language. Within this process children are taught expected behavior and the rules of society. They also gain insights into the worldviews of their culture (Schieffelin, 1990). Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), leading anthropologists and researchers on language acquisition, made two claims about language socialization and culture:

1. The process of acquiring language is deeply affected by the process of becoming a competent member of a society.
2. The process of becoming a competent member of society is realized to a large extent through language, by acquiring knowledge of its functions, social distribution, and interpretations in and across socially defined situations. (p. 277)

Schieffelin (1990) maintained that the acquisition of language is a process through which one learns to become a competent member of society. Furthermore, one becomes a competent member of society through learning the functions of language.

The importance of language to the socialization process is significant for children emerged in African-American culture (hooks, 1994; Perry & Delpit, 1998). While they are in the home and community, they often learn a set of rules based on that culture. Yet, when they enter school, they are expected to learn Standard English, which varies in both verbal and paralinguistic communications (Smith, 1998; Smitherman, 1998a). Suddenly they must learn to negotiate a new set of rules, and they begin to gain insights into a different worldview. This process can be damaging to students' ability and desire to learn if they are constantly corrected and informed that their language is wrong and must be fixed (Delpit, 1995; Scott, 1998). Therefore, positive methods for transitioning students into this new language within classroom instruction are important.

Much debate has focused on the recognition of African-American Vernacular English as a language. There is a tendency for people to devalue its use and to consider it slang (Perry & Delpit, 1998). Yet, it has been demonstrated to be an African language system that has taken on European words (Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smith, 1998; Smitherman, 1998a; Whatley, 1981). Moreover, in 1979, the federal court system in the case *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board* set precedents in recognizing that African-American Vernacular English is a statutory language of the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOC). Section 1703(f) of the EEOC reads in part: "No state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by . . . the failure to overcome language barriers that impeded equal participation by its students in its instructional programs" (as quoted in

Smitherman, 1998b, p. 165). The court in the *King* case determined that the students involved had indeed been denied an equal education, because the school district had failed to overcome language barriers.

The decision in *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board* legitimized African-American Vernacular English.

Geneva Smitherman (1998b) discussed several of the lessons learned as a result of this trial:

Judicial processes are critical in shaping educational policy and practice. . . . We need a school effectiveness policy monitored and enforced by the courts and by appropriate citizens' bodies. . . . There should be a national moratorium on "tests". . . . All evidence points to the cultural and linguistic biases of such tests. . . . Legal legitimacy has been given to a speech form spoken at times by 80–90 percent of the Black community in the United States. . . . The viability and appropriateness of Black English should in no way be construed to mean that students should not be taught competence in Standard English. . . . The media is not an ally. . . . *King*. . . reaffirms the need for more, not less, research that is responsive to the needs of Black and other dispossessed communities. (p. 170)

Language has a strong impact on education, and this was clearly recognized in the *King* case. Given that the trial occurred approximately 20 years ago, it is inexcusable that our school system has not significantly changed. Today many African Americans, in order to gain access to education and employment, have learned how to "code-switch" in order to also maintain their culture and language. They speak one language within African-American culture, and often another within the European-American context (Brinson, 1998; hooks, 1994). This would surely attest to intelligence rather than inferiority!

Individually hooks (1994) and Brinson (1998) wrote of the need for their language to be taught and spoken about. Both experienced busing to European-American schools in an effort to end segregation. Each lost their joy of learning for years, partly due to differences in language usage. This should not have occurred, and

it is something that should be ended today. Educators and administrators need to recognize and value African-American Vernacular English as a language. Rather than informing African-American students they are wrong in the way they communicate, educators need to respect their language while also teaching them Standard English. In addition, it is important that educators instruct students on which language is appropriate in which contexts. Moreover, educators should demonstrate their appreciation of the African-American language and culture by reading works by African-American authors that embrace each in a positive manner.

The use of language is of special concern because it relates to standardized assessments. Today the success of schools and students is being measured largely based on these tests. Given the language and cultural differences of many African-American students, as well as many other students in the United States, the use of standardized assessments as a measure for comparing intelligence must end (Maddux, 1997; Nieto, 1999; Perry & Delpit, 1998). If it does continue, it is essential that the assessments' usage be adapted to compensate for the language and cultural biases that exist for many students within the United States.

Another strategy for improving the educational outcomes of African-American students is to have specially defined programs for them based on both race and gender. For instance, many school districts now have programs that run explicitly for African-American males, and a number of independent schools run in this format as well (Hopkins, 1997; Hudley, 1995). The push for schools and programs for African-American males exists for several key reasons:

- (1) American African males have a shorter life span than any other group in the United States, due to a disproportionate vulnerability to disease and homicide;
- (2) structural changes in the labor market and racially discriminatory hiring practices create high unemployment rates among American African men, wide gaps between the earnings of American African and American European men, and a disproportionate number of American African men living

in poverty; (3) dysfunctional sociopsychological conditions include a number of female-headed families, a lack of positive male role models, intraracial crime, and low levels of educational attainment; (4) the internalized negative self-image and the negative attitudes of authority figures result in the disproportionate involvement of American African males with the criminal justice system; and (5) the location of drug markets within American African communities results in an increase in violence and drug abuse. (Asher, 1991, p. 10; as quoted in Hopkins, 1997, p. 30)

The societal problems that African-American males encounter are tremendous.

Currently, many schools are not set up to enable them to cope well given the odds they face (Ferguson, 2000; Hawkins, 1999; Hopkins, 1997).

Historically, within the public school system, the attention paid to African-American males has been mainly negative (Ford, Grantham, & Bailey, 1999; Hopkins, 1997; Murrell, 1999). They are not represented well within the curriculum, and the attention they receive tends to be associated with discipline (Hopkins, 1997). Ferguson (2000), in her yearlong qualitative analysis of “troublemakers” within a racially mixed school, documented the biased treatment of African-American males. She discovered that they often get into trouble for behaviors that go unnoticed when other students are the offenders. Moreover, they receive harsher punishments.

The literature and media are replete with negative images of African-American men (Polite & Davis, 1999). Still, many have successfully dealt with racism and prevailed against all odds. Polite and Davis (1999) stated, “. . . at the core of African-American males’ experience in school and society is persistence and triumph—one that has been overshadowed by the literature and discourse that focus primarily on the social pathology of African-American men . . .” (pp. 2–3). Their courage, strength, and determination should be a point of focus within the literature, school curriculums, and the media. Furthermore, schools can contribute to the strengths of African-American men through curriculum geared specifically to their needs (Hopkins, 1997).

Programs and schools for African-American males are designed to help provide a high-quality educational experience that will enable students to develop high self-esteem, perform well in school, and develop methods for coping with the difficult and discriminatory circumstances in their lives (Hopkins, 1997; Hudley, 1995). The schools and programs most often address “. . . identity/self-esteem building, academic values and skills, parents and community strengthening, [and] transition to manhood, and [they] are safe havens” (Hopkins, 1997, p. 29). Proponents of all-male programs believe that they can benefit everyone (Hopkins, 1997; Hudley, 1995). African-American men have a great deal to contribute to society, communities, and families. Many boys and young men would gain from African-American male role models, an educational setting conducive to learning, rewards and incentives for accomplishments in school, and methods for coping with their unique circumstances (Hopkins, 1997; Hudley, 1995).

African-American females may also benefit from specialized programs. The inequities of being African-American and of being female have negatively affected many African-American girls and women (Collins, 2000; Ladner, 1995; Lomotey, 1997; Taylor, 1995). Many have had to endure harsh racist and sexist circumstances (Collins, 2000; Lomotey, 1997; Taylor, 1995). A large proportion of African-American females live in poverty, and many are single mothers and heads of the household (Bing & Reid, 1996). Their education and employment opportunities are shaped by racist systemic factors. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) documented the way in which African-American women experience oppression. She concluded,

Taken together, the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned, subordinate place. This larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite White male interests and worldviews. (p. 5)

African-American women and girls face tremendous odds.

African-American girls have been essentially invisible and ignored (Brown & Gourdine, 1998; Cousins & Mabrey, 1998; Taylor, 1993). How can we possibly wonder why they are becoming increasingly aggressive (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998; Taylor, 1993)? Cousins and Mabrey (1998) recommended,

First, on an individual level, African American girls need to be demythologized and the fear that they may instill in peers, educators, and counselors alike needs to be de-constructed as a contextual adaptation to community. Mentoring and therapeutic relationships need to be established and maintained. . . . A second responsibility. . . lay in the challenge to the male-dominated hierarchy that continues to exist in most schools and organizations. . . . To a great extent, the adaptations of African-American girls in urban schools mirror much of what Wilson discovered. That is, the alarming shortage of suitable employment has contributed to an aura of combat and heightened disparities (and victimization) within urban communities. (p. 102)

Discrimination and poverty can have powerful effects. We must do what we can to support African-American females as they cope with stereotypes and structural biases that operate against them.

Within the urban environment, we may especially witness the effects of both being African-American and being female (Brown & Gourdine, 1998; Cousins & Mabrey, 1998; Sullivan, 1993; Taylor, 1993). Lisa Yvette Sullivan studied teenagers living in New Haven, CT. She observed that

young black girls in distressed urban communities felt invisible and neglected by the “save black males” social agenda. My personal experience organizing youth in New Haven, Connecticut revealed the extent to which black girls felt abandoned both by society and black leadership. Frequently consumed by the dysfunctional realities of poor families and neighborhoods, the young women I befriended told stories of emotional abuse, domestic violence, incest and rape. . . . Teenage pregnancy, understood correctly, is a condition symptomatic of much larger societal ailments. And yet, for many of these young women, it seems that few who address the issue really understand their pain and suffering. (quoted in Taylor, 1993, pp. 3–4)

Despite the conditions stacked against African-American females, their concerns have largely been ignored. Schools can begin to address this problem by providing African-American females with programs similar to those many African-American males have been receiving.

Sex education is another area of concern that schools can address (Fine, 1993). The census data from 1990–2009 show that of teenagers, Blacks had the highest birth rate of the races surveyed (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 2010). This is of major concern, as the effects of teen pregnancy are not positive (Carroll, 1998). Births to young mothers may cause physical complications as well as psychological, social, and economic consequences. Support to discourage teenage pregnancy has been lacking in this country (Carroll, 1998).

Schools can contribute to African-American female education by empowering young women with a language with which to discuss sex and relationships (Fine, 1993). By denying this, the school system exacerbates their vulnerability (Fine, 1993). The lack of discourse surrounding sex and the failure to analyze the language of victimization may contribute to a slower development of sexual subjectivity and responsibility in youth (Fine, 1993). We need to provide these young women with a voice and assistance (Consortium for Research on Black Adolescence, 1990; Fine, 1993; Taylor, 1993).

Just as programs have been established for African-American males, similar programs for should be established for African-American females. Females also need support, positive role models, and incentives. Moreover, they need to be heard and valued equally.

Last, it is important to focus on teacher quality. Teacher quality is the single most important factor influencing the education of African-American children. Hundreds of studies have shown the importance of teacher quality to student

achievement. It has been found to be the most important attribute, with no other component coming close to having as much influence (Hanushek, 2011; Rowe & Centre for Independent Studies, 2002). Still, the United States needs to simultaneously focus on making schools more equal, as that will help attract and keep high-quality teachers and will greatly benefit students. Darling-Hammond (2010) explained:

For teachers to be highly effective, they need to work in schools that are organized for success—schools that enable them to know and reach their students, teach to worthwhile learning goals, use productive tools and materials, and continually improve their practice. (p. 234)

Our quest for high-quality teachers must also include the goal of improving the infrastructure of our school systems. Teachers are most effective when they have appropriate curriculum and materials, as well as other supports.

Of great concern in the United States is that the most disadvantaged children are receiving the lowest quality teachers and the least in terms of supports and materials. Often the only teachers recruited into low-performing schools are those just out of college, or people who become teachers through alternative certification routes. It has been shown that teachers in their first 3 years are still learning much, and are not as effective as experienced teachers (Hanushek, 2010). Add to this the fact that many of these teachers are minimally trained in the field of education and in cultural awareness, and we have clear reasons to be concerned. In addition to students having new and inexperienced teachers, the teacher turnover rate is high, as many of these teachers leave within a short time. This lack of consistency is detrimental to children and schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

International studies demonstrated that when countries focus on teacher quality, changes in the educational achievement of children can be tremendous (Kihn & Miller, 2010; OECD, 2011). Finland is a prime example (D’Orio, 2012; Richards, 2011). Finland has moved from being a low-to-mid-performing country to being the

world's top-performing nation in a matter of 35 years (Sahlberg, 2011). Similar gains have been noted in South Korea and Singapore (OECD, 2011). The world has been fascinated by each country, and they all allow us to know that it can be done. If a nation focuses on teacher quality, it can produce extraordinary outcomes for children, and its achievement scores will reflect those results. It is especially imperative for the United States' most disenfranchised children, who currently tend to receive the lowest quality teachers.

Solving the problem of poor teacher quality will take much effort in a society that is very different from the international studies from which we are learning. But it is an issue that needs to be addressed for our most marginalized youth, who suffer the most from poor teacher quality and high teacher turnover. Because of the many disadvantages African-American children frequently face, they are the very students most in need of high-quality educators.

There is much we can do to bridge the achievement gap. In this chapter I began by explaining why it is necessary to do so. Instituting concepts of multicultural instruction, Afrocentricity, and African-centered pedagogy in the minds of educators and in classroom instruction will make a difference for students. An awareness of cultural difference theories, stereotype threat–disidentification theory, and cultural-ecological theory provides us with perspectives and strategies we can use in schools and the classroom. Next, I identified many different specific strategies, such as anti-biased instruction, parent involvement, high standards, cooperative learning, and demonstrating a respect for different languages and cultures. There is much that teachers and leaders can do right now, despite the barriers that exist. Last, I reviewed the need for experienced teachers with effective teaching skills for our most disadvantaged students. It is imperative that we find ways to attract and keep teachers in our low-performing schools, while at the same time striving to restructure schools

so that they receive equal resources. Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and equalizing schools for our lowest-performing students will require more time and effort on the part of our leaders. Yet, it can be accomplished if taken seriously and done well. It is an extremely important goal for the United States to strive toward.

Despite the many hardships that exist in society for African Americans, much can still be accomplished through training education employees for cultural awareness and by monitoring instructional practices. Educators can learn effective strategies and leaders may advocate for and create programs that will meet the specific needs of various groups of African-American students. For the sake of U.S. children and the nation's future, diversity must be valued. We must fix the achievement gap for the benefit of all. Therefore, it is extremely important to document and analyze the perspectives of African-American educators so that we may better understand and practice inputs for the conceptualization, design, and implementation of policy for change.

CHAPTER IV:
**THE PROFESSION OF BEING A TEACHER IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL
SYSTEM**

The teaching profession differs from what many people believe it to be. New teachers are shocked by the realities of teaching. I believe that the realities of teaching had an impact on teachers' willingness to participate in my research. The time, stress, and frustration teachers experience may have been a deterrent to participating in the research I had planned. I also believe that the type of teacher training they received was, in most cases, not the type of training that I received at an elite research university. As a result, they did not have the research background to properly understand the paperwork I was asking them to sign in order to participate in my research. These problems further contributed to my inability to gain participants for the study.

This chapter describes the options for teacher training, as a difference in training may have been a factor. It also highlights the issues that exist or may exist for teachers in public schools. These issues may have resulted in stress, a lack of time, and a sense of vulnerability that prevented teachers from wanting to participate.

The Four Main Opportunities for Becoming a Teacher in the United States

Teachers enter the teaching profession through four main avenues. First, many teachers enter the profession with no teacher training. They may have a high school diploma, or a different 4-year college degree, but lack training specifically in the field of education. One can find these teachers home schooling, in private schools, or in public schools where they have been allowed to receive "emergency certification" to teach because of a significant shortage of teachers. Emergency certification is allowed in some states as a result of critical teacher shortages. This certification bypasses state

licensing requirements. These paths to teaching have been growing fast and are subject to little regulation (Andrew, 2005).

Another avenue for teachers to enter the field is through direct entry. Teachers are trained through organized programs that are not affiliated with a college or university. In many cases, the federal government supports and encourages these programs (Andrew, 2005). As of 2005, the National Center for Education Information reported that in 47 states and the District of Columbia, 538 alternative route programs were being offered. In 2004, 35,000 individuals entered teaching through these alternative routes. These routes to certification began in 1980 as a method of ensuring that teacher shortages would be minimized. According to the National Center for Education Information, alternative routes for teacher certification are now regarded highly and are a major source of the recruitment of “highly qualified teachers.” Ninety-nine percent of people entering the field through this route hold at least a bachelor’s degree. The information provided is unclear about the educational level of the other 1% (Feistritz, 2005a).

The most popular way to enter the field of education is to attend college-based teacher education programs dedicated to teacher training. Often these programs are at state liberal arts colleges or regional state universities. Over the past 50 years, most teachers have become certified in this way (Andrew, 2005). I too received my initial teacher training and license through a state college.

The fourth avenue for teacher education is private liberal arts colleges and major research universities (Andrew, 2005). Major research universities have a high-level focus on research. I did not learn how to conduct research that involved having to obtain research documents approved by an institutional review board (IRB) until I attended a major research university. Although I had previously attended a private liberal arts college known for a high level of research activity, in the field of education

I did not receive that research training. Rather, I learned how to conduct research in the classroom for my own use. Thus, I received two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree without ever having learned to conduct research that required approval by an IRB.

Since most teachers are not trained to conduct research requiring IRB approval, I can understand that the paperwork I presented was daunting and, despite my explanations, may have discouraged teachers from participating. I have been a teacher for about 15 years and worked in a variety of schools. Yet, I have never known of an individual researcher approaching anyone I knew, including myself. When research was conducted in the schools I taught in, it came down from administrators, and we were never required to sign any paperwork. An individual researcher approaching me would be a new experience and may have been a foreign experience to the teachers with whom I spoke.

Within the schools where I sought to conduct my research there were at least 25 African-American teachers teaching within the district. They were minorities within the district. Yet, at least within the schools where I was able to meet them, they were not isolated as the only African-American teachers. Rather, at least five African-American teachers taught in each school, and they seemed to have bonded with one another. They appeared to rely on each other for friendship and support. Because I never received permission to conduct my research, I was never able to get the basic questionnaires completed or to ask any questions. However, given what I know about New York State, I believe the teachers had received their training through colleges and universities. I do not know if any of the teachers were trained at major research institutions. However, it did appear that the forms I needed to have signed were foreign to them. They were surprised by the paperwork involved.

Ultimately, many teachers were willing to talk “off the record.” It’s hard to know whether this was due to a distrust of me when paperwork was involved, whether it was a distrust of the process itself, or whether the paperwork alone was the issue. I believe it was a combination of many factors and that the paperwork may have been an “easy” excuse to decline participation. Here I present some of the factors that exist in teacher training and public schools that may have been a strong disincentive.

The Demands of Being a Public School Teacher in the United States

I begin this section by reviewing my own teaching experience, as once again, my perspective becomes a part of the information. I do this so that I can provide firsthand examples and supplement the information in the literature. In brief, I was a full-time public school teacher in the United States for over 13 years. I also taught adult education part-time for a full year, and I now teach in a rural Australian public high school. Within U.S. public schools, I taught in a town, a small city, and a large city school district.

Regardless of environment or grade level, teaching has been very difficult for me in many ways. Teachers have numerous responsibilities, aside from the teaching. Our job is tiring and ongoing. Most of us take work home with us, and many of us even work during the summers. While I recognize that not everyone has the same experience, the stories I find in the literature are much the same, and the majority of teachers I know face similar challenges.

In the following discussion, when I mention teachers, schools, and teaching, I am referring to public school teachers and public schools, where 90% of teachers teach (Newman, 1994). As I describe teachers and teaching, I do so based on the literature and my experience. I am not able to tell specifically what teaching is like for the teachers I hoped to interview, as New York State offers a range of environments in which to teach. That is information I would have had to gather. The difference in

wealth alone between the two school districts in which I attempted to conduct my research would have made for very different narratives from the teachers.

Those who do not teach in schools often do not understand what it means to be a school teacher. People notice that teachers' contracted hours are short and that they receive generous vacation time, which most often includes two months off in the summer. This arrangement does sound enviable when one considers the time involved in other careers and the lack of vacation time that much of the U.S. workforce receives. Yet, even with all of the vacation time factored in, most teachers do not earn what others in careers with similar educational requirements earn (Johnson, 2005).

Teaching is complex, and many teachers leave the field each school year. Teaching is not quite what it seems. Dworkin (1987) stated, "Teaching is a vulnerable occupation that is characterized by much-higher-than-average rates of turnover" (p. 1). As an example, the national attrition rate for new teachers in the first 3 years of teaching is about 26% (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2005), and many more teachers leave after that initial period as well. In 2005, results of a national survey by the National Center for Education Information showed that 40% of public school teachers did not believe they would be teaching in 5 years (Feistritz, 2005a). While that figure includes retirements, it is still a very large percentage. If teaching were the dream that many people think it is, there would not be such a high turnover rate. Additionally, many more people would be entering the field. We would not have teacher shortages.

Teachers in schools serving large populations of African-American students tend to be shouldered with additional burdens. The students often need more from them in terms of love and care, as issues of poverty often affect these students. Additionally, the system itself does not provide for the same resources that are available to students who live in more affluent areas (Anyon, 1997; Rousmaniere,

2005). These factors can make the job much more demanding. I know this not only from the literature but also from personal experience.

So what exactly does it mean to be a public school teacher in general? If one is an effective teacher, it means being much more than just a teacher. It means working many more hours than the contract requires. It means the giving of lots of time, energy, and emotion. Moss, Reilly, Burdman, and Parsons (2005) described the job:

. . . to teach is to establish and maintain relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. It is to advance one's own skills and knowledge. It is to be a role model, counselor, mentor, and advocate. Teaching involves early mornings, late nights, weekends, and yes, even summers. Assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, management, organization, discipline, and sometimes lunch duty are but a few of the daily responsibilities. Split-second decision making is routine. The stakes are real. Respect is elusive. The pay is poor. The rewards are tremendous. The dedication is real. (p. 108)

Teaching does not mean that one is just a teacher. It requires many more skills and much more time. Although I was fortunate to be in a position where my pay was not poor in recent years, this description fits very aptly with my experience.

My days at work as a teacher in the United States were full, and it was very stressful to accomplish all that was required of me. I would arrive early, and I would stay late each afternoon. In addition, I brought work home at night, and my husband watched our son for hours each weekend so that I could complete schoolwork. There was no way that I could ever complete my duties in the contracted time. The literature is rife with examples of teaching just like this. For example, Johnson (2005) stated,

There are few breaks in a teacher's day and lunch is often no more than twenty or thirty minutes. Teachers cannot do a good job in the classroom without committing more time after official school hours planning for the next day's classes, gathering materials, and grading students' work, time that must come from evenings and weekends. The relentless schedule and intense demands of working with so many students in an institutional setting make teaching exhausting work, no matter how exhilarating or rewarding it might be. (p. 165)

That is something I continually try to explain to people who do not teach. By the time I get a break, I am very much in need of that break. It is very important for me if I am going to be an effective teacher. Often, many teachers use breaks to catch up on work and to prepare work as well. It has been my experience that most teachers strongly feel they need the breaks they receive.

Teaching is also not what many teachers themselves expect it to be. In Brown (2005), Emily, a new teacher who began her teaching career in her forties after having a previous career, stated:

Having my own class was not what I thought it would be. I never realized how much time it would take. Of course, I wanted everything to be perfect each day for my students, but it was just impossible with so many other demands on me. The administration wanted this and that, my team needed to take care of discipline, we had to organize field trips, the list never stopped and this had nothing to do with curriculum. I hated this. I honestly thought that the main focus of my job would be on student learning. (p. 641)

Based on my experience, my reading, and the many teachers I know, Emily expresses well what many teachers feel. It is indeed a shock to learn that teaching just isn't what one thought it would be, and it is surely a disappointment to find out that student learning is not the main focus of a teacher's job.

In addition to the many factors already mentioned, teaching affects people in many other ways. In a study identifying the reasons for teacher turnover and burnout, Dworkin (1987) found that numerous factors were upsetting to people. Teachers cited the following reasons for their dissatisfaction: lack of discipline, drug-related issues in schools, lack of public confidence in education, low pay, problematic security, oversized classes, culture shock, growing bureaucratization of urban education, and professionals expecting more autonomy than they actually get.

Several of the factors mentioned above are related to student behavior. Because of the laws in place today and the negative publicity that many schools are

susceptible to, students who do not know how to behave properly are still often permitted in schools. In many cases, teachers must deal with behaviors they find unacceptable, even when it disrupts and takes away from the learning of other students. Additionally, drug-related issues and problematic security can each account for teachers not feeling safe in their workplace.

As I described in Chapter I, I know firsthand that it is not comfortable trying to teach when one does not feel safe. I have heard many stories from teachers and now know that numerous educators across the United States work in situations that are unsafe and chaotic. It is a wonder that countless schools find dedicated teachers. Furthermore, it is understandable that many people opt out of teaching when these are the environments to which they are exposed.

Several factors already mentioned are related to the conditions under which teachers work. Low pay is one problem. Johnson (2005) explained:

The common assumption was that women were more suitable for teaching and could be paid less. Given women's history of second-class citizenship, it is no surprise that U.S. teachers, 80 percent of whom, in 2004, were women, continued to have second-rate standing. (p. 162)

As with many careers in the United States, it is upsetting to not only be paid poorly but to have that correlate with the fact that you are a woman.

Rousmaniere (2005) described the historical conditions affecting teachers:

One theme encapsulates the complex history of the work of public school teachers in the United States. As public education developed and expanded, increased expectations were placed on teachers at the same time that the economic insecurity and ambiguous professional identity of teachers remained static. (p. 1)

Thus, not only were women being paid unfairly for their work as teachers but, over time, they also experienced higher expectations while still receiving a lack of respect

for the jobs they performed. It is therefore not surprising that many women sought careers in other fields, and that many others leave the teaching profession each year.

When I first began teaching, for many years I kept saying that if I were paid better the job would be a lot easier to tolerate. I was fortunate to learn that I was right. Once I was paid properly everything I did became easier to handle. When I got paid a fair wage it made it more tolerable to stay late in the afternoon or into the evening. It also made it more acceptable, in my mind, for me to work on weekends. I recognized that those who are paid well often work long hours. Thus, I was okay with doing so. Putting in all those extra hours was not okay with me when I was not getting paid a fair amount. I still did my job and worked the hours, but I was much more upset about it and always sought a way out of my chosen career.

As previously mentioned, culture shock is another factor negatively affecting new teachers. Most teachers in the United States are White, female, and middle-class. The student population, on the other hand, is growing more racially diverse, and many students are of a lower class. According to the National Education Association (2010), in 1986, 90% of teachers were White, and in 2006 that number decreased to 87%. Clearly, it is still the case that a very large percentage of public school teachers are White. The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported that in 1988, 68% of public school students were White. By 2008, that number had decreased to 55%. The trend is that White students will soon be minorities in the public school system; yet, White teachers will remain a large majority. Feistritzer (2005b) with the National Center for Education Information reported that public school teachers are also increasingly female. In 2005, 82% of public school teachers were female, an increase from 69% in 1986. Diversity is truly needed within the teaching field. Until that can occur, diversity training and support is a necessity for the many White teachers who

are experiencing culture shock, because what they do and experience affects our children.

Along with the many struggles I mention above, the growing bureaucratization of education is another challenge. In fact, as far back as 1961 there were more central office administrators in New York State than in all of Europe. With the increase in upper management comes extra work for teachers, especially in terms of documentation (Mayer, 1961). Thus, when I taught in the city, not only were teachers struggling with all of the factors I've mentioned, but also the paperwork teachers were expected to keep was excessive. I don't imagine that many people were able to do it. That alone could cause any teacher a great deal of stress.

New teachers may also experience being dismayed by a lack of autonomy in the classroom, as they tend to expect it (Johnson, 2005; Newman, 1994). Most teachers learn quickly that this is not the case. In the vast majority of schools, teachers are given a curriculum that must be taught and books with which to teach it. Frequently, teachers are even told how to teach and given "scripts." We teachers are often not free to make our own decisions. Schedules are filled for us, and we work very hard just to accomplish the required things each day. There is little time for careful thought, reflection, or creativity. For the most part, we do what we are told. Johnson (2005) explained how this has occurred:

During this period when business practices were in vogue, teachers functioned explicitly as subordinate workers whose job performance was closely monitored and whose independence in doing their work was tightly circumscribed. This hierarchical relationship has largely continued to the present. . . . Low pay and its corollary, low status, indirectly limit teachers' role in determining how schools educated students. . . . Since teachers' salaries are funded with tax dollars, citizens at both the local and state levels claim the right to hold them accountable for their work. (pp. 163–164)

Teachers are not given the respect one would expect in a profession. Although parents and leaders will hold teachers accountable, teachers have very little decision-making power. Most choices about what occurs in the classroom are made at the state, local, and district levels. These days, such decisions are even made at the federal level.

Teacher autonomy is an illusion.

The No Child Left Behind Act signed into law by the federal government in 2001 has further eroded teacher autonomy and increased pressure on teachers. The law requires annual tests in reading and math and an additional subject test for all children in grades 3 through 8. We are told that these tests are designed to measure students' progress. If it is determined that students are not making sufficient progress, sanctions are imposed on schools that consistently fall short. Now teachers essentially teach to a test. In some areas, this pressure is exacerbated by the fact that teachers' salaries are also connected to test scores.

This atmosphere of high-stakes testing may well deter some people from entering the field of education, and others from staying. One can debate whether testing is an adequate measure of student success. One can also debate whether students and schools are really improving under these laws, or whether they are just becoming more test-savvy. Or, are school districts shifting students around so that no one school is ever consistently falling short? Otherwise, is something else going on entirely? Certainly, the general premise of the law is an insult to teachers. After all, what teacher enters education with the intention of leaving some children behind?

Despite the public perception that teachers have an easy job, teachers clearly see things differently. Newman (1994) explained:

In spite of all the publicity about teacher burnout, some people still cling to the belief that teaching is a fun job. It is not. Getting through to students can certainly be rewarding, but reaching them takes hour after hour of effort. Fun is not the right word. (p. 7)

Again, teaching is much more than actual teaching. It takes teachers many hours to prepare for each school day.

In addition to the many factors mentioned, Gallup polls have shown that teachers believe that schools lack parental interest and support, public financial support, student interest, and student discipline (Newman, 1994). Moreover, my experience has taught me that many classrooms are overcrowded and that the public is unsupportive of teachers. New teachers in a city environment identified the following as problems: mentors were needed, they felt isolated, they had many duties beyond teaching, there was a lack of curriculum, the time required was enormous, there was little respect for teachers, and innovation was resisted (Brown, 2005). Clearly, all schools and all teachers are different, and not every teacher experiences the same problems. Still, it is clear that teaching is not what many people think it is.

As mentioned in Chapter I, teachers in their first few years are also under pressure to obtain tenure, which typically takes between 2 and 3 years. Teachers are probationary and can be dismissed easily until this status is obtained, which creates more stress for new teachers. An untenured teacher is typically required to undergo more formal observations and to complete more paperwork. An untenured teacher tends to feel more vulnerable and less secure in his or her job.

It is clear through the literature that teachers face many responsibilities, duties, and obstacles in U.S. public schools. The career is neither easy nor what many people, including teachers-in-training, expect. Teachers fulfill multifaceted roles within a school, with teaching being but one piece of the job. The role of a teacher is often time-consuming and stress-inducing. Given current laws and the tenure process for new teachers, it can also be a job in which teachers experience pressure. Educators who work in schools where student achievement is low and resources are lacking may feel this stress and pressure even more acutely.

Thus, the answer to my original question of whether the teachers I sought to work with were uncomfortable as teachers and/or as African Americans in the system has been answered at this stage. African-American teachers felt uncomfortable with my research for both reasons. As discussed in this chapter, certainly any teacher may feel too overburdened to participate in the type of research I proposed, and any teacher may feel uncomfortable with the paperwork involved. Also, all teachers may feel more vulnerable if they do not have tenure. Still, African-American teachers are fewer in number and often face additional challenges.

African-American teachers are more likely to be negatively affected by my proposed research. African-American educators often face more stress in their jobs, as they most often serve disenfranchised youth who attend schools with a higher teacher turnover rate and a lack of resources. Many African-American teachers are also spending extra time planning for culturally relevant instruction and may also be taking additional steps to meet the needs of disadvantaged students. As noted previously, there are fewer pools of African-American teachers from which I could find potential subjects, lowering my chances of finding a sufficient number of teachers willing to participate. As I discuss in more depth in the next chapter, African Americans have also been subjected to a long history of racism and disenfranchisement. Race is indeed a salient factor. Yet, the experiences of being a teacher are also an issue and could deter any teacher from participating.

Since many teachers experience strain and tension as a result of their complicated job descriptions, it is possible that most teachers would not want to take the extra time to participate in a research study that requires additional hours from their daily schedules. It is very conceivable that the teachers I sought to interview and observe were in fact overwhelmed with their workloads. This may be especially true since I was attempting to conduct my research in schools that serve disadvantaged

populations. It is likely that I would have added extra pressure to teachers' already busy lives. It is also possible that the circumstances in their schools caused African-American teachers to feel uncomfortable with the notion of being observed teaching by an outsider such as myself. It is also plausible that the teachers were unfamiliar with the type of research I was attempting to conduct and the paperwork involved. Unfortunately, a lack of experience with the research process may have resulted in teachers feeling as though they would be vulnerable if they participated. Regardless, the sheer realities of teachers' lives, and especially African-American teachers, may have deterred them from participating in multiple interviews and observations with me.

CHAPTER V:
**REFLECTION ON RACE, EDUCATION, AND LIFE EXPERIENCE IN THE
UNITED STATES**

In my effort to understand why I was unable to conduct my research, I have identified a complex set of factors that inhibited my success. Pronounced among them is the long history of mistreatment and racism against African Americans in the United States. This situation can be attributed to European domination and the perceived ethnic superiority of White society prior to the formation of the United States of America. White privilege, as it is known, has been institutionalized and maintained to protect those who are in power. These practices continue to evolve to this day and are ever-changing.

So that White privilege can be more fully understood, I proceed with a brief history of African Americans in the United States. I also provide a background history on the African-American educational system in the North and South, as well as specifically in New York State, as that is where my research was to be conducted. Last, I provide information on educational policies, practice, views, values, and beliefs that affect African Americans. Although it is well known that mistreatment of and racism against African Americans has occurred in the United States throughout its history, this chapter very clearly shows the effects of White privilege on African-American society and the education they receive today.

Historical Perspectives on African Americans

Beginning in about 1610, traders brought enslaved Africans into the United States. The trade of enslaved Africans was conducted by European nations including Holland, France, Great Britain, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands. Upon arriving in the United States, enslaved Africans were sold again and forced to perform unpaid

labor for their owners. Inherently this free labor made wealth for the many who owned enslaved Africans or who participated within the system, while leaving the Africans within the United States with little to call their own. The practice of slavery continued in the United States for centuries.

Even though the end was still a long ways off, beginning in 1775 it became clear that the country was moving toward a gradual and complete end to slavery (Bond, 1970). Many Africans who had been enslaved or were freed fled north looking for a better life. Unfortunately, they still encountered hardships similar to those experienced in the South. Governmental policies, in addition to slavery, further denied opportunities to people of color in the United States. For example, Black Code laws, Jim Crow, the Homestead Act, and Supreme Court decisions starting from the 1800s all benefited Whites while denying privileges to African Americans. A harsh fact was that African Americans had to accept the reality that the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence did not apply to them. Slavery in the United States finally came to an end in 1865 with the completion of the Civil War and the ratification of the 13th Amendment, but segregation between Whites and Blacks did not. It took another 88 years for the last of the Jim Crow laws to be overturned, outlawing this practice. As I will explain, in many ways segregation is still a fact of life for most of us today.

Within education, African Americans have endured a long struggle toward gaining instruction equal to that of their European-American peers, and the struggle is still ongoing. Beginning in the seventeenth century, when the first settlers arrived with enslaved Africans, opposition to this treatment was voiced, and ways to receive an education were sought. With few rights of their own, African Americans were able to find methods for gaining an education. Within this process they faced not only inferior circumstances but also outright hostility in many areas, including mob violence and

the destruction of their schools. Despite the hardships involved, African Americans persevered and made great gains. Through extensive effort, African Americans have increasingly gained access to a high-quality education. Yet for the vast majority, the struggle continues.

Historical Perspectives on African-American Education in the Northern United States

The North was often viewed as a nicer place for African Americans prior to the Civil War, but African Americans in the North frequently endured hardships similar to those experienced in the South. Many communities did not want to accept them, much less help to support them (Bond, 1970). In addition, many leaders, courts, media personnel, and researchers created a climate that made life difficult for African Americans in the United States (Watkins, 2001).

Education for African Americans was still more widely available and of better quality in the North than in the South. Although many African Americans were able to receive an education in the North before the Civil War, their numbers were actually very small in relation to the entire population of African Americans in the United States. Bond (1970) stated, "Previous to the Civil War, education for the Negro was provided only in scattered schools in the North where 1.7% of the Negro population of school age attended school" (p. xiii). Unfortunately, a similar statistic does not exist for the nineteenth century after the Civil War. For the entire United States, however, the 1890 census reported that there were 25,000 "colored," teachers, and that 15% of African-American college graduates were teachers (Du Bois, 1901). Thus, we can be relatively confident that the numbers did increase, although primarily in the South.

The struggle for African-American education in the North varied from state to state and from community to community. Public schools were often not an option for the education of African Americans. Instead, African Americans raised their own

money for schooling. Otherwise, philanthropists and church leaders gave them money to establish their own schools or created the schools for them. These last options most often came at the price of having to abide by the belief systems of philanthropists and church leaders, resulting in low standards for the education of African Americans.

Many more events occurred in the United States throughout the nineteenth century that influenced education and the general climate for African Americans. As early as 1804, Black Codes were enacted, limiting the basic rights of the African-American community. They existed in nearly every non-slaveholding state and became more extreme and widespread during the nineteenth century. These laws served to deny African-American immigration into some states, and in other states they served to degrade African Americans and to enforce segregation. Racist attitudes, economic competition, and a desire to avoid violence greatly affected the behavior of European Americans and other voluntary immigrant groups within the United States.

In 1816, the American Colonization Society was formed with the goal of raising money to send African Americans to what later became Liberia. By 1830, this organization had become a Northern organization to address the Northern “problem” of free African Americans (Strane, 1990). Irvine and Dunkerton-Town (1998) described the impact of this organization:

In Carter G. Woodson’s view (1919), the years 1830 to 1835 were the greatest single period of racial oppression free blacks endured in the first half of the nineteenth century. The free black population expanded from 59,557 in 1790 to over 300,000 by 1830. This “anomalous” population’s dramatic increase did not go unnoticed. . . . While free blacks knew they had many enemies, the movement that cut deepest was the African colonization campaign. . . . The response of Philadelphia free blacks to the formation of the “American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States” was representative of how free blacks elsewhere felt about this movement and this organization. . . . Three thousand blacks packed into the Church and bitterly and unanimously denounced the scheme. . . . (pp. 260–262)

This Society posed a great threat to the well-being of African Americans in the North, and did have an impact.

Racist practices were becoming much more commonplace. African Americans and abolitionists responded harshly, while European Americans counterattacked. Fears grew after Nat Turner's slave rebellion on August 22, 1831, in Southampton County, Virginia. Nearly 60 European-American people were killed. This rebellion precipitated even more Black Codes designed specifically to prevent the education and freedom of African Americans (Strane, 1990). Whites became more extreme in their display of hatred as their fears grew. In 1827 a newspaper run by African Americans was being printed for the first time, and in 1831 a European-American man named William Lloyd Garrison began publishing an abolitionist newspaper called *The Liberator*. A mob of pro-slavery people responded by dragging Garrison through the streets of Boston in 1835. Tensions were strong between those for and against slavery.

Throughout the next decade things calmed down; yet, separate schooling for African Americans existed in most Northern states. Du Bois (1901) referred to the period 1835–1870 as the “Period of Separate Public Schools” (p. 20). In Massachusetts the State Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools for African Americans were legal in *Roberts v. City of Boston (1849)*. Despite such problems, African Americans gained some benefits during this period. For example, in 1844 the Massachusetts Constitution was amended to read, “The state funds were declared for the equal benefit of all people. . .” (p. 379). At least in theory, Massachusetts' African Americans were given the right to equal school funding.

By 1850 the situation for African Americans turned again and became even more restrictive. The Fugitive Slave Law was enacted during this year. This law provided White United States citizens with “. . . the right to organize a posse at any point in the United States to aid in recapturing runaway slaves. Courts and police

everywhere in the United States were obligated to assist them” (Blockson, 1994, p. 11). As a result, many African Americans were arrested and many fled to Canada. For example, in Columbia, Pennsylvania the African-American population decreased from 943 to 487 people (Woodson, 1968).

Clearly, the Fugitive Slave Law had an impact on African-American education. Woodson (1968) described the Northern situation:

The African Methodist and Baptist churches of Buffalo lost many communicants. Out of a membership of one hundred and fourteen, the colored Baptist church of Rochester lost one hundred and twelve, including its pastor. About the same time eighty-four members of the African Baptist church of Detroit crossed into Canada. The break-up of these churches meant the end of the day [schools] and Sunday-schools which were maintained in them. Moreover, the migration of these Negroes aroused such bitter feelings against them that their schoolhouses were frequently burned. It often seemed that it was just as unpopular to educate the blacks in the North as in the South. Ohio, Illinois, and Oregon enacted laws to prevent them from coming into these commonwealths. (pp. 242–243)

The law resulted in many African Americans having to flee their towns and in the loss of many African-American churches and schools. The situation was horrific for African Americans.

Two U.S. Supreme Court decisions in the same decade added to this drama. In 1857, the court ruled in *Scott v. Sandford* that African Americans lacked legal status in U.S. courts. The *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision stated that African-American people were not citizens, and that Southerners could take slaves as property to the West (Martin, 1998). The situation for African Americans was growing more and more difficult.

The most significant event of the nineteenth century, the American Civil War (1861–1865), also had an impact on education for African-American students in the North, and brought about many changes for the United States. During the war many more African Americans fled to the North. Racist reactions against African Americans

intensified, and although improvements did occur, persisted until 1865 (Martin, 1998), when the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified to outlaw slavery. Finally, this amendment resulted in improvements for African Americans in the North. During the period of Reconstruction (1865–1877) following the war, the Civil Rights Act recognized African Americans as citizens in 1866 (Strane, 1990), and the Fourteenth Amendment provided citizenship and equal protection to them in 1868. Next, in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment granted African-American men the right to vote. Then, in 1875, the Civil Rights Law further increased their rights by forbidding racial discrimination in many public areas (Martin, 1998).

During the Reconstruction Era, racial extremist groups appeared in the South, and these events affected the North. One of the groups, known as the Ku Klux Klan, formed in 1865, after the Civil War ended. Political power in the South shifted at this time, and in every Southern state Democrats regained control. This led to Jim Crow laws, which allowed the segregation of Black people from the White population. Lynching, mob violence, and race riots were acceptable means of enforcing Jim Crow in the South. This increase in violence and racial abuse encouraged millions of African Americans to flee to the North after 1877. Sadly, once there they found that similar segregation conditions existed and the same type of violence occurred.

Several Supreme Court decisions negatively impacted the African-American efforts made during the Reconstruction Era. In 1883 the Civil Rights Law of 1875 was nullified. In 1892 the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld Jim Crow laws by supporting separate but equal accommodations for Blacks and Whites, and the U.S. Supreme Court endorsed this decision in 1896 (Martin, 1998). This was a test case staged by African Americans, and certainly they were upset by the results. Most absurd about this case is the fact that Plessy was only 1/8 Black (according to the way

they measured such things in those days; Martin, 1998). Racism continued to be upheld by the courts.

In spite of the many challenges African Americans faced, they still pursued an equal education. Bond (1934) concluded,

Despite all opposition, the schools flourished and were responsible for the training of a distinguished leadership for Negroes both before and after the Civil War. Charles Reason, Alexander Crummell, John M. Langston, Henry Highland Garnett, Ira Aldridge, and other notable men received their first training in the private schools established by philanthropists or by Negro parents for Negro children. (Bond, 1934, p. 372)

Even during extremely difficult times, many African Americans struggled forward and managed to gain an excellent education for themselves and to educate other members of their race.

A History of African-American Education in New York State

I now turn to relevant historical developments related to the education process and its legacy in New York State. These developments help to further explain the persistent contradictions and ongoing problems that motivated the initial research I attempted to conduct.

In the eighteenth century the proportion of African Americans in New York State rose to 14%. Yet, by the time of the Civil War, this number had dropped to 1% and did not increase much again until the twentieth century. Thus, when discussing education for African Americans in New York State, we are often discussing a very small number of people.

The documented history of education in New York State begins in the seventeenth century, when education for African Americans began with the goal of Christianizing them. We lack information on these early schools, but we do know that by 1704 Elias Neau opened a school for Christianizing African Americans. Although

he passed away in 1722 (Du Bois, 1901), the school ran at least on a part-time basis until 1783 (Mabee, 1979). Later, throughout the nineteenth century, African-American schools were spread out across the state. Public schools, church schools, and private schools were all established for African Americans during that century in New York. Beginning in the 1830s, African Americans began to fight for integrated schools. Yet, it was not until the 1870s through the 1910s that they were successful (Mabee, 1979).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, benevolent societies addressed education once the English church organizations lost their legitimacy with the end of the American Revolution and the United States' independence. The New York Manumission Society, a benevolent society that formed in 1785, was very influential in New York City. Its influence extended so far that it was responsible for the policy of gradual emancipation that was meant to conclude in 1827, but due to a loophole in the law did not fully end until 1841. The Manumission Society also established the African Free School in 1787. Several hundred students were enrolled in this school by 1820. In 1830, African Americans were able to take over the schools established by the New York Manumission Society. They replaced most White teachers and the White principal with African Americans. Later the school expanded into several schools (Mabee, 1979). Up until the 1830s, benevolent societies were largely responsible for African-American education.

From the 1820s to the 1850s, European Americans ran charity schools for African Americans in at least eight different places throughout the state. But raising money for these schools was becoming increasingly difficult. During this period, in 1821 a law was enacted that enabled all European-American men to vote, but African Americans had to own property in order to gain the same right. The practice of segregation was growing as well and European-American racism was increasing. Frequently the benevolent societies were condescending. It was perceived that

African-American parents were illiterate or seemed to be indifferent toward education. Children had little reason to believe that academic success would lead to economic success. The curriculum was limited, and inadequate methods of instruction were being used in many schools. Despite these difficulties, benevolent societies and charity schools did contribute greatly to the education of African Americans in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the fact that they hired well-educated and socially aware African-American teachers helped to offset the problems (Mabee, 1979).

Although the African Free Schools were making progress, by 1810 Sunday schools were also contributing to the education of African Americans in New York State. They generally educated students who were attending neither school nor church. The curriculum included religion, reading, writing, and math. From 1810 to 1860, 110 known African-American Sunday schools existed in the state. In total they reached approximately 8,000 students (Mabee, 1979).

In 1834 the African Free Schools were turned over to the New York Public School Society. This society was in charge of the largest charity schools for African Americans. Eventually these schools became the city school system, when in 1853 the New York Public School Society gave its educational authority to the New York City Board of Education (Bond, 1970; Mabee, 1979).

Public schools began to be encouraged in New York State as early as the 1790s. However, there was no state law regarding African-American education. As a result, both integrated and African-American education existed where European Americans tolerated it and did not exist where European Americans did not. For the most part, African Americans were treated poorly and de facto did not attend integrated schools (Mabee, 1979).

African-American schools run by school districts were gradually instituted (Mabee, 1979). In 1827 there were 15,000 African Americans in New York State, but

only two schools existed for their public education (Strane, 1990). Yet it has been estimated that from the 1810s to the 1940s African-American schools existed in 43 different cities, towns, or villages within the state. These schools most often were established as a result of African-American initiative. Still, the state contributed to these separate schools by insisting that African-American children attend African-American schools (Mabee, 1979).

In 1841 laws required that separate schools be established for every school system that voted for it (Mabee, 1979). By 1847, 5,000 African-American students were enrolled in separate public schools, and a New York State commissioner complained of unequal funding, stating that public tax funds were being diverted to European-American schools. Two cases also helped to maintain separate schooling in the nineteenth century. A case in Buffalo, New York, in 1869 supported separate schools, and in 1883 the Supreme Court decision in *People vs. Gallagher* ruled for separate but equal schools. In addition, litigation arising from alleged discrimination in the Borough of Queens in 1899 resulted in the same decision (Martin, 1998). These separate schools became the target of violence. Finally, in 1900 the statute was repealed, and separate schools were no longer permissible in New York State (Bond, 1970).

African Americans in New York State were also being prepared as teachers. Although Albany, Oswego, and New York City each offered full-time normal schools for teacher preparation, very few African Americans were admitted (Mabee, 1979). However, that changed with a state law in 1873 that required equal educational opportunities. Mabee (1979) wrote, “In comparison with other submerged groups in the New York metropolitan population at about the end of the century blacks were showing that they had a moderate drive for professional education” (p. 113). The fact that African Americans did not show a “high level of drive”, according to this author,

may be a result of being compared with immigrants who had more educational opportunities before coming here. Woodson (1919) also made an important point about African-American teachers. He stated, “Many intelligent Negroes who followed other occupations had teaching for their avocation. In fact almost every colored person who could read and write was a missionary teacher among his people” (p. 109). Thus, many African Americans in New York State acted as teachers. In New York, as elsewhere, African Americans were demonstrating an interest in being educated and educating their children. They were also proving their intelligence in spite of the many forms of racism directed against them.

Historical Perspectives on African-American Education in the Southern United States

The history of education for African Americans in the South was similar to that of the North, yet also very different because of the unique circumstances that existed there. I review it here, as it affected many African Americans who later traveled to the North and it had implications for African-American education in the North.

From about 1610 to 1865, during the years of slavery in the South, many enslaved Africans were able to receive an education. They were able to gain formal knowledge in a variety of ways. One method was through religious education. Interest in providing this type of education began as soon as enslaved Africans reached the shores of the United States, and it is noted that some progress was made with this idea. A century later, education became formally available to them (Bullock, 1967). Additionally, often masters noted the intelligence that enslaved Africans demonstrated, found they needed specific skills for the benefit of their plantation, and sent selected enslaved Africans for specialty training. As evidence of the extent to which this took place, Bullock (1967) stated,

. . . permissiveness contributed to the development of a group of skilled workers within the free Negro and slave populations. This fact is clearly evidenced by the number who were employed in skilled occupations during 1848. Using the industrial census of Charleston, Phillips showed that free Negroes were employed in all but eight of the fifty occupations composing the skilled group, and slaves were employed in all but thirteen. (p. 7)

Many enslaved Africans were able to learn the skills to succeed in numerous occupations.

Additionally, Bullock (1967) described that life on many plantations led to closeness and intimacy among enslaved Africans and their masters. As such, many enslaved Africans learned the morals, demeanor, and ways of the Whites. Ultimately, this closeness led to the development of literacy. Black children played with White children, and often playing school with them was enough to teach the enslaved Africans how to read. Other times, literacy was formally taught to enslaved Africans. Learning was simply expected of them. Yet, on other occasions, enslaved Africans were eager to learn and found their own distinct ways to gain this education. The fact is that laws forbidding the education of enslaved Africans were not well enforced and did not work. Enslaved Africans were frequently able to gain an education, despite the fact that a public education was not available to them (Bullock, 1967).

After emancipation, the South was not in a position to offer education to all Whites, let alone to Blacks. The South had a history of not providing education to its lower classes. Additionally, many debates occurred over how the United States should cope with the freed enslaved Africans. Thoughts of returning them to Africa, leaving them to the mercy of the South, and of making them immediate and full citizens were expressed. The determining factor was that the cheap labor of Blacks was still badly needed in the South in order for Whites to succeed. Southern farmers used their influence and power to prevent new schools from being created. After all, the farmers knew that parents living in poverty would forgo the benefits of child labor so that their

children could receive an education. However, a method of appeasing African Americans and giving them hope was found in providing them with a second-class education. As a result, many African Americans continued to work the land of Whites and felt they had no option but to accept that education. Or, they found their own ways of learning.

African Americans of the South were also offered an opportunity in schools such as Hampton Institute and Tuskegee (Spivey, 1978). General Samuel Chapman Armstrong founded Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868. The education offered there solved the problem of what should be done with the freed enslaved Africans. Armstrong felt that a school of industrial training would advance reconciliation between the North and the South and provide lasting peace and order between the races in the South. He offered African Americans an education that was suitable for the “Negro’s place.”

Armstrong’s view of African Americans was extremely prejudiced. He viewed them as deficient in character, lazy, and uncivilized. Therefore, the curriculum offered at Hampton Institute was centered on Christianity and manual labor, to teach the skills he felt they needed. He believed that African Americans were most suited for labor and that they were the best natural resource of the South. After all, the prosperity of the South, in fact, was owed to African Americans’ labor. Hampton Institute and the schools it influenced had a commercial interest for the South, and for northerners with interests in the South. Moreover, Hampton itself benefited from the labor of its students. The students were required to perform manual labor in exchange for their education. Thus, this work also was a form of cheap labor (Anderson, 1988; Spivey, 1978).

Booker T. Washington, an African-American man, began the first school born of Hampton Institute in 1881. Although Washington advocated industrial training, his

reasons for doing so were much different from Armstrong's. Washington saw in manual labor an opportunity to gain money, political influence, and social mobility. He recognized that African Americans were stuck in a White-dominated society and felt the need to make the best of it. Through proceeding on White terms he believed that African Americans could gain money and eventually power. As a result, he founded Tuskegee. He began to train African Americans in much the same way that Hampton had. His school advocated for "proper behavior," Christianity, hard work, industrial training, and manual labor in exchange for one's education. Once again, cheap labor was the trade-off for an education. And once again, this education involved little academic training (Anderson, 1988; Spivey, 1978; Thrasher, 1969).

Many others were to advocate for the industrial education of African Americans. Most were White supremacists. They valued the labor of African Americans and feared they would move up from the lower classes if given a different educational opportunity. J. L. M. Curry, Robert Curtis Ogden, William H. Baldwin, Morris K. Jesup, and John D. Rockefeller were among the men advocating for this type of schooling. As an example of the existing attitudes, William H. Baldwin (as cited in Anderson, 1988), stated, "The potential economic value of the Negro population properly educated is infinite and incalculable. In the Negro is the opportunity of the South. Time has proven that he is best fitted to perform the heavy labor in the Southern states" (p. 82). In this statement we see the attitude of inferiority and the fact that education was being used as a tool to meet the needs of the White men.

Beginning in the late 1890s, a debate arose between those advocating an industrial education and those encouraging an academic education. Many philanthropic northerners and religious leaders, with interests in the South, sought to educate African Americans through academics. They believed in their ability to teach

African Americans to accept their subordinate roles in White society (Anderson, 1988). Essentially, some believed in a subtle social control through academic education, while others believed in coercion.

Christians offered African Americans options for gaining an education as well. Of the 653 schools for African Americans in 1916, 507 had religious affiliations (Ratteray, 1994). As an example of the type of education offered, Ratteray (1994) stated,

European and European-American religious leaders established and controlled schools to teach religious content in the curricula and to use the principles articulated in this content to spread the established social and economic order. (p. 130)

The Church taught Christianity not only as a means of spreading the Word, but also as a means of “civilizing” the freed enslaved Africans. They may have believed they were improving humanity, but they did not stand for equality or even hear the voices of those they were teaching.

In actuality, missionaries were providing instruction on “rules” for African Americans within the culture of the United States, and teaching African Americans “their place” within a capitalist society. Anderson (1988) wrote,

During the immediate postwar years the more conservative missionary societies made some attempts to superimpose upon the common school curriculum a set of readers designed specifically and exclusively for ex-slave children. . . . Such readers. . . contained social values designed to inculcate in the ex-slaves an acceptance of economic and racial subordination. These books portrayed blacks in subservient roles and frequently assumed that blacks were morally and mentally inferior. (p. 30)

Rather than educating toward equality, they practiced an education that perpetuated the values of a White-dominated society.

Inequality also existed in the quality of public schools offered to African Americans. Of the years between 1900 and 1920, Quarles (1987) stated, “In building

schools with public monies, it was not possible to ignore the Negro. But less could be spent on him than on the Whites, on the ground that he paid few taxes and that there was little point in giving him any training beyond the basic elements of reading and writing” (p. 193). Beliefs about the inferiority of African Americans not only were expressed in the debates of the time, but were demonstrated in the type of schools available to them. White leaders continually adopted policies or advocated for specific practices out of a need for cheap labor and a belief in the subordinate status of African Americans. The situations in the North and the South became much the same.

Values and Beliefs Affecting the Development of African-American Education

Throughout the nineteenth century, so-called scientific racism provided a rationalization for the appalling treatment of African Americans in the United States. Imbedded in the social and political fabric of this country, it influenced many aspects of life in the United States, especially educational decision-making. It was a means by which to not only rationalize slavery but deny jobs, and to provide an inferior education or no education at all for African Americans. Through “scientific” explanations of the superiority of the White race, and the inferiority of the Black race, leaders within the United States were aided in their efforts to maintain dominance and control. Scientific racism came to permeate the minds of many influential people within this country (Watkins, 2001).

Scientific racism firmly took hold in the United States throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By scientifically explaining the assumed inferiority of African Americans, European Americans were able to justify exploiting them. Carolus Linnaeus began classifying human beings by race in 1735, claiming the different levels of morality and intelligence exhibited by each. Given the times, Whites were found to be far superior to African Americans. Others, including Ernst Haeckel, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, and Charles White, added to this discourse

with notions of a hierarchy, aesthetic beauty, and even the belief that African Americans are a different species from Whites.

Scientific racism became even stronger as medical professionals found more difference based on psychology, physiology, and anatomical lines. These beliefs were supported by President Thomas Jefferson and aided by the work of a Harvard University professor, Louis Agassiz (Watkins, 2001). Agassiz was a naturalist who studied medicine and biology. His inability to accept that all humans were of the same species, and his insistence that Whites were a superior species, led him to become a White supremacist (Lurie, 1960). He had significant influence on the social policy of the time (Watkins, 2001). It was Samuel George Morton, a physician with two medical degrees, who provided legitimacy to the White supremacist beliefs that Agassiz insisted on. Although the research was unsound, their work combined paved the way for many other White supremacist researchers and leaders (Menand, 2002; Watkins, 2001).

Ultimately, it was Charles Darwin and his biological theories of “survival of the fittest” that may have had the most influence on the mind-sets of Americans during the nineteenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century, Social Darwinism was developed as a social interpretation of the Darwinian theory of evolution. The idea of “survival of the fittest” became a very popular way of claiming to explain the assumed “inferiority” of African Americans and the assumed “superiority” of Whites. Social Darwinism was used as a justification for maintaining the status quo (Martin, 1998; Watkins, 2001).

Social Darwinism led to yet another area of study and method for maintaining the subordinate place of African Americans in the late nineteenth century. At this time eugenics, the study of genetics and heredity, became popular and influenced the work of academics (Watkins, 2001). Eugenics has been considered a science, and it supports

the belief that Western Europeans are superior. The goal of eugenics is to influence the qualities that people inherit in an effort to improve the physical and mental traits of humans. It is directed at improving people of color, immigrants, and lower class White people (Lancaster, 2007). Unfortunately, similar belief systems are upheld by many, even in contemporary times.

Today, it is also true that many people are not intentionally racist, but still benefit from White privilege. Kendall (2006) explained the mindset of White privilege that continues to exist. She stated:

White privilege is an institutional, rather than personal, set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions. One of the primary privileges is having greater access to power and resources than people of color do; in other words, purely on the basis of skin color doors are open to us that are not open to other people. . . . Further, it is essential to be conscious that the patterns set in history are continued today, not only in systemic discrimination against people of color in housing, health care, education, and the judicial system, but also in the less obvious ways in which people of color are excluded from many white people's day-to-day consciousness. (p. 63)

As a White American, I may view myself as “good” and have the best intentions in mind. But, for many years it was easy for me to not recognize the privileges I have. I also failed to recognize the privileges that others are denied and the impact it has on those people. My experience has taught me that this is true for many.

Education Policies, Practice, and Race Relations since Emancipation

Throughout the years following emancipation, the setting for rebellion was established in the United States. Although Whites far outnumbered African Americans, other mechanisms were at work. African Americans were fully aware of their oppression. Yet, in the United States many poor Whites were increasingly aware of their oppression as well. Political parties operated in such a way that a pattern of open participation against the existing social order was occurring (Cell, 1982).

African Americans spent many years seeking equality in education through the court systems without success (Bullock, 1967; Jackson, 2001). White leaders attempted to cope with the problem of racism not only through disenfranchisement, but also through the extremely oppressive nature of Jim Crow laws. African Americans felt that they were left with only one choice in the face of worsening conditions. This choice was the long-term goal of a mass movement toward equality, and preparations began. We see the climax of this effort in the 1960s with the advent of the Civil Rights movement. The actions taken by the oppressed demonstrate that when unequal access to education and the job market are forced upon a people, the risk of rebellion exists. Because the government refused to recognize the extent of this resistance and failed to see beyond their needs, revolution occurred (Cell, 1982).

As preparations for the Civil Rights movement were underway, another major event changed America forever on May 17, 1954. In a landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruled to end segregation in public schools. African Americans had been resisting unfair treatment for many years, and many cases had already been tried. Finally, they were able to rejoice! As of this day, the federal government no longer formally supported racial segregation. This decision had significance for every facet of American life, as official policies of “separate but equal” came to an end.

Just one year later, Martin Luther King, Jr., emerged as the voice of civil rights for all Americans. The Civil Rights movement had begun. Years of nonviolent protests, Freedom Marches, sit-ins, and demands for equality followed. Finally, in 1964, the U.S. president and Congress made the commitment to end racial segregation and to move toward equality. The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. It made racial discrimination illegal in public places and required employers to provide equal employment opportunities. In 1965 the Voting Rights Act was passed, which made it

illegal to require literacy tests and poll taxes as a way to determine who could vote. Also in 1966, James S. Coleman, a Johns Hopkins sociologist, completed a social survey study that had been commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. His results of gathering data from teachers and students at 4,000 public schools demonstrated the importance of desegregation in closing the achievement gap (Coleman, 1966). Hallinan (2000) reported that it was one of the most influential factors in the efforts made toward desegregation. Through each of these events, African Americans felt a sense of hope that their dreams may come true. At last, the government slowly enforced the mandates of the *Brown* decision. Finally, more of an educated Black middle class was able to emerge, and many African-American children were allowed a high-quality education (Orfield & Lee, 2006).

Despite the enormous changes since the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and the Civil Rights movement, the United States, to this day, has far to go toward providing African-American children with an equal education. In addition, the changes that occurred were not as far-reaching as many had hoped. With the power in the hands of Whites, desegregation came to mean that African-American students were bused to White schools. In the large majority of places, it did not mean that Whites were bused to African-American schools. In addition, African Americans were not met with welcoming arms. Instead, many had to endure protestors, were harassed, and some had to experience the fact that certain Whites simply refused to attend school with them. In truth, there was only a brief period in the 1960s of desegregation in the South and the Border states, before African Americans were then progressively resegregated. Even so, the South and the Border states continue to have some of the lowest rates of segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2006). Thus, desegregation efforts did have a significant impact in the areas where it was enforced.

All in all, “efforts” at desegregation have been unsuccessful. As of the 2003–2004 school year 38% of Black students were attending extremely segregated schools or “apartheid schools” (with only 0% to 10% Whites, who likely had no choice, as they were among the poorest segment of the population) (Orfield & Lee, 2006). New York State is one of four states with the highest levels of Black segregation, with about 51% of Black students attending extremely segregated schools.

On the other hand, today, Whites are actually the most segregated group. Orfield and Lee (2006) stated, “. . . the average white student attends schools where more than three quarters (78%) of his or her peers are also white . . . ” (p. 8). Why does this matter? Racial segregation may be harmful to Whites as well, in that they are not being prepared to function in a diverse society or a global economy, and they are not benefiting from the learning that naturally occurs when diverse perspectives are heard and valued. It becomes very hard for Blacks and Whites to understand one another and to form close ties when they are segregated.

Worse, segregation severely affects African-American and Latino students. The most segregated schools are segregated not only by race but also by concentrated poverty. This has a profound impact on the learning that occurs. Orfield and Lee (2006) explained:

Concentrated poverty is shorthand for a constellation of inequalities that shape schooling. These schools have less qualified, less experienced teachers, lower levels of peer group competition, more limited curricula taught at less challenging levels, more serious health problems, much more turnover of enrollment and many other factors that seriously affect academic achievement. (p. 29)

The segregation of African-American students results in many inequalities for these students that hinder their ability to learn.

At this stage, even in theory, desegregation is no longer a part of the national agenda. The U.S. Supreme Court decision of June 28, 2007, in the case of *Parents*

Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District solidified this. The court ruled that race could not be a factor in assigning students to public schools. It reversed the *Brown* decision of 1954 (Ikpa & McGuire, 2009).

Another concern is that desegregated schools still leave much to be desired. A school can appear to be desegregated in terms of numbers. However, segregation is often still occurring inside the building. Kunjufu (2006) clarified:

There are many desegregated schools, but if you look carefully at the classrooms, you will see new forms of segregation, which are called tracking and special education. A desegregated school could be 50 percent Black and 50 percent White on the outside, but the AP, honors, and gifted and talented classes reveal a less than equal playing field in educating African American and White students. Nationwide, only 3 percent of gifted and talented students are African American.

On the other end of the education spectrum, we have special education. African American students comprise 41 percent of the students placed in special education. The school could be integrated on the outside, but predominately White in advanced placement, honors and gifted and talented, slightly desegregated in regular classes, and predominately Black and Hispanic in remedial and special ed [sic] classes. (p. 102)

Conditions for most African-American students continue to be unjust and unfavorable.

Segregation by race and income continues to be a problem in the United States. Seventy-seven percent of large city school districts are poor and are predominately populated by students of color (Anyon, 2001). In contrast, wealthy suburbs have a student population that is almost all White and part of the upper-middle socioeconomic class (Anyon, 2001). In addition, students of color who do live in the suburbs generally attend schools with a student population that is predominantly African-American or Latino and underfunded (Anyon, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2001). Within integrated schools, they are frequently in the lower academic tracks (Anyon, 1997, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Oakes, 1985). In addition, large numbers of students who live in poverty (both African-American and European-American) live in rural areas that also suffer from a lack of funding and resources

(Darling-Hammond, 2001; Kunjufu, 2006). In other words, even in just considering funding and resources, today inequality is still a fact of life for the majority of students of color, no matter where they attend school in the United States.

To the detriment of all, education within the United States has been mainly focused on European values and beliefs (Asante, 1980; C. Banks, 2001; Shujaa, 1994; Woodson, 1933). It has served to oppress people of color and to uplift Whites of all social classes (Cell, 1982; Dove, 1994; Watkins, 2001). As a consequence, deeply ingrained beliefs of White supremacy have been perpetuated and reinforced throughout centuries of education (Cell, 1982; Dove, 1994; King, 2001; Watkins, 2001). This has been accomplished through many avenues, including segregation, unequal funding, textbook publishing and manufacturing, teacher training, the media, unequal access to education, skewed/biased standardized assessments, and most recently through a standardized curriculum in several states.

For centuries, people of color in this country have been ignored, rendered invisible, or degraded within instruction (Anderson, 1988; Cell, 1982; Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2001; Woodson, 1933). Although this awareness is documented, little has been done to correct the problem (Anyon, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Kozol, 1991). Efforts that may appear to exist on the surface have been simplistic, quick-fix techniques (Lee, 1994). We have yet to see schools in equal condition, provided with equal resources, or compensated for the many years of unequal funding that continues to this day (Anyon, 1997, 2001; Kunjufu, 2006; Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2001; Ratteray, 1992). Furthermore, a hierarchy based on race and socioeconomic status is the social framework of this country. A belief system of racial superiority and inferiority persists in the minds of many (Dove, 1994; King, 2001).

There is a tendency to believe that education is always beneficial. Most of us learn that if we work hard in school we will advance in society. We are taught that the

answer to success lies in education. However, a closer analysis of this perspective indicates that education may take many forms and may often not be for the common good. It is important to analyze the objectives and goals of any curriculum and ask, “Whose purpose is this serving?” and “In what ways does it benefit the students or society at large?” We must then go a step further and ask, “How does it hinder people?” A review of the educational policies enacted since the emancipation of enslaved Africans within the United States, demonstrates the manner in which education may be used to create and maintain the oppression of people.

Educational processes, and their intended and actual outcomes, are not always positive. Education may be used as a tool to advantage the leadership and may act as an oppressive influence on groups of people. Education for the freed enslaved Africans was used as a form of oppression to impede the development of African Americans. This system of unequal access benefited the White-controlled governments. The need for cheap labor and profits gained from the exploitation of Blacks benefited the government and landowners. Furthermore, a need to demonize African Americans existed so that the masses would support this oppressive system (Cell, 1982).

European ways were brought to the United States and transmitted through many different generations. Educational curriculum in the United States has been centered on values of White supremacy and the subjugation of people of color. A few elite minorities have been allowed to seek a quality education and advance in society. Thus, the myth has been created that anyone can do so if only they work hard (Zvobgo, 1994).

Due to this long history of racism in this country, it makes sense that African Americans might not trust me. They have been given many reasons not to. Kendall explained the implications:

Expect suspicion from the person to whom you are talking, particularly if your conversation hasn't come up naturally. That concern is heightened exponentially when there is an even greater imbalance of privilege and power. . . . Because so many white people see ourselves as individuals and as relatively good people, we have a hard time imagining that we pose a threat to someone we work with or are talking to. We see ourselves entering into conversations as just us; usually, the person of color sees us as a representative of our race, our gender, and our class. . . . One of the privileges granted to those of us who are white is permission to forget that all of us come into conversations bringing our history and our experiences with us. People of color generally bring their personal encounters, those they have witnessed, the stories they've read, and the history they know between white people and people of color, just as white people carry all that they've seen and been told about, our personal biases, the unconscious and conscious beliefs about the superiority of whiteness. But we get to forget that we do this. (p. 129)

A history of institutionalized racism and policies in the United States, which still have a stronghold in this country, creates a situation in which it is only natural for African Americans to be suspicious of those who are White. Teachers I encountered had no reason to trust that I would represent them in the manner in which they would want to be represented. They had no reason to believe that I would not misinterpret their words and/or take them out of context. The history in this country has created these circumstances.

On the other hand, history also creates a situation in which White educational leaders may not value the insights that can be gained from listening to the voices and perspectives of African Americans. If they believe that African Americans are inferior and/or they blame the victim (for example, they may believe that it is the students' and families' faults that African Americans are not learning at the same rate as European Americans), then it is easy to see why my research would not be valued. It is reasonable to believe that given the current climate, educational leaders may have considered my research a waste of their time and therefore I was not given permission to conduct my research.

This chapter helped answer the questions I originally posed. The historical experience of African Americans in the United States results in a situation in which teachers may have felt uncomfortable with a White researcher interviewing and observing them. Race is an aspect of this, as a history of mistrust between White leaders and the disenfranchised has been established in our country. Additionally, this history has resulted in a situation in which White educational leaders might not value the research I have proposed and might not have granted me permission to do my proposed research for that reason. The fact that only Black principals showed an interest in the research I was proposing is a clear indication of this.

Many challenges exist as numerous educational leaders attempt to bridge the achievement gap and struggle toward an equal education for all. There is a strong and historical base for the conditions that exist in schools and society. Our history has also created a situation in which White educational leaders may not truly believe that the achievement gap can be eradicated. It is honestly a long, hard road to overcome the oppression, segregation, and racism in its various forms that have been deeply ingrained in peoples' minds for centuries. My inability to conduct the research I had originally proposed means that an opportunity has been missed. I was unable to help contribute to the improvements that need to be made through a better understanding of the system, from the voices of African-American teachers, especially women. With the lessons learned from my experience, I have hope that in spite of the racism and structural issues, I and many others will be successful with similar research in the future. I strongly believe that African-American teachers have much to contribute, in many ways, toward improving the education for African-American children in this country. It is important that their voices be heard, documented, and valued. I will continue to strive to ensure that they are.

CHAPTER VI: RESEARCH LAWS, SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Policies and laws, past and present, have hindered my attempt to conduct vital research that may be significant for African Americans in the U.S. public school system today. One factor is the low number of African-American teachers in the United States. This circumstance could leave potential participants feeling vulnerable. These feelings of vulnerability are in part created by the current laws on human subjects that are designed to protect research participants. Another issue is that I faced a lack of trust from the teachers. Perhaps this was a result of my being unfamiliar to the participants and lacking a rapport with them. It is also likely a result of race relations and historical circumstances within the United States, as discussed in Chapter V. As well, current laws that govern school districts may have been instrumental in the poor participation and lack of interest shown in my research request.

To validate the claims I have made, in this chapter I discuss the laws and policies that impinge on the educational system and that also affect research. I also explain the history of school governance and the way it has been shaped. Last, I discuss how it operates today as a result of recently implemented laws and policies. In doing so I describe the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and additional policies that have been enacted since then. I show that the current laws regarding education can influence the decisions made by local leaders.

Laws for the Protection of Human Subjects

Federal laws for the protection of individuals during research were created after abuses of human subjects for biomedical research purposes became known to the public, especially during World War II. The National Research Act (Pub. L. 93-348) was signed into law on July 12, 1974. As a result, the National Commission for the

Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research was created. The Commission was given the goals of identifying basic ethical principles that should guide biomedical and behavioral research involving human subjects, and developing a set of guidelines for people to follow to ensure that research is conducted in a manner that follows these principles. The Belmont Report is the result of the Commission's efforts. The document summarizes the principles and guidelines to be followed when conducting biomedical and behavioral research. The Belmont Report has been published in the Federal Register, and reprints are available upon request. The Commission recommends that the Belmont Report be adopted for use in its entirety (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

In response to the Belmont Report, IRBs have been established at research institutions, and researchers must submit protocol to these boards for approval to conduct their research. Within this protocol, researchers are required to outline the specific study they intend to conduct, outline how they intend to select subjects, and submit forms that human subjects will need to review and sign if they agree to participate in the research. These forms must be written in a language that the intended human subjects can comprehend. It is also essential for the forms to provide information regarding the research procedure, the purposes, risks and/or benefits, and a statement that gives subjects the opportunity to ask questions and tells subjects that they may withdraw at any time. All of these requirements are intended to ensure the basic ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. An IRB reviews the researcher's protocol and determines whether or not it properly follows the guidelines established in the Belmont Report. Once approved, researchers must then seek permission to conduct research from the institution involved and/or directly

from potential human subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

In my case, my research was approved by the IRB at Cornell University. After this, I was required to submit my paperwork regarding human subjects to administrators at the school district level. Once I received approval there, I had to seek permission directly from the administrators and teachers I hoped to interview. In order to proceed with my research, it was essential that individual teachers and administrators sign forms granting me permission and acknowledging that they understood the nature of the research (see Appendix B).

Institutions, such as the school districts that I applied to, must ensure that research is carried out properly within their school districts. They must also abide by policies outlined in the Belmont Report by the federal government. Additionally, due to the time involved and the precautions a school district must take, it is a general policy to only allow research that is viewed as beneficial to the school district. I believe that many school districts did not grant me permission to conduct research because they did not see any immediate or tangible value in it. There also may not have been a genuine commitment to change through the use of research as policy input. Furthermore, due to federal legislation and the diminishing power of school boards and the superintendent of schools, school district leaders may in fact feel and be powerless to make the kind of changes that teachers consider to be relevant and needed.

I argue that there is much every school district can do even within the current framework and despite the need for the United States to make significant changes in educational policy. It is my belief that many leaders may not have recognized that fact. Moreover, school districts with large populations of African-American students and teachers also tend to be school districts that are poorly funded, serving a large number

of students from low-income populations, receiving bad press, and coping with institutionalized racism. With these extra disadvantages, district leaders may be feeling a great deal of pressure. Perhaps they feel even less able to make the changes teachers want, and with which they may even agree. And conceivably, they might have worried that what I learned and wrote would add to their negative press.

I have learned from experience that my research might have been affected by human research requirements differently than other studies, for a variety of reasons, some of which I mentioned earlier. I know that many researchers conduct research in areas where they are well known. This was not an option for me, and I was not able to establish the rapport with the teachers that perhaps would have made my research successful. I was not able to get a job where they worked, or to find a way for them to get to know me as a person and for me to get to know them. I am a White researcher who sought to interview and observe African-American teachers. In describing their research involving interviews with gay male undergraduates, Strayhorn, Blakewood and DeVita (2008) stated, “Researchers describe how issues of distrust and poor rapport can compromise any attempt to unearth the experiences of marginalized, disempowered, invisible, ‘voiceless’ people . . .” (p. 96). Due to historical circumstances it is likely that I too experienced issues of distrust and poor rapport in attempting to conduct research with a group that has been marginalized.

A long history of racism, combined with unfamiliarity with me, may have resulted in a distrust of my ability to present African-American voices and actions in a positive manner. Milner (2007) explained:

- People of color historically have been misrepresented, exploited, silenced and taken for granted in education research (Dillard, 2000; Stanfield, 1995).
- Some education researchers have given privileged status to dominant, White voices, beliefs, ideologies, and views over the voices of people of color (Gordon, 1990; Tillman, 2002).

- Researchers' multiple and varied positions, roles, and identities are intricately and inextricably embedded in the process and outcome of education research (Chapman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Stanley, 2007). (pp. 388–389)

A history of African Americans not being properly represented within research, of facing the bias that results from the way in which many White researchers perceive the world, and of being relegated to the margins, has created a situation in which African Americans are not comfortable with White researchers. They have in fact been given many reasons to be suspicious and to distrust our intentions.

African Americans are also not well represented on teaching staffs. The conditions under which they often must teach, the low pay, the educational requirements, and the biased testing to which teachers are subjected, may have resulted in this. As well, African Americans make up only about 13% of the U.S. population. The fact that there are a limited number of African-American teachers also affected my ability to conduct the proposed research. These factors resulted in the small number of schools that qualified as potential research sites. They also likely resulted in African-American teachers feeling vulnerable, and gave them the sense that those in power might be able to identify them if they participated.

On another note, many graduate researchers are able to conduct their research and write their dissertations as an aspect of a larger study initiated and conducted in part by faculty at the university. Or, researchers are able to conduct commissioned research that is guaranteed to be utilized. These were not options for me. In addition, I was told that my topic was viewed as controversial, and teachers may have been afraid to tell me what they really had on their minds. Even when I conducted pilot interviews, where no signature was needed, I had to reassure people, often multiple times, that I would not share what they said with anyone outside of my class at the

university. When it came down to conducting my actual study, the teachers were not comfortable participating when the paperwork was involved.

Historical Perspective on Public School Governance through Policy and Practice Changes

In the United States, approximately 47 million children are educated in public schools. There are nearly 15,000 school districts, consisting of 93,000 public schools (Corcoran & Goertz, 2005). These school districts vary widely from area to area, as the United States is an extremely diverse country. How schools are run and who leads them may vary based on the circumstances in individual states and areas within each state.

Originally, school systems were established as separate governments. Local education boards and the position of superintendent were each created to have authority over schools within the immediate vicinity. These positions still exist, and the public tends to believe that they run schools. Yet, they have very little power today. They still directly manage most of the school districts. But they do so under the influence, laws, and regulations of the state and federal government, courts, and outside agencies (Epstein, 2004). They must function within a multitude of constraints.

In the 1830s the common school movement began to shape education. Public taxes financed the common schools, and they were locally controlled. Local communities determined what was best for them; thus, common schools varied greatly. The federal and state governments were not directly involved in how these schools were run (Kirst, 2004). However, the states were beginning to participate in educational decisions. By 1825 James G. Carter, a legislator and educator in Massachusetts, advocated for teacher training and standards, and for the increased attendance of White children in schools. With these goals in mind, he believed

strongly that there must be some level of state control. Thus, in 1836 and 1837 he established a state board of education with the superintendent as leader. In time, other states began to create boards of education as well (Martin, 1915).

Common schools functioning with some direction from state boards of education had spread across the United States. Additionally, state legislatures committed themselves to several shared goals: 1) a primary education for all White children to be supported by tax money, 2) raising standards for teacher training and the hiring of teachers, and 3) some centralized control from state boards of education (Newman, 1994). From the perspective of the majority, common schools thrived in this way until long after the Civil War (Kirst, 2004). Throughout most of the nation, a method for supporting state-run school systems was either in place, or developing (Newman, 1994).

It wasn't until the Progressive Era, beginning in 1896 with the election of William McKinley and ending in 1917 with the United States' entry into World War I, that a great change began (Newman, 1994). It resulted from widespread corruption in the school systems and the advent of industrialization (Kirst, 2004). At this time, large numbers of people were also moving to the cities, and there was a great influx of immigrants (Newman, 1994). Reformers sought changes, and superintendents were given centralized power over school districts, just as managers in the business realm were given centralized power over plants. Also, businessmen and professionals worked closely with the superintendent by serving on school boards, mainly as a way to ensure that their ideas and views were supported most in the school district. At this time, superintendents also began to consolidate schools into larger school districts (Howell, 2005; Kirst, 2004). Professional standards for the educational system began to emerge as well. Due to the increasingly diverse student body, educators varied the curriculum and increased the schools' responsibilities. Students were placed in

different classes and programs depending on their perceived intelligence and needs. Schools began to service children in relation to their health and their home lives (Newman, 1994). Through teacher training and publications in professional journals, common standards for important areas of education such as methods of instruction and curriculum, began to emerge. These changes brought uniformity to education in the United States (Kirst, 2004).

Until the 1950s, the U.S. government and educational leaders seemed to believe that local control worked well. Superintendents were able to do what they felt they needed to do, and the federal government and the states focused on other areas. This all came to an end after World War II as vast changes occurred in society. In the years following World War II, enrollment in public schools increased, the Supreme Court ruled to end segregation with the *Brown* decision, and cold war fears prompted the government to sign into law the 1957 National Defense Education Act in an effort to improve students' math, science, and foreign language skills (Kirst, 2004). At that time, the act was the largest contribution by the federal government to public school education there had ever been. It brought the federal government into formulating policy for elementary and secondary education. From this point forward, the court system, teachers' unions, and the state and federal government played an increasing role in forming the policies implemented in schools (Doyle, 2006; Kirst, 2004).

Beginning in the 1950s, local school leaders had to adjust their roles to accommodate teachers' unions. In 1940 there were about 1 million teachers. By 1970 that number had risen to nearly 2.5 million teachers. At this time, teachers were experiencing less and less autonomy and professionalism, and a greater amount of bureaucracy. As a result, they began to form unions, participate in collective bargaining, and walk picket lines (Kirst, 2004). The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) gave teachers a voice in

forming policies in the schools (Newman, 1994). By 1980, these unions operated in most areas of the United States.

Teachers' unions drastically changed school governance, as local leaders lost more power over local policies. School districts were now bound by a written contract between school leaders and teachers specifying wages, hours, and employment conditions. However, teachers and their unions did not stop there. Instead, they organized to gain their preferred policies via both the state and the federal government. Therefore, in 1976, the NEA endorsed a presidential candidate for the first time and spent 3 million dollars in support of federal candidates. Politics became a strong part of the educational system (Kirst, 2004).

During this time period, state and federal courts also had greater influence on public schools, especially since the *Brown* decision of 1954. In the 1970s, for example, the federal courts effected change for disabled children, ensuring that they were given just rights in receiving a public school education. The courts also established rules for second-language learners and fought sex discrimination (Epstein, 2004; Kirst, 2004). The courts enacted numerous policies for schools to follow regarding such things as which organizations could meet in public schools and what religious references are permissible at graduation ceremonies. Courts also instituted regulations for school finance in an effort to equalize school funding. Furthermore, they issued court orders to urban districts to revise enrollment policies with the goal of integrating schools racially and economically (Howell, 2005). The court system, at times, has a powerful influence on how schools are run.

In 1965, the federal government became thoroughly entrenched in the issues of public school education. It made an even larger federal commitment to public school education than in the past. Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Doyle (2006) described the significance of this:

In his first 100 days, Johnson was able to do what no predecessor could have even tried: He forged a sweeping federal role that is with us to this day. Indeed, so deeply embedded is it that it is difficult to even imagine that it was not always thus. (p. xii)

The signing of this act was significant; Johnson allocated education money to special-needs categories such as low-income students, low-achieving students, students with disabilities, and second-language learners. Johnson also encouraged new types of schools and teaching methods. Political bargaining and coalition formation occurred during this period from 1965 to 1980, as specialized programs and services received funding from the federal government. The largest financial element of ESEA was Title I funding, geared toward serving the needs of low-income students (Foorman, Kalinowski, & Sexton, 2007). Title I funding is still in place today.

At this same time, corporate leaders were expressing concerns about the education system. Another influence was the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. U.S. leaders were envious of the Soviet launching of the first space satellite, Sputnik, in 1957 (Foorman et al., 2007). By 1983 Secretary of Education Terrel Bell released an enlightening publication titled *A Nation at Risk*. The National Commission of Excellence in Education wrote this publication and was made up of a diversified and elite task force appointed by Bell. *A Nation at Risk* caught the attention of the media, the nation, and educational policy makers. It became of great importance to leaders in formulating policies for schools. It warned that the United States was becoming less globally competitive in math and the sciences. It highlighted failures of the educational system and recommended specific methods for improving schools (Hayes, 2008; Kimmelman, 2006). These factors all contributed to a great emphasis on math and science education (Foorman et al., 2007; Kimmelman, 2006) and on the concept of standards (Wong, Guthrie, & Harris, 2004). *A Nation at Risk* is still influential in the policies being made today.

Federal involvement in education also led to state education departments expanding to fit the new demands. State governments became more and more involved in the activities of local schools, too. By 1995 the Government Accountability Office, a branch of Congress given the responsibility of investigating matters regarding the receipt and use of public funds, discovered that the federal government was a large financier of many state agencies. With this money, states followed the lead of the federal government and created their own groups to aid underrepresented populations. State courts also ruled that funding schools through local property taxes created a school system that was unequal. States, therefore, began to provide funding for public schools themselves and became the largest financier of schools. Thus, increasingly, states began to exercise their right of control over local schools (Kirst, 2004).

Local schools boards' and superintendents' roles have drastically changed in this new age of education. Once, they exercised control over schools through local management. Today, due to an increase in oversight from the federal government and state governments, they actually have very little power. Currently a broad range of people dictate how schools are run. Howell (2005) explained:

Whereas school board members governed virtually all aspects of public education during the nineteenth century, today members must compete with political actors scattered throughout the federal, state, and local governments as well as organized interests in the private sphere. Almost everything that school boards do is now subject to regulations handed down from city councils, state legislatures and boards of education, the federal government and federal courts. (p. 5)

Governments, courts, and unions now have great influence and authority over what school leaders and school boards can do.

As the federal government and other interest groups became more involved in education, local school leaders began to lose power. Kirst (2004) explained:

The national movements behind such programs, moreover, often spawned new local interest groups on such issues as civil rights, women's roles, special education, students' rights, and ethnic self-determination. Hence, atop Washington regulations these new forces began agitating locally for reforms. . . . They ended up winning partial decentralization through subdistrict board elections, with tighter oversight of superintendents. All these efforts further eroded the power of local school authorities. . . . (p. 24)

Federal action brought about local action. At this time, local interest groups began to heavily influence schools, too, affecting the amount of control local school authorities could exercise.

School boards, as local authorities, now faced many limitations. Gross (1958) explained:

To sum up: lack of financial resources, staff inadequacies, community traditionalism or provincialism, citizen apathy, ineffective or inappropriate school board behavior, and inability to allocate time to priority tasks were most frequently mentioned in describing the barriers to the effective performance of their job. (p. 12)

Although this was written many years ago, the realities of serving on a school board are similar today. School board members are often not trained to be leaders and are most often not trained in the field of education. Aspiring educational leaders elect to serve on school boards. Once elected, they most frequently serve while also managing careers and families. These factors alone, and especially when combined with local politics, can be a deterrent to effective policy even in the limited areas in which school board members can be influential. School boards and educational leaders come together to operate within the confines of the federal and state laws, court orders, and union policy. The practice of local control is a thing of the past. School boards are greatly limited in their effectiveness.

Still, school boards remain in operation in most school districts. They do continue to exercise some control over local school policy. Typically, today's school

boards are composed of 3 to 10 members. The school board has some decision-making power regarding the school budget, teacher salaries, textbooks, the hiring and firing of a school superintendent, and a variety of other local issues. Even though decision-making is limited, the school board can still have a strong influence over schools (Gross, 1958; Howell, 2005).

Increasingly political leaders have been affecting school governance and change. Through the 1970s up until today, an ever-enlarging number of governors, mayors, and state legislators are asserting themselves in education. They have accomplished this through implementing such policies as state academic standards, state tests, and even state takeovers of schools. Most recently politicians have asserted their power at the national level with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which George W. Bush signed into law in 2002. Additionally, governors and mayors have taken over school districts to be run under them.

Despite the strong influence of the federal government, mayors, and governors, political leaders are not held directly accountable. Their time in office is too short to accurately evaluate their effectiveness (Epstein, 2004), and the public still believes that local school boards have the most power to improve schools (Howell, 2005; Kirst, 2004; Zeigler, Jennings, & Peak, 1974). There is a large gap between those who create school policies and those who are held accountable. This can make the job very difficult for school leaders, as they are the ones who are held accountable for things they are obligated by law to do. This can also make educational decisions very confusing for teachers, students, and the general public, as the wrong people are held accountable.

Within the past 20 years, an increasing number of charter schools, voucher systems, and privately owned businesses have forayed into the field of educational solutions. Still, we have not seen an overall improvement in student achievement

(Epstein, 2004; Foorman et al., 2007). Educational reformers continue to experiment with a variety of strategies as state and federal governments continue to establish more control over education.

Next I turn to the policies of NCLB, the most significant federal educational mandate affecting U.S. public schools at this time. However, before I move forward, I find it important to clarify that I am not stating that local control, state control, federal control, or a combination of the three is best. My point here is not to define what is most effective for our system. I have not intended to make a moral judgment on the rationale for and extent of the involvement of various stakeholders. The argument, rather, is to highlight the complexities of interest groups and respective requirements in the decision-making process. State and federal governments must be involved to ensure that equity and equality of opportunity are addressed. These are important to our people and our country and should in fact be a priority at each level of government.

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), signed into law in 2002, represents the most comprehensive involvement of the federal government in public education to date. NCLB is standards-based reform which first became a matter of national policy with the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 under the Clinton administration. NCLB contains much of the same language and ideas of *A Nation at Risk* and laws that have evolved through federal policies instituted since that time. For example, the National Goals Education Panel of 1990, the Goals 2000 Act in 1994, and NCLB each called for an increase in standards better aligned to curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Gamoran, 2007). A major difference from policies of the past is that the federal government does expect to see schools fail and appears to be planning to take over the public schools. At this stage, many of our public schools

have already shifted into government-run charter schools and community schools that may also be supported by philanthropists.

The Goals 2000 legislation and organizations such as the National Science Foundation provided money for school districts to create and implement a standards-based reform system. NCLB is a continuation of these standards-based reforms and a reauthorization of the ESEA (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005). Through ESEA, Title I federal funding and services have been provided to schools serving disadvantaged populations since its inception. Title I continues now through NCLB. Kimmelman (2006) further explained the historical roots:

. . . NCLB incorporates the concepts that were discussed for many years and imposes sanctions for failing to meet certain requirements. Clearly, the law incorporates accountability, assessment, academic standards, and teacher quality as its cornerstones. All four of these concepts have been subjects of concern in nearly every report on education since 1957. (p. 23)

NCLB has historical roots that span over half a century.

States have been largely affected by NCLB and held accountable through the orders set forth in this federally mandated policy. NCLB requires that states accepting Title I funding (currently all) establish standards to align with curriculum, and that students be given standardized assessments to evaluate their progress in reading and mathematics in Grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. As of 2007, a third criterion is also assessed in the third through eighth grades. In New York State, where I have attempted to conduct my research, the third criterion is science in Grades 3 through 8. In order to demonstrate achievement, schools are also required to ensure that 95% of their students take the test, that no more than 3% of disabled students take alternative assessments, and that students learning a second language are tested within 2 years of their arrival in the United States. These measures were designed to ensure

that school districts cannot “hide” their low-performing students (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hayes, 2008).

Test scores are required to be reported separately by designated subgroups so that inequities in education can easily be seen. Assessment scores must be published and made available to the public. The idea is that these assessments will then help states to determine which schools are in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. It is also believed that this process of reporting assessment results may create a will for school leaders to address and solve the problems of inequity in their schools (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hayes, 2008). The problem is that the correct types of improvements and corrective actions are not happening in schools that are failing. Institutional racism and inequality greatly hinder our low-performing schools.

Reporting “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) is a mandate of NCLB and a component of the standards and assessments. AYP goals are established by each state based on assessment criteria. Each state is permitted to determine at what level it expects its students to perform on assessments in order to show proficiency. In New York State, a district is identified as “in need of improvement” status if it fails to make AYP in English language arts or math at both the elementary/middle level and secondary level, or in science for the elementary/middle level or in graduation rate at the secondary level (New York State Department of Education, 2008).

NCLB is also designed to address specific subgroups of students within the student body who have had a historical disadvantage. The subgroups identified in New York State are “all students; students with disabilities; economically disadvantaged; limited English proficient; White; American Indian/Alaskan; Asian; Black; and Hispanic” (New York State Department of Education, 2007). In addition to being accounted for in the school totals, subgroups are also counted separately, and may be counted in more than one subgroup. AYP will not be met if an increasing percentage

of all students do not achieve it, but also if any of the subgroups does not achieve it. AYP will also not be met if the 95% participation requirement is not accomplished. Because identified groups are counted separately, schools with more subgroups have a greater risk of failing (Gamoran, 2007; Wood, 2004).

The requirements of AYP have put diverse schools at a clear disadvantage. Results of studies for 2004–2005 showed that 13% of schools were identified as “in need of improvement.” The majority of these schools were large and urban. They were also more likely to serve students who were poor, minority, or of limited English proficiency (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

It is also of concern to others that schools may be identified as “in need of improvement” even though they are high-performing schools, simply because one subgroup does not achieve AYP. The New York State Department of Education (2007) agreed with that perspective:

Labeling an entire school in need of improvement and thus triggering school-wide interventions when only one subgroup may be in need of additional assistance is a waste of staff and fiscal resources at the state, district and school levels. (p. 2)

The fact is that interventions and resources may need to be directed at just the subgroup in need. Claiming that something must be done school-wide does not make sense to many, when only one program and group of students needs to be affected. This causes a whole school to appear to be “failing” to the public, when in fact only one subgroup is identified as struggling. This is something that many do not feel is fair to the school. Last, a school may be identified as “in need of improvement” because it is unable to meet the 95% participation rate. This, too, triggers school-wide interventions, although it may be that the only intervention needed is to increase attendance rates.

While I understand that people are upset about a small subset of students affecting the negative rating of an entire school, I do not agree that it is wrong. Just as one may say “It takes a village to raise a child,” one can argue that it takes a diverse student body that is receiving an equal education to make a successful community in the twenty-first century. I have strong hopes that the issue for teachers and educational leaders is more that they do not agree with the assessments as being a valid indicator. I also hope that they may recognize that some of the goals need to be more realistic. Furthermore, one of the real issues may be related to a lack of time and money. I do believe that educators want to institute school-wide initiatives on behalf of students in need of assistance. I do believe that they want to solve all of these problems.

Schools identified as Title I schools that do not meet the requirements of AYP in the first year are required to notify parents. If a school is unable to meet AYP for 2 consecutive years, then it is designated as “in need of improvement,” and increasing sanctions apply if the school does not improve. Schools not making AYP may be required to create an improvement plan and to offer students free tutoring or pay to transfer students by bus to other schools. If these methods fail, schools may be closed or reconstituted by the government (Wood, 2004).

In New York State, after a school has not made AYP in a category for 2 years in a row, the school district is required to offer students the option of transferring to a school that is not in need of improvement (called school choice). The following year, if AYP is still not met, the school must also offer low-income students supplementary services, such as tutoring (New York State Education Department, 2007). Schools identified as Title I schools that have historically received federal funding now receive federal funding only if they are in compliance with the law and can demonstrate that they have met the goals established by the states regarding AYP. Thus, loss of funding is a threat to these schools. Schools that are not identified as Title I schools are not

mandated to receive the same sanctions. Yet, in order for a state to receive NCLB funding, it must also create a sanctions system for these schools. Therefore, they may receive the same or similar sanctions.

NCLB added many administrative duties at the state and local levels. States have been required to establish standards that align with curriculum and with yearly assessments. They have also had to provide testing and accommodations for groups of students with disabilities, and for groups of students learning English. Furthermore, they have been required to establish accountability plans and oversight for all of these assessments and for other NCLB mandates such as ensuring that all teachers are highly qualified. Additionally, it has been mandatory that school districts accomplish test grading and reporting. Then, if school districts are identified as failing, those districts are expected to create improvement plans that

. . . among other things, incorporates scientifically based research strategies to strengthen the core academic program, devotes 10 percent of Title 1 funds to professional development, includes specific measurable achievement goals and targets for each subgroup, includes the possibility of extending the school day or year, tries to include parents in the improvement process, and specifies the responsibility of the state in providing technical assistance. The requirement that schools identified for improvement provide supplemental services (tutoring) in the second year of improvement has now been changed to allow for these services during the first year of improvement (Gamoran, 2007, p. 27).

These plans are quite extensive and require much time and effort on the part of school district leaders to implement. They are yet another burden placed on already struggling school systems. Moreover, these school districts are required to supply tutoring or school transfers. These requirements not only take more planning and time from school district personnel but also draw money away from the struggling schools. Without extra funding and support staff it makes sense that educational leaders would feel pressured and that they would be struggling to find ways to cope effectively for the benefit of children.

NCLB also mandated that teachers be highly qualified in the subjects they teach. The definition of “highly qualified” has been left up to individual states to determine (Vinovskis, 2009). In New York State, “highly qualified” means that a teacher must have a bachelor’s degree or higher, be state certified, and demonstrate subject knowledge through coursework, state examinations, or through a “high objective uniform state standard of evaluation” (HOUSSE)—an option created by states using specified guidelines. HOUSSE applies only to veteran teachers, new special education teachers, and new teachers in rural local education agencies (New York State Education Department, 2007).

Requiring highly qualified teachers seems like a very reasonable mandate. After all, we know that high-quality teachers are best for children. Yet, we do not have a true definition of what makes a high-quality teacher. Moreover, poorly funded schools that are struggling to achieve AYP may not have “highly qualified” teachers willing to teach at their schools for a variety of reasons. They also lack the resources to offer an effective incentive program, and they may not be able to afford highly qualified teachers. Still, according to the New York State Department of Education (2007), these schools districts must now

ensure that through transfers, providing professional development, recruitment programs, or other effective strategies, low-income students and minority students are not taught by unqualified, out of field, or inexperienced teachers at higher rates than other students. (p. 14)

Again, we see that people who work for struggling schools have more work to accomplish than those who do not. We also see that they are expected to achieve things that are beyond their control.

It seems that there is an unfortunate and overriding issue in what the federal government is asking school personnel to accomplish. That is, that the mandates of NCLB have been imposed on struggling school systems and that the government has

failed to provide sufficient funding to assist them in their efforts. While Title I funding has continued to be forthcoming, it has not been forthcoming at the levels states require to achieve NCLB mandates. Additional funds to support state departments and local school districts with all of the extra requirements of establishing standards and assessments, and completing data analysis and reporting, also has not occurred to the extent that many districts feel they need (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Karp, 2004; Liu, 2008; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005; Sunderman & Orfield, 2008).

In its initial passage, significant amounts of money were allocated for states and local school districts to meet the mandates of NCLB, with a 17% increase in funding. However, this in itself was insufficient and unfortunately did not continue. In the following year the money allocated was greatly reduced to a 5.1% increase (Hayes, 2008). State governments have not been receiving the significant amounts they need in order to fully comply with NCLB. With past mandates the government supplied money for research, training, and recruitment; yet, this has not been an aspect of NCLB (Sizer, 2004). Without even this type of funding, some schools are greatly suffering, and these tend to be the schools in need of the most support. Another complaint is that schools began in unequal conditions with unequal resources. Many schools are in need of building repairs, materials, smaller class sizes, and high-quality teachers. Money has not been supplied through NCLB to create equality in the schools (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Karp, 2004; Liu, 2008; Sunderman & Orfield, 2008; Sunderman et al., 2005). Although the government is demanding more of schools and more of state departments of education, they have not supplied the money, infrastructure, resources, and knowledge base needed to ensure high quality (Comer, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Sunderman & Orfield, 2008).

Fortunately, under President Obama's stimulus package, approximately \$140 billion was allocated for education spending. Title I schools received an additional \$12

billion in 2 years, schools that were not consistently meeting their testing goals received \$1 billion, and \$20 billion was allocated for renovation, repairs, and other school improvements. Concerns persist that the money was not properly directed at the schools most in need, but this was a major step in the right direction (Morris, 2009). Above I have accounted for only \$33 billion dollars of that money. The rest of the money appears to have gone to funding college grants, maintaining programs for young children, and preventing job losses (Southall, 2009).

Given the sanctions that many schools face if they do not comply with the law or cannot achieve AYP, it is understandable that educational personnel would see the law as punitive, rather than supportive, in terms of helping low-performing students, teachers, and schools. It is very upsetting for those who have dedicated their lives to education to feel that they are being told that they are the problem, rather than to have the government acknowledge and provide aid for the poor conditions in which many students are taught, in which many teachers are required to teach, and in which many administrators are required to lead.

The fact that the United States has determined to rely on standardized tests to measure achievement is also questionable. Educators are trained to assess students through a wide variety of methods. Yet, the federal government has determined that a single measure, the standardized assessments, will be used to assess those of us involved in education. Until 2011, school leaders were told that students must be 100% proficient on assessments by the year 2014 or their schools would be penalized. NCLB created very unrealistic goals, even for schools where more funding and assistance is available. The fact remains that some children face considerable challenges and are simply low performers. At this time, while this mandate still exists, some schools have now been allowed more time. I will review additional policies shortly.

A further incentive for educational leaders to address and solve the problems of inequity in public schools came through an NCLB regulation to utilize money specifically for charter schools. These charter schools are given the latitude to experiment. They are not held to the same standards as public schools and are free from most bureaucratic restrictions. In most cases, they are even free from dealing with teacher and paraprofessional unions. Yet, they are established to compete directly with public schools and draw students and resources away from the public schools (Hayes, 2008). One may ask how this helps to produce equity.

Charter schools are not the only schools exempt from NCLB assessments, standards, and the mandate of “highly qualified teachers.” Private schools, home schools, and non-Title I districts are exempt from NCLB, too. About 10% of public school districts do not apply for Title I funds and cannot be forced to comply with NCLB laws. These schools tend to be located in wealthy districts (Hayes, 2008). As stated earlier, however, they may face similar sanctions, as states have been required to create a sanction system for these specific schools. This sanction system varies by state.

Community schools are now emerging in many public school districts as a way for schools to provide students with a wide variety of services in an effort to improve student achievement. The establishment of community schools requires schools to form a partnership between educators, families, volunteers, businesses, health agencies, social service agencies, youth development organizations, and others committed to fostering the achievement of children. Housed in public schools, community schools are open for extended hours, 7 days a week. They may operate in different but similar ways, because each community and the resources to draw from are different. These schools may provide everything from dental care, to medical care, to social work services, to sit-down family dinners. Students may be given

opportunities to participate in leadership training or to learn a string instrument and play in an orchestra.

While we believe that community schools are doing wonderful things for children and families, the advantages and disadvantages of these new schools are not yet known, and their sustainability has not been proven. They are also another step away from the current public school system. They are funded through such sources as community foundations, national philanthropies, corporate funds, and state-level initiatives, and through locally appropriated funds (Coalition for Community Schools, 2009). Through community schools, more federal and state money as well as private interests are vested in public schools. This is money that is not reaching our traditional public schools and may be preventing our most needy children from receiving the services and materials they need to be successful.

Many people worry that our public schools are coming under the control of the federal government and private interests. Diane Ravitch (2010) wrote extensively about the influence of foundations and wealthy individuals on public education in the United States. She shared these concerns:

There is something fundamentally antidemocratic about relinquishing control of the public education policy agenda to private foundations run by society's wealthiest people; when the wealthiest of these foundations are joined in common purpose, they represent an unusually powerful force that is beyond the reach of democratic institutions. These foundations, no matter how worthy and high-minded, are after all, not public agencies. They are not subject to public oversight or review, as a public agency would be. They have taken it upon themselves to reform public education, perhaps in ways that would never survive the scrutiny of voters in any district or state. If voters don't like the foundations' reform agenda, they can't vote them out of office. The foundations demand that public schools and teachers be held accountable for performance, but they themselves are accountable to no one. If their plans fail, no sanctions are levied against them. They are bastions of unaccountable power. (pp. 200–201)

Wealthy people are being given the power to determine school policies. They do not have the training and research knowledge on which to base their decisions. They also have no one to hold them accountable. They are experimenting with our public schools, and if what they do does not work or produces negative results, they are not required to answer to anyone or to pick up the pieces. It is most definitely a risk that our government allows this to happen. The fact is, as explained in Chapter IV, our past has already demonstrated that many of the educational ideas and policies put forth by the wealthy do not benefit African Americans and society as a whole. It is indeed concerning that they are being permitted so much power at this time.

NCLB has resulted in other unintended consequence as well. The law has allowed each state to establish its own set of standards and assessments, and to determine the appropriate level of proficiency that students must demonstrate each year. This means that some states have set low requirements and adjusted their requirements as well, in order to show progress and to look good to the public. Clearly, without a common definition of proficiency, there can be no common standard of educational goals across states. Thus, what is hailed as excellence in one state could be failing in another state (Hill, 2007; Koretz, 2008; Linn, 2008; Sunderman et al., 2005). As a result, NCLB is not producing equality.

Also because there is great variance in schools within a state, having one standard established by the state can be detrimental to some schools within the state as it fails to take into account the vast differences in schools and groups of students within that state. For example, there is an enormous difference between the school system in New York City, New York, and the school system in rural Cincinnati, New York. Not only is one a large city and the other a rural environment, but also they serve very different populations of students. The two cannot be compared in that the

contexts are tremendously different. With careful planning and/or local control, adjustments can be made for different needs and experiences.

It does seem that we cannot win either way with these proficiency standards. Applying one standard to all does not work well, but neither does varying the standards. There are negatives no matter how we approach the subject. The law did not account for these immense differences, and it appears that it fails to help the schools facing the greatest challenges. These factors cannot be ignored if we truly want to produce educational equity for children.

Many schools are finding that they are labeled as “in need of improvement” or “failing” because of the special education populations and the limited English proficient (LEP) and English-language learner (ELL) students they serve. It is indeed nearly every teacher’s goal to maximize learning for these students and to have school districts properly support them to meet these goals. Still, for many of these students, it is unrealistic to expect that they can achieve 100% proficiency on norm-referenced tests.

Even with appropriate instruction and modifications, there exists a group of special education students who because of their intellectual and cognitive disabilities cannot master the general education learning standards but do not qualify to take alternative assessments. Unfortunately, in New York State these students (who make up about 2% to 3% of the total population) still must take the NCLB examinations and are counted in AYP (New York State Education Department, 2007). If a school services a large percentage of these students, they are at a clear disadvantage through no fault of their own.

New York State also provides education for a large number of LEP students and ELLs (about 192,425, with New York City serving the most, at about 134,300 students). Research shows that the AYP goals for this group of students are simply

inappropriate. Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier conducted the most comprehensive study to find out how long it took students with no English-language background to score at the 50th percentile on norm-referenced tests. Through a longitudinal study, they discovered that it took anywhere from 5 to 10 years depending on how much native-language education students had received previously. And many students who were below grade level in their native language never achieved grade-level norms. Thomas and Collier demonstrated that the results were not affected by socioeconomic status, home language, or students' country of origin (see New York State Education Department, 2007). Therefore, the NCLB mandate requiring students to begin testing just 2 years after they have arrived in the United States sets them up for failure. It sets their schools up to fail as well.

In 2009, regulations for a new NCLB program, titled Race to the Top, were released. The federal government established a fund of 4.3 billion dollars for education reform. States were required to compete for this money. States were excluded from the competition if they limited charter schools or denied a linkage between student test scores and teacher evaluations. In order to receive the money, states were told to implement as many of 19 ideas the Obama administration came up with, none of which were evidence based. The reforms focused on teacher evaluation, test scores, merit pay, charter schools, shutting down schools, and or transforming schools. For educators, the conditions for Race to the Top money were punitive. Teachers were being threatened by the policies. Furthermore, U.S. media began to attack teachers and public education, too.

When the Race to the Top competition was announced, schools were facing a budget crisis, and those involved in schools were already suffering from that. Many school districts applied for Race to the Top funds out of a need for the money, rather than a belief that the changes would benefit children (Ravitch, 2010). Ten states and

the District of Columbia won the initial competition for the money. New York was one of the states selected. I witnessed Race to the Top conditions creating lower morale among teachers and within schools. Since that time it is my understanding that little has changed.

Within the United States, in September 2011, flexibility in NCLB law was offered to states whose leaders applied and could prove that they were making significant reform efforts. According to the Office of the Press Secretary, the White House (2011), in order to opt out of specific mandates, state leaders needed to prove that they are

transitioning students, teachers and schools to a system aligned with college- and career-ready standards for all students, developing differentiated accountability systems, and undertaking reforms to support effective classroom instruction and school leadership. (para. 2)

Major reform was required for states to gain exemption from a mandate. In February 2012, 10 states were approved for this flexibility. These states are no longer required to meet the goals of NCLB by 2014, but must set new performance targets (Brenchley, 2012). All in all, 39 states expressed an interest, and those not yet approved may be granted this flexibility at a later date. Although NCLB reauthorization was originally expected in 2008, the federal government is still in the process of completing it, and partisan politics are an issue (Duncan, 2012). At least for now, states do have the option of flexibility. And government leaders feel that by allowing this flexibility they are allowing for more state and local government decisions.

I wish to trust that our government and philanthropists believe they are doing the right things for children. Perhaps closing schools and reconstituting schools is the change force that is needed, since all else has failed. I can hope that it was just an oversight that the voices of educational leaders and school personnel were not better heard and that top researchers in the field of education were not consulted. After all,

most of us in the field of education know that there are more positive ways of going about reform and of supporting the disadvantaged. More testing in schools and more time spent preparing students for tests are simply not the ways to go about identifying schools in need of improvement.

All any policy leader needs to do to identify schools in need of improvement is to walk into a variety of schools unannounced. This concept derives from a Japanese term *gemba*, meaning “the real place.” The idea of *gemba* is that problems can be observed at the worksite. One must go directly to a place of work to understand the full impact of any problem and to gain data from all sources. When visiting a site, one is expected to approach with an open mind. Questions are not predetermined, and research goals are not established (Imai, 1997).

In applying the concept of *gemba* to the school settings, leaders may enter schools and visually see the differences that exist between schools in terms of the practices, resources, services, class sizes, and in the buildings themselves. One is also likely to see groups of students segregated in schools based on their perceived ability level. Utilizing the concept of *gemba* could enable our leaders to understand the vast differences between schools and even within schools. Yet, if going into schools is too much to ask of policy leaders, a few assessments and graduation rates can tell leaders where help is needed. Numerous standardized assessments and classroom time wasted on them are simply not needed to identify schools in need of improvement.

In so many ways, NCLB is detrimental to children and to public schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). Businesses such as test-preparation companies and tutoring services seem to be the ones benefiting most from NCLB. Private companies have also become more involved in running schools. Some researchers and leaders surmise that is where we are headed: to the privatization of public schools (Karp, 2004; Kohn, 2004). This may not be what educational leaders

and school personnel want, but those in struggling schools are already overburdened with demands. It might be too much to fight the forces that are embarrassing them and threatening to take them over. If this is to occur, it is in our best interest as a nation to learn from past lessons and to consult many diverse perspectives through research and even through diverse committees of the many stakeholders involved. We must try a new approach if we are to avoid the past mistakes.

Conclusions

Although schools were once run by local communities, that is no longer the case. A shift in power began to change school governance in the nineteenth century when school boards and superintendents became the major governing institution for schools. As of today, schools are subject to the influence of many governing institutions. Now courts, unions, corporations, other private entities, and governments at the local, state, and federal levels all have considerable influence over how schools are run. This is mainly a result of governmental legislation directed at improving school standards and the funding provided to schools that are associated with these changes. Now school boards and superintendents have little control over a school's direction. Instead, they are forced to operate within the legislative confines or suffer sanctions.

Whether in the public or private sphere, research is regulated by sets of laws at various levels. Thus the interface of the politics and laws regarding research, and the politics and laws of schools, interfere with one's ability to secure permission to conduct research in public schools and the actual procedures for carrying out the research. Local schools must follow state and federal laws in determining what research to allow in their schools. People who live in the United States are in a society where the threat of sanctions and of being sued exists on many levels. Thus, it is imperative for local school leaders to ensure that they follow all applicable laws and

policies. These requirements deter school leaders from allowing certain types of research.

A researcher is accountable to conduct research in a manner compliant with federal laws and the policies of states and schools. These laws and policies influence the type of research that is permitted in school districts. Also, when the research is permitted, these laws and policies may prevent some subjects from understanding and feeling comfortable with the paperwork a researcher is required to present and have signed in order for a subject to participate in the research. Participants may feel a sense of vulnerability when asked to sign their name providing consent for research that some view as controversial. Small research populations, such as African-American female teachers, may also hinder participation due to a feeling of lost confidentiality. The fear may exist among potential participants that the documentation of their participation in research could be used against them.

Returning to the subject of school leaders, in this climate of NCLB, it may be that school districts did not approve my study because personnel were already feeling stretched to the maximum. It may be that district leaders felt wrong in asking their administrators and teachers to do one more thing. It may be that they were already struggling with embarrassment over published test scores and the designation of “in need of improvement” and could not risk that one more negative thing be said about them and potentially leaked to the public. It may be that because of the climate, educational leaders believed that what teachers had to say simply did not matter. We educators may know best on some levels, but the fact remains that local control did not work. Now, the federal government is having its turn and local educational leaders and teachers are limited in what they can do. It may be that the federal government is in the process of taking over all public schools and that NCLB is the way this is being accomplished. It is worrisome that those who are disenfranchised have not been

consulted, and that experts from a variety of educational settings have also not been heard. It is also concerning that the wealthy have been given so much power in our educational system, despite their lack of training to do so and a history that shows their efforts can be detrimental.

As a school teacher and a researcher, I have known for a long time that those who make policy are out of touch with those who are in public schools and classrooms on a regular basis. It is clear to me that political leaders do not know, or understand, the realities of life in a variety of public school classrooms. A recommendation I have is based on proven manufacturing practices called *gemba*. This takes leaders to the schools and classrooms unannounced. The problems will be visible and give them firsthand experience of the reality of working schools. Though simple in concept, this practice is not currently followed.

We teachers often even feel that local school district leaders have “amnesia” regarding their time in the classroom. Their policies and what they are asking us to do appear not to align with what teachers know is best for students. It has been frustrating for school teachers, paraprofessionals, many school parents, and students involved in schooling, as we all feel powerless to effect the changes we wish to make and no one knows who is truly to blame or who to turn to for answers.

Ultimately, the politics of schools, the politics of research, and the historical ways in which they have been institutionalized greatly affects our public schools. It has also greatly affected my ability to conduct research on African-American teachers’ perspectives. The history of schooling demonstrates that leaders have often not acted in the best interests of African-American children and that the public schools have always been unequal. Laws recently established to help, appear instead to have hurt many disenfranchised youth and their schools. School leaders likely did not allow me access to their teachers because of the disadvantages they have been facing. They may

have feared that my research would be more hurtful than helpful. They may have also doubted the value of my research and that it could have made a difference, since they faced so many constraints and since they in fact may feel powerless. The reality that African-American teachers are small in number and tend to work in schools that lack resources also was likely a reason that when I was allowed to talk with them, they were resistant to participating in my research. They were likely overworked, felt that my research would not make a difference, and felt uncomfortable with me both as teachers and as African Americans. It is unfortunate that history has created these circumstances.

My research could have contributed to effective changes. I believe strongly that policy makers, educational leaders, educators within the classroom, parents, and students all view the schools in very different ways, and that there needs to be more understanding among these groups. I have also come to realize that many factors contribute to the educational situation for African-American students and teachers. Ultimately, the politics of schools, the politics of research, and the historical ways in which they have been institutionalized greatly affects our public schools and disenfranchised youth. The result is that local educational leaders are doing what we hope is the best they can, often while facing many constraints. I believe that with more research of this kind, with having the voices of African-American educators heard, and an integration of relevant research in policy, change can be forthcoming and the racial achievement gap can cease to exist.

CHAPTER VII:

RESEARCH INITIATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

In Chapters I through VI, I explained the educational research I had hoped to conduct and theorized about why I was unable to conduct that research. I covered the topics of the profession of being a teacher in the public school classroom, school and classroom practices, African-American experiences that influence education, educational law, and school governance and policies, as well as NCLB. An effort has been made to highlight challenges that may occur for researchers attempting to conduct research in public schools, and especially for researchers who wish to study a marginalized group of which they are not a part. In doing so, I hope that others will learn from my experience and will be able to work around these challenges. I also hope that educational leaders, universities, and governmental leaders may be more instrumental in ensuring that schools are more accessible to research initiatives not directly funded by them.

This chapter addresses the impact of NCLB on a sample of public schools and on the students, teachers, and leaders who work in them. Results obtained from a recent longitudinal study in three states that are relevant to the research presented here are summarized. I also discuss results from a data-driven study examining an urban school district that successfully maintained a narrow achievement gap. In addition, I review the results from a school district that has made significant attempts to narrow the achievement gap but have much more work to do before success can be claimed. These outcomes are important because NCLB aims to narrow the achievement gap in schools, but leaders have provided little information to school districts on how to do this. These studies also have important implications for future research that are in alignment with the study I attempted to conduct and the goals I have established. The

research studies I present below enable me to make recommendations on future research directions. I conclude by providing a brief summary of the chapters that have been presented, integrate them with this current chapter, and provide guidelines for future research efforts.

Summary of Results from the Implementing Standards-Based Accountability (ISBA) Project

As noted in Chapter VI, NCLB has greatly affected public schools around the country. The influence of these governmental mandates has led to much research and debate about their impact. This is important to the research I was attempting to accomplish, as each school I sought to conduct my research in was coping with the effects of NCLB.

In research presented by Hamilton et al. (2007) and Stecher et al. (2008) the voices of teachers are highly regarded. RAND Education, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, conducted research in public schools from 2003 to 2006. This research was conducted in three states: California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. They entitled it the Implementing Standards-Based Accountability (ISBA) Project.

The research team began with several general questions. They wanted to know what strategies states, districts, and schools used to implement standards-based accountability. Once they identified these strategies, they sought to learn which ones correlated with changes in classroom practice and student achievement, including teacher interviews and school-level data. Last, they required learning the extent to which test scores accurately indicate changes in student achievement. Through this process the researchers anticipated identifying methods for improving the implementation of standards-based reform, encouraging change in student achievement, and helping to bring about positive differences in schools and classrooms.

The states participating in this longitudinal study were selected to provide a widely differentiated representation of NCLB in the United States. California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania were chosen because each began at different starting points when the mandates for NCLB were enacted, and these three states also represented differences in geography and demography (Hamilton et al., 2007). To provide further understanding of the contextual factors in each state, a summary of the conditions in each state follows.

In California, a large percentage of Hispanic students (46%)¹ and a smaller than usual percentage of White students (32%), are being educated in public schools. Few Black and Asian students attend these schools (8%). They also service a large number of students from low-income households (about 49%). There are approximately 1,000 districts in the state, and more than 100 of these districts educate over 10,000 students, while about half of the school districts service fewer than 1,000. California also educates a large percentage of ELLs (about 25%). California had established a standards-based accountability system on its own prior to the federal enactment of NCLB (Hamilton et al., 2007).

In Georgia, a fairly large percentage of Whites (52%) and Blacks (38%), and far smaller percentages of Hispanic students (7%), Asian students (3%), and ELL students (4%) are taught. The state services a percentage of students from low-income households (46%) that is similar to California. Georgia has 180 districts, and each district educates anywhere from about 350 to 13,770 students, although most fall in the 2,500- to 10,000-student range. Georgia had begun a school accountability system using standards-based reform beginning in 2000. Thus, when NCLB was enacted, it already had a strong state-testing program in place (Hamilton et al., 2007).

¹ Data presented in this section are from the school years 2003–2004.

Educators in Pennsylvania, on the other hand, teach a large percentage of Whites (76%), a low percentage of Blacks (16%) and small percentages of Hispanics (6%) and Asians (2%). Only about 16% of students come from low-income households. Pennsylvania has 500 districts. In two of the districts over 25,000 students are taught, whereas in 128 districts fewer than 2,000 are taught. At the time that NCLB was enacted, Pennsylvania had an assessment system in place that was linked to sanctions. Yet, it had much work to do, as that system was a long way from being compliant with NCLB (Hamilton et al., 2007).

In addition to the differences mentioned above in each of these states, NCLB itself allowed for states to interpret and implement the law differently. Therefore, especially given the different stages of practice states had with standards-based accountability, there developed vast differences in how NCLB was interpreted and put into practice. Still, all three states had one thing in common. Each serviced approximately the same percentage of students with disabilities, ranging from 10% to 14% (Hamilton et al., 2007).

Districts in each state were stratified by size and random samples selected from that. Researchers were able to enroll 68 districts out of 104 that were selected to participate during the first year of the study. They increased this number to 92 districts participating out of 132 districts that were selected for the second and third years. Only traditional public schools, subject to NCLB mandates, were solicited to participate (no special schools, such as charter schools or alternative schools). From 261 to 301 schools participated in the study at any one time over the course of the 3 years. Schools were selected randomly, and the number of schools invited to participate was based on the size of the district. Within each district from 1 to 5 elementary schools and from 1 to 5 middle schools participated. Most schools in the study made adequate yearly progress (AYP). In 2006, the percentage making AYP in

each state ranged from 61% to 83%. Few schools were identified as in need of improvement. The range was from 10% to 23% (Stecher et al., 2008).

At the state-department level, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with an array of vital personnel in the education department, and also with state policy makers. In addition, state data were collected. This mainly consisted of the content standards and research the district had conducted to ensure that these standards were in alignment with testing. At the district level, the research team conducted semi-structured telephone interviews and paper-and-pencil surveys. At the school level, teachers of mathematics and science at the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th and 8th grades were selected to complete paper-and-pencil surveys. Additionally, case studies were conducted in 14 schools the first year and in 16 schools the second year. Principals, teachers, Title I coordinators, and other administrative support staff were interviewed face to face. In addition, several parent focus groups were conducted. However, due to their small size and the fact that participants were self-selected, the information obtained from these cannot be generalized to be representative of all parents from the schools (Stecher et al., 2008).

Researchers were able to gather a wide variety of data through this process, gain a significant amount of information about the implementation of NCLB, and draw many conclusions based on these findings. Much of what the researchers learned is not applicable to the information I present in this dissertation. I therefore focus on the results that relate to my findings so that I may provide direction for future research efforts involving teacher perspectives (Stecher et al., 2008).

First, it is important to note that the researchers found common responses across states, districts, and schools. They believed that this information may be generalized across other states. They also found major differences across states, districts, and schools, mainly due to differences in contextual factors. These findings

have significant implications for policy makers, as these differences should be taken into consideration as changes to the law are made (Stecher et al., 2008). I do not cover the individual differences here, as they are not applicable to this dissertation.

Across all three states, many teachers reported that the tests provide valuable information about the level of student mastery of concepts. In fact, many school districts began administering progress assessments, and many teachers are satisfied with these results as well. They found that all of the assessments helped them identify gaps between curriculum and instruction and enabled them to make corrections. Often these testing data were utilized as a major focus of professional development and efforts for improvement. Still, teachers were not as optimistic as administrators about the validity of these assessments, and teachers expressed more concerns about students (Stecher et al., 2008).

Many teachers also felt that NCLB positively influenced teaching and learning as they improved their practices. Yet, they also expressed a negative impact as well. They felt that they narrowed the curriculum to address only what was tested and limited instruction to the types of problems and formats used on the tests. In addition, teachers spoke of concern for specific groups of students. Often teachers felt that their focus was being given to borderline students, and that low- and high-performing students were being shortchanged (Stecher et al., 2008).

Although teachers reported aligning instruction with curriculum and making changes to instructional planning, they did not report changing their teaching techniques. These results stand in contrast to a national survey that reported 60% of districts had taught teachers specific methods for improving the instruction of low-performing students in reading and math. The researchers recommended further exploration of this topic (Stecher et al., 2008).

Teachers conveyed that their efforts in implementing NCLB were hindered by a variety of factors, many of which existed prior to NCLB. They noted a lack of time. Teachers felt constrained by too much material to teach in the time allotted and too little time for planning instruction. Teachers also complained of class sizes being too large, struggling to address the needs of a wide range of ability within their classes, lack of support from parents, and student tardiness and absenteeism. Last, teachers believed they must move forward with curriculum in order to cover all they were required to cover, despite the lack of basic skills students demonstrated (Stecher et al., 2008). In other words, teachers expressed frustration with NCLB and did not fully agree with the mandates.

The findings of this study have important implications for future research. Hamilton et al. (2007) and Stecher et al. (2008) emphasized that teachers need to be heard. Teachers are the ones in the classroom and the ones who are teaching children. The main effects of NCLB will be achieved through teacher efforts and what they choose to do in the classroom. Therefore, it is in the best interest of policy makers to ensure that teachers support NCLB and teach in the most effective ways. Additionally, teachers are the ones who are closest to observing the effects of NCLB on learning and on children in general. Teachers have important insights and concerns, of which those who are not directly involved in children's daily lives and learning experiences may have little knowledge.

I know that there is great value in hearing the voices of public school teachers. This is very important research that could help bridge some of the gaps between what policy makers believe and what teachers actually experience. It is also important that this research be conducted in a variety of settings. Schools and policies vary significantly across each state and across the nation. In conducting the research, it will be especially valuable to document the context from which teachers' voices emerge.

One way to conduct the individual research I hoped to conduct would be through documenting teachers' voices in general regarding NCLB. From there, the voices of African Americans, Hispanics, and/or other disenfranchised groups could be extracted and studied in their own right. Not only would this help to make specific groups of teachers feel as though they were not singled out, but it would also come across as a topic that may yield less controversial findings. In doing this, one may not gain the depth and breadth of information I had sought, but important insights could still be gained. Because marginalized groups are suffering the negative consequences of NCLB now, their voices stand to be different from those of the majority group in the United States. We need to pay attention to what they say and what they know. If we truly want to leave no child behind, we must hear the voices that may not represent the norm. We must respond in ways that are culturally and educationally relevant for these specific groups that have been historically left behind.

At this juncture, it is important to note that the research of Hamilton et al. (2007) and Stecher et al. (2008) was a commissioned study. It came about as a result of genuine governmental interest, and there was a legal avenue for the use of this data. My research did not have this. I was presenting research as an individual. My work was supported through an institution, but not by an institution. Thus, I could not guarantee that my research results would be used. This factor alone may have made it difficult for potential participants to see value in what I was doing. Or, it may have made them feel as if it was not worth the risks they perceived. Therefore, for those of us pursuing research with disenfranchised groups, it is also important to have an influence on government. We must convince governmental leaders that there is significant value in our form of research. We must work to convince them to commission this type of research.

Summary of Results from a Data Analysis of the Achievement Gaps in Norfolk, Virginia

NCLB has challenged districts to close the achievement gap and threatens to penalize them if they do not. Yet, school districts were provided with little knowledge on how to accomplish this goal. Thus, a data analysis of the achievement gaps in Norfolk, Virginia, was conducted to describe the achievement gap that exists between African-American students and European-American students in Norfolk, Virginia, and to present strategies the district used to narrow the gap. The premise of the study is that we must critically look at successful school districts in an effort to learn what works so that we may use these strategies in school districts that are continuing to struggle. Furthermore, by highlighting the success of African-American students in city school districts, the researchers demonstrated that leaders must reject deficit models that blame the victim and be held accountable for making a difference. Norfolk is similar in composition and experience to many school districts that continue to struggle with closing the achievement gap, and its experiences may be helpful to those districts (Ikpa & McGuire, 2009).

Norfolk Public Schools is the largest school district in Virginia. In 2008, approximately 33,000 students attended its schools. Ikpa and McGuire (2009) described the demographics:

A review of race/ethnic demographics revealed the following divisions: 48.4% European American; 44.1% African American; 05% American Indian; 2.8% Asian American; 0.01% Native American; 1.7% other race; 2.5% biracial or multiracial; 3.8% Latino. . . . The districts' 2008 enrollment is 35,610 students of which 59% receive free or reduced lunch and have been categorized as economically disadvantaged. Approximately 23.7% of the students attending the district's public schools are European American; 63.9% are African American; 3.9% are Hispanic; 2.4% are Asian/Pacific Islander; and 0.25% are American Indian/Pacific Islander students. (p. 42)

Thus, although the percentages of European Americans and African Americans were fairly equal in the community, they were not in the school system. Many European-American parents exercised their privilege to send their children to private school.

Norfolk Public Schools experienced a period of desegregation, from 1959 to about 1983 for elementary students, to about 2001 for middle school students, and to about 2003 for high school students, before returning to neighborhood schools. Many European-American families had moved out of the city, and efforts at desegregation were deemed ineffective. These desegregation decisions were made not only by the school board but also by the court system (Ikpa & McGuire, 2009). As a result of the efforts at desegregation and the return to neighborhood schools the Norfolk Public School system leaders had to accept their situation as resegregated public schools. Leaders made a focused commitment to provide a high-quality education to all students and to narrow the achievement gaps.

In 2005, Norfolk Public Schools won the Broad Prize for Urban Education. This is currently the largest education award school districts may receive. It is awarded to urban school districts that “demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among low-income and minority students” (Broad Foundations, 2010). The school district had also been a finalist in the competition since 2002. The award money funded scholarships for those who were graduating, as required by the Broad Foundation. The Broad Foundation hailed the district’s improvements in reading and math test scores, and praised the narrowing of ethnic achievement gaps. Specifically, in 2005 it was recognized for the fact that African-American middle school students had closed the gap between themselves and their European-American peers by 10 points, and at the elementary level Hispanic students had closed the achievement gap in reading by 11 points. One must also remember that they had been narrowing the achievement gap

over a period of years and that African-American students represented the large majority in these schools (Ikpa & McGuire, 2009). From 2004 to 2007, in elementary and middle school reading and math and in high school math, African-American students in Norfolk Public Schools, in relationship to their European-American peers, were doing better than other schools in the state at narrowing the achievement gap. This is a significant achievement for a city school district given all the additional challenges it faces.

Within this study, Ikpa and McGuire (2009) identified a variety of strategies the school district used to achieve success in narrowing the achievement gap, and also discussed another study on classroom methods that can make a difference. I list their school district recommendations below, but encourage readers to refer to the authors for further explanations. They were 1) “Curriculum Alignment and the Articulation of Academic Goals,” 2) “Staff Alignment and Capacity Building,” 3) “Centralized Instructional Programs and Practices,” 4) “Data-Driven Decision Making,” 5) “Early Interventions and Adjustments,” 6) “Stable Leadership,” and 7) “Equity in Inputs and Outputs” (Ikpa and McGuire, 2009, pp. 129–132).

This research not only highlights the many barriers that African-American students face in the school system but also provides other school districts with strategies to use in working to close the achievement gap. Ikpa and McGuire (2009) stressed that researchers must identify the policies, curriculums, and educational leaders’ practices that allow children to succeed and that enable school districts to narrow the achievement gap. They also recognized the importance of context and of ensuring the identification of practices that can hold up over time in a continually changing environment.

My initially proposed study represented a small piece of this process. I sought to identify ways of narrowing the achievement gap in one school district from the

perspective of teachers who felt the effects of these policies both in their everyday work environment and from the perspective of being a minority within a dominant system. We must do all we can to work toward change within society at large. But since that change can be slow and very difficult to come by, we must also do all we can for children within the dominant system in which we all function. Thus, I recommend many studies within many different school environments to address the achievement gap from a variety of perspectives. We need to learn all that we can to maximize our efforts, so that all school districts and all school children find success. Ikpa and McGuire (2009) looked at the positives in a district that had achieved success in narrowing the achievement gap. In order to conduct the type of research I had proposed, it is recommended that a positive approach be sought so that the research is not considered controversial.

Summary of Results from the Diversity Project at Berkeley High School

The Berkeley Unified School District of Berkeley, California, is situated in a very liberal area where affluence exists and resources are not lacking. Yet, it serves as a glaring example of the achievement gap, despite meaningful efforts by the district to properly serve the most disadvantaged. It is situated in a community where overt racism does not exist and where the commitment to tolerance is unquestionable. In fact, desegregation here occurred voluntarily. In contrast to the large majority, this school district created a system of shared busing in which Whites and Blacks alike were bused. And, in Berkeley, White flight did not undermine integration. Still, the achievement gap persists (Noguera & Wing, 2006).

From 1996 to 2002 researchers from the University of California at Berkeley partnered with educators, school staff, parents, and students of the district to form the Diversity Project at Berkeley High School. This research was initiated by an institution with funding, whereas my proposed research was not institutional, and I did

not have funding. The researchers' goal was to identify the variables that contributed to the achievement gap that existed between races and between social classes, and to ascertain the factors that accounted for the racial separation of students within the school. Ultimately, they wished to narrow the achievement gap and to reduce the inequities that existed within the system. They sought to use their findings to foster change within the school and structured their research methods to achieve this goal (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Here I provide a brief summary of the Diversity Project, after which I describe how it ties in with the research I proposed and the research I have reviewed in this chapter, before providing further recommendations for future research.

The Diversity Project began in the fall of 1996 and over the course of 6 years utilized a wide variety of research methods. Noguera and Wing (2006) described their methods:

We employed a variety of research strategies, including an annual survey and study of the entire class of 2000 that was maintained over four years; focus groups with all of the core constituencies; analyses of course enrollment patterns; analyses of school discipline patterns; and a review of academic programs such as the detracted freshman English/history core and the English as a Second Language programs. (p. 20)

Initially, Diversity Project leaders put together two diverse teams and began forming committees and task forces. The Diversity Project then continually expanded over time to include more committees and many members of the school and community. In order to gain as much participation as possible, project leaders used a grant to pay research assistants and to gain release time for teachers. Through these methods the researchers were able to explore and critically analyze the topics that directly influenced the achievement gap. By the end, the Diversity Project had become a normal part of the educational environment (Noguera, 2006).

The researchers found many areas in need of improvement. They discovered that the way schools are structured, and the lack of support and guidance given to disenfranchised youth, leads to great inequality in the school. Everything from the way in which courses can be chosen, to tracking, to teacher assignment, the way in which the ELL program is instituted, the way that gender is negotiated, and the perceived racial barriers that exist in the after-school programs, influences the inequality that results (Noguera & Wing, 2006). As Rubin et al. (2006) stated, “The structure undermines efforts to provide a consistently high-quality education to all students, regardless of how well intentioned the teachers or how hard working the students” (p. 85). Until we as a nation are willing to analytically examine the process of schooling and to actually make related changes, progress will not be maximized.

The economic, social, and cultural capital of students and their families also plays a significant role in the education children receive. They serve to provide invisible advantages to the privileged while leaving the unprivileged disadvantaged (Rubin et al., 2006; Wing, 2006). For example, while low-income students must rely on the school for guidance and help in planning for college, high-income students can hire private coaches and people to assist with their college applications. While technically savvy parents can share information with each other online, those who lack that knowledge or the resources miss out on a lot of important information (Wing, 2006). It was also discovered that White students sneak away from campus and get away with cutting classes. Yet, Black students don't even attempt to sneak away. They simply walk away and accept whatever discipline comes to them (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006). The cultural capital that White students possess enables them to remain free of trouble or to receive minimal consequences, when the truth is they are performing the same negative behaviors for which the Black children are being punished (Gregory et al., 2006). I have presented only a few minor examples of how

the forms of capital students possess greatly affect the education they receive. Noguera and Wing (2006) explained these forms of capital in detail and their overall effect on schooling:

Social scientists have identified significant resources, or forms of capital, that play a role in influencing student academic outcomes. Research has shown that economic capital, that is, the wealth and income of parents, is one of the primary factors influencing student achievement (Coleman and others, 1966; Rothstein, 2004; Farkas, 2004). Student achievement is also influenced by more subtle resources such as social capital—the benefits derived from connections to networks and individuals with power and influence (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001; Noguera, 2003)—and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)—the tastes, styles, habits, language, behaviors, appearance, and customs that serve as indicators of status and privilege. All three forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—play a role in perpetuating disparate educational experiences and differential access to educational opportunities. However, they do so in interaction with seemingly neutral structures that operate within schools and society. (p. 31)

Thus, there is much that occurs in schools that those who are privileged believe is normal. But many children are being denied access to the knowledge and opportunities that all children should receive. Without interventions by school educators and leaders to bring about equity, disenfranchised students are at an extreme disadvantage.

The researchers also explored the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers to gain a better understanding of all the issues. Among many things, they learned that parents did care but felt excluded and that educational personnel often formed wrong assumptions about parents and students (Chatmon, Scott-George, Okahara, Fuentes, Wing, & Noguera, 2006). They also learned that many students were rendered invisible in their classes and were not being challenged by their teachers. Even well-meaning teachers often lacked the time and support needed to make a difference (Mosely, 2006). Fortunately, the Diversity Project was able to make a difference in many of these areas.

Ultimately, the Diversity Project did not bring about the change in the achievement gap it was designed to accomplish. The researchers made it clear that they still believe that these changes can occur and they hope that others will learn from their experience (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Several factors influenced their inability to bridge the achievement gap. A major factor is that school leadership was unstable. In nearly every year of the Diversity Project, new principals served the school. This had the effect of creating a sense of uneasiness and forcing teachers and staff into ongoing new initiatives. Staff morale was low. Teachers were frustrated by things such as needing equipment and discovering that it did not work. Sadly, during two years, fires were also reported dozens of times, resulting in reconstruction of parts of the school and limited space. Graffiti lined the walls in parts of the building, too. In general, the climate was chaotic.

Sometimes the Diversity Project and the desire to narrow the achievement gap simply weren't a priority at the school. Other issues had to be dealt with, and establishing order and a calm environment were primary concerns. Furthermore, the coordinators of the Diversity Project had not fully recognized the opposition they would face from parents of the privileged students and even from some of the teachers and administrators. Still, the Diversity Project revealed much about the dynamics of the school system and the reasons why some children do not succeed (Noguera & Wing, 2006).

The researchers were able to make many recommendations for change. These involve steps that will move the school toward closing the achievement gap, steps toward enhancing learning and participation, and steps toward involving marginalized groups on an ongoing basis. The recommendations are far too many to list here, but may be found throughout Noguera and Wing's (2006) book and specifically on pages 291 through 293. Perhaps if they are not implemented and successful at Berkeley High

School, they will be implemented and successful elsewhere. After all, a significant number of schools in the United States face similar challenges.

The Diversity Project demonstrated that changing schools in order to create equity and equality for all children is an enormous challenge in an environment where life is neither equal nor equitable (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Gains can be made, and we must strive for equality. But the challenges are great, and it is important that research address these challenges and that schools learn from one another. This study further substantiated my own research recommendations. There are things that school district leaders can do and there are things that teachers can do in the classroom to make a difference. These changes will take time, and district leaders will need to be creative and perhaps even daring. Yet, for the sake of our country, we must strive to make these adjustments.

We must also research changes to quantify and understand the effects of new initiatives. In addition, we need to conduct research within individual schools and within districts to adequately understand the dynamics in a community, so that specific needs can be effectively identified and addressed. Noguera and Wing (2006) also stated a belief that I have upheld within my endeavors:

. . . teacher reflection and research is an essential part of eliminating the achievement gap. This belief is rooted in our understanding that school change is not just about altering the processes and systems that guide schooling. It is also about battling macro forces like institutional racism, and doing that by addressing the microlevel classroom interactions between teachers and students. (p. 165)

Teachers are the people who directly influence children. Teachers are the ones who know them best and who can make changes within the classroom. And teachers are directly affected by mandates and policy changes. We need to hear their voices. We need to understand how ideas and theories translate to classroom practice and to the detriment or benefit of children. We especially need to hear the voices of groups that

have been marginalized as well. It is clear that the dominant perspective is not making the difference for children who have long been neglected within our educational system. It is time we do things differently, both within institutionalized research and within individual research.

This study also leads us to a way in which my research could be accomplished: as a component of a larger study. Through this large-scale university study, several doctoral candidates were able to conduct their research. Had the opportunity been available to me, I likely could have interviewed teachers and used the voices of African-American teachers specifically to accomplish my goals. Conducting the research I had hoped to conduct, through larger initiatives, may be a viable option. That the school and many educators were involved on an ongoing basis might have put African-American educators more at ease, and perhaps they would have felt comfortable participating. Institutionalized research and mandated research are vital. While the struggle for individual researchers to break through barriers is pursued, it is important to also convince those who mandate research and those who are able to pursue institutional research to value teachers' voices and the perspectives of marginalized groups.

Synopsis and Further Recommendations for Future Research

In Chapter I, I explained the research I had hoped to conduct and the fact that I could not conduct it. I had hoped to focus on the perspectives of African-American female educators. In understanding their perspectives I also sought to understand the context in which they worked. After facing considerable challenges in being able to conduct this research, I changed my focus to gaining an understanding of the nature of the barriers that prevented successful research on my part. I have pursued this route so that researchers, including myself, can learn from my experience and the theories I have developed here. In presenting my research plans and theories, I recognized the

need for people to know about me. The events of my life play a significant role in the research I hoped to pursue and the recommendations I make here. Thus, I completed this chapter by explaining my professional experience.

In Chapter II, I described the methodology of the research I initially pursued. I strove to interview administrators in education, in addition to the teachers; gain data about the school district from publications; and observe the teachers teaching and working. In addition to two teacher interviews and a group interview with teachers, I planned to interview district administrators, including the superintendent of schools, an assistant superintendent, the curriculum coordinator, and four principals. This was so that I could gain and document a more thorough understanding of the environment. I also sought to obtain state-level publications, school district documentation, newspaper articles, historical data, and any other relevant sources that might have helped me better understand the conditions in which these schools functioned. Last, I wanted to observe each teacher throughout 2 full school days; the observation would occur between the first and second interviews. In analyzing the data, I planned to use a modified grounded theoretical approach, with modifications, as I already had formed a core theoretical framework and had established the purpose of my work. My core theoretical approach was to be what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms a “Black feminist epistemology,” and I planned to conduct my research as an outsider within. I believe that the use of multiple research strategies would yield more in-depth data, would help me identify important themes and exceptions, and would help me better understand and document the context in which these teachers worked. Within this chapter, I also provided a literature review of the perspectives of African-American female teachers. This review demonstrated the value in documenting their voices and the diversity of perspectives that African-American teachers possess.

In Chapter III, I discuss the purpose of education and current educational movements that value diversity. I cover the educational theories focused on bridging the achievement gap, and methods and strategies leading to success for African-American students. This chapter was written to substantiate the need for my proposed research. Within the chapter I also endeavored to demonstrate that all schools can show improvement, even within the constraints faced by a lack of funding and government mandates. There is much that leaders can do to improve education for African Americans.

In Chapter IV, I began to theorize as to why I was unable to conduct my research. Here I specifically explored the careers of teachers and the training teachers receive. I explained that teacher training often limits educating prospective teachers on research methods. Teachers tend to learn only how to conduct basic research in their individual classrooms. Their training most often neglects learning how to conduct the type of research that involves gaining permission from an IRB. I theorized that teacher training could prevent teachers from understanding the research process and paperwork involved. As a result, teachers may also be unwilling to participate in the type of research I was hoping to conduct. Additionally, I explained that teaching demands a great deal of time and effort, more than what most people believe. I theorized that the careers of teachers are often very demanding and that this may have prevented many from wanting to participate in my research. The demands on teachers, especially untenured teachers, are sufficient reasons for teachers to not want to participate in my research. Yet, race is still a factor for the teachers I hoped to interview and observe, as African-American teachers are disproportionately affected by a lack of resources and institutionalized racism. Moreover, as a result of race, there were fewer teachers from whom I could seek participation and fewer districts in which I could potentially conduct my research. The realities of being a teacher and the

realities of racial experience each influenced my ability to conduct research involving the perspectives of African-American teachers.

In Chapter V, I theorized that a long history of racism and mistreatment, as well as the impact of that on African-American teachers, is among the reasons I was unable to conduct my research. I began by reviewing the fact that slavery existed in this country for centuries, creating a base of wealth for many European Americans and a lack of wealth for African Americans. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, governmental policies continued to put wealth in the hands of European Americans while excluding African Americans from the same privileges and opportunities. The Homestead Act of 1862 and the handling of the Gold Rush serve as examples. I explain racist attitudes and belief systems that existed and may still exist in the minds of some, and the mentality of White privilege that continues to exist today in the minds of many. This chapter served to further substantiate the fact that race played a central aspect in the research I pursued. U.S. history creates a situation in which African Americans mistrust White researchers, and in which White educational leaders may not value the perspectives of African Americans.

Next, I turned to the educational history of public schools as this influences the work our teachers perform and the environment our students encounter. Through this history I provided an understanding of how racism became imbedded in our school systems and that it continues to operate today. I theorized that this history may have prevented African-American teachers from trusting me. It may also have prevented European-American leaders from valuing the knowledge they could have gained from African-American teachers. I discussed educational history in both the North and the South as well as history specific to New York State, before addressing the overriding philosophies in U.S. educational history as a whole and our educational history since emancipation. Through this history we learn that African Americans, in general, have

always valued education and have found ways to gain an education. This effort exists despite the fact that priority for funding and access has been given to European Americans and other immigrant groups.

In Chapter VI, I turned my attention to the laws, the governance of schools, and the policies that are affecting our school system currently. Here I theorized that the way in which our school system has evolved and is now run affects both why school districts were uninterested in having me conduct my research there, and why school teachers may have been reluctant to participate the two times that I was able to interest school districts in my project. The process of informed consent and research is not something most teachers are taught, and the paperwork I was required to have them sign may have been a deterrent. Also, many school districts are struggling right now with the mandates of NCLB and the resulting economic hardships. Adding more to their plates may not have been an option for them. Furthermore, the loss of local control may in fact leave school districts feeling powerless to make any of the changes that teachers could recommend. Therefore, we have an additional reason why leaders may have failed to see value in the research I was hoping to conduct.

Everything I have discussed within this dissertation leads us back to the fact that public schools are currently facing the consequences of NCLB. For some school leaders this may be good for their schools. For many, especially those educating marginalized groups, this experience is negative. Hamilton et al. (2007) and Stecher et al. (2008), through their longitudinal research in schools, made a strong case for why it is important to hear and document the voices of our country's teachers as policy leaders look to make changes to NCLB. I take this a step further and state that it is very important to listen to and document the voices of teachers from marginalized groups specifically. Educational reformers claim to be attempting to narrow the achievement gap. Since it is members of marginalized groups who are suffering the

most through reforms, and since it is them we are claiming to want to help, we need to hear their perspectives the most.

Government leaders and schools district leaders appear to lack the knowledge or ability needed to narrow the achievement gap. They may even lack the belief that it can be done. Thus, we need to conduct research to prove that it can be accomplished, to discover the methods that work, and to learn the best methods for implementation within specific environments. Both Ikpa and McGuire (2009) and Noguera and Wing (2006), in different ways, sought to uncover methods that school districts, leaders, and personnel could employ in closing the achievement gaps. Much more research of this type is needed in a variety of environments.

These are confusing times. The federal government has decided that teachers, administrators, and local school districts have had their say in public education for years and have made very little improvement. Now our government believes it is their turn, and it has increased funding and mandated change in schools. While these mandates are putting a focus on changes that need to be made, they are also turning more schools away from public education. Often schools are finding money elsewhere and receiving funding from the federal government to function outside the public school system. This leaves many concerned that African-American students and other disenfranchised groups may still not truly receive the education they deserve. Now more than ever we need the research that those from marginalized groups can achieve.

Researchers who hold an outsider within perspective or an insider perspective need to be able to get into schools in order to study disenfranchised groups. They need support from district leaders in contacting potential subjects and in gaining their trust. My research may have led to some controversial findings for those who do not want to acknowledge the truth. However, there was no ill intent in the research I hoped to conduct. I only wished for good to come from it. As a teacher who had the opportunity

to teach in a school where the student body was primarily African-American, I better understand the struggles these children endure day to day. I believe strongly that the findings I sought are important first steps to decreasing the achievement gap for these children. Thus, we need to be persistent and pursue this research and similar research in ways that are different.

I know the research I initially proposed can be done. An African American, or a researcher of another ethnicity who has become an insider, may conduct this research if they have strong networks within a school district where primarily African-American students attend. If these options do not exist, however, as they did not for me, there are still ways to conduct very similar research.

I recommend approaching the research in a positive manner. This study is possible if the research is done in a school or school district that has been successful in bridging the achievement gap. If we talk to teachers about what has been successful in their schools, we researchers can be successful, too. Leaders and teachers will view this research as positive, and teachers will not feel afraid to speak. The nature of the questions would change, but the information to be gained would be quite similar.

I also advise that voices be heard as part of a larger research initiative when feasible. That has been effective in many of the studies I reviewed. If all teachers in a school are talking, we can extract the voices of disenfranchised groups from that larger study and analyze and document them in their own right. We would not obtain the same depth and breadth of data, but the knowledge acquired would still be valuable.

Another option for very similar research is to have voices heard and documented from outside of the school system, where school district permission is not required. In this case, data regarding the context in which the teachers work would need to be collected in ways that do not require the researcher to be present within the schools. Researchers can get to know African-American teachers through being a part

of the school or community in order to gain a rapport and a positive reputation. This, in combination with the fact that school district leaders would not know of the study, would encourage African Americans to participate. There would be a greater rapport established with them and stronger confidentiality would exist. Specific information about schools is publicly available and can be sought online, through the school district, in newspapers, and often in historical documents. Additionally, the public is invited to attend open door sessions of school board meetings and frequently is invited to other public school events. Researchers are a part of the public and could thus attend these sessions to gain information. Community members may be willing to talk as well. The observation piece would be lost and the understanding of the context would not be as thorough, but important information would still be gained.

As a last resort, the research could be conducted in a more deceptive manner. This borders ethical boundaries. Yet, due to the importance of the research and the challenges in conducting it, it is an option that may be necessary. If teachers believe that they are talking as part of a larger study when they are not, or regarding a more general topic, they will be more comfortable and more willing to participate. I was not able to do this as it does not suit me. Still, I know it is very important that much more of this research is conducted and valued. It will benefit not only African Americans, but also all citizens of the United States. It is more important now than ever, as our children must learn to function well within a global and diverse economy.

African Americans value education and have historically been very creative in gaining an education for themselves. They have struggled forward despite a lack of resources and support from our leaders. African Americans do want what is best for their children, the same as other people. History has left them with unequal opportunities and different perspectives on education. It is very important to hear their ideas and thoughts. It is imperative that we work together with those from

marginalized groups so that we may correct the history of neglect that exists in our educational system and that has a disproportionately negative impact on them. We know that African Americans have the same potential as every other human being. We know that successful methods have been created and successful schools for African Americans exist. We must strive to capitalize on this success and to learn from it. We must also commit to stop doing what we know is not working.

Educational improvements can be made in all settings, and it is time we set about making those improvements. African-American educators have much to contribute, and their perspectives need to be heard and valued. I know this firsthand, because without the help of African-American educators I never would have survived my teaching experience in a large city school district. I also would not have learned successful methods for supporting and educating African-American students within this setting. I have learned from what I have been through and have plans to continue my efforts to positively impact African-American education in different ways moving forward. I encourage all educational researchers to learn from my lessons. We must continue to pursue research to benefit children, especially our disenfranchised youth. We must stand up for what is right and provide equity in education for all of our children. It most certainly can be done!

APPENDIX A:

CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEWEE BASIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Pseudonym _____

This questionnaire serves to provide me with basic information about you and to compile data about interviewees as a group. For any future documentation, I will use pseudonyms for your name and for school names. Identifying information of any sort will not be utilized.

Please use the back if you need more space on any of the questions.

How many years have you been teaching as a full-time teacher? _____

How many years have you taught in the public school system? _____

How many years have you been teaching in this school? _____

How many years have you held this current position? _____

Please list your previous teaching experience in terms of the schools you have taught in, the grade levels you have taught, for how many years each, and in which subject areas. (*If it's easiest, you may attach a resume*).

Please list the degrees you have earned from accredited colleges/universities and the subject areas of these degrees:

What grade level do you currently teach?

What subject(s) do you currently teach?

APPENDIX B:
CONSENT FORMS

Breaking Through the Barriers: African-American Educators' Perspectives on Educational Practice

Teachers—You are invited to participate in a research study. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an African-American teacher in this school district. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to document the voices and perspectives of African-American educators on educational practice.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study I will ask you to complete a basic questionnaire providing me with your teaching experience as well as your educational background. This will take about 5–10 minutes to complete. I will also ask you to participate in two individual interviews that will each take about 1 hour, and 1 group interview that will take about one additional hour. Additionally, I will ask that I observe you for 2 full days as you teach and perform your work duties. Last, I will ask that you review a copy of the interview transcripts to ensure that you are represented in the manner you wish. This will take about an hour.

Benefits and Risks: Benefits include having your voice and perspective heard and documented, with the intent that policymakers, educators, and educational administrators may utilize this research to improve education for African-American students and for students in general. In the future, this research may also serve as historical documentation of the experiences of African-American educators. Known risks include that your principal will have knowledge of the fact that I am observing you and that I am conducting research in the district, district administrators may know that you participated in the study, other participants in the study may meet you if you agree to participate in the group interview, and members of your community may be able to guess that you participated in the study, if in fact they read the resulting publications and know of your relationship with me. The research will be utilized for a dissertation in which quotes will be published, and potentially for a variety of publications including journal articles and a book. In all publications the transcripts of our conversations will not be published, but instead relevant quotes will be utilized and pseudonyms will be used. The purpose of each publication will be to document the perspectives of African-American educators as they relate to educational practice. Specifically, I will focus upon the barriers to providing African-American students an effective education, teachers' coping strategies, and teachers' recommendations for change.

You are allowed to ask questions concerning the study, both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable without any penalty to you. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Your answers will be confidential. Your name will not appear on anything other than the consent forms. At no time will anyone's real name be utilized. In addition, the name of the school district and any of the schools will not be utilized in documentation or in publication. Relevant quotes will be published using pseudonyms and any personal data will be presented in aggregate so that your individual contributions will not be identified.

A digital recorder will be used. These interviews will be burned onto a compact disc and erased from the digital recorder. I will archive compact discs in a locked safe after transcription. Transcriptions and other non-published materials will be archived as well and placed in a locked safe. Archives will be confidential and kept for a period of ten years and then destroyed.

If you have any questions: You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me (Christy Dodge) at any time at _____ or at _____ >, or my advisor (N'Dri Assie-Lumumba) at _____ or at _____. You may also contact the University Committee on Human Subjects (UCHS) with any concerns or complaints. They may be reached at _____ by phone at _____, and you may view their website at <http://www.osp.cornell.Compliance/UCHS/homepageUCHS.htm>>. Please note that email and Internet transmissions are neither private nor secure. There is a chance that these transmissions may be read by a third party.

You will receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in this study.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Consent to be recorded: Please sign below if you are willing to have interviews recorded on digital recorder and burned to compact discs. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded on a digital recorder:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the UCHS on November 30, 2006.

Breaking Through the Barriers: African-American Educators' Perspectives on Educational Practice

Administrators—You are invited to participate in a research study. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an administrator and thus in a position to help me understand the school district as a whole. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to document the voices and perspectives of African-American educators on educational practice. Your participation in this study will help to provide a context for these voices.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study I will also ask you to participate in an interview that will take about 1 hour.

Benefits and Risks: You will make a positive contribution toward documenting the diverse perspectives and experiences of African-American educators. Your participation in this study will enable a better understanding of the context from which these voices emanate and contribute to a study that aims to improve education and test scores for African-American students and students in general. In the future, this research may also serve as historical documentation of the experiences of African-American educators. Known risks include that other district administrators may know that you participated in the study and members of your community may be able to guess that you participated in the study, if in fact they read the resulting publications and know of your relationship with me. The research will be utilized for a dissertation in which quotes will be published, and potentially for a variety of publications including journal articles and a book. In all publications the transcripts of our conversations will not be published, but instead relevant quotes will be utilized and pseudonyms will be used. The purpose of each publication will be to document the perspectives of African-American educators as they relate to educational practice. Specifically, I will focus upon the barriers to providing African-American students an effective education, teachers' coping strategies, and teachers' recommendations for change.

You are allowed to ask questions concerning the study, both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable without any penalty to you. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Your answers will be confidential. Your name will not appear on anything other than the consent forms. At no time will anyone's real name be utilized. In addition, the name of the school district and any of the schools will not be utilized in documentation or in publication.

A digital recorder will be used. These interviews will be burned onto a compact disc and erased from the digital recorder. I will archive compact discs in a locked safe after transcription. Transcriptions and other non-published materials will be archived as well and placed in a locked safe. Archives will be confidential and kept for a period of ten years and then destroyed.

If you have any questions: You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me (Christy Dodge) at any time at _____ or at _____ >, or my advisor (N'Dri Assie-Lumumba) at _____ or at _____. You may also contact the University Committee on Human Subjects (UCHS) with any concerns or complaints. They may be reached at _____ by phone at _____, and you may view their website at <http://www.osp.cornell.Compliance/UCHS/homepageUCHS.htm>>. Please note that email and Internet transmissions are neither private nor secure. There is a chance that these transmissions may be read by a third party.

You will receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in this study.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Consent to be recorded: Please sign below if you are willing to have interviews recorded on digital recorder and burned to compact discs. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded on a digital recorder:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the UCHS on November 30, 2006.

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