2010

Successful European American Teachers of African American Students in Urban High Schools;an Ethnographic Study of Teachers' Journeys to Success

Thomas D. Griffin
Cleveland State University

SUCCESSFUL EUROPEAN AMERICAN TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF TEACHERS' JOURNEYS TO SUCCESS

THOMAS D. GRIFFIN

Bachelor of Business Administration

Cleveland State University

March 1995

Bachelor of Science in Education

Bowling Green State University

August 1996

Master of Education in Administration and Supervision

John Carroll University

August 2000

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN URBAN EDUCATION: ADMINISTRATION

at the

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

December, 2010

This dissertation has been approved for

the Office of Doctoral Studies,

College of Education

and the College of Graduate Studies by

_____

Joanne Goodell, Chair & Methodologist

Teacher Education

_____

Frederick Hampton, Member

Counseling, Administration, Supervision, and Adult Learning

_____

Anthony Menendez, Member

Teacher Education

_____

Mittie Davis Jones, Member

Urban Studies

_____

Mark Storz, Member

John Carroll University

DEDICATION

Dr. Frank Aquila

You were with me throughout many years of the doctoral process.

I only wish you were here to celebrate the completion of the work.

Dr. Deborah Houchins

You motivated me to obtain my doctorate and even introduced me to my topic.

A good friend, boss and overall great person. I miss you.

Dr. Tye McKeenan

Your wisdom, guidance and support are still with me today.

Your “survival package” kept me going until I finished. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My goal of obtaining a doctoral degree has finally been reached. However, I did not get here alone and would like to thank many of the individuals who have had such a major impact on my life. I must start at the top, with God, for which all things are possible. I would not be here today without your countless blessings and for always watching over me.

I am forever grateful to the three teachers who allowed me into their classrooms and into their lives so I could document their success. You have inspired me to improve not only my own personal teachings, but also showcase to others how to improve theirs for the benefit of all students. The three of you are incredible people and I am honored to have met you.

I cannot begin to thank my committee for all their time and guidance. I will forever be grateful to Dr. Joanne Goodell, who not only stepped up late in the game as my methodologist, but also as my advisor. Your wisdom, encouragement and humor kept me going. Dr. Mark Storz, my first professor in graduate school at John Carroll. I am very glad that you became a part of my committee and thank you for sharing your knowledge with me. Big thanks also go out to Dr. Fredrick Hampton, Dr. Mittie Davis-Jones and Dr. Anthony Mendendez for all your help in finishing my Ph.D.

The support and encouragement from Cohort XVI made this entire process a life changing experience. Day one of the doctoral program I knew that friendships would become life-long and I especially value those of Dr. Aaron Ellington, Dr. Nancymarie Phillips, Dr. Chris Hirschler, Dr. Kay McAtee, Dr. Kim Benetto and Danielle Pinkerton.

Special acknowledgement must go to Dr. Kristie Cooper, my “go between”, cheerleader and life saver. This degree would not have been finished today without all of your wisdom, motivation and evenings at the Harp.

There have been many influential teachers in my life who are true role models for not only their students, but for me as well. Dr. Robert Berns, the best marketing-educator in the world, for introducing me to the world of Marketing Education, DECA and BGSU. You prepared me to succeed as a teacher and thus laid the foundation for this study. Sharyn Zeppo, for always believing I would be successful one day and for putting the “spark” in me to teach. You taught me many lessons but the most important one of all was that of trust. Both of you have participants in this study named after you for you are true examples of successful teachers. To “KBH” & “BAS” for teaching me to “write what you know best” (I think this work is a prime example), for Brian Rayl for believing in me and not giving up on me even after I wanted to quit, and to George Garber, who was the best role model of success I could ever wish to find.

I am honored to teach alongside some of the finest teachers everyday at Maple Heights High School. Each day I am amazed by how much dedication, hard work and care you put into the art of teaching. Maple Heights students are fortunate to have such dedicated teachers.

This degree could not have started, nor ended, without the help of two incredibly intelligent brothers: Dr. Dan Keenan and Dr. Charlie Keenan. You are both role models to me for you are prime examples of hard work, intelligence and success. Thank you for all your help.

To Wanda Pruett-Butler, who always knows the right answers, has the most patience of anyone I have met, and did an amazing job of helping me complete this degree. You always believed that I would finish and your encouragement means more than you will ever know.

Lori Chick, former colleague, Board of Education President, and friend. I cannot thank you enough for the hours spent helping me perfect my application into the doctoral program, believing that Maple Heights would one day be all that it could be and making it happen.

To all the wonderful members of the Irish American Club Eastside, who have been with me throughout this entire process, from the submission of my application for this degree to the final celebration party at the club. Whether it was a little extra in your tip to help cover tuition, encouragement to finish the degree or just a general interest in my research, I thank you.

To Nancy Cerny and Lucille Esposito, who enthusiastically submitted letters of recommendation when I applied for the Ph.D. program. Your belief, and encouragement, have not been forgotten. You had a choice, and you both chose to support me. Thank you.

I must thank all my “fans” on Facebook who joined the group “I want Tom to finish his Ph.D”. You have followed years of updates, offered encouragement when I was stressing, and celebrated upon the completion of me finally being able to add those three little letters to the end of my name.

To Sallie Estvanik, who took a chance on hiring a 14-year old kid and taught me the fundamentals of marketing at an early age. The foundation you laid grew to make a difference in the lives of so many high school students, and mine as well. Thank you for always believing in me, for all your encouragement and for being so proud of my completion of this degree.

To Holly and Tom Theis, who helped this first year teacher with not only successfully gaining employment, but also showing me the ropes of how public education works. Your role as mentors helped me navigate through some rough times, but knowing you both were there to offer assistance allowed me to overcome any obstacle. I could not have asked for a better principal to begin my career or a better teacher, and friend, to work alongside my first year.

To Barb Balogh-Allie, who most likely never thought I would make it through freshmen English, let alone finish a doctorate. From those late night drives to Kent for your help with my papers, to our 20+ year friendship, and all the laughs we have shared, you make my life better knowing you are one of my closest and dearest friends. Amazing how one of my first year students, whom you suggested a title for his (award winning) research manual, would one day become your brother-in-law and how a student who used to fix my classroom computers and hang out with my students would one day become your husband. You are the best!

Finally, I could not have completed this work without the love and support of my family. My parents, Norman and Mary Griffin, always placed an emphasis on hard work, dedication and honesty. My mom always said to value education for it is “the only thing

nobody can ever take away from you". Even if you did not always understand what it was I was studying or what degree I was getting this time, your support and encouragement mean the world to me. To my sister, Noreen, for challenging me to be the best I can be and for always being good for a laugh or two. You always remind me to never give up, never settle for anything less than the best and to be the best person possible.

Successful European American Teachers of African American Students in Urban High Schools: An Ethnographic Study of Teachers' Journeys to Success

THOMAS D. GRIFFIN

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study describes how one person, a successful European American teacher of African American students in an urban high school, can have a major impact on the educational outcomes of his students. Using ethnographic methodologies, the researcher conducted observations and interviews with successful teachers. The construction of ideas and patterns, which teachers have formed from their own experiences in successfully working with African American students, were brought to light. Personal characteristics identified in the study included items such as having high expectations, building relationships, caring about students and possessing a sense of humor. In addition, the beliefs that influence teaching practices which allow them to be labeled as "successful" were identified and included having a shared philosophy regarding teaching, classroom procedures and students obtaining mastery of material taught. An unanticipated third finding also emerged, that of cultural sensitivity. It is the belief of the researcher that simply possessing the aforementioned personal characteristics and teaching practices is not enough. The dimension of cultural sensitivity seems to be the key component of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> *"If our country fails in its responsibility to educate every child, we're likely to fail in many other areas. But if we succeed in educating our youth, many other successes will follow throughout our country and in the lives of our citizens."*
>
> (President George W. Bush, 2001, Forward ¶4)

For more than two centuries, Presidents of the United States have expressed similar concerns as President Bush about the educational system within our country and yet the academic achievement gap between European American and African American students still continues to be problematic today (Lucas, 2000). Addressing the problems African American students face on a daily basis in urban schools is an important national educational issue and more research needs to be conducted. It is in these urban neighborhoods that the greatest percentage of students at risk of failure is found and the issues they face have an impact on everyone. In addition, the fact remains that urban neighborhoods themselves encompass the worst economic and social conditions possible within the United States when compared to their suburban counterparts (Waxman & Huang, 1997).

Among the most important factors influencing student success is the quality of the teacher (Leake & Leake, 1995). The implementation in 2001 of the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* law required all school districts in the United States to improve teacher quality and "ensure all students are taught by effective teachers" (p. 5). However, Jencks and Phillips (1998) state one cannot overlook the statistics which show that the white-black achievement gap begins before kindergarten, exists throughout the educational career, and actually increases and continues into adulthood. On standardized tests, the authors report African American students continue to score 75% below their European American classmates. It is the belief of this researcher that simply meeting the requirements for a "highly qualified" teacher, which requires one to be trained and certified in the subject one teaches in order to enter the classroom, does not always translate into highly effective performance once in front of a group of students. As the basis to provide structure for this research study, one main assumption was used: that one person, the teacher, can have a major impact on the educational outcomes of students.

While NCLB has built a foundation on which teachers are labeled highly qualified, the requirements to meet this criteria may need to be expanded beyond those of simply earning certification and minimum training within their teaching areas. Hence, the reason for this research being conducted.

Hodges (1996) explains that the number of youth today who have no ambition or any apparent goals to succeed is increasing; meaning their survival in mainstream society is at risk. When students are alienated, bored and discontented, dropping out is

many times the road chosen – an epidemic that crosses all economic, gender and ethnic lines. Sable and Gaviola (2007) of The National Center for Education Statistics reveal startling annual statistics of over 540,000 youngsters leaving school early, representing nearly 4% of the total school population. Flax (1989) reports that students are not only dropping out earlier from school than suspected, but students in urban areas appear to be doing so at the highest rate. The critical and complex learning needs of those students most at risk of academic failure require the teacher to possess a high level of understanding about the students they teach on a daily basis. Thus, living in a society which promotes higher education and in an economic system which promotes individuals to compete against one another, there are enough reasons to demand improvements in both the educational practices for eliminating the achievement gap in schools today and in the performance of European American teachers of African American students (Norman, Ault, Bentz & Meskimen, 2001).

Problem Statement

The literature shows that one of the major problems in schools today is that we are failing a large number of students, many of whom are African American, who will not be prepared for the next grade, let alone tomorrow's competitive workforce. The National Education Association (2002) indicates European Americans constitute close to 90% of public school teachers, leaving African American students little opportunity of being taught by someone of their same race. Entwisle and Alexander (1988) explain that when European American teachers of African American students have an inability to relate to their students and their families, the result is all too often the forming

and/or recording of negative biases and comments in school documents regarding behavior; many times resulting in the placement of these students in special education classes due to poor grades. Inappropriate teaching strategies are an important factor that contributes to African American students' low achievement in schools and, thus, alienation from school and difficulty reaching their true potentials (Teel, Debruin-Parecki & Covington, 1998). Evidence has shown that teaching practices can be either detrimental or beneficial to African American students' academic performance (Clark, 1991). The purpose of this qualitative study will be to identify the personal characteristics of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools. In addition, the beliefs that influence their teaching practices which allow these teachers to be labeled as successful will be identified. This is a significant study for it focuses on the successful teaching practices of European American teachers which facilitate academic success among African American students rather than emphasizing the negatives of the black-white achievement gap.

Research Questions

In particular, this research study will address the following questions:

1. What are the personal characteristics of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools?
2. What are the beliefs that influence teaching practices which distinguish these teachers?

Through the identification of this information, the creation of a profile of successful practices of European American teachers of African American students will be

constructed. This information may be beneficial to educators in secondary schools containing large percentages of African American students to better assist them in ensuring high levels of student achievement while at the same time maintaining the integrity of their students' culture. In addition, this information will be useful for administrators when interviewing teaching candidates for employment opportunities.

Significance

The significance of this research lies in the fact that the National Education Association (2002) indicates that African Americans constitute only 13% of public school teachers, with the rest being composed predominately of European American teachers. This means, for many African American students, that a large majority of the teachers they encounter throughout their educational careers will be of European American descent. For instance, in the eight major urban districts in Ohio, the faces of students hardly reflect those of the teaching staff with 70% of the student body composed of minorities while 80% of the teaching staff is European American (Finer, 2007). Gay (1995) suggests that oftentimes these teachers have very little to no cultural knowledge of the students they teach on a daily basis and tend to teach African American students in urban high schools as they were taught. The author expands by stating that teaching is a highly personalized and individualistic process and that imitating others can be potentially catastrophic. Gay recommends that one can become a more effective teacher by learning from those who have established successful records, hence one reason why mentoring and modeling are becoming more commonplace in teacher education programs today. Models and mentors present living examples of the

theoretical principles of good teaching, which allow teachers to determine how best to modify their examples for their own use. Furthermore, Gay reminds us that teachers play a critical role in classrooms today and successful teachers in urban schools need an understanding of how educational experiences are affected by the racial identities of both themselves and their students. Consistent with the findings of Ladson-Billings (1994), teachers can change the way they teach to be more culturally relevant and stronger educators. Ideas such as respecting and honoring the home culture of the student and providing educators the opportunity to observe culturally relevant teaching in other classrooms are just a few of the best practices provided by Ladson-Billings. In order for this to happen, though, schools must provide an environment which supports teachers implementing the knowledge base of successful practices and be supportive of this change (Hodges, 1996). The information from this study will allow European American teachers of African American students to discover a series of successful practices.

Rothman (2004) states students who are taught by effective teachers, those whose students achieve higher than expected for three consecutive years, continue to make percentile gains as opposed to students who were not taught by effective teachers and lost ground. Based upon this idea, the approach of this study was to learn from successful European American teachers of African American students. Research by Kennedy (1992) has shown that socioeconomic factors have more influence on the educational experiences of European American students, while school factors are more related to African American student educational outcomes. The research contained in

this study can give both new and veteran European American teachers a series of successful practices which they may incorporate into their own daily interactions with their African American students and allow both to become more successful within the classroom. In addition, administrators in urban schools can better equip their staff with this research and have better insight into characteristics which to seek when interviewing potential future teachers.

Definition of Terms

A number of terms are used throughout this study which requires definition.

African Americans and *Blacks* are used interchangeably to represent Americans who are of black African descent.

Academic Emergency is the lowest of the five state rankings used by the Ohio Department of Education to classify school districts.

Achievement Gap and *Black and White Testing Gap* are used interchangeably and describe the difference in scores African American and European American students receive on standardized tests.

Culture is defined as the beliefs and behaviors characteristic of an ethnic group.

Effective teachers are defined in the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act as teachers who are fully licensed, possess bachelor's degrees and have subject-matter competency. This term is used interchangeably with "successful teachers" and will be discussed fully in the methodology section on observing success.

European Americans and *Whites* are used interchangeably to represent Americans who are of white European descent.

Participants are the teachers who will participate in the study and are of European American descent and teach African American students in urban high schools.

Personal Characteristics are the distinguishing features or qualities pertaining to a particular person. For the purpose of this study, the researcher was particularly interested in the personal characteristics of the participants that enhanced their abilities to experience success with their students.

Teaching Practices are the customary performances used by teachers within a classroom setting.

Urban means related to cities and *Urban Students* refers to the students who attend high schools located in cities. *Urban high schools* are best characterized as the schools located in the urban areas.

Chapter Summary

Chapter one introduces the topic being researched in this study and highlights the research problem: we are failing a large number of students, many of whom are African American, who will not be prepared for the next grade, let alone tomorrow's competitive workforce. With European Americans comprising close to 90% of the teaching force, African American students have a slight chance of being educated by someone who shares their same race. Teachers who cannot relate to their students often use inappropriate teaching strategies, which contribute to the low achievement African American students' encounter in schools across the country. The significance of this study is the focus on the successful teaching practices of European American teachers which facilitate academic success among African American students rather

than emphasizing the negatives. In addition, the beliefs that influence teaching practices which distinguish these teachers will also be identified. Chapter one also included the definition of terms which are used throughout the study and the research questions used in this study.

Organization and Overview of Dissertation

Chapter two contains a review of the literature and explores the historical culture of the American educational system, the culture of African American students, culturally relevant teaching practices, cultural issues and economic factors, a well as the black-white achievement gap. Chapter three explains why qualitative research was chosen for this study and the rationale for conducting an ethnographic study. In addition, the identification of participants, methods of data collection and analysis as well as the limitations are also identified. Chapter four highlights the findings of the personal characteristics and beliefs which influence teaching practices which distinguish the teachers participating in this study. Finally, chapter five discusses the four personal characteristics which emerged from the data collection as well as the three beliefs that influence teaching practices which distinguish the teachers participating in this research. An unexpected finding, cultural sensitivity, is also highlighted along with suggestions for future research and implications.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"We propose an audacious goal…America will provide every student with what should be his or her educational birthright: Access to competent, caring and qualified teaching"

(What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future, 1996)

Successful schools are as important to our country as is our national defense and economic security, according to national reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983). However, these same reports criticize education in our country by stating that students are not learning (Middleton & Midgley, 2002). Low parental involvement, inadequate school funding and an array of other factors are often blamed for low student achievement and the black-white achievement gap. However, there are always Hollywood stories showcasing teachers overcoming these barriers and who experience student achievement within their classrooms. It is oftentimes these teachers who refuse to accept anything but the best, while pushing and believing in students, who make the biggest difference between a life of despair and a life of hope. More urgent than ever is the retraining and recruiting of teachers who are committed and excited about teaching students in urban schools (Neito, 2003).

Numerous components within schools today have an influence on student achievement. The following literature review outlines the background issues related to successful teaching practices of European American teachers of African American students. This literature review will explore the (a) historical culture of the American education system, (b) culture of African American students, (c) culturally relevant teacher practices, (d) cultural issues and economic factors and (e) black-white achievement gap.

Historical Culture of the American Education System

Throughout history, public officials, educators, concerned citizens and pressure groups have sought after the power to decide what school children should be taught and what they should learn. Sometimes this struggle was because they had a sincere interest in improving education, but more often was fought for a single, overarching goal: because it embodied their goals for the future of society and their ideology (Ravitch, 2001). In *Whose America?*, Zimmerman (2002) exposes the NAACP's answer to why the doors of opportunity were slammed in the faces of minorities – school textbooks. When racism is taught in the schools through such lessons as "the laziness, shiftlessness, and irresponsibility of the Negro [are] part of his racial heredity" (p. 24), these lessons carry over into life.

From textbook manufacturers who decide what and how information is presented in classrooms throughout the nation to educators who teach as they were taught (Zimmerman, 2002), the American education system is in need of a major overhaul if one wishes to ever see culturally relevant lessons being delivered. Founded

by our white forefathers hundreds of years ago, our educational system remains largely unchanged today. From a nine month school calendar, designed to accommodate the agricultural needs of yesterday, to the obvious omission of African American trailblazers in modern textbooks, the culture of American education has remained as it was created: white (Stevens, Wood & Sheehan, 2002).

In urban areas, especially for low-income African American youth, public schools may offer everyone access, but once inside the doors of public schools, many youths from low-income families virtually disappear (Fine, 1991). Students in urban areas may seem to be less competitive because the relevance of education to their future is doubtful, since the experience of families and friends has shown frail hope (Labaree, 1992). Looking at those around them, many find the value of a strong educational background granting them social mobility upward to be more of a gamble than a promise (MacLeod, 1995).

One must ask himself if there truly is justice in today's educational system. Why do we let children attend schools where no CEO would ever think of stepping foot? Education is one of the best predictors of occupational prestige (Stevens, Wood & Sheehan, 2002). Despite being 50 years after the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education (Zirkel, 2001) and numerous Ohio Supreme Court rulings in the DeRolph vs. State of Ohio case declaring the states system for public school funding unconstitutional, we continue to find suburban area schools with greater amounts of revenue than we do in urban areas. Stevens, Wood and Sheehan (2002) address the topic of merit, asking, "Who has the power in schools today?" In addition, the issue of opportunity is

highlighted by the authors who question if all students have the same chances in their school as they would in another, possibly in a neighboring suburban district. The answers to these questions are disheartening in that the power and opportunities are not in urban districts, rather outside them, and beyond the reach of many African American students today.

Even today, over fifty years after the Brown versus Board of Education ruling striking down the 1896 "separate but equal" Plessey versus Ferguson doctrine, our schools continue to deprive minority students of educational opportunities (Zirkel, 2001). According to Kozal (2005), predominantly black schools receive about $1 million less in government funding than white schools of comparable size. It has been recommended that the best way to address the achievement gap between the rich and the poor is to improve the federal-funding formula so that schools in poor neighborhoods have the resources to address their weaknesses and, most especially, the ability to hire experienced teachers (Wallis & Steptoe, 2007). Talk show host Steve Harvey comments on the way schools are allocated funds, which are determined according to the tax brackets of the residents of the neighborhoods are in, noting that the same amount of money does not go to poor neighborhoods as it does to more affluent districts. Harvey concludes by stating "once you start off behind, you end up behind" (Buckner, 2006).

In addition, with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, students in public schools are tested more often than in years past. As a result, many schools in urban areas are overly concerned with preparing students for mastering the

standardized tests and have therefore implemented a “drill and kill curriculum” resulting in what Kozal (2005) states leads only to an artificial boost in test scores and not in actual learning. According to the author, suburban school children are taught to think critically and ask questions, while there is often little or no time in the “drill-and-kill curriculum” for this to happen in urban schools. Rather, students are only prepared to correctly answer standardized test questions without giving much thought as to why the answer is indeed the right choice. When teachers place a higher emphasis on learning rather than grades, student achievement can be enhanced (Young, 1997). Individuals who possess critical thinking skills enable themselves to make wise decisions in both life and school on a daily basis. Ravitch (2001) states, “The best protection for a democratic society is well-educated citizens.” The role of the teacher has never been more important than today, especially in urban areas where achievement is lower than their suburban counterparts.

Culture of African American Students

Issues that affect African American student school performance stem from the historical practice of denying blacks access to desirable jobs which reward and require good education. This practice was enforced through a job ceiling (Ogbu, 1978a). In these cases, blacks were denied opportunities to use their education and, thus, were not rewarded with jobs and income which went along with their abilities and skills. As a result, American society discouraged African Americans from taking the time and putting forth the effort into pursuing education. While this lack of encouragement for embracing education has gone on for many generations, the results were quite possibly

passed onto future generations who may continue to discourage pursuing a higher level of academic achievement (Ogbu, 1987). Labaree (1997) supports this view and states, "The experience of their families and friends is that the future is uncertain and the relevance of education to that future is doubtful" (p. 57). Parents of lower economic standing students may not encourage their children to do whatever it takes to complete classes in order to graduate for fear of setting them up for disappointment (MacLeod, 1995).

Society has provided African Americans' with an inferior education, ensuring that they do not possess the same skills required to successfully compete against whites, who possess superior education, for the limited supply of desirable jobs. The importance of this idea presented by Ogbu (1987) is supported by Drucker (1994) in *The Age of Social Transformation* and states that "knowledgeable workers gain access to jobs and social positions through formal education" (p. 64). He continues by stating that education becomes "the center of the knowledgeable society, and the school its key institution" (p. 66). With education being the center of society, African Americans are not able to compete for jobs with an inferior educational background.

Schools have an effect on the varying levels of educational achievement. In addition to providing an inferior education, lower expectations from teachers and administrators and the labeling of black students as possessing "handicaps" all play a role (Ogbu, 1987). As a result, learning is hindered and conflicts arise from school personnel who do not understand and respect the culturally learned behaviors which

black students bring to school. The dominant group members project how students view and respond to school through their believing in the blacks' collective inferiority.

MacLeod (1995) supports this idea and states that African American students all too often fall victim to having leveled aspirations, where individuals in a stratified social order come to accept their own position and the inequalities of the social order as legitimate. When a student sees the negative stereotypes of his race showcased in the media and reinforced by their teachers in schools, one begins to accept the future that is set for himself by others. Schools legitimize this process by reproducing these hierarchies by making them appear to be based on previous merits or skills, thus converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies (Zimmerman, 2002). This translates into a culture in which African American students have a difficult time accepting and valuing the current educational system, oftentimes due to the fact that they were not valued in educational textbooks or in the schools they attended.

Ogbu (1987) describes African Americans as involuntary minorities, who were brought to this country against their will through slavery, conquest or colonization, and who have experienced secondary cultural differences. These differences arise after members have been mainstreamed into another institution, such as in school, and are more responsive to the situation at hand. An important feature that has an effect on involuntary minorities is that of cultural inversion. It is here that African Americans tend to claim certain behaviors as either characteristics of their own population or that of another. Oftentimes, members of an involuntary minority group are not encouraged by their peers to act according to the characteristics of the opposing group.

These involuntary minorities appear to create a new identity in opposition to the way the dominant group treats them socially, economically and politically. The low level of trust given to public schools from involuntary minorities arises from discriminatory perceptions from both past and present, which results in higher failure rates. "Acting white" (Ogbu, 1987) is the term commonly used among African Americans when discussing the procedures and policies used in many of our schools today. The acceptance and following of school rules is a threat to one's loyalty to his culture which oftentimes results in having to choose between "acting white" or "acting minority".

However, one must not believe that African Americans do not value education. Rather, one would find quite the opposite. In the 1860s, African Americans provided private schools for their children before city school districts were opened. Teachers in these schools, who were African American themselves, knew the community and more importantly, their wants and needs. In fact, blacks ranked improving education as one of their highest priorities (Tyack, 1974). No matter what the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments supposedly guaranteed, they had to continually fight for their rights to an education. A former slave, James W. C. Pennington, states in 1849, "there is one sin that slavery committed against me, which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education" (Yannielli, 2007). Clearly, it is not education that African Americans do not value but possibly the system through which the education is delivered.

An underlying problem in urban schools is many children come to school underdeveloped in the areas necessary to be successful in school (Smith, 2005). Anthropologist Annette Lareau (2003) studied how the cultural differences translate

into disadvantages not only in school and on standardized tests, but throughout life and into the workplace as well. It is suggested that to improve academic and social performance, schools need to integrate what is known about child and adolescent psychological development with the academic work. A big problem in schools today is that the main focus is oftentimes on curriculum and assessments, namely looking at test scores, versus actually helping students develop. Since this practice is not the traditional way of running a school, it is all too common met with great resistance (Young, 2006).

Research has shown that motivation plays a major role in the level of success that students achieve throughout their educational careers. Evidence supports the idea that students can be inspired to learn when teachers place a higher emphasis on learning rather than on grades. Just as children can modify the way they approach learning, the way classroom environments are constructed have a direct effect on student achievement. Tough (2006) believes it is becoming difficult to ignore the evidence that teachers who succeed at teaching African American students invariably use practices which are more intensive than those employed in most American schools. The most effective way to achieve greater success of African American students has been shown to incorporate more culturally relevant teaching practices.

Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices

Teel, Debruin-Parecki and Covington (1998) suggest inappropriate teaching strategies as one of the most important causes of African American students' low achievement in schools. As a result, these students have difficulty reaching their full

potential, thus alienating them from school. The authors found that incorporating alternative teaching strategies resulted in higher levels of interest, confidence and engagement among students who originally appeared to lack motivation.

Ladson-Billings (1994) uses the term culturally relevant teaching to describe such a strategy used by successful teachers of African American students. This teaching "uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (p. 17). The negative effects can be brought about, for example, by seeing one's culture, background or history distorted or possibly not even represented in the curriculum. Culturally relevant teaching empowers students emotionally, intellectually, politically and socially by using cultural referents to impart attitudes, skills and knowledge. These cultural referents are aspects of the curriculum and not merely vehicles for explaining or bridging the dominant culture.

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them and possess the following characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of difference ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.

- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (p. 29).

Teachers' perceptions of others and themselves are just one dimension of culturally relevant teaching. Those who practice culturally relevant teaching identify strongly with teaching and see themselves as professionals. In addition, teachers see teaching as giving back to the community, see themselves as part of the community and encourage their students to do the same. They view themselves as artists and teaching as an art, with no set recipe able to predict student outcomes. These teachers believe that all students can succeed and help them make connections between their global, national and community identities. They view teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students and believe students arrive at school with knowledge that it must be utilized and explored in order for students to become achievers (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Creating a climate that fosters learning for all students was noted by Passow (1991) in urban schools. Ladson-Billings (1994) supports this notion that teachers create a sense of community in their classrooms through the structuring of social relations,

which extend into the community. Student-teacher relationships in classrooms implementing culturally relevant teaching practices is "humanely equitable" and fluid, with teachers sometimes assuming the role of student and the students teaching the class. Beyond the classroom, teachers also work hard to find ways to facilitate interactions with parents and students, carefully demonstrating a connectedness with each of them. Oftentimes this requires teachers to have an understanding of their students' lives outside of the classroom, such as hobbies, interests and favorite pastimes. These teachers encourage a community of learners, where students care about their classmates' achievements as much as they do their own achievement. Students are expected to learn collaboratively and teach one another while taking responsibility for each other.

Teachers implementing culturally relevant teaching view knowledge as something that is continuously shredded, recycled and re-created. This idea often goes against the notion of students merely accepting whatever the teacher gives or tells them to do, and encourages students to attempt to participate in and understand the knowledge-building process. Teachers view knowledge critically and link students' everyday lives with classroom experiences to allow them to express themselves in a wide variety of ways. Culturally relevant teachers are passionate about knowledge, helping students develop skills necessary to successfully participate, and view excellence as a complex standard which takes individual differences and student diversity into account. Teachers distinguish between rewarding substandard performance and acknowledging student effort for they believe students need to experience excellence in

ways that do not deceive them about their own academic achievement. Students can be encouraged to conceive of excellence broadly through the in-class recognition of out-of-class excellence, thus creating a stronger connection between school and home. When teachers comment on things students enjoy, the student often seek similar recognition in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Teel et al. (1998) suggest the use of a diverse curriculum and culturally relevant experiences in teaching to promote academic self-confidence and increase student interest, both necessary prerequisites for student learning. They found students responded more enthusiastically and more easily grasped meanings when topics appeared to be relevant in any way to their own lives. In addition, they were willing to work harder when they had choices with regard to assignments used within the classroom. Teachers who gave students choices were regarded as showing more respect for them. When teachers are willing to listen to and accept students' feelings, African American students indicated a sense of appreciation for their teachers of a different racial background. Noguera (2003) also suggested teachers find ways to incorporate information related to the culture and history of students into the curriculum. This inclusion serves as an important step in helping them in the identity formation process for adolescents.

Teachers who have had success in raising achievement share similar culturally relevant teaching practices. Peterson, Bennet and Sherman (1991) found successful teachers make their classrooms not only culturally congruent, but places where student interests are the main priority. Teachers acted as "coach" in the classroom, showing

students how to be successful, and had clearly defined academic programs where achievement was apparent. High expectations were emphasized by teachers and students were held accountable for their actions. The authors ask if students "benefit from remarkable practices, remarkable people, or some interactive combination of the two? This understanding is important in terms of thinking about transportability to other educators" (p. 193). Ogbu (1987) states, "the failure of school personnel to understand and respect minority children's culturally learned behaviors often results in conflicts that obstruct children's adjustment and learning" (p. 319).

Corbett, Wilson and Williams (2005) studied great urban teachers and found teachers who believed that it was on the educators' shoulders where the responsibility for student success rested. Having high expectations, connecting content to prior knowledge, using numerous instructional methods in class, and teasing, berating, and praising students as they moved toward success are just a few of the traits teachers possessed. Examples of ways teachers showed students they cared about their success were refusing to accept failure as an option, making house calls, and using phrases such as "I'm like one of your family" (p. 10).

Showing students that you care about their success – both in and outside of the classroom – has shown to be a very powerful influence in African American students. The idea of teachers caring for their students is supported by Ogbu (2003). In his book *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb*, the author states that students "are more concerned with how they are treated or represented in the curriculum and with whether schools and teachers 'care for them' than with teachers' expertise in

knowledge, skills and language" (p. 53). Nieto (2003) found that teachers who developed a close relationship with students witnessed their students striving for higher levels of achievement to please their teacher. For students whose backgrounds differ from the mainstream, an essential sense of belonging is promoted by the teachers' caring philosophy. Gay (2000) states that caring in a culturally relevant classroom:

> Places teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence…an unshakable belief that marginalized students not only can but *will* improve their school achievement (p. 52).

Noddings (1992) defines caring relations as "a connection or encounter between two human beings" (p. 15) where both parties offer contributions in order for the connection of caring to occur. Noddings believes it is not enough to hear teachers simply claim they care (2005) but that they must first strive to establish and maintain relationships built on caring. It is through these relations that teachers exhibit an integrity for which a foundation for everything the student and teacher do together is built. The author continues that when caring, motive energy begins to flow towards the wants and needs for the cared-for. Caution must be given to take into account desires and feelings present, while at the same time never trying to lead others to a better set of values or approval of what others want, while responding in an encouraging manner as one's principles allow. Noddings emphasizes that caring is not simply a warm, fuzzy feeling that allows others to find people likable and kind. Rather it implies a search for

competence that is continuous for 'when we care for another' we often want to do our very best for them. She stresses that caring for students is fundamental in teaching and something that educators must recognize if they wish to be more successful.

Nieto (2003) finds teachers persevere because their identities are deeply implicated in their teaching. Through the study of successful teachers of African American students, novice educators and administrators alike can implement what works in schools today and avoid having to "reinvent the wheel" on their own. The demands of state and central office can still be met while pursuing the ideals for which teachers enter the profession in the first place (Noddings, 2006).

Cultural Issues and Economic Factors

African American students' achievement scores are lower today when compared to the past decade and make the economic impact of the gap a national problem (Educational Research Service, 2001). McDade (2006) reports race, poverty and property wealth have proven to be related to student performance, creating a performance gap influenced largely by socioeconomic factors that schools find are beyond their control. Research suggests that high-poverty schools lack many of the learning resources that schools without poverty issues possess, have more difficulty retaining and attracting experienced and highly trained staff, and may face added welfare and health challenges which accompany poverty (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

Furthermore, the lack of highly qualified teachers has also led researchers to conclude that these same high poverty schools also fail to graduate over half of their students and do not adequately prepare those who do graduate for college (Bigg, 2007).

Statistics show that 20% of teachers in low-income schools have three years or less of teaching experience, compared to only 11% in schools with the fewest poor students (Flannery & Jehlen, 2005). It is in these types of communities where parents have turned over the responsibility of educating their children to teachers. Lareau (1985) states "just as they depended on doctors to heal their children, they depended on teachers to educate them." Teachers who work with students with cultural backgrounds different from their own oftentimes know little about the students they teach and, as a result, find it difficult to reach them (Nieto, 2003). According to the study conducted by Grossman, Beaupre and Rossi (2001):

> The dirty little secret is that there are large numbers of unqualified individuals teaching, and they are disproportionately assigned to teach children of color and children from impoverished backgrounds.

In their study, Norman and Crunk (2004) found that teacher perceptions may be potent mediating mechanisms for the black-white test score gap and that there is a significant difference in how black students and white students perceive their academic environments. The authors suggest that teachers remind themselves of the everyday realities black students encounter both inside and outside the classroom in their daily lives. The idea of teachers understanding their students' lives outside of school is a main component of culturally relevant teaching. Ferguson (1998) concludes that "black children do not require exotic instructional strategies that allegedly suit black children better than whites" (p. 367) and offers a reminder for the importance of culturally relevant teaching practices.

In addition to the research conducted on socio-economic status affecting student motivation, it is noteworthy that people of a different culture can affect the levels of internal motivation that a student possesses and have a positive effect on their educational careers. This research is important for many teachers who teach in urban districts tend to be of a culture unlike that of the students they are teaching. Research conducted by Ladson-Billing (1994) has shown that teachers can change the way they teach in order to be more culturally relevant and that the ethnic background of the teacher does not make a difference in making an influence on a students' level of motivation within the classroom.

Bigg (2007) notes that the trend for African American students attending "separate and inferior" schools will likely have a negative effect on our economy. One third of poor students drop out of school without graduating (Flannery & Jehlen, 2005). As an educator, one must be aware of the importance of motivating students to obtain high levels of achievement and the role it plays not only on the students' success, but also on the success of our overall economy. This success does not end with graduation but carries on into and throughout life as well. In his book *Laying Down the Law* (1989), upon which the Hollywood movie *Lean on Me* is based, former high school principal Joe Clark says,

> There are one million dropouts every year. The unskilled dropout who can't get a job often turns to crime and drugs. We pay for unemployment. We pay for welfare. When lost tax revenues and losses from vandalism are factored in, the price tag soars to an estimated $228 billion. Even at the lower estimate we are

paying $60,000 per year per dropout. A year's worth of education per student costs between $3,000 and $4,000 (p. 4).

The opening words of a *Nation at Risk*, written to raise educational standards in the 1980s and 1990s, also stressed the importance of raising academic requirements for all students and the economic sense it makes:

> Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world...We report to the American people…the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5)

There was once a time when students who dropped out of school could find good paying, blue collar, unionized, mass-production industrial jobs. They would earn middle-class and upper-middle class wages, while requiring neither skill nor education (Drucker, 1994) and be able to support a family and gain a decent portion of the American dream. However, times have changed and many of these industrial jobs have disappeared the fastest. Something has got to change in urban classrooms today for the time for students achieving at higher levels is now.

Black-White Achievement Gap

During the last century, a major area of concern in urban education has been to provide an equal education to children everywhere, regardless of their demographic profiles. Much research has been done on finding effective ways to address the

academic achievement gap between African American students and their European American counterparts (Ogbu, 2003 and Ferguson, 1998b). While research has shown that children today are obtaining higher levels of achievement when compared to years past, we must remind ourselves that children (predominately of African American culture/heritage) in urban areas continue to achieve at lower levels than their suburban counterparts.

It is generally true that the overwhelming majority of black students in the United States attend urban or inner-city schools, whereas suburban schools are largely attended by white students. This feature of urban schools may be contributing to the gap, according to Norman, Ault, Bentz and Meskimen (2001), and give the black-white achievement gap an urban/suburban dimension. The researchers state that it is generally true that superior resources are provided to suburban schools when compared to urban schools, which oftentimes lack such materials and community resources. Hence, the gap may possibly be a function of many other gaps, such as the gap in resources.

In *Variability in Minority School Performance*, Ogbu (1987) constructs an explanation for the varying levels of educational achievement among minority groups. The questions that his study addresses is why some minorities successfully cross cultural boundaries and/or opportunity barriers and do well in school, while some others do not succeed nor do well in school. He states:

> School performance is not due only to what is done to or for the minorities; it is also due to the fact that the nature of the minorities' interpretations and

> responses makes them more or less accomplices to their own school success or failure. There are thus three sources contributing to the school failure of the minorities who are not doing well in school, namely, society, school and community (p. 317).

The research by Steele (1997) tried to understand the intellectual performance of African Americans and identified "stereotype threat" as an obstruction to test score performance. Steele (1999) defines stereotype threat as "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm this stereotype" (p. 46). This threat can lower achievement and affect both students' expectations of themselves and teachers' expectations of students (Noguera, 2003). Norman et al. (2001) suggest schools and classrooms reduce such stereotype threat as a possible means of enhancing African American student achievement.

Ferguson (1998a) provides evidence which states, "Teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors interact with students' beliefs, behaviors, and work habits in ways that help to perpetuate the black-white test score gap…biased by racial stereotypes…which make it difficult for minority students to distinguish themselves from the generalized expectation" (p. 274). The author says teachers' expectations, behaviors and perceptions should be uncorrelated with students' race. Once set, however, teachers' expectations do not experience a great deal of change and may help produce self-fulfilling prophecies (when bias in a teachers' expectation affects the performance of a student) among black students of poor performance. Ferguson

(1998a) states unbiased teachers expect the same, on average, of white and black students. When teachers appear biased, relationships are spoiled and trust may be eroded. Ferguson (1998b) continues with, "Perhaps more for black children than for whites, teachers play a central role in determining how students feel about their positions in the achievement hierarchy" (p. 341). He states that one way to narrow the black-white test score gap is to improve achievement among black students who are at risk of failure.

One method Ferguson suggests implementing is the use of culturally relevant teaching practices for the home environments of black children often differ greatly from the typical white homes in which their teachers commonly reside. Simply grouping by ability or varying the pace of instruction, without modifying the instructional methods or curriculum to be more culturally congruent, has shown to have little effect on achievement. In addition, black teachers were not shown to have any significant advantage over white teachers in improving standardized test scores. What seems to matter most is that teachers of any race possess the skills and knowledge to be successful in the classroom.

Students, regardless of their upbringing, must be motivated to do well in school in ways that do not ignore their cultural backgrounds. Teaching about others who have shared similar backgrounds and showing that these individuals have overcome many of the same odds students face on a daily basis can, and oftentimes does, motivate students to succeed (MacLeod, 1995). In addition, young people may look at people in

their environment and use their accomplishments as motivation to achieve the same level of success (Ehrenreich, 2001). Norman et al. (2001) state:

> The persistence of the gap and the slow rate at which it is decreasing indicate the need for careful rethinking of the problem in order to establish effective research-based intervention strategies aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating the gap…In an economic system based on intense competition among individuals, in a society that prizes access to higher education, particularly in a political climate open to the dismantling of affirmative action, there is good reason to demand changes in educational practice that will rapidly diminish and soon eliminate the achievement gap (p. 1104-1111).

The teachers who participated in this study are successful in improving African American student performance and thus may point others in the right direction as to effective teaching strategies which may play a role in eliminating the black-white testing gap.

Summary of Chapter II

Chapter two examined the literature from five areas - historical culture of the American educational system, culture of African American students, culturally relevant teaching practices, cultural issues and economic factors as well as the black-white achievement gap . These background issues have an influence on student achievement and relate to the successful teaching practices of European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools. The methodology contained in chapter three will detail the participants, data collection, data analysis and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

> *"The qualitative researchers' goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are."*
>
> (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 38)

The purpose of this research was to describe how one person, a successful European American teacher of African American students in an urban high school, can have a major impact on the educational outcomes of his students. Using qualitative research and ethnographic methodologies, the researcher conducted observations and interviews with successful teachers. The construction of ideas and patterns, which teachers have formed from their own experiences in successfully working with African American students, were brought to light.

Research Questions

Research questions were designed to provide rich, deep descriptions of the personal characteristics and beliefs that influence teaching practices which distinguish successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools from other educators. In order to guide this study in achieving its purpose, the following research questions were used:

1. What are the personal characteristics of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools?
2. What are the teaching practices that distinguish these teachers?

The data gathered from these successful teachers resulted in the creation of a profile of successful teacher practices, methods and styles of European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools.

Qualitative Research

In order to study the experiences of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools, qualitative research was used for it can "facilitate study of issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). In order to discover the personal characteristics and beliefs that influence the participants' teaching practices, the use of qualitative methods allowed for what Patton (2002) explains is a "wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people" which "increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied". The researcher believed that qualitative methods were more appropriate than quantitative because this form of research would provide the opportunity to have conversations with participants that would allow the "why" of the research problem to emerge.

Ethnography.

According to McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy (2005), one does not learn about a culture (and micro-cultures) by constructing a questionnaire. Rather, one learns by asking questions and by observing. Therefore, ethnography is the methodology chosen to conduct the research for this study. From an ethnographic perspective, the

construction of ideas and patterns, or categories, which teachers have formed from their own experience in successfully working with African American students, were brought to light.

> McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy (2005) define ethnographic research as:
>
> The process of discovering and describing a culture, which is the knowledge a group of people use to generate behavior and interpret experience. Ethnography is the formal research approach used to acquire the cultural knowledge of a social group. It also includes the description, often written but sometimes visually or orally presented, used to convey information about the group's culture to larger audience. (p. 9)

In short, the authors suggest that what needs to be done is to seek to learn what other people know, how they view the world, what conveys meaning and guides their actions by learning their "inside information", and having them teach us without imposing our beliefs on what is told to us. The authors further state that culture is not biologically inherited but rather learned and argues that members act and groups are organized according to the knowledge which they have been taught. Merriam (2002) describes ethnography as "one that focuses on human society with the goal of describing and interpreting the *culture* of a group" (p. 236). Why one person in a cultural group behaves differently from another within the same system can tell about an individual's characteristics through the study of their personal knowledge (McCurdy et al, 2005). Vidich and Lyman (2000) state *ethnos* means "a people" or cultural group in Greek, meaning the study of *ethnos,* or ethnography, is "devoted to describing ways of life of

humankind…a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their people hood." Through this study, the researcher was trying to learn what is "inside their heads" and what guides the teacher's daily actions within the classroom. Merriam (2002) continues with:

> The researcher would be interested in describing what people do, what they know, and what things people make and use…and to focus more on understanding the meaning and importance of what is said and what is taken for granted (p. 236).

As McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005) state, "informants are our teachers; we are their students" (p. 11).

Participants

Culture.

Culture is defined by McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005) as "knowledge that is learned and shared and that people use to generate behavior and interpret experience" (p. 5). This suggests that since this knowledge is inside the heads of people and cannot actually be seen, the researcher has to infer it from participants being studied. The authors further state that "the idea of culture is learned knowledge counteracts the notion that members of groups (think of race here) biologically inherit shared behaviors" (p. 6). This study tells why one person, the successful European American teacher of African American students, behaves differently from others within their cultural group by identifying their individual characteristics though the study of their personal knowledge.

Microcultures.

Numerous suggestions for conducting an ethnographic study are provided in *The Cultural Experience* by McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005). They begin by recommending that researchers study microcultures, which are smaller groups that exist within society who share similar knowledge but whose lives are not entirely defined by it. The authors also recommend finding "one or a small number of cultural informants who are willing to teach you their micro-culture" (p. 21). While teachers throughout the country may have a culture which everyone in education may share, for this study the researcher focused on the microculture of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools.

Go-betweens.

A go-between is a person the researcher knows who also knows a suitable informant. Go-betweens are a recommended means of locating study participants (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005). The authors further recommend widening one's search by asking a go-between to suggest other individuals who may serve as go-betweens to help identify study participants. Therefore, administrators, parents, teachers, school counselors and teacher educators served as go-betweens to identify successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools who best represent the microculture identified in this study.

The advantage of using go-betweens to identify participants is that these individuals know the researcher and the prospective informant, making an initial degree of trust present, oftentimes increasing one's willingness to participate in the study

(McCurdy, Spradley & Shandy, 2005). The authors also suggest that participants selected should not have recently learned the culture at hand but rather know the culture well, be involved in it at the time of study and located nearby with time to participate. The teachers selected for participation in this study met the above recommended criteria and, therefore, made ideal participants for learning more about the culture of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools.

Spradley (1980) suggests numerous criteria for selecting participants and those chosen for this study included selection due to personal interest, suggestions from informants, and theoretical interest. The researcher is a European American teacher of African American students in an urban high school and sought to identify others who have been successful in their classrooms. The use of go-betweens allowed the researcher to better identify the participants used in this project to address the topic of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools.

Participant quantity and rationale.

Patton (2002) explains that a common sampling strategy in qualitative research is to study a relatively small number of participants who are successful and therefore a good source of lessons learned. Merriam (2002) states:

> Since you are not interested in "how much" or "how often", random sampling makes little sense. Instead, since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the

meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned (p. 12).

Patton (2002) states "qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n=1), selected *purposefully"* (p. 230). For that reason, the researcher has chosen to use purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) where teachers are "selected because they are 'information rich'…they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling, then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population" (p. 40).

What statistical sampling would label a "bias" and therefore a weakness, purposeful sampling becomes a strength and intended focus in qualitative sampling and allows one to learn from those who are exemplars of good practice (Patton, 2002). The author states "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (p. 244) and "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 245).

Merriam (2002) expands upon this notion by stating:

> The basic question even in qualitative research is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. But since small, nonrandom samples are selected purposefully in qualitative research, it is not possible to generalize statistically. A small sample size is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of many (p. 28).

The selection of teachers for this study used a strategy Patton (2002) refers to as extreme or deviant case (purposeful) sampling, where information rich cases are selected because they are considered special or unusual in some special way, such as outstanding successes. The logic behind this sampling practice is the lessons learned and possible relevancy to other situations. Participants chosen for this study represented an array of years teaching, differences in age, and varying degrees of educational background experiences.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sample selection to the point of redundancy,

> …in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion (p. 202).

Patton (2002) recommends specifying minimum samples based on the purpose of the study and which, if needed, can be added to as the fieldwork unfolds. Therefore, three teachers were interviewed and observed in this study. These teachers were not randomly chosen but rather came from nominations from administrators, parents, teachers, and school counselors. Had, as the study unfolded, the researcher not experienced redundancy in the findings, additional teacher(s) would have been added to the study and once again been chosen from the nominations submitted. However, since redundancy was found, three teachers were used to make up this study. Patton

(2002) states “fieldwork should last long enough to get the job done-to answer the research questions being asked and fulfill the purpose of the study” (p. 275).

Institutional Review Board Process

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which ensures the ethical treatment and protection of participants, was needed before this research could begin. The IRB reviewed the purpose and objectives of the study, how participants would be recruited and their involvement in this study, the risks and benefits associated with participating in this research, as well as how the researcher planned to ensure privacy of the subjects and confidentiality of information collected. They also reviewed the demographic and background survey participants would complete, as well as the interview questions asked.

Upon the approval of the IRB, each participant signed an informed consent statement, which they were also given a copy, outlining the details of this study. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for each participant. Notes, transcripts and tapes used in this study are kept in a locked filing cabinet on the campus of Cleveland State University. Upon three years from project completion, these items will be destroyed.

Data Collection

In order to address the research questions, the problem statement, purpose and assumptions of this study, interviews were conducted as a means of trying to better understand what allows European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools to be successful while others are not. In addition, to observe

firsthand what is reported in the interviews, classroom observations also took place five times throughout this study with each of the participants. Patton (2002) recommends combining research methods to strengthen a study, which establishes the reliability and validity of theme analysis. The use of three data collection methods– multiple classroom observations, personal interviews and nomination forms – allowed the researcher to better understand the complex characteristics which are possessed by a successful educator and provided reliability through triangulation. This form of member checking also established trustworthiness with the participants through the prolonged engagement within the field as well as through peer debriefing.

School district selection.

Various urban high schools in the northeast Ohio region were suggested by go-betweens for use in this study. A fellow doctoral studies cohort member, employed as a school counselor in a school matching the demographic criteria needed for this study, offered to serve as a go-between for this study in the high school in which she was employed. This connection at a local, well-known high school made it a first choice as a possible research site which might allow the conducting of research on their teachers who have been successful in teaching African American students. Upon completion and approval of paperwork requesting to conduct research within the district, it was decided that the Cypress Lakes-Royal Palms City School District would be the district used in this study.

The Cypress Lakes-Royal Palms City School District is located in Ohio. For over 100 years, they have served multiple cities and is composed of diverse religious and

racial heritages. The district serves over 6,000 students in one high school, three middle schools and more than a half dozen elementary schools.

The student population in the Cypress Lakes-Royal Palms City School District does not accurately reflect the community for many of the residents choose to enroll their children in one of the many private schools in the area. Cypress Lakes has a population close to 50,000 residents, with approximate median household incomes of $50,000 and median home values around $100,000. The population of Cypress Lakes consists of approximately 50% white, 40% black and various other nationalities making up the balance. Royal Palms, on the other hand, contains only about 10,000 residents, with median household incomes of $70,000 and medium home values around $200,000. The population of Royal Palms consists of approximately 75% white, 20% black and various other nationalities making up the remaining 5%. Over half of households in Royal Palms hold a bachelor's degree or higher, possibly representing many of the residents who work in academia in one of the nearby colleges. Both communities are within close proximity to numerous cultural, medical and academic institutions.

Throughout the year and during professional development days, the district works with the nation's foremost educational experts to enhance classroom experiences. Over 75% of teachers hold a master's degree or higher and district educators are experienced with helping every child succeed. Each school is required to develop a plan, which is included in the evaluation of the principal, making them accountable for their students' growth and successes.

Cypress Lakes High School

Improving student achievement is the goal at Cypress Lakes High School, which, for more than 75 years, has educated their students and prepared them to achieve great things in life. With a graduation rate of over 90%, the school surpasses the state average of 84.6% by a comfortable amount. It operates five small learning communities within the school, each containing approximately 400 students, and is located within the larger school setting of nearly 2,000 students. While each school is organized around several instructional models, they all seek to increase the number of students who graduate, score well on standardized tests, participate in leadership programs, take the most advanced classes available, attend college, and view school as an engaging place to learn.

The teachers who participated in this study are all members of the same small school, called Scholar. Reflective of the entire student population, Scholar contains approximately 80% African American students, 15% white and the remaining 5% making up other nationalities including Asian, Latino and American Indian. This small school prides itself on integrating classes, where students discuss the same topic(s) in depth and from different perspectives throughout their various classes. In addition, the curriculum is guided by the strengths and interests of the students as well as through collaboration with peers as tutors or mentors.

Participant selection.

Wallis (2008) recommends teachers to possess an unshakable belief in a child's ability to learn as well as possessing a vast knowledge of the subject matter in which

one teaches. Garnaut (2007) notes that the best teachers appear to be effective at their jobs due to innate factors such as having a personal drive and the ability to relate to students. In *Successful Teachers of African American Students,* Ladson-Billings (1994) asked parents and principals to identify successful teachers and qualities, such as working with parents, having high expectations, good classroom management, offering challenging work, improved classroom attendance and having effective discipline skills. Stronge (2002) defines effective teaching as:

> Involving a two-way communicative process initiated by a teacher who is well versed in the subject matter, caring, and able to establish and maintain classroom control. In such a setting students are continually attentive and progress in their learning (p. 108).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the various definitions stated above in addition to those identified from nominations to help showcase the successful teachers in this study.

Administrators in urban high schools not in Academic Emergency that have a majority of African American students from low- to middle-level income levels were targeted for nominations of successful European American teachers of African American students in this study. The rationale behind this selection process was to allow schools selected for use in this study to represent the settings vast majorities of African American students encounter within their educational careers.

In addition, other teachers, school counselors and parents of African American students within the selected high school received a nomination form either from the

researcher or through electronic mail. Finally, teacher educators were also asked to nominate successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools. Nomination forms asked two questions: (a) List the names of 1 or 2 current successful teachers and (b) Why do you believe these particular teacher(s) are successful? To validate parent and colleague nominations, those teachers believed to be successful (using criteria determined by the nominators) with African American students had to be recommended by their building principals as well.

My go-between distributed the nomination form via electronic mail to teachers, school counselors and parents to solicit nominations for participants to use in this study. After the nominations were compiled, the names of three teachers continued to reappear on entries detailing why the nominator believed the teacher to be successful with teaching African American students. The principal of the school was then contacted to confirm these nominations and upon confirmation, the three teachers were invited via electronic mail to participate as research subjects in this study. At that time, the researcher identified himself, the agenda for the research, and asked the teachers to participate in the study. The agenda included the study's purpose which was to identify what it is that they are doing in their classrooms which enable them to be successful with African American students. This would be accomplished through what Spradley (1980) identifies as one-on-one formal and informal interviews as well as focused classroom observations to better understand the daily practices which occur within the classrooms of these teachers identified as "successful". Through the in-depth discussions with teachers and observations of their actions within their classrooms, the

researcher gained a better understanding of the daily patterns and routines of each teacher's classroom. In addition, the characteristics identified in the second question of the nomination form identified numerous traits successful teachers have and was something which was observable once the researcher was inside the classroom. Upon their agreement to participate, the researcher electronically mailed the demographic and background survey for the participant to complete and return. It was also through electronic mail correspondence that scheduling of the first formal interview date, time and location was made. Upon completion of the interview, the participant and researcher outlined the dates and times of the five classroom observations.

Classroom observations.

McCurdy, Spradley, and Shandy (2005) define tacit culture as "the cultural knowledge people don't put into words" (p. 8). Teaching styles, and how they vary among every teacher, serve as an excellent example of tacit culture. Since tacit cultural categories cannot be named, the authors state that they must be inferred from observation. Participant observation is the primary method of ethnographers (Patton, 2002) and therefore to expand, strengthen and better understand insights offered and identify tacit culture during the research being conducted, each participant allowed the researcher to observe them in their classrooms on five different occasions. Patton (2002) suggests naturalistic observations take place in the field, which for those researchers conducting an ethnographic study, is a cultural setting. The author continues by claiming advantages to this method include better understanding and capturing of the context within which people interact, allowing the inquirer to be

discovery oriented and noticing things which may escape someone during an interview, the ability to learn things which some participants may be unwilling to discuss during an interview and finally, to allow the researcher to draw upon personal knowledge during the formal interpretation stage of analysis.

The ethnographer engaged in these focused classroom observations is doing what Spradley (1980) identifies as passive participation. The researcher is present in the classroom but does not interact or participate with other people to any great extent. In passive participation, one finds an "observation post" from which to observe and to record what goes on. These focused observations allowed the researcher to identify culturally relevant teaching practices which allow them to be identified as successful.

Classroom visit logistics.

Five classroom observations for each of the participants of this study were conducted over a period of five weeks in order for the researcher to observe situations at different times and have the opportunity to clarify any questions that might arise about the culture. At least one meeting took place in the morning, another in the early afternoon, and another at the end of a school day. Each observation was for one class period, typically averaging 45-50 minutes of time. This period of time gave the researcher an opportunity to observe the participant at various times of the school day, noting items such as how they begin class, take care of administrative and attendance duties, conduct classroom instruction, and, finally, how they conclude the class period. Patton (2002) states:

> The critical point is that the length of time during which observations take place depends on the purpose of the study and the questions being asked, not some ideal about what a typical participant observation must necessarily involve (p. 275).

Grand tour observations.

Spradley (1980) suggests the use of grand tour observations to give an overview of what occurred during the time within the classroom setting. Examples include the actors (teacher, students) involved, the space (classroom setting), activities (teaching being conducted), objects (physical things present), acts (what the teacher and students are doing), events (activities being carried out during the class), time, goal (teachers objectives) and feelings (emotions expressed and felt) observed during the observation.

To start the observation process, Spradley suggests grand tour observations, which leads to rich descriptions of the social situation and into what he calls mini-tour observations. These smaller focused observations lead to a vast number of detailed descriptions of what is being observed in the classroom and takes what sometimes appears as a trivial event and records it in specific detail.

Patton (2002) suggests that the major strengths of using observations include providing the researcher more details and evidence than other data sources and offering a more naturalistic setting in which to study the process of education. In addition, observations allowed the researcher to provide a check on what is reported in interviews and identify characteristics of successful teaching given on the nomination form from those who nominated the teachers being studied. This use of multiple

avenues of research provided reliability to the study through triangulation, which obtains information from multiple sources.

Observing success.

During classroom observations, the researcher identified culturally relevant teaching practices. Stronge (2002) synthesizes his research on qualities of effective teachers and identifies key indicators, such as the teacher as a person and manager, how they organize and implement instruction and how the teacher monitors progress and potential.

The teacher as a person. Stronge (2002) looked at the teacher as a person through characteristics such as caring, fairness and respect, motivation, enthusiasm, and student interaction. Examples of caring that were witnessed during classroom observations include items such as showing concern for students' physical and emotional well-being, creating a warm and supportive classroom climate, showing concern about the lives of students' outside school, and exhibiting active listening skills. Treating students equally, showing them all respect, creating situations where success is possible for all students, responding on an individual level to misbehavior, and preventing situations where peer respect is lost are indicators of fairness and respect. Motivation was observed through items such as offering feedback which is meaningful to students and maintaining work that is considered high quality both to the students and teacher. Enthusiasm included showing content material joy, taking pleasure in teaching, and involvement in outside school learning activities. The friendly way teachers interact with students, yet still being professional, sharing responsibility with

students, knowing students' in and out of school interests, and being able to communicate in a playful and fun, sometimes joking manner, are all characteristics of how successful teachers interact with their students, according to Stronge (2002). The author also looks at the teacher as a person through indicators such as their dedication to teaching and reflective practices used. Examples of these indicators include having a positive attitude about teaching and life, seeking professional development to implement new instructional strategies, and having an understanding of one's own personal strengths and weaknesses, reflecting upon their own teaching, and setting high expectations for classroom performance.

The teacher as classroom manager and organizer. How teachers discipline students, organize, and manage their classrooms are a few of the ways in which Stronge describes the teacher as a classroom manager and organizer. Items which may be observed include ways in which one responds and interrupts inappropriate behavior in a timely fashion, fairly and consistently implements rules, reiterates positive behavior expectations and uses appropriate disciplinary measures. In addition, the ways in which the teacher handles classroom tasks in a prompt, efficient and consistent way, in addition to being prepared in advance and efficient use of classroom space identify classroom organization skills. The use of appropriate discipline, routines, multitasking, and anticipation of potential problems are just a few of the many methods teachers may use to manage their classrooms on a daily basis which can be identified through classroom observations.

Organizing for instruction. Other areas noted by Stronge as possible observable skills include time allocation, teachers' expectations, instruction plans, and importance of instruction. Limiting classroom interruptions, focusing class time on learning and teaching, having high expectations for both students and self, and careful planning of lessons to meet objections and students diverse learning styles are a few indictors of how teachers organize for instruction.

Implementing instruction. Student engagement, questioning, complexity, content and expectations as well as instructional strategies used were also identified by the author. Employing various techniques within the classroom, relating it to students' current knowledge, setting high expectations for growth and development, as well as giving clear examples and guided practice, are just a few of the many avenues which are observable. Having a concern about learning versus memorization, higher order thinking and using various types of questions-with appropriate wait time-to reflect the goals of the lesson, are all indicators of ways successful teachers implement instruction.

The teacher teaching: Monitoring student progress and potential. Finally, how teachers monitor progress and potential of the student through areas such as homework are noted through items such as clearly explaining the assignment, relating it to student content and capacity, and offering comments and discussions on work assigned. Since research has identified the abovementioned characteristics, these are areas which may be observed in this study during the classroom observations.

Observations took place during the 2010 spring semester of the school year. At this time of year, teachers have taught the students for approximately six months and

classroom norms were established. In addition to reviewing relevant answers given during the initial interview, the researcher kept in mind the areas identified by the research conducted by Stronge (2002) and Landson-Billings (1994) while observing teachers and used field notes from classroom observations to identify both the characteristics and practices used by successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools.

Interviews

Explicit cultures are coded in language and consist of cultural categories, according to McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005). The authors suggest that since people cannot talk about explicit culture, simply listening to them speak or interviewing them is an important way to discover this cultural knowledge. They suggest the best suited method for discovering explicit culture is through the interviewing method. Therefore, each teacher participating in this study was interviewed approximately twelve times by the researcher, both formally and informally.

Spradley (1979) recommends the interview process to be thought of as a series of friendly conversations in which the interviewer introduces ethnographic questions. The author states that "the three most important ethnographic elements are its explicit purpose, ethnographic explanations, and ethnographic questions" (p. 59). During interviews, informants were reminded of the point (purpose) of the interview, the goal of the research (explanation) as well as through implementing descriptive (ethnographic) questions. Initial interviews were taped and transcribed, with each teacher given a code name to maintain confidentiality. Participants all chose their

principal's office as the location where they felt most comfortable for the interviews to take place and all made comments which the researcher did not include in the study. Spradley (1979) states "all informants must have the protection of saying things 'off the record' which never find their way into the ethnographer's field notes" (p. 36). Interviews were all scheduled by electronic mail. Before any participant could be interviewed, the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form had to be signed, permitting the researcher to also tape record the meeting and later transcribe what was recorded.

Each interview had an estimated time frame of 30 minutes in length. In addition, an information card was given to teachers to complete to gather data about their personal/professional characteristics and included information such as their name, age, educational background (K-post secondary), gender, number of years teaching, teaching experience and professional development on African Americans. After reviewing the completed survey, additional questions were created and asked during the interview time which pertained to survey answers given and of which had relevance to the study at hand.

Initial interview.

Formal interviews (Spradley, 1980) were conducted upon initial meeting, which introduced the researcher to the participant and explained the logistics of this research study. In addition, the interview questions designed for use in this study (listed in Figure 1) were asked at this time to gain a better understanding about the teaching which was observed during classroom visits.

Each teacher agreed to take part in an interview where a list of descriptive questions (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005) was asked to elicit folk terms. The idea behind descriptive questions was for participants to talk about what works in their cultural worlds (classrooms) and to describe activities being conducted during any given class. These open-ended questions allowed the researcher to understand the world as the respondent sees it without predetermining points of view through the prior selection of questionnaire categories (Patton, 2002).

McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005) recommend using a grand tour question as the first question to ask and are generally the most common kind of descriptive question. Spradley (1979) suggests descriptive questions as being a very useful tool to use in starting the conversation and keeping the participant freely talking. This question asked participants to describe what one would see on a typical day in their classrooms when students are engaged. The author states, "Descriptive questions aim to elicit a large sample of utterances in the informant's native language…to talk about a particular cultural scene" (p. 85).

Following this question were mini tour questions, which asked for expansion on folk terms discovered in the first question and provided for greater details and possible future questions. These probing questions were asked after teachers had responded to the questions created for use in this study. In addition, hypothetical-interaction questions (Spradley, 1979) such as "If I were to observe your class, what kinds of things would I see going on?" and example questions such as "Could you give me an example of that?" were also used. Finally, experience questions were asked to gain a better understanding of ways in which teachers have learned the successful methods used in their classrooms on a daily basis. Examples of the abovementioned questions included having teachers expand upon their answers by the researcher asking things such as "Tell me more about that", "What do you mean by that?" and "What else?"

During the interviewing process, Spradley (1979) recommends making repeated explanations as to the goal of the study and help in the rapport-building process. The author also suggest restating what the participants say as a means of reinforcing what was said and demonstrating an interest in learning more about the participants' culture. Finally, Spradley suggests asking for use, not meaning, through statements such as "What kinds of things would I hear you saying to your students in class to encourage them to learn?" These suggestions were all used in this study.

Story questions were used to have participants tell of actual experiences associated with the microculture and offer details about how they learned to be successful within the classroom. Questions were not given to the teachers beforehand and the researcher avoided asking what things are like or how subjects feel about things

(McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005). Figure 1 below shows how interview questions correlated to the research questions posed for this study.

Research Questions	Interview Questions
What are the personal characteristics of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools?	1. You have been regarded as a successful European American teacher of African American students. Tell me what makes you successful with teaching African American students. Why do you do that? Where did you learn this from? Why do you think… 2. How do you think your peers and students would describe your teaching style? What else? 3. What are the principles/beliefs which guide your teaching? Tell me more about that. 4. Please explain why you are teaching predominately African American students. 5. Please feel free to say or add anything else that you think is relevant to being an successful European American teacher of African American students. Is there something you think I should have asked you?
(overlaps both questions)	
What are the beliefs that influence teaching practices which distinguish these teachers?	6. Could you give me some examples of how, from whom or ways you have learned to become successful in teaching African American students. 7. What works, and why – when helping African American students learn? Tell me more about… What do you mean by… 8. Could you describe what I would see you and your students doing during a typical hour within your classroom when students are engaged in learning, using statements such as "I would be…" and/or "Students would be…".

Figure 1. Relationship of Research Questions and Interview Questions.

Post observation interviews.

Informal interviews (Spradley, 1980) were conducted briefly before and after each of the five classroom observations. Interviews after each classroom observation allowed the researcher to better understand all that was witnessed and the decision making that went into such actions. Field notes taken by the researcher during the

classroom observation were shared with the participant during interviews, allowing them to expand upon what was going on in the classroom and the theory behind it. Furthermore, the interview time after each observation gave the participant time to explain more about what was observed as well as the practices used during class instructional time. On occasions when there was not ample time to conduct a post observation interview, the researcher met with the participant later in the day or after school.

Follow-up interviews.

The last interview was conducted after the participant had been given a copy of, and had time to review and check for errors in fact or intent, classroom and prior interview transcripts. It was during this meeting, which once again conducted in the principals' office, where the researcher and participant referred to classroom observation notes as a means of incorporating what was seen during the classroom observation into the interview. Participants were given the opportunity to reflect, expand up or change any items which were initially stated in the interview or witnessed during classroom observations. None of the participants requested any changes.

Field Notes

McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005) suggest taking note of when members of a micro-culture use certain words, called folk terms, as they speak with one another. The authors state that field notes, written accounts of what transpired, consist of typed transcriptions of interview questions, everything that was said, and written accounts of what transpired during both interviews and observations. Patton (2002) confirms this

suggestion by claiming “what is not optional is the taking of field notes” (p. 302). The author further recommends leaving nothing to future recall and sufficiently detailing (thick, deep and rich descriptions) settings so as to allow the reader to visualize it. In addition, the author suggests it may also be appropriate to observe items which did not occur (such as lack of artwork on the walls) when making field notes. Spradley (1979) suggests field notes encompass both condensed and expanded accounts. Single words, phrases and unconnected sentences make up the condensed accounts while the expanded account include filling in details and recalling things which were not recorded during the taking of field notes. The expanded accounts are an extension of the condensed version and was done once the researcher was done with an observation or interview.

During the interview and classroom observations, field notes were taken and included items such as the classroom layout, researcher thoughts about how the interview was conducted and other items handwritten (such as direct quotes to capture participants’ views of their experience in their own words, including both native terms and observer terms) until they were transcribed. McCurdy, Spradley, and Shandy (2005) state that while this may be a long and tedious process, it not only minimizes the impact of ethnocentric bias but more importantly provides an exhaustive and detailed record of parts of the subjects’ culture.

Researchers can build on the strength of interviews, observations and field notes while at the same time, minimizing the weaknesses of any one approach and is a triangulated, mixed methods approach (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) states that “the

documentation would not have made sense without the interviews, and the focus of the interviews came from the field observations. Taken together, these diverse sources of information and data give…a complete picture" (p. 307).

Data Analysis

In a qualitative research study such as this, data analysis involves "making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said" (Patton, 2002, p. 380). The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics and practices of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools. Through the analysis of data collected during classroom observations and interviews, various themes emerged and are identified and expanded upon further in the findings section.

Data analysis must occur, according to Spradley (1980), if one wishes to discover cultural patterns and is done so by reviewing field notes. Cultural domains are categories of cultural meaning which include smaller categories, such as folk (when teachers use terms derived from common language used by successful teachers) and analytic (making inferences from what teachers do/say in their classrooms and create my own terms to label this behavior) domains. McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005) describe the domains and the sets of terms with them as taxonomies. These simple lists of various items are found under a domain word classified by members of a micro-culture due to a shared attribute. In the case of this study, successful European American teaching practices used with African American students in urban high schools

were studied to determine a relationship among the various subjects observed and interviewed.

Ryan and Bernard (2000) state that researchers build various models using data collected to represent how people think. "Componential analysis produces formal models of the elements in a cultural domain, and taxonomies display hierarchical associations among the elements in a domain" (p. 772). Identification of distinctive features is the basis for componential analysis and produces a model based on the relationship among features.

Word analysis is a method Ryan and Bernard (2000) suggest using to help the researcher discover themes in texts. By identifying words commonly used in the answers to grand-tour questions such as "Describe what I would see in your classroom when students are engaged", the researcher is better able to identify constructs which may be important in providing data for making comparisons among the various teachers used in this study.

The authors also suggest presenting direct quotes as a way to describe themes identified in the study. The quotes showcased will allow the reader to gain a quick understanding of what makes the participants used in this study exemplary examples of successful teachers.

Transcription.

After each participant was interviewed and classrooms were observed, the researcher transcribed the field notes and participants' answers to the research questions. After the interview responses were typed, a copy of each participant's

interview was sent to them for review. They were then given the opportunity to modify, delete or add anything they thought was necessary. None of the participants requested any changes.

Determining themes.

Opler (1945) defines a theme as "a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in society" (p. 198). He proposed that by identifying recurrent themes one could better understand the general pattern of a culture. Spradley (1980) himself defines a cultural theme as "any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning" (p. 141). McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy (2005) suggest identifying cultural themes as an important final step in the ethnographic process. They suggest rereading field notes, noting similarities that may form general themes between the various teachers participating in this study. Spradley (1979) states "cultural themes serve as relationships among domains" (p. 195). He continues by explaining how the ethnographer can begin to find relationships by making comparisons and contrasts among domains. Spradley (1980) suggests there are universal themes present and they were identified in this study. The first were the participants' personal characteristics, which included holding high expectations for their African American students. In addition, the relationships they built by being building relationships, caring and having a sense of humor were also brought to light. The second theme was their teaching practices, which allow them to be successful, and is built on a foundation of cultural knowledge about the student they

teach. In addition, their teaching philosophy, classroom procedures and idea of students obtaining mastery of material taught were identified as well.

Coding themes.

This ethnography of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools identifies profiles of effective practices and styles. This was accomplished by coding sections of text transcribed from interviews and field notes to identify the key words associated with each theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The authors suggest that these key words should then allow the researcher to look for the theme in the rest of the study for additional occurrences. The researcher incorporated the abovementioned methods as well as the implementation of grounded theory line-by-line coding as suggested by Charmaz (2000) to analyze data.

Once participants were interviewed and the interviews were transcribed, the researcher began data analysis through the coding of the transcripts to determine themes. Data collected from the background questionnaire, interviews and observations were coded as they were collected. This process served as a means of categorizing it as a starting point of developing a schema of what characteristics make for a successful European American teacher of African American students in urban high schools. Once new questions were created, the researcher revised the interview protocol to incorporate them and to focus the observations to do the same.

The researcher conducted an ongoing review of field notes and transcribed interviews, continuing to code them along the way to develop a schema for future observations and revisions to the interview protocol. This led to the identification of

cultural domains and a better understanding of the ways in which the teachers being studied were successful in teaching African American students in urban high schools. Upon identifying common themes, the researcher identified specific codes which were found to be present among the various participants observed in this study. The researcher then reviewed the newly identified characteristics in future interviews following classroom observations to verify my understanding and schematic organization of how the members of the culture thought about the findings in order to build a model of how teachers think.

These are the steps taken to carefully analyze the data to arrive at the findings of the ways in which European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools are successful classroom teachers.

Limitations

This study focused on three successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools. The sample size, itself, is the first limitation of this study. The inclusion of additional participants may have showcased other characteristics and practices which could have resulted in the creation of additional themes and subcategories.

The fact that only successful European American teachers of African American students participated in this study is a second limitation. The inclusion of African American teachers, and other ethnic backgrounds, identified as successful teachers of African American students could also possibly lead to the identification of additional themes. These teachers, who may share similar cultural backgrounds as the students

they teach, may have different methods of teaching practices and/or building relationships.

Cypress Lakes was the only school where participants were recruited and is the third limitation. Teachers in other urban schools, who may not be broken down into small schools, may have to overcome different challenges than the participants in this study. In addition, the inclusion of teachers from other schools might identify methods unique to their school building and student population. This study was limited to teachers in Ohio schools in urban areas and may not reflect the practices used by successful educators in suburban and rural school systems or in other parts of the country.

This study looked solely at successful European American teachers of African American students, and not teachers of white students, which is limit number four. Studying successful teachers who teach students similar to their own cultural backgrounds would identify characteristics and practices used within a different student population, resulting in findings possibly similar or different from the ones of this study.

The fifth limitation of this study was that it did not interview the students of the teachers identified as successful. Students could be asked to explain their philosophy on why some European American teachers of African American students encounter success in the classroom while others are not, noting personal characteristics and teaching practices. Furthermore, the identification of teachers nominated by students as successful could have also been used in the recruiting participants to observe and study.

Finally, the research is based on data which was observed in classrooms as well as from interviews with the participating teachers. Therefore, the results are subject to the issue of recall and description of what one reported at the time of interview versus what one actually does during the classroom observations by the researcher. With the interviews and classroom observations being conducted during the spring semester, pressures around testing, school breaks or other deadlines may have led respondents to report data which may be more reflective of unusual circumstances during that time period versus during more normal periods of teaching. Furthermore, selection bias may occur as respondents are not required to participate in this study upon being nominated and therefore may have demonstrated a higher level of commitment to this topic versus those unwilling to volunteer.

Patton (2002) suggests observation limitations may have also included the chance that the observer affects the classroom being observed in ways unknown to him, that the teacher and/or students behaved in ways which are atypical and that the observer's selective perception could distort the data. In addition, Patton notes observers can only witness external behaviors and are unable to see what is happening within the minds of the participants being studied. Other interview limitations may include recall error, self-serving responses, and the possibility of responses being distorted due to anger, politics, personal bias, or simple lack of awareness.

Summary of Chapter III

Chapter three reviewed the methodology used in the study, beginning with the research questions and an explanation for the selection of qualitative research. In

addition, ethnography was described along with information on the school district and participant selection process. The Institutional Review Board procedures were detailed in addition to the classroom observation and interview logistics, followed by explanations of field notes and data analysis. Finally, themes and limitations were listed for this study. Chapter four will present findings from the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

"The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it"

Chinese Proverb

The quote above reflects the findings from this study. Urban students are all too often labeled as lazy, unmotivated or helpless because of their demographic profiles. The teachers who participated in this study impart high expectations and levels of trust upon their students, constantly reassuring them they have what it takes to achieve their goals and to be successful. To those who doubt that one person, or a small group of people, can make a difference, these findings are just the proof needed.

Data was gathered from teacher nomination forms, interviews and classroom observations. The participants all shared similar personal characteristics and teaching practices which enabled them to be successful when teaching African American students. Themes began to emerge as the interview transcriptions, nomination forms and classroom observation field notes were analyzed. As the themes emerged, similar quotes from the various data sources were grouped together.

Despite the fact that the data has been grouped into a category for each research question, it is important to note that findings are not necessarily exclusive to one only and may overlap others. There are numerous ways to organize the data due to their interdependent qualities, and several might apply to more than one theme. This is a prime example of how teachers' personalities and practices go hand-in-hand playing a role in successfully teaching African American students in urban high schools.

In each of the interviews, participants shared very similar beliefs and ideas about the African American students they teach on a daily basis. All three expressed not only liking their students as people, but also going so far as to say they actually care about them. Participants hold very high expectations for their students, hoping to ensure they encounter nothing but success during their educational careers. The participants all believed that he or she possessed a sense of humor, was very relationship oriented with his or her students and treated each of them with dignity. A high degree of honesty allows the participants to have a type of trusting relationship with their students, which not all teachers have, and has proven to be essential to their success. Knowing something about their students' lives outside of the classroom was deemed very important in building relationships with students, and enables participants to use culturally relevant teaching practices. Finally, believing in students and expecting content mastery, while never lowering their own personal morals or judging students because of their background, were views also shared among the participants in this study.

Participant Demographics

Frank Cooper.

Frank Cooper, or "Coop" as he is often simply referred to by his students, student taught at Cypress Lakes and returned after a year of teaching middle school in a private school. He is now finishing his eighth year of teaching World History, U.S. History and an elective class called Social Problems. Upon graduating high school in Pennsylvania, he moved to Ohio to attend college with plans of majoring in architecture. Now in his mid-thirties with short, brown crew cut hair and a neatly trimmed goatee, Cooper recently finished his Master's Degree from a college in Northeast Ohio. A very slim man, he dresses preppy for class each day in polo shirts, khaki pants and brown dress shoes. Rarely wearing a tie, Cooper proudly participates in spirit wear Fridays and displays Cypress Lakes High School tee shirts, accompanied by jeans and athletic shoes to complete the casual look. He commutes close to one hour a day to work each way and resides in the country with his wife and two children, a son and a daughter.

Deborah Zeppo.

Deborah Zeppo, the lead teacher in Scholar, is in her early forties and rides to and from work each day with Frank Cooper since they live in neighboring towns in the country. In her eleventh year of teaching, she arrived at Cypress Lakes after teaching at the middle school level her first four years in education. Born and raised in Northeast Ohio, Zeppo also attended the same college for undergraduate study as Cooper and holds a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from a college near Cypress Lakes High School. She is a petite woman, with shoulder length brown hair and a bubbly

personality. Zeppo often dresses up for work, sporting dress shirts, skirts, pants and shoes, but also participates in spirit wear Fridays proudly displaying her Cypress Lakes High School tee shirts accompanied by jeans and flip flops. She is a wife and mother to four children, two sons and two daughters.

Tye Berns.

When he was in his early forties, Tye Berns moved to Ohio from the southwest part of the United States to escape the heat. Had he chosen not to relocate, Berns currently would have been retired. Now in his early fifties and balding, he has taught English Literature, British Literature and American Sign Language at the junior high, high school and college levels. Raised and educated in the south, he completed post-graduate work on-line though an Ohio university to learn more about educating struggling boys and to effectively raise their achievement levels. He dresses casually for work, sporting either plain or Cypress Lakes High School tee shirts, accompanied by jeans and athletic shoes. Never married, Berns has no children and lives in a city within close proximity to Cypress Lakes High School, where he currently teaches American Sign Language.

Personal Characteristics

Relationships.

Possessing a high level of respect for their students enables the participants to build a relationship based on trust. They all believed that these trusting relationships were the reasons they are oftentimes able to say things to students that other teachers may not feel comfortable saying to students. As Zeppo comments,

> Some people say things such as how I refer to them, that I have a rapport with them, which makes me be more successful, makes me be able to say things to them that maybe if I did not have the rapport I would not be able to say. Maybe when you observe it, you might think is inappropriate. Students learn because of how I talk to them; because they know I think it is important.

Cooper mentions being "Not being politically correct" at times with this students and suggests, "It's kind of where that gray line is that maybe I can say things that other teachers can't say to students." While there are times when he wonders if things he had said could have been worded differently, he says "I think the human part of my students think, well that's Cooper, he says what he thinks and most of the time he's right and or he does it for the right reasons…or my students just go, good point".

While participants spoke of teachers being reported by students for making inappropriate comments, the opportunity to build rapport with students starts when they first enter the classroom on day one. Cooper recommends,

> Take the first week and get to know your students. Whether it is a survey, whatever. I have a survey that is a pretty innocent survey; it is favorite movie, book, things like that, but there are also questions that give you a little bit about them. When you read their answers you find a little bit more about their life. About home.

This divulging of personal information is not a one way street either. Teachers reported that they share their own personal information with students as well.

Students then see these teachers as more human, real and easier to relate with versus those who share no personal knowledge. "I talk a lot about my wife and kids. They know, and they ask questions about them. It's part of just being real with them," says Cooper. This was witnessed firsthand during an observation when Cooper talked about the two-sided joys of fatherhood. He told a story about the excitement of arriving home from work at 3 p.m. to the calls of daddy, but quickly told of an incident where the same call coming at 2 a.m. was not as fun when "the boy" completely undressed himself and wet the bed. Students laugh at not only his story, but also the use of "the boy" to describe Cooper's son Simon.

The result of this rapport building is students doing well in their classes, yet sometimes "are jerks in other classes," says Berns. He gives an example a student who has a deceased mother, dad in prison, and a grandmother, whom he was very close to, passing away recently. The student has been shipped around a lot from home to home, has a lot of anger and a strong dislike for people in authority. However, this student does fine for Berns and another teacher, but is nothing but headaches for others.

While the building of relationships starts at the beginning of the school year when classes first start, the positive effect it has carries throughout the entire school year, but it also comes with some initial hesitance. Berns noted, "All too often, our students are used to folks giving up on them and will try to push our buttons to see if they will do the same, testing us almost." Once students have built positive working relationships with their teachers, it is not uncommon to hear them reminding fellow classmates to show respect for these particular staff members. Participants agreed that

students will do almost anything to not let their teachers down and, thus, tarnish the relationships they have built.

Discipline issues were not common with the participants in this study and all believed they handled such issues both firmly and in a fair manner. Students strived to maintain positive rapport with their teachers, even carrying into other classes as well. When another teacher sent one of Zeppo's students to the office for a discipline incident, the principal deferred the referral to Zeppo to deal with as she saw fit since the principal knew the student would be harder on himself for disappointing a teacher with whom he had built a relationship. On another occasion, Zeppo quizzed a student in her class about his behavior in another teacher's classroom. She was heard saying, "Were you disturbing the class? I heard several people asked you to get it together. When asked to leave, where did you go? Not to the office obviously. Is this worth the consequences?"

They agreed that many discipline issues are based on teacher perspective and that, oftentimes, the same student behavior in one class will be viewed differently by another teacher during the next class. When teachers have relationships with students, they believe discipline problems are minimal due to the fact that students are able to talk about the problem at hand versus acting out on it. Cooper noted that a simple, "Really? You're going to be like this with me?" is oftentimes enough to make students realize their behavior is unacceptable and to get back to the given task at hand. When a classmate cutting class could be seen from the window, students asked Zeppo whether she was going to punish her. "She's not getting her education. Isn't that punishment

enough? Her punishment is Algebra again, with me," she replies and moves along with the lesson for the day.

While no teacher is without exception to the occasional student outburst, both Berns and Zeppo provide examples of the power of having rapport with students. After reminding a student about their constant tardiness to class, Berns says the student "bit my head off". He let the student cool off and did not pursue the discussion any further. The student returned to Berns at the end of class and apologized for his behavior because he knew he messed up. Zeppo experienced a similar situation with a student who cursed and stormed out of the classroom, but returned to apologize later that day and told her, "I love you."

Regardless of the discipline incident, the participants all agreed that what unacceptable behavior occurs one day in class does not get carried over to the next day. Rather, everyone agreed that students start with a clean slate and they do not to carry a grudge. Cooper gives an example by saying, "Yesterday I sent an entire group out. Today I don't have an issue with them. What I'm going to say to their group is, "This is important, let's get this done." While the participants in this study abide by this philosophy, they commented that students remind them that this is not always the case with other teachers throughout the school building.

Finally, in regards to discipline, participants classified themselves as not being "yellers" and that yelling is a characteristic they did not believe belonged in the classroom. They agreed that students not only yell louder, but also win whatever issue is at hand because the yelling teacher loses credibility. "All the kids are going to

remember is Coop yelled today. They might lose the message over the act itself," explains Cooper.

Caring.

The participants did not believe that liking or caring about their students had anything to do with their race, rather more an internal belief that their students can do well regardless of both parties sharing different ethnic backgrounds. Everyone agreed that by building relationships, treating students with dignity and letting them know you believe in them plays a major role in their success with African American students.

The above mentioned traits are also ones the teachers believed were something one cannot pretend to possess. Berns explains, "Kids can see straight through you. They know if you really care about them or if you're just acting like you care about them. They know that we care about them. There's never any question about that." Zeppo agrees and states,

> I think kids just see through you if you read in a book that I need to try this, ask about their personal lives, find out their interests, or I need to use their name in a story somewhere. If you're trying to do that, I think kids actually see right through that.

When asked to expand further upon the idea of caring, Berns explained,

> I think the biggest thing for them to know is that I care about them, not just as students, but as people. I'm not looking at them as a grade book entry. A lot of these kids have never had anyone care for them at all before. They're not used to that. I think it makes them feel worthy; a lot

> of them for the first time. It confuses a lot of them, too. I've actually had students ask me 'Why do you care?' They weren't asking it to be ugly, they were confused.

Curious as to how Berns responded to the student inquiring as to why he cared, he replied,

> I just tell them it's just who I am. I don't know how to not care. I don't know how to explain it any other way. In my mind, from the day they walk in my classroom until the day they walk out, they belong to me. They're a part of my family. And my job is to take care of them. Academically and emotionally.

It was not uncommon to observe Berns directly telling students "I care about you" in class. Cooper adds that for some of his students, he is "as close to their concerned parent that they have…and I'm not letting them bow out." Zeppo agrees and says, "They feel like I care more about them."

The participants agreed that their personalities play a major factor in their caring about their students and may separate them from other staff members who may not encounter such success with their own students. Zeppo adds,

> I think you're either a social person, and are interested in other people, or you are not. We have this discussion all the time about other staff members, what we can do to help them, and I honestly think that sometimes you either have it or you don't have it. I don't think you can learn that, actually. Because most of the people that don't built the

> rapport with their students also don't build a rapport with other staff members. They keep more to themselves, so I think it's a personality trait. It's how you are. If you're goal for this study is to try and transform some people, I don't think you can.

Teachers believed their personalities, which allowed them to care about their students, see potential in them which perhaps other teachers may not, and wanting them to gain the best education possible, were the result of the foundation laid for them by their parent from a very young age. All three participants recalled growing up in predominately white neighborhoods, attending schools that reflected the same racial makeup as themselves and not interacting with others from different races. However, all credited their parents with being influential factors in their lives on how to treat other people and believe this has an important role in their success as teachers today. Berns credits his father, also a teacher, by bragging, "Almost everything I know about teacher–every good thing-he taught me." It was Zeppo's parents who taught her to have a fondness for people and helped develop her charming personality which students today embrace. Cooper says,

> My parents went to a predominately African American high school and the whole race thing was never a huge deal. Now, where I grew up and went to school, it was, we probably had two African American families in the whole school. So it was a big deal, but never to me.

Cooper recalls growing up poor, on food stamps, with an alcoholic dad and in an abusive home. He believes these life experiences are similar to those his students sometimes

encounter and allow him to have a better understanding of what their lives are like outside the normal school day.

With the exception of Berns, who knew from the third grade that he wanted to be a teacher, Zeppo and Cooper did not enroll in college with plans to teach. Even after all three had graduated with majors in education, none ever sought to teach African American students in particular. Rather, Cypress Lakes was the school which offered each of them an employment opportunity. They stay here, however, due to an emotional connection they have with the students and the belief that they are making a difference in the lives of the students they teach on a daily basis.

After 31 years of teaching, Berns says, "I have never felt anywhere else like I was really making a difference." When asked to expand upon this feeling he adds,

> I think I give these kids something they might not otherwise get. And it's not because I'm great, because I'm smarter than anyone else, but I try to be so in tune with what's going on with them, and always mindful to the fact that I never know when they walk in my classroom what hell they have already gone through before I even see them. Other kids can't wait to come to school, to get away from home, and then they don't always want to go back home. I feel like I'm kind of a rock for them and I never really felt that way.

Zeppo says "I enjoy my job. I want to be here. I feel like this is kind of like my home, that I'm part of the family. I have no desire to go anywhere else or teach any other

cultures because they all have their own issues." Cooper agrees and says, "I think I can do the most good here, make the most difference."

While no teacher said everyday is perfect, they all agreed that there are days when situations arise which make them ponder their future employment in education. Cooper agrees with the comment made by Zeppo that all cultures have their own issues and says,

> It's not like my white kids don't have issues, and only our African American kids do, but it just seems like the amount of diversity, or the amount of poverty we have, or gang issues, or whatever it is, this is a place where we can really do the most good. I think I can teach at an all white district, and there would probably be days that were easier. There are some days here that are wow…I'm not sure I'm going to go back tomorrow, and you always do.

What exactly this difference is that teachers believe they make for their students varies as much as the students themselves. For some students, the difference might just be getting them to come to school every day. Berns believes he makes his class a safe place to come and learn because students

> know that one period of the day that they can come in and they don't have to worry about if they're going to be humiliated, or if they're going to be disrespected, if the teachers going to get in their face.

This difference may be for some students simply wanting to focus on improving their knowledge of the subject matter at hand or simply trying to improve their life. "Other

kids it may be challenging them enough that they become better students and move onto bigger and better things," says Cooper. They all believe that education is the key to helping their students move forward in life one way or another and that caring about their futures remains as the key reason they return day after day.

Humor.

While participants believed they could say things to students which other colleagues might not feel comfortable saying, they all agreed that this was one of those areas where it is a two way street, where teachers joked with students just as easily as the students did with teachers. Participants chuckled recalling comments made to them by students concerning the size of one's stomach or receding hair line, reference as a nerd or other items such as their age. While they agreed that what one teacher does may not work for another, they suggested that teachers need to lighten up a bit when dealing with high school students and have fun in what they call "dual bashing," where teachers and students can make jokes at the other's expense.

During one class observation, Berns noticed a bald spot on the back of a male student's head, the result of the barber using a razor too closely. When this student did not respond to his request for an answer, he replied, "I now know why you have that bald spot on the back of your head; because your mom thumbs you when you don't listen to her." In response to a joke made by a student at the teacher's expense, the teacher almost spit out the coffee he was drinking, causing the rest of the class to laugh even more. Other times, the teacher is the subject of their own jokes. Cooper jokes about his age in class and says, "I'm very old. I may drop today. My heart can only beat

so long." Zeppo jokes about making an error in class and responds "Everyone makes one mistake per year. That is the one mistake I will make all year. My bad…" When a computer encounters some technical difficulty and the website being shown in class suddenly displays a black screen, the teacher simply responds, "This was filmed at night." All of the above comments were met with laughter from the class.

After class mumbling when being asked why everyone was so tired and if they needed to get up and do jumping jacks, Zeppo says "What did you say? You're too fat to jump?" On days when students are sloth, Cooper raises up the hand of a student and shockingly asks the class, "What, a question?" Upon hearing laughter coming from another classroom, Berns says "People are laughing in another classroom. That is unacceptable." All three teachers shared numerous jokes made about the researcher on different classroom observation days, the most common being "Is he your cousin?", referring to both individuals being European American. The above examples were met with laughter from the class, teacher and in this last case, oftentimes the researcher as well.

Other times students and teachers joked about each others' looks or race. A student commented, "Two cute people can make an ugly baby" to which the teacher replied, "You're not that ugly. Don't get down on yourself." When a student asks if the lights will be out during the movie, the teacher joking replies "Yes, so I cannot see you." After a student inquires as to why Cooper suggests they avoid the use of Wikipedia, he replies, "Because people can write anything they want on that page and it is not always true. In fact, I just made a page about you on there, check it out." Finally, a student

tells Cooper about Zeppo buying her friendship by giving her chocolate and asking what he was going to do. Cooper asks, “Why’s it got to be chocolate?” to which the student responds, “It’s white chocolate.” With a dumbfound look on his face, he replies back “Is there any other kind?” to which students shout back with laughter “Milk”, “Dark”.

Another day, a student from the hallway entered a classroom and greeted Berns as Stewie, a reference to a chubby and bald television cartoon character the student believed he resembled. Later that class period a student with headphones on dances to the front of the room and then around the teacher, who rapidly joins in by replicating the students dance steps, much to the surprise of the class. When Zeppo is asked by students to close the classroom window due to cold air coming in she tells them, “No, it’s hot and you guys stink”. Cooper, in response to hearing music from a student in the hallway, announces to his class “Hold on, my song is on”. All the parties involved enjoyed a laugh from the comments made.

When a student inquired about the Berns showing favoritism and asked why a classmate was allowed to do something he was not, he simply responded, “Because she’s cuter than you”. Responding to a different student moments later asked if they could use the bathroom, simply replied “I hope so,” causing the student to wonder what he meant. “If you can’t go, that’s not good”, as he wrote them a pass and reminded them to wash their hands when they were finished. Upon being asked the same request, Cooper tells a student to write a pass, who then points across the hall and says “It’s right there.” He replies “I’m aware of where it is located. I pass it every day”, after which he draws a picture of himself on the pass versus simply signing his name. When

asked when the bell was going to ring, Zeppo quickly replies “The bell will ring when time is over.” Another time, being told by students that a classmate was sleeping, Zeppo jokes “No, he’s just resting his big head”.

Other times teachers used their skills in drama to create laughter. After giving herself a paper cut, Zeppo wraps it up with toilet paper over and over, proclaiming “Now I can’t write”. Other times, while playing with the undo function on her new Smart Board, makes animated sounds, to which the students shout out with laughter, “You’re such a big kid.” Finally, upon taking a pen that glows from a sleeping student, the teacher enthusiastically announces to the class “It’s a good day for me. Even if you learn nothing, I’m happy today” as she hides her pen and reminds them to stop looking at it. Regardless if the joke was made by the teacher or student, sometimes at their own expense, the researcher observed “dual bashing” firsthand, which always seemed to be done in good spirits.

A big issue in schools today, not only at Cypress Lakes High School, is the use and possession of a mobile phone by students. Teachers again were heard using humor to address this issue, while at the same time both reminding and enforcing school rules prohibiting use during the school day. When a student’s phone rings during class, Zeppo quickly grabs it and reminds the student to do a problem before getting it back. Jokingly, she says to him, “I’m not taking this one, trust me, it’s all jacked up.” Other days teachers can be heard telling students “I would love to take your phone and sell it” or “Take your phone with you when you leave, you might die without it,” all which are met with student laughter. Berns was heard after a classroom observation telling a

student, “I’m going to bust you within an inch of your life if you don’t keep this in your pocket,” in reference to the cell phone which the student returned after class to pick up after it had been taken by the teacher for being out during instructional time.

High expectations.

While they all expressed being pretty laid back in class and enjoying a few laughs, they also were quick to point out that they hold high expectations for all their students, have a goal for students to reach and that failure is not an option. Participants spoke of not lowering their expectations due to their students’ demographic profiles or the way in which the students were raised, which may have differed from the way their own parents raised them or they currently raise their own children. Cooper adds,

> I think we have teachers who don’t actually believe that all students can learn. They might write it down on the survey, they might write it down on a professional development collaboration thing, but they don’t actually believe it. I think that either their classroom style, or their testing style, or their grading style, reinforced that. I think there are probably circumstances where, when their African American students don’t achieve, it just reinforces what they already believe. Then they think, well OK, everything just reinforced my beliefs.

They all agreed there was no cookie cutter way to deal with their students or recipes for success. Berns sums it up by adding, “There is no mold that a student is supposed to look like.”

While participants understand what is required to be successful with their students, it is obvious that others are also taking notice. On a nomination form submitted for Zeppo, the nominator commented,

> Deborah simply does whatever it takes to help every single student. She is able to reach every student – regardless of race, social economic status, age, attitude, etc. Her rapport and relationships with her students is unmatched. Students often seek her out and her room is always full of students after school who are seeking additional help. Deborah jokes and plays with them but she holds them to a high standard. She naturally does this while maintaining extremely high expectations of them to learn to their fullest potential. She is willing to go the extra mile for kids and she demonstrates to each of them that she cares about them and wants them to be successful. She believes all students can learn and keeps current on best-practice research and implements those strategies in class. Her students see her as much more than just their teacher. It doesn't matter which 'hat' she needs to wear, she seamlessly is there for them. Besides their teacher, she many times is asked to be 'mom', friend, confidant, disciplinarian. I wish we had 20 Deborahs.

The nominator for Cooper notes,

> Frank leads by example and does everything in his power in making history relevant to his students. He also has tremendous rapport with them as well while still maintaining extremely high expectations for them

when it comes to learning. Frank builds a relationship with all of his students and believes that all of them can be successful. He never gives up on them.

Bern's nominations forms expressed similar comments and included,

> Tye is genuinely interested in their personal lives. He seeks help at the slightest sign of a problem. He pulls them aside and expresses his concerns and tries to help in any way he can. He also involves the parents and other teachers when support is needed. Tye is a special person and can reach every student. He finds positive attributes in every child, even the ones everyone else has given up on, and calls home when kids are successful. Once, when a student had been suspended for 10 days, Tye met with him after school at the library so he wouldn't get behind. Tye respects every kid and he conveys that to them. They in return respect him.

The participants were confident that students could do better in school if colleagues could change some of the beliefs which they hold. Berns adamantly says,

> I think one of the problems that people have who are not successful with this particular group of students, not just at his school, but in general, is they see social economic states, they see family history, that kind of stuff, and they automatically lower their expectations. They do not need you to feel sorry for them. That is not going to help them. That's the last thing they need you to do. They need someone to push them to

> encourage them. Yeah, you come from a bad home. You've got to somehow bypass that, and make sure you make your life better that what you came from. I've seen all too often teachers who do just the opposite. It kills the kids. I think a lot of them are just hoping and praying that somebody will have enough faith in them that they will keep raising the bar. And instead, there are too many – and administration is equally to blame – in schools all across the country – let's just lower the bar and try to make it easy for them. Poor things. Doesn't work.

Cooper explains to his class how he serves on the school's scholarship committee and the importance of making oneself marketable, so that others will want to give them scholarships, grants and jobs, and how they are competing against the entire country. He reminds students that no one rewards laziness and how they cannot change by just sitting there doing nothing. Cooper encourages them to take advantages of the various opportunities they have in life and to make the most of it. Zeppo says, "Students will opt out if you let them. Let students know you're not going to quit. When will this get done? Great, you did half. Now let's sit down and finish it. Failure is not an option." She stresses the importance of high expectations and believes that not everyone is successful in education by saying, "If you don't care, or if this is just a job for you, and a paycheck, then I don't think you're going to be successful with any type of student."

Teaching Practices

Cultural knowledge.

While one's personality, intrinsic motivation and desire to help students do well builds a good foundation for a successful teacher, the participants provided reminders on the importance of knowing their students' culture, which is oftentimes different from the one in which they may already be familiar. The teachers in this study agreed that 99% of learning how to become successful in teaching African American students is done on the job. Cooper recommends,

> I realized that as much as I thought I understood black culture, as much as I thought I was knowledgeable about it, you can't really understand it by reading a book, or seeing it on television. The best you can do it talk to people. I get tips from both white and African American co-workers, be it a teaching tip or a life experience that they had that I didn't, they share it with me.

Berns agrees and adds, "I actually just learned from being here because I had always taught at white schools before and the white schools I taught at had an African American population of about 1% or lower. So this was all brand new to me." Zeppo recalls practicing with what works and what doesn't-trial and error-as well as observing how African American colleagues interacted with their students, noting what kind of expectations they held and how they got around various issues. She remembers as a child her teachers passing out papers by order of grades, with those returned last obviously earning the lower grades and thus failing. While that was a motivator for her

as a child, Zeppo quickly learned, “That’s not the case here. It’s not a motivator at all. It’s actually just something that makes them run the other way.” She has also learned “how my attitude is affecting their performance” and now makes sure “they know I’m not giving up on them.” Zeppo believes she has come a long way since she first started at Cypress Lakes High School and now jokes, “I think I know a lot about them, because that’s one of the comments [students] come back to me with all the time. You are all over me. Nothing gets by you. I’m all in their business.”

These cultural differences are oftentimes new experiences for many teachers unfamiliar with African American students. When asked about the cultural aspects the participants have learned during their years as teachers at Cypress Lakes Zeppo begins, “They do have different beliefs, different things are emphasized, in their families or in their heads. Different learning styles.” Berns explains,

> I don’t see nearly the kind of support at home here that I saw in the white schools. I think there’s a cultural attitude that’s very strong, where it’s more important to be a man on an athletic field or being a rapper, than it is to be educated. Whether the parents intend to send that message to the kids or not, that’s the message a lot of kids are getting. These boys don’t know how to be men, because everything they see is based upon what the media shows them. They’re struggling trying to figure out who they are and how to get where they want to go, and they really don’t know where they want to go. That’s something I didn’t have to deal with before.

While Zeppo doesn't believe teachers should have expectations that their students be just like them, she does believe these differences are strengths and talks a lot in class about them with her students. Zeppo explains,

> I'll just bring stuff up, based on my age, things that used to be or based up where I grew up, or based on where I live now. They're just amazed by stuff that I do compared to stuff they do. We like that difference.

Through the trusting relationship Zeppo and her students share, she is able to have the conversation about race many teachers would not feel comfortable having in class. She says,

> I understand you're different. I understand you don't do the same thing on the weekend that I do. I think it interests them, also, that it's OK that I'm different and if I were more standoffish, they would feel like she is not like me. She is not from where I'm from.

Cooper is also able to have conversations about race with his students and gets discouraged when students sell their own race short. He explains,

> They don't generally have a high opinion of themselves, except on athletic ability and survival skills. I've had students say black people don't read books. I'll say, well how's that worked out for your people, so far? I might also say, well, I think Condoleezza Rice has probably read a book before.

He uses articles in class from ESPN.com, written by rapper Little Wayne, to show how well written and thought provokingly he writes, in comparison to the lyrics of his music.

Whenever students speak negatively about African Americans, he says, "I call them out on it and point out for so long they didn't have access to education. That during slavery people who promoted slavery and continued slavery understood that was the way to do it. Have them be uneducated and they can't survive. We discuss the fact that nowadays lack of education is the new slavery."

History students ask Cooper which he believes to be worse, the Holocaust or slavery. He responds,

> It's probably the worst two things that ever happened to two groups of people. One was 10 to 15 years of targeting and killing of millions of Jews and one is 300 years of using them as slaves, breaking up the family. But at some point, you have to say, OK, that ended. There are still going to be symptoms or repercussions from it, but you can't just accept that's your life because of what happened.

While he understands some of his students come to school with various issues, he understands what slavery has done but believes that the past cannot dictate his students' futures. Cooper adds, "I think they respect that I don't tell them that their issues are OK, but I don't condemn them for their issues either." He reiterates the importance of getting to know one's students, while keeping in mind not to "judge them based upon their life experiences, or their beliefs but then also don't lower your own moral standards."

Berns believes "their life experiences are different but inside they're the same." During a classroom lesson on signing various career titles, he reminds students to be

proud of their families and backgrounds, saying "I know times are hard. Before you come in understand that it is nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about if someone is unemployed or laid off. If your parent has an honest job to put food on the table, never be embarrassed." They all agree that students, regardless of demographic profiles, need teachers who care about their success.

One surprising aspect of teaching African American students, which the participants never expected to learn, had to deal with the derogatory comments from people of varying ethnic backgrounds about their students. Common questions include "What's it like to teach those (emphasis) kids?" and "Are you scared?" Every school has their share of good and bad students, Zeppo believes, and she finds her students to be very respectful to her. Cooper adds that a lot of people he encounters look at Cypress Lakes as a different world but believes that he has many more good days than bad and that he enjoys really teaching at the school. Racist is how Berns describes these questions and tells a story from when he first started his position at Cypress Lakes High School. He was greeted by an African American colleague who boldly told him, "You will never be successful in this school. You're a white male. These kids will never accept you." In response to such a welcome, Berns replies, "I was not offended that she thought that about me, but was mortified that she didn't give the kids anymore credit." He says he has come to learn that students "don't care what you look like, how old you are, how fat you are, how bald you are, what color you are, they don't care, as long as you care about them."

Philosophy.

Participants believed that their colleagues, students and themselves would describe their teaching style as laid back and fun, yet at the same time, challenging. They have a passion for teaching and are enthusiastic both about the subjects and the students they teach. Participants stressed the importance of teachers knowing about their students-both inside and outside of school-which enables them to build the type of relationships where students care about not disappointing their teachers during class. The result of building relations with students and using engaging work in class allows students to reach the high expectations teachers have in place for them.

How the participants conduct their classes each day varies among each teacher and the particular class in which they are teaching. Once an art room and still containing an old art poster and working kiln, Berns' room is actually two classrooms combined into one. The beige room is lined with student desks, with bulletin boards containing American Sign Language borders and posters showing signs for the alphabet, along with a Far Side comic hung behind his desk. "Fantastic" is how he describes the students he teaches and says his classes are

> "…not typical, because of the nature of what I teach-American Sign Language. There is not any standing up, lecturing, and the kids take notes. That doesn't happen. That can't happen. They're a lot more active with what's going on in class what you would see in a typical lecture class. The one exception is my deaf culture class which tends to

be a little more typical, but not yet all that typical. They're actively participating. They don't just come in and sit."

A lot of modeling behavior, where students-either individually or with a partner-practice the vocabulary or grammatical structures that they are learning, is the method most commonly preferred by Berns and was observed during each classroom observation. Students would oftentimes ask where a particular sign got its origin, with Berns breaking it down for them to understand easier. Other times, Berns would ask students why a particular sign was created to represent a given word. An example during one observation was the term waitress, whose sign came from the act of carrying a tray of food. Students seemed to have a better understanding and means of remembering new terms when they had a grasp of the meaning behind the sign. In addition, students would inquire as to how new signs were created, for recent terms such as Facebook and Twitter.

These new lessons would then oftentimes be demonstrated by students in front of the class to exhibit mastery of the material. Other students are given time to solicit constructive feedback or ask questions to classmates on what was just presented. This is then followed by Berns giving students immediate feedback as to how they did, noting strengths and weaknesses which they could improve upon, and then the class using the sign for applause as the student returned to their seat. During one observation, a student improperly signed at his mouth versus his chin, making the gesture which represents the smoking of weed. Upon Berns feedback and explanation the correct sign, the class had a good laugh. After the class left, Berns referred to the incident with

a smile and said, “These demonstrations are oftentimes accompanied with joking and laugher.”

The notion of his students being active in class was observed on each visit. Students could be heard randomly shouting out answers to questions asked by Berns in class, followed by him enthusiastically responding by writing their responses on the board, signing or verbally stating whether they were correct or not. When students had questions in class, again they would oftentimes simply shout them out, with the teacher once again oftentimes modeling the correct sign to represent the answer or giving some type of verbal feedback. He also reminded them to “be nice” when students make derogatory statements about classmates or other people.

When students tell Zeppo she is a little bit crazy she jokingly replies back “I have to be crazy to come back every day.” Standing at her door before each class, she can be seen greeting her students and returning several of their high fives. On one occasion she was seen playfully smacking a student while yelling “No hugs!” only to be followed by asking a female student “Where are the rest of your shorts?” Her position at the door also allows her to distribute work for the given day while at the same time conducting hall duty. The work, which is also projected onto the front board, lists the objective students are to master at the top of the page along with practice problems students are to do at the start of the period. Still outside at the classroom door, she leans inside the room and reminds them, “I hope you’re reading the board and doing your practice work.”

The classroom boards contain motivational posters, another explaining the history of math as well as reminders of proper procedures on solving math problems. Her room is composed of both student desks and tables, carpeted in mixed woven colors and is shared with another math teacher, who oftentimes is in the room grading papers at the second teacher desk while Zeppo conducts class. She tries to make her classroom a pleasant place where students want to come and believes that, while they may not always enjoy the content, they pay attention and enjoy her class for the most part. She, like Berns, can be heard telling students "Be nice" when they solicit comments of a derogatory nature about others.

Zeppo describes her teaching as "a little less structured and maybe, chaotic at times, more of a kind of go with the flow" but does admit to changing it a lot. If a plan she has prepared for the day is not going as anticipated-students are not getting it or she sees students are tired-it gets changed. Many of her students are also not shy in voicing their opinions during class, whether they find the material boring or confusing, which is fine by Zeppo for it gives her a better grasp on students understanding of the objective at hand. "I am not structured in that my expectations are that students sit and be quiet. I actually don't mind chatter as long as it is chatter about what we are talking about in class. For the most part, I prefer them to be noisy and obnoxious over heads down, sleeping and quiet, then you start losing them," says Zeppo. While there are days when she cannot deal with the chatter, she finds that simply telling students up front, "Today is not the day to drive me crazy," usually works just fine.

Zeppo uses a Smartboard in class and is in her first year of implementing a new computerized program to teach Algebra. As the lowest level math class offered at Cypress Lakes, it contains four students repeating the class for the third time and is not uncommon to have 18 year old freshmen enrolled. She says many would describe her students as "the bottom level class" and explains "most of them have come in with the experience of, I'm not good at this, so I try to mention to them when they do something well." Problems are either worked by students on the board, by themselves as practice or together as a class. The use of different color markers clearly identify the various steps students need to remember to follow in order to successfully master the objective, which on the day of observation was listed as, "I will be able to solve a system of equations using linear combinations." When students ask if the material being presented is similar to their previous project, she responds, "Yes, good, it's similar. As I told you, you will see it again."

Trying to keep their interest is always Zeppo's goal, while also keeping the students focused and motivated. Motivational levels, she believes, are kept up by not doing anything in class for too long of a period of time, walking around and touching students to reassure work is done right, as well as allowing students to work in small groups. "Come on pokey" or "Dude!" she can be heard in class saying to students taking their time completing work. In addition, she uses students to motivate each other. One day it might involve moving the seat of a student to be near another student who can keep them on task better. Another day it may be asking a student why another is acting the way they are and if they could help get the student back on task. "I use them to yell

at each other. They pretty much tell on each other and I'll hear them say, 'C'mon, we need to finish. Let's just do two more," explains Zeppo. She finds that talking to some students individually, those she knows can do better, also works as a means of motivating students to accomplish the task at hand. Nonetheless, Zeppo isn't too proud to stoop lower and explains, "I kind of guilt trip them, let them know I'm watching them and tell them that I expect more out of them."

Zeppo teaches with enthusiasm and handles minor disturbances with ease so as not to stop the flow of classroom lessons. With her doors open to reduce the classroom temperature on a hot May afternoon, numerous students can be seen passing by Zeppo's classroom. "Go to class, you're annoying" or "You're wasting our time. Education is going on," she says to the ones who walks inside and interrupts the lesson, while others she simply waves or reminds to go to class as they walk past and continues along in her teaching. "You can see how you're being a distraction. Please sit down so you can learn" is said to a student in her classroom who gets up to seek out the disturbance in the hallway. "I thought you had best students," asks a student, in regards to the noise outside her classroom. She replies, "They're not Scholar," in reference to students not being a member of her small school, and, thus, in an unauthorized area of the school building. Without skipping a beat, she immediately calls upon another student to explain the procedures for solving a question displayed on the board and the class continues along with the lesson.

Cooper believes that his use of comedy draws some students to his class, if not only to hear what he is going to say that particular day. His classroom is also carpeted,

with beige walls and is located across the hall from Zeppo. The boards contain samples of student work, a map, and a quote relating to the topic at hand which reads, "Everybody like us is 'we'; everybody who's different is 'they'." He uses pre-assessment quizzes to begin a unit to gain a better understanding of students' prior knowledge on the upcoming unit. Cornell note taking, developed by a professor at Cornell University where terms are listed on the left side of the paper with explanations and definitions listed on the right, is used in class. He mentions that some days it will take the entire period to cover a half page of notes due to the vast discussions being had in class. Like Zeppo, he prefers students to be talking and asking questions and does not like when it is only him talking. "I like there to be a lot of give and take between student to student or me to student," Cooper says. To get the dialogue flowing, he says, "I try to provide them with a modern scenario and have them react to it based on what we're learning about." In addition, he uses role play type scenarios and group activities to reinforce the objectives he expects students to master.

To allow students to master the objectives in his history class, Cooper likes to use problem based learning. He describes this as a way for students to work collaboratively in small groups and grasp a better understanding of the topic at hand, which on the day he was observed, was genocide. In order to complete the project, students must take the initiative to learn additional information on a country they chose which has been a victim of genocide.

Cooper begins the lesson by writing on the board "Why are you who you are?" and explains, "Before we can judge others, we must know ourselves." He gives the

example that “people in New York may not see things always see things the same way as Los Angeles folks see it.” He introduces a fictional project entitled, “The Universe of Obligations” to demonstrate why this may be and has students draw four circles on a sheet of paper, which he models for them on the board. In the middle circle he writes Coop, and jokes with students to do the same, just with their own names and not Coop or ‘your name’. Students are instructed to write all the people they would die for in the second circle, which he provides examples of such as Maddie, the boy and his baby momma. This continues onto the third circle where names of people whose opinions matter to them, who they would not want to let down, and whom they would do a lot for them are listed. Examples given included co-workers, in-laws and neighbors. Finally, outside the circle students were told to list people who would die for them. Cooper explains that this exercise shows who matters to them in their lives. He jokes with students to see if their names are on their friends list, and vice versa, and to see if they’re still friends after this exercise. While pointing to his chart, he announces that their [student] names are not present, to which a student yells out, “I don’t like you that way either,” and is met with laughter from both the teacher and students.

To assist in their work on the genocide projects, students visit the computer lab on several occasions as well as have a mobile computer lab brought into their classroom. Cooper announces on one occasion that this was to be the last day using computers and offers to give up his lunch period should students need additional time. Students are observed conducting searches for countries such as Bosnia, while another finds a game on Darfur where the player must run for water, which Cooper immediately

shares with the class and ties in with the lesson. Stationed at the front of the classroom is Coopers' own personal computer, which is on and ready to help students bypass the district limited access system if needed. He circulates the room to get updates from each group, with several students waiting patiently in line behind him to gain his attention. A group studying Cambodia has prepared some notes and can be overhead asking very inquisitive questions, demonstrating their use of higher order thinking.

On another visit, the class continues their work on the genocide unit by watching in silence the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, which Cooper explains does a good job of showing what a genocide is all about. A paper is given to all students with character descriptions as well as questions to answer about the movie. He stops the movie numerous times to discuss important facts as they appear, with students also asking plenty of questions of their own. He explains why a character in the movie will not help his neighbor because he was not family and, therefore, was not someone who mattered greatly to him. Cooper ties the example from the movie into the "Universe of Obligation" projects students did at the start of the unit. Students comment that they, too, would save their own family first and gain a better understanding of why people in other countries sometimes believe and act the way they do. The project was co-created with the English teacher, who helps with grammar and essay composition during her classes, and will conclude with the videotaping of the groups as they present their persuasive argument.

Procedures.

Classes started promptly after each participant took attendance, noting any students who arrived tardy. On a day when Cooper was at the door talking with another teacher and started class a few minutes late, he begins by saying "I apologize for the delay. I know you like to start right away." His comment is met with chuckles from the class and a student responding, "Yeah, come on." He reminds students to get into their groups, which most of them have already done, in order to continue work on their projects. Berns starts his American Sign Language class each period by flashing the classroom lights and stomping his foot to get the students attention, the same method used among deaf individuals, who feel the floor vibration or change in lighting. His classes are silent as he signs to them the objective they will master, followed by students responding orally with what was introduced. The students in Zeppo's classroom are already aware of the objective of the day due to the fact that it is written on the top of the paper she distributed when meeting them at the classroom door. Simply asking students, "Are you ready?" or saying, "We need to get started, we have a lot to do" is other times often enough to get them focused and ready to learn. She often begins by reviewing the foundation needed to master the objective for the day by asking students for the procedures and they gladly shout out responses.

Participants all introduced students to the objectives they are expected to master upon completion at the start of class. Whether it is written on the board, mentioned orally, typed on a rubric or at the top of the daily practice sheet, the participants in this study all avoided student test anxiety by clearly identifying what they

needed to know. Students obviously understood the content mastery concepts for it was not uncommon to hear students ask questions such as “Will this help us master it?” regarding objectives during various classroom observations.

Participants all choose not to yell over students to begin class and will oftentimes simply say to them, “I will wait”, “Excuse me” or “Listen carefully.” There are also days when participants use students to help them begin class. Waiting for students to get quiet, a student of Zeppo finally yells, “Will you all get quiet?” and is met with student compliance. On a day when students in History were taking a long time to settle down, Cooper says, “I simply went to my desk and finished up some paperwork. Finally, one of the students was like I think he’s waiting for us and they all kind of caught on.”

During class, when students started to get off task, participants again avoided yelling and instead used such comments as, “We’re losing focus”, “Let’s calm down”, “Are you with us?”, “Are you ready?’ or a simple “Uh hem” to get them participating once again. Most days, a simple calling of the student’s name did the trick. Berns uses practices one would use with deaf students, such as simply flashing the classroom lights or tapping on a desk, to remind students they are off task. He reminds them “If I cannot see your eyes, I can’t teach you the signs” or “Back up here please” to gain their attention while students who have their heads down are told “Let’s see that pretty face”. “Sweetie” seemed to be a favorite word of Zeppo used to get students focused again and could oftentimes be heard in class saying things such as “Look up here sweetie”, “Sweetie, look at your paper” or “[student name], sweetie, why are you back there?.” During one observation when students were off task discussing the scheduling

of classes, she replies “Your schedule will stay Algebra if you don’t pay attention.” At her most stern moments, she could be heard firmly exclaiming, “I’m not playing games”, “Focus”, “Stop that”, “Seriously, how many times do I have to ask?” or “Can I talk?”, all of which brought the class back to the learning atmosphere she expects from students.

Participants used a wide variety of nonverbal cues as well and were witnessed many times during the classroom observations. Simply touching a student’s shoulder, sometimes giving it a playful squeeze or poke, or a light slap on the back were often enough to remind students they were not exhibiting model behavior. Other times, participants gave students a light pinch or a kick in the rear end for doing an unwanted behavior. The most commonly observed practices were smiles, head nods of approval or disapproval, high fives and the ever popular “teacher look,” where teachers stare wide eyed at students as if to say “What [emphasis] are you doing?.” When students had hats on or phones out in class, teachers could be observed walking to the students desk, picking it up and placing it elsewhere, all without a word being said and without any interruption to the lesson being conducted.

All the participants were noted during classroom observations asking a lot of questions, versus simply regurgitating information for students to record and process. Examples recorded during classroom observations include “How would we do this?”, “Why is it the only thing you can do?” and “Who can tell us how to prepare for graphing?” It was not uncommon to hear teachers ask questions one after another. Most often, upon the asking of each question, students would normally shout out responses, which were immediately followed by either some type of praise by the

teacher or suggestions on how to reach the correct answer. Examples teachers used to confirm answers included such things as “Good question”, “Perfect”, “That’s an excellent way to start” and “Look at you-learning over there.”

In addition, it was very common to find teachers constantly circulating the room during class, oftentimes offering praise. Teachers explained that this practice actually served multiple purposes. It allowed them to monitor student progress, gaining a better understanding of which students understood the material at hand and who may need additional time or help. By “teaching from their feet, and not from their seat,” participants also could easily stop at a student’s desk, kneel down beside them, and offer one-on-one assistance. Cooper moved from group to group during his class, inquiring about student’s projects and offering assistance to students as they learned more about the country and its people for which the genocide impacted. “Master these objectives” was a common saying used by Zeppo as she moved from student to student checking their progress on the sample problems being worked out in class. Berns was heard saying to a student who exerted zero effort and had a blank paper sitting in front of them, “I can’t make you do it, but I know you can do it.” At the same time, teachers believed that this minimized discipline issues for teachers always had a bird’s eye view of the various classroom activities.

Students were observed eating snacks during class, which the participants did not mind as long as students remained on task, which they always seemed to do. Oftentimes, students offered teachers a taste of whatever they brought to class. Upon tasting a “fruit snack that’s not really fruit” given to him from a sign language student,

Berns learns of its sour nature and makes a scrunched face, eliciting laughter from the class. He takes this "teaching moment" and reminds his students to sign close to their faces for the other person also "reads" your facial expressions. While students could obviously read what emotion he was expressing after tasting the candy, he reminded them of the importance of doing the same when using American Sign Language and communicating with those who are hard of hearing.

The philosophy of holding high expectations was present in every class observation and participants projected this belief to students in various ways. While some students got frustrated demonstrating the proper procedures for signing numbers in American Sign Language, Berns was observed saying to his class, "Numbers cause a lot of people problems. They're more difficult to read versus letters. If you struggled, you're like 99% of the rest of the world. It doesn't mean you're dumb, just that you need practice." Having them become stronger was something he not only expected, but helped them achieve through additional guided practice in class. "If you don't sign with me when I show them to you, there is a slim chance you're going to remember them," he says. Reminding students to sign close to their own face so others can "read" their faces as they sign, and physically moving students' arms at times to the proper positions on their body, all were part of Bern's way of helping students master the material.

When a student inquired whether her grade was an A or not, in a playful manner he responded "Do you ever get that high?" Her reply of "Don't play me Mr. Berns. I always get good grades in your class" demonstrates that students understand the high level of expectations he has set for them. Berns also uses his knowledge of students'

families to assist him to ensure students are doing their best. "Does your dad know about your grade? I know your dad. He'd kill you," he tells one student during a class observation. Other times, it's simply reassuring students they have what it takes to achieve content mastery. When asking a student how they arrived at a given answer, the student responded "Because I'm a genius." Berns simply relies, "Obviously."

Cooper meets with students as they work in groups and explains that he may not get back to the group again for several days. During that time, he expects them to continue working on their projects. Upon returning to the group, he asks "What have you done since we last met?" Students update him on their recent research and, if none is provided, he reminds students that they're only hurting themselves and of the importance of using class time to move along further with their projects.

Zeppo doesn't back down easily when students claim to not know how to solve a problem when they are called upon in class. She simply replies, "Yes you do" and is followed by the student explaining how to properly work out the problem on the board. Other times, when students do not understand something or claim to not be good, Zeppo tells them, "It's OK if you're not too good. We're doing more practice so you can be good." When students are simply not exerting effort, a simple "Do I need to call Grandma?" often does the trick to get students working again. Other times, when students are having a difficult time staying on task, she can be heard telling them, "If you put forth zero effort that is all you're going to get" and "We're not going to finish this if we keep being this lazy."

Classes all ended with a review of the material covered during class that day, which is usually done by the teacher asking students for a summary of the objective they needed to master. It was also common to hear participants remind students about upcoming lessons and projects as well as any information or materials they needed to have in order to be ready for the next class session. Participants were heard telling students of their absence the next day and the work they would be during for the substitute while other days announcing, "Yes, I'll be here tomorrow", causing students to laugh.

Despite the bell ringing, indicating class was over, it was very common to observe students staying after class to continue working on an assignment, ask additional questions or talk with the teacher about something going on in their lives. During one such occasion, a student stayed after class to speak to Berns about the phone call he had made to his parents, which resulted in them beating him severely. The student hugged Berns and said he wasn't mad at him, rather just mad at what had happened. "Just breaks my heart," says Berns after the student leaves the room, "He really is a great kid…just not a great life."

Mastery.

While the participants all agreed that they held high expectations for their students, they also understand that not all students learn at the same pace. A teaching practice which all three participants shared was the idea of allowing students to retest upon not mastering the material on the first try. While there are no surprises on the

tests due to the fact that students get the objectives ahead of time, teachers allow students to retest in order to achieve content mastery. Cooper explains,

> For a lot of teachers, that's hard to wrap their minds around because it's not how they were taught and they think that retesting rewards laziness. My thought is if you're my student and we just had a test on the New Deal, I would love you to have learned it by now, and gotten an A on it. But if you didn't, and you come in and spend extra time, and relearn all that, and you take it two weeks from now, and you get the A then, to me, your grade's an A. You now have an A knowledge of the New Deal. You didn't have it on the day of the calendar I wanted you to have it, but you have it now. That's fine.

Zeppo believes some students are going to be strong in some areas and weak in others. She doesn't expect all students to learn at the same pace but believes "they will, if you keep on them, eventually they will get it." While students may not learn the material to the depth she would prefer, she doesn't give up on them easily. She allows them to "retest, over and over" and explains the purpose of retesting is to master material. On tests, she writes no letter grades or percentage, rather makes notes on what students have done wrong, how to improve, what they need to fix, along with check marks by what is good. "I think me being on them, and being cognitive of what they have mastered and what they have not," Zeppo says, reminds students that they have yet to master a particular objective. She leaves a blank on the grade sheet versus a zero,

which would indicate failure, when an objective has yet to be met. "My goal is really to get them to learn as much as they can."

Cooper wants students to demonstrate content mastery and therefore prefers essay format assessments, which are graded on a five point scale. He believes his tests are fair because students are given the questions ahead of time, giving them time to think about how to prepare their answers in order to submit acceptable responses. Students are permitted to have Cooper proof answers ahead of time to obtain assurance of being on the right path, but notes that not every student takes advantage of that opportunity. It is times like this, when students waste valuable learning opportunities, which he believes students would describe him as not fun and not laid back. "The rest of the world is not waiting for you to catch up. You don't get to come back here when you're 24 years old once you figure it out," he says to students. Cooper believes students respect him when he calls them out on issues such as this because he does so in a manner that is not demeaning, while at the same time, reinforcing to students that he cares about them.

With a class such as American Sign Language, Berns believes the way students demonstrate mastery is through the use of actually signing words the proper way. To assess students he meets one-on-one with them at the teacher's desk and uses a rubric to record mastery of the objective being presented. Berns was observed making small talk with students before the exam, oftentimes asking about their family, sports or other classes. During the few minutes that it took for a student to test, Berns could be seen giving lots of nonverbal encouragement to students, be it smiling, laughing with the

student, or the sign language sign for applause. Occasionally, Berns would shout out "Beautiful" or "Wonderful" in response to a student who passed the test both quickly and without error. While students were testing with him, the remaining students practiced their vocabulary with other students in class. Just as the other participants held high expectations for their students, Berns was the same. Should a student not master the material on the given test day, he also allows students to retest at a future date.

Summary of Chapter IV

Overall, the participants in this study all believed a successful teacher must create caring relationships with their students to build a foundation of trust. Teachers must also possess an understanding about the students one teaches, as well as their culture, which oftentimes is different than their own personal backgrounds. Participants also stressed the importance of holding high expectations for their students, while remembering to have fun and a sense of humor while educating their young, influential minds.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

"Success is a function of persistence and doggedness and the willingness to work hard"

(Outliers, p. 246)

In his latest book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, international bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell explains that outliers are "Men and women who do things that are out of the ordinary" (p. 17). He asks "What is the question we always ask about the successful? We want to know what they're like – what kind of personalities they have…or what special talents they might have" (p. 18). In a way, this study is my own version of *Outliers*. Instead of looking at successful athletes, lawyers and entrepreneurs as Gladwell did, the focus of this study was on successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools. It is in these urban classrooms where successful teachers prepare students to write their own future stories of success and, thus, where future outliers are made.

The reason for this study and the belief of the researcher was that simply meeting the requirement for the NCLB "highly qualified" teacher designation, which requires one to be trained and certified in the subject one teaches in order to enter the

classroom, does not always translate into highly effective performance once in front of a group of students. Even before beginning my career as a European American teacher of African American students, I had an interest in learning from other teachers who have been successful in their careers educating similar students. Watching Hollywood movies about successful educators, such as *Stand and Deliver, Lean on Me* and *Dangerous Minds*, always left me wondering "Do I have what it takes to be like them?"

In order to find out what is "inside their heads" (Merriam, 2002) and learn their "inside information" (McCurdy, Spradley & Shandy, 2005) about successfully teaching African American students, I asked each of the three participants a series of questions which addressed the two research questions: (1) What are personal characteristics of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools? and (2) What are the beliefs that influence teaching practices which distinguish these teachers? As analysis of the interviews, classroom observations and field notes were conducted, themes of personal characteristics and teaching practices emerged, along with several subcategories given to support each.

The answers to these research questions address the problem statement that inappropriate teaching strategies are an important factor contributing to the black-white achievement gap by showcasing successful practices and the personal characteristics of the teachers who possessed them. The significance of this research lies in the fact that the National Education Association (2002) indicates European Americans constitute close to 90% of public school teachers. Inappropriate teaching strategies are an important factor that contributes to African American students' low

achievement in schools and thus, alienation from school and difficulty reaching their true potentials (Teel et al., 1998). I believe wholeheartedly in Stevens, Wood and Sheehan (2002) statement that "education is one of the best predictors of occupational prestige" and believe that teachers impact future generations as a result of their teaching. Teachers can learn from those who have encountered success, changing the way they teach to be more culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

In order to provide a framework and support for the conclusions drawn, the findings described in chapter four are briefly discussed here again. The interviews conducted for this study provided a means of gaining an understanding of what personal characteristics and teaching practices allow the participants to be successful while others are not. Classroom observations allowed the researcher to witness comments made during the interviews in action as well as view the practices participants use as they go about in their daily work. Pre and post-classroom observation interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to ask additional questions regarding practices observed during visits and also gave participants the chance to explain items the researcher witnessed during class.

Research Question #1

What Are The Personal Characteristics of Successful European American Teachers of African American Students In Urban High Schools?

Four personal characteristics emerged from the data collected from research participants: relationships, caring, humor and high expectations. Each of these themes will be described in this section.

Relationships.

The encouragement of teachers building relationships with students is incorporated into the Cypress Lakes-Royal Palms mission statement by suggesting students will learn in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. Research suggests students strive for higher levels of achievement in order to please their teacher (Nieto, 2003). Participants all stated during interviews that they tried to make their classrooms a comfortable place for students and that relationship building begins the first week of school. Both of these activities are supported by Ladson-Billings (1994) in describing culturally relevant teaching practices. Positive student-teacher relations carry throughout the school year and are believed to prevent many common classroom discipline issues. Participants believe it is because of these trusting relationships they are able to say things to students other teachers may not feel comfortable saying. When students learn in these types of settings, they are motivated to take their education seriously and try harder for their teachers.

Caring.

Noddings (2005) believes it is not enough to hear teachers claim they care but must first strive to establish and maintain relationships built on care. Participants agreed that many teachers may write on a staff development survey that they care about students, but the truth is often uncovered when their actions speak louder than their words. "They know what we care about them," Berns says during the initial interview. Ogbu (2003) states students "are more concerned with how…teachers care for them than with teachers' expertise or knowledge" (p. 53). Participants all agreed

that caring about their students had nothing to do with their race, rather more an internal belief that their students could do well regardless of both parties sharing different ethnic backgrounds. Teachers believed they were raised to treat others with respect, which allowed them to deal with others who do not view their students in the same manner. This idea is supported by Garnaut (2007) who finds the best teachers appear to be effective at their jobs due to innate factors such as having a personal drive and the ability to relate to students. Corbert, Wilson and Williams (2005) found that teachers who cared about students' success refused to accept failure as an option, made house calls and used phrases such as "I'm like one of your family" (p. 10). Comments like this could be heard during classroom observations when teachers reminded students of their parents' expectations and by expecting students to master the objectives given to each other. Noddings (2003) reminds us that when we care for one another, we often want to do our very best for them. This philosophy is quite similar to the findings of expressed earlier by Nieto (2003), and reiterates the importance of caring and building relationships as a working partnership where one cannot be successful without the other.

Humor.

Humor was another shared personal characteristic shared by participants in this study and is supported by research on great urban teachers conducted by Corbett, Wilson and Williams (2005). Participants all agreed that it was through the caring relationships students and teachers shared that jokes could travel a two way street, something they referred to as "dual bashing." Participants believed that not all teachers

would feel comfortable with some of the humor expressed in their classrooms but they would encourage colleagues to loosen up a bit and have fun with the students they teach.

High expectations.

The final personal characteristic participants shared was that of holding high expectations for their students, which evidence shows can inspire students to obtain higher levels of excellence. All too often minority students fall victim to having leveled aspirations (MacLeod, 1995), where they accept their own position and the inequalities of the social order as legitimate. When media stereotypes of their race are reinforced by their teachers, students begin to accept the future that is set by them for others. Fortunately, for the participants' students, this is not the case. Participants were constantly reinforcing their expectations over and over during classroom observations and through the idea of mastery of class objectives. Participants never lowered their expectations and believe that all students can learn, regardless of demographic profiles. They agreed that students need teachers who are going to push, encourage and not quit on them. This idea is also incorporated into their district mission statement with the inclusion of rigor.

Research Question #2

What Are The Beliefs That Influence Teaching Practices Which Distinguish These Teachers?

Three beliefs that influence teaching practices emerged from the data collected from research participants: teaching philosophy, classroom procedures and focus on content mastery. Each of these themes will be described in this section.

Teaching philosophy.

The participants' teaching philosophy is best described as laid back and fun, yet, at the same time, challenging. Participants have a passion for teaching and are enthusiastic both about the subjects and students they teach. Relationship building, where students care about not disappointing their teachers, was stressed during interviews as playing a major role in successful teachings. While Kozal (2005) states that urban students are oftentimes instructed through a drill-and-kill curriculum, participants in this study taught students like their suburban counterparts and instructed them to think critically and ask questions. Participants used project based learning, group work, modeling, storytelling and numerous other methods of instruction as avenues in allowing students to master objectives. The use of work, which connects to their future as critical thinkers and problem solvers, also ties into their district mission statement of relevance.

Classroom procedures.

The classroom procedures used by teachers in this study showcase teaching practices which have clearly defined expectations for students. Participants all have

clearly defined objectives for students to master and use a lot of questioning techniques while teaching. Nonverbal and verbal cues are given to students when they are off task, oftentimes never interrupting the flow of the lesson. Circulating the room allowed participants to gauge student understanding of the objective being covered. Classes all ended up with a review of the information with students oftentimes staying after class for additional assistance from the teacher. In addition, the implementation of humor, bestowing of high expectations, exhibits of caring and the results of relationship building could easily be seen in each classroom observation.

Content mastery.

The final example of teaching practices is the idea of having students master objectives and tied into their personal characteristics of holding high expectations for students. Participants agreed that they went against common practice and encouraged students to retest on objectives not mastered. Participants in this study avoided the use of multiple choice tests and favored the implementation of others, which required students to demonstrate mastery, such as essay, short answer and role playing.

Additional Findings: Cultural Sensitivity

An additional finding emerged which was not anticipated but was significant enough to include in the discussion was that of cultural sensitivity. Learning is hindered when school personnel fail to understand and respect the culturally learned behaviors which minority students bring to school (Ogbu, 1987). As a result, inappropriate teaching strategies are one of the most important causes of African American students' low achievement in schools (Teel et al, 1998). Fortunately, participants in this study

implement culturally relevant teaching practices. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains one dimension of this practice as teachers viewing their position as giving back to the community and see themselves as members of the family. In addition, they believe there is no set recipe to predict student outcomes and that all students can learn. Participants all agreed that they viewed their positions as making a difference in their lives of those they teach and felt as if they "belonged there," as if almost a member of the family. They also agreed that there was no cookie cutter way to deal with students or recipes for success. Ferguson (1998) says "perhaps more for black children than for whites, teachers play a central role in determining how students feel about their positions in the achievement hierarchy" (p. 341). He recommends the use of culturally relevant teachings for the home environments of black children differ greatly from the typical white homes from which their teachers commonly reside. Participants in this study practiced implemented culturally relevant teaching practices, resulting in higher levels of interest, confidence and engagement. It is the belief of the researcher that simply possessing the aforementioned personal characteristics and teaching practices is not enough. The dimension of cultural sensitivity seems to be the key component of successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools.

Overall, the results of this study seem to indicate that teachers' personal characteristics have an influence on their successful teaching practices, and in return, their successful teaching practices build upon their personal characteristics. Nieto (2003) confirms this by reminding us that teachers persevere because their identities

are deeply implicated into their teachings. It is the belief of the researcher, and the participants in this study, that one is not more important than the other and they are not interchangeable. We also believe that these findings are useless to other teachers unless they possess the cultural sensitivity to properly implement them with students.

Future Research

Three areas of research are recommended for further study: teacher education programs, professional development and urban high school students'. Each of these themes will be described in this section.

Teacher education programs.

I would suggest that future research be conducted on the various teacher education programs throughout the United States. It is in these institutions, which prepare individuals for careers in teaching, where future teachers need to learn how to successfully teach any students, regardless of their demographic profiles. While most college programs have a course on multicultural education, one must wonder if reading really translates into successful practice in everyday life. Are students required to do any field observations in settings unfamiliar to them, to better learn about a culture different from their own, such as in urban schools? Programs may consider incorporating required field experiences in an urban school where education majors observe classrooms of teachers identified as successful. Students in these classrooms would find it common to have outside parties observing their classrooms, much the same way students of participants in this study did. By conducting research into how education majors are prepared, policies and procedures can be more effectively

developed to encourage culturally relevant teaching practices by future educators throughout the country.

Professional development.

In addition, research needs to be conducted on the professional development training available to teachers in schools today. With more and more resources available due to the world becoming electronically connected, there are avenues through which teachers can become stronger educators by learning the latest research, at little or no cost to either themselves or their school district. While not every teacher is fortunate to always work for a leader who holds high expectations for staff and students, this should not hamper ones internal motivation to improve their teaching practices.

Urban high school students.

Finally, I would suggest research be conducted on the students who attend urban high schools and are thus affected most by inappropriate teaching strategies. By gaining a better understanding of students' perspectives, educators can not only learn firsthand areas in which students are deprived but also where their strengths lie. By knowing one's audience, teachers can more effectively reach them through culturally relevant teaching practices. Students could complete surveys which have them (anonymously) rate the teaching practices they encounter within their various classes. This kind of data would be beneficial for the teachers under research to better enable them to continue building upon their current strengths, while at the same time, find avenues which allow them to improve upon areas of weakness. In addition, the research findings solicited from student input would also prove to be beneficial to the

district for it would serve as a means of identifying where future professional development may be needed in order to ensure success for all students.

Future Implications

I agree with the research findings that the quality of the teacher is the most influential and important aspect in the success a student encounters during their educational career (Leake & Leake, 1995). Oftentimes we hear about lack of educational funding, with residents being asked to pass levies and pay more taxes to cover these shortchanges. In the current economic condition our country faces, it is pointless to throw additional funds into education if teachers are not effective, a factor unaffected by spending. I believe that teachers need to perfect their art in order to allow every student the opportunity to experience success. Too many teachers in this country are failing an entire generation of students who want to learn. Fortunately, the research also supports the fact that teachers can change their teaching styles (Ladson-Billings, 1994), become more effective and hence, the reason for this study.

Implications for teachers.

The fact remains that close to 90% of teachers in this country are white, with many oftentimes having no cultural knowledge of the students they teach. Inappropriate teaching strategies are an important factor to African American students' low achievement in schools and thus the continuation of the black-white achievement gap. The No Child Left Behind law requires all school districts in the United States to improve teacher quality and "ensure all students are taught by effective teachers" (p. 5). The findings from this research can help them discover successful practices to

incorporate into their daily classroom teachings and help eliminate the black-white testing gap once and for all.

Implications for administrators.

Administrators in urban districts can benefit from this study as well. In positions to hire candidates, they may tailor interview questions to be more probing as a means of developing a better understanding of teachers' personal characteristics, which have been identified in research as helping them exhibit success once inside the classroom. Every job candidate is going to have the required degree and certification needed to teach. However, administrators would be wise to properly identify individuals who possess the personal willingness to learn the culture of their students and care about them achieving success. These are characteristics which the researcher and the participants in this study believe cannot be taught and which have shown to help teachers successfully teach African American students.

While not always an easy task, these same administrators also possess the ability to not renew contracts of those who exhibit no drive to perfect their teaching styles. Providing teachers with the skills they need to succeed is one thing. Having staff members who do not take advantage or try to improve their craft or knowledge is inexcusable. Administrators need to expect all teachers, not just a talented few, to be successful. Too often in schools throughout this country, teachers slip through the cracks for a few years and are granted tenure, oftentimes making their release from teaching next to impossible. Leaders set the level of expectations for their entire organization and just as teachers in this study held high expectations for their students,

administrators need to do the same for their staff. They need to make a vigorous commitment to model desirable behaviors while supporting and encouraging faculty and staff. Without their caring, enthusiasm and competence, teaching loses its vitality and subsequently its value.

In addition, administrators in schools today are oftentimes the decision makers about the professional development which teachers receive. The incorporation of successful teaching practices and identification of personal characteristics as a topic could assist teachers in not only identifying their own strengths and weaknesses, but also allow them to better incorporate them into their daily interactions with students. I have witnessed firsthand how teachers perceive many professional development programs as times when they can catch up on grading or reading of magazines. On the other hand, when research such as the one presented in this study has been presented during staff development days, I have experienced a room full of teachers eagerly listening and taking notes in order to better their practice.

Finally, Noddings (2006) reminds us that the demands of state and central office can still be met while pursuing the ideals for which teachers enter the profession in the first place. Central office administrators and boards of education are responsible for creating mission statements and visions to lead their districts. They might be wise to model themselves after the Cypress Lakes-Royal Palms School District for they do a great job of incorporating many of the findings from this study into their mission statement. Highlighting rigor, relevance and relationships as key words shows the district has an understanding of the importance of teachers building relationships with

students, culturally relevant teachings and high expectations. While actions speak louder than words, this district walks the talk and encourages staff to live and breathe their mission statement. They are not afraid to spend money on staff professional development with the nation's foremost educational experts. More districts could learn from their example.

I believe, if given the choice between being successful or not being successful, teachers would choose success. Oftentimes, they just need the resources to assist them in accomplishing such feats, and administrators are just the individuals to provide them with what they need. This research provides the tools to discovering a whole new world of opportunities, for both teachers and students.

Summary of Chapter V

The results from the research study were summarized in chapter five in addition to the answering of both research questions. An unexpected additional finding from the study was also included and proved to be important in implementing the findings from this study. Finally, future implications for teachers and administrators as well as suggestions for future research were presented.

Conclusion

Gladwell (2008) ends his book by reminding readers that "we are so caught in the myths of the best and brightest and the self-made that we think outliers spring naturally from the earth" and suggests instead that "success follows a predictable course." It is the outliers, he says, "who have been given opportunities-and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them" (p. 267). Teachers are given the

greatest opportunity possible, the ability to have an influence on a students' future. Having an understanding of others who have encountered success can allow educators to be more eager about doing their best work within the short time they are given with students. It is the hope of this researcher that the outliers showcased in this study, successful European American teachers of African American students in urban high schools, can provide other educators better insight into how personal characteristics, coupled with professional teaching practices, can help them become a viable component in the education of the democracy of the future.

REFERENCES

Barton, P. (2004). Why does the gap persist? *Educational Leadership*, *62* (3) 8-13.

Bigg, M. (2007). *Segregation in U.S. schools is increasing*. Retrieved August 20, 2007 from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/29/ar2007082902111_pf.html.

Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Buckner, M (2006). Backtalk with Steve Harvey. *Black Enterprise, November 2006*, 172.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook for Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (p. 509-535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Clark, J., & Picard, J. (1989). *Laying down the law.* Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway.

Clark, M. L. (1991). Social identity, peer relations, and academic competence of African American adolescents. *Education and Urban Society*, 24 (1), 41-52.

Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B. (2005). No choice but success. *Learning from Urban Schools*, 62 (6), 8-12.

Drucker, P. F. (1994). The age of social transformation. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 274 (5), 53-80.

Educational Research Service (2001). *What can schools do to reduce the achievement gap?* Retrieved February 11, 2008 from http://www.ers./org/otsp/otsp3.htm.

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and dimed: On (not) getting by in America.* New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Entwisle, D. R. & Alexander, K. L. (1988). Factors affecting achievement test scores and marks of black and white first graders. *Elementary School Journal,* 88 (5), 449-471.

Ferguson, R. F. (1998a). Teachers' perceptions and expectations and the black-white test score gap. In C. Jenks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (p. 273-317). Washington D.C.: The Bookings Institution.

Ferguson, R. F. (1998b). Can schools narrow the black-white test score gap? In C. Jenks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (p. 318-374). Washington D.C.: The Bookings Institution.

Fine, M. (1991). *Framing dropouts: notes on the politics of an urban public high school*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Finer, C. (2007). Teacher Demographics. *Catalyst Ohio*, *9*, 15.

Flannery, M. E., Jehlen, A. (2005). Closing the gap. *NEA Today, 23*(4), 22-31.

Flax, E. (1989). New dropout data highlight problems in the middle years. *Education Week.* Retrieved September 20, 2009 from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1989/04/19/08260021.h08.html

Garnaut, J. (2007). Best teachers get top marks from study. *The Sydney Morning Herald.* Retrieved May 22, 2007 from http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/ best-teachers-get-top-marks-from-study.2007/05/2007

Gay, G. (1995). Modeling and mentoring in urban teacher preparation. *Education and Urban Society, 28*(1), 103-118.

Gay, G. (2000). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice. New York: Teachers College Press.

Givvin, K. B., Stipek, D. J., Salmon, J. M., MacGyvers, V. L. (2001). In the eyes of the beholder: students' and teachers' judgments of students' motivation. *Teacher and Learner Education, 17*, 321-331.

Gladwell, M. (2008). Outliers: The story of success. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Grossman, K. N., Beaupre, B. B., & Rossi, R. (2001, September 7). Poorest kids often wind up with the weakest teachers. *Chicago Sun-Times.* Retrieved September 22, 2009 from http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_action=print

Guay, F. & Vallerand, R. J. (1997). Social contest, student's motivation, and academic achievement: Toward a process model. *Social Psychology of Education*, *1*, 211-233.

Hodges, H. (1996). Using research to inform practice in urban schools: 10 key strategies for success. *Educational Policy, 10*(2), 223-252.

Jencks, C. & Phillips, M. (1998). The Black-White Test Score Gap: An Introduction. In C. Jenks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (p. 1-51). Washington D.C.: The Bookings Institution.

Kannapel, P. J., & Clements, S. K (2005). *Inside the black box of high-performing high-poverty schools*. Lexington, KY: Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. Retrieved June 1, 2007, from http://www.prichardcommittee.org/Ford%20Study/FordReportJE.pdf

Kennedy, E. (1992). A multilevel study of elementary male black students and white students. *Journal of Educational Research,* 86, 105-110.

Kozal, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America.* New York, NY: Crown Publishers.

Labaree, D. F. (1992). *The making of an American high school: The credentials market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Labaree, D. F. (1997). Public good, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34 (1), 39-81.

Ladson-Billing, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Incorporated.

Lareau, A. (2003). Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life. Los Angeles, University of California Press.

Lareau, A. (1985). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education, 60 (4), 73-85.*

Leake, B., & Leake, D. (1995). Mentoring the marginal urban school learner. *Education and Urban Society, 28*(1)*, 90-102.*

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lucas, S. (2000). Hope, anguish, and the problem of our time: An essay on the publication of the black-white test score gap. *Teachers College Record,* 102 (2), 461-473.

MacLeod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

McCurdy, D., Spradley, J, & Shandy, D. (2005). *The cultural experience.* Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

McCade, P. J. (2006). *The status of high school education in Wisconsin: A tale of two Wisconsins*. Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Report, 19 (1), 1-23.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Middleton, M. J., & Midgley, C. (2002). Beyond *motivation:* Middle school students' perception of press for understanding*. Contemporary Educational Psychology,* 27, 373-391.

National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform.* Washington D. C.: U.S. Department of Education.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996). *What matters most: Teaching for America's future.* New York, New York.

National Education Association (2002). *2002 Tomorrow's Teachers: help wanted: minority teachers.* Retrieved January 26, 2007, http://nea.org/tomorrowteachers/2002/helplwanted.html

Nieto, S. (2003). What keeps teachers going? *Keeping good teachers*, 60 (8), 14-18.

No Child Left Behind. Retrieved August 20, 2007, http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/presidentplan/proposal.pdf

Noddings, N. (2006). Educational leaders as caring teachers. *School Leadership and Management,* 26 (4), 339-345.

Noddings, N. (2005). Caring in education. *The encyclopedia of informal education.* Retrieved June 26, 2010 from www.infed.org/biblio/noddings_care_in_education.htm.

Noddings, N. (1992). The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education. New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (1995). Teaching themes of care. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76 (5), 675-679.

Noguera, P. A. (2003). How racial identity affects school performance. *Harvard Education Letter Research Online.* Retrieved September 28, 2003 from www.edletter.org/past/issues/2003-ma/noguera.shtml

Noels, K. A. (2001). Learning Spanish as a second language: Learners' orientations and perceptions of their teachers' communication style. *Language Learner, 51*(1), 107-144.

Noels, K. A., Clement, R., Pelletier, L. G. (1999). Perceptions of teachers' communicative style and students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *The Modern Language Journal,* 83, 23-34.

Norman, O., & Crunk, S. (2004). *What are the real differences between black and white students? Exploring the achievement gap.* Paper session presented at the American Educational Research Association 2004 Annual Meeting in San Diego, California.

Norman, O., Ault, C., Bentz, B., Meskimen, L. (2001). The black-white achievement gap as a perennial challenge of urban science education: A sociocultural and historical overview with implications for research and practice. *Journal of research in science teaching, 28*(10), 1101-1114.

Opler, M. E. (1945). Themes as dynamic forces in culture. *American Journal of Sociology,* 53, 198-206.

Ogbu, J. U. (1978a). African bridewealth and women's status. *American Ethnologist*, 5 (2), 241-262.

Ogbu, J. U. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. *Anthropology of Education Quarterly,* 18 (3), 312-334.

Ogbu, J. U. (2003). *Black American students in an affluent suburb.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Incorporated.

Organizing for America. Retrieved June 25, 2010, http://www.barackobama.com/2007/06/19/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_16.php

Passow, A. H. (1991). Urban schools a second (?) or third (?) time around: Priorities for curricular and instructional reform. *Education and Urban Society*, 23 (3), 243-255.

Patton, Michael Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Incorporated.

Peterson, K. D., Bennet, B., & Sherman, D. F. (1991). Themes of uncommonly successful teachers of at-risk students. *Urban Education*, 26 (2), 176-194.

Ravitch, D. (2001). Education and Democracy. In Ravitch, D. & Viteritti, J. P. (Eds.), Making good citizens: Education and civil society (p. 15-29). New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rothman, R. (2004). Landing the "highly qualified teacher: How administrators can hire and keep the best". *Harvard Education Letter.* Retrieved July 26, 2007, http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/2004-jf/hiring/shtml

Ryan, G. W. & Bernard, H. R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook for Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (p. 509-535). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Sable, J. & Gaviola, N. (2007). *Numbers and rates of public high school dropouts: School year 2004-2005* (NCES 2008-305). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved September 20, 2009 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2008305.

Smith, H. (Producer). (2005). *Making schools work with Hedrick Smith* [Television series]. South Carolina: SWET. Retrieved September 21, 2009 from http://www.pbs.org/makingschoolswork/sbs/csp/jamescomer.html

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview.* New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publications.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist,* 52 (6), 613-629.

Steele, C. M. (1999). Thin ice: Stereotype threat and black college students. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 284 (2), 44-54.

Stevens, E., Wood, G., Sheehan, J. (2002). *Justice, Ideology, & Education.* Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Stronge, James H. (2002). *Qualities of Effective Teachers.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Teel, K., Debruin-Parecki, A., Covington, M. (1998). Teaching strategies that honor and motivate inner-city African-American students: A school/university collaboration. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 14*(5), 479-495.

Tough, P. (2006). What it takes to make a student. *The New York Times.* Retrieved June, 25, 2010 from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/26/magazine/26tough.html?ex=1322197200&en=365dad1e4281cb2f&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss

Tyack, D. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American urban education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

U.S. Department of Education. *A nation at risk* (1983). Washington, DC

Vidich, A. J. & Lyman, S. M. (2000). Qualitative methods: Their history in sociology and anthropology". In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook for Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (p. 37-84). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Wallis, C. (2008). How to make great teachers. *Time, 171*(8), 28-34.

Wallis, C., & Steptoe, S (2007). How to fix no child left behind. *Time*, *169*(23), 34-41.

Waxman, H., Huang, S-Y (1997). Classroom instruction and learning environment difference between effective and ineffective urban elementary schools for African American students. *Urban Education*, *32*(1) 7-44.

Yannielli, J. (2007). Should the children of undocumented immigrants pay more to go to college? *History Network News*. Retrieved February 11, 2008 from http://hnn.us/articles/40317.html

Young, A. J. (1997). I think, therefore I'm motivated: The relations among cognitive strategy use, motivational orientation and classroom perceptions over time. *Learning and Individual Differences, 9*(3), 249-283.

Young, S. (2006). Separate and Unequal: How do we fix the poor state of public schools for black children? *Black Enterprise*, *11*, 34.

Zimmerman, J. (2002). *Whose America? Culture wars in the public schools.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zirkel, P.A. (2001). Decisions that have shaped U.S. education. *Educational Leadership, 59*(4), 6-12.