21st CENTURY LITERACY INSTRUCTION: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES’ EXPERIENCES IN AN ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

BY

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DISSERATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how literacy instruction is organized for, taught, and experienced by five adolescent, African American, male students in an eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom. With this dissertation, I acquired an understanding of what impacts how and why teachers deliver literacy instruction. I adopt a sociocultural perspective of literacy development by focusing on the literacy practices that occurred during literacy events. From a sociocultural perspective, students can be seen as active and capable literacy learners as they experience and engage with a wide range of literacy practices in everyday contexts.
Acknowledgements

Without God none of this would have been possible. God has given me the intellect and endurance to complete this dissertation. I have been blessed to have great parents who have given me all of the support and encouragement needed, as well as instilling in me that “with God all things are possible”. To my mother, Juanita Blackmon-Nicholson, and stepfather, Elijah Nicholson, thank you and I love you both dearly. My mother has molded and shaped me into the person that I am. I am thankful to my mother for instilling in me to always have faith and never doubt. My mother has been my role model, the person that I look up to, and who I always strive to make proud because she has sacrificed and always done so much for me. Thank you to all of my family members and close friends who have given me many words of encouragement and constantly reminded me that I could do this. A special thank you to my aunt Maggie Curtis, cousins Ronald Kearney and Angela Eversley, and friends Kimberly Gunn-Ridley, Desiree Taylor, Caron Brace, Cerise Green, Meredith Wilkerson, and Greg Gibson.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Violet Harris, who guided me through this doctoral program and dissertation. Dr. Harris was like another mother to me, who not only supported and encouraged me educationally, and also encouraged me professionally and personally. No matter what I was going through, Dr. Harris was always there for me. I have become a better researcher, writer, and person because of her. Thank you for being a great advisor, mentor, and intellectual who helped with the emergence of a practitioner into the world of research.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Anne H. Dyson. Dr. Dyson, taught me how to become a qualitative researcher. From taking numerous classes with Dr. Dyson, I have become
knowledgeable about observing and carefully articulating what I observed. Dr. Dyson gave me the insight to look carefully at curriculum and instruction with a critical and sociocultural eye.

Dr. Richard C. Hunter helped me become more knowledgeable about school improvement and how to craft my research into the whole big scheme of education in the twenty-first century. Dr. Hunter’s expertise and experiences in school improvement, school law, and school leadership has helped me craft my educational experiences into my research. Dr. Hunter’s generosity in sharing knowledge has enabled me to become a better educator.

Dr. Christina DeNicolo was invaluable in helping me dig deeper into the issues and causes of African American males’ achievement. She pushed me to look beyond the academics and to take a look into other factors such as political, institutional, and ideological issues. Dr. DeNicolo gave me constructive criticism to ensure that I was becoming knowledgeable in my area of research and would become an expert at my craft.

I would not have gotten through without the support and pep talks from my classmate who has now become a good friend, Kelly Byrd. Kelly constantly reminded me that “you are going to get through this”. I want to thank Kelly for reading my writing, giving me feedback, emotional support, and always being there when I needed to vent or just needed a word of encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank the young men and the two teachers who participated in this study. They let me into their lives for a small portion of time. These individuals were honest, funny, and patient. I hope that I adequately portrayed my time spent with them.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

We are smart, but we are young Black men in America living in an urban area so it is going to be rougher for us. We can’t help the life that you are brought up into, what else do we really have. Randy from “The Wire” (Simon, Burns, & Noble, 2007)

In season 4 of “The Wire”, an HBO television series, that gives real and factual depictions of Baltimore, MD, created by David Simon and Ed Burns, takes a critical and deep look into education and kids ranging from ages twelve to fifteen who “are vulnerable to the corner” (Simon, Burns, & Noble, 2007). With this particular season, four, adolescent, African American males are the primary focus. A former Baltimore City police officer “witnesses first-hand the role of inner-city education in the formation of youth as four, African American, male students as they face dangerous decisions and adolescent angst in a city rife with the temptations of crime and easy money” (Simon, Burns, & Noble, 2007). Let me paint the scene:

Four male characters are dropped in an area of Baltimore full of poverty, violence, and drugs. Namond is a show-off who has nice clothes, his father is in prison serving 20 years for drugs and murder. Namond is being raised by his mother whose main concern is looking nice and keeping up with certain materialistic images so she allows and encourages Namond to sell drugs and emulate his father. Duquan is very intelligent. His mother is addicted to drugs as well as all the other adults living in the home. Duquan’s mother sells his clothes for money to buy drugs. The home seldom has electricity or running water and Duquan barely has food to eat. Basically Duquan is living by himself. Michael is the quiet and mysterious one. Michael’s mother is also addicted to drugs. He has a little brother for whom he cares for, Michael is primarily the father for his little
brother. Michael gets involved in a drug gang to get money to take care of his little brother and himself. Finally, Randy is a foster child who does not know who his father or mother are. Randy has lived in a group home and now is living with a foster mother who takes good care of him; but he shows bad judgment at times because of the area and environment that he lives in. Namond, Duquan, Michael, and Randy all attend the same middle school with outdated facilities, inexperienced and non-certified teachers, and limited resources. These four African American adolescent males according to David Simon are “going to learn, but the question is where. (Simon, Burns, & Noble, 2007)

This description identifies a few of the social ills affecting some of Baltimore, MD’s most vulnerable populations. Those problems include addiction, poverty, incarceration, and dysfunctional families. This is what we see and hear only on the surface level, but what one does not know is that the people are enduring and trying their best to survive. What one mostly sees and hears may be negative, but what is not highlighted is parents walking their children to school, working more than one job to make ends meet, and children wanting more than what is put before them. Although the children attend schools with outdated facilities, inexperienced or non-certified teachers, and limited resources, they are enduring because they keep returning back to school. The school represents great hope for them; and, they are, seemingly, betrayed by the schools’ administrators and teachers and left without hope.

This study examines what happens when students similar to the characters in “The Wire” experience literacy in an urban school. The following section provides an overview of the issues facing African American males in urban schools.
Background of the Problem

The student composition in today’s classrooms has shifted dramatically in recent years to encompass large percentages of students of color (Dyson, 1993, Genishi & Dyson, 2009, Ball, 2009). Specifically, in Baltimore City, 87.8% enrolled students are African Americans and 83.6% of these students are low-income (Baltimore City Public Schools By the Numbers, 2010). Various data and research specific to African Americans and their achievement consistently point to academic disparities between them and European American students in key academic areas such as literacy, math, science, and social studies with African American males being at the bottom of the achievement levels (Center of Educational Policy [CEP], 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2008; Rothstein, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Specifically, in Baltimore City Public Schools, students in middle school had a reading gap between African American male students and European American students that was 17.2% with the African American males trailing behind their European American male counterparts (Maryland Public Schools, 2010). Achievement levels for African American males, specifically in economically disadvantaged urban school environments that are also racially homogenous, further reflected the dismal results (Noguera, 2003). According to recent statistics and literature, African American males in the United States are more likely to attend schools in economically disadvantaged urban school settings (CEP, 2006; Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). These schools are more likely to be poorly staffed (inexperienced, non-certified), female dominated, and lack educational resources to adequately support curricular goals (Augenblick, Myers, & Anderson, 1997; Parrish, Hikido, & Fowler, 1998). In addition, African American males are disproportionately represented in special education and/or remedial classes (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Davis, 2004). Also, they are typically suspended or expelled
more than other races and/or genders (Mendez & Knopf, 2003; Monroe, 2005; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). African American males comprise one of the lowest performing subgroups in the area of literacy. Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 illustrate the differences in literacy performances as measured by National Reading Scale (2011) and NAEP Reading Scores (2007).

Table 1

*National Reading Scale in Public Urban Districts (2011)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2003 Scale Score</th>
<th>African American Males</th>
<th>European American Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Test scores were obtained through The Nation’s Report Card: The Nation’s Urban Report Card: Trail Urban District Assessment in Reading conducted by the U.S. Department of Education National Education Center for Education Statistics, 2011.

Table 2

*Average Scale Scores in NAEP Reading for 4th grade students (2007)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Test scores were obtained through the National Assessment of Education Progress in Reading and Math conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, National Education Center for Education Statistics, 2007.
Table 3

*Average Scale Scores in NAEP Reading for 8th grade students (2007)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Test scores were obtained through the National Assessment of Education Progress in Reading and Math conducted by the U.S Department of Education, National Education Center for Education Statistics, 2007.

Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 suggest the potential impact of low literacy levels among African American males, their families, communities, and society at large. These tables also suggest that the males have different and/or difficult experiences with books/texts. Callins (2006) expressed that if we properly teach a child to read and increase literacy skills, then the individual will be less of a burden or strain on society because he is less likely to be on welfare, commit a crime, skip work, fail to pay taxes, and need remedial education.

Numerous explanations exist regarding the poor academic performance of African American males; included among them are poverty, social-psychological environment, and feelings of helplessness (Davis, 2004; Noguera, 2003). African American students have higher dropout rates, earn lower grades, attain less education, and participate in less academically rigorous classes and programs than do Caucasian students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012). African American males are rarely referred to as “competent,” “resourceful,” “aspiring,”
or motivated;” but on the other hand, are often characterized as “defiant,” “criminal inclined,” and “low-achievers” (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2008). These are all labels and/or negative ideologies placed on African American male students, in particular those that attend urban schools. Many schools, teachers, and even parents have begun to accept that African American males’ poor performance in school is the norm. Expectations for these students have been lowered and anti-intellectualism is often reinforced in schools (Floyd, 1996; Tatum, 2005). So often others, as well as African American males, perceive that there are only certain academic tracks that they can enter (Floyd, 1996; Tatum, 2005). For African American males, there are specific tracks (or avenues) or life choices that they often are in (i.e. vocational schools, special education, remedial classes, high school drop-out, criminal, rapper, or athlete) to which they are directed in a conscious or non-conscious manner (King, 2007; Polite & Davis, 1999).

For the past few decades, the United States’ focus has been on improving the education of minority and poor students. Between 1970 and the early 1980s, the achievement gap in reading between African American students and other subgroups was cut in half. Since the 1980s the gaps have widened between European American and African American students, especially African American males. Harris (1992) explains that although many people wanted integration, achievement lessened considerably in the late 1970s and later because of factors such as teacher experience and ability, curricula, and ways of interests to motivate students to increase academic success. Further, African Americans started to reassess and place emphasis on the need for philosophies and curricula that affirmed the value of African Americans and their culture. During the mid-1980s, the nation was in the midst of the Ronald Regan era in which government entitlement programs were dismantled, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) served to cut federal funding programs for the poor as well as inducements for states providing funding
was enacted, and that caused a reduction in federal aid to education. These funding cuts negatively affected the educational success of African American children because most of these children lived and attended schools in inner-city, lower socioeconomic areas where the funding was cut. Most African American children attended Title I schools that received federal funding. The federal funds that supplied additional programs and/or resources that enabled African American students to move towards equal footing with their European American counterparts now was being cut drastically. Also, our nation began standardized assessments that were based on measures based on the achievements of advantaged students.

In the post-Civil Rights Era (late 1980’s-present), African American children still have a desire for literacy, but they are in search of a way to “reconcile the desire for literacy with the realities of living” (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995, p. 5). African American males’ perception of literacy and its value has changed from their ancestors (slavery and post-slavery) and their parents (Civil Rights Era). According to Perry (2003), African American males no longer see literacy as a symbol of freedom and emancipation. African American males are less likely to see school literacy in the same way as mainstream America. I define mainstream America as individuals of the dominant and majority population (political and economic), that are not always racially determined, who share similar values and belief, and who more than likely speak the language of wider communication or Standard English (Delpit, 1995; Smitherman, 1998).

Statement of the Problem

As a former teacher and reading specialist, I have experienced and encountered African American males’ struggle with reading, observed their disengagement, and pondered the questions they asked, such as, “Why do we have to read?” and “Do I really need this”? In so many of the urban inner city schools that house a significant number of African American males,
their reading curriculum consists of prescribed basal readers. In *Rethinking Schools*, Miner (2001), explained that there is a dominance of basal readers in big city urban schools (e.g., Milwaukee, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, New York, San Diego) which he believes is a disturbing trend within public education that reduces literacy learning to drill and skill. Furthermore, Menon and Hiebert (2005) explain that the statistics reveal that United States’ students in high poverty and high minority urban schools have the least access to skilled instructors and use of literature-based basal readers. The accountability and standardization of the No Child Left Behind era and the current Common Core State Standards are evidence of government mandates on how we should teach and what students should learn. Specifically, in the area of reading and writing there is a narrow definition of literacy that reflects the mainstream culture (Enright, 2011; Willis, 1995). The majority of educators in schools have a traditional and narrow definition of literacy that views literacy as the ability to only read and use printed text, word and symbol recognition, and decoding and comprehension of printed text (Stevens, 2003; Black & Steinkueher, 2009). This narrow definition of literacy has impacted educational policies which claim that great strides have been achieved in our understanding of literacy learning without acknowledging factors associated with cultural and linguistic diversity (Meacham, 2001). Children are being exposed to and participating in various types of literacies. So, why is it that today we have become so content and stuck in the modernist conception of literacy (unified meaning within the boundaries of a single text)? Meacham (2001) suggests that singular and English-exclusive conceptions of literacy were perceived as a means of constructing national identity as well as protecting the United States’ cognitive capacity from the inferior cultural influences of African Americans, indigenous Americans, and later, working class Eastern European immigrants.
African American adolescent males are more aware of the harsh realities before them, and literacy is no longer seen by them as a vehicle to freedom, power, or emancipation (Perry, 2003). Rarely has the African American male been positioned to accrue the benefits of power resulting from literacy and “adolescent African American males do not believe that reading for intellectual development matters” which Tatum has labeled as “anti-intellectualism” (Slaughter-Defoe & Richards, 1995; Tatum, 2005, p. 13). Literacy now is looked upon by many African American males as a site of cultural conflict and struggle. Today, literacy as practiced by many African American males is sadly shaped in tension and not responsive to their needs (Morrell, 2000; Tatum, 2006). The types of literacy that African American males are being exposed to in schools does not always present a positive image of them or not enough of them. As Kirkland (2008) notes, the literacy (e.g. street fiction/literature) in the lives of many adolescent African American males is usually ignored or criticized in schools. Street fiction is a literary genre that is defined by socio-economic realities and culture of its characters as the urban setting “whose plots, characters, and settings focus on everyday life in contemporary urban neighborhoods” (Hill, et al., 2008, p. 76). Hill, et al. (2008) further explained that street fiction has “ghetto contexts, connection to hip hop culture, and has tradition of the Black experience” (p.77). The most recent wave of street (urban) literature, such as the Bluford High series and G-Unit books, has attracted young African American males in urban areas between the ages of 14 and 25 (Rosen, 2008). The Bluford High series and G-unit books are both written by males, one European American (Paul Langan) and the other African American (rapper 50 Cent/Curtis Jackson). Paul Langan, the author of the Bluford High series explained that the stories “reflect personal experiences, including the difficulties of growing up without a father and the many challenges students face in inner city schools” (Scholastic, n.d.). Curtis Jackson, better known as
New York rapper 50 Cent, created and authored the G-Unit books to express his life and his friends’ lives on the streets of the inner city, focusing specifically on sex, guns, and the lives of African American males. Both of these males, even though they are of different races, are writing about what African American males can relate to and experience in their everyday lives. It seems that it does not always matter the race of a person—more important are the experiences. Hip-hop fiction and street literature is doing for thirteen through twenty-five year old African American males what Harry Potter did for kids, but these type of books have not been well accepted or not often used in schools (Venable, McQuillar, & Mingo, 2004).

In-school literacy for most African American males and other males tends to be disengaging and lacking interest. According to Wilhelm and Smith (2002), not just African American males but males in general lack engagement and interest in reading progress as they go through school. Many students in urban schools who traditionally have lower achievement in the area of literacy, based on standardized assessments, and who are disengaged, often excel in out-of-school literacies (Mahiri, 2004). Various out-of-school literacies that African American males engage and participate in include reading magazines that are of particular interest to them (i.e. sports, comics, hip-hop, video games), poetry, movies, internet, spoken word, and hip-hop. Many of these forms of literacies are considered part of popular culture. Some researchers have incorporated popular culture into the classroom. For example, Kirkland (2007), Morrell (2004), and Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) have all used hip-hop and film in an English/Language Arts classroom of urban adolescent students. The research from these scholars did not document, for the most part, improved literacy ability. Rather, the results indicated an increase in motivation and engagement, participation more in discussions, and more connections with traditional academic/canonical texts. One important aspect from the research of Kirkland,
Morell, and Duncan-Andrade on the incorporation of hip-hop and film into the English/Language Arts curriculum documented improved ability in composing and producing expository writing.

With this research, I explored what was happening in an English/Language Arts classroom. The key questions to be answered were as follows: a) What are the ways that the literacy events are enacted in an English/Language Arts classroom? and c) How do adolescent African American males respond to and engage in the literacy events within the English/Language Arts classroom? I was particularly interested the experiences of African American males and the types of literacy practices that were vital to engaging them and increasing their literacy achievement.

**Models and Types of Instruction Used to Resolve the Literacy Achievement Gap**

Three models—scripted programs, direct instruction, and basal readers—dominate curricula in low-income schools. These three particular models are heavily used in inner-city low income schools mostly because of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) made because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and incorporation of high-stakes testing in the 1970s. Title I, part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). According to the U.S. Department of Education website (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleIparta/index.html) “provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEA) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.” Schools that meet criterion for Title I designation (typically, schools with at least 80% of the student body receiving free or reduced lunch) receive additional funds from the federal government to provide enhanced academic
support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children who have low socioeconomic status master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects.

In the 1960s the ESEA enabled the federal government to provide funding and programs to primarily low economically disadvantaged schools to improve the education of the children and youth who attend these particular schools (McCarthey, 2008; McGill-Frazez, 1994). According to Allington and McGill-Frazen (2004) beginning in the 1970s and still today “the federal influence of education was increasing and the federal government intervening and influence was motivated because the government felt that schools were not making an influence in the lives of children from low-income and minority families” (p. 7). The federal government started to form national panels such as National Reading Panel to investigate and/or research the best ways to improve reading with American students. This particular panel recommended the use of scripted programs, direct instruction, and basal readers to be used in schools to increase reading achievement especially for low-income and minority students. The results of the research from the National Reading Panel helped to formulate the Reading First Initiative. The Reading First Initiative for Title I schools enforced and mandated explicit and systematic literacy instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Of course, using federal funds (e.g., Title I) means abiding by and adhering to federal mandates. Some of the federal mandates included using curricula and/or programs that the federal government recommended based upon results from the National Reading Panel. Low-income schools with a majority minority population have less power to resist the government mandates and are monitored more than schools in high-income areas because they rely heavily on the federal funds (McCarthey, 2008). Another reason that scripted, direct instruction, and basal readers dominate in low-income schools is because of high-stakes testing. Murphy (2007) and McCarthey (2008)
both explain how high stakes testing narrow the literacy curriculum and promote “formulaic teaching” (p. 468). The dominance of these three models suggest that teachers are not knowledgeable about their profession or instruction of how to effectively teach students. Eppley (2011) explains, “direct instruction teachers are not to be thoughtful and active citizens, but instead are specialized technicians whose job is to manage and implement curricula” (p. 2). In addition, Eppley (2011) described further how scripted programs, direct instruction, and basal readers deskill teachers.

Scripted, district-paced teaching for individual skill mastery now dominates in urban schools, particularly those deemed low-income, which are disproportionately populated by children of color (Dyson, 2009). Our society has had a more urgent need to increase the academic achievement of marginalized students that has led to a narrower concept of learning. Dyson (2001) contends that the history of African American males and their present condition in America are generally overlooked when educators plan reform. Official curricula have led literacy in schools to become homogenized and constrained. A majority of these homogenized and constrained literacy programs in schools have been handed down by federal and state mandates (Hood, 2011; Beach, et al., 2012). Federal and state mandates have led to structured literacy programs to states and/or districts that need federal funds. African American males of low socio-economic status attend urban schools that need and receive federal funds because they are typically Title I schools.

Direct instruction. Direct Instruction System Teaching and Remediation (DISTAR-DI) for reading is a comprehensive school-reform model (CSR). This CSR model offers an approach to school reform that includes professional development, measurable weekly goals, staff support, and evaluation and coordination of resources (Borman et al., 2003; Englemann et al., 1988).
Direct Instruction (DI) places emphasis on phonics, is explicit, and purports to be scientifically-based instruction reading and programs with scripted lessons (Englemann, et al., 1988). It was implemented in the late 1970s to help students, specifically from lower income families, who have lagged behind their peers in language skills. From their research, Ross et al. (2004) determined how various stakeholder groups (e.g. school district leadership, union leadership, and president of the school board) had strongly advocated and supported that use of DISTAR program with predominately, disadvantaged African American students. Lee (2004) argued that DI was implemented based on studies claiming that speakers of African American English Vernacular (AAEV) spoke an inferior language that interfered with African American students’ ability to both decode and comprehend. It was furthered explained by Lee (2004) that DI “provided explicit instruction in vocabulary, syntactical patterns, and decoding to meet the presumed deficits of African American students” (p. 72). In Baltimore City Public Schools 74.1% of students in DI are African American students (Baltimore City Public Schools a, 2008). This further solidifies what Henley, Alsozzine, and Ramsey (2008) emphasized regarding how DI “was used to teach language development to poor inner-city children” whom were majority African American children that society believed to language deficient instead of “language different” (p. 31).

**Basal readers.** Basal readers first emerged as a series of grade-level reading books in the 18th century (Austin & Morrison, 1961; Hoffman, et al., 2002). The basal readers first came about during the word and whole stories method of teaching reading (Smith, 1934; Slover, 1957). Most believe that basal readers first emerged with the McGuffey Readers in the 1860s, but Samuel Worchester published the first primer in 1828 and by “1844 more than six million copies of his readers had been sold” (Slover, 1957, p. 416). The McGuffey Readers were the largest
publishers of reading series, most used in schools, and was considered the first to have interesting reading materials for school aged children (Slover, 1957).

Basal readers were more teacher-centered with students doing a lot of rote memorization (Shannon & Goodman, 1994; Reyhner, 2008). It was not until the twentieth century that the basal readers became commercialized reading materials that have stories organized in ways to develop specific skills that are taught in a pre-determined sequence (Hoffman, 2001). According to Shannon and Goodman (1994), basal readers, beginning in the 20th century have come to characterize or become the face of reading instruction in the United States. Basal reading series consisted of explicitly scripted teachers’ manuals for direct systematic instruction, anthology of short stories and narratives (for students), accompanying workbooks, assessments, and activities. There was a surge and dominance of basal readers (Houghton Mifflin, Macmillian/McGraw-Hill, Open Court, and Scott Foresman) in the 1900s and into the early 21st century because of the skills-based driven period in education.

For some of the same reasons that basal readers have been praised, they have been criticized. Basal readers are heavily scripted materials that tell teachers what to say, when to say it, and what to do. The stories that are chosen and included in basal readers are purposely chosen for skills embedding and practice that may seem uninteresting, not meaningful, and/or authentic. Basal readers have been heavily used in low-performing and/or urban schools because they have been geared for heavy test preparation that mirror national or state assessments. The major failure of basal readers is that they encourage teachers to teach to the test and many lack authentic literature featuring minority stories or characters. From this view I believe and argue that teachers lack the agency needed to change patterns of instruction. Most school districts in low-income urban areas have a top down philosophy where instructional methods are dictated to
the teachers without their input or views. Teachers have a low level of agency in terms of change in curriculum and patterns of instruction because of prescribed national curricula (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012). Also, bureaucracy has increased leaving teachers feeling disempowered and professionally marginalized (Ball, 2008).

**Culturally responsive literacy instruction.** There has been significant debate about whole-language versus phonics-based instruction and trade versus basal readers in teaching of literacy (Pearson, 2004). Researchers and teachers have debated this for years, yet minority students continue to struggle in the area of literacy. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) asserts that whole-language instruction, phonics-based instruction, or basal readers have not been effective approaches for African American children. Further, she argues that these materials do not address the persistent poor performance of African American males. For so long, African American males have been asking the question “literacy for what” and the dominant practices of literacy instruction that have been used in U.S. schools have not answered the question. To answer this question and increase academic performance for African American students, particularly males, more educators must use various genres of literature that include topics and characters that are of interests to these type of students, move language beyond what mainstream America uses, and focus on sociopolitical issues that address African Americans needs and issues that they face in an urban society (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994; Taylor, 1989; Tatum, 2008). It is not that no educators are beginning to adopt an eclectic approach to reading instruction, but we need to see more of this happening in schools particularly those in urban settings with large populations of minority students.

Gloria Ladson-Billings offered a potential solution to the educational problems plaguing African American youth. She argued that a culturally response pedagogy is needed. A culturally
response pedagogy to teaching language and literacy is explained by Ladson-Billings (1992)”

“Rather than attempt to tie minority students’ literacy to vocational aspirations, culturally
response pedagogy asserts that literacy is a tool of liberation, both personal and cultural” (p. 318).

Culturally responsive literacy instruction comes from grounded theory that sought to make connections among home, school, and community. Some students of color and English as second language learners typically come to school with different literacy skills than most mainstream students, which usually leads to a disconnect that results in lower achievement and engagement. Culturally responsive literacy instruction allows teachers to bring in culturally relevant materials and instructional strategies into their classroom. Gay (1995, 2002) and Cortes (2000) describe materials and strategies within culturally responsive pedagogy as:

• Teachers analyze and determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum design and instructional materials; and, if needed, make changes to improve their overall quality.

• Use of societal curriculum, which is knowledge, ideas, and impressions about ethnic groups that are portrayed in the mass media.

• Deal directly with controversy, studying a wide range of ethnic individuals and groups. Contextualizing issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender; including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives.

• Symbolic curriculum which includes images, symbols, icons, mottos, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach knowledge; skills, morals, and values.
• Cultural scaffolding- using students’ own culture and experience to expand their intellectual and academic achievements.

The incorporation of these materials and strategies allows for validation of the experiences and perspectives of minority individuals and groups, which in turn invites student engagement that results in higher degrees of academic achievement and particularly serves as a catalyst for increased reading achievement (Calins, 2006; Gaye, 2000). Instead of teachers who teach in urban schools with large populations of minority students teaching literacy skills within contextualized meaningful situated practices, they often only engage these students with decontextualized skills-based lessons (Delpit, 2006; Strickland, 1994; Tatum, 2005). Culturally responsive literacy instruction incorporates culturally relevant texts that provide authentic portrayals of characters, situations, and themes with which students can relate. Ladson-Billings (1995) clearly explains:

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

In an attempt to close the literacy achievement gap, one can see that there have been various curriculums, pedagogies, and/or reforms adopted. Instructional practices in use in classrooms today must address the needs of all students. Recent reforms in education, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, are comprehensive plans that were created to help disadvantaged students reach expected levels of achievement. All of the data and research show that we continually miss the mark, especially with African American males. Because we still have an
achievement gap and many minority students are underachieving, then perhaps it is time to take on and/or look at another perspective of literacy.

**Researcher’s Perspective of Literacy**

Literacy is contextually based on the broad concept that it is grounded in social practice. Becoming literate is more than acquiring skills. It includes developing knowledge, attitudes, and understandings about the forms, functions, and purpose of literacy. From this perspective students can be seen as active and capable literacy learners as they experience and engage with a wide range of literacy practices in everyday contexts. The sociocultural model of literacy views literacy as a broad concept that includes oral, visual, symbolic, and written literacy as well as a range of literacy forms, functions, and practices that occur on various contexts (Barratt-Pugh, 2002; Hamer, 2005). My own definition of literacy is heavily influenced by sociocultural theory, in the sense that I view literacy as inextricably connected with the social context in which it is practiced. I see literacy primarily as the act of making sense of and communicating a message in order to accomplish some sort of meaning making activity. Literacy practices will vary depending on the communication needs of the specific moment. My literacy definition is informed by Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic’s (2000) use of the term “situated literacies,” which represents literacy as a set of socially mediated practices rather than an objective static act, which remains constant across all contexts. According to Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2000) literacy practices “are patterned by social institutions and power relations, and some literacies are more dominant, visible, and influential than others” (p. 8). These theoretical orientations focus on how literacy events point toward literacy practices (Street, 1985). From a sociocultural theory it allows me to acquire an understanding of how African American males experience literacy events through the social practices in which they are involved.
Taking on the sociocultural theoretical perspective with this research that literacy is not focused on individual learners or singular modes of literacy, rather literacy events can be seen as culturally situated practices (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Goodman & Goodman, 1990). This research does not adopt a neutral definition of literacy; rather I assume the stance associated with a sociocultural perspective. Sociocultural theorists believe that literacy cannot be separated from its social context. The sociocultural context organizes literacy and what counts for literacy. Assuming a sociocultural perspective with this research is particularly salient because it enables literacy to be understood in different discourse communities within situated practices.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore and help acquire an understanding of the experiences of African American males in an English/Language Arts classroom. This study was guided by one main question: How is literacy instruction organized for, taught, and experienced by adolescent African American males in an eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom in an urban inner city kindergarten through eighth grade school? From this main question these sub-questions emerged:

1. What are the ways that the literacy events are enacted in an English/Language Arts classroom?
   a. How do teachers’ beliefs and philosophies of literacy instruction impact their teaching strategies and/or styles?
   b. How do the teachers perceive and/or explain 21st century literacy instruction?
   c. How do the teachers’ planned lessons become enacted and unfold in the classroom?
2. How do adolescent African American males respond to and engage in the literacy events within the English/Language Arts classroom?
   a. What are African American males’ perceptions of literacy?
   b. What are the ways that African American males participate in the literacy events in the classroom?
   c. What factors impact African American males’ participation in the literacy events in the classroom?

Significance of Study

For so many years, emphasis has been placed on how African American male students are academically lagging behind their counterparts. There has been some research, mainly at the secondary level, that documents instructional practices and/or philosophies that engage African American males and increase their academic achievement (e.g., Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Kirkland, 2007, 2008, 2009; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Mahiri, 1998, Morrell, 2002, 2004; Tatum, 2006, 2007). Some research findings on the literacy experiences of African American males has focused on how literacy instruction is organized and taught (e.g., Mahiri, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Tatum, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2009). I sought to determine why teachers of African American males were teaching what they were teaching and what factors impacted how they were teaching. Looking into what and how something was taught and its impact on the engagement and participation of African American males gives further insight into classroom literacy experiences.

I hope to contribute to the body of knowledge about African American males’ literacy in the middle school level by investigating how literacy instruction is enacted and how African American males experience the enacted literacy events. This research will give an understanding
of how teacher’s literacy beliefs impact their teaching styles and how and what teacher’s teach impact African American males’ literacy experiences. In addition, this research will contribute to the body of knowledge about how planned lessons unfold in the classroom and the experiences of African American males as the lessons unfold.

Definition of Terms

**Literacy events:** In this study the term is used as a unit of analysis. It derives from sociocultural theory and is a social activity organized in a way for using oral or written language to interact, produce, or interpret text (Heath, 1982; Heath, 1983).

**Popular culture:** This signifies a participatory culture that has been produced and can emanate from the products of commercial media (i.e. cartoons, movies, characters, music, entertainers, toys, etc.) or individuals; is a set of interconnected practice where individuals produce meaning; and interpret the world and participate in the world (March & Millard, 2000; Genishi & Dyson, 2009)

**Multiliteracy:** This term was coined by the New London Group in 1996, which argued for the multiplicity of communications channels and media. It is emphasized that multiliteracy extends, rather than replaces, understanding of literacy associated with print; pertains to the increasing importance of cultural and linguistic diversity—the scope of literacy pedagogy that extends to account for greater cultural and linguistic diversity in the contemporary context; and takes on the text forms that include activities such as interpreting environmental print, critiquing advertising, oral debating, writing memos, internet, text messaging vocal and dramatic performances, and many other cultural and linguistically diverse textual practices for multiple cultural purposes (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis, Cope, & Fehring, 2002)
Co-teaching: This represents a situation in which two teachers—a general education teacher and a special education teacher—are teaching in one classroom together. The teachers plan together, take turns leading a lesson, and are responsible for instruction of all of the students in the class (Cook & Friend, 1995; Arquelle, et al., 2000)

**Learning and instructional beliefs:** This refers to personal conceptions of learning and instruction that guide how one teaches and one’s delivery of instruction (Anderson, 1989)

**Engagement:** This is on task and focused attention (Fisher et al., 1980; Brody, 1983). Students who are engaged during an instructional activity are involved, with a willingness to participate and to construct meaning from a lesson (Natriello, 1984). When engagement occurs during instruction, students utilize cognitive and meta-cognitive processes to monitor their learning

**Study Limitations**

The unit of analysis for this study was limited to five African American male students in one eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom. Types of classrooms vary according to structure, types of teachers, expertise of teachers, number of teachers (e.g., one teacher in a classroom or a co-teaching model), and the number of students. The type and kind of classrooms can have extreme to moderate differences between and among classrooms and schools. However, in this study, only the focal students’ responses are considered and accounted for—not the classroom context. Additionally, there are other participants on whom this study could have focused, such as African American females, who are also worth being researched; but, my research focus was specifically on African American males’ literacy experiences in a classroom. It was vital and urgent to focus research on these particular students because all of the data and research indicate that African American males are performing the lowest on _____ (School-
measured academic tasks? State tests? Both? Something else?) out of all cultural and gender subgroups.

This qualitative research was purposeful and selective so that generalizations about the findings to a larger population in terms of statistical confidence will be reduced. The participants in the study were not randomly selected but were selected purposefully. By purposefully selecting participants this allowed this research to provide an in-depth look into the world of a small group of African American male students as they participate, engage in, and experience the literacy practices that are put forth before them in an English/Language Arts classroom.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The limited academic tracks within schools that African American males are afforded has been attributed to their lack of engagement and lowered achievement levels relative to school literacy. Literacy is the foundation for everything that occurs in the classroom. It may be the most important subject taught, yet it is not discrete. Literacy is a subject that is intertwined with all aspects of learning. America has constantly been engaged in “reading wars” designed to improve and increase American students’ achievement in reading (Ravitch, 2001; Rayner, et al., 2001). The reading war in America has been an on-going educational and political battle of proponents of phonics versus proponents of whole language philosophy to those that advocated other methods in the past such as “look and say” (Ravitch, 2001; Rayner, et al., 2001). Phonics is a bottom-up approach where students sound out (decode) words to gain word meanings and understanding of text. Whole language philosophy relies heavily on trade books and is a top-down approach where the students construct a personal meaning for text based on using their prior knowledge to interpret meaning. This occurs in a literature-rich environment that provides opportunities for speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Reyhner, 2008). The phonics approach assumes aspects of B. F. Skinner’s behaviorist theory and whole language contains elements of Lev Vygotsky’s constructivist theory. Between phonics and whole language, our nation’s reading curriculums and literacy programs have evolved.

There is no doubt that there is a disproportionate number of low-income African American and Latino children living in most urban environments who consistently lag behind in the area of reading. According to Teale, Paciga, and Hoffman’s (2007) analysis of NAEP data for fourth and eighth grade reading achievement in eleven urban districts, conducted in 2005 and
2004, most of the existing gaps are significantly larger for urban students than for the overall population. Seventy percent of urban African American and Hispanic learners are deficient in reading (Bursuck & Damer, 2007). Labov’s (2003) research revealed that most minority students in inner city urban schools are the struggling readers that are “performing at levels no higher than those of dyslexics in the suburbs, it is not likely that they are suffering from the same neurological deficit” (p. 128). Though we are well into the 21st century, problems still exist, and there is still a literacy achievement gap specifically between most ethnic groups and African American males in urban schools. In order to increase the achievement of African American males in the area of literacy, there is a need to acquire an understanding of what has and is being done in literacy curriculum and instruction in urban areas with a majority African American populations.

This review of literature takes on four main purposes: (a) discuss the theoretical perspectives that shape this research; (b) examine the academic achievement and schooling experiences of African American males; (c) describe literacy instruction from the 20th century to the 21st century; and, (d) provide a critical discussion of the research that has been conducted on the literacy lives of African American males. These are interrelated issues and understanding them provides a foundation for analyzing the data that are collected. The literature review critically analyzes past research about African American males and their literacy from the mid to latter twentieth century through the twenty-first century. This section (a) includes a discussion about sociocultural theory in terms of literacy, (b) achievement and school experiences, (c) the continuum of views about literacy among African American males ranging from deficient to different to culturally centered; and, (d) ends with what the research is lacking.

**Theoretical Framework**
**Sociocultural.** This research does not take on a context neutral conception of literacy; rather a sociocultural perspective of literacy undergirds the study. The framework is adopted from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory that considers and seeks to understand the cultural context within which children grow and develop (Perez, 2004). Sociocultural theorists believe that literacy cannot be separated from its social context. The sociocultural context organizes literacy and what counts for literacy. This theory is derived from Vygotskian views that emphasize the social world where learning and literacy emerge (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory encompasses what Tatum (2005) considers the nesting ground framework (cultural, social, and emotional development) that has a goal of ensuring that African American males receive literacy instruction that promotes academic excellence and nurtures a positive identity of who they are and what they can become. Understanding literacy as the construction of meaning within a sociocultural context attempts to account for aim, purpose, audience, text, and the context in which reading and writing occur.

A sociocultural perspective towards literacy instruction allows opportunities for African American males to use cultural tools, symbols, texts and the ways of thinking in an active process of meaning making. Within situated practices, the sociocultural approach allows literacy to be expanded in different discourse communities. Also, a sociocultural approach to literacy development allows for an understanding of the values and purposes of literacy. Sociocultural theory permits the researcher to highlight and gain an understanding of how the teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of literacy affect learning. Finally, sociocultural theory enables the identification of strategies, teaching styles, activities, and/or resources that are beneficial in creating positive participation, engagement, and interaction among African American males in the area of literacy.
Within sociocultural theory, literacy is viewed as inextricably connected with the social context in which it is practiced. One has to look at the social event and what is accomplished within that event. The social context involves forming new types of relationships between students and teachers, with students working in critical collaborative inquiry with others and assisted by the teacher (Warschaur, 1997). Sociocultural theory supports the examination and use of situated literacies, which represents literacy as a set of socially mediated practices rather than an objective static act, which remains constant across all contexts (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). Sociocultural theory enables thinking about what sorts of contextual situations are beneficial in the literacy development of African American males.

A sociocultural approach to literacy views learning as more than acquiring skills; rather the focus includes developing knowledge, attitudes, and understandings about the forms, functions, and purposes of literacy through a wide range of social and cultural contexts (Barratt-Pugh, 2002). From this approach students can be seen as active and capable literacy learners as they experience and engage with a wide range of literacy practices in everyday contexts. Hamer (2005) explained, “[a] sociocultural model of literacy views literacy as a broad concept that includes oral, visual, symbolic, and written literacy as well as a range of literacy forms, functions, and practices that occur in various contexts” (p.72). Literacy cannot be defined as an individual cognitive act, but rather as a social practice; to teach literacy, therefore, means to apprentice people into the social practices of literate communities (Warschaur, 1997).

Sociocultural theory also considers the cultural context. Perez (2004) explains, “a view of literacy from a sociocultural theory of learning considers and seeks to understand the cultural context within which children have grown and develop[ed].” (p. 4). I view culture as a lived experience of the participants. For this research I viewed classroom culture as the experiences of
the teachers and the students in the classroom during the literacy events. According to Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005) culture is a lived experiences according to which funds of knowledge emerge and serve as a dynamic, emergent, and interactional basis. My research sees culture as the practices of specific sets of people interacting within local communities (the classroom) of practice. I assumed the point of view in which children (in particular African American males) are active agents that learn, participate, and negotiate in a classroom environment. Also, sociocultural theory helped me acquire an understanding of how the teachers create the classroom environment in which African American males can learn, participate, and develop as literacy learners.

Sociocultural theory allows for a broad definition of literacy. In the 21st century we have become a more diverse (cultural and socially), global, and technological society. This has led to increased different and diverse ways of knowing and communicating which expands our conception of literacy. Such a conception places demands on rethinking the spectrum of skills, knowledge, and understanding requisite to the development of literacy pertinent to the needs of the 21st century (Hong, 2006). Literacy in contemporary postmodern society is characterized by rapidly changing and emergent forms of meaning making in the context of increased cultural and linguistic diversity, such that it can no longer be defined narrowly (Hong, 2006; Mills, 2007). Kirkland and Jackson (2009) discuss the importance of a broad and expanded notion of literacy for adolescents, when they write, “Literacy is capable of operating from a diversity of representational systems, particularly when combining written and oral forms with visual, gestural, and other kinds of symbols…[Y]outh, in particular, practice literacy by weaving together identities and common world views.” (p. 279). Today’s adolescents partake in and construct meaning from a broad array of socially mediated symbols and media, which include
video games, computers, cell phones, television, magazines, internet, and many more.

Sociocultural theory enables educators to take into account more than the traditional single-versed definition of literacy. Consequently, I can gain an understanding of how broad the teachers’ definition of literacy is and how they incorporate various forms of literacy in their instruction. Also, the sociocultural perspective allows for an understanding of how adolescent African American males view literacy and how the incorporation of various genres and modes of literacy impact their literacy learning development.

African American Males’ Academic and School Experiences in Urban Schools

Various data and research specific to African Americans and their achievement consistently point to academic disparities between African Americans and European American students in key academic areas such as literacy, math, science, and social studies with African American males being at the bottom of the achievement levels (CEP, 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2008; Rothstein, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Achievement levels for African American males, specifically in economically, disadvantaged, urban school environments that are also racially homogenous, further reflect the dismal results (Noguera, 2003). According to recent statistics and literature, African American males in the United States are more likely to attend schools in economically disadvantaged urban school settings (CEP, 2006; Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). These schools are more likely to be poorly staffed (inexperienced and/or female dominated, as are most elementary schools) and lacking educational resources to adequately support curricular goals (Augenblick, Myers, & Anderson, 1997; Parrish, Hikido, & Fowler, 1998; Schwartz, 1999).

Urban schools do not exist independent of the larger social and political context in which they are located; they are impacted by human and organizational relationships referred to as
social capital that affect achievement (Orr, 1999). Society has placed several labels and/or negative ideologies on students, specifically African American males, who attend urban schools. Ferguson (2000) explains how schools create, shape, and regulate social identities. The socially constructed identities that have been shaped of African American males who attend urban schools have been those of defiance, low-achievement, and criminally inclination (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2008).

**Achievement.** Low achievement rates are frequently one of the major ways in which urban school settings are typically characterized, especially those that are racially homogenous and in poverty-stricken (economically disadvantaged) areas. Research highlights lower achievement rates for children of color, particularly African American males, within these settings (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Thirunarayanan (2004) confirmed the existence of low achievement rates within urban schools. This research compared the student achievement rates of urban, suburban, and rural schools by examining the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data for grades four, eight, and eight in various subject areas and years. The research indicated that urban schools, when compared to their counterparts, performed statistically worse in several subject areas. Further, findings showed that urban students performed significantly worse than rural students in reading for all assessment years in grades four and eight. Students in urban schools also performed statistically worse than rural schools in writing for grades four and eight during the 2002 assessments. Tatum (2005) further clarified this by pinpointing that, specifically in the area of reading, adolescent African American males of low socioeconomic status under perform compared to students who are not poor. Most of these students are placed in remedial or special education programs and are overrepresented in the programs. The remedial, low-level tracks, and special education programs
focus mainly on discrete skill instruction, often referred to as skill and drill, and do not evoke a passion for reading (Davis, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005). In his research, Tatum (2005) explained that students who are struggling in reading and/or are in remedial or special education classes rarely are given any choice about what they read, books are often chosen for these students that they are not culturally connected to, and books they read have controlled vocabulary that reinforce isolated reading skills. Kirkland & Brass (2006) and Gilyard (2002) discuss how African American males are exposed to the limited nature of school literacy practices that are not connected to their cultural and social orientation of their home. Vygotsky’s fundamental premise regarding the learning process is based on an understanding of cognition and learning as social and cultural that value the whole child and honor the different cultures, languages, prior experiences, and learning styles that children bring to the classroom (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). Vygotsky spoke to the cognitive schema that children bring to the learning process facilitate the learning of new knowledge (Ormrod, 2006). If there is a disconnect between the existing schema and new knowledge, learning becomes difficult. Therefore, one might conclude that the lack of connection of African American males experiences in their learning experience, in schools can result in disconnect and lower achievement.

Even though a majority of research has highlighted low achievement in urban schools, there have been other researchers who have counter-examples to this concept. Scheurich (1998) explained that there are plenty of urban schools that have been highly successful academically that serve low-socioeconomic students of color. High achieving successful urban schools do not place blame on students or their environments, but place an emphasis on their organizational structure, school model, instructional pedagogy, interpersonal relationships, and community connection (Rogers & McLean, 1994; Scheurich, 1998; Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). A
study done by Milner (2008) in a urban, inner city, top-performing school located in the southeastern region of the United States revealed that this particular school placed emphasis on teaching strategies, use of innovative classroom practices and had teachers and administrators who allowed students to have a voice, engage in critical discourse, and immersed themselves into students’ worlds. There has been increased academic achievement in urban schools that have combined elementary and middle grade levels into one school to transition to kindergarten to eighth grade schools. The inception of public charter schools, smaller learning communities, and school models like Comer Schools have also resulted in improved achievement. Public charter schools (open to all children, do not charge tuition, do not have special entrance requirements) are unique schools of choice that are funded with public money, allowed the freedom to be more innovative to do whatever it takes to help students achieve, and run autonomously of the existing public school system (Bulkey & Fischer, 2003; Hoxby, 2004). Smaller learning communities is “the practice of organizing high schools into smaller units” basically running schools within a school that creates smaller, more learning-centered units of organization including schools and career academics (Oxley, 2005, p. 1). Comer schools is a school development program (SDP) that was created by James P. Comer and his colleagues at the Yale Child Study Center, where the focus is on a school-wide intervention to apply child and adolescent development principles. (Nobit, Molloy, & Malloy, 2001; Joyner, Ben-Avie, Comer, 2004).

**School experiences.** The schooling experiences of African American males affect their academic performance. According to Davis (2001) schools ignore many African American males’ aspirations, disrespect their ability to learn, fail to access and cultivate their many talents, and impose a restrictive range of masculine options. Various studies have revealed several factors from African American males’ experiences in schools that contribute to their academic
performance. Adolescents, especially adolescent African American males, adopt a perception towards achievement and their identities that are profoundly shaped by the school setting and their experiences in school (Noguera, 2001). The structure and culture of the school plays a major role in reinforcing and maintaining racial categories and stereotypes.

A critical factor that contributes to these students’ academic performance is the composition of teachers in schools. Over the past twenty years, in-depth research has critically examined the shortage of African American teachers in kindergarten to grade twelve schools. Alarmingly, the data revealed that African American male teachers are on the verge of extinction, constituting only one percent of the teaching force (Greenlee, 1997; Lewis, 2006). Some statistics support this claim: One in four Chicago Public Schools students is an African American male, but just one in sixteen teachers is an African American man (Meyer, 2009); African American males make up 19% of Maryland public school population but less than 5% of the teaching force (Maryland Task Force of African American Males, 2007). Even though these various studies have revealed some dire statistics, missing is the fact that not only are African American boys not seeing African American male teachers, but they are not seeing many male teachers of any race. This was supported by Keller and Manzo (2007) who found that 90% of public school teachers were European American during the 2005-2006 school year, with more than three-quarters (79%) were female—the lowest representation of males in 40 years. Keller and Manzo also revealed that the proportion of African American teachers has declined since the 2004-2005 school year from 8% to 6%.

The abundance of European American female educators teaching African American males, may lead to educational disconnect. According to Michie (2007), one major reason that many European American female teachers have a disconnect with African American students,
especially boys, comes from teachers’ resistance and refusal to accept their “White privilege” (p. 86) and adherence to their belief in meritocracy. Many European American teachers’ belief in a meritocratic society has led them to a complacent idea that racism no longer exists. According to Tatum (1992) and Sleeter (1993) many European American teachers still believe in the meritocratic myth. Ullucci (2007) explained this meritocratic myth as:

Believing that if children of color just work harder, they too could be successful. The myth of meritocracy states that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed in life and in school, providing they work hard and apply themselves. This myth supports the notion that schools are neutral places, where structural inequities do not exist and fairness is the name of the game. Teachers who support the notion of meritocracy set up a worthy/unworthy dichotomy. Because all students have equal chances to excel, students who do succeed within the system are worthy of the benefits they receive. Children who fail do so of their own accord, not because of bias in the system. The myth of meritocracy is also colorblind. Merit stresses individual student efforts while minimizing race and language based factors. As a consequence, this myth ignores inequalities associated with one’s gender, race, class and age. (p. 30)

From the explanation this myth does not allow them to understand the problems that are before African Americans, in particular African American males, and do not identify or take into consideration the race, socioeconomic, and other factors that impede on their academic achievement in schools and that they still do not have an equal level playing field.

This existence of the meritocratic myth and White privilege carries over into the classrooms when the European American teachers start their teaching career because many teacher education programs are not properly preparing their pre-service teachers for diversity in
terms of culture or class. Bakari (2003) found a difference across ethnic lines, a lack of pre-service students’ sensitivity to the curricular needs of African American learners and willingness to even to teach this population. In Bakari’s study, using a stratified sample, 415 pre-service teachers were divided into three groups: (a) pre-service students from predominantly White public institutions; (b) pre-service students from historically Black colleges and universities; and (c) pre-service students from predominately White private institutions. The willingness to teach the African American children was higher for group B than the other two groups and group C had the lowest mean score for willingness or a clear understanding of how to teach African American students. Even though the students from the Black colleges and universities had the highest percentage for willingness to teach African American students, there still was a small percentage, about 8%, who did not want to teach them. Bakari’s research suggested that the means for all groups were lower on the cultural sensitivity toward teaching African American students. Bakari revealed that (a) European American teachers do not have a strong desire to teach African Americans; and (b), the students who attended predominately White institutions did not understand the cultural, linguistic knowledge, and learning needs of African American children.

Although these aforementioned data indicate a lack of interest among teachers for positions working with African American students, a modicum of research exists that documents the success of some European American teachers and African American students. Some recent research by Bidwell (2010) and previous work by Ladson-Billings (1994) revealed that teachers who are not African American have had success with teaching African American students in Title I urban schools. Bidwell’s (2010) research followed four European American mathematics teachers (two males and two females) of African American students. The qualitative study
conducted by Bidwell revealed that these teachers were successful in teaching African American students because of the following: (a) the teachers’ upbringing by parents who raised them to be open-minded and not see color, (b) belief that the students can succeed, (c) their approach to helping students develop knowledge by scaffolding, (d) their building of strong relationships inside and outside of the classroom, (e) their connectedness with students, (f) employment of some culturally relevant pedagogy in their classroom, (g) their willingness to allow students to work together collaboratively, and (h) the fact that the teachers saw themselves as part of the community and considered the tie to the community as part of the job. The results from Bidwell’s research were similar to Ladson-Billings’ (1994) work (i.e., points b, d, and h). Bidwell’s results were also similar to Cholewa, Amatea, West-Olatunji, and Wright’s (2012) research on a successful African American teacher of African American students. Cholewa et al. (2012) documented some additional results, such as defining the class as a community, using the class funds of knowledge and culture as a foundation from which to present information, and being very transparent to students (i.e., sharing imperfections, sharing personal feelings, and being playful when appropriate) resulting in students’ academic gains. Cholewa et al. revealed that, in math, students had the highest gains on the state’s standardized test, and 56% of fifth grade students obtained scores on or above grade level. Bidwell’s results did not reveal any data about academic gains of students. It focused on information about relationships, engagement, participation, motivation, and effective discussions. A limitation of Bidwell’s and Cholewa’s et al. studies is the small number of participants and the focus on math instruction.

Extensive research has been conducted about culture and learning. The research has revealed that the culture and academic expectations of students are validated or disaffirmed through the classroom teachers’ practices. Tatum (1992), Noguera (2001), Morrell (2000), and
Gilyard (2002) revealed the same findings from their qualitative studies: Many African American boys felt that who they are is not always valued in school and that their culture is not valued or brought into instructional practices. Noguera (2001) specifically stated that schools do not associate African American boys with achievement, but associate them in stereotyped ways based on their surroundings. Schools mirror society’s beliefs, stereotypes, and preconceived notions about race and gender and that masculinity develops relative to those preconceived notions (Davis, 2003). African American adolescent males’ negative academic shift is greatly influenced by their schooling and whatever value they attach to it. Franklin (2004), explained how feelings of alienation and ambivalence toward formal education are cultivated:

What schools often provide for boys of African descent is a slowly nurtured understanding that being somebody is more directly attached to the peer culture than to the classroom. Our potential and ability are robbed by the climate in schools thoughtlessness. . . . Such attitudes cultivated among Black males by the school environment play into racially coded expectations that become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Poorly equipped schools, school environments preoccupied with behavior problems, mismatches between acquired, marketable skills and career opportunities, and the resulting awareness of our increasing marginality as young adults—all contribute to the way society makes African American men invisible and undermines their interests in learning. Many young boys of African descent fight a loss of faith, feeling that the outcome of education is not worth the humiliation (p. 94).

As a rule, children tend to live up or down to adult expectations, and it does not take very long for students to detect how much or how little is expected of them. This was supported by a study completed in New Orleans that explained how 58% of the 5,423 African American males who
were interviewed and surveyed said they believed that their teachers should push them harder. Forty-four percent said their teachers did not set high enough goals for them (Bennett, 2006). More than half of these males were in grades four through eight. Bennett explained that when it comes to expectations of African American males, many African American parents believe that stereotypes creep into many teachers’ perceptions. This excerpt from the New Orleans study puts this clearly into perspective:

Keith kept complaining to me that his teacher only wanted to talk about football, says his mother. Over time, the teacher’s continued dismissal of Keith’s real interest of reading and math, and wanting to become a lawyer upset the boy. It’s like he doesn’t want me to be smart or something, Keith told his mother unhappily. Like I should be playing sports because I am Black. . . . After a few months Keith began telling his mom that he is disinterested in school and should just become who they want me to become, which is not too much of anything. (Bennett, 2006, p. 36)

Many teachers hold fast to certain assumptions about how African American male students are supposed to behave and place limitations on their possibilities of achievement. Noguera (2001) revealed in a study conducted in a northern California school that, in response to the statement “My teachers treat me fairly.” (p. 75), only 18% of the African American boys surveyed replied yes. In response to the statement “My teachers support me and care about my success in their class.” (p. 76), only 7% replied yes. With all of these studies, both qualitative and quantitative, we can conclude that when it comes to African American boys, there is a lack of support, nurturing, or genuine care and concern from the teacher, the primary facilitator of learning in a classroom.
Another critical factor that has an impact on African American boys’ academic performance is the types of literacy practices they experience in schools. When one looks at the literacy practices in schools, they tend to resemble those most used in European American cultures and communities. Findings from research of Meier (2008) and Piestrup (1973) on language socialization and literacy practices reveal that European American adults frequently engage children in question/answer (known answer) exchanges in which the child’s anticipated response is predictable and invariant. In contrast, some individuals in African American communities support verbal challenges and interaction in verbal exchanges. The type of literacy practices that some African American children are exposed to in schools is not familiar to them (Edwards, McMillion, & Turner, 2010). In order to achieve, they have to assimilate and accommodate, but this seems to be easier for African American females than African American males. Labov (1972) emphasized this in the results of his study of language use among African American adolescent boys in Harlem, New York. His results explained how African American males did not adjust as well on questions that relied only on literal recall, but excelled on defending one’s point with “wit and logic” (p. 96). Because it is not an easy adjustment and African American males see these practices as a rejection of them and who they are as a people, underachievement begins and further widens in adolescent years (Kunjufu, 2005; Noguera, 2008).

Research shows that children who are unable to read at grade level by fourth grade face a downward spiral. Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) explained that fourth grade is a time when some students, especially male students who live in poverty, exhibit a sudden decrease in reading comprehension. According to a study conducted by Bennett (2006) of more than 105,000 students in Maryland’s Prince George’s County, where African Americans made up about 65%
of the enrollment, African American boys performed comparably to boys and girls of all races on first- and second-grade standardized math and reading tests. But by fourth grade, African American boys experienced a sharp decline in their scores. More recent national studies have shown similar findings: In 2008, fourth-grade reading scores of African American boys lagged behind those of all other groups at the same grade level, according to the NCES. Jones (2002) explained that many African American males would not be able to complete reading and writing assignments or pass tests that help them move onto higher grades or high school.

Several factors emerged in this examination of the literature on the school experiences that affect the academic performance of African American males. The factors that surfaced from the various research studies were both internal (personal) and external (structural). The literature heavily revealed that how teachers perceive African American males has an impact on whether or not their experience in school is a positive or negative one. It seems that negative ideologies surround these male students and these negative ideologies became detrimental to their experience in schools, leading to low academic performance. Repeatedly, African American males expressed and described how low expectations are set for them by their teachers. Although African American males may begin with high expectations of themselves, when the adults (teachers) who are supposed to nurture, encourage, and support them expect less of them, they tend to internalize and believe less of themselves (Davis, 2001; Noguera, 2008). How African American males are treated and perceived in schools can change or alter their self-efficacy.

**Literacy Instruction from the Twentieth century to Twenty-first Century**

In order to ameliorate the literacy achievement gap and increase achievement in minority students of low socioeconomic status, there have been various instructional models, reading approaches, philosophies adopted, and curricula reintroduced from the mid-to-latter twentieth
century through the present. Some of the most prominent literacy approaches that have been implemented are direct instruction (DISTAR), basal readers, Success for All (SFA), culturally-centered approaches (culturally responsive theory), and multiliteracy pedagogy. These various literacies models, instructional strategies, and/or philosophies range on the spectrum of behaviorist→cognitive→sociocultural theories.

**Deficient perspective.** The deficit viewpoint attributes an individual’s behaviors to cultural traits or labels human characteristics as inferior or undesirable. According to Eller (1989), the deficit theory that emerged in the 1960s suggested that children from lower socioeconomic homes are verbally deprived due to economic disadvantage, “cannot speak complete sentences, do not know the names of common objects, cannot form concepts or convey logical thought… [T]hus the deficit theory claims that children from disadvantaged populations are intellectually disadvantaged as a result of inferior linguistic development” (p. 670). There have been some reading programs that have emerged because of the deficit perspective that have been and still are being used in urban schools with large numbers of African American students and/or other minority populations (e.g., English language learners); with the most widely used being Direct Instruction (DI). Of the four assumptions that underlie the DI model, two of them support the deficit perspective: (a) learning basic skills, including logical procedures is central to intelligent behavior and should be essential to any compensatory education program and (b) disadvantaged children tend to fall behind other students in skills needed to succeed in school as they are now structured (Becker, 2001).

**Direct instruction.** Various scholars and educational commissions have conducted studies on the effects of DI on the reading achievement of urban, African American, or other minority students. The studies conducted have been longitudinal that revealed both quantitative
and qualitative findings. Both positive and negative effects of DI have been identified. Ross, et al. (2004) conducted a four-year mixed method study with students in grades two through six in the Toledo Public Schools (Ohio). Their results showed mostly negative effects of DI with African American students. Ross, et al. (2004) conducted their study in six schools that served a predominately African American, high poverty student population. The African American student population in these six schools ranged from 92% to 97%. Ross et al. shared the following results from their study: (a) schools implementing DI programs had significantly lower posttest means than expected in fourth and sixth grade; (b) in second grade, the overall DI effect size declined from 1999-2001 and fourth grade overall DI effect size was progressively larger and more negative than second grade; (c) in second grade student achievement declined from 1999-2001; (d) achievement scores were substantially below the district average in 1999 but normative in 2001; (e) in fourth grade three schools were slightly below the district average gains in 1999 and the other three schools exhibited “modest” improvement in 2000 but “moderate” decline in 2001; (f) sixth grade showed a large decline in achievement; (g) the most effective elements of DI were emphasis on phonics, the consistency of methods across classes, the 90 minutes of reading, and the overall reading work completed in the lower grades; and (h) DI’s impact on achievement was that reading and writing improved; however, comprehension skills were still weak in intermediate grades. All of the schools that were in this research study were in their first or second year of DI implementation when the study began.

Another group of researchers, Ryder, Burton, & Silberg (2006), conducted a study centered around the main question: What is the effectiveness of DI compared with more traditional non-DI reading instruction approaches? Their three-year longitudinal study took place in three Milwaukee Public Schools that had a ninety-eight percent African American student
population. Ryder, et al. used the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) to identify the effectiveness of DI on student achievement. Compared to the students who were in the traditional non-DI classrooms during grade one, DI students displayed less growth in reading achievement from year to year. Across all schools, students in grades one, two, and three who received DI scored significantly lower on their overall reading achievement than students receiving more traditional forms of reading instruction. All these students also receiving DI scored lower on measures of comprehension than the non-DI students. First graders who received DI scored a lot lower in decoding and comprehension than students who received more traditional forms of reading instruction. Ryder et al.’s results were comparable to those of Ross et al., except Ryder’s research group showed all negative impacts of DI on student achievement. Basically, the results of Ryder et al.’s three-year research concluded that DI reading instruction was not effective in raising the achievement of children in urban schools.

Other research done on DI in urban schools revealed more positive effects of DI on reading achievement. Shippen, Houchins, Stevens, and Sartor (2005) conducted a six-week study in an inner-city middle school with a 99% African American population located in the southeast part of the United States. The subjects in the study were seventh-graders who were performing two or more years behind their grade level in reading. Their data revealed after six weeks that the students showed gains in word reading efficiency, reading rate, reading accuracy, and reading fluency. The Shippen et al. study gave further insight about how DI was more effective and efficient for the stronger readers and the higher performing group of students made more gains (i.e., students reading at or above the fourth grade level progressed more rapidly than students reading at the third grade level or below). A limitation of the study was its short duration.
Shippen et al. did not mention how DI impacted students’ comprehension; their data only highlighted word recognition and fluency.

At the middle school level, students should be beyond learning to read and moving in the direction of reading to learn. Research conducted by MacIver and Kemper (2002) showed results similar to Shippen et al.’s research. MacIver and Kemper, in their four-year study in an Baltimore City public elementary school (kindergarten through sixth grade) with a majority African American population, concluded that DI had a positive impact on reading vocabulary and fluency scores, but “no compelling evidence as to significant effects of DI on reading comprehension” (p. 217). These studies determined that, in elementary or middle school, DI had positive effects on reading vocabulary and fluency, but little or no impact on comprehension for African American students. Stockard (2010) conducted research also in Baltimore City Public Schools with startling results for DI’s positive impact on comprehension. Stockard compared DI with a basal reading program (Open Court) to identify the changes in reading achievement from first to fifth grades. Direct instruction is a comprehensive school reform model, and Open Court is not. According to MacIver, et al. (2002), the creators of Open Court and DI were collaborators during the 1960s, but somehow they had a falling out and went their separate ways, which resulted in:

Open Court being a more politically palatable program as it is a toned down, softer application of the research. Direct Instruction is a more pure application of the learning research and uses techniques (such as choral responses and scripts) that closely adhere to the findings of the original and subsequent research on effective teaching strategies. (p.1) Results from Stockard’s study indicated that: (a) students who had the DI curriculum through their elementary grades had significantly greater gains than students in the basal reader
curricula (i.e., the average students in the DI schools scored at the 38\textsuperscript{th} percentile in vocabulary and the 36\textsuperscript{th} percentile in comprehension whereas the average students using Open Court scored at the 58\textsuperscript{th} percentile in vocabulary and 45\textsuperscript{th} percentile in comprehension); (b) students in DI schools had vocabulary scores in fifth grade that were higher than their scores in first grade compared to a decline of 7\% for the students receiving Open Court; (c) DI students had an average increase in comprehension of 22\% compared to only 6\% of students who received Open Court; and (d) the results suggest that the modifications and expansions to DI have been successful in promoting higher order cognitive skills (p. 232-237). In Stockard’s research, the research group used a form of DI (Reading Mastery Classic) with language instruction for thirty minutes of Language for Learning, Language for Thinking. It seems that the different results on the impact of DI on reading achievement had to do with the inclusion of an additional element of the language instruction program to DI. Various studies carried out in urban schools with a high population of African American students have revealed that DI’s strength is in increasing achievement in reading, vocabulary, oral fluency, and basic skills. On the other hand, there was no significant increase in reading comprehension with significantly weak results in intermediate grades or little evidence that support effective promotion of complex, critical, and rigorous literacy achievement.

**Basal readers.** Basal readers are heavily scripted. The stories that are chosen and included in basal readers are purposely chosen for skills embedding and practices that may seem uninteresting, not meaningful, and/or authentic. Willis (1995) refers to basal series as functional literacy. She further explains functional literacy as:
Mastery of the skills needed to read and write as measured by standardized forms of assessment. This view promotes literacy as a cognitive set of skills that are universal, culturally neutral, and equally accessible through schooling. (p. 35)

Willis (1995) discussed her African American male son’s literacy experience in elementary school. She explained how her son’s interests in literacy started to deteriorate as he went through elementary school. In Willis’ (1995) specific experience of her son’s second grade experience with basal readers, she argued that the basal readers “ensured skills needed to be a successful reader were covered, included universal themes and contained illustrations of various ethnic groups but made little reference to the culture of the people” (p. 41).

Willis’ (1995) description of her son’s school literacy experiences are very similar to the results of other researchers that describe African American males school literacy experiences that “have not addressed his cultural ways of knowing, experiences, language, and voice” (p.43). In a qualitative study using observations and interviews, Tatum (2006) found that African American males really detested the reading materials in school because they felt that they did not represent them or their lives. Tatum’s study was conducted in only two locations, Chicago, IL and Baltimore, MD; and, he used purposeful sampling with a small population. Tatum specifically chose African American males who were reluctant readers and who were reading at least two grades below grade level. In a study executed by Davis (2001), during an interview a sixth grade African American male said:

I don’t live in Little Miss Riding’s Hood and she would be scared or just wouldn’t come in my hood, so why in elementary school did I have to read it and now even in middle school why am I still having to read things that do not resemble me or my environment. (p. 148)
Brozo (2006) undertook a study in two eighth grade classrooms that revealed that boys, in particular African American boys, were bored and did not like attending their English/Language Arts classes. Interviews with 48 students revealed that 93% of the African American boys reported that the texts from the basal readers used in the class were not engaging to them and they could not make connections with the texts; 86% felt that the reading and writing activity was not related to their everyday life experiences, and 99% felt that “most of the time they could not fully understand or comprehend the text” (p. 85-88).

The impact of basal readers is not limited to engagement and participation. Some research revealed findings on comprehension and achievement. Skindrud and Gerston (2006) completed a two-year quasi-experimental design where they evaluated basal readers use as a means to improve reading achievement in a large urban school district. Their research took place in 12, Title I, kindergarten-through-sixth-grade schools with at least 95% African American population. The results from Skindrud and Gerston’s research revealed that the Open Court basal reading program was an effective means of improving reading achievement in grades kindergarten to second; but, beginning in grade three and moving up in the intermediate elementary grades, there were minimal effects on improvement in reading achievement.

The research conducted by Menon and Hiebert (2008) had similar results as Skindrud and Gerston’s (2006) research, where both used quasi-experimental research methods. Menton and Hiebert conducted their research in an inner city, high poverty, kindergarten-through-grade-five school in the Midwest with 75 fifth graders, all of whom were African American. Menton and Hiebert’s data revealed that the experimental groups in the literature-based basal anthology did not make comprehension gains, but made gains in reading words and fluency. Skindrud and Gerston and Menton and Herbert’s research, being quasi-experimental, lacked internal validity.
Each study would have benefitted from a qualitative component, such as interviewing the students to come to an understanding about why the reading achievement decreased.

**Culturally responsive literacy.** Research on culturally relevant teaching has shown positive effects on African Americans’, particularly African American males, reading achievement, participation, and engagement. Ladson-Billings (1992) conducted a two-year ethnographic study of eight teachers and their teaching of language literacy. In her study, Ladson-Billings describes classroom experiences of teachers who teach culturally relevant pedagogy. One teacher in this study had her lessons and instruction around a book entitled *Charlie Pippen*, a story about an 11-year old African American girl “whose relationship with her Vietnam war veteran father is strained” (p. 315). During Ladson-Billings’ observations, it was determined that this teacher used a whole language or literature-based approach to teaching with noticeable engagement and participation of the African American males in the classroom. The nine African American males in this classroom in previous years had been identified and known as the trouble makers. This year, however, in this classroom they had evolved as the “intellectual leaders” in the classroom (p. 315). Ladson-Billings explained how this teacher promoted student discussion and the sharing of ideas, confronted issues of race and culture, legitimated African American culture, and included African American texts that students could relate to into her instruction.

One of the main conclusions in Ladson-Billings study was that culturally relevant literacy instruction actively engaged African American males. They participated in class and dominated classroom discussions. In addition, both male and female African American students in the eight classrooms achieved by performing at higher levels in reading and writing on standardized state tests than their other district counterparts. Although the students in Ladson-Billings’ study
achieved, when compared to students in middle class communities, they still lagged behind. However, more of these students in the particular teachers’ classrooms were at or above grade level on standardized tests. Not all of the teachers in Ladson-Billings research were African American. As a result, one can conclude that any teacher can be effective at teaching African American students if their pedagogy is rooted in the students’ cultural practices. Teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy view knowledge critically, take student diversity and individual differences into account, and have “conceptions of self and others, manner in which social relations are structured, and conceptions on knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.478).

Ladson-Billings research that she conducted had all female teacher participants. Consequently, one might conclude that pedagogical practices rather than race, ethnicity, and/or gender was of greater importance.

Alfred Tatum has conducted some research centered around exposing and instructing African American adolescent males with culturally relevant texts. In an eight-month study, Tatum (2000) used culturally relevant texts in an eighth grade class in a school in Chicago. Tatum’s results described how African American males, who were in a low-level reading class, were engaged, became less resistant to literacy instruction, and developed deeper “processing strategies through reading, writing, questioning, and discussing” (p. 63). From Tyson’s (1999) research it was found that the adolescent African American males she worked with enjoyed and became more engaged with books that focused on socially significant events, prominent to or about their culture, and that encouraged the boys to draw upon their experiences to respond to texts. Tatum (2009) echoed the need to use culturally relevant texts as “bridge[s] of opportunity” when he argued for the need to anchor texts that “pay attention to [young Black men’s] multiple identities—academic, cultural, economic, gendered, personal, and social” (p. 14). Tyson’s
research had similar findings to Tatum’s work—specifically the use of culturally relevant texts had positive impacts on African American males’ literacy achievement. Both Tyson and Tatum determined that culturally relevant texts and/or texts about significant events that males could relate or connect to impacted enjoyment, engagement, processing of texts, and effective questioning and discussions. The major limitations of their research was that the data did not reveal anything about test performance, which would have been an indicator of whether culturally relevant literature affected academic performance.

**Twenty-first century literacy instruction.** Adolescent males today are interested in and exposed to more than just printed text and/or canonical texts. Popular culture and technology are also key foci. Jenkins (2006), in a report for the MacArthur Foundation, explained that the regular curriculum has to make use of new literacies, including multiple forms of texts (print, visual, and digital), that can be read critically for multiple purposes in a variety of contexts. The popular culture that has been so intriguing to African American males is music and film. The research and work of David Kirkland and Ernest Morrell has been fascinating in the use of hip-hop and film in the English/Language Arts classrooms of urban adolescent students. Both Kirkland and Morrell used hip-hop and film alongside traditional canonical literature. Hip-hop and film are used as a bridge to help students who are traditionally alienated by the canonical texts from the standard curriculum to conquer and gain critical understanding of them (Morrell, 2000). Kirkland (2006), in his study that included hip-hop in a English/Language Arts curriculum, explained in the findings that the use of popular culture (hip-hop) in the classroom brought about agency and power with African American males because this was a culture that was created by them and it that is so engrained in their culture, even though it has expanded over to all races and cultures. Incorporation of hip-hop brings in elements of social action. Hip-hop
texts can be discussed that can lead to thoughtful analysis, which could translate into expository writing, the production of poetic texts, and/or a commitment to social action for community empowerment (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Also, hip-hop can be used to scaffold literary terms and concepts, promote writing, and critical dialogue.

Kirkland (2006) explained that the use of hip-hop in his unit “The Classroom, the Community, and the World” enabled students in a secondary English/Language arts classroom to demonstrate their understanding in writing and “to apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts” (p.138). In their research, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) used films, such as “Scarface” and “The Godfather” trilogy which resulted in enabling a bridge to teaching literacy and “linking the seemingly vast span between the streets and the words of academics,” extended analysis of canonical texts, allowed critical discussions among students, and increased writing (p. 301). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) and Fisher (2007) saw increased participation in literacy events, interpretations between canonical poems and popular culture, writing, critical discussions engagement of urban students with the use of poetry and spoken word. The work of Mahiri (1998) also revealed that the use of popular culture in the English/Language Arts curriculum enabled students to make connections that are relevant and needed to interpret and understand the types of typical literacies required/used in schools. From the research, popular culture (i.e., hip-hop, media literacy, film and spoken word) is a powerful tool in literacy because it helps to increase the engagement and achievement in both reading and writing. This body of research done was conducted primarily with high school students with some undertaken by Fisher, Morrell, and Duncan-Andrade in afterschool programs or during summer programs. Very little of the research was situated in classrooms where the primary focus
was on African American males. Another important aspect to point out about the research of incorporation of hip-hop and/or popular culture is that none of the data revealed anything about improving test scores or increases in academic achievement.

**Summary.** The research that has been conducted that is focused on adolescent African American males and their literacy acquisition and development has been minimal, but has now slowly increased in the past couple of years. There has been substantial research completed on the elementary and secondary levels in regards to marginalized students of color, but minimal research has been done on the middle school level (grades six through eight). Researchers such as Keith Gilyard, David Kirkland, Ernest Morrell, and Alfred Tatum have made significant impact on research about adolescent African American males’ literacy acquisition and development. Tatum’s, Morrell’s, Kirkland’s, and others’ research pinpoint how literacy instruction has to be planned in order for improvement in the educational, social, and economic situations of African American males. The research reveals that educators can no longer just teach only in the realms of academic literacy, but must be able to expand the definition of literacy in their pedagogical practices in order to engage and empower adolescent African American males. Given the low literacy achievement of students on the middle school level, and particularly African American males, more research needs to be conducted on what is happening in the classrooms that engages and disengages these students and what literacy practices increase their achievement.

My research will provide insights and extend our understanding of the experiences of African American males in classrooms as literacy events unfold. This research will describe what teachers’ literacy beliefs are in a 21st century English/Language Arts classroom and how their beliefs impact their literacy instruction. Although teachers plan lessons, what they plan may not
always unfold or turn out how they planned, my hope is that this research will give in-depth accounts and descriptions of how the African American males engaged in, responded to, and interacted with the literacy events that unfolded in the classroom. With this research, situated in a classroom, I hoped to acquire deeper insights about how African American males respond and react to literacy events as they unfold in the classroom.
Chapter 3

Methodology

No ethnographer wants or can ever be expected to take responsibility for providing the full and complete account of some group of people, such a goal is unattainable. We do well to capture some of the relevant detail and do even better when we can capture some of the more elusive spirit of those of whom we study. (Wolcott, 1999, p.29)

Introduction

As Wolcott suggests, the research reported is not an exhaustive examination of literacy among African American males. However, it is a necessary beginning. African American males are underperforming, in part, because of the type of literacy practices and the narrowness of the definition of literacy in schools (Gilyard, 1991; Kirkland, 2008; Morrell, 2000; Tatum, 2005). This microethnographic study examined how teacher beliefs about literacy impact their instruction and how their instruction and teaching style impact African American males’ experiences in an English/Language Arts classroom. Research about the impact of teachers’ belief and the implementation of planned lessons and the intersection of these on the experiences of African American males has not yielded significant insights from researchers. Using sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework, I uncovered how beliefs about literacy are linked to instructional practices and how the instructional practices impact the participation and engagement of African American males.

Qualitative Research Design

Researchers use qualitative research methods to develop studies that are “concerned with understanding the uniqueness and particulars of human experiences” by exploring a topic in
depth in an unstructured way in order to acquire a rich understanding (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Shaw, 2000, p. 269). Qualitative research is unique because it provides a detailed account of participants’ experiences in the conditions in which their experiences occur. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), five main features characterize qualitative research (a) naturalistic, where the setting is the direct source of data, and the researcher is the instrument for the data collection; (b) the data are descriptive, in that they are completed in words or verbal descriptions rather than numbers; (c) researchers are equally concerned with the process as with the outcomes or products; (d) data are analyzed inductively; and (e) researchers are concerned with meaning, what people are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences, and how they structure the social world within their context. For this study, I used qualitative inquiry methods because this approach allowed me to obtain the detailed contextual information needed to attain an understanding of how teacher beliefs impact their instruction and the experiences of adolescent African American males in an eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom.

**Restatement of the Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research study was to explore how literacy instruction is organized for, taught, and experienced by adolescent African American males in an eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom in an urban inner-city kindergarten through eighth grade school. My aim was to acquire an understanding of: (a) how the teachers’ beliefs and philosophy of literacy instruction impact their planning and type of instruction that is delivered, (b) how the planned lessons unfold in the classroom, and (c) and the experiences that adolescent African American males have as literacy events are enacted in the classroom. I focused on time spent on literacy events, the perception of literacy and literacy instruction, nature of discussions, and participation in the literacy events. This study explored and obtained an understanding of how
literacy instruction in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century is planned, enacted, and experienced by a sampling of African American males in an urban school district.

**Formulation and Restatement of the Research Questions**

Because qualitative research is inductive, the researcher has to demonstrate flexibility beginning with question formulation with an understanding that, once in the field, she may have to revise the questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I entered the site with general questions that focused on how multiliteracy pedagogy is organized for, taught, and experienced by adolescent African American males. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this was essential because it gave focus and organization to my data collection. After about the first month in this classroom, I noticed that the teachers were not incorporating enough mulitiliteracy pedagogies to make this the main focus of my dissertation. The New London Group (1996) (and its members, such as Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis, Cope, & Fehring, 2002) described multiliteracy pedagogy as pedagogy moving from different media, allowance of multiple avenues, or expanded forms of literacy practices that included imaginative or cognitive integration of text-based and multimedia practices. As I was collecting my data, I noticed that different curricular, instructional, and assessment strategies were emerging, so my research questions had to reflect those changes. As I was “hanging loose, spending time in the classroom, seeing what was going on, and hearing what people were saying” during the observations in this classroom, my questions had to change in order to reflect what was going on around me (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 54). Over time, I reassessed the initial questions, reflected on their relevance, and reformated them to reflect my observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). From my reflections and reassessment, the following questions were formulated and they formed the basis of my study:
1. What are the ways that the literacy events are enacted in an English/Language Arts classroom?
   a. How do the teachers’ belief and philosophy of literacy instruction impact their teaching strategies and/or styles?
   b. How do the teachers perceive and/or explain 21st century literacy instruction?
   c. How do the teachers’ planned lessons become enacted and unfold in the classroom?

2. How do adolescent African American males respond to and engage in the literacy events within the English/Language Arts classroom?
   a. What are African American males’ perceptions of literacy?
   b. What are the ways that African American males participate in the literacy events in the classroom?
   c. What factors impact African American males’ participation in the literacy events in the classroom?

**Ethnographic Research**

According to Watson-Gegeo (1998), ethnography is under the umbrella of qualitative research. Ethnography is described by Creswell (2003) as “when the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting primarily observational data” (p.14). My study is a specific type of ethnography labeled microethnography because I went into a single setting to examine a more specific group (African American males) within a larger group (Gay, Mills, & Airasion (2009); Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Microethnography is a technique within the qualitative research paradigm that focuses on the face-to-face interactions of participants within the (school) setting (Haas, 1994). For this study,
microethnography was used utilizing qualitative data gathering techniques. Principle elements of microethnography are (a) participant observation, (b) open-ended interviewing, and (c) analysis (Haas, 1994). In doing this research, I was interested in studying the learning and educational process in a cultural context (the classroom). Microethnographic studies include examination of (a) what is occurring, (b) how it is occurring, (c) how the participants perceive the event(s), and (d) what social and academic learning takes place (Kamil, Langer, & Shanahan, 1985). A microethnography can report on the culture of a single classroom, a single group of learners, and even a single learning event (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Kamil, Langer, & Shanahan, 1985; Green & Wallat, 1981). Microethnography fit my study well because I examined what was happening in one classroom with a small group of African American males and two teachers.

According to Heath and Street (2008) ethnography is a theory-building enterprise constructed through detailed and systematic observing, recording, and analyzing of human behavior in specific spaces and interactions. Ethnography, in the study of language and literacy, involves close observation, figuring out definitions, constant learning, reflecting, assessing, and making use of various means and modes at various stages of learning. Using the technique of ethnographic research, I entered my selected site (field) with a sense of curiosity wanting to know “what is happening in the site that I chose” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 31). I entered the lives of the persons being studied as fully and naturally as possible, not just to gain a description of events and actions that the participants create, react to, assess, and learn within the site, but also for history and explanations informed by and leading to theories. The specific type of ethnographic research that I conducted was an ethnographic case study because I focused on describing a specific case and the activities undertaken by a group, and the patterns of behavior that happen over a period of time (Gay et al., 2009). One of my goals for this study was to enter
into the classroom/school lives of the African American male students and their teachers’ lives as fully and naturally as possible to find a greater understanding of how literacy is defined, planned for, taught, and experienced by these particular students over a period of five-months. I went directly to the sources (a) the students, (b) teachers, and (c) the curriculum. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), the classroom offers rich material for observation in an environment where I am most comfortable being: (a) surrounded by children, (b) seeing what they do, (c) hearing what their teachers say and do, and (d) experiencing the world around them. This study fits an ethnographic study because I went into this classroom placing an emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomena (Gay et al., 2009).

As an ethnographic researcher, I tried to make sense of the local action and knowledge of a culture for which limited knowledge exists. For this particular research study, culture was seen as the lived experiences of the participants. Culture is constructed as a dynamic, interactional, and emergent practice(s) where its participants actively contribute, anticipate, and produce rather than passively obey and follow a set of rules and regulations (Banks & McGee, 2009). This study, in other words, was situated within the classroom culture. According to Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005) culture is viewed as lived experiences from which funds of knowledge emerge and serve as dynamic, emergent, and interactional. Within this research, culture was viewed as the practices of specific sets of people interacting within local communities of practice, which, for this study, is the classroom. As a researcher, I hold the point of view that African American males are active agents who learn, participate, and negotiate in a classroom environment.

**How research questions are qualitative.** The research questions are suited for an ethnographic study because they are structured in a manner reflective of qualitative research
technique. Qualitative inquiry “is a systematic process of describing, analyzing, and interpreting insights discovered in everyday life” (Wolcott, 1994, p.16). The questions that were created for this research allowed me to observe empirically, a phenomenon and its characteristics. The first question elicits an understanding of the teachers’ beliefs about literacy, how they engage in planning and what type of literacy instruction takes place in the classroom, and how what they planned actually plays out in the classroom. The second question gains an understanding of what literacy is to adolescent African American males and their experiences of the literacy events that take place in an English/Language Arts classroom. According to Mehan (1982) the key question asked in an ethnographic study are how is the researcher seeking a description of a particular classroom culture. The research questions being asked required that I look within the English/Language Arts classroom (local community) as the participants interacted, responded, and engaged in literacy events. The local community in the study was an eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom, which consisted of local participants: African American males and the teachers (one African American and one European American). Also, the questions used in this study were not intended to establish relationships between variables (as in experimental studies), but rather to determine/ascertain what some phenomenon means as it is socially enacted within a particular case (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I tried to ascertain and gain an understanding of how literacy instruction is organized for, taught, and experienced by adolescent African American males (phenomenon) in an eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom.

In addition to these questions, I was able to obtain descriptive data from the African American males and the teachers through their planning of lessons, discussions, interactions, and participation in the literacy events within the classroom. Janesick (1994) explains qualitative design as focusing on understanding a given social setting, not necessarily on making predictions
about the setting. From this, one can see that the particular questions are ethnographic questions because they allowed me to examine the culture of this classroom, gain an understanding of how literacy is perceived by both the teachers and African American males, determine how literacy instruction is developed, and document the experiences of these students in the literacy events that occurred in the classroom.

Another reason why the questions fit a ethnographic qualitative study is because they enabled me to go in a naturalistic setting, and, only by going into a naturalistic setting was I able to acquire a full description of how and what the teachers teach, how their planned lessons unfolded, and how the adolescent African American males participate and engage in the literacy events that occurred in the classroom. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) posit that a naturalistic setting is one of the five features (naturalistic, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive, and meaning) that characterize qualitative research. For this study, I went into the classroom, which was a natural ongoing setting, to observe the students who share a culturally gendered identity (African American males) engage in and respond to the literacy events as well as acquire an understanding of how the teachers’ beliefs impacted how and what they teach. This is considered naturalistic because I entered the world of the participants as it exists and obtained data without any deliberate intervention to alter the setting. The questions allowed me to focus attention on what was happening and the experiences of the participants during literacy events. Also, the framing of the questions allowed me to attempt “to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). This study, like other ethnographic research, had a naturalistic approach to secure an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon of how literacy instruction is organized for, taught, and experienced by adolescent African American males in an eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom. The questions
enabled me to take on a naturalistic approach to the subject matter and not make predictions about how literacy is defined by participants, how beliefs impact instruction, or how literacy instruction is planned for and experienced by African American males but to observe, examine, and gain an understanding. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) “qualitative research starts with questions and results in learning” (p. 13).

**Research Site**

Victory Elementary/Middle School is a prekindergarten through eighth grade, public, charter school located in a large urban city in a Mid-Atlantic state in the Northeastern part of the United States. Victory is within an urban school district in the United States that has had a huge expansion and has pushed for the kindergarten through eighth grade model since the early 1990s (Bowie, 2012; West, 2012). The particular Mid-Atlantic school district that Victory is in has, in the past decade, expanded their reliance on the kindergarten through eighth grade model for various reasons: (a) student in grades six through eight that attend kindergarten through eighth grade schools perform better than students in traditional middle schools, (b) the move to middle school caused a substantial drop in student test scores the first year in which the transition from elementary school to the traditional middle school took place, (c) the incurred additional costs with the kindergarten through eighth grade model has been justified in terms of the improved academic outcomes, and (d) kindergarten through eighth grade schools provide smaller more nurturing environments and have encouraged sustained parent involvement (Hardiman, 2006; Bowie, 2012). The majority of this particular school districts kindergarten-through-eighth-grade schools are “extended elementary schools in which the same population of students remain in the school through the eighth grade” (Hardiman, 2006).
Victory has a total enrollment of 430 students (195 males and 235 females), which is ninety-nine percent African American and one percent Caucasian Americans (non-Hispanic). Housed at this school are two, city-wide, special education programs, and a preschool. This school receives Title I school-wide services because 96% of the students are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. The staff at Victory consists of the following: (a) administration—executive director, principal, and dean of student support; (b) three instructional support teachers—two for literacy (prekindergarten to third grade and fourth to eighth grade) and one for mathematics; (c) twenty-five classroom teachers; (d) two self-contained special educators and two special education resource teachers; (e) one parent liaison; (f) one guidance counselor; (g) one global classroom teacher; (h) a computer lab teacher/test coordinator; (i) eight resource teachers—two art teachers, two vocal music teachers, librarian, Spanish teacher, two physical education teachers; (j) eight instructional assistants; (k) a speech therapist; (l) a social worker; (m) a school psychologist; (n) a school nurse and a nurse assistant; (o) two office assistants; (p) an attendance monitor; and (q) a school accountant. It is not common for a school with a small population like Victory Elementary to have so many staff members, but the school is a public charter school that is also operated by another institution besides the school district. Victory receives additions funds and supports from that institution. The additional funds and resources Victory received were used to increase support staff, to support teachers’ base salaries, provide additional professional development, and purchase additional programs and resources for the students and staff (F. Kober, personal communication, August 16, 2010 & Interview, 8/20/2010).

The majority of the students at Victory are students who live within the neighborhood in which the school is located. This school is located in a high-poverty and crime stricken neighborhood. The neighborhood has a high population of families on state-funded public
assistance and approximately 30% of students live in single-parent households or live with extended family members such as grandparents (Ames et al., 2011). The median household yearly income of occupants in this neighborhood is $30,078.00. There are only 7% of children in this neighborhood who live with parents that are married and 26% are in households headed by single mothers (Ames, et al., 2011). Twenty-one percent of the children in this neighborhood are living in poverty (Ames, et al., 2011). The educational attainment of the adults in this neighborhood is (a) 46% have less than high school, (b) 30% have a high school diploma or equivalent, (c) 8% have less than one year of college, (d) 3% have one or more years of college, (e) 5% have bachelor’s degrees, and (f) 6% have master’s degrees (Ames, et al., 2011).

In January 1996, Victory, which was then a prekindergarten to fifth grade school, was identified as reconstitution eligible due to low achievement levels and attendance rates (Lewis, et al., 2006). Victory had less than ten percent of students from each grade level passing the state assessment (Interview, August 20, 2010). The school also had the third lowest reading and math scores in the entire state. DuBois State University, an Historically Black University (HBCU) that is located less than one mile from Victory, submitted a proposal to the school district to run and operate this low performing public school. The university’s mission for this low-performing school was to remake it in a manner that placed emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills, revamp organizational and instructional structure, and provide on-going pedagogical training for staff (“Our History,” 2011). When the university began operating this school in 1998, it was one of the lowest performing prekindergarten through fifth grade schools in the city (Lewis et al., 2006). Under the operation of the university the school expanded to a prekindergarten to eighth grade school in June 2006 and was removed from the state’s reconstitution eligible list where they have not returned since (Interview, August 20, 2010).
Victory Elementary/Middle School has met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) every year since 2003 (“The Utilization of Best Practices”, 2009). According to the Maryland Public Charter School Annual Report (2011), Victory scores are as follows: percentage of students proficient and/or advanced in reading 2008-85%, 2009-95%, 2010-94%, 2011-81% and in math 2008-77%, 2009-81%, 2010-87%, 2011-80%.

The spring before DuBois State University began operating the school, their College of Education completed an intensive search for administrators who would reorganize the school and hire teaching staff (F. Kober, personal communication, August 16, 2010). According to Mr. Barnes, a twelve-year veteran principal from the school district who remained the principal at Victory until 2008 and then became the executive director of Victory where she is the liaison between the school and the university, a position that she still holds (D. Barnes, personal communication, August 21, 2010). Before that principal became the executive director of the school, she hired an assistant principal who was trained under her for a year to become the principal beginning the 2008-09 school year (F. Kober, personal communication, August 16, 2010). That person remains the principal now. When the University first began operating Victory in 1998, the University’s College of Education professors were heavily involved in the curriculum, instruction, and structure of the school (D. Barnes and F. Koper, personal communication, August 28, 2010). The university faculty conducted monthly professional developments (Mrs. Kayhill, personal communication, September 3, 2012). According to Dr. F. Kober, Dubois State University College of Education professor and University liaison to Victory, classes were offered free to the staff on the school’s premises, and they were involved in the evaluation of the teachers (personal communication August 16, 2010). After the 2007-2008 school year, the “University felt that Victory was stable enough, had effective leadership, and
had developed teacher leaders within the school that they stopped being as hands-on and
directive with their supervision” (F. Kober, personal communication, August 16, 2010). Now the
university takes on more of a collaborative style of supervision. The University still “provides
resources—additional funding for school and staff, free classes to the staff, grant writing
opportunities and support—and houses Victory’s pre-kindergarten classes on their campus but is
not so involved with the daily operation or curriculum and instructional aspects” (Mrs. Kayhill,
interview, August 21, 2010).

I chose to conduct my research at Victory Elementary/Middle School for various reasons.
I had known the principal for ten years and was familiar with the location and demographics of
the school. This is a unique school because it was the first public school in the state to be
managed by a university (“Our History,” 2011). The school has made tremendous gains since the
university has been operating it (F. Kober, personal communication, August 16, 2010). For
example, the school is now in the top ten percent of schools within their school district, has
experienced dramatic improvements in its reading and math scores by topping the city and state
average for each grade level (e.g., 2009 sixth grade reading scores 97.7%, eighth grade reading
scores 97.4%), and the attendance rates are up from seventy-six percent to ninety-five percent

These achievements and conditions piqued my interests as a researcher and prompted me
to acquire an understanding of what was happening in this school, and the type of culture created
for the students that motivated their attendance and resulted in successful students. What was
happening in this school that changed it from a failing school to a school in which students
excelled, even beyond the standards set by the district and state sparked my interest enough for
me to conduct my research at Victory (“The Utilization of Best Practices,” 2009). Another
reason that this site was chosen was because of the school’s large population of African American students. With such a large population of African American students, I knew that it would not be difficult to obtain the particular participants needed for the study relative to race and gender. Because the purpose of the study was to answer questions about adolescent African American male students, I purposely chose to complete the research at a predominately African American school in an urban area.

**Gaining access to site.** Getting permission to conduct research in public schools requires that a researcher go through various gatekeepers. I knew that the most difficult gatekeeper would be the school district; so, I began investigating how to gain their permission first. Once I went to the school district’s website (www.baltimorecityschools.org), I discovered that in order to gain permission from the school district, I had to submit an external research application packet to their Division of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability. I had to complete an application form, include my research proposal, and a copy of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter for my research. Because I knew that some form of permission from the school district or the actual school was needed in order to obtain IRB approval, I decided to seek approval from the school first while I simultaneously submitted my application for IRB approval.

My 10-year friendship with the principal, Mr. Barnes, of Victory Elementary/Middle School gave me a little leverage in the beginning stages of gaining access into the site. I first contacted Mr. Barnes over the phone to inform him of my interest in conducting my research at his school and sent him, via email, my research purpose and questions. Mr. Barnes quickly got back in contact with me, in about a week, granting me permission to conduct my research at Victory. He also informed me that he spoke with the executive director of the school and she had no problem with me conducting my research there. With permission from Victory’s
administration and a consent letter granting me approval to conduct research at the school, I
received authorization from my university’s IRB committee to conduct my research.

Once I received the authorization from my university’s IRB, I then proceeded to gain
permission from the school district. I submitted the complete external research application packet
to the school district’s Division of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability on
April 2, 2010. I received an email in May 2010 from an individual in the Division of Research,
Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability requesting that I contact them because some
questions were raised about my research. During a conversation on May 15, 2010 with a member
from the Division of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability I had to answer
specific questions about why I wanted to conduct this research; why I wanted to conduct it in
their district; if I had any particular school in mind to conduct my research; and if so, did I have
the school administrator’s permission; and how my research would benefit their district. After
two months had passed between the time I applied to conduct research in the district and had two
communications with the Division of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability, I
finally received approval from the school district on June 8, 2010. Basically, I began the process
of gaining access to the site in January 2010 and in June 2010 access was finally granted. It was
at that time that I was able to “turn to details of official data collection” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005,
p. 62).

Participants

Student participants. This study examined eighth grade, African American, male
students in an urban prekindergarten through eighth grade public charter school during their
English/Language Arts class. Eighth grade students were chosen because research reveals that
this is one of the grade levels at which African American males are disengaged in literacy
practices, and NAEP data show that these students consistently are not doing well on reading comprehension assessments (NAEP, 2009). As African American males proceed through the elementary grades, their reading proficiency continues to fall. Holzman (2004) and Wheat (1997) discuss how, when African American males make the transition to middle school grade levels (and continue through high school), their proficiency in reading takes a tremendous drop and the literacy gap widens even more. It is estimated that 70% of African American males in eighth grade nationwide are not proficient in reading (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). The 2008 National Alliance of Black Educators Policy Institute reported these statistics: By the age of thirteen, 54% of African American males are one or more years below grade level in reading compared to 33% of African American females, 30% of European American males, and 22% of European American females. In 2009 NAEP reported that only 47% of eighth grade African American males scored at or above basic level in reading compared to 71% of European American males (NAEP, 2009). Another critical reason that this particular population was chosen is that Gallagher (2009), in *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*, revealed that the eighth grade literacy achievement gap between the poor and non-poor has remained unchanged since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Eighth Grade Gap Between Poor and Nonpoor*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>23 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>24 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>23 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>24 points</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In addition, Tatum (2005) explains that data from NAEP indicate a correlation between low levels of reading achievement and socioeconomic status. Tatum goes further and states that poor students in grades four, eight, and twelve, especially African American males, are underperforming in reading when compared to students who are not poor. Most research and statistics suggest that adolescent African American males lack acceptable levels of achievement in literacy. I wanted to determine the type of instruction and literacy activities that prompt engagement among youth and that result in achievement.

Victory had only two 8th grade classes in their school. I had the choice to select in which class to conduct my research. One 8th grade class had a large number of special education students with individual education plans (IEP) and the other eighth grade class had more of a variety of ability levels with only three special education students with IEPs (with only one of the three being an African American male). I decided to choose the class that had the various academic levels because I wanted to have a study that included a heterogeneous group of students. The class in which I choose to conduct my research consisted of a total of 23 students: 13 females and 10 males. This class was primarily African American except for one European American male. I focused on five particular students because it was difficult to pay attention to all of the African American male students in the class.

The focal students were chosen carefully after preliminary observations (from what Dyson and Genishi, 2005 refer to as “casing the joint”, p. 19), review of formal testing data, and discussions with the teachers. The focal students were not a homogenous group, but were on different reading ability levels (on, above, and below) and were students who had high and low interests levels in reading. Having a heterogeneous group of focal students allowed me to discern different ability and interest levels of African American males participating in the literacy events.
I used purposeful sampling to select my participants. Purposeful sampling allowed me to focus on selecting participants who would provide rich information and would better inform me regarding the current focus of the investigation (Krathwhol, 2009; Patton, 2002). The use of purposeful sampling in this study allowed me to generalize to the specific case, which is a community of learners (African American males and teachers) in a classroom.

I began the observations on the first day of school, August 30, 2010. After about the third week, September 20, 2012, of observations and interviews with the teachers, I chose eight students as my focal students out of the total number of 10 male students in the class. One student was not considered because he was a European American male and did not fit the participant criteria for the study; and, a second student was consistently late or absent and was excluded as a result of the attendance pattern. Out of the eight students that I gave the assent and consent letters to, five returned them. Time limitations for data collections caused me to move forward with the five students who returned the consent forms. The five focal students that participated were a diverse group, which I believed would give me a wealth of data for my research.

**Teacher participants.** When I first informed Mr. Barnes about my interest in conducting my research at his school (2009-2010 school year) he introduced me to the seventh/eighth grade English/Language arts teacher with whom I would conduct my research in his/her classroom. Mr. Barnes informed me at the beginning of August 2010 that the previous seventh/eighth grade English/Language Arts teacher whom I had met, who I thought would participate in my research, and in whose classroom I had planned to conduct my research, had been promoted to a position outside of the classroom as an instructional resource teacher. The administration restructured some teacher assignments for the 2010-2011 school year. Two teachers were assigned to co-
teach for the seventh and eighth grade English/Language Arts classes. I met both teachers during
the week teachers reported for professional staff development (week of August 26, 2010). Mr.
Barnes had informed both teachers about me conducting research and both teachers verbally
consented to have me in their classroom. When I met both of them, I introduced myself and told
them about my research. They both consented formally to participate in my study.

**Researcher Role**

The role that I took on as a researcher was that of a participant-observer. In this role, I
attempted to reproduce, in a complex manner, the actual experience, actions, and thoughts of the
teachers and the students. Informing my perceptions was my familiarity with school settings and
the act of teaching. Also, my researcher role can be explained as what Dyson and Genishi (2005)
identify as a researcher in a study having “overlapping identities” (p. 57). I had taught for six
years as an elementary teacher and for one year as a reading specialist/department chair at a high
school. All seven of my years as an educator have been in urban schools with a predominately
African American population. The elementary and secondary students that I taught were the
same culturally, socially, and academically as the population of the participants in the study. For
five out of the six years in my teaching career, I was a classroom teacher in the same school
district in which this research was conducted. Although I acquired teaching experience in urban
schools with African American students, I have had no experience with the middle school level
grades (six to eight) or with co-teaching. Both the combination of knowledge and lack of other
kinds of knowledge about students, teaching, and learning allowed me to “make the familiar, at
first strange, and then familiar again” (Spindler & Spindler, 1982, p. 76).

To the students, I assumed the role of an attentive adult friend on the participant-observer
continuum (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I took on the role as an adult friend to the students because
I wanted the students to talk and discuss things openly in front of me. I wanted them to know that I would not let them harm others or would only correct them so that they would not get in trouble with their teachers. Only when the students invited me to participate in the activities in the class did I participate. I did this so I would not come off as intrusive; I wanted the boys to invite me into their world as their friend.

Another essential reason that I took on the researcher role as a participant-observer was not to place or bring in any of my influences, ideas, or suggestions into the classroom. Although I am not male, I am an African American educator who has taught in inner-city urban schools. Therefore, I have some insights and experiences with the population. I wanted to observe so that I did not seem to the teachers as an expert, trying to tell them how to do their job, or become critical and make them feel uncomfortable in their own environment. In turn, by taking on this researcher role, the teachers performed naturally, and were open and welcoming to me. With this role I was not in the site to be judgmental or criticize, but to observe and to gain an understanding of what was occurring in the classroom.

**Data Collection**

Data collection commenced in two phases. Phase one (casing the joint) was completed in one month, August 30 through September 30, 2010, during which time I gained an understanding of the kinds of literacy events (how they unfolded and their purpose), how reading was conducted, how discussions were structured (purpose and nature of discussions), and reviewed planned curriculum. Phase two was completed during the last four months of the research study (October 1, 2010 through February 1, 2011). During this phase, focused observations were completed, artifacts were collected, and interviews were conducted.
In order to collect in-depth data and complete thick-rich descriptions, my primary data sources were the districts’ Scope and Sequence (official curriculum) (see Appendix A), lesson plans, student work, observer’s field notes, and transcribed audio-taped interviews. These multiple data sources that were used in accordance with the research methodology of ethnography that involves in-depth observations of classroom lessons, formal and informal interviews with teachers and students, and the collection of teacher and student artifacts (i.e., lesson plans, textbooks, and assignments) (Dillon, 1989). I was the instrument for data collection. The data that were collected for this study were organized into three sets (a) observations, (b) interviews, and (c) artifacts.

**Observations.** In qualitative research, the researcher uses observations because the technique provides her with the ability to record human behavior as it occurs (Drew, Hardman, & Hart, 1996). The observations must be conducted carefully with strict consideration for the research participants, as observations represent a “firsthand encounter with the phenomena of interests” (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). The role that I took on as an observer in this study was that of an “observer-as-participant”, wherein I attempted to have a peripheral membership in the group/context being observed (Alder & Alder, 1994, p. 380). No informal, intentional interaction between the participants and myself took place; but, I was a friendly, knowledgeable outsider that sat on the outskirts as events unfolded and only participated when I was invited in. During the observations, the students and the teachers would ask me to help them do things or ask my opinion about certain things. For example, the teachers would ask me to help set up a bulletin board, pass out papers, or watch over the class for a couple of minutes if they had to step out. Some of the male students would ask me questions or request that I look over their work. I took detailed ethnographic fieldnotes during the observation of the literacy events. Fieldnotes allowed
me to better see the complexity of the events (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). During the observations I took fieldnotes on how the teachers conducted their lessons, how their lessons unfolded in the classroom, and how the African American males responded to and were engaged with the lessons. As an observer I selected the least obtrusive location in the classroom to observe and take notes on the implementation of the lessons by the teachers, activities created for the students, interactions and participation of the students, and other contextual elements. Adler and Adler (1994) note that:

One of the hallmarks of observation has traditionally been its noninterventionism. Observers neither manipulate nor stimulate their subjects… Qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic in essence: it occurs in the natural context of occurrence, among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction, and follows the natural stream of everyday life. (p. 378)

The observational techniques that I used provided me with further insight and understanding into how the teachers enacted the curriculum, and the participation and experiences of African American males with the literacy events that occurred.

**Interviews.** Formal and informal interviews of the teachers and focal students were conducted during this study. Formal interviews were conducted at the beginning and conclusion of the data collection period, and informal interviews were conducted throughout. The teachers were interviewed to give me better insight into their beliefs about literacy instruction, thoughts about the district’s curriculum, their planning of lessons, and views about race and gender in literacy instruction. The male focal students were interviewed to gain a more in-depth understanding of their perspectives on literacy and thoughts about the literacy events that occurred in the classroom. Conducting interviews allowed me to obtain an insider or emic
perspective regarding the issues being studied. The interaction between researcher and participants through the interview is, “the establishment of human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366). Interviews completed in this study invited participants to reflect on their definitions or perceptions and reactions to engagement with the literacy events. The interviews were semi-constructed, consisting of open-ended questions that allowed for spontaneous follow-up questions that were responsive to the teachers’ and students’ statements and reflections (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Having semi-constructed interviews provided more for consistent investigation for particular topics with the participants and basic introduction questions, but also afforded flexibility to engage in natural conversation that provided deeper insight. Handwritten notes were taken during the interviews for the purposes of extending questions or as I needed to take personal notes for further investigation.

The formal interviews were audio-taped and transcribed using digital media. Transcribed interviews were provided to the participants for review and member checking. Member checking was generally considered an important method for verifying and validating information transcribed by the researcher (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Stake, 1995) and was meant as a check and critique of the data. Member checking also provided material for further investigation and triangulation, “the participants also help triangulate the researcher’s observations and interpretations… The actor (participants) is asked to review the material for accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 95).

**Artifacts.** Artifact collection is a less intrusive data collection method and provided detail and evidence of corroboration or contradiction as compared to other collected data (Merriam, 1998). The artifacts that were collected for this study allowed me to look at the
planned curriculum (lesson plans, districts eighth grade literacy curriculum scope and sequence, Maryland state voluntary curriculum). The planned curriculum artifacts enabled me to acquire more understanding of the plan for instruction (plan developed for response to local conditions with some constraints) that is oriented toward some defined end goal. In addition, student work was collected to get a better understanding of how the enactment of the planned lessons impacted their comprehension and understanding.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The end of data gathering led to the organizing of the data for analysis. Through inductive analysis, the data were coded to look for themes and patterns that emerged. The unit of analysis was literacy events. I organized the data by themes (i.e., patterns that emerged around definition of literacy, beliefs about literacy, teaching style, participation and engagement, use of technology, response to multiliteracy and popular culture [Emerson et al., 1995]) to identify “theoretically rich” events, in which an analysis of what is planned, how it is enacted, and unfolds in the classroom impact the experiences of the students in the classroom (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 88). Even though I established initial codes in my data, I then began to adopt a more focused coding by “doing a fine grained line-by-line analysis of notes” into subcodes because “by breaking down fieldnotes even more finely into subcodes, the ethnographer discovers new themes and topics and new relationships between them” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 160-161).

I organized the data based on certain distinct themes that emerged. For example, a theme that emerged from the data was “unfolding of lessons”. From this particular theme subcategories emerged such as the use of technology, problems with technology, benefits of technology usage, time, etc. I sought to determine what actually happens when the teachers enact their planned
lessons in the classroom, asking questions of the experience and the data, such as: Does everything go as planned or expected? What were the African American male students’ reactions to the type of instruction and activities used in the classroom? As I further explored the themes, I asked questions of the fieldnotes, for example: What activities do the teachers use during instruction? What are the students doing during the instruction? Does technology enhance or hinder instruction (Emerson et al., 1995)? The assertions that I made in the following chapters came from the answers to these questions.

The research questions along with the planned data collection and plans for analysis for each are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the ways that the literacy events are enacted in an English/Language Arts classroom?</td>
<td>-observations -teacher lesson plans</td>
<td>-review and analysis of transcribed fieldnotes to identify what occurs during the literacy events -review and analysis of lesson plans to identify the kinds of literacy pedagogy are included in the daily planned lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. How do the teachers’ beliefs and philosophy of literacy instruction impact their teaching strategies and/or styles?</td>
<td>-interviews -teacher lesson plans -observations</td>
<td>-analysis of interviews for perceptions and understanding of literacy and literacy instruction -review and analysis of lesson plans to see what types of literacy pedagogies are incorporated in daily lesson plans</td>
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Table 5 (con’t)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
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<tr>
<td>1b. How do the teachers perceive and/or explain 21st century literacy instruction?</td>
<td>-analysis of transcribed fieldnotes to see what pedagogical decisions are made during daily instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c. How do the teachers planned lessons become enacted and unfold in the classroom?</td>
<td>-analysis of interviews for perceptions and understanding of 21st century literacy instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do adolescent African American males respond to and engage in the literacy events within the English/Language Arts classroom?</td>
<td>-analysis of transcribed fieldnotes to see what the teachers actually plans unfolds, is perceived, and understood by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. What are African American males’ perception of literacy?</td>
<td>-analysis of interviews for perceptions of literacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (con’t)

2b. What are the ways that African American males participate in the literacy events in the classroom? -observations -review and analysis of transcribed fieldnotes for students’ participation in the literacy events

2c. What factors impact African American males participation in the literacy events in the classroom? -observations -interviews -review and analysis of transcribed fieldnotes to see what types of pedagogical teacher decisions affect students’ participation -analysis of interviews for students’ responses to what kinds of pedagogical decisions impact their participation in the literacy events

Validity

Qualitative researchers must take measures to ensure validity. In order to ensure validity in the study, two different methods were used. First, vivid descriptions were used to portray the context observed. This was completed in this study by spending a significant amount of time in the classroom where the data were collected. I spent three to four days a week during a period of five months in the classroom for the entire seventy-five minute class period. This gives more credibility to the study as the researcher has been immersed in the context under observation. The other method used was to have the teacher and students read over the transcribed interviews. This was incorporated in order to help ensure accuracy. Both of these methods and constantly taking inventory of my actions during the process were ways used to continually check on the trustworthiness of the data.

Triangulation

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Triangulation is the use of various data sources (two or more) to ensure accuracy, credibility, and more understanding of the phenomena you are studying (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Krathwohl, 2009). The data sources that I used during this study were observations, interviews, and artifacts. The observations in the classroom were my main data source that allowed me to focus on what occurred during the literacy events and the participation of the African American males during the literacy events. The additional data sources, interviewing and collection of artifacts, enabled triangulation to occur in this study. The interviews were conducted to further explain the participants’ actions that were observed and to get participants specific insight and thoughts. The artifacts allowed me to acquire an understanding of why certain things were taught and get an example of how the African Americans performed independently after delivery of instruction.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained how and why the design of my study is qualitative. This qualitative study is ethnographic based on the design of my research. I introduced the site, Victory Elementary/Middle School, and gave insight of the demographics of the site’s community. I detailed my role as a researcher in this study and thoroughly discussed my data sources and analysis of the data that were collected. In the next chapter three chapters, four, five and six, I provide detailed descriptions of the student participants and discuss the findings from this study with particular emphasis on students’ interests and perception of literacy.
Chapter 4

Getting to Know the Boys:

I Like What I Like, You Like What You Like

There are differences in what adolescents like to read, how they like to read, how well they can read, and how they like to share their responses and insights. Just like all other groups of readers, there is also a range among adolescents from those who can but don’t read outside of school to those who read every chance they get. (Gainer & Lapp, 2010, p. 5)

I began this journey on August 15, 2010, and actually in one of Victory’s eighth grade classrooms on August 30, 2010 when the students reported for the first day of school. I had an opportunity to observe, interact with, and become acquainted with the young men on this five-month journey. It was important to determine the interests and perceptions of the African American males in order to fully understand and gain insights into how they participate, engage, and perform in the area of literacy. I wanted to acquire an understanding as to what determines the students’ level of participation in literacy events, the factors that determined the completion of assignments, and their responses to tasks and activities. This chapter consists of vignettes about each student based on observations conducted in the classroom, interviews, student work, and artifacts collected on each of the young men. I begin this chapter by providing biographical information about each of the five focal students and their families, and their academic performance. Then, I offer specific insight about the males’ views of literacy and classroom activities by describing and explaining their interests and perceptions of literacy. The chapter concludes with a discussion that: (a) compares the students’ interests and perception of literacy,
(b) explains how their interests impact their involvement and/or participation, and (c) describes the changes that occurred in the completion of tasks and/or assignments.

Quinton’s Vignette

Biographical information. Quinton was a tall, neat, and well-kept student. He was Mr. Barnes’, the principal of Victory, nephew. Quinton lived in a single-parent household that was headed by his mother. Mr. Barnes provided Quinton’s mother (Mr. Barnes’ sister) with financial support and a positive male presence in Quinton’s life. Mr. Barnes helped so much with Quinton because Quinton’s father was incarcerated at the time of the study for drug charges and murder, and his mother was a recovering drug addict trying to put her life in the right direction (Mr. Barnes, personal communication, September 3, 2010). Quinton attended Victory for two years. Before that, he was enrolled at another middle school that had been renamed and restructured because of poor academic performance, attendance rates, and violence. He expressed that he liked attending Victory because “the teachers really care, they really like you, and they really want you to learn” (Interview, January 31, 2011). He also expressed that, at his previous school, they did not really care about your education “so they just gave you work and really didn’t try to help you with it” (Interview, January 31, 2011). He was really helpful and not a behavior problem in the classroom. Each morning Quinton helped the cafeteria staff to distribute the breakfast to each classroom in the building. Quinton would always ask the teachers things such as “Can I help you with that?”, “Do you need me to take the attendance down?”, and “Do you want me to get that for you?” (Fieldnotes, September 12, 2010, October 11, 2010, December 12, 2010)? Mr. Barnes expressed, “Quinton has come a long way, he was a major behavior problem at his previous school and at times at home; hanging with the wrong crowd because of his parents’ situation” (Mr. Barnes, personal communication, October 18, 2010).
**Academic performance.** Mr. Barnes decided at the end of last school year to hold Quinton back to repeat eighth grade during the 2010-2011 school year because he felt that Quinton was not academically ready for high school. Quinton is a special education student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). His IEP indicated that he could, with support in a general education setting, complete various things. With support Quinton could read on-grade-level words. Even though he is reading below-grade level, Quinton did answer basic literal level questions without support. In the general education setting Quinton needed support with written language and expression. According to his IEP, Quinton participated in the state’s modified assessment with specific accommodations for support.

Quinton did not do a lot of talking in class when he was supposed to be paying attention; he was always very attentive and listened to instructions given by the teachers. He would often ask questions to ensure clarification or to verify that he understood what to do or the messages conveyed by the teachers. Throughout my observations, I noticed that he asked questions and made comments in order to improve his understanding and clarify his thinking. For example, just before they began reading *Richard III* and the teachers completed a lesson on the daily life in Elizabethan England to give the students background knowledge, Quinton asked various questions such as, “Why wouldn’t the parents nurse her own baby?”, “If the mother let the baby breast feed on another woman then how will that baby form a relationship with the mother and won’t the baby like the nurse better?”, and “So Mrs. Kayhill, are you saying back in those times marriages were pretty much arranged and you did not have a choice in who you married?” (Fieldnote, November 29, 2010)? His mannerisms conveyed to the observer that he wanted to do well. He was one of the hardest-working and most determined students in the class. It was observed that if Quinton did not know or give the correct answer, he would constantly go back to
the text or other resources to find the answer. Also, on numerous occasions, while writing, he would refer back to the rubric to ensure that he had included all components in order to get the highest score. During personal time (either during lunch, before or after school, or at home), he would rewrite assignments when specific guidance was given.

**Completion of tasks/assignments.** Quinton was very focused when it came to completing his work. Very seldom would I see him playing around, talking with other classmates, or just simply not doing his work. Each day, when the students would come in and have an agenda or morning-to-do list to complete, Quinton would work diligently on his agenda while eating his breakfast (he used one hand to eat and the other hand to write). He would not talk to other students around him when he was completing his assignments, unless it was to ask a question about the assignment. From my observations, Quinton did not indulge in idle chatter or play around when he was completing his independent work. Each time that I would look or go near Quinton when he completed tasks and/or assignments, he would be completing his work or looking up as if he were thinking, and then quickly continue to write. Or, if it were a group task, he would continue to make contributions in order to complete the assignment.

According to his teachers, Quinton had low academic ability levels, but he had a high interest level in the area of literacy and put forth tremendous effort. His teachers described him as a hardworking and dedicated student. Quinton’s teachers expressed that, even though he was not the smartest student in the class, “he was one of the best behaved and always put forth his best effort in the class” (Ms. Jackson & Mrs. Kayhill, personal communication, November 12, 2010). Based on Quinton’s performance on various formal assessments (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson, DIBELS, state assessment, etc.) by school personnel, the teachers identified him as “not the smartest student in the class”.

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**Interests.** Quinton enjoyed coming to the English/Language Arts class, participating in the class, and doing the work. He enjoyed reading because he said, “it’s better than math” (Fieldnote, November 23, 2010). He liked writing; and enjoyed writing the journals daily at home and in class. This was evident by the fact that Quinton completed every journal entry from the start of school and throughout the entire time that I conducted this research. Each time the journals were collected, his was always turned in complete; and, at various times when I looked through the journals, Quinton’s would have comments from the teachers that read “another great journal entry”, “wow”, “great thought”, and “great text-to-world connection” (see examples in Appendix B). Also, when Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill gave the students their individual student reports before Christmas break on December 15, 2010, Quinton was the only one out of the five focal students who received a passing score on the journal category; he had a 90%.

During an interview, Quinton told me that the one thing that he would like to learn in this class was “how to write better” (Fieldnote, December 12, 2010). On numerous occasions when Quinton completed writing assignments, journal entries, answering comprehension questions, or brief constructed responses he would ask me “Does this sound right?”, “Do you think I should add anything else?”, “Can you read over this for me?”, or he would say “I can write better but I was rushing.” (Fieldnotes, September 8, 2010, November 15, 2010, November 21, 2010, January 22, 2011). These questions and/or statements led me to believe that he was very particular and meticulous about his writing.

Quinton enjoyed reading books that were chosen for the class to read. He liked reading both *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, 1967) and *Richard III* (Shakespeare, 1995). Quinton has said on numerous occasions that he liked reading books about true events so that was the main reason that he liked reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In one of the interviews, he made a point
to mention that, in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, he liked how “It’s her diary (Anne) and she’s the one who wrote it” and “the things that Anne went through is stuff that we go through.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). Quinton went on and further explained by saying, with a serious look on his face, sat and straightened himself in his chair, and for the first time looked straight into my eyes:

Even though today we may not be going through something as extreme as the Holocaust but today people still mistreat, stare, or even try to harm others who are not like them or do not have the same beliefs as them. (Interview, November 23, 2010)

Mr. Barnes, principal of school and Quinton’s uncle, informed me that he could tell that Quinton really was into *The Diary of Anne Frank* because he constantly talked about the things that Anne and her family went through; and, at times, he compared the events that took place in the book to the civil rights movement, segregation, and burning of black churches in the South (personal communication, November 16, 2010). Even though they did not spend as much time on *Richard III* as they did with *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Quinton still said, “I enjoyed reading it because it was more for boys because it had a lot of murders in it.” (Interview, January 31, 2011). He also mentioned that the plot in *Richard III* was “kind of interesting” (Interview, January 31, 2011).

There were a couple of things that Quinton really enjoyed doing in this English/Language Arts classroom. Quinton would always have a smile on his face and eagerly participated when activities involved use of the Smart Board or iPads. He said that using the Smart Board and iPad was like “doing a graphic activity” (Interview, November 23, 2010). He described to me that the Smart Board and iPads were more like a hands-on activity that included a lot of graphics, pictures, and sounds. Also, Quinton liked when the teachers brought in movies that were adaptations of the books that they read and/or about something that they were doing in class. On
several occasions he would say to me, “The movies help me visually see what happens in the book and allows me to understand it better.” (Fieldnotes, September 24, 2010, October 2, 2010, November 3, 2010). The one unit that Quinton told me that stood out to him when I asked him what are the instructional things that he liked learning in class, was the poetry unit. He felt that poetry was like rhyming, and he liked “rhyming sometimes like Weezy and Jay-Z” (Interview, January 31, 2011). Quinton added that he got to know more about poetry and the elements of it.

One particular observation that stuck out to me when we were talking about the poetry unit is how, during the unit, the teachers incorporated things that the students could relate to and the teachers’ interests being similar to theirs. This excerpt from an interview speaks about this:

I really liked how Ms. Jackson incorporates music into poetry like rap and R&B and how she lately have been talking about how she likes certain rappers rhymes and hooks in songs. This let me know that teachers can like stuff that we students like and have things in common. It also makes things more interesting and understandable when they bring things that I like and relate to. (Interview, January 31, 2011)

Perceptions of literacy. When I asked Quinton to define literacy he took a long pause and then said, “I can’t define literacy.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). As the interview continued I went on to ask probing questions to try to get Quinton to a sense of what literacy meant to him. After about 30 seconds of him placing his hand on his head looking like he was in deep thought, Quinton stated, “I think that literacy does not only include reading and writing but includes entertainment.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). When I asked him does he perceive comics, poetry, music, blogging, and movies as forms of literacy, Quinton said that only movies were a part of literacy. He went on further to explain to me that he “perceives movies as a form of literacy because they are entertainment and you have to write it down like a script and then act
Quinton seemed to perceive literacy in an expanded form that is multimodal and is more than just printed text. Or, Quinton viewed film as literacy because you had to read a written text and memorize the dialogue and information.

**Summary.** Quinton was a well-behaved student who always put forth his best effort in anything that he did. His parental situation and previous school environment did impact his academics at one point in time, but during this study Quinton seemed to be in an environment where individuals were more involved in him and in him being successful. He seemed to have enjoyed this English/Language Arts class because of his liking for reading over math and because of how the teachers presented some of the activities and readings in the class were of interest to him. His inquisitiveness was not because of his lack of not knowing, but it was his way of processing and gaining further understanding. Quinton showed evidence of an expanding perception of literacy and seemed to better understand concepts when they were presented in multimodal forms.

**Marcus’ Vignette**

**Biographical information.** Marcus was a tall, slender, friendly student who, at times, might have come off as kind of quirky to his fellow male classmates. Computers were really a big thing to him. So much so that often his classmates called him a tech geek. He was an eclectic type student who was into the arts, world travel, classic literature (i.e. Shakespeare), and computers; but Marcus still had “stereotypical” male interests such as sports and games. He was always polite and respectful. Marcus was dropped off at Victory daily by his mother because he did not live in the school community. His mother had a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing and was a divorced single parent. His aunt was the seventh and eighth grade mathematics teacher at Victory. He had been a student at Victory for one and a half years. Marcus came to Victory
from years of attending a private school in the suburbs that had a majority of Caucasian students. Marcus expressed that he liked Victory better than his previous school because “At Victory they care about your grades, they care about achieving and at my other school they don’t care about you, just give you work, and not really teach you how to do the work.” (Interview, January 31, 2011).

**Academic performance.** Academically, Marcus was an average to above average student. Marcus put forth effort, but was easily distracted by his peers and other things around him. His grades fluctuated; and, on average, he would score between 55% and 85% on assignments and tests. When Marcus came to Victory from the private school he had a C- average.

**Completion of tasks/assignments.** Marcus had a tendency to not complete assignments. On numerous occasions when the journals were collected to be graded, he would not have his journal to turn in or the journal entries would be missing or incomplete. When I asked him why he was not completing his entries, he told me, “I don’t like to write because I am on the computer so much that I probably would do better if I could type them.” (Fieldnote, November 15, 2010). Marcus requested permission to type his journal entries. Both Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson told him he could. However, Marcus never turned in a typed journal entry. When Marcus received his student progress report before the Christmas break, he had a 39% for the journal portion (see Appendix C). At times in class, he would be very talkative with his male classmates around him, would play around, or would start to complete the tasks late. One particular time, when the class was taking a quiz that had multiple choice questions and a brief constructed response (BCR), Marcus was not as focused on completing his quiz because the other males at his table had already finished before him and Marcus was talking and playing...
around with them. Marcus was informed by Mrs. Kayhill and myself during the quiz to get focused, stop talking, stop playing around, and finish his quiz, but when he turned in his quiz at the end of the period, the BCR was not completed and only had three written lines on it. Marcus received a 55% on that particular quiz. Even when they were completing things as a whole class for guided practice, he still seemed to lag behind the rest of his classmates. An example of this was when Ms. Jackson reviewed a worksheet with the whole class entitled “Story Building Blocks,” in which they analyzed the actions of the characters in *The Diary of Anne Frank* that advanced the plot, Marcus had not filled in his sheet as they were going through it as a whole class. At times, he was playing around with the other males at his table and did not complete the assigned tasks. When it was time for the students to independently fill in the solution portion of the worksheet, he finally started to fill in some things. When Ms. Jackson walked around to see how the students were progressing, she noticed Marcus’ nearly incomplete sheet. Before Ms. Jackson could say anything to him, Marcus blurted out, “Robert kept messing with me so I couldn’t follow along and that is why everything is not filled out on my sheet.” (Fieldnote, October 11, 2010).

It seemed that the other males at his table may have talked and played around, but they seemed to have completed tasks and assignments more than Marcus did. On numerous occasions at the end of the period he would try to finish work and/or get what he missed from another student. It seemed that the only time that I observed Marcus really staying on the task before him in the specific time that was allotted was when they were creating the plays about *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Marcus’ group actually received the highest grade and had a good concept of the plot that was seen in their play. Also, he did really well with the quiz in which they used the Smart Board and clickers. Marcus finished the computer quiz in the specific time given and only
had one wrong answer, which gave him a grade of 83%. He was so excited about completing this quiz that he was smiling when he said to me, “Ms. Blackmon, look. Come over here. See, I only got one wrong” (Fieldnote, October 25, 2010).

**Interests.** When Marcus was asked during an interview if he liked reading, he said, “No because it’s too much and is kind of boring” but he did like to read Shakespeare and other classics (Interview, November 23, 2010). As the interview continued Marcus began to feel more comfortable and opened up to me. He no longer saw me as just an adult but more as an adult-friend in whom he could confide. This shift in interaction seemed to occur after I reminded him of our confidentiality. Marcus said to me, “Ok Ms. Blackmon, I will be real with you because you always look out for us, don’t tell on us but just get us back on track when we aren’t always doing the right things, and help me out in class.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). He explained to me that he had really been turned off to reading because of things that he would be literally forced to read in school that he didn’t like, could not relate to, or were just “really fiction stuff for girls” (Interview, November 23, 2010). Books that were interesting to Marcus were nonfiction books and classics such as “wisdom books, debate books, and books written by Shakespeare” (Interview, November 23, 2010). He did not like reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* because he thought that it was boring and sad, but he enjoyed reading *Richard III*, Marcus actually wanted to play the main character of Richard when they had read it in class. Marcus said he liked *Richard III* not only because it was written by Shakespeare, but also because “it’s poetic but it’s a play” (Fieldnote, December 2, 2010).

Marcus liked to learn about slavery, Shakespeare, poetry, England, and plays and enjoyed dealing with computers and technology. During class one day when they were comparing the Holocaust to slavery, I could tell that he was really into the discussion because Marcus was
constantly adding his personal feelings about slavery, putting himself in the place of slaves and sharing how he would react and deal with things during those times, and he raised his voice a little to get his point across. Marcus expressed that, “Slavery was not right and I guess it is OK to compare slavery to the Holocaust, but slavery lasted longer and led into Civil Rights and Jim Crow Laws.” (Fieldnote, October 10, 2010). He continued by noting, “I know that the Jews had their experience but in no way does it compare to the African American experience” and said, “If I was a slave back then I would be one of those field Negroes cause I’m a little chocolate, but I would be in those fields putting stuff on the crops to destroy them so that the master would lose money.” (Fieldnote, October 10, 2010).

Marcus really was into the play that they had to write about *The Diary of Anne Frank*. While the class was separated into groups to write their plays, he emerged as the leader of his group. He kept the group on task, came up with the scene that the group was going to perform, and assigned parts. This was not surprising because he did mention to me some time previous to this activity, that for high school, he wanted to attend The Baltimore School for the Arts. Marcus shared with me that he liked to create things whether on the computer with graphics or words or just to write things to express himself freely. Because he liked computers and technology, he really enjoyed when students went to the computer lab, used the mobile computer lab with the laptops in class, used the iPads or desktops in class, or used the Smart Board. Marcus added that he really enjoyed using the iPads because he said that it gave him a chance to learn new things. He loved technology; and, because he was on the computer a lot at home and with more infusion of technology he was able “to learn and do things in school that I do out of school” (Fieldnote, December 1, 2010). Marcus also liked that Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill took the students on a fieldtrip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC; allowed for student discussions about
what they read, had a the poetry unit because “it gives me a chance to express my feelings by writing poems” (Fieldnote, January 28, 2011), and focused on figurative language activities. During the poetry unit Marcus constantly participated in the activities and often had a smile on his face.

**Perception of literacy.** Marcus’ definition or understanding of literacy was intriguing and different from the other African American males. When I asked him to define literacy his exact words were “I would define it as freedom of speech. Like freedom writing, kind of like debate but in your own words” (Interview, November 23, 2010). Literacy for Marcus afforded him independence. He also felt that literacy was more than just printed words in books or writing because he said that he did perceive comics, poetry, music, blogging, texting, and movies as forms of literacy. Marcus believed that more types of multiliteracy needed to be used in schools and that he appreciated that the English/Language Arts teachers brought in the movies. He felt that bringing in other elements like movies, music, and comics into a English/Language Arts class helped him understand better because “every time you see the scene like in a movie it makes you think about what you just read, it triggers your mind and begin to make connections” (Interview, November 23, 2010).

**Summary.** Marcus thought that reading was boring, but he really liked classics such as Shakespeare and was really into artistic type things (e.g., plays, art, etc.). According to his teachers, Marcus was a student in the class who has had more exposure to things beyond an urban-minority environment. I could see this by the different types of things that he would bring in class. For example, one time Marcus showed me a brochure about a summer experience for students in grades seven to eleven to travel to Europe for one month in the summer. When he showed me the brochure he came over to me smiling and excited saying, “Look, Ms. Blackmon.
I am going to apply for this because I get to see and learn about a lot of things but of course I am going to have to apply for financial assistance.” (Fieldnote, December 10, 2010). Marcus really became motivated and interested when tasks or assignments dealt with the computer, Smart Board, or any other nontraditional print text. He was the type of student who enjoyed things where he could venture out and express himself in different ways. Marcus believed that literacy gave him an avenue to freely express himself.

D’Andre’s Vignette

Biographical information. D’Andre was a kind of chunky, tall student who wore glasses. In class D’Andre tended to hang more with the females in the class than the males. D’Andre lived in the Victory neighborhood with his mother, aunt, and grandmother. He was the only male in his household. He was not originally from the inner city. D’Andre was born and spent most of his early elementary years in a southern state where he lived in a small community. This was his fifth year at Victory, and he had been attending the school since third grade when he moved to the state from the state of Virginia. He liked Victory because “they have the best teachers and the education is great” (Interview, November 23, 2010). D’Andre was a very bright student who knew that he was smart. He had the kind of attitude that projected in ways that said, “I know everything” and “I am one of the smartest students in this class.” At, first, D’Andre came across as very arrogant and felt as though he did not have to participate because he knew it all. By mid-September I began to see a change in him. He started to participate more, realized that he did not know everything, and became more a part of the classroom community. D’Andre was not like most of the images that stereotyped African American males. He spoke standard English and rarely used slang. When it came to books D’Andre had read many, whether it was classics or African American authors. For example, he had read Hamlet (Shakespeare, 1963),
The Adventures of Huck Finn (Twain, 1994), and Monster, this last book an award winning novel written by African American author Walter Dean Myers (1999).

**Academic performance.** From the researcher’s observations, and scores on formal and informal assessments, D’Andre was a very intelligent student who was always focused and on task. He scored at the advanced levels in both reading and math on the state assessment last year. D’Andre had always excelled in school, and became very upset if he scored anything less than 85% on anything. He was very particular about his work and took pride in it. Last year, his cumulative average was a 93%.

**Completion of tasks/assignments.** D’Andre worked really hard at completing tasks and assignments in class. Even when he would come to school late, he would not play around; rather he immediately started his work. If he did not know what to do, he would ask the teachers or his neighbor. On one particular day that D’Andre came in late at 8:25 am, he quickly sat down at his desk, immediately took out his notebook, and began taking notes. I went over to him shortly after he arrived and asked him if he needed me to catch him up. He responded, “I recognize the author’s purpose PowerPoint from the other day, and I know that I need to take notes on it like we had done before.” (Fieldnote, January 3, 2011). D’Andre took his work seriously and, on numerous occasions, would complete assignments or quizzes before the rest of his classmates. He would actively participate in-group assignments and eagerly helped others in his group if they did not understand or have questions. D’Andre believed in getting good grades and liked to be considered one of the smartest students in the class. He took pride in his work and in completing assignments. In the beginning of the year when he was not writing in the journals daily or not turning them in, his grades started to decline. He became really upset and whispered in a very low voice to himself, “This can not be happening. I got to see what I need to do to pull my
grades up.” (Fieldnote, December 10, 2010). When D’Andre received his second quarter progress report, he went up to Mrs. Kayhill, and looking very sad asked her, “Can I turn in old journal entries, and what else do I need to do to pull up my grade because 76% is not acceptable to me?” (Fieldnote, December 21, 2010). After this, I noticed D’Andre turned in his journal entries more when they were to be collected and graded.

**Interests.** D’Andre’s interest in reading varied. He said, “I am not the biggest fan of reading, but I enjoy reading sometimes if a book quickly catches my interest and attention and I enjoy reading sometimes.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). D’Andre expressed that in order for him to enjoy reading, a book had to capture him at the beginning when it first starts off. He said, “If the first couple of sentences in a book are real good, then I’ll want and love to read it.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). Basically, D’Andre liked reading when it engaged and interested him. He was the first and only one of the focal students to mention that he liked books by an African American author. During interviews D’Andre stressed that the type of books that captured his attention were books by Sharon G. Flake (African American female author that writes young adult literature about African American adolescents). D’Andre said, “I love reading books by African American authors, and one of my favorite authors is Sharon G. Flake.” (Fieldnote, December 2, 2010). He was very familiar with a lot of Flake’s books and expressed, “My favorite book by her is *Begging for Change.*” (Interview, November 23, 2010). D’Andre did indicate to me that he not only liked fiction, but he also liked nonfiction and biographies such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (X & Haley, 1964), and *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (Beale, 1994). During an interview, D’Andre made it very clear that majority of the books that he enjoyed reading, he read out of school. In the same interview he did make an exception and explained to me:
Last year Mr. Andrews, our English/Language Arts teacher, had us reading some books that were interesting to me like books by Walter Dean Myers. We did a lot of interesting things last year and read some really good books that were about African Americans, written by African American authors, and books that had male characters… I remember Mr. Andrews saying that we were going to be reading some things and doing some things differently, and not necessarily part of the curriculum because he was doing some work to finish up his degree that he was working on at a university. (Interview, November 23, 2010)

When it came to this class, there were some things that D’Andre really liked doing, and, of course, that he did not enjoy doing. He was really an active participant during the discussion summaries and/or recaps about the books that students read in class. He said that he enjoyed writing summaries and the homework portion where they had to read every night, but he did not like doing the nightly journals. Instead of doing the journals daily for homework to show their understanding of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, D’Andre explained to me, “We could have read a certain amount of pages per week and then at the end of the week write a summary.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). D’Andre liked reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* because he learned about something that happened in real life, and because it happened during World War II, a period about which he wanted to learn more about. During an interview, D’Andrew informed me that a movie he saw about World War II prompted his interest in learning more about the time period. In D’Andre’s persuasive essay about whether or not the rising eighth graders should read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, one could tell how he was intrigued with history, particularly that time period. One of the main reasons that he thought that they should read it next school year referred to learning about history and World War II (see Appendix D). D’Andre liked how “Anne was
going through some really crazy things in the book” and that captured and prompted him to read more to find out what happens next (Fieldnote, October 26, 2010). D’Andre enjoyed reading Richard III as well because he liked Shakespeare and plays.

D’Andre also enjoyed using technology in the classroom. His response documents the interest in technology:

Yes, technology is good for us, it helps us learn more things faster and in different ways, and it is preparing us for our future. Since technology is all around us why not bring it into schools so that we can connect what we do outside of school what with we do in schools. (Interview, November 23, 2010, January 28, 2011)

Each time the class went to the computer lab, used laptops, or iPads, D’Andre would get a serious look on his face as if he was really into it. There was also a look of amazement on his face at all of the things that he would find or could do with technology. D’Andre also helped others out, particularly the female students, who had difficulty using the technology.

Technology was not the only thing that he really liked, D’Andre really enjoyed the poetry unit. He told the teachers and me several times that he knew a lot about poetry because he was a poet himself and that he was real passionate about writing poetry. His liking of poetry was definitely displayed in the classroom. During the poetry unit, D’Andre actively participated by constantly asking questions, making comments, extending the teachers’ responses, and becoming excited during the poetry activities. At the beginning of the poetry unit, Mrs. Kayhill provided instruction about the elements of poetry and had the students take notes from the PowerPoint presentation, D’Andre participated in the discussions and answered questions; but, he did not take notes. Mrs. Kayhill noticed this and said, “D’Andre you are being a super participant, but
you don’t have any notes written down, so I assume that you know all this”. D’Andre responded, “I know most of this stuff cause I like and read poetry a lot.” (Fieldnote, January 10, 2011).

**Perception of literacy.** D’Andre perceived literacy to be reading and a form of communication that can be either verbal or nonverbal. He viewed literacy as being more than just reading and writing and as going beyond print. D’Andre also felt that literacy was a way to express yourself. He stated, “I think that poetry, music, texting, and movies are forms of literacy.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). D’Andre told me that “with movies sometimes can be trying to send a message, poetry you are expressing yourself and telling a person about you, someone, or something, and in music are showing how you feel about the world or anything else” (Interview, November 23, 2010). His perceptions coincide with Kirkland’s (2009) research where he explained, “literacy is a social practice in which the individual engages to negotiate and articulate the human aspects of self and others” (p.390). From this, one can understand why he perceives literacy as being a way to communicate.

**Summary.** There is no doubt that D’Andre liked to always perform well and do his best. Even if he did not like or have an interest in the tasks, activities, or assignments, in most instances, he would still do them because he did not want anything to affect his grades. The genres of literature that he liked to read was vast, but he had a particular interest in African American literature. From the researchers’ observation, D’Andre spent a lot of time talking with and interacting more with the females in the class than the males. This could be attributed to him being raised in an all-female household or the fact that he had an emerging interest in girls that signaled attraction and/or desire.

**Michael’s Vignette**
Biographical information. Michael was a slender student who had his hair cut in a very low Mohawk. He was well-groomed and always had on the latest pair of new sneakers. You would often hear him talking about girls and how many girls liked him. He was well known as a little Casanova in the school and throughout the neighborhood. Michael was the popular student who was born in and raised in a neighborhood less than five miles from Victory. The neighborhood that he lived in had the same demographics and socioeconomic status as Victory’s neighborhood. Michael came from a single-parent home headed by his mother. During an interview, Michael informed me that his father left when he was about five-years old, so “I let the streets be a role model for me.” (Interview, October 12, 2010). Like many males, he really enjoyed sports, wrestling, and video games. This was Michael’s first year at Victory after attending another school within the city that was a traditional middle school with subpar academic achievement.

Academic performance. Overall, Michael was performing as an average student and on some assessments, he just made the proficient level in reading. Some of his teachers attributed this to his lack of focus. His teachers believed that he was smart and capable of great things, but they wanted to see him put forth more effort into his academic school work. In the beginning, Michael was being very lazy and needed a lot of reinforcement until a conference with the administration, his teachers, and mother took place. He was not very fond of reading; and at times, his interest level was low in the area of literacy.

Completion of tasks/assignments. Michael would often sit with his head on his desk during whole class discussions and/or activities. But, when it came to completing independent tasks or assignments he, for the most part, would get them done. When he had to work on tasks with small groups he was not really an active contributor. He would play around, talk, or just go
along with everyone else. With the small group activities he really was not very vocal and never emerged as the leader. Michael was not a big fan of the journals. So, from the beginning of the school year until around mid-December, he was not fully completing the journals or turning them in to be graded. It was not until around mid-December when I began to see a change in him. On December 13, 2010 Michael’s mother came in and had a conference with him, Mr. Barnes (the principal), Mrs. Kayhill, and Ms. Jackson. This seemed to have been the turning point in his being more focused and completing the journals. In the beginning of the year when Michael moved his classroom seat location away from Quinton and near some other African American males, he became more playful, talkative, and did not begin his agenda or morning work. Around December 15, 2010, I began to see him more focused on completing his journal and not as talkative in the mornings. After this date and on several occasions, I saw Michael with his notebook on his lap, looking down as he was writing; and, he would at times have his finger on his head looking as if he were thinking in deep thought. He was not talking to his neighbor Aaron in the mornings as he normally would. It was also noticeable that Michael participated more in discussions and really put forth an effort to contribute more in small group activities.

**Interests.** Michael, like many other African American males in this class, did not really enjoy reading unless it was something engaging or something in which he was interested. Tatum (2007) explains that African American males have a disinterest in reading because, typically in school, they have been exposed to “dis-abling” texts that lacked “broader perspective and largely ignore students’ local contexts and their desire as adolescents for self-definition, focusing instead on skill and strategy development” (p. 46). Tatum’s (2005) research revealed that literacy instruction has not held African Americans’ interests or attention because instruction in literacy had not held value in the males “current time and space,” there is a lack of masculine text
(specifically with African American characters), and narrow definitions of literacy (p. 15). In Michael’s words, he did not like reading because “it takes too long, we don’t read stuff I like, and most of the time it is boring” (Interview, December 8, 2010). After he made that comment he asked me, “Why do you think that I have my head down most of the time when they are reading in class? It’s because when they do all that reading especially reading aloud it takes a long time and all that reading makes me tired.” (Interview, December 8, 2010)? The types of things that were interesting to Michael were books about sports (e.g., football and basketball) and wrestling magazines. During my five-month period in this classroom there were not any of those types of books read or talked about. He did not like reading The Diary of Anne Frank too much because he thought it was too long and a little too girlie for him. Michael clearly expressed his disinterest in the book, stating some of the same reasons and noting that it should be a book of choice to read rather than mandatory in his persuasive essay (see Appendix E). Even though he did not like reading The Diary of Anne Frank, he did like some of the discussions that came from them reading the book. Michael enjoyed sharing his ideas. Once, during a discussion that the class was having about how the world could have been different if Hitler had not came into the world, Michael became very enthusiastic and waved his hand vigorously to participate and tell his points of view. During this discussion he compared the Holocaust and the treatment of the Jews to slavery and the Jim Crow Laws. Michael was so into the discussion that one time he blurted out, “Man Hitler was like the KKK and the slave owners, and if this would be occurring today me and my homeboys would be busting some heads.” (Fieldnote, October 5, 2010). After the discussion at the end of the class period, I asked him if he had enjoyed the day’s class, and he said, “Yes because we got a chance to talk with one another, say our thoughts, and the discussion helped me learn from others thoughts and opinions.” (Fieldnote, October 5, 2010).
Michael was very candid about the things that he liked and disliked in the class. I remember asking him during an interview about class read alouds and he said, “No, I do not like read alouds because it at times puts me to sleep, sometimes it can be too long, and I just don’t feel like being read to or reading aloud to others.” (Fieldnote, October 28, 2010). There were many occasions where they would read-aloud through a type of round-robin reading called popcorn reading where Michael was not following along. When he was called on to read, he would not know where they were. He would have to ask someone next to identify the section of the text he should read. Michael would lift his head up slowly, with an agitated manner saying things like, “Ah man, where we at?” (Fieldnote, December 6, 2010). Or, he just would sometimes simply read the wrong thing. Michael was not a big fan of journaling, either. He did not like the journaling every night because he thought the teachers asked them to do too much for the journal. He told me, “Instead of letting us write what we want to write about, instead Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill have us put certain things in each of their journal entries… it is like they telling me what to write about what I think and feel.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). Basically, he would rather write about what interested him in his own form and fashion. Michael’s dislike and reluctance to do the journals showed in his journal entries (see Appendix F). He expressed to me several times that he would rather do a book report when they finished the book rather than journaling daily. Even though Michael did not like certain assignments that they had to do in the class, he did enjoy when they utilized the use of the Smart Board during instruction, used the iPads, and created and performed the play. In this excerpt from an interview completed, one can see how he feels about technology use in school:

> It is a better way for us like to see with technology other than just writing on the chalkboard because when you write on the Smart Board or use it we get a visual view of
what we going to be doing or what we learning about. I really liked when they include the
different graphics, sounds, and practice activities on the Smart Board, computer, or iPads.
With the Smart Board it is more interactive, and it is not just the teacher doing
everything. (Interview, November 23, 2010)

Michael did like reading Richard III because he thought it was interesting how the story played
out and it had a lot of fighting in it.

**Perception of literacy.** It took some time before Michael could come up with what
literacy meant to him. Once he got his thoughts together he explained, “I think that literacy is
just reading and writing to communicate.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). Michael further
expressed that there were no other forms of literacy but reading and writing. His perception of
literacy seemed to only be connected to the traditional view of literacy that has singular forms for
reading and writing. The perception of literacy that Michael had was disconnected from the other
forms of literacy that he most likely used out of school. When I asked him if he perceived
comics, poetry, music, blogging, texting, and movies as forms of literacy, his response was, “It
could be.” (Interview, November 23, 2010).

**Summary.** Michael enjoyed sports, boxing, wrestling, computers, and video games.
Literacy and reading were not his favorites. Michael had not been interested in too many of the
in-school literacies. He thought of literacy as only being what he was exposed to in school and
was a narrow definition of literacy. Michael’s narrow view of literacy has allowed a disconnect
from the out-of-school literacies that he experienced by not equating them to be aspects of
literacy. For example, his use of the computer, texting, the internet, and video games were forms
of literacy he did not identify. It was quite evident that when one brought various types of
technology, activities, and/or tasks into class that were of interest to Michael, he felt some
connection with the activities. Then, the teacher had an opportunity to hook him into learning. He was a very bright student who could easily get turned off. Even though Michael was intelligent, sometimes he was lazy and did not participate or pay attention at times in class.

**Robert’s Vignette**

**Biographical information.** Robert was a slender, very playful, and outspoken student. He resided within the local Victory community and lived with his mother and younger sister. Robert’s mother graduated from high school and attended the local community college in the city for two years. Overall, he was a happy kid, who was your typical boy (gendered as to what one assumes a typical boy is) who enjoyed video games, sports, and computers. Robert informed me that, if he was not outside with his friends, then he was in the house on the computer or playing video games on his X-Box. Robert has been at Victory since third grade so he had attended this school for the past five years. While he very seldom had discipline referrals, from my observations Robert was very talkative and playful in class. However, his teachers could always and easily redirect him.

**Academic performance.** Robert did have some academic difficulties in previous years but overall he was an average student. He had scored proficient on the state assessment in both reading and math for the past four years. Robert’s average in English/Language Arts the year before the study was 83%. He was reading on grade level. Unfortunately, Robert was very disinterested in reading. According to his teachers he finished his assignments and completed his work in class, but they felt that he could put forth more effort. The teachers felt that his participation in the classroom activities would vary. They explained to me that sometimes he would be an active participant and other times he would indicate disinterest and would do things such as play around at his desk.
Completion of tasks/assignments. Robert played around in class often but he knew when to stop in order to complete his assignments. For example, one particular morning when the students were supposed to be completing their agenda quietly, which included doing a journal entry, Robert would occasionally talk to other classmates. Mrs. Kayhill had to tell him to stop talking more than once, but he completed his journal entry and finished eating his breakfast. He worked really well when the class was separated in small groups to complete tasks or assignments. Within the group he became very vocal, put his points across in discussions, and made contributions. For example, he would say things like, “Wait, I know what we can do.”, “I got to get my point across.”, and “I see what you saying and I like it, but…” (Fieldnotes, November 23, 2010, October 16, 2010, October 29, 2010). When Robert was asked his feelings about working in groups, he responded, “I think that you learn a lot from other people, getting different points of views, and having discussions to figure things out” (Fieldnote, November 24, 2010). Often, when students had to complete quizzes and/or class work, he was one of the first students finished. Although he would be amongst one of the first students to finish, he would not always get the best grades or answer questions completely (see Appendix G).

Interests. Robert had a lack of interest in reading. Research has shown that African American males’ disinterests in reading stems from their feeling that school reading and writing has become a threat to their masculinity, while others contend school literacy rarely meets the needs or interests of Black boys (Tatum, 2005, 2009; Kirkland & Brass, 2006; Gilyard, 2002). His disinterest in reading stemmed from feeling that books were too long and the things that they read in school had very little interest to him. Robert’s interest in literacy typically lay in out-of-school literacies. He informed me that he liked reading game books that were about his video games like Xbox 360 and Wii. He was really into playing video games, so he liked reading the
pamphlets in them so that he could catch on quickly in order to easily advance through the
various levels and master the game. Robert told me, “See, I like reading the video game
pamphlets ‘cause they are only about 30 pages. It is of interest to me, and I quickly apply what I
read.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). It seemed as if he enjoyed reading texts that were about
things that interested him (e.g., video games); and, after reading, he would determine if it had
real-life application. When I asked Robert if he thought that his reading the video game
pamphlets was literacy because he was reading for understanding, his response was “Yea, I
guess, but it is not school or academic stuff. It is fun and entertaining, and it doesn’t have a lot of
pages.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). Robert informed me on different occasions that he
really did not like reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* because it was too long, boring, a girlie type
book to him, and “Anne talked too much.” (Fieldnote, September 10, 2010, October 15, 2010,
October 26, 2010). He also said that he did not like reading *Richard III* either because “My
character died, so that did not leave me much to read, so I had to just listen to others read most of
the time.” (Interview, January 31, 2011). Robert emphasized that *Richard III* seemed to have a
good plot and that he liked the conflict and fights in it, but since his character died so early he
kind of got turned off and tuned out because everybody was reading but him. The other things
that Robert did not enjoy doing was journaling daily, reading every night, reading aloud in class,
and the poetry unit. He simply told me, “I don’t like poetry, so that is why I don’t like the unit.”
(Fieldnote, January 11, 2011). Although Robert did not like the poetry unit, he did like when
they used the iPads during the poetry unit. Every time the students were able to use the iPads,
during my observations, I noticed that Robert was smiling and actively engaged in the activity.
The reason that Robert does not enjoy reading aloud in class because he said, “It is too many
different voices.” (Fieldnote, December 15, 2010). Basically, it seemed that he did not like
hearing all of the different people reading. In an interview, he revealed that he did not like the journaling and reading every night and gave an alternative for that he would prefer doing:

I could see if we were doing reading logs, we could read for like 20 minutes, but you do not have to do it every night you can do it one night and then skip it the next night and then do two or whatever number you want to do the next night; it is fun like that. (Interview, November 10, 2010)

Robert told me that even though he did not like journaling daily he did them anyway because it is a part of his grade and he did not want to fail this class. He did admit that sometimes he might “half do them” or “skip some sometimes because I did not feel like doing it” (Fieldnote, October 18, 2010) (see Appendix H).

Even though the list of Robert’s disinterests or dislikes seemed to be extensive there was something that he was interested in and liked in class. He said that the only thing that he enjoyed doing in class was getting on the computer because “I only like computer stuff.” and continued to say that if computers were used more with instruction he would like it better (Interview, November 23, 2010). On several occasions I saw Robert become excited when he knew that they were going to use the computers or Smart Board. It seemed that he got into his own world or in a zone when he was working with computers or some other type of technology, pretty much like it is his sanctuary.

**Perception of literacy.** Robert did not really have a clear and definite perception of literacy. When he was asked how would he define literacy, with a sound of unsureness in his voice he said, “A story um reading a book.” (Interview, November 23, 2010). As he said this in a low voice, he was looking at me with uncertainty and wanting me to confirm his answer. Out of comics, poetry, music, blogging, texting, and movies, Robert only perceived texting and comics
to be forms of literacy. He believed that texting and comics were forms of literacy because they have “printed words” (Interview, November 23, 2010).

**Summary.** Robert was a playful and outspoken student. Just from observations and conversations with him, I could tell that he was not into reading and books (in-school literacies), but more into sports and games such as basketball, football, and video games. Every Monday morning he would come in and talk about how the National Football teams did on their Sunday games. Robert was highly interested in what can be perceived of as masculine activities such as wrestling, sports trading cards, computers, and video games. It seemed that he was not making the connection with his out-of-school literacies to in-school literacies because Robert did not consider what he was doing outside of school as literacy practices. Robert considered in-school literacy as boring and of little interest to him. He became interested in literacy more when the teachers made connections and tied in things of interest to him.

**Analysis of the African American Males’ Vignettes**

In this section, I discussed the overall interests and perception of literacy of the focal male students and the impact of their interests and perceptions of literacy. The comparisons of these students’ interests and perceptions of literacy highlight the similarities about African American adolescent males and literacy. I discussed how their interests impacted their involvement and participation in the English/Language Arts classroom and how their perception of literacy affects how they feel about reading. Finally, some insights on the motivation behind the African American males desire to or not to achieve academically were identified.

**African American Males Interests and Perception of Literacy**

Only one out of the five adolescent males really liked reading. According to various research boys viewed reading as a gendered activity, more appropriate for girls than boys and
types of texts exposed to (Taylor, 2005; Tatum, 2005). Millard (1997) suggests that this is because boys tend to see their mothers and sisters reading more at home than their fathers or brothers. Also, because the teaching force is overwhelmingly female, boys may consider reading and school work in general as more of a feminine activity (Taylor, 2005). The other four either did not like reading at all or liked it sometimes depending on what they were reading. These middle school adolescent males were at a critical age and time period in their lives where there was resistance and negative attitudes toward reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Most of them felt that either reading was boring, too long, of no interest to them, or too girlie. I believe that their attitudes would have changed if they had been able to read what they wanted. Confirmation of this conclusion can be found in a study by Powell, McIntyre, & Rightmyer (2006). They found that tasks in which the children had limited control and choice resulted not merely in disengagement, but in behaviors that children also characterized as resistant. In another study of middle school students, Broadus and Ivey (2001) found through interviews that, “Students worst experiences reading in school were directly related to assigned reading and that they found the assigned reading materials boring.” (p.363). Also, at the end of December, before the winter break, Mrs. Kayhill said to the students, “When we return from the break or shortly after we will be doing things a little different, and you will be reading books of choice instead of reading what we chose for the whole class to read.” (Fieldnote, December 2, 2010). All of the students had smiles on their faces, and both D’Andre and Marcus shouted out “Yes!” (Fieldnote, December 2, 2010).

The next week as the students were in line to go to their next period class, I asked D’Andre and Marcus what books of choice they were going to read, D’Andre said, “Begging for Change by Sharon G. Flake.” (2003) and Marcus said, “Lightning Thief.” (Riordan, 2005)
(Fieldnote, December 6, 2010). For the most part they were only equating the literacy that they were exposed to in school to their interest or likeness of reading and not to their out-of-school literacies. These adolescent males’ primary interests were computers, games, sports, magazines, comics, nonfiction, action-packed stories, and realistic fiction. If the literacy that they were exposed to and had to read was of interest to them, or they could make some type of connection with the text, then they would be engaged in and want to participate or want to read it. Tatum (2007) further explained this by expressing that in order to motivate African American teenage males to read texts, they must be exposed to text in the classroom that have connections to them whether personal, social, or cultural connections. Some of these connections can be seen with the inclusion and the need for African American literature, as expressed by D’Andre. What they read and were exposed to in the English/Language Arts classroom definitely had an impact on African American males’ interests in and how they felt about literacy.

When the males only perceived literacy in singular form as only reading and writing, it seemed that they took on more of a negative attitude towards reading. For instance, Robert and Michael perceived literacy as the traditional singular form and their attitudes/feelings were more resistant toward reading. On the other hand, D’Andre, Marcus, and Quinton had a more expanded definition of literacy and perceived literacy to be of multiple forms. They had a more positive outlook and perspective. Yes, most of the males did not 100% love or enjoy reading; but, the three who had a multiliteracy perspective were more towards the fence of enjoying reading, depending on what type of text it was. What surfaced from the observations and interviews was that what the adolescent African American males perceive literacy to be or include as literacy has an impact on how they feel (whether like or dislike) about reading.

**Interests have an Effect on Completion of Assignments**
When African American males did not complete assignments or did not do very well on them, it did not necessarily mean that they did not have the academic ability to do so. Tatum (2009) clearly addressed this:

African American males are not engaged in a great conspiracy to fail themselves… They continue to underperform in school as they wait for educators to get it right and bring in curriculum and texts that interests and relates to them. (p. 68)

In this study it was clearly evident that, if something interested them or they liked what they read, then these African American adolescent males were more likely to do the work. When any task or assignment involved anything with technology (i.e. computers, iPads, Smart Board) all of the boys were indeed engaged with and completed the task. With the journaling Quinton, the one student who enjoyed writing, consistently did the daily journaling and did well on his entries. Also, even though D’Andre did not like doing the daily journaling, he liked reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* and he did the journaling although it was not done consistently. Marcus, Michael, and Robert had the capabilities to do the journaling but did not because they did not like writing or the book *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

**Motivation to do Well and/or Complete Task**

Everyone is motivated to do things and these African American males are no different. The study of achievement motivation distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Hudley, 1997). In the case of these five boys it was no different than either of the extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors. As was just previously mentioned, the boys’ interests, which was an intrinsic motivation, drove them to do well or complete a task. Marcus did not like *The Diary of Anne Frank*, but he liked plays and was an arts type person so he excelled in doing the play for the book. D’Andre loved poetry so he was intrinsically motivated to participate and complete the
assignments during the poetry unit. The other motivating factor that these males displayed was extrinsic. They changed their attitudes and started to do more in the class when outside factors like grades and their parents came into to play. It took Michael’s mother coming in for a conference with the administration and his teachers for him to start completing his work more, participating, and becoming more focused on his work. In Marcus persuasive writing about The Diary of Anne Frank, he explained the rising eighth graders should read Anne Frank not because it is a good book but because it could affect their grades if they do not. The extrinsic or intrinsic motivation influenced and/or changed or affected the boys’ attitudes about completing the tasks or assignments in the class.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I formally introduced the five focal students through vignettes. In those introductions I gave detailed descriptions of how each student looked, their living situations, academic history, perception of literacy, engagement in the classroom, and likes and dislikes in and out of the classroom. I provided a glimpse of who these young men were and what they did in the classroom. From this chapter, some typical essentializations and not so typical essentialized gender roles surfaced about males, and some were specifically stereotypical of African American males. It was revealed in this chapter how the students’ home life and out-of-school experiences impacted their in-school experiences. In the next chapter, I introduce the classroom teachers and reveal their literacy instruction beliefs. Further findings will be discussed with particular emphasis on how teacher beliefs impact their instruction.
Chapter 5

Teachers’ Beliefs about Literacy Comes through Their Teaching

A classroom will take on its own meaning based on the teacher’s belief. One way to understand what teachers do in their classrooms and why is to recognize the teacher’s unique and individual beliefs. Beliefs are part of a construct that name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states that are thought to drive a person’s actions… Teaching beliefs usually come from personal experiences, prior schooling, instructing experiences, and interaction with formal knowledge. (Shaw, Barry, & Mahlios, 2008, p.36)

Teachers are not just empty vessels; they come into the classroom with many years of experiences and bring these experiences into their teaching. These experiences emanate from educational experiences and from personal or social experiences as well. Teachers are social beings that have histories of their own; so, their teaching becomes a social act in the construction and production of knowledge. A teacher’s experiences and beliefs not only influence what a teacher decides to teach but also how they teach the material (Grossman, 1990; Pajares, 1992).

In this chapter, I formally introduce Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill by providing background about each teacher. Next, I present and describe the teachers’ beliefs about literacy instruction. I discuss the teaching style of the teachers. Then I explain how the teachers’ planned lessons unfold in the classroom. I believed that it was essential to discuss the unfolding of the planned lessons because it describes how what the teacher uses (i.e. resources, materials, technology, etc.) plays out in the classroom when the planned lesson is enacted in the classroom. My research will describe what teachers encounter as they attempted to implement the 21st
century literacy elements, the impact (whether positive or negative) on the delivery of instruction on the students, and how what they planned to do actually played out in the classroom. At the conclusion of this chapter I link the teachers’ beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about literacy instruction with their teaching style. In the final section of this chapter I detail how what the teachers believed was enacted in the classroom.

Ms. Jackson

Ms. Jackson was an African American teacher who was unmarried with one daughter. She resided within the Victory community, about one mile from the school. She said that she often saw most of the students when she was at the grocery store or the mall (Interview, November 10, 2010). Ms. Jackson had been teaching for nine years. Education was not her first career choice. Psychology was her major study in undergraduate school. She wanted to be a drug rehabilitation counselor, but she said, “I never pursued my masters in it.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Ms. Jackson worked some retail jobs before she started teaching. While working in retail, she heard about an alternative teaching certification program, decided to take part in it, and relocated from a state in the south to come to the northeast to become part of the program. Ms. Jackson said once she decided to pursue the alternative teaching certification program to become a teacher, she has not thought about another career change since she began teaching. Ms. Jackson has taught on the middle school level since 2006. She has taught English/Language Arts ever since she had been teaching on the middle school level. This was her first year teaching at Victory. She transferred to Victory from another kindergarten through eighth grade school within the district. Ms. Jackson had been at her previous school for four years and decided to leave that school because, after her third year there, the principal retired. She explained to me, “I tried to stay there longer but the new administration that came in I didn’t believe in their vision for the
school, I saw the school make drastic changes for the worst, and the staff morale went down.” (Interview, 9/1/2010). Her first few months at Victory had been “enjoyable”, “I have bought into the vision of the school that Mr. Barnes has set.”, and “I like how Mr. Barnes believes in and treats his staff.” (K. Jackson, personal communication, December 21, 2010).

The resources that Ms. Jackson has relied upon for professional development have primarily been from the district and school-based professional staff developers. She felt that she received professional development, as well, when she is among her fellow teachers engaged in dialogue in staff meetings and/or grade level meetings. Ms. Jackson mentioned that the university provides free reading courses for the staff that she will probably take advantage of next school year because “I want my daughter to get a little older before I start taking so much time away from her.” (K. Jackson, personal communication, September 15, 2010). She believed that co-teaching this year has allowed her to develop more professionally because she had an opportunity to reflect on her literacy lessons with another person daily in order to better serve the students. Ms. Jackson had not pursued her master’s degree yet because of finances and constraints of time. Professional organizations for reading/English teachers, such as National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association were not professional development resources for her. During an interview she said, “Honestly I do not know about them and I only know of Fountas and Pinnell.” (Interview, November 10, 2010). Irene Fountas and Gay S. Pinnell are researchers and university instructors that created a company that provides educators with books and other resources for systematic small group instruction, guided reading, and leveled literacy interventions (e.g., leveled books, benchmark assessments, etc.).

**Ms. Jackson’s Beliefs About Literacy Instruction**
Thoughts and feelings about literacy. Ms. Jackson had a firm belief that literacy is an essential element in the academic development and success of students. Her belief about the importance of literacy was expressed in an interview on August 30, 2010:

Literacy is like the foundation of learning because without being literate you can’t function in the outside world. So I think literacy is like the stable crop or staple subject that students should have under their belt and be able to master.

She thought that the best way to teach students was to incorporate the philosophy of “I do” “where I model and give explicit instruction, “We do” where together the students and myself do examples together with guided practice and I check for understanding before moving on, and “You do” here is where students “do independent practice individually or in small groups and can be done in centers” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Ms. Jackson also believed that with literacy instruction, teachers need to include multicultural literature. She felt and expressed, “Multiculturalism through literature exposure gave students background knowledge that they may not have had the chance to acquire based on their demographics.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Her experience teaching in urban, predominately African American, schools had allowed her to realize “African American students in urban areas more times then not are sheltered to their lifestyle, way of living, and communities that they miss out on so much of the world that is around them.” (Fieldnote, August 26, 2010). According to Ms. Jackson, “Exposing students to multicultural literature takes students out of their comfort zone, aids in acquisition of cultural tolerance, and brings elements that they are unfamiliar with into their world.” (Interview, September 1, 2010).

Because our country has put such a strong emphasis on testing, Ms. Jackson said, “Literacy instruction has become too skill and drill where our instruction is mimicking the tests
and where we are teaching students to memorize and not conceptualize or comprehend.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). She felt that the district’s literacy curriculum placed more emphasis on skill-based instruction instead of reading comprehension, and “This does not benefit students because it just endorses rote learning and not reading or a love for reading.” (Interview, September 1, 2010).

Ms. Jackson had a firm belief that literacy instruction, especially for middle school students, should involve reading novels instead of anthologies or basal readers. This excerpt from an interview clearly explains Ms. Jackson’s sentiments about novels rather than basal readers and anthologies:

Basal readers and anthologies are boring to me and from my years of experience as a English/Language Arts teacher the kids think that they are boring as well. I don’t think that the students actually benefit from reading a splice of a story because they always in my situations they always want to know what happens in the end or they remember this is from a book that I read to them before. So I think exposing kids to the whole novel is a practice, especially in middle school it needs to be done a lot more because once they get into high school they actually go more to a novel base study it is not really anthologies based. (Interview, September 1, 2010)

Although the school district promoted and required for middle school literacy instruction the use of the anthology entitled The Language Literature by McDougal Littell, A Houghton Mifflin Company, the teachers at Victory could use any instructional materials that they choose because they worked at a public charter school within the district and that allowed them more choice and freedom. After I spoke with Ms. Jackson about the use of anthologies versus novels she let me
see *The Language Literature* anthology and showed me how they have an excerpt of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in it. As she showed me the story in the anthology I could see the displeasure on her face as she said to me:

See what I’m talking about it is not the complete story so the students do not get the full meaning, understanding, and experiences of this little girl, that is why we have purchased *The Diary of Anne Frank* for our students to read for our first unit. (Interview, September 23, 2010)

Ms. Jackson strongly believed that books and novels were the “center piece” and that literacy instruction should revolve around and that students should be reading whole books and novels (Interview September 1, 2010). She expressed that she selected the books that the students read based on “student and teacher interests” level, and according to the school districts scope and sequence” (Interview November 10, 2010). Her knowledge of literacy for youth basically came from her experience as a classroom teacher. Ms. Jackson felt that, because she has been teaching reading to fifth through eighth graders for five years, “Experience has been the best teacher.” (Interview, November 10, 2010).

In order to effectively instruct students Ms. Jackson firmly believed that how one assesses and type of activities students complete in the lessons is essential. Ms. Jackson expressed:

I am pretty big on different types of informal assessments, I don’t want the kids to think that I am constantly testing them, but it is essential to do quick pre-assessments before teaching a new skill/concept because it allows me to base my lessons on what their needs are and be more specific with differentiation.” (Interview, September 1, 2010)
She felt that assessment was essential to cater to the needs of students, but should be done in varying informal ways. Engagement and increasing students’ academic ability were important to Ms. Jackson. Ms. Jackson thought that this could have been done by doing project-based activities at the end of a unit because “kids have a chance to apply what they have learned to the real world” (Interview, September 1, 2010).

**Race and gender with literacy instruction.** In terms of gender Ms. Jackson thought about it in terms of interest and engagement. She believed that males and females learn in different ways and their interests can vary. Because of her beliefs in gender differences Ms. Jackson revealed, “Differentiation of instruction in literacy is crucial in order to reach all learners.” (Fieldnote, August 24, 2010). Ms. Jackson felt that race plays a crucial role when selecting books. When it came to race Ms. Jackson explained to me that at the time of book selection, “I do not consider race at first but after a few weeks go by I do because I usually begin to wonder if the book makes certain students feel uncomfortable.” (Interview, September 1, 2010).

Ms. Jackson had a keen interest in teaching African American males. Everyone was well aware of the plight and disinterests in education that a lot of African American males have, so Ms. Jackson identified well with them because “I have a first hand account of their lifestyles, living situations, and environment because I live among them and see what they go through and endure on a daily basis.” (Fieldnote, 10/1/2010). She stated, “I generally like teaching males a little more than I do females because once they do get it, it is like a light clicks on and they take it and run with it.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). During an interview Ms. Jackson explained her take on African American males’ literacy education and instruction:

From what I’ve seen African American males do not enjoy reading and I think
that reaching them is difficult because they do not see many other African American males reading, they don’t see where reading can get them, and too many times in school they have not encountered texts that interests them, characters that look like them, or texts that they can relate to. Even though reaching African American males can be difficult, but once you hook them in they are giving you ideas that you never thought about before using in the classroom…

Ways that get uninterested reluctant African American males readers, I usually try to figure out what it is that is keeping them from being interested in reading and nine times out of ten it is either they do not know how to read on a proficient level or they do not see what reading can do for them in the future. So I find literature that is exciting for them whether it be magazines about sports, books about games they play at home, articles about basketball players, football players, rappers, anything that they are typically interested in, and I bring those in so they can start at least feeling comfortable with the subject matter and then expounding on their ability to actually read. In order for them to see the importance and need for literacy I remind them how it is all around them, in everything they do, and want to do in the future. (Interview, September 23, 2010)

Ms. Jackson’s understanding of African American males and literacy of today was that their perception of literacy and its value has changed from their ancestors (slavery and post-slavery) and their parents (Civil Rights era). According to Perry (2003) African American males no longer see literacy as a symbol of freedom and emancipation. Ms. Jackson felt that African American males were less likely to see school literacy in the same way as mainstream America.
So she believed that her instruction needed to be “differentiated, engaging, and interesting” to these young men (Interview, November 20, 2010).

**Twenty-first century literacy instruction.** Ms. Jackson viewed the impact of twenty-first century literacy in two ways. She considered twenty-first century literacy the “new and improved literacy that includes: movies, plays, extension activities, benchmark testing, Smart Boards, Smart Board tests, assessments used to group students into smaller groups, computers, YouTube, blogging, popular culture, and two teachers in a classroom to co-teach” (Interview, November 10, 2010). It was evident that Ms. Jackson viewed 21st literacy instruction as including multiliteracy, differentiation, multimodal, and co-teaching. Ms. Jackson gave a concise explanation as to why she thought that multiliteracy is essential in the classroom:

> Bringing in multiliteracy like blogging, video games, movies, music (e.g., rap, R&B), and spoken word into the classroom I find myself doing it a lot. One in particular because I love watching movies and listening to music, and also because there are so many ways to teach literacy other than A+B=C formula. I think if teachers stepped a little more out-of-the box or honed into their more creative modalities then the students would be actually be a lot more successful. (Interview, September 15, 2010)

She explained how all the technology and multiliteracy had helped and been beneficial for students who have difficulty learning with the traditional learning practices. Ms. Jackson’s strong belief in the inclusion of multiliteracy in literacy instruction also came from her experiences with them as she was a student. Her personal experiences with multiliteracy helped her connect to the unknown of canonical texts such as *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1963) and *Othello* (Shakespeare, 1963). The use of modernized movies and plays about or similar in plot to the canonical texts she said, “Helped me understand the language and terms to better comprehend the text.” (Interview,
September 1, 2010). It was the inclusion of multiliteracy that allowed her to finally begin to understand canonical texts that she could not relate to. Ms. Jackson discussed a time in school when she had to read *Othello* and “not being able to really understand it until I watched a movie about Othello that was titled “O”. (Interview, September 1, 2010). The movie “O” starred an African American actor named Mekhi Phifer and Ms. Jackson recalls being so excited because “I thought that Mekhi Phifer was so cute and the movie was modernized so that I could understand it and make connections.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). The movie enabled her to make connections between the old English version in the book to the new version in the movie. The movie was structured so that she was able to note similarities, make connections, and begin to understand the text.

Although Ms. Jackson believed in 21st century literacy instruction, she also felt that today’s students did not really have to know how to read most things like a map or a book. She argued that technology, audio, video, etc. was crippling some students. Ms. Jackson gave an example of this by explaining, “Research is now completed on a much faster scale with technology with things like Google, Wikipedia, etc. and the fundamentals of research have been lost.” (K. Jackson, personal communication, October 1, 2010). She went on further to explain how students did not even know how to create simple outlines, organize, or summarize to create essays because it is all done for them “by a quick search on the internet” and she believes that “This is the reason that there is so much plagiarism occurring in middle and high schools.” (K. Jackson, personal communication, October 1, 2010). There was no doubt that Ms. Jackson thought that technology is needed and essential in literacy instruction for engagement, interests, and to reach students, especially those having trouble reading or spelling. They would now have a comfort zone with the use of technology. Ms. Jackson felt that it was important to incorporate
“the old-school and new-school” ways of instruction in her teaching (Interview, September 1, 2010). She informed me that she incorporates 21st century literacy instruction with some old basics. For example, she explained:

I may let the students publish their writing using the computer, but they have to produce an outline that they create from the various sources that they got their information from and create a summary of what information each resource provided them. (Interview, November 10, 2010)

Mrs. Kayhill

Mrs. Kayhill was a European American teacher, married with no children. She and her husband did not live in the city, but lived in a suburban area in a neighboring state that was about one hour from Victory. Mrs. Kayhill said to me, “I am originally from the state that my husband and I reside in, and I came to this state for college.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). She attended one of the very prominent and internationally known private universities, which was located in that Northeastern city in which Victory was located.

Mrs. Kayhill was in her fourth year of teaching. She had been working in the school district since the start of her teaching career. Her husband worked for the school district as well, as a technology supervisor. Mrs. Kayhill was dual certified in special education and social studies. She was currently pursuing a master’s degree in reading with reading specialist certification endorsement. Education was her major while she was an undergraduate. She started out teaching in high school as an eleventh grade social studies teacher and did not like it; so, she took a break from education for about a year. Her dislike of secondary school, she believed, came from her “Thinking that I was fresh out of college and too young to be teaching in high school at that particular time.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill informed me that
she eventually came back to education. What got her back into education and enjoying it was “a different population,” coming to the kindergarten to eighth grade level, and primarily focusing on special education (Interview, September 1, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill had been teaching at Victory for three years and this was her second year teaching on the middle school level. The two previous years that she had taught at Victory, Mrs. Kayhill was a self-contained teacher or special educator resource teacher. During a conversation with Mrs. Kayhill on August 27, 2010, the first week the teachers returned for professional development and setting-up of classrooms, she expressed to me, “I love Victory; it has been a very good experience and everyone’s very supportive and positive.” (S. Kayhill, personal communication, August 27, 2010). In the three years that she had been at Victory she explained to me that the university’s connection with Victory:

> Is very beneficial when it comes to technology, I am pretty sure that’s why everybody has a Smart Board, TV, image projectors in there classrooms. They are very good with the technology support. As for the instructional support I haven’t really noticed any influence except maybe for the free classes that they offer that I have not taken because I am pursuing my master’s at a private college. (Interview, September 1, 2010)

Mrs. Kayhill had taken various opportunities to develop professionally. She was doing it by pursuing an advanced degree and took advantage of other professional development opportunities. Most of her professional development had been in the area of reading and/or special education. In October 2010 she went to New York for a conference on using literature in elementary schools. When she returned she was so excited, “I saw in a school how students as young as first graders reading actual books and not reading out of anthologies.” (Fieldnote, October 12, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill not only relied on the professional development that was offered
in the district and at the school, but she sought out other opportunities as well. She mentioned, “Mr. Barnes is great when it comes to funding outside professional development that we want to attend.” (Interview, November 10, 2010). Although she took advantage of various professional development opportunities Mrs. Kayhill is not part of professional organizations such as the International Reading Association, Language Research Association, or National Council of Teachers of English. Mrs. Kayhill was aware of these particular literacy organizations but did not utilize them for resources about literacy for youth. She said, “I utilize many websites to find and select books, and the search usually begins with Google.” (Interview, November 10, 2010).

**Mrs. Kayhill’s Beliefs About Literacy Instruction**

**Thoughts and feelings about literacy.** Mrs. Kayhill believed that literacy is the most important thing for any individual to acquire. She expressed, “Yes, it’s important to know how to add and subtract, but if you can’t read the chances are you are not going to go really far.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill felt that literacy was the key element for survival and success. During one informal interview she stated, “So many students struggle in the middle and high school grades across the various content areas because they did not master or lacked early and emergent literacy skills from their elementary school years.” (Interview, October 12, 2010). She believed that her school district’s literacy curriculum focused more on test preparation and “skill and drill, does not benefit the students, and is more skill focused rather than reading focused”, which allowed more for memorization instead of understanding and applying concepts through the use of authentic literature (Interview, November 10, 2010). According to Mrs. Kayhill’s belief about literacy instruction and philosophy of education, “Teachers need to introduce the skill or concept, do explicit direct instruction by modeling, next do guided practice, and then allow students to independently practice the skill/concept by
applying it within as well as out of the context that it was taught” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Another important aspect in literacy instruction that Mrs. Kayhill believed to be essential is the use of novels. Mrs. Kayhill felt strongly expressed, “Students have struggled so much with reading because they have not been accustomed to reading novels.” (Interview, 9/1/2010). She thought that novels and/or reading books instead of using basal readers and anthologies were better for elementary and middle school students.

Mrs. Kayhill believed that multiculturalism and culturally relevant teaching was needed in literacy instruction. She felt that multiculturalism and culturally relevant teaching were incredibly important for the diversity of students in today’s society. In regards to multiculturalism Mrs. Kayhill expressed:

With the continued development of the global community comes the importance of cultural tolerance. Students could be exposed to a variety of cultures in their studies at school. Using literature to introduce students to a culture different from their own is a great way to begin their cultural growth. In my experience, schools continue to be incredibly homogenous. Introducing multicultural literature is a way to introduce students to a world they are unfamiliar with and have little to no exposure with. (Interview, November 10, 2010)

Mrs. Kayhill believed that because most schools had a homogenous population, with Victory being 99% African American, it was essential to expose students to things out of their element and that were unfamiliar to them. For her, using multicultural literature was a critical piece to bring about cultural acceptance and introduce students to worlds that they may be unfamiliar with. Mrs. Kayhill shared her thoughts by stating that, “Using literature to introduce students to a culture different from their own is a great way to begin their cultural growth.” (Interview,
November 10, 2010). Although Mrs. Kayhill had a strong belief that with literacy instruction, students need to be introduced and exposed to things unlike them or their community, she believed that students needed to also be exposed to things that looked like them and their communities. Her definition of multicultural literature is incorrect to some extent. She has a partial understanding of multicultural literature but, Mrs. Kayhill was missing a key component of multiculturalism which is that one has to start with the culture of the students.

Mrs. Kayhill explained her views, thoughts, and ideas about culturally relevant teaching. She said, “I believe that students need to connect in some way to what they are learning. Students connect best with information that is relevant or in someway looks like their lives.” (Interview, November 10, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill felt students need to make connections and culturally relevant teaching is essential for this to happen. In literacy instruction, as well with any other content area, Mrs. Kayhill knew students would be exposed to things that they were not familiar with or was not culturally relevant to them, so she explained, “It is the educators responsibility to provide the background knowledge or help them connect to the non-culturally relevant information.” (Interview, November 10, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill firmly believed with the use of literature, one could expose students to the familiar and introduce them to different things and materials would only serve to benefit students.

**Race and gender with literacy instruction.** Mrs. Kayhill felt that she placed more emphasis on gender rather than race in her teaching and instruction. She expressed, “I am aware that the females would prefer to read something different than the males and vice versa, and that certain instructional activities may be more engaging for some more than others in terms of gender.” (Interview, November 10, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill had a multicultural perspective about race. She said:
I do consider race when I select books. I think it is incredibly important for students to read material that is culturally and racially relevant, but on the other hand the students live in a very homogeneous environment and I think it is very important for them to be exposed to different types of cultures, classes, and races of people. (Interview, November 10, 2010)

Her beliefs about race and gender with literacy instruction had views that expressed the importance of exposing students to things within their comfort zone, but believed it was as equally important for teachers to help students step out of the element or comfort zone in order to learn about things or that is not like them. When I attempted to further probe to get an understanding of whether or not Mrs. Kayhill assumed that the students have experience with African American literature for youth, she said:

Well I guess they read things about African Americans because I have seen and heard my students reading things like Essence and Ebony magazines and I believe that they are saturated by things like them so why not expose them to other cultures (Interview, November 10, 2010).

It seemed that Mrs. Kayhill believed and assumed, since these students were African American living in an African American community that they were exposed to plenty of African American literature. So in school they should be exposed to other types of texts and/or genres that they are not familiar with. It seemed that Mrs. Kayhill was not enabling all out-of-school literacies into in-school literacy.

When it came to African American males and their performance in the area of literacy, Mrs. Kayhill acknowledged that they seemed to still be struggling in this area. Mrs. Kayhill summed up that African American male students lack in the area of literacy because of their lack
of early and emergent literacy. She explained, “Most inner-city low-income African American students were not read to as children.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill’s thoughts on why African Americans struggled in the area of literacy was based on an erroneous belief. She based her perspectives on her years of teaching African American students in urban areas so Mrs. Kayhill believed that she had a better knowledge of working with inner-city low-income African American students. She gave me an example of how she did reading intervention with students and when she exposed the students to various types of reading (e.g., newspaper, different genres), she stated, “The African American students could not connect, seemed unfamiliar, and not being exposed therefore making it difficult and took a little longer to acquire reading skills.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill believed that because adolescent African American males “lack a lot of the early and emergent literacy skills, high low books are a really good way to get them to read and be able to read on their own independently” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Her sentiments on the low academic achievement for adolescent African American males in middle school were that they are exposed to contexts and books, and they might be interested in the subject but they just could not access it because of their of low skills in early and emergent literacy brought on by home environments/situations.

**Twenty-first century literacy instruction.** Technology and the internet was the area where Mrs. Kayhill was very comfortable. She was delighted in and believed that it was her duty as an educator to incorporate technology into her instruction. In 2010 the school district piloted the use of iPads in the classroom, and Mrs. Kayhill was the one who suggested and submitted the proposal for she and Ms. Jackson be designated pilot teachers on the use of the iPads in a classroom. Mrs. Kayhill believed technology and the Internet had made this a “now generation” (Interview, September 1, 2010) where instant gratification is a part of life; so, educators had to
know how to use the Smart Board, googledocs, iPads, computer games, incorporate mulimodalities and multiliteracy, and have other resources in place to accommodate the now generations’ needs. She gave an example of what she meant. Mrs. Kayhill explained, “If a student were using the iPad to read a book, then they could highlight words they did not know; and, with the click of a button, instantly find the meaning of a word.” (Interview, September 1, 2010).

Mrs. Kayhill felt one had to go beyond the printed text and bring in other forms of literacy, for example, music, film, pictures, and technology because they were good ways to provide background knowledge, connect to students, understanding, and hook students in. The belief in incorporating multiliteracy and technology in instruction came about for Mrs. Kayhill not only because of professional reasons or experiences, but also her own personal experiences. She spoke with me about being in third grade in a gifted and talented program back in 1986 and being exposed to the first Apple computers. Mrs. Kayhill told me in detail with a grin on her face about her third grade experience:

On these Apple computers where the turtle moved over the screen and you had to give it directions. I remember playing on the computer “Where in the World is Carmen San Diego” and I think back to how that really laid a foundation for me learning about continents and learning about different places and it wasn’t just because it was scripted to me or just sit and study a map, but I learned because I was engaged with the computer program in wanting to figure out where Carmen San Diego was. So I began to apply those skills to learn about other things.

(Interview, October 15, 2010)

Summary of Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson’s Beliefs About Literacy
As literacy educators, both teachers felt that literacy was vital and essential. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson each had a love for and passion about reading and literacy. They both believed that literacy was at the center of children’s development. Literacy instruction to them meant that literacy should not be skills-based instruction but more of a multimodal, multiliteracy focus with an emphasis on reading (reading being able to identify words and understand what has been read). The two teachers believed their district’s literacy curriculum focus was more skills focused rather than reading focused and did not benefit the students long-term; but, the focus was more on testing. Their school district, like so many other urban school districts in our country, aligned their curriculum with the high-stakes tests that used and promoted pre-packaged scripted instruction (i.e., anthologies and basal readers) that implemented decontextualized skill and drill practice rather than on careful and thoughtful examination of literature (Blanton, Wood, & Taylor, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 1998).

From Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson’s opinions and personal experiences, they both were anti-textbooks (i.e., basal readers or anthologies) and used novels to teach. Blanton et al. (2007) seemed to be in agreement with these teachers by explaining that basal readers and anthologies “are not an ideal approach for engaging middle school students in reading an array of challenging texts in or out of school” (p. 79). Although the school district promoted the use of the anthology entitled The Language of Literature for grades six through eight, teachers at Victory could have used any instructional materials of their choice because they were a public charter within the school district, which allowed them more choice and freedom. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson’s strong belief in using novels for literacy instruction has affected how they went about implementing the district’s curriculum. Because they used novels instead of anthologies for literacy instruction, when both teachers came together to plan, they looked at the
state’s voluntary curriculum (see Appendix I) along with the school district’s scope and sequence. Then they planed lessons to cover and teach the required skills or concepts through the authentic literature.

Jackson and Kayhill placed such strong emphasis on actual books and novels in literacy instruction because they believed that books would better prepare elementary and middle school students for high school, as well as the endurance of reading. Their knowledge about literacy for youth did not come from resources like International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, or any other professional literacy organization. Instead, they utilized websites like Google and their experiences as teachers to select books to read and use with their instruction. Although they said they selected books based on student and teacher interest levels, and according to the scope and sequence of their school district (the scope and sequence gave suggested genres to use during certain times to go along with certain specified skills) (see Appendix A), their actions did not exemplify their words. For example, the teachers did not give the students a reading interest inventory or initially ask the students what type of books that they liked or wanted to read. In addition, for quarter one (August 30, 2010 - November, 2010) some of the suggested genres listed in the scope and sequence were diaries, autobiographies, historical fiction, etc.

The teachers choose to use *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which they used from September 3, 2010 - November 24, 2010. During an interview with both teachers they spoke of the reason why they chose *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Ms. Jackson’s decision to use this book was because she had never read it and she thought that the students should read, “A story about a girl around their age who still has most of the same experiences that they do, just instead of a regular adolescent period she spends it inside a secret annex.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). Mrs. Kayhill’s
reason for deciding to use *The Diary of Anne Frank* was based on another teacher’s recommendation that used the book the prior year when he taught eighth grade. She said, “Conveniently, this same teacher, whom she was friends with and was taking classes with for a reading specialist endorsement, had a class set and he informed her that the eight grade students last year really enjoyed and benefited from the knowledge.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). It seemed that the selection of the books were more of the teachers’ interests than the students’ interests. This most likely was attributed to Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson’s lack of training and knowledge or use of professional literacy organizations. According to Podhajski, Mather, Nathan, and Sammons (2009), teachers believe that they are more knowledgeable and prepared for teaching reading than they actually are and they do not have a solid foundation in theory and research based concepts of understanding literacy development. These researchers went on further to explain that teachers often do not understand that teaching of reading involves much more than word recognition skills and comprehension, but must include ways to engage, motivate, and connect with at-risk students such as children of poverty.

Neither of the teachers had a reading teacher or specialist endorsement, Mrs. Kayhill just started taking classes for her masters in reading, and Ms. Jackson had not taken any reading courses even though they are offered free to her through the university. As I looked at the graduate College of Education’s website for the university that Mrs. Kayhill attended, I noticed that there was not one course about multicultural literature or multiculturalism. The College of Education only offered courses such as strategies and resources in teaching reading, diagnosis of reading difficulties, and psychological and linguistic foundations of reading. There are a lot of teacher education programs that may or may not even include a multicultural orientation and fail to infuse multicultural education throughout the entire program; the result is often teachers who
have a positive, yet rather vague outlook on multicultural education do not have the appropriate pedagogy to be effective (McNeal, 2005). Kayhill and Jackson’s beliefs matched up with how we should teach and engage children in a diverse society, but their lack of training did not allow them to properly carry out and implement their beliefs with the adequate resources. For example, if they were properly trained and/or made use of professional literacy organizations they could have used other books written by Virginia Hamilton, Walter Dean Myers, or Sharon Draper and could have complemented *The Diary of Anne Frank* with *The Diary of a Slave Girl* (McWilliams, 2001). Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) expressed, “Educators can not eliminate the achievement gap in our schools without closing the knowledge gap in our profession.” (p. 223).

Both teachers discussed the importance of first figuring out what they wanted students to learn (skill or concept) and then what they would explicitly teach through the novels during planning periods. Although the students read the entire book, the teachers pulled from certain parts of the book to highlight or emphasize for instruction particular skills or concepts. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill felt that it was important in literacy instruction to teach a skill, concept, or strategy by first modeling it for the students. Next they conducted a guided practice as whole class or with a small group; and, then allowed students to independently practice the skill by using or applying the skill, concept, or strategy. What the teachers believed to be the appropriate way to teach literacy is called the gradual release of responsibility framework for instruction (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Pearson & Gallagher, 1993). The teachers’ beliefs about literacy can thus be understood as including what they assume, think, and know about how children develop literacy skills (Hindman & Wasik, 2008).
Kayhill and Jackson believed that differentiation of instruction was so beneficial because boys and girls were interested and engaged in different things. Tomlinson (2001) asserts a similar view when she described how gender influences how we learn and there are gender-based preferences. Engaging students in literacy is essential in getting students to make meaning and to gain a deeper understanding. In order to engage boys in literacy they need to be introduced to and have books available that interest them (Taylor, 2005). These two teachers believed in differentiation of instruction but they only implemented two elements of differentiation. Kayhill and Jackson only focused on differentiation of products and learning environments. They did not implement the other two elements of differentiation, which are differentiation of content and process. According to Tomlinson (2000) Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson did differentiation of products because for the culminating project for *The Diary of Anne Frank* they had students create plays and by allowing students to work alone or in small groups on their products; and learning environment because of the development of routines, setting out clear guidelines, and proving materials that reflect a variety of cultures.

The two teachers were well aware of the literacy gender gap and how African American males seem to be performing the worst out of all other subgroups. Their thoughts on African American literacy education were different and took on different perspectives. Ms. Jackson’s thoughts on African American males’ literacy and instruction identified the lack of engaging and enabling texts, types of literacy instruction, more culturally responsive teaching, and incorporating the males’ background experiences from their homes and community. Her take on African American males’ literacy and instruction took on a sociocultural perspective that included children’s culture, home, family, and community as a backdrop for their learning in school (Diamond & Moore, 1995; Edwards, McMillion, & Turner, 2010).
On the other hand, Mrs. Kayhill’s views on why African American males were not achieving as well as others in the area of literacy was the typical middle-class ideals that have come up so much in research that “children who come from homes with books, where children are read to have greater likelihood of achievement in the area of literacy” (Bean, 2005, p. 23). The middle-class perspective takes on a single-minded view that does not take into account the research of Heath (1983, 1986) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), which revealed that some African American parents in low-socioeconomic classes interact with their children differently and provide different literacy activities in their homes and communities than Caucasian American middle-class families. In both Heath’s and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaine’s research it was concluded that African American children do not lack literacy skills but actually have effective literacy practices and development when they enter school. However, the in-school literacy activities were not connected to their out-of-school literacy practices, consequently some children had difficulty and struggled with the literacy experiences in school. African American children living in low-income communities do not lack early and emergent literacy skills when they come to school but actually vary tremendously in the amount and depth of literacy knowledge they bring to school (Meier, 2008). Ms. Jackson’s thoughts about why African American males lack in the area of literacy were that the African American students’ home literacy practices are not embraced in school and that is why they lagged in the area of literacy. On the other hand, Ms. Kayhill saw their home literacy practices as irrelevant and/or non existent and that was why they are not performing well.

Both Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson believed that the 21st century respects the literacy that came before it and pushes literacy further to encompass literacies. They realized that in the 21st century, we have seen a change and expansion in teaching and instruction that encompasses
more than just textbooks, paper, pencil, and chalkboards. Kayhill and Jackson have observed that
technology has had a profound effect on literacy, what is construed as literacy, and the
instruction of literacy. They believed that students are so accustomed to technology in their
personal lives that infusing technology into literacy instruction is just one way to “speak their
language” (Fieldnote, October 12, 2010) and engage them in instruction. If this does not happen,
then a great deal of literacy instruction fails to meet the multiple and complex literacy needs of
most middle school students (Blanton et al., 2007). New technologies, globalization, and
diversity have led us to rethink what literacy is, forms that literacy can assume, and what
constitutes effective literacy instruction in schools (Healy, 2008). Jackson and Kayhill knew
literacy was no longer a singular term, but now a plural term. They both believed in going
beyond the printed text. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson expressed, “When you incorporate
multiliteracy into literacy instruction you are allowing out-of-school literacies to be brought into
the classroom.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). It seemed, in expanding literacy to multiliteracy,
the teachers believed that it would bring in elements that were relevant to the students. The belief
in incorporating multiliteracy and multimodalities also came from the teachers’ personal
experiences as students.

Teaching Style

Within the first month of my observations, I was, as Dyson and Genisihi (2005) put it,
“casing the joint” which allowed me to observe the social dynamics, social dimensions, and the
structure of how Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson worked in their world or element (p. 19). After
the first month, I spent four months of focused observations on how these teachers planned,
implemented, and enacted the literacy curriculum in the English/Language Arts classroom. From
the focused four months observations, I gained an in-depth understanding about and a detailed description of the teachers’ instructional styles.

It was 8:00am. When you looked outside of room 217, you saw two lines (one male and one female) side-by-side waiting for either Ms. Jackson or Mrs. Kayhill to tell them to enter the classroom. Inside the classroom the students’ desk were arranged in six sets of collaborative groups. Once the students had been given permission to come in, they quickly went to their seats and sat. Then, they immediately looked up at the Smart Board to see the agenda or morning to do list displayed. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill always had displayed what they expected the students to do the first thing in the morning while the students were eating their breakfast and listening to the morning announcements. Typically, the teachers had an agenda or morning to do list (it is named whatever either Mrs. Kayhill or Ms. Jackson felt like naming it when they do it but it serves the same purpose), the type of student supplies they needed to complete tasks (e.g., pencil, journal, book), other items that they will need when instruction begins, and usually some type of activity or task that was a review or an introduction to what they were going to complete for the day. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill had the 75-minute period begin for the students in a very structured and organized manner. After the morning announcements were done, which usually was around 8:20am, the teachers would begin with word study. The formal structured word study began August 31, 2010 and ended September 30, 2010. After that, word study was more informal and vocabulary would be discussed from the texts during reading while either teacher reviewed or discussed the texts. Then the teachers would shift into reading instruction.

Seldom would there be writing instruction completed during the class period. Typically, the daily writing that was accomplished stemmed from the students journaling daily either at home or in class. The journal entries would be about the daily reading of the novels they read for
class (e.g., *The Diary of Anne Frank, Richard III*). Whether it was summarizing what they had read the night before, integrating a skill, concept, or strategy with the novel. The teachers would have the students respond in their journals to questions like: (a) What is the main idea about Richard and his self-esteem?, (b) What is an inference and what can you infer about Anne after reading her conversation with Richard?, and (c) What is the cause and effect relationship between Richard and Clarence that we have read about so far? Also, journal entries were used in order to determine what students knew about something (e.g., what is poetry). On the weekly lesson plans from September 7, 2010 until November 5, 2010, the teachers had the students journal nightly about the readings they were assigned for homework for the entire book *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Actually, on the second day of school, when the teachers introduced the students to *The Diary of Anne Frank*, they had the students use their journals. Ms. Jackson told the students, “First think what you know about Anne Frank, and, then, in your journals write the things that you already know about Anne Frank and what do you think a memoir is.” (Fieldnore, August 31, 2010). Typically, the students read about seven to ten pages per night of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. When the students began reading Richard III on December 2, 2010 they began journaling in class for their agenda or morning to do list when they first arrived. If the students did not finish the assigned in-class journal entry, during the allotted time at the beginning of the period while they were eating their breakfast and listening to the morning announcements, then Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson allowed the students to complete them at home for homework. The teachers informed me, “We don’t want to just fail students or want them to fail so we try to give students every opportunity to be successful and since we periodically grade the journals which was fifteen percent of their grade.” (Fieldnote, September 12, 2010). Either Mrs. Kayhill or Ms. Jackson would announce at least three days before that they were going to collect the
journals and tell the students the number of journal entries that they should have completed for grading. The teachers used a rubric to grade the journals and they wrote students comments about their journal entries.

**Co-teaching.** Conflict could emerge in a class co-taught by individuals with different knowledge levels, teaching abilities, views of learning, and those who have never done it before. This was not the case with Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill. Neither teacher dominated; they really co-taught and no one was able to tell who was the regular educator or the special educator. From the first time that they met during the professional development week for teachers and staff, the week before the students reported for the first day of school for the 2010-2011 school year, they discussed co-teaching roles and what co-teaching should look like in the classroom. During the first week during their individual planning time they both emphasized that no one should know who is the regular educator or the special educator. They planned together, fed off of each other’s strengths, and valued each other’s inputs. It was quite evident to me during my five months in their world that everything that they emphasized during their first week together, was evident in the classroom.

An environment of teamwork between them was evident during observations. During PowerPoint presentations, they would take turns presenting slides or within slides by contributing a different perspective or element or just further solidify one another’s statements. When one teacher was in charge or led a particular part of instruction, the other teacher would not remain seated or out of the room doing paperwork or something. Instead she walked around making sure that the students were on task, understanding information, answering students’ questions, or offering assistance or support for the other teacher. A prime example of this was when Ms. Jackson was reading an excerpt from a short novel, *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*
(Gantos, 2000) for instruction on how a character and setting can advance or affect the plot, Mrs. Kayhill walked around assisting students as well as assisted Ms. Jackson by passing out papers and elaborating on Ms. Jackson’s examples. For example, Ms. Jackson said,

Remember how when Joey acted after taking the mineral oil in his house and how he acted when he was in school, the setting affected what Joey did, then Mrs. Kayhill added think about how in the Diary of Anne Frank where Anne was or the setting advanced or affected the plot because when they were in their own house they could move around and talk but when they were in the secret annex had to stay quiet, couldn’t play around like use to, and didn’t have a lot of space. (Fieldnote, October 26, 2010)

Another example of this occurred when Mrs. Kayhill gave the students background information and prepared them for reading Richard III by going over the Elizabethan Time Period using a PowerPoint entitled “Daily Life of Elizabethan England” Ms. Jackson walked around ensuring that the students were staying on task, elaborating on things that Kayhill said for further clarification and/or understanding. The teachers took full advantage of having two teachers in a classroom by incorporating simultaneous small group instruction. When they had students in the groups, they would teach or review the same skill but differentiate instruction according to students’ ability level from the assessment (either pre or post) score for that particular skill or concept and by completion of assignments. With the splitting up of students into smaller groups, one teacher had a group that needed more instruction or direct instruction and the other teacher had a group where they were more of a facilitator of learning and directed students’ work more independently.

Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson would put the class into two different groups when they were trying to accomplish different things during a class period and they would split the groups
by having the students count off or having a male group and a female group. When this type of grouping would occur, the teachers would engage the students in a variety of different tasks that centered around some type of activity that they were doing in class. All of the students had the opportunity to experience the different tasks with each teacher. One particular time, Jackson and Kayhill had the students placed into two groups that were gender specific, Ms. Jackson was in charge of instruction and reviewed author’s purpose. Mrs. Kayhill was on the other side of the room with the long tables and the iPads to get the students set up with Google accounts. On another occasion, students were split into groups according who had completed their writing assignment. Ms. Jackson passed out the students’ rough draft of their writing assignment. Some students did not get theirs back because they had not completed their rough draft. The teachers split the students into groups based on who had their papers returned and who did not. Ms. Jackson dealt with the writing instruction and Mrs. Kayhill did the reading portion by continuing to read *Richard III*. Each teacher spent about 30 minutes with each group. The only teacher that changed her instruction a little for the two different groups was Ms. Jackson because one group of students was further along in the writing process than the other group. By doing the co-teaching this way, they were able to get two different tasks and/or assignments finished and not have to spend more than one class period completing them both.

**Differentiation of instruction.** Some teachers utilize differentiated instruction in order to not fit students in a one-size fits all box. According to Tomlinson (2003), “Differentiation of instruction is where teachers engage students in instruction through different learning modalities and interests by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity.” (p. 149). Tomlinson went on further to explain:
A teacher proactively plans varied approaches to what students need to learn, how they will learn it, and/or how they can express what they have learned in order to increase the likelihood that each student will learn as much as he or she can as efficiently as possible (p. 151)

Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson differentiated instruction was primarily based on pre-assessments that they gave the students. At times, they would not base decisions to differentiate on pre-assessments. The differentiated instruction the teachers adopted in the classroom, fit two of three characteristics of differentiation. The three characteristics of differentiation of instruction are: (a) readiness- tasks that are a close match for students’ skills, (b) interests- tasks that ignite curiosity or passion in a student, and (c) learning profile- the assignment encourages students to work in a preferred leaning manner (Tomlinson, 2001). The two characteristics of differentiation of instruction that Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson incorporated were readiness and interests, with readiness dominating.

The teachers put the students in groups primarily for differentiation of instruction. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson each conducted the instruction or tasks. Or, they placed the students in groups where they worked with different activities that the teachers monitored. The teachers frequently gave the students quick pre-assessments; for example, the students had to use colored stickers, numbers, or symbols to indicate their answers that only took about two to three minutes for the students to complete. The results of the pre-assessments gave Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill an indication of where the students were so that they could plan their instruction as well as differentiate instruction in order to meet the needs of the students based on ability levels for certain skills and/or concepts. After comments that Mrs. Kayhill shared with me, I noted the following:
Since there are mixed abilities and interests in the classroom, Ms. Jackson and I feel that we have to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the students because what students know vary according to the content, skill, or concept. (Fieldnote, October 8, 2010)

Differentiation of instruction based on readiness (result of pre-assessments) would vary depending on the knowledge base of the students. There would be a group that had direct and explicit instruction and a group that worked more independently with the teacher being a facilitator.

Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill varied in who would instruct the group that needed more direct instruction or the group that worked more independently needing the teacher to serve more as a facilitator. Some students, who did not know the concept as well or were not ready to perform the skill, concept, or strategy on at least a proficient level, were placed in the group that had more direct and explicit instruction. The teacher that had the group that needed more direct and explicit instruction would provide more modeling, questioning, and guided practice. When the group of students who were more familiar with the concept, skill, or strategy performed at proficient or advanced level, they were assigned to work more independently in the group. In the more independent group, the teacher merely reviewed concepts. Below is an excerpt from my fieldnotes that gives a detailed account of what occurs in each of the types of groups:

After word study the students began working in their perspective groups that were based on the results from the preassessment given at the end of the class period yesterday. Mrs. Kayhill started with a chart of text features displayed on the image projector. Quinton, D’Andre, Marcus, and Robert were in this group. Mrs. Kayhill went over each text feature with the students and got or gave examples. She used a social studies textbook
that each student in the group had one of and as a whole group they found examples of the various text features and she helped the students to explain the purpose of the text features. As Mrs. Kayhill displayed the textbook through the image projector, she had the students turn to various pages to look for text features and give the text features purpose. As they found various text features Mrs. Kayhill asked questions like, “What else do we see?”, “Do you see a subtitle?”, and “Do you see how text features draw attention to certain things?”. In Mrs. Kayhill’s group the students had more guided practice and direct instruction. On the other hand in Ms. Jackson’s group that Michael was in the students did things more independently. Ms. Jackson began by giving students text feature chart that listed all of the different types of text features, a social studies textbook, and then had the students find various text features on their own by writing down the text feature and page number that they found the text feature on. After the students completed the task she had the students share amongst the whole group the text features that they found and explain the purpose of the text feature. (Fieldnote, November 12, 2010)

The differentiated instruction that was based more on interests was primarily conducted for review, follow-up, or extension activities. These differentiated instructional groups were not based on abilities and the groups were determined by having the students simply count off or they would have gendered groups. Typically, the differentiation was completed so that the students would be exposed to multimodalities in reading and writing. The teachers would say things such as, “Each group will have two different types of review.” or “Today you will be doing various tasks or activities that all deal with the Holocaust.” (Fieldnotes, September 16, 2010, October, 8, 2010, November 20, 2010). If there were only two groups, then each teacher conducted a task. Mrs. Kayhill would always have the activities for the students that involved
some type of technology element. She would use the Smart Board, iPads, or computers. When they reviewed author’s purpose and had the students split into two groups, Mrs. Kayhill used the Smart Board by having things displayed from her laptop through the image projector onto the Smart Board. Mrs. Kayhill involved the students in an interactive activity in which the students came up and tapped on the Smart Board to select an answer and used dry eraser boards. If they selected the correct answer, “well done” would pop up on the screen. If the student selected the incorrect answer, then “try again” would appear on the screen” (Fieldnote, November 18, 2010). When the text was displayed on the screen along with the question, “What is the author’s purpose?” at their seats using the dry erase boards the students had to write their answers on the dry board with a P for persuade, I for inform, and E for entertain (Fieldnote, November 18, 2010). When the students went to Ms. Jackson for the same review about author’s purpose, they were given a teacher created worksheet that had small passages with multiple choice answer selection. Ms. Jackson read the passage aloud to the students or selected a student to read aloud. Then they were directed to select the author’s purpose. No matter what they reviewed, Mrs. Kayhill’s activities were more multimodal and infused technology more whereas Ms. Jackson had the students complete more paper, pencil, and print type activities. The ways that Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill conducted their instruction within their groups came from Ms. Jackson’s belief that literacy instruction today needs to still have students complete paper and pencil activities and not rely on technology to always “think and do for them” (Interview, September 1, 2010), and Mrs. Kayhill’s delight, enjoyment, and strong belief in incorporating technology into her instruction reflect her commitment to technology based instruction.

If more than two activities were involved, then Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson differentiated instruction by having different activity stations set-up around the room. All of the
activities would center around one central theme, skill, or concept that they were working on in class. When they were reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the teachers had something called extension Friday where they had students do various activities that dealt with the Holocaust, Jews, characters or setting of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, or World War II. For example, there were different stations located in the room where the students had to read articles to summarize, use the computers to watch videos and discuss them, finish an integration of the arts activity called tableau. Tableau was an activity where students would select a certain picture, or pick a section of the picture in order to replicate the pose. When they were tapped by the teacher, the student would state what they thought the individual in the picture, would be saying or thinking, and use the video recorders to create newscasts or interviews. The differentiated activities were designed to tap into students’ interests and multiple intelligences. How Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson differentiated instruction came from their belief that literacy instruction should be multimodal, boys and girls learn in different ways, and are engaged with different instructional activities.

**Explicit instruction/gradual release of responsibility.** The responsibility of a teacher is to make what is implicit, explicit (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill demonstrated this belief and taught by modeling, guided practice, and time for students to independently practice and apply skills, strategies, or concepts. Kayhill and Jackson explicitly taught by doing what Pearson and Gallagher (1983) call, gradual release of responsibility framework for instruction. The teachers always explained what they were doing and why they were doing an action. Whether they used visuals or not, they were constantly in dialogue and talking with the students to show their own thinking and mental processes. For example, Ms. Jackson led a lesson on text features and how they enhance text and support understanding of
text for the reader. She began the lesson by showing the students a passage that was text featureless. As she read the short passage aloud to the students, she periodically stopped at points where she thought a text feature would enhance her understanding. She used a think-aloud comprehension strategy as she was modeling by saying things such as, “A footnote would go great here because it would give me more background information about what actually are Germany’s Nuremberg Laws.” and “A map would be beneficial because it would give me more of a visual of what things surrounded the Netherlands where Anne Frank lived.” (Fieldnote, October 7, 2010). For the guided practice Ms. Jackson gave each table a text that had no text features; and, as a group, they had to come up with at least two text features that would help them better understand the text and why. Then, each group presented its responses to the whole class. As each group shared, other classmates agreed with them or identified other text features that they would add.

This type of practice is consistent with Rogoff’s (2003) guided participation where there is a mutual bridge of learning. Children learn through cultural practice or activities that go beyond only the adult influence. For independent practice, the students were given another text featureless passage to complete for homework in the exact same manner as in class. Other times when the teachers used a PowerPoint presentation to guide their lesson or instruction, they included in the PowerPoint opportunities for modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. For example, in Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson’s PowerPoint presentations, they would include short passages, examples for students to practice, interactive activities with the Smart Board for guided practice in which they would ask students questions about or have the students participate in activities where they would apply what they had learned (see Appendix J). The teacher with the gradual release of responsibility provided opportunities for learning to take
place by constructing knowledge through interaction. Here is an excellent example of this in an excerpt from a fieldnote:

They did number four as a whole class, which was an inference question, Mrs. Kayhill asked who choose letter D and Robert was one of the seven students to raise his hand to indicate that they choose letter D. Mrs. Kayhill then went on to say that the correct answer is D and Robert responded, “Yes” loudly with a smile on his face. Before going on Mrs. Kayhill asked the students who had another answer that they stand strongly behind that they believe is correct and D’Andre raised his hand saying that he choose B for number 4. Mrs. Kayhill asked D’Andre a series of questions trying to get him to give any indication that it was not a difficult time for Mandela in prison as Mrs. Kayhill was asking D’Andre questions he was starting to realize that his answer was incorrect and why. He said that what he made was an assumption and he did not draw a conclusion based on the information that was in the article or prior knowledge about Mandela. Mrs. Kayhill then had several students go around and explain what an inference is. She then allowed the students to independently complete numbers one, two, three, four, five, and six (Fieldnote, December 13, 2010).

From this particular excerpt the teacher was scaffolding. Using Rogoff’s (2003) framework, one can ascertain that there is a deliberate interaction occurring where Mrs. Kayhill (the adult) guides and responds to D’Andre by asking him questions where meaning was happening between communicative interactions of people. The explicit instruction that occurred in this classroom had approaches that were based on a socioconstructivist model because the learning occurred in a rich social context, with interaction, negotiation, and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch,
McNamee, McLare, & Budwig, 1980). They way that both Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson incorporated gradual release of responsibility into their instruction was in line with both of their beliefs about how one should go about daily instruction.

**Constant review/recap.** Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill’s way of ensuring students’ understanding and application of skills, concepts, or strategies was achieved through their constant review and recap. The teachers found various ways to ensure that the students grasped the concepts that they were teaching, whether it was use of games, riddles, technology, traditional oral way by asking questions, or use of the student’s data from assessments. For example, they would use games such as charades and locate the meaning where the students had to get up, move around, and act things out to do follow-up review. It was interesting when Ms. Jackson created riddles for word study to review words with multiple meaning. An example, is the riddle that she created, “A man rode into town on Friday, three days later he left on Friday, how did he do that?” (Fieldnote, September 24, 2010). The multiple meaning word from that riddle was Friday. None of the students figured out the riddle. Ms. Jackson explained to them that the multiple meaning word Friday was the name of the horse and the day of the week. After that example, the students begin to understand and said things like, “Oh, I got it now.”, “That was fun, let’s do some more.”, and “I like learning like this.” (Fieldnote, September 24, 2010). The Smart Board and the iPads being brought in for the reviews enabled technology to be incorporated into instruction. What Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill did with the review type games, whether it was with or without technology, is what Jackson et al. (2008) suggests, “To capitalize on African American males’ existing interests in game playing, turning interests from a potential liability to a potential asset with respect to academic performance.” (p.441).
Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson also used the traditional method of asking questions for review or recap. It did not matter if the teachers used PowerPoint presentations for instruction, did read alouds, or just in natural conversation about the novels, they would periodically ask students questions, literal or higher-order level. The questions asked were to gain clarification, determine the students’ thoughts or opinions about things or events that happened in the books, vocabulary development, summaries, and further or deeper understanding.

Marshall, (2009), Gregory and Kuzmich (2004), Tomlinson (2000), and Reeves (2000) state that data should drive instruction. Kayhill and Jackson used the students’ data from assessments as a means to reflect on their teaching for indications of re-teaching and more review. There was a time, when I arrived early before the students came into the building, and Ms. Jackson told Mrs. Kayhill, “After checking the student’s text structure quizzes from the other day that we need to find some time today to go over the quizzes with the students because they did not do well as we expected the students to do on them.” (Fieldnote, December 6, 2010). During this particular review of a quiz, the teachers gave the students highlighters for them to highlight phrases, sentences, or clue words for each text structure paragraph. Also, when the teachers received the data back from the first quarter benchmarks, they noticed that most of the students did not do well with a brief constructed response (BCR), a response to a higher-level cognitive question. The state uses the BCR test item to assess students' reading comprehension and it also specifically targets a students' ability to communicate their comprehension through a written answer. A BCR enables students to include details and examples to support their answers (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010). The particular BCR test item that appeared on the benchmark included an advertisement where the students had to identify the author’s purpose, the audience, and explain why. Because the students did not do well on this particular
type of BCR, Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson decided to recreate a similar type BCR (included an advertisement where the students had to identify the intended audience for the advertisement and explain their answer) for the students to complete for an agenda item one morning. After the announcements were over, Mrs. Kayhill began instruction on author’s purpose for persuasion using various advertisements from newspapers and magazines as Ms. Jackson walked around and assisted. I noticed that, this time, the instruction for author’s purpose was different from prior occasions. This time the teachers brought in various advertisements, allowed students to create advertisements, and enabled students to create their own brief constructed response question for author’s purpose. Kayhill and Jackson used the data, not just to say the students were not good at this or place the blame on the students, they actually looked back at their instruction and saw what and how they should do things differently in order to help the students to grasp the concepts.

**Infusion of popular culture.** Popular culture has become an integral part of society, especially for children and adolescents, in the 21st century. According to Alvermann, Moon, & Hagwood (1999), Dyson (1997, 2002), Marsh & Millard (2000), and Marsh (2006), popular culture is an everyday participatory culture that is produced by mass media which contains images, sounds, symbols, movies, music, etc. that appeal to different audiences in different ways. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson did not view popular culture as something negative or harmful to students, rather they used it as a way to connect students to traditional texts, improve understanding, or create interest in students for things like particular genres, canonical texts, and historical periods in which they would typically not have interest. For instance, when students had difficulty with vocabulary or understanding concepts in the text, then Ms. Jackson brought in elements of popular culture from movies or television series such as “The Sopranos” which was
about a mob family in New Jersey. Rome (2004), Steele and Brown (1995), and Ward (2004) in their research, based on their data, majority of the African American males living in urban areas related to crime based television shows such as “The Soparnos” and “The Wire” because it was about crime, money, and power that was similar to their environments or what or who they wanted to aspire to be. Other influences from popular culture were Tyler Perry’s characters in his plays and movies, for example, Madea and Mr. Brown. The male and female students in the class could relate and liked Tyler Perry’s movies and plays because they are based on traditional African American family ideals and values. When the students had to create plays on various occasions, the teachers would bring in Tyler Perry’s plays, allow the students to watch parts of them. Then, Ms. Jackson used the Tyler Perry play as a model for discussion about certain elements of plays, for instance, dialogue and plot.

One particular day, November 3, 2010, as the students created their Diary of Anne Frank plays, Ms. Jackson talked about dialogue in plays. She played approximately eight minutes of Tyler Perry’s play “Madea’s Family Reunion” for the students. This day’s objective was “students will demonstrate their knowledge of plot and parts of their text by creating a play” (Lesson Plan Overview Artifact, November 1-5, 2010). After they viewed the short clip Ms. Jackson discussed dialogue with the students. She stated, “When things are in parentheses it usually means what the character is doing something, doing an action” (Fieldnote, November 3, 2010). As she was demonstrating this, she referred to “Madea Family Reunion” and the things that Madea and Mr. Brown were doing in the play to help the students understand.

The teachers incorporated music from the genres of hip-hop and R&B as well during the poetry unit and for writing instruction. From the research completed by Mahiri (1998), Morrell (2002, 2004), Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002), Tatum (2000, 2005), and Kirkland (2006,
2008) the use of music in middle and secondary schools, particularly hip-hop, has been important in teaching some African American males and has allowed them to understand concepts that are unfamiliar to them. The music piques interest for them in topics in which they have no interest. When the teachers incorporated the popular culture they did it informally; it was not a structured lesson centered with it or around it. For example, when Ms. Jackson was teaching writing and how you have to generate interest in your writing, which is called the hook, she then said, “You know how you guys constantly sing the hooks in Jay-Z or Lil Wayne’s raps.” (Fieldnote, January 10, 2010).

Some of the African American males complained about poetry when they began the poetry unit during some lessons about what poetry is and the elements of poetry. Ms. Jackson would incorporate the popular culture music icon Jay-Z:

During the poetry unit Ms. Jackson began with ballads and said whether written by Jay-Z or Edgar Allan Poe you should be able to interpret and understand the story… I am in the process of going through Jay-Z’s book Decoded to find some things that we can use in this poetry unit. Green continued to say a lot of Jay-Z’s raps tell a story about where he grew up and how he grew up…In most of hip-hop or R&B refrain is called a hook or other types of music refrain are called a chorus and Michael replied, yea I kind of get it cause I know all the hooks in Jay-Z’s raps (Fieldnotes, January 10, 2011, January 21, 2011).

Ms. Jackson incorporated hip-hop and other elements of popular culture, and used them as a pedagogical tool by incorporating students’ lived experiences and culture in the official literacy curriculum (Edwards et al., 2010; Paul, 2000; Tatum, 2000).
**Multiliteracy pedagogy.** Multiliteracy expands the singular definition of literacy. In the twenty-first century, we now have become a more diverse (cultural and social), global, and technological society and that has led to increased different and diverse ways of knowing and communication, which expands our conception of literacy. Multiliteracy pedagogy places an emphasis on how literacy instruction broadens the approaches to literacy by accounting for the increased emergent multimodal text forms and practices that deal with information and multimedia technologies that could include activities such as interpreting environmental print, oral debating, or text messaging (Mills, 2007; Kalantzis, Cope, & Fehring, 2002; & New London Group, 2000, Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Multiliteracy pedagogy involves the use of multimodal texts where teachers can offer and engage students in opportunities to “access, evaluate, search, sort, gather, and read information (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008, p. 87).

Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson included multiliteracy pedagogy in their instruction. Beginning with the first day of the school, Jackson and Kayhill used multiliteracy. On the first day of school the teachers had the students do an “All About Me Project” which was a way for the students to introduce themselves. Instead of filling in a template-framed worksheet, they allowed the students to communicate in various ways to the class about themselves, using multiple modes. For example, Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill gave the students options for the project; they could present themselves to the class by doing a rap, picture, a monologue, or poetry. Another way that the teachers allowed the students to use alternate ways to communicate was when they were doing a word study activity with multiple meaning words. With this particular activity the students had to draw or use clip art to depict multiple meaning words. Working with a partner, they exchanged the visuals that they created for the multiple meaning words for the partner to figure out the multiple meaning word from the artwork.
Art was brought into or used in the classroom for interpretation and/or understanding. Just before they began reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill began by giving the students some background knowledge using a PowerPoint presentation about the Jews and the Holocaust. In this PowerPoint presentation the teachers included audio and artwork from the Holocaust and World War II. The audio they had in the PowerPoint that they played for the students was of the school’s instructional support teacher, Mr. Stephens, whose grandfather discussed his experiences in World War II and with the Holocaust. The teachers asked the students to “Listen carefully to the audiotape, especially for the expressions and intonations in his voice, to see if they could understand what it was like during those times.” (Fieldnote, September 2, 2010). From this audio the students were getting an interpretation and understanding. Some of the comments made by the students after they heard the audio were, “I could hear the pain in his voice.” and “Could understand and realize the hardships and how the Holocaust was a bad thing.” (Fieldnote, September 2, 2010). From this audio the teachers enabled the students to make meaning and interpret this live text’s sets of signs and symbols which Anstey and Bull (2006) explain to be the auditory semiotic system. From the grandfather’s voice they interpreted the intonations in his voice to make meaning and gain an understanding of how it was during World War II and the Holocaust.

On several other occasions, live texts (e.g. person to person or a live performance) were used in the classroom or the students had the opportunity to experience the understanding of text through art, pictures, and drama. Whether they had art in PowerPoints or from books, the teachers had lessons that enabled the students to make meaning of these live texts’ visual, gestural, and spatial semiotic systems. During lessons, the teachers provided students the opportunity to understand and interpret the artworks (the live text). Sets of signs and symbols
were reviewed by having students view pictures and artwork from the Holocaust by asking the students to tell them what they saw in them and “What do they think things symbolize in the pictures?” (September 2, 2010).

The teachers brought in many other multimodal texts into the classroom or exposed the students to film, video, plays, video clips, and internet sites. Movies were brought in for the students to watch and discuss while they were reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* such as “Anne Frank: The Whole Story” and “The Diary of Anne Frank”. They also took the students to the computer lab and reviewed different websites that were about the Holocaust. The teachers showed the students different websites and they allowed the students to Google the word Holocaust so that they could find websites as well. For the culminating activity for *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson had the students work in groups to create and perform a play about something in the book. The teachers informed me, “This is a creative and multimodal way to see if the students understood the concepts and content of the book as well as plot without having them do a traditional paper and pencil assessment.” (Fieldnote, November 15, 2010). When they were reading *Richard III* the teachers set up a trip for all of the eighth grade students to go see the performance of the play “Richard III” at a local theater. The fieldtrip was another example of the teachers incorporation of multiliteracy pedagogy in their teaching that included what Cope and Kalantzis (2000) explains as multimodal textual practices that combined linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial modes.

The teachers did not ignore or omit the element of critical literacy, which Anstey & Bull (2006) explain is significant with multiliteracy pedagogy. With the use of the multimodal texts the teachers explained to students that the authors of texts have their own opinion so “It is critical to carefully analyze the text and get information from various sources.” (Fieldnote, October 7,
2010). There were some discussions that came up in the class that the teachers did not shy away from the importance of being critical of texts. For example, when the students had finished watching a part of the movie “Anne Frank: The Whole Story” and Ms. Jackson had them talk about the similarities and differences between the movie and the book the students identified some discrepancies between the movie and the book. When Michael asked, “Well who is wrong?” (Fieldnote, September 24, 2010). Ms. Jackson responded:

It is not actually what is wrong but is different versions… the book is more accurate because it is actually Anne’s diary and it is a primary source…have to look at various sources, where source is coming from, and the credibility of the source.

(Fieldnote, September 24, 2010)

The students were assigned homework to read the articles “Burning a Koran Day” (Wagner, 2010) and “Muslims in Pakistan” (Page & Hussain, 2009). They had to compare the two articles and connect them to Anne Frank and her families’ freedom of religion. Mrs. Kayhill asked the students that when they read an article “Do we absolutely have to believe what we read?” (Fieldnote, September 10, 2010). After the class responded “No”, she went on further to say, “Because the writer adds in their own opinion we need to get information from various sources.” (Fieldnote, September 10, 2010). The teachers introduced and explained to the students that they have to critically analyze any type of text and it’s contexts. Anesty and Bull (2006) and Luke and Freebody (2007) explain that when teachers teach students to be critical of texts they are taking literacy to a sociocultural critical perspective which invites students to be multiliterate, explore the codes of various texts, evaluate, and comprehend.

**Unfolding of the Lessons**
Teachers take time to plan out lessons that they hope will unfold as planned and the defined end goal achieved. The planned lesson looks wonderful on paper and the activities or tasks that have been included in the lesson seem to be appropriate. How the students react to, participate in, and what they gain from the lesson is an indication of whether or not the lesson was effective. Actions that the teacher does during the lesson and resources used during the lesson impact how the lesson is enacted in the classroom as well. There are other factors that affect how the lessons unfold in the classroom such as technology, time, and how the teachers react to occurrences that take place in the classroom.

**Technology: a blessing or a curse.** Technology was incorporated in the classroom in a clearly observable manner. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson used their laptops, desktop computers, or Smart Board basically everyday. They would use PowerPoint presentations to guide them through their prepared lessons, explicitly teach, and complete activities or games with the students. Their PowerPoint presentations allowed them to, as Jones-Kavalier and Flannigan (2008) would say, “Catapult traditional leaning methods into orbit-traditional and overheads.” (p.76). The touch of a finger on the Smart Board or click of a mouse, quickly and with ease, allowed Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill to “stream video, access the internet, and real-time audio-video interaction” (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2008, p. 14). When these teachers used the Smart Board for their PowerPoints, games, or any other instructional activity they were not confined to a desk or seat. They simply had to tap on the board for functionality, (e.g., go to the next screen or slide, go to an internet site, display answers or statements) which allowed them to walk around more and not be confined sitting behind a computer. Mobility and maintaining eye contact with the students allowed for less chatter among the students. The teachers were more readily accessible to students and had better classroom management. When the teachers
just used their laptop without connection to the Smart Board, they were pretty much confined in a certain area, particularly at the long table in the front of the room, sitting down facing the screen with their backs to the students. The room was arranged in such a way that had six sets of collaborative grouped desk with four desk in each group, spaced enough apart to enable the teachers to circulate freely (see Appendix K). The groups of desks were situated with enough space between them that enabled the teachers to circulate freely and students were able to face the large Smart Board, which was placed in the front center of the room. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill placed a long table almost in front of the Smart Board where they often placed their laptop, student work, worksheets, etc.

The way the room was arranged had the Smart Board as the main feature that the students often faced and the teachers used daily. Use of the Smart Board varied between the two teachers with Mrs. Kayhill maintaining connection and use of it daily. There would be a lot of small conversations going on during the times that Ms. Jackson did not have her laptop connected with the Smart Board. At times, some of the male students for example, Marcus, Robert, D’Andre, and Michael, would play with things at their desk or with each other and sometimes laid their heads on the desk. Ms. Jackson would have to stop throughout the lesson and tell the students to pay attention or keep quiet. The differences in use of the technology between the two teachers can be explained by their beliefs in the use and incorporation of technology with instruction. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill both believed in the use and importance of technology, but Ms. Jackson also saw it as a crutch or hindrance and Mrs. Kayhill was the technology guru who lived by it.

The use of technology with the Smart Board allowed the teachers to give the students the opportunity for an interactive lesson. Mrs. Kayhill displayed her journal entry about *The Diary of*
Anne Frank on the Smart Board for the students to evaluate her journal entry. During this activity, the students went up to the Smart Board to underline and/or circle in various colors to identify the requirements that were included in Mrs. Kayhill’s journal entry. For a word study activity using the Smart Board, Ms. Jackson reviewed synonyms by having a paragraph displayed on the Smart Board where certain words were in bold print. Then, either Ms. Jackson or a student would come up to type in or write the synonym of the bold print word. During this same activity, when the students had difficulty coming up with a synonym for the word, Ms. Jackson broke the word into morphemes (e.g., prefix, suffix, base (root) word, plurals, possessives, infixes, etc.) by highlighting each morpheme in a different color.

The use of games or other type practice/review activities with the Smart Board allowed students to move things around and place things into their proper place with ease with the use of their finger and/or by tapping the correct responses on the Smart Board. Using PowerPoint presentations with the Smart Board for the most part enabled Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill to go through a lesson with ease and have the access to weblinks, games, and activities with just the touch of a finger. The only time when the lessons did not go through smoothly or as planned was when they had website links in the PowerPoint and the school had difficulty accessing the internet. The few times that the internet was inaccessible, the teachers did not waste too much time trying to fix the problem. They would move on by describing what the particular website was about, complete an impromptu activity that would relate to the lesson, or they would just move on to the next slide. After a couple of occasions of internet inaccessibility when they had website links in their PowerPoint presentations, Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson began to incorporate in their PowerPoint presentations an additional slide after the previous slide that had the website links. The additional slide was similar to whatever the website demonstrated, gave
information about, or activity. There was another occasion where difficulty with technology altered and affected how the planned lesson was enacted in the classroom. Here is an excerpt from a fieldnote that gives a detailed account of what occurred in this classroom when technology presented problems:

Ms. Jackson brought in the mobile computer lab into the classroom. Ms. Jackson was checking all of the laptops to see if they were charged and said if they are not charged there is no place to plug them in so if they are not charged the lesson will have to be postponed until tomorrow… While Ms. Jackson was setting up the students finished their breakfast and agenda they were sitting at their desks talking… Mrs. Kayhill made a comment after she couldn’t get laptops or her desktop logged into the internet she said, “It’s wonderful to integrate and use technology, what can you do or what good is it if you can’t log into it.”. Since Ms. Jackson couldn’t log on and most of the laptops on the mobile computer lab were not charged Ms. Jackson went to the front of the room with her laptop and told the students that what planned to do today isn’t working out as planned so still will do computer activity but just as a group instead of individually. She continued to tell them that they each were suppose to have their own laptop and work through the activity but since the mobile lab is acting up will have to do as a whole group. While Ms. Jackson was attempting to log on to the internet from her laptop to be displayed on the screen through the projector, students were having individual side conversations while waiting. Robert was talking to Marcus about the Ravens vs. Patriots football game that was played yesterday and then Quinton and Michael joined in the conversation after about 2 minutes. It took Ms. Jackson about fifteen minutes to get the laptop set up, working, and website displayed on the screen. Once everything was set up Ms. Jackson
said, “Sorry it took forever to load, now we will read a story to be able to go over and understand different parts of a plot”. By it taking so long to get the technology working Ms. Jackson had to rush through the lesson, did not have time to do all of the activities that would have provided students practice, and when the students left they had a lot of questions about the different components of plot. (Fieldnote, November 23, 2010)

Technology has its positives and negatives like anything else; but, how the teachers prepare to handle technical difficulties is what matters. At times Mrs. Kayhill and Mrs. Jackson learned from mistakes that happened and prepared for them but at other times they did not. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill’s actions, according to Marcinek’s (2010) ideas were, adapted and adjusted to technology failures, expected infrequent failure, and created a back up plan. Although some problems did arise during the PowerPoint presentations that were out of the teachers’ control, they were minimal with the use of the Smart Board.

The males played around less and the students were active participants in the lessons when the technology was used. It seemed that the males participated more in the lessons, were less distracted, and the teachers did not have to waste time telling them to be quiet or remind them to pay attention. Also, the teachers with these particular lessons that used technology, were not just reading or lecturing to them; but they allowed the boys to be a part of and participant in the lessons. Sanford (2006) and Tatum (2005) assert that teachers need to develop and implement innovative teaching approaches like providing numerous opportunities for hands-on learning, problem solving, and interactive teaching to address the specific needs of males. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson used technology to expand their teaching styles and strategies, which enabled their planned lessons to engage students, had minimal distractions, and provided ways for the students to want to participate and be a part of the lesson.
Social interaction was apparent in the class daily because of the inclusion of technology. For example, Ms. Jackson used the book *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* for a lesson on character development. The image projector was used to display the particular contents of the book that Ms. Jackson used during the lesson so that all of the students could see it because there was only one book. As Ms. Jackson read aloud and had students read aloud particular paragraphs, the students followed along attentively because they had to listen for thoughts, actions, and words that developed a character. I noticed the students were talking amongst themselves about the thoughts, actions, or words that needed to be identified for the character development after the reading. Marcus came up to the Smart Board and underlined “not so fast Joey” then he said, “That is words.”, and next Robert came up and underlined “she had read his file” and responded, “That is an action.” (Fieldnote, September 29, 2010). As various students were coming up to underline the action, thoughts, and words, the other students discussed if what the students had underlined contributed to the character’s development. Overall, the discussions enabled them to make meaning and learn from each other.

**A race against time.** From 8:00am to 9:15am Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson had seventy-five minutes daily to deliver instruction and allow time for guided and independent practice. During my five-month period in this class, I had a chance to see how the teachers’ lessons unfolded and the teachers impact on the students during the 75 minute period. There were several factors that contributed to how time affected the planned lessons in this classroom.

I had to factor in problems with technology as an aspect of the data collection because technology was such an integral part of Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson’s daily instruction. When there was trouble with technology, it took time away from instruction, in the classroom and/or laboratory. This example illustrated the negative impact. One extension Friday, when they split
the class in different groups to work on various extension activities, the group that had to do their activity in the computer lab and sometimes students experienced problems. Students could not log on to the Internet to complete the extension activity about the Holocaust. About fifteen minutes was spent in the computer lab until, eventually, Mrs. Kayhill had the students return to the classroom to work on the desktop computers. Because there were only two desktop computers in the classroom and five people in the group, all of the students could not access computer and the students did not have enough time to watch all of the brain-pop videos and complete the accompanying quizzes for the videos. I noticed that Robert got upset and said, “This isn’t fair that we don’t have enough time to do our activity.” (Fieldnote, September 17, 2010). Robert was an African American male who enjoyed doing things on the computer. The inability to complete an activity that interested him was very upsetting to him.

The essential plans in the teachers’ lessons for this particular activity was for each student in the group to have access to their own computer, watch the four short brain-pop videos, complete the quizzes, and then discuss with each other their feelings and thoughts of the videos as well as go over their answers to the quizzes. When the problems with the technology occurred, students had to share two computers; consequently not every group member had an opportunity to watch all of the brain-pop videos. Different students watched different videos and the group just exchanged answers without discussing their thoughts on the videos or answers. There were at least 10 other incidences that occurred like this but this time they occurred in the classroom either with the iPads (which they did not get and begin using until December 14, 2010), the teachers’ laptops, or Smart Board with the internet troubles running slow or not working at all. If it was not the internet connection causing loss of time from instruction, then it was Ms. Jackson
experiencing problems setting up or getting the technology started. When Mrs. Kayhill led a lesson, problems arose from her inability to gain internet access.

Another very critical element that impacted instructional time was the time spent on the novels. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson reflected and noticed that they had spent a lot of time reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. They began reading this book on the fourth day of school, September 3, 2010, and did not finish until November 10, 2010. This could have been attributed to the fact that teachers, for the entire months of September and October, only had students reading only five to ten pages per night. The disproportionate time getting through the book led to a lot of teacher read-aloud and round robin reading in class. Around October 25, 2010, I noticed that the teachers went beyond doing the usual daily 2-3 minute recap of what the students read the night before and began the read-aloud and round robin reading daily. The teachers did stop periodically during the read-aloud and round-robin reading to ask the students questions, get clarifications, or discuss vocabulary. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson would read-aloud five to eight pages to the students in one setting. One particular time, Ms. Jackson read-aloud to the students for fifteen minutes. Then, after the 15 minutes of reading aloud to the students, Ms. Jackson said, “I think now we are going to popcorn read because I notice when I read aloud all of you are not paying attention or following along in your books.” (Fieldnote, October 29, 2010).

Popcorn reading is a form of round-robin reading where the students call on the next person to pick up on the reading instead of the teacher. According to Goldfinch (2002), reading aloud should be done to enable students to hear what good reading sounds like, language development, and associations between students and recreational reading. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson did not incorporate the read alouds for any of these purposes by the end of October. They did the read alouds at this point, which were for a longer period of time, to hurry and finish
the book because they had spent too much time on it and the principal had asked them why were they still reading this novel after they had been reading it for over a month.

Very few literacy educators advocate round robin reading because they argue that it is not effective or beneficial if it is engaged in repeatedly (Frager & Frye, 2010). Frager and Frye (2010) explain that round robin reading, similar to variants such as popcorn reading, wastes valuable instructional time because only one person is engaged in the reading as the other students are passive listeners at best, assuming that they are not sleeping, playing around, or are in anxiety because they do not want to be called on to read next. Frager and Frye view round robin oral reading as “closer to malpractice than to effective practice” (p.57). Everything that Frager and Frye said about round robin reading happened in this class. Most of the males were playing around or doing other things and not following along during round robin reading. More of the females than the males in the class followed along during the round robin reading, but there were, at times, one or two students who were not and were writing notes or playing around at their desk. In the following excerpt from my fieldnotes, I describe in detail one of the male’s experience in this class with popcorn reading:

When Darryl was called on to read he was unsure where they were because he was not following along in the book anymore and had his head down in his lap; D’Andre showed Darryl where they were in the book. Darryl began reading slowly and very low (only read about four to five words) where you could hardly hear him, only the person next to him and in front of him could hear him reading. Ms. Jackson asked Darryl to speak up so that others could hear him, so Darryl began clearing his throat and was slow to begin reading again, so other classmates said things to him like, “Hurry up!”, “Do you know where we are?”, “Read!” and Darryl then said, “I don’t even want to read now.” (he probably said
this because he became discouraged because he usually doesn’t read aloud in class, is in one of the lower reading groups, and is somewhat of a reluctant participant) & Gerral said, “man I’ll read.” (Fieldnote, November 22, 2010).

The popcorn reading and reading-aloud that was Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill did in class for the most part was not conducted for the best interests of the students or instruction. Also, if they had assigned more pages for the students to read at home, given that was pretty much their only home assignment they had to complete besides a journal entry on the assigned reading, they could have read through the book quicker. Further, they would not have experienced reading instructional practices that were not effective because they were rushed for time.

The final crucial example that time played a major factor in the unfolding of the lessons was the lack of time spent on writing instruction. On numerous occasions, writing was on the lesson plans but Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill did not get to the writing lessons before the end of the period. Consequently, all that was covered on a daily basis was word study and reading. Writing was on the lesson plans a total of twenty-one times during the observation period; but, writing instruction did not happen. As I looked carefully through the lesson plans, I noticed that for the time period of October 4-29, 2010 Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson did not include writing on their weekly lesson plans and writing did not occur for the entire month of October. The closest activities to writing for the students was their daily journal entries that were either completed at home or in class. The lack of time spent on writing instruction reflected in the male students’ writing in their journals, general writing in class, and writing on the quarterly benchmark assessments. Their writing was not fully developed, lacked structure, and lacked support. The one time that Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill went through and taught the complete writing process for the only formal writing assignment, a persuasive writing piece about
whatever the rising (upcoming) eighth graders read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, it took four weeks (November 22, 2010 - December 23, 2010) to complete the assignment. Even though the teachers had writing instruction in their lesson plans, majority of the time they did not get to and did not make too much of an effort to make it up.

When I looked at one of the state’s previous year’s assessment, I did notice that the students were not getting assessed in writing or the mechanics of writing. During a conversation with the teachers one morning, on November 1, 2010, before the students arrived in school, they discussed writing instruction. Ms. Jackson made a comment about how infrequently they were doing writing and Mrs. Kayhill commented, “It is ok because it is not heavily assessed on the state assessment.” and Ms. Jackson replied, “You are so right, they don’t look at structure or mechanics but more on content.” (Fieldnote, November 1, 2010). What and how the state assessed, or lack thereof, is how often and what the teacher’s teach. It did not matter that writing is vital for students, Kayhill and Jackson were not worried that writing instruction did not receive an adequate amount of time because it was not a major part of the state assessment. Because it was not a heavily graded component on the assessment, it meant that it also was not something that students doing well on would affect their evaluation (in turn their job). So why should the teachers stress about not getting enough time to teach it?

**Linking Teachers’ Thoughts and Beliefs About Literacy Instruction with Their Teaching**

Throughout this chapter the teachers’ beliefs about literacy, how they go about teaching literacy, and how their planned literacy lessons are enacted in the classroom have been described. The purpose of this chapter was to explain Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill’s thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about literacy instruction and to see how they are connected to their teaching style
and delivery of instruction. In this section I connect these elements together and explain how the teachers’ beliefs are evident in their curricula and what they teach.

Both of the teachers believed that literacy instruction’s main focus should be on reading, centered on novels, multimodal, and included multiliteracy. When Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill said reading they meant word identification and understanding of text. During my various formal and informal interviews with them, neither one of them mentioned or discussed writing as a part of literacy instruction, their emphasis was on word meaning and comprehension. All of this came through in their teaching style and instruction in the classroom.

The teachers constantly emphasized to me their disbelief that basal readers and anthologies were beneficial for students in literacy instruction from the first day that I met these teachers in August 2010. For example, Ms. Jackson mentioned during an interview that “basal readers are boring and the kids think they are boring” and Mrs. Kayhill said, “I don’t think that the students benefit from reading basal readers and anthologies because the students only get a splice of a story and most times all genres aren’t included.” (Interview, September 1, 2010). They were firm believers that students should be exposed to entire texts and novel-based instruction. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson did not disappointment and firmly stood behind their view and used novels as the main base for their instruction. They went from *The Diary of Anne Frank* to *Richard III*; and, in-between, they used an early adolescent novel *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* for additional support during instruction. Most of their instruction was word study and reading. The word study was based around the vocabulary from the novels. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill’s firm belief that literacy instruction’s main focus should be reading really overshadowed the aspect that writing is an integral part of literacy as well. So much time was spent on reading that writing instruction was ignored.
Multimodality was brought into their instruction by including video clips, Tyler Perry movies, and adaptations of Anne Frank movies, internet sites, fieldtrips to the Holocaust Museum, and performance of the play “Richard III”. The teachers used live texts for their instruction not just for entertainment or engagement, but also so that the students could interpret and better understand. The visual texts that the teachers used in their instruction enabled the students to use semiotic systems to process and interpret information which blends visual, audio, spoken, nonverbal, and other forms of expression produced through a range of different technologies (Anstey & Bull, 2006). Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson expanded the definition of literacy to include more than just printed text. They believed that our world is changing into a more socially and culturally diverse society that has now become a more globalized and technological world. Having this disposition served as a catalyst for their belief that, in order for students to be prepared for technological and digital era, they included in their literacy instruction how to read and interpret more than just printed word text but also multimedia text, different types of texts such as artwork, and spoken language. An example of this was when the teachers were dealing with text features, they did not just cover printed text features, but they also included online features and spent quite a lot of time with that through instruction and hands-on-practice with the students. Also, when the students had to enact the tableau activities, they had to interpret what the people in the picture would say or were thinking. In addition, for review of multiple meaning words, Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson had the students complete a worksheet where they had to answer questions where the answer choices were not words but pictures (e.g., One question was, Which picture shows he settled it in the court?) and the students had to create two more questions of their own and they had to draw or use of clip art for the answer choices to the question that they created.
For the most part, the two teachers showed similar views when it came to literacy instruction, particularly literacy instruction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill both believed that the use of technology is important and essential in 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy instruction and that belief accounted for why some type of technology was used daily in their instruction, their perception of it and its effects on students were a little different. Mrs. Kayhill thought of 21<sup>st</sup> literacy instruction as more of an infusion of technology and the internet. Ms. Jackson on the other hand thought of it as more of an expansion of the word literacy to include movies, plays, music, and popular culture. Ms. Jackson believed that technology is important; but, she also felt that because of technology, children have became handicapped, relied on it too much, and did not know how to do basic things like read a map, locate information, and organize or put things together with just their hands and minds. Basically, Ms. Jackson felt that the students needed basic paper, pencil, thinking skills, and instruction sometimes without all the bells and whistles of computers and the internet. Mrs. Kayhill felt that technology devices such as the iPad, “Were the best things to be invented, I can’t put it down since I bought it, and students have to be exposed to them and they have to be used for instructionally purposes.” (Interview, November 20, 2010).

Their different attitudes and feelings about technology were seen clearly with differentiation of instruction. When Ms. Jackson had a group, she would use worksheets that usually had short passages on them with fill in the blank answers or multiple choice. In contrast, Mrs. Kayhill would use the Smart Board, iPads, desktops, or the internet for her groups. If Ms. Jackson used technology then it would be the image projector to display her PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, or worksheets for all the students to see and follow along. Both teachers used PowerPoint presentations for their instruction but what was in the presentations
differed vastly. Mrs. Kayhill would connect her PowerPoint presentations more with the Smart Board, enabling more interactive activities for the students by having website links, games, and activities linked. Ms. Jackson’s PowerPoint presentations had graphics and sound but were seldom connected to the Smart Board. Mrs. Kayhill would direct or facilitate the use of iPads while Ms. Jackson assisted. Whenever a problem with technology occurred, Mrs. Kayhill would be the one who most likely solved it.

Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill felt that their teaching experiences and recommendations from other teachers were the best resources to help them determine the book choices to use in their classroom. They were not part of and did not use professional organizations, for example, the International Reading Association (IRA) or National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Because, these teachers only relied on their experience and colleagues recommendations for book choices and did not use other resources such as IRA or NCTE, there were missed opportunities for bringing in other types of books. While they were reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* and dealing with the Holocaust, these teachers could have brought in and used books like *The Diary of a Slave Girl* or any other type of multicultural book that dealt with similar issues or experiences like the Holocaust. Although Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill believed in multicultural education it was evident that they do not know how to properly incorporate or use it in their instruction because of the lack of utilization and involvement in educational organizations that offer research-based best practices from actual teachers and researchers. They had belief in but no incorporation of multicultural texts, etc.

When it came to race and gender, Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson placed more emphasis on gender than race with literacy instruction. Although, Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson believed that males and females learn differentially, their view and conception of gender had been
constrained to “typical male and female roles”, just as most individuals in the education arena. Catsanbo, Mulkey, Buttarro, Steelman, and Koch (2012) concluded that teachers “gender-stereotyped traditional expectations about the talents and interests about boys and girls affected placement of students in different tracks, ability groups, and activities/tasks” (p.9). Before I began this research study, I, too, just like Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson essentialized the “typical gender roles”. For example, we thought that males were typically not interested in reading, discussions, or the arts; but mostly interested in sports, games, and math. Some of the males in this research diffused those “typical gender role”. Some prime examples are: (a) as we saw two young men Quinton and D’Andre really enjoyed reading and as a matter of fact Quinton revealed that he enjoyed reading because he indicated, “It’s better than math.” and Quinton enjoyed writing, and writing in the journals daily (Fieldnote, November 23, 2010; (b) D’Andre loved poetry and interacted more with the female students than the male students; (c) Marcus really enjoyed reading Shakespeare, plays, and writing plays; and (d) most of the boys were actively involved and dominated discussions. One morning when the teachers were reviewing their plans for the day, Ms. Jackson discussed how she knows that “The boys will really enjoy playing against the girls.” and Mrs. Kayhill added “I think that the boys will enjoy reading the book Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key more than the girls.” (Fieldnote, October 28, 2010). These conceptions about “traditional gender roles” I believed constrained the teachers approaches/understanding of how students learn. These “traditional gender roles” in the classroom put the students into specific categories or fit them into boxes whether they truly conformed to them or not.

Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson both knew when it came to African American males, they had to get them engaged and interested first in order to be able to increase their academic achievement. This resulted in Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson doing a lot of differentiation of
instruction. Both felt the need to expose students to books outside of their race and culture before exposing them to material that reflected their race and culture, and this was evident in the books that they choose to read in this class: *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Richard III*, and *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (with a picture of a Caucasian boy on the cover). None of the books were about African Americans, written by an African American author, or had African American characters. I believe that Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson had good intentions; but, African American males needed to be exposed to a wide variety of texts. They also have to be exposed to “must read” culturally relevant books as well (Tatum, 2005, p. 20). According to Tatum (2005) that is essential for African American males so we will not hear them say, “Although I had been introduced to a few black authors in school by teachers who read excerpts of their works, I did not understand why we were not reading more of this Black stuff-books by black authors.” (p. 21). What Tatum expressed did happen in this classroom because the only time that the teachers exposed or talked about texts by African American authors was during the poetry unit when they had the students read and interpret poems. One in particular was “Blossoms” by Walter Dean Myers.

Between the two teachers Ms. Jackson considered race more and had a sociocultural perspective in regards to race and gender in literacy instruction. Ms. Jackson had more of a sociocultural perspective of literacy instruction of African American males and it showed in her instruction because she brought in a lot of what Edwards et al. (2010) term “Black popular culture” which are cultural products such as hip-hop music, hip-hop artist, Tyler Perry movies or plays, etc. (p. 84). Edwards et al. emphasized some things that Ms. Jackson knew and incorporated in her teaching with Black popular culture that “Black popular culture is at the core of a broader cultural movement for young people, especially Black youth, and it is represented
by and enacted through a number of related sociocultural practices such as music videos, television programming, movies/films, and advertising” (p. 85). I believe most of Mrs. Jackson’s sociocultural perspective about race and gender was clearly revealed in her teaching style and instruction because she lived amongst the students within Victory’s community and she is an African American who has some shared experiences as the students.

Summary

What one believes impacts ones actions or how one goes about doing things. This was the case for some of Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill’s pedagogical decisions in this classroom. Although they had certain beliefs and thoughts about literacy instruction, their professional educational training or knowledge impacted how they delivered instruction. For the most part what Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson believed about literacy and literacy instruction came through in their delivery of instruction; but, some things that they believed and felt strongly about were not properly implemented or seen in their instruction. This was the case because of their lack of multicultural literacy training, middle school/adolescent development courses, and awareness or participation in professional literacy organizations. Beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about instruction in essence impacts pedagogical decisions, but professional training and/or knowledge can affect how effectively one implements the beliefs.

This chapter has given detailed insight into these two teachers beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about literacy and literacy instruction, and how it impacts their teaching. In this chapter, one can see that beliefs do impact how one goes about their instruction, and professional development and/or teacher training affects pedagogical decisions that may alter, contradict, or differ from beliefs. Chapter five explained how and why Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson planned and delivered their literacy instruction. This chapter provided some insight into the teachers’
plans and actions. The following chapter explains how teachers’ planned lessons and delivery of instruction affected African American males in an eighth grade classroom.
Chapter 6

“You Can Turn Me On or You Can Turn Me Off”

Though the instructional strands are often of most interests to teachers, principals, and district administrators in their effort to improve the reading achievement of Black male students it would be a mistake to focus solely on instructional details. Teachers must also give attention to more general issues- the role of literacy instruction in the lives of Black males, forms of pedagogy that have been effective, and appropriate curriculum planning and text selection… In order to structure an effective curriculum orientation for Black males, teachers must evaluate present curricula and select quality materials that will engage their Black male students and maximize their potential. (Tatum, 2005, p. 38)

Experiences of African American males and any other type of student, whether male, female, African American, European American, Hispanic, etc., in the classroom can either be engaging and make them want to participate or they can be disenabling and turn them off. What happens in the classroom, the culture that is created in the classroom, types of texts exposed to, and the type of literacy events African American males participate in have an impact on their interests and achievement in the area of literacy (Davis, 2003; Tatum, 2000, 2005; Wilson-Jones & Caston, 2004). Chapter four revealed the male focal students’ interests and thoughts about literacy, chapter five offered insights into how and why the teachers perform their literacy instruction, and chapter six is a description of the students’ experiences with the planned and enacted literacy events in this eighth grade English/Language Arts classroom. In this chapter I discuss how the students responded to 21st century literacies (e.g., technology, multiliteracy, and popular culture) and their participation and engagement in the literacy events.
Positive Participation and Engagement of African American Males

Various questions have been raised about why boys are so disenchanted with literacy. According to Guthrie et al. (2004) motivation and engagement may influence the development of reading comprehension because engaged students usually want to understand text content fully; and, therefore, process information deeply. An engaged student suggests the learner is committed, has a mental involvement, and the willingness to participate in literacy activities (Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 2000). In this classroom, there were various activities and assignments completed that had the African American males participating and engaged in the literacy events. Observable engagement behaviors included: “focusing attention, participating in tasks and volunteering, reading aloud, reading silently, talking about the lesson, asking and answering questions, and looking at the teacher” (Cobb, 1972, p.106; Greenwood, 1991, p. 54; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002, p.18). Because the instructional lessons and activities are “organized, planned, and delivered by the teacher, student learning and academic achievement are influenced by the teacher’s ability to actively engage the student” (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002, p.86).

Technology, multiliteracy, and popular culture. Technology, multiliteracy, and popular culture are the new and out-of-school literacies that adolescent African American males as well as any adolescent student needs to have brought into instruction in order for them to become more engaged in the literacy events that occur in the classroom. When teachers bring in these out-of-school and new literacies into the classroom they are inviting and allowing students to draw from their sociocultural experiences (Gainer & Lapp, 2010). Incorporating 21st century literacies elicited a positive response from and had an impact on the African American males in this classroom. Whether it was the big smiles on their faces, types of comments that were made,
or their active participation, one could tell that technology, multiliteracy, and popular culture was an appropriate instructional move for these students.

**Technology.** Most of the technology that was used in this classroom was with the Smart Board, iPads, and laptop or desktop. Whenever the Smart Board was used for review, guided practice, or any type of instruction, all of the males actively participated and were engaged in the activity. Something as simple as a text feature chart placed on the Smart Board where the students had to tap for a question about text features to pop-up, prompted interests. When the chart below (see Figure 1) appeared on the Smart Board, the boys raised their hands more and increased their participation.

Figure 1

**Text Features Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print Features</th>
<th>Graphic Aids</th>
<th>Online Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Font size</td>
<td>Map</td>
<td>Homepage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bold</td>
<td>Cartoon</td>
<td>Hypertext Link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italic</td>
<td>Diagrams</td>
<td>Dropdown Menu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlined</td>
<td>Tables</td>
<td>Url</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colored</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sidebar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, Quinton told Ms. Jackson, after thinking for about 10 seconds, “Font is different types of writing.” (Fieldnote, October 4, 2010). Quinton raised his hand to tell what bold meant and its importance. Later, during the lesson when Ms. Jackson did not recognize Quinton’s hand he called out to Mrs. Kayhill to call on him. Ms. Jackson laughed and shook her head yes and Mrs. Kayhill called on him. Quinton’s response was, “When reading and see a sentence the word usually has a darker print and to let know that it is important.” (Fieldnote, October 4, 2010). The males enjoyed doing game-type activities on the Smart Board that the teachers used for review or guided practice. During a vocabulary review game, that was displayed on the Smart Board the class was split into two groups. The two groups sat directly across from each other and were
situated so they were facing each other with about three feet of space separating the two groups from each other. The boys worked together and eagerly participated in answering questions to get more points; and, they encouraged each other by saying things like, “You got this.” or “The team is depending on you.” (Fieldnote, September 21, 2010).

Another time that the smartboard was used that had the boys’ attention was when Mrs. Kayhill used a website that had an interactive story that helped with parts of the plot of a story. All of the boys seemed involved in this interactive Cinderella story. They paid attention and laughed at some parts of the story as if they had never heard or read Cinderella before. After the interactive story, along with a review of the plot, the students had to complete a worksheet where they had to explain each part of a plot and give examples. All of the males scored at least 85% on the classwork; and, for their examples, they used different parts of the Cinderella story. I asked Quinton and Michael about the activity and they said, “It was fun and I especially liked how we could change the version of the story by changing certain elements of the plot.” (Fieldnote, October 18, 2010). Marcus added, “That’s why I like computers and the internet cause you can do so much with it, it is not boring, and it makes learning fun.” (Fieldnote, October 18, 2010).

Another piece of technology that the males really seemed engrossed in during literacy events that occurred in the classroom were with the iPads.

I remember vividly, on December 14, 2010, when Mrs. Kayhill first brought the iPads into the classroom and discussed that they would be used for instruction. As Mrs. Kayhill talked about the iPads, all of the boys’ had smiles on their faces, were chatting amongst themselves about the iPads, and asking questions. D’Andre asked “Is there a Richard III movie and if so are they on the iPads?” (Fieldnote, December 14, 2010). Whenever the teachers would pass out the iPads the males would have big smiles on their faces with a look of great anticipation. During the
observations I noticed that when the boys worked with things that they liked and were in their area of interests, certain characteristics of leadership began to emerge within them. For example, in a group that had Quinton, Michael, and Robert in it, the students were doing an activity on the iPad that had prefix flashcards. Robert emerged as the leader in the group and was focused and not playing around as he would sometimes do while he should have been completing tasks or activities during class. For instance, when triathlon came up Robert said, “Ok guys what does tri-mean,? Does it mean three so now we need to figure out what –athlon means and I think I remember hearing that when the Olympics were on so I believe it is some type of sporting event.”(Fieldnote, January 11, 2011). During this same activity with the iPads, I observed that the male groups were working well and seemed to enjoy the prefix flashcards and that they were a little more engaged with the activity than the females. Michael and Robert would get really excited when they correctly identified a prefix and meaning of words. Robert moved around in his chair excitedly and said things such as, “I got it right and ya’ll did not.”(Fieldnote, January 11, 2011).

The responses that the males had to the various formats of assessments that were given were informative. They were not too excited about traditional paper and pencil assessments and made comments such as, “Here we go again with these boring tests.” and “I can not wait till I am finished completing this cause my hand hurts.” (Fieldnotes, September 7, 2010, September 8, 2010). Computer assessment given by Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill required the students to just look on the Smart Board and use a hand held clicker to choose their answers. At the beginning of the computer assessment Marcus said, “I am going to like this.” (Fieldnote, October 25, 2010). The boys thought that it was cool that they could see their score and what they got right or wrong immediately after they completed the computer assessment. They were excited to show each
other their scores and discuss their scores among one another. It seemed the males enjoyed doing things that involved technology that allowed them to interact either with the teacher, each other or some type of text and had some element of competition. This could be attributed to what the Jackson et al. (2008) study revealed that African American males used the computer and/or internet to play video games more than females and most of the five focal students enjoyed playing video games. African American males enjoyed competition and interactive teaching which Sanford (2006) asserts that teachers needed to provide for males. Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill included a lot of game-type review and activities on the computer and with the smartboard for the students. These instructional decisions seemed to support the idea that males like to explore more in the world of digital literacy (Taylor, 2005; Sanford, 2006; Cohen, 2007).

**Response to mult literacies.** From the first day of school, August 30, 2010, the males responded positively to multiliteracy. On the first day of school when the students had to present the “All About Me Project” in multiliteracy forms, (e.g., create a rap, draw a picture, write a monologue, or create a poem) the males were the first to volunteer to present. One of the tables that had all boys was the only table that had everyone from their table present that day. Michael shared a rap and both Quinton and D’Andre recited poems that they all eagerly volunteered to do.

On Extension Fridays, the teachers had the students in three to four groups where the students completed extension activities. They completed extension activities such as, going to the computer lab to watch videos or search web sites and arts integration activities that were centered around the particular topic or skill that they were working on at the particular time. All of the male students enjoyed doing the various Extension Fridays’ activities except for the activity where they had to read various articles and write a summary for the article. One
particular Extension Friday, Marcus, Michael, and Robert were in the group that completed the tableau activity. All three males enjoyed doing the tableau activity. When Marcus, Michael, and Robert heard that they were going to do the tableau activity, they all began smiling. While they completed the tableau activity Marcus, Michael, and Robert really got into their presentations. They discussed with one another what they saw in the picture and how to represent what they saw in the picture. Also, during their tableau presentation, as each person was tapped to say what they thought the person was thinking or saying in the picture, they would give more suggestions that could have said to express the picture.

After observing several extension Fridays, I noticed that when the males were doing the tableau or the computer activity, they were engaged and enjoyed the activities; but when they were reading articles they were sometimes off-task. On one occasion, I overheard Quinton tell D’Andre, “Man I want to be in the group that is doing the tableau because just reading articles and answering questions is boring to me.” (Fieldnote, September 26, 2010). It did not matter the activity, as long as it was not the traditional reading and writing activity, the boys enjoyed the various multiliteracy activities on Extension Fridays. They would say things such as, “That was a fun activity.”, “Can we do another one?”, and “I like doing stuff like this cause it is not boring and I actually learned something from it.” (Fieldnotes, September 17, 2010, September 26, 2010, October 16, 2010).

Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson brought in movies to accompany the reading of The Diary of Anne Frank or enhance the understanding of the book. The males were attentive, no one had their heads on their desk, and they were not talking or playing around when the movies were playing. At times, when there would be idle chatter while the movies were being played, it was the male students who would get the class quiet, Robert would yell out, “Shut up!” (Fieldnote,
October 2, 2010). While the movies about Anne Frank were playing the students would have small discussions where they would talk about the characters and their similarities or differences between the book and the movie.

One day, when Ms. Jackson played about fifteen minutes of “The Diary of Anne Frank” movie, as D’Andre was watching the movie at certain points, he would pick up his copy of the book *The Diary of Anne Frank* to find the part in the book that he was seeing in the movie. After one of the viewings of some clips from the movie “Anne Frank: The Whole Story” I asked some of the boys if they liked the movie. D’Andre said, “I like movies because it is more graphic and give more details than the book.”, Quinton said, “liked the movie because visual wise help to better understand the book, characters actions, and I can’t wait to watch more of the movie to see the action, killings, and how the concentration camps look.”, and Marcus said, “I liked the movie for various reasons but especially how the lighting and sound gives you an indication if something good or bad is going to happen, I like the visual and audio clues.” (Fieldnote, September 24, 2010).

For the culminating activity for *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the students had to select a part of the book, then write and perform a play that had to include all elements of the plot. The teachers brought in Tyler Perry DVDs of some of his famous plays such as “Madea’s Family Reunion” to assist the students with their play writing and character development. All of the boys in their different groups became engrossed in their plays and what they needed in order to perform. During their writing and rehearsing of their plays, at times, I would hear them talk about the certain props that they were going to use and how they would have to say and do things to make the audience believe that they were the character that they were portraying. Also, while
they wrote and rehearsed they related what they saw in “Madea’s Family Reunion” to how they must develop the plot and characterization in their plays.

Marcus emerged as a leader in his group that consisted of all male students (two African American males and one European American male) during the writing of the plays. He took charge and organized his group when they had difficulty getting their concept together for their script. During the performances, Marcus’ group had the best well-developed plot. You could clearly tell the part of the book that they re-enacted, and they received the highest score from both their peers and teachers. Marcus was in his element when he was creating the play; and, once, he made a comment that he was thinking of stuff off of the top of his head and that he should be a playwright. Their creation and performance of plays led into reading Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. While they read the play, the students had the opportunity to go on a fieldtrip to a local theater to see a theatrical performance of “Richard III”.

There were some mixed reviews from the males about the “Richard III” theatrical play that they saw. Robert thought it was stupid and all he heard were sound effects and what he saw was fake looking action. However, he did add that, by seeing the play it helped him to understand the reading of the play better because they modernized it. Marcus did not like it because they modernized it. Quinton liked it because it had action and was a more modern version than the book that were reading now. Michael liked it, thought it was entertaining, and gave him a little bit of knowledge of the book that they are reading now and better understanding of the book. Even though some liked or disliked the theatrical performance of the play “Richard III”, for the most part, they all seemed to feel that going to see the play performance allowed them to understand the book better. What these students experienced with the various forms of digital, media, and live literacy is what Jenkins et al. (2006) explain as transmedia navigation.
which is “the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities” (p. 4).

**Response to popular culture.** The males were exposed to popular culture by their teachers informally as they interwove it into the curriculum. Although popular culture was not formally infused into the curriculum, by doing assignments or activities with them and mentioning them in the classroom during instruction, the boys connected with things that they were unfamiliar with or just not interested. Each time any type of popular culture, whether it was television shows, music, or music artist was mentioned, the males responded positively to it. On various occasions when the students could not understand certain vocabulary or content that was in the novels, Ms. Jackson would use examples of television shows and their characters to get the students to acquire the meaning of or how the word or phrase was being used in the books. For example, when most of the students did not know the correct way that the multiple meaning word “made” was being used in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Ms. Jackson used the HBO series “The Sopranos” as an example and when she named the television series all of the boys raised their hands and said things like, “Oh yeah, now I get it.” (Fieldnote, September 21, 2010). Michael said, “The Soprano family had money and controlled a lot of things and people, so “made” means wealthy and powerful people.” (Fieldnote, September 21, 2010). In the context of the Sopranos, a “made man” is a member of the Mafia who is trusted and one of power whom others trust. When they discussed some things that happened or things that they characters said in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Ms. Jackson would often include popular culture to get students to comprehend what had happened in the memoir.

Ms. Jackson asked the class a question about what does Anne mean when she said “don’t pity me” and she used an example from an old television series “A-Team” a series character and
now pop-icon Mr. T. Ms. Jackson said, “Mr. T says all the time I pity the fool.” and then D’Andre responded, “Oh ok pity means feel sorry for, so Anne means don’t feel sorry for her.” (Fieldnote, October 25, 2010). The use of popular culture such as movies and television series can be used to teach vocabulary and to make connections to traditional texts which has enhanced African American male students’ engagement with literacy and improved their vocabulary and comprehension skills (Tatum, 2000, 2005, 2009).

Only three out of the five focal students liked poetry, but when Ms. Jackson talked about hip-hop music, and hip-hop artists, some began to change their thoughts about poetry. Ms. Jackson, during the poetry unit, frequently talked about and made connections with hip-hop music. When she discussed refrain, an element of poetry, Ms. Jackson played for the students some songs from Tupac’s and Jay-Z’s compact discs. After she let the students hear a couple of parts from each of their songs, she asked the students what was the hook in certain songs. All the African American males in the class were waving their hands, smiling, and enthusiastically waiting to be called on to give their responses. I overheard Michael say, “I know all the hooks in Jay-Z raps.” (Fieldnote, January 13, 2011). Ms. Jackson explained to the students, “The refrain in poetry is the same as the hook in hip-hop or R&B music or other types of music refrain is called a chorus.” (Fieldnote, January 13, 2011). Ms. Jackson also brought up a lot of rap and R&B artists and their music such as Common, Mos Def, Monica, Nicki Minaj, Drake, Lil Wayne, Fantasia, Keisha Cole, and Biggie during the poetry unit. When Ms. Jackson discussed the relation to “How hip-hop artists tell a story in their music is the same as how poets tell a story in their poems.” (Fieldnote, January 20, 2011) seemed to really get the boys attention and more interested in poetry. As Ms. Jackson talked about Jay-Z, she shared that she had his book _Decoded_, which explained his raps, and how they would be using some of his raps during the
poetry unit. All of the males’ eyes got big like they were lit up bright like a Christmas tree and they smiled when she indicated that Jay-Z would be a part of the poetry unit. Robert said, “Yes, Ms. Jackson when we gone start with some of Jay-Z’s lyrics, poetry might be alright.”

(Fieldnote, January 13, 2011). It seemed that these students’ response to the integration of hip-hop and poetry was just as effective as the work of Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) with poetry and hip-hop in urban classrooms. What was different in this particular classroom than in other research in middle/secondary classrooms with hip-hop, is that the teachers just mentioned it informally and did not fully integrate it into the curriculum with assignments, projects, or comparing it to canonical texts. It was engaging and an effective strategy in this classroom for the male students. Including popular culture in any form was a way that the African American males made connections from their social and lived experiences, helped bring the unknown to the known, engaged, and piqued their interests.

**Discussions in class.** There were plenty of opportunities for social interaction in this classroom. Questions were asked that went beyond the literal meaning that enabled the African American males to bring in their personal experiences and feelings, which lead to meaningful discussions or debates. While they were reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* or *Richard III* when the teachers would ask questions either during the re-cap or read alouds, the students were really vocal and engaged. With *The Diary of Anne Frank* much of the discussion for these students was about what Anne and her family had to go through during the Holocaust and the treatment of the Jews by the Nazi. During these discussions the boys made comparisons of the things that Anne and her family went through to their own experiences or other African American experiences. Quinton mentioned, “The time that Anne Frank grew up and how her family was treated is similar to how Muslims in the United States were treated and still today being treated since
9/11.” (Fieldnote, September 17, 2010). By Quinton mentioning this led to a 15 minute discussion that had the students reflecting on 9/11, the state of the country, and their own religions. Some comments that were made during the discussion by some of the boys were:

We can’t judge all groups by some people’s actions, think about the articles that we read about the Christian pastor wanting to burn the Muslims’ Koran; I am a Christian and I know that is not what God wants us to do or what the Bible says, and I get why we have to be cautious of the Muslims because look what they came over here and did to our country and took the lives of innocent people. (Fieldnote, September 17, 2010)

Robert and D’Andre brought up the different ways that people are mistreated and/or treated differently because of religion, skin color, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnote that I observed during a debate that started during a PowerPoint presentation of “Daily Life in Elizabethan England”, as an introduction and background knowledge for them reading Richard III, about marrying for love or money:

Tina (female student) said, “Love don’t pay bills.”, then D’Andre responded, “Love conquers all.”, next Quinton said, “Love last longer than money.”, another female student said, “Suppose to marry for love because going before God and marry for just money just ain’t right.”, Marcus said, “Both, money can help with some stuff but love can help with other stuff.”, Quinton then added, “Why couldn’t have love and money back then?”, and D’Andre also added “Money can’t buy happiness.” and while D’Andre was speaking Robert yelled out “No it won’t!” and “Love don’t pay the bills!”. As this debate was going on Mrs. Kayhill gave an example from a modern movie to give an example of what happened if someone married for only money, but she said she was giving this example only being a devil’s advocate and not choosing a side either way. Mrs. Kayhill told the
students that they did a good job with a discussion by listening to others opinion before responding & respecting one another. (Fieldnote, November 20, 2010)

From this debate, the students gained an understanding of some of the people’s thoughts and ideals during the Elizabethian period through comparing their own thoughts and opinions about marrying for love or money. Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson’s questions were typically open-ended which usually encouraged meaningful answers from the students, which allowed the students to use their own knowledge and/or feelings. Another example of this was when Ms. Jackson asked the students, “Do they think Shakespeare is trying to persuade or convince us that Richard is not really a bad person?” (Fieldnote, December 14, 2010). This led to a short discussion where Robert, Marcus, D’Andre, and Michael were really into the discussion, giving examples from the text, and bringing in their own personal feelings in understanding why Richard did what he did. During the discussion on December 14, 2010 there was an exchange going on amongst the males:

Robert and Marcus both said how Richard III was an OG (old gansta) and he did the right thing by taking out his enemies, the Woodvilles, before they got him first. Marcus said Richard III killed the Woodvilles in self-defense and that is not a bad person but a smart person. Robert replied, “It is some boys around my way who I know are after me, so I sneak up and get them before they get me”. Yea, survival of the fittest- Michael. D’Andre later chimed in saying, “Ya’ll are wrong, Richard III was a bad person because he killed his own family members”. Michael quickly replied, “Well they were pulling for the wrong team, the Woodvilles so they had to go”. Robert reiterated that if you are family you side with your own family and not another family who is after or dislike someone in your family, when you turn against your own blood,
you are now against me and considered my enemy. So I don’t blame or think that Richard
III was wrong, he got rid of those who were against him whether family members or not.
(Fieldnote, December 14, 2010)

During this 10 minute discussion, the males talked for about 7 minutes of the discussion and only
two females said anything. When one female began to speak, after about 10 seconds of her
speaking, Robert cut her off and started to refute her opinion (Fieldnote, December 14, 2010).
The African American males dominated the conversations most of the time when discussions
and debates occurred in this classroom. During the discussions, there was a lot of constructing of
meaning and understanding of the text because the students were relating things to their own
experiences. What occurred in this classroom with these boys is what Tatum (2005) explained as
discussions help create meaning, go beyond answering comprehension questions, and
particularly for African American males the teachers created a classroom culture that honored
students’ voices in the interpretation of texts.

**Step-by-step instruction.** Whether it was with writing or reading comprehension, the
African American males responded positively to direct and explicit instruction. With writing
instruction, I noticed how all students paid close attention and followed along step-by-step as
Ms. Jackson went over each direction for the parts for the graphic organizer for the prewriting
for the Anne Frank persuasive essay. All of the boys were attentive and writing when they were
informed to do so after directions were given and modeling was completed. When I asked
Quinton, Marcus, Michael, D’Andre, and Robert how they felt about how the persuasive essay
that they were writing they all informed me that they “liked how they are being taught step-by-
step how to write the essay and how they were pretty much given a template or formula of what
should be included and where it should be in the essay” (Fieldnote, December 20, 2010).
D’Andre and Quinton informed me that the template that Ms. Jackson created was really helpful to them in organizing their essay after they had finished the graphic organizer. Robert and Michael said, “Liked how the instruction for the writing assignment was broken down step-by-step.” (Fieldnote, December 16, 2010). Quinton added, “I liked how Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill walked us through everything, basically what each paragraph needs to entail, and this really helped me because I am not really good with writing.” (Fieldnote, December 16, 2010). It seemed that the students benefited from the teachers breaking the tasks down into smaller parts and creating clear and concise instructions (Webster Groves Writing Project, 2002). Although, the African American males greatly benefited from the step-by-step instructions during my observations it was noticeable that the females benefited as well. One of the female students mentioned at the end of a class period, “Now that Ms. Jackson went over what should be included in paragraph of the essay it will make it easier to revise my essay and I now get the comments that she made on my rough draft.” (Fieldnote, December 9, 2010).

Negative Participation and Engagement of African American Males

Levels of engagement are a contributor to academic outcomes. To that end, engagement has been described as an alterable behavior because a student’s level of engagement can be modified by changes to the teacher’s instructional practices and curricular content (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). If a student is not focused, attentive, nor engaged, then the student is not metacognitively active, not regulating his/her learning and not constructing meaning (Oldfather, 2002). At times, the African American males were not actively involved or engaged in the literacy events that occurred in the classroom. If a student is not engaged then they most likely are not an active participant in the activities that happen in the classroom.
**Teacher read-aloud and round-robin reading.** After about the first month and a-half into my observations it was noticeable that read alouds had became a fixture and almost daily routine in this classroom. As Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill increased read alouds, males’ engagement decreased. There were several occurrences in this classroom that were an indicator that the males were not actively paying attention, engaged in, or liked the reading aloud done in the class. Typically, the teachers would read-aloud about six to ten pages per setting when they would read-aloud. On about three or four occasions, they read more than 10 pages aloud. When Ms. Jackson or Ms. Kayhill read aloud, the males did so many other things, and paying attention or following along as the teacher read-aloud was very seldom done. One day when Ms. Jackson read aloud pages 160-166 in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Robert and Marcus put on hand sanitizer and played around with each other. Even when the teachers displayed the book that they were reading aloud on the image projector for students to follow along, when they only had one copy of the book, the boys tended to still not be engaged. For example, when Mrs. Kayhill read aloud *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*, because there was only one copy of the book and she had it displayed on the image projector, Robert and Marcus had their heads on their desks. Michael was talking with Troy and D’Andre was playing around with Guy at their table. It was a time that the teachers noticed that the students were not as attentive when they were reading aloud. During a class period after Ms. Jackson had gone over the morning agenda she began reading on page 190 in *The Diary of Anne Frank* after about three minutes of her reading, she abruptly stopped and asked the students if they wanted to read or do popcorn reading because she noticed that when they (the teachers) read aloud, some students did not pay attention or follow along in their books. After this happened, the read-aloud by the teachers did not necessarily decrease but they did have
the students popcorn read more and the effects of this type of read aloud on the African American males did not change too much.

The boys just slightly paid attention so that they would be ready if they were chosen to read during popcorn reading. There were times that I would hear them ask the person next to them where are we or say things like, “I wasn’t paying attention show me where they are reading at.” (Fieldnote, November 22, 2010). With the popcorn reading they were a little more attentive, even if for the wrong purposes; there were still some males who were just not attentive no matter what. For instance, during a time when they were popcorn reading Michael just was not into it. Michael had moved from his seat in order to sit next to someone who had their book because he forgot his that day. Even though he sat with someone (a female) with a book to follow along, he still was reluctant to follow-along. Michael did not look on his neighbor’s book and he sat with his chair leaned back with his head facing upward in the sky looking as if he was sleeping. When he was called on to popcorn read, Michael slightly sat up and asked the female student with whom he was supposed to be sharing the book, “Where we at?” (Fieldnote, November 22, 2010). Ms. Jackson responded, “Michael the purpose of you sitting over here is to share and look on a neighbor’s book and you should not have to ask where we are.” (Fieldnote, November 22, 2010). Michael only read two sentences aloud, called on another classmate to popcorn read next, and then said in a low voice, “I’m going back to sleep now.” (Fieldnote, November 22, 2010). The overkill of reading aloud and the prolonged period of time of doing it began to cause the very few students who would normally pay attention and follow along to start to become disengaged. Quinton, for the most part, was engaged and followed along during read alouds. When Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson began to do read alouds for more than fifteen minutes even he became disengaged. At a time when Ms. Jackson read aloud for almost an hour, I noticed that all the
males were disengaged. From my previous months of observations in this classroom, I noticed that during most read alouds Quinton would be the only male who was following along and paying attention. It took this one particular time that the read aloud lasted beyond thirty minutes for Quinton to become disengaged. Quinton, a couple of times during this period, looked over at me and asked me where they were during the read aloud because he had dozed off. This was Quinton’s first time losing track of where they were after about 28 minutes of reading aloud. Eventually after almost 45 minutes of reading aloud, Quinton was not following along in his book, but he played with a piece of paper at his desk. One morning I asked both teachers how they felt about the boys’ lack of engagement and focus during the read alouds. Mrs. Kayhill said, “Well you know males have short attention spans and we have to try to change that.” and Ms. Jackson responded, “I think we have to build the boys’ endurance up for listening for prolonged period of times because this is preparation for college in lecture and discussions.” (Fieldnote, November 3, 2010).

**Paper and pencil activities.** Paper and pencil activities in this class had the students stationary or immobile. It did not matter if the paper and pencil activities completed were a worksheet, a benchmark assessment, or taking notes, it had the boys in an unchanging or fixed position. The quarterly benchmark assessment was in the form of a typical paper and pencil fashion. Both times that I observed the students taking the benchmarks tests, students would always say things like, “Not these again.”, “They are so boring.”, and “Sitting doing these makes my butt hurt.” (Fieldnotes, September 7, 2010, January 10, 2011). I remember for the first quarter benchmark during the assessment, Robert said softly at his seat, “I am bored and don’t want to take benchmark assessment.” (Fieldnote, September 7, 2010). Most of the formal assessments that the teachers gave the students were paper and pencil assessments that the
African American males were never pleased to hear that they were going to be taking. When the teachers gave them a computer assessment where they used the clicker and the Smart Board, it was a totally different reaction for the males. It seemed that they enjoyed taking this type of assessment. When the teachers informed them that they were going to do a different type of assessment, all of the males had smiles on their faces and Marcus and Michael said, “This may be cool to do.” (Fieldnote, October 25, 2010). After the computer assessment was over they were excited that it did not take them a whole lot of time to complete. They were able to see their scores immediately and asked the teachers if they could take all of their tests like this.

Whenever Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson differentiated instruction, the African American males were always more engaged and participated more with the teacher who used technology in their instruction rather than with the teacher that just used worksheets. When they were with the teacher that integrated technology in her instruction, they were actively participating and engaged. In contrast, when they were with the teacher who just had them read things off of a worksheet and had them answer questions, they seemed less enthusiastic, would seldom raise their hands to participate, and would often have their heads on their desks. During the teachers’ PowerPoint presentations they would have the students take notes on either a worksheet that they provided or in the students’ notebook. Most of the time that the students had to take notes, maybe one or two of the focal students would do it consistently and not do other things.

Mrs. Kayhill presented a PowerPoint presentation on the characters in Richard III before they actually began reading because she felt that it would be helpful for the students as they were reading. Before she started the presentation, she gave the students a character/family outline and informed them that they were to write notes on the worksheet. D’ Andre wrote notes on his outline as Ms. Kayhill talked during the presentation. Robert, Marcus, and Anthony did not take
notes. Mrs. Kayhill had to tell Robert to pay attention and follow along because he was not even on the same page as Mrs. Kayhill. At that point, Robert began to underline things and take some notes. After about three minutes, I went over to Robert because I noticed again that he was not on the same page as Mrs. Kayhill and was drawing on the back of the worksheet. The students who did not take notes or did not pay attention did not perform well on the classwork or quizzes that the teachers gave to the students. For example, D’Andre and Quinto often took notes and paid attention in class. On one particular occasion when the students had to take a paper and pencil quiz that included both multiple choice and a BCR, D’Andre and Quinton both received a 85% or higher on it (Fieldnote, December 13, 2010). Marcus, who did not take notes often and was talking or easily distracted in class, received a 52% and only had four to five lines written on his paper for his BCR. During the quiz, Mrs. Kayill informed Marcus twice to “Get focused, stop talking and playing around, and finish your quiz.” (Fieldnote, October 12, 2010). On the other hand, when the males completed an assessment with the Smart Board and clickers Marcus only got one incorrect with a score of 83%. It seemed that the attentiveness, focus, and type of assessment can have an impact on how well males perform on classwork and/or assessments.

**Summary**

Participation and engagement plays a vital role in the classroom experiences of students as well as academic outcomes. Hudley, Daoud, Polanco, Wright-Castro, & Hershberg (2003) define engagement as “the persistence and quality of a student’s involvement in learning activities… that links the individual student to the classroom” (p. 3). Within the classroom student engagement and participation is critical, for student engagement and participation affects academic achievement for students (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The African American males’ classroom participation and engagement depended on the activities that were put before them.
The activities and/or tasks that these particular African American males were interested, engaged, and participated in were not always the typical or essentialized gender specific roles that we, at times, place males. The males were actively engaged and participated in literacy events that involved technology, popular culture, multiliteracy, discussions and step-by-step instructions. The literacy events that included those elements were the times that the males participated, were engaged, constructed meaning, understood information, and acquired an interest in the literacy event. On the other hand, the boys were bored and were not engaged or inattentive during read alouds and when they had to complete numerous paper and pencil activities.
Chapter 7

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I discuss how what happened in this classroom with these male students and their teachers is situated in a wider societal context of education. I identify the larger themes that were revealed in the study, recommendations for future research, education policy, curriculum, instruction, and professional organizations; and then conclude with my final thoughts from the study.

This microethnographic qualitative, research study examined the literacy instruction and experiences of a small sample of African American males in an English/Language Arts classroom. The purpose of this study was unique in that it not only explored these males’ experiences in the classroom, but it also explored teachers’ beliefs and instruction, as well as how the teachers’ delivery of instruction impacted African American male students’ engagement and achievement. Using sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework, I gained an understanding of how, in the 21st century, literacy instruction was planned, enacted, and experienced by five African American males. This study clearly revealed how knowledge and understanding was constructed collaboratively between teachers and students as well as between students. I determined that literacy learning took on a sociocultural perspective because literacy learners experienced and were engaged with various literacy practices in the everyday classroom context.

With this study, it was revealed that, although African American males in an urban school setting have certain perceptions (whether they be positive or negative) about engagement/participation with literacy, they can be changed based upon what and how literacy events are planned for and how they are delivered to them. Also, this study demonstrated that
teachers may have their own thoughts and beliefs about literacy and the instruction of literacy, but teacher education training and professional development can and will affect how effectively the instruction is delivered.

**Interests and Perception of Literacy**

Results from this study suggest that perception and interests play a vital role in how African American boys participated and engaged in literacy events in a classroom. Most of these five adolescent males’ lack of interest and negative and/or singular perception of literacy was evident. On occasion they viewed reading as boring and a feminine activity and felt unsuccessful with it. Cleveland (2011) validated this as she referred to this as part of the “boy code” (p. 38). She further explained how females typically do well in the area of literacy and “boys often purposely shun such tasks in order to avoid being associated with being feminine or girlie thereby stunning their ability to master the kind of skills necessary for success in school” (Cleveland, 2011, p. 40). The one student D’Andre who enjoyed reading and read often was a student who did not hang out with the other males in the class often, but mostly surrounded himself with the girls and associated more with the females in the class. D’Andre according to Cleveland (2011) had a “natural affinity for literacy;” and, thus, could have been labeled, and acted and associated more with girls (p. 40). On the other hand, Quinton enjoyed reading and writing, but hung out and associated more with the males in the classroom. These were examples of how all males do not fit into the “typical male gender roles,” and this has to be considered in classroom assignments, texts/readings, and/or tasks.

The boys who saw literacy only in singular form, saw reading in a negative way. Much of the gender gap in literacy stems from the narrow definition of literacy (Sanford, 2006; Taylor, 2005). These boys were engaging in multiple forms of literacy, but could and did not equate
what they were doing with out-of-school activities as actual other forms of literacy. Ives (2011) labels this as “hidden literacies” because multiliteracy is not usually enacted in school and have been characterized as “unofficial, overlooked, ignored, unsanctioned, or vernacular” (p. 252). All of these boys were engaging in literacy in so many other ways such as the internet, email, text messaging, and video or computer games; but these out-of-school literacies had seldom, if ever, become in-school literacies. The few students who defined literacy beyond a singular form had a more positive attitude towards reading and literacy.

If literacy practices/activities were put before these African American males that were of interest to them, then they were active engaged participants and willingly completed tasks. Reading of text and activities that the boys could connect/relate with and/or were interested in led the boys to be active participants in the literacy events. As Tatum (2005, 2009) and Gilyard (2002) discussed, in order to engage and increase academic achievement in African American males, educators have to ensure that they are taking into account the four literacy needs—academic, cultural, emotional, and social. Tatum (2006, 2009), who has extensive research and experience with adolescent African American males, expressed that these boys have to be exposed to enabling texts that have male characters, engage boys emotionally, legitimize the male experience, support boys’ views of themselves, and engage them in activities that bring out-of-school practices in-school.

**Why it was Planned and How it Unfolded**

The teachers in this study, Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson, both had beliefs about literacy for the most part that were to the benefit of African American males and were in alignment with the diversity and/or advanced technology that they are confronted with in the 21st century. As it was revealed in this research what and how they planned the literacy events in the classroom was
heavily influenced by their beliefs about literacy and how they believed African American males should be taught. Teachers’ beliefs are grounded in their own personal beliefs, can be considered to be individual conceptions about how they desire to teach, and conceptions about how students learn (Beijaard, 1998; Richardson, 2003). Some of Ms. Jackson’s and Mrs. Kayhill’s beliefs on gender fit into the typical essentialized gender roles. This impacted how they felt and thought that African American males should be taught and how they infused activities or tasks in the literacy events that they believed the boys would like or be interested in.

What the teachers believed about literacy was formed by earlier experiences, their personal experiences as they were students, and influenced by professional context (Pajares, 1992; Keys, 2007; Raths, 2001). What Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson believed about literacy and literacy instruction was carried out in their planning and implementation of instruction; and, most importantly, their beliefs influenced their teaching practices and their identity (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Kane, Sandretto, & Heathm 2002; Pajares, 1992). Even though these two teachers had similar beliefs about literacy, their personal experiences impacted their thoughts and beliefs about some aspects of the literacy instruction of African American males. Ms. Jackson’s view of effective literacy instruction for African American males took on a sociocultural perspective and Mrs. Kayhill’s view was more of a psycholinguistic perspective, but she also had some elements of a sociocultural perspective, e.g., her view that students needed multicultural literature. Ms. Jackson’s view of literacy was in accordance with Vygotsky in that literacy is social, learning occurs through interaction, and includes culture. On the other hand, Mrs. Kayhill’s view of literacy for the most part took on Chomsky’s perspective where African American males lacked early and emergent literacy skills because they still had not learned the rules because of the lack of skills and exposure.
Both teachers had good intentions for effective instruction of their students, but they lacked training, professional development, and involvement in professional organizations. Teachers need to possess specific and specialized knowledge in order to help students meet the literacy challenges of the 21st century and increase academic achievement (Lytle, 2000). Darling-Hammond (2000) insists that teacher training and how teachers further their knowledge “helps teachers learn how to look at the world from multiple perspectives and cultures different from their own… to use the knowledge in developing pedagogies that can reach diverse learners” (p. 170). These essential things that Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson lacked impacted how effectively their planned lessons unfolded in the classroom. There were missed opportunities to further the boys understanding and to engage them because of the lack of the teachers’ knowledge base and not having the access to resources to help acquire the knowledge.

Did You Engage Me?

The type of activities the teachers presented and in which they involved the African American males during the literacy events were critical in the boys’ engagement, participation, and comprehension. Some of the boys’ negative perception and/or dislike about literacy changed over time because of the type of activities that the teachers presented to them. A couple of the boys did not like poetry until rap lyrics were brought into the lessons. Also, the boys were actively engaged and begin to get deeper understanding of canonical texts when movies, acting, and other forms of popular culture were involved. When the students were involved and participated in literacy activities that involved social skills through collaboration, networking in play, and with the arts that included popular culture, children had the ideology of ownership and increased engagement (Duncan-Andrades & Morrell, 2005; Dyson, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Morrell, 2000). Social interaction and participatory culture was an avenue in which the boys
were engaged, participated, and gained comprehension/understanding during literacy events. When the out-of-school activities were brought into the in-school literacy activities and lessons, the African American males were empowered, had agency, and were actively involved in the literacy events. Something else that stood out in this research was how the teachers’ explicit instruction helped the boys’ comprehension and further understanding. Tatum (2005) placed particular emphasis on how in his work with African American males, “students are better able to comprehend text and promotes active engagement when they receive explicit instruction” (p. 104).

Just as the boys were engaged with some literacy events that occurred, there were several activities planned with which these boys were very disengaged. The two main activities that the boys experienced in this classroom where they were bored, often times not interested in, and did not hold their attention for prolonged periods of time, were read alouds and paper-pencil activities. Cleveland’s (2011) research found that, when boys had to read literary text through read-aloud, this process “consumes so much energy that they often tune out” (p. 202). The experiences in schools like doing worksheets are just exercises rather than “authentic opportunities for communication and because of this often marginalized students perceive schools as a disadvantage” (Powell, 2009, p.19). The experiences of these five African American males that were disengaging for them mainly dealt with things that were in repetition, they could not connect with, did not involve technology, and where they were not involved with dialogue and discussion.

Recommendations

Future research is needed in order to further explore ways to increase participation, interest, and engagement of African American males in literacy. Also, teachers need to consider
adding more books written by African American authors to the English/Language arts curriculum. The incorporation of more books written by African American authors could be investigated to gain an understanding of how it will impact African American males’ participation, interest, engagement, and academic increase. There has been research completed on incorporation of pop culture and engaging texts, but none of that research produced results that indicated any impact on achievement and/or test scores. Further research is necessary in the area of multiliteracy pedagogy to increase academic achievement with this particular minority subgroup.

African American males are underperforming because of the type of literacy practices and the narrowness of the definition of literacy in schools (Gilyard, 1991; Kirkland, 2008; Morrell, 2000; & Tatum, 2005). Researchers Gilyard (2002), Kirkland (2004), and Tatum (2005), who have done specific research on African American males and literacy, expressed that the definition of literacy needs to be defined more broadly to include multilingual, multimodal, and multitextual capacities that are needed in a multicultural world. Multiliteracy is a philosophy of education as well as pedagogy. Anesty and Bull (2006) give an excellent description as the necessity to have multiple forms of knowledge and understandings about literacy and social contexts that enable appropriate and successful performance in all aspects of life. There is a need to further investigate the phenomenon of the expansion of the term literacy to multiliteracy for its implication on literacy instruction. This particular kind of research could explore how multiliteracy pedagogy fits into the curriculum and gain a first-hand account of African American males’ experiences with multiliteracy and its impact on their achievement.

This research also suggests the need to acquire more insight on dialogue and counternarratives on the literacy experiences of boys of color with text taking on a more critical
view. Conducting research on critical literacy with a critical race theoretical framework might bring more understanding and further research on how African American males analyze and find more than one meaning of texts, as well as help them think about who they are as readers and why they might read a text in a particular way. Literacy instruction from the critical literacy perspective is as much about ideologies, identities, and values as it is about codes and skills (Frank, 2008). Morrell (2009) insists that literacy research be more critical and believes that it “holds the potential to provide the missing link in the theory-to-practice research chain” (p. 99).

Additionally, future research needs to explore what and how current teachers pursue professional development/professional organizations to further their knowledge. There have been numerous studies on teacher training and/or teacher education programs at colleges/universities, but very few investigations on how teachers further develop their craft and further educate themselves once they become classroom teachers. Times are changing, technology evolving, and there is much more diversity in our society; so, educators also constantly have to change, learn, and develop. From my research, one could clearly see that both teachers had some solid beliefs about literacy that would help improve the engagement and achievement of the boys in literacy, but their lack of course work, professional development, and involvement in professional literacy organizations hindered them from effectively carrying out their instructional beliefs. This in-turn impacted the males’ experiences and achievement in the area of literacy.

Just as this research made implications for future research, it also leads to recommendations in educational policy, curriculum, and instruction. School districts and state boards of education have become too top heavy. Many individuals who work in the local and state educational agencies do not have education backgrounds but maybe business backgrounds. If they do have education degrees, they have spent very few years in the classrooms or as school-
based employees. One might argue that many urban school districts have become some sort of modern dictators and who dictate what to teach, how to teach, and how long to teach specific contents. This has led to teachers having low-level agency. I recommend the development of educational policy changes that allow more input from teachers when it comes to allowing flexibility in curriculum and the schedule. Teachers are so often confined to using certain curriculum to teach certain subjects; these materials may not even be what is best for their particular type of students. Also, teachers are restricted and must teach within certain timeframes (e.g., 120-minute literacy block, 90-minute math block, etc.). If they go over the time frames because students may not have mastered the skills, they often are penalized on evaluations or scrutinized. This recommendation is warranted because of the over-direction of teachers in classrooms. Teachers are in the trenches with the students, and they know what works and what does not work for their students. So, one can conclude that they should be actively involved in educational policies because they will ultimately be the ones who carry out and implement them.

Some educational policy changes need to be made in the area of assessment. It was revealed in this research that some of the males performed better with assessments that were not just traditional paper and pencil assessments. The paper and pencil assessments had the boys in unchanging positions where they had to consistently sit upright. This format that had the males in upright unmovable positions could have been problematic for them. When the boys in this study had to demonstrate their understanding when they were not so immobile and were able to move around, they did perform better. In addition, although many states are moving to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment that will be completed on the computer, but as this research as well as other research revealed, students particularly African American males, can and are capable of displaying their mastery of
skills/concepts in many other forms (e.g., through oral discussions, debates, graphically, artistically, etc.). I recommend that assessments of students should be done in various forms. There will still be ways for holding educators accountable, but the accountability does not have to be measured by using only one form or type of assessment.

This research revealed that there needs to be some curricular recommendations that would have supported the work of Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson, as well as any teacher in urban schools. A critical area in the area of curriculum is guidance and/or suggestions for selecting texts. The scope and sequence gave genres of text but did not give specific examples of text that could have supported the curriculum units. The scope and sequences and/or units need to include guidance for teachers on selecting complex multicultural texts that are also culturally conscious. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that most states have already adopted or are planning to adopt have taken the curricular shift towards complex text. So guidance for choosing complex text is essential. There were missed opportunities from Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill because of their narrow text selection. If these teachers would have had guidance and/or a broader booklist on text selection, I believe that they could have related similar experiences across time periods and/or cultures/races. This, I believe, would have enabled deeper understanding, connections, and cultural acceptance and consciousness.

Another recommendation is to match or pair teachers in terms of strengths and complimentary aspects. In this research co-teaching was done in a meaningful and effective manner. Mrs. Kayhill’s special education background not only helped the special education students but the general education students as well. Mrs. Kayhill’s computer and technology savvy enhanced the students’ learning experiences in the classroom and helped to develop Ms. Jackson technological skills. Ms. Jackson brought in her out-of-school literacy practices that
engaged, motivated, and help the males to better understand skill/concepts/literary genres. In addition, co-teaching allowed for maximizing instructional time. In this classroom, teachers were allowed to differentiate instruction, pull small groups that not only were at students’ ability level but also at their readiness and completion of assignments. With co-teaching teachers were able to give immediate attention to students who were struggling and/or needed additional assistance. Co-teaching that allows teachers to compliment and display their strengths is beneficial for both students and teachers.

Most states are implementing or are in the process of beginning to implement the CCSS. The CCSS were written to prepare students for college and ensure that they are ready to go to college. These learning standards are meant to be mastered at the end of each instructional grade level. For instance, once a third grader completes third grade, the CCSS assumes and expects that the third grader has mastered all of the third grade standards. But in urban areas in schools similar to Victory, this does not always occur and can be a misconception. So this leaves some limitations in the CCSS and forces states and/or school districts to create scope and sequences with expected timelines that may not be in the best interests of all students. The writers of CCSS did not recognize that not all students will master benchmarks and that there will be a need for teachers to reteach skills and/or concepts in order for students to proceed or build their knowledge capacity. I recommend that CCSS writers, educational researchers, teacher education institutions, classroom teachers, and curriculum writers come together to make adjustments to the CCSS and create realistic scope and sequence charts that may have to be differentiated according to students’ ability, capacity, and background.

Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill lacked some professional knowledge that could have enhanced their development professionally and, therefore, improved their instruction in the
classroom. From this research there are some recommendations I have for educational researchers, teacher education programs, and professional organizations. All three of these entities are supposed to be a resource, support, and enhancement for teacher development. But it seems that they are doing more talking to and at each other instead of to the school districts and teachers who have direct contact with and impact the students. Educational researchers come into the classroom for a specific agenda or motive for their particular research objective; but, they should come into the classrooms more to do more action research with teachers, where the teacher partners with the research, but is also considered an expert. So much emphasis has been put into theories, but in order to have an impact on the professional development of teachers and increase student achievement, we must know how to put theory into effective educational practice.

The teacher education programs need to ensure they are preparing pre-service teachers to teach in urban areas with minority and/or diverse populations by emphasizing culturally relevant curriculum. So many pre-service teachers are unprepared to teach diverse populations in urban areas because of their lack of course work and practicum experiences in teacher education programs. Teacher education programs have a plethora of course work, but I recommend that they begin practicum experiences as early as their second semester. The best teacher is when one is in the field getting the experiences and applying what they have learned from coursework.

In terms of professional organizations, such as the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English, these are supposed to be for the development and resource for teachers, but it seems more of a disconnect. So many teachers, who are the practitioners, are not affiliated with these organizations. It seems that more educational researchers are benefiting, affiliated, and participating in the professional organizations. The
professional organizations need to partner with school districts and teacher education programs in order to get the teacher practitioners and pre-service teachers more involved. These organizations can develop best practices/instructional strategies with these individuals and acquire a first-hand account on how they impact student learning.

More choice needs to be made available for students when teachers create/assign tasks or activities. This is important to avoid activities or task that are mostly or solely based on essentialized “typical gender roles”. If Ms. Jackson and Mrs. Kayhill had not perceived that there were certain activities or tasks that they felt only males or only females would like, then maybe they would have really tapped into more interests of students rather than perceptions.

Another vital and critical recommendation that has come out of this research is the incorporation of the students’ voices and interests in their education. The students want agency and their knowledge/experiences included. There have been such literacy gaps in education because we have not taken the time to find out from the students what works best or interests them. From this research certain things were not thought about that I believe affected student achievement: (a) how the students were constricted by paper and pencil assessments, (b) how the format and structure of activities impacted student learning, engagement, and/or participation, and (c) what flexibility with space and movement would aid in learning. Interest inventories need to be taken in order to find out from the students how they best learn, what they like and interests them, and what out-of-school literacies could be brought in school to help them achieve.

**Final Thoughts**

I set out on this journey to gain an understanding of the experiences of African American males in an English/Language Arts classroom. I wanted to determine how their teachers planned for these experiences. In turn, I learned why and how the teachers planned, as well as what
impacted the boys’ experiences in this classroom. What came out of this study was how personal experiences and beliefs impact what happens during literacy events. It is not solely about what you learn, but how you learn it. What the teachers did, how they did it, and what they did it with impacted the experiences of the boys in this English/Language Arts classroom.
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Winston.


# Grade 8 Literacy Curriculum Sequence

## School Year 2010-2011

### Quarter 1 (Aug 23 – Nov 5)

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**UNIT 1 ASSESSMENT**

**UNIT 2: Unraveling Other’s Stories**  
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Language Arts/ Writing

➢ Research Writing

➢ Verbs
  • Tenses
  • Regular
  • Irregular

➢ Adjectives
  • Degrees of Comparison

➢ Sentences
  • Simple
  • Compound
  • Complex
  • Combining

➢ Punctuation

Reading Comprehension

➢ Text Features
  • Identify and explain contributions to meaning

➢ Author’s Purpose/Perspective
  • Author’s Opinion
  • Intended Audience
  • Author’s Reliability

➢ Text Structures
  • Chronological order
  • Main Idea/Details
  • Cause/Effect
  • Problem/Solution
  • Comparison/Contrast

➢ Main Idea
  • Explicit/Implied
  • Explain information peripheral to the main idea

➢ Drawing Conclusions

UNIT 2 ASSESSMENT

Quarter 2 (Nov 6 – Jan 21)

Benchmark B | testing window
Nov 1 – 12

UNIT 3: Exploration | Timeline:
October/November

248
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### UNIT 4 ASSESSMENT

**Quarter 3 (Jan 22 – Mar 30)**

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**UNIT 5 ASSESSMENT**

**MSA TESTING (Mar 7-16)**

**UNIT 6:**

Timeline: March
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### UNIT 6 ASSESSMENT

**Quarter 4 (Mar 31 - Jun 10)**

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**UNIT 7 ASSESSMENT**

**UNIT 8: Sharing Our Perspectives**

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UNIT 8 ASSESSMENT
In the story when Anne said, “We had a short circuit last evening, and on top of that the guns kept burning all the time.” I can relate to Anne because sometimes when I live near guns going off but that is only so often. But lately on the news I have been hearing people being murdered in Baltimore City. Also, when Anne said, “I still haven’t got over my fear of everything connected with shooting and planes, and I creep into Daddy’s bed nearly every night for comfort.” “I know it’s very childish but you don’t know what it is like.” I can relate to Anne because around the age of ten I use to crawl in bed with my mother and not just because I was scared of anything. I just have to get in bed with my mother. I learned that Ann use to crawl in bed with her Daddy at the age of thirteen. I feel that you can be scared of anything at any age. I no... Anne was scared when she heard people shooting, as I said I hear it so often. Anne said she hears it very often. As I was reading I came across a word I didn’t understand and that word was Pneumonia.
In the story when Anne's mother asked her, "Shall I say your prayers with you tonight, Mummy?" I answered, "Alice when Anne's mother said, "I don't want it to be cross, love, cannot be forced. There were tears in her eyes as she left the room."

I learned that any and her mother didn't have a good relationship. I can imagine how Anne's mother felt. If I was Anne's mother, I would feel hurt and crushed. I would feel that way because for me to have some attention, me and to them to push me away, it would hurt. In our world today, mother and daughter aren't close.

Because we don't have time to communicate. I wonder what Anne and her mother say to have a better relationship. I wonder if Anne's mother is how one feels in the story. I came across words I didn't understand, these words were Binnerschule, Vizeleiterin, Singer.
In the story "When Anne Said," "Families are torn apart, the men women and children all being Separated." "Children coming home from school find that their parents have disappeared." For me to be use to seeing my family every day. Then out of no where me and my family is broken apart I would be scared and hurt. Even if I was use to coming home from school every day. The I come home and my family is gone. I would be hurt. When Anne Said. "The children have run about in just a thin blouse and clogs no coat, but no stocking and no one helps them. I remember when that hurricane happen in New Orleans alot of people where walking around with little clothes on. I learned that Anne's family also the Van Daan's and Dussel can think and say some bad things about Anne. Even though Anne's family where being mean to her she remained strong.
In the story, Anne said, "I witnessed a terrible air battle between German and Allied planes. I saw people being killed in the wreck. Also, when Anne said, "he asked me to give him a cigarette." I knew he was being buried alive."

As I was reading, I came across a word I didn't understand. The word was cigarettes. In the story, Mrs. Von Loon sent both workers away and went downstairs to Mr. Dussel's room. Seeking there the rest with she could not find with her spouse, Dussel received her with the words, "Come into my bed, my child." "Which sent us off into uncontrollable laughter." The sunfire travelled us no longer, our fear was banished."

I learnt that it doesn't matter what goes on, all of them are one big happy family. Where's Text? Text?
I feel though the poem Anne's farther gave to the was very interesting. In the story, when Anne said "Mr. Vossen has not been operated for his duodenal ulcer." "When he was on the operating table and they had opened him up, the doctors saw that he had cancer, which was far too advanced to operate. In our world today a lot of people are dying with cancer. I know that there is more than one type of cancer. Most times when doctors operate on a person, the cancer is exposed to air, and two or three weeks later that person has died. Because the cancer had been exposed to air. When I heard that Mr. Vossen had cancer I felt bad for him, because I no a personal friend that have cancer also. I know Mr. Vossen felt bad when he found out he had cancer. Because the type of pain people go through that have cancer also depending on the type of cancer they might have. I learned that Anne and her farther has a good relationship. Because Anne's farther wrote her poem for her birthday.
Individual Student Report

Class: MS Lang Arts MS Lang Arts 08 (08-01) Teacher Name:

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This is the book.

Sit: How is your life going, so far? I think you should be great. Imagine living in a country where the things you can not live without. Imagine I think the new 8th graders should read Anne Frank because they will have a great experience reading the book. One good reason is that it is about our history. Another good reason is Anne went through problems just like every other teenager in the world. The last reason is that it is a great way to learn about WWII.

First, the book is about history. One reason is in the book you get to learn about the Holocaust. Another reason is that the book tells about WWII. WWII is a part of history and kids should learn about what happened during that time period. The last reason is that you get to learn about the things that Hitler did.

Sit: On top of that, it is a real waste to learn about WWII. The entire world was at war. Millions of people died just because of their religion. One more reason is that cities were burned to the ground. A lot of people loved ones had died because they wasn't German.
Finally, Anne went through problems. Just like other teenagers, she had different problems to face. She being the youngest in the house. Anne was always being looked down at. A lot of people feel this way at least once in their lives. Anne was in hiding because of the fear of death.

In conclusion, I think the new p^th grade would have a great experience reading Anne Frank. Yes, I think kids should read this book because it's a great opportunity to learn about history. Also, kids will be able to connect with Anne because she went through things that all every other teenagers. The back of the book tells you about WWII; it was a world at war. If we ever see it, it's going to be a world at war.
Should the rising 8th graders read *Diary of A Young Girl*?

I say yes because this book is apart of history and I'm sure the kids will love this book. Another reason is Anne went through problems just like everybody else. Another good reason is if those kids want to learn more about WWII, this is a good way.
I said this book Another reason is Anne
was a part of history went through problems
and the kids will just like every little
love Anne Frank kid in the world.
So they know what
she went through.

I think the New 8th Graders
would have a great experience
reading Anne Frank.

Another good reason To summarize it
is if those kids want I think all kids
to learn more about should learn about our
WWII and this history and it prepare
a good way to learn then for more books
just like this or for
books that are more
difficult. And if this
every happen to them they
can read the book
and do what the franks
did to survive.
The book is about history. Anne went through problems just like us.

Holocaust: box girl problems. I shamed, looked down at. The Gethseman.

WWII: Hitler

I think the new 5th graders would have a great experience reading 'Anne Frank.'

A great way to learn about WWII.

This was a war where millions of people died. Cities burned to the ground.
Appendix E
Michael’s Writing

Why not to read Anne Frank

Do you like reading long books do you have trouble reading well here how you pass and have fun watch the movie then write all about it to save some time and humiliation.

It was too long because when you reading for fun you might want a short 7 chapter book or less. If you are lazy because 200 and some pages is way too long even if you reading with the class some people might not understand Anne frank I think since being 8th graders you should mature enough to choose your own book to show people you are responsible.

It making no sense along the way the way because once she got on a subject she would sometimes digress off of one subject to another but I just didn’t make sense because in the story Anne Frank used big words that even myself could not understand but if I read well so if I have trouble with some words then that mean people who do have trouble reading is going to have more trouble.

I don’t think Anne Frank is going to help to help u get a job no disrespect to Anne Frank. This might sound dumb but its true try to go down to the police station and say I read Anne Frank give me a job then get to go high school you probably will have a to read Anne Frank but its your choice to be opened minded.

In my own opinion I think Anne Frank diary is for girls because girls can relate to this more than boys and some boys are immature about what they say in the book some girls are too but mostly it’s a girl book from my point of view so these are my reasons why not to red Anne Frank so its up to you whether you want to read Anne Frank.

Justin

**You are missing punctuation. How am I supposed to know where SENTENCES start end?**
Should the rising 8th graders read the diary of a young girl? No

1. They should be able to choose their own book
2. It is too long
Because some might not believe in the Holocaust.

So people might want their own choice.

Voting, taxes, education.

I think it would not benefit the rising 8th Graders.

It's boring.

Too long, didn't make sense. It not written like a Joanie.
1. I learned that Anne sleeps in a cramped space. She is very busy in the evening with very little time. I learned that the secret Anne is getting cramped and weather is heating up so people will be irritated.

2. If I was in Anne’s place, I would go out being cramped and irritated staying in one spot for half of the day. What is the metal pot under her bed?

3. Quarrel

4. tto s = earlier in the book nobody got along now they understand each other a little.

5. tto s = when Anne says the place is filling up I can relate when I stay with my aunts they have a big house and she has a lot of relatives and the house get packed.

6. how I can relate the Holocaust to all in New York explain how! You did not do what!
**10-5-10**

Peter sneaks to get bread
Everybody tries not to go upstairs because Mrs. van Daan will ask for a favor.

I would be miserable after a year in hiding with the routine. I would hate having a certain place.

Anne takes vitamin pills everyday to prevent worry and depression but feels miserable the next day.

Your entries should be written like a journal.

You are not giving connections at all.

Why not?

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You can do much better than this. I'm shocked!!
Robert's Classwork and Quizzes

Appendix G

*Journals began doing in class for agenda. Whatever I didn't finish in class could complete for homework. (First week of doing this)

The way he did was going to ANNE and arguing with her. I would have done it different. I would have stayed away and get CLARENCE out of jail and realized what he had done. So he went anyway and went and got caught and Fussed at.

Which text structure is evident in your answer? It's not evident.

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<tr>
<th>2/5 Answered Question</th>
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The cause is Richard is trying to kill Clarence but Clarence is going to jail. When Clarence gets out Richard will kill him. Since King Edward IV is dying, Richard is trying his best to kill him but he will not succeed because the guards are watching over King Edward IV.

You gave a cause but you didn't give the effect of that cause. Your supporting details don't support the cause and effect.
Directions: Identify how this information has been organized.

In recent decades, cities have grown so large that now about 50% of the Earth's population lives in urban areas. There are several reasons for this occurrence. First, the increasing industrialization of the nineteenth century resulted in the creation of many factory jobs, which tended to be located in cities. These jobs, with their promise of a better material life, attracted many people from rural areas. Second, there were many schools established to educate the children of the new factory laborers. The promise of a better education persuaded many families to leave farming communities and move to the cities. Finally, as the cities grew, people established places of leisure, entertainment, and culture, such as sports stadiums, theaters, and museums. For many people, these facilities made city life appear more interesting than life on the farm, and therefore drew them away from rural communities.

✔ cause and effect
☐ main idea and details
☐ problem/solution
☐ compare and contrast
✔ chronological sequential order

There are a lot of crimes in the world and the amount of crimes are gradually increasing because some laws are flexible. The problem of crime can be solved by enacting strict laws, getting high education and fining. The first solution is enacting strict laws. If a place has strict laws, the rate of crime gets lower in this place. Strict laws are important for amount of crime. Another solution is to get high education. If a person is educated, this person don’t commit a crime. The last solution is fining. Fining prevents a lot of crime. If you are a poor person, you don’t commit a crime because you can not pay this punishment. To sum up, solutions of crime depend on the rules. If you follow these solutions, you avoid every crime.

☐ cause and effect
✔ main idea and details
☐ problem/solution
☐ compare and contrast
☐ chronological sequential order

Consumers concerned about the hazards or noise can reduce noise pollution in many ways. They can purchase noisy products such as garbage disposals and lawn mowers with reduced noise levels. They can also use sound absorbing materials in their home. Carpeting can be installed instead of hard flooring, and cork and fabric can be used in rooms that tend to be noisy. Also, people can become less noisy themselves. They can learn to avoid shouting, to close doors without slamming them, and to play radios, TV sets, and stereos at moderate levels.
Norman Rockwell is considered one of America's favorite painters. He was born on February 3, 1894, in New York City. When he was in eighth grade, his teacher recognized his talent and encouraged him to draw. During his freshman year in high school, he started giving art lessons to pay his fees for art school. He earned enough money so that by the age of eighteen he began art school as a full-time art student. At the age of twenty-two, he sold his first cover picture to the Saturday Evening Post. Later in his career he painted what was to become his most popular illustration, Saying Grace. Rockwell died in his home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1978.

☑ main idea and details
☐ problem/solution
☒ compare and contrast
☐ chronological sequential order

Some people think cats are all alike but I live with a pair that have quite different personalities. Dark and massive, Arthur ambles around with a dignified trust of his head followed by an unsettled tail. On the other hand, Kelly prances on tiny pointed toes and displays immaculate ears and whiskers due to perpetual bathing. Their daily routines are also a contrast. Sniffing at each chair to find the proper seat, Arthur finally settles at a safe distance from any humans. Kelly has nothing but favorable reactions to people as she nudges the closest hand into a patting position and begins to write ecstatically on a lap. Another parting of opinions comes at feeding time. Kelly, with a scornful look at her portion, dabs in a paw, speedily retracts it, and bustles away. Arthur, would go into mortal combat for a soda cracker, pounces on his dish cramming and gulping to the very bottom.

☐ cause and effect
☐ main idea and details
☐ problem/solution
☒ compare and contrast
☐ chronological sequential order
Appendix H

Robert’s Journal Entries

Journal Entry #6

In the Diary of Anne Frank it was Peter’s Birthday. He had just turned sixteen. In this chapter it’s Peter’s Birthday. Peter invited Anne to his party. Peter was starring at Anne while she was standing at the bottom of the stairs.

I can make a text-to-text connection in the Holocaust Peter had a party in the story. Mrs. Van Dam invited Dany to the party. Peter had to sneak and drive his party. Where is the book you are connecting this too?

I can make a text-to-world connection because I see someone invite someone to a party.

That person mother and father invited people to. I need to be specific. You can’t use a general statement like

I can make a text-to-self connection cause I invited 100 people to my party. My mother invited 20 people. Good!

Where are your comments/questions, and vocab?
In the Diary of Anne Frank, The Van Daans. Daddy, Mummy, Mrs. Van Daan is angry at everyone else. The Carlton Hotel is smashed to bits. Two British planes filled with incendiary bombs fell on the Offiziersheim. The air raids on German towns are growing in strength everyday. All men fight in 1940 mobilized have been called up to work for "der Fuhrer.”

I can make a text-to-self connection. My mother gets mad at people a lot, my sister, and cousins get mad at people. Why?

I can make a text-to-world connection. Everybody gets mad at people a lot. Be specific!

I can make a text-to-text connection. In stories people gets mad at people. What book? Be specific!
Journal Entry #10

In the Diary of Anne Frank. In Italy, the Fascist Party got banned because people are fighting, the army is joining the battle. I feel as though that people should have equal. I wonder if the Fascist Party survived the fight and battle.

In this chapter, I read across programs, anxious/embossing: peonies migrated.

I can make a text-to-world be the soldiers in Iraq was in a battle against Germany, and people fight all the time.

I can make a text-to-world connection because Germany attacked Norway because they were poor and Germany took over. If what are you connecting this to?

I can make a text-to-self connection because when I play Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II I have a battle and fight. What does this connect to in the book?
Journal Entry 12

In the Diary of Anne Frank EF
It's half past eight in the morning everyone has to be quiet, they have to pack up everything. I feel as though you should have to be quiet in a secret annexe.

I can make a text-to-world connection people in the army have a secret annexe to gear up and get guns and bullets and this connects to the book because...

+ 35

why did you skip the last two journals?
State Curriculum: Reading Grade 8

Document Date: 11/15/07
3-8 Acrobat 166k Ms Word 914k
VIEW GLOSSARY -

TOPIC C.
Students will read orally with accuracy and expression at a rate that sounds like speech.

INDICATOR
1. Read orally at an appropriate rate

OBJECTIVES
 a. Read familiar and independent level text at a rate that is conversational and consistent
 b. Read instructional level text that is challenging yet manageable

INDICATOR
2. Read grade-level text with both high accuracy and appropriate pacing, intonation, and expression

OBJECTIVES
 a. Apply knowledge of word structures and patterns to read with automaticity
 b. Demonstrate appropriate use of phrasing
   • Attend to sentence patterns and structures that signal meaning in text
   • Use punctuation cues to guide meaning and expression
   • Use pacing and intonation to convey meaning and expression
   • Adjust intonation and pitch appropriately
 c. Increase sight words read fluently

TOPIC D.
Students will use a variety of strategies and opportunities to understand word meaning and to increase vocabulary.

INDICATOR
1. Develop and apply vocabulary through exposure to a variety of texts

OBJECTIVES
 a. Acquire new vocabulary through listening to, independently reading, and discussing a variety of literary and informational texts
 b. Discuss words and word meanings daily as they are encountered in text, instruction, and conversation

INDICATOR
2. Apply and refine a conceptual understanding of new words

OBJECTIVES
 a. Classify and categorize increasingly complex words
 b. Explain relationships between and among words

INDICATOR
3. Understand, acquire, and use new vocabulary

OBJECTIVES
 a. Use context to determine the meanings of words
 Assessment limits:
   • Above grade-level words used in context
   • Words with multiple meanings

b. Use word structure to determine the meaning of words
c. Use resources to confirm definitions and gather further information about words
d. Use new vocabulary in speaking and writing to gain and extend content knowledge and clarify expression

**TOPIC**

E.

Students will use a variety of strategies to understand what they read (construct meaning).

**INDICATOR**

1. Apply and refine comprehension skills through exposure to a variety of print and non-print texts, including traditional print and electronic texts

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Listen to critically, read, and discuss texts representing diversity in content, culture, authorship, and perspective, including areas such as race, gender, disability, religion, and socio-economic background
b. * Read a minimum of 25 self-selected and/or assigned books or book equivalents representing various genres
c. Discuss reactions to and ideas/information gained from reading experiences with adults and peers in both formal and informal situations

**INDICATOR**

2. Use strategies to prepare for reading (before reading)

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Select and apply appropriate strategies to prepare for reading the text

**INDICATOR**

3. Use strategies to make meaning from text (during reading)

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Select and apply appropriate strategies to make meaning from text during reading

**INDICATOR**

4. Use strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text (after reading)

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Identify and explain the main idea or argument
   Assessment limits:
   • Of the text or a portion of the text
b. Identify and explain information directly stated in the text
   Assessment limits:
   • In the text or a portion of the text
c. Draw inferences and/or conclusions and make generalizations
   Assessment limits:
   • From the text or a portion of the text
d. Confirm, refute, or make predictions
   Assessment limits:
   • The development, topics, or ideas that might logically be included if the text were extended
e. Summarize or paraphrase
   Assessment limits:
   • The text or a portion of the text
f. Connect the text to prior knowledge or personal experience
   Assessment limits:
   • Prior knowledge or experience that clarifies, extends, or challenges the ideas and/or information in the text or a portion of the text

**Standard 2.0 Comprehension of Informational Text**

**TOPIC**

A.

**INDICATOR**

1. Apply and refine comprehension skills by selecting, reading, and analyzing a variety of print and non-print informational texts, including electronic media

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Read, use, and identify the characteristics of primary and secondary sources of academic information such as textbooks,

trade books, reference and research materials, periodicals, editorials, speeches, interviews, articles, non-print materials, and online materials, other appropriate content-specific texts

**Assessment limits:**
- Grade-appropriate primary and secondary texts

b. Read, use, and identify the characteristics of workplace and other real-world documents such as sets of directions, science investigations, atlases, posters, flyers, forms, instructional manuals, menus, pamphlets, rules, invitations, recipes, advertisements, other functional documents

**Assessment limits:**
- Grade-appropriate workplace and real-world documents

c. Select and read to gain information from personal interest materials such as books, pamphlets, how-to manuals, magazines, web sites, and other online materials

**INDICATOR**
2. Analyze text features to facilitate and extend understanding of informational texts

**OBJECTIVES**

a. **Analyze** print features that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

b. **Analyze** graphic aids that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

c. **Analyze** informational aids that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

d. **Analyze** organizational aids that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

e. **Analyze** online features that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

f. **Analyze** the relationship between the text features and the content of the text as a whole

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

**INDICATOR**
3. Apply knowledge of organizational patterns of informational text to facilitate understanding and analysis

**OBJECTIVES**

a. **Analyze** the organizational patterns of texts such as common organizational patterns, transition or signal words and phrases that indicate the organizational pattern

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

b. **Analyze** the contribution of the organizational pattern to clarify or reinforce meaning and support the author's purpose and/or argument

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

c. **Analyze** shifts in organizational patterns

**Assessment limits:**
- Portions of text that illustrate a shift in organizational pattern

d. Use organizational structure to locate specific information

**INDICATOR**
4. **Analyze** important ideas and messages in informational texts

**OBJECTIVES**

a. **Analyze** the author's/text's purpose and intended audience

**Assessment limits:**
- Purpose of the author or the text or a portion of the text
- Connections between the text and the intended audience

b. **Analyze** the author's argument, viewpoint, or perspective

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

c. State and support main ideas and messages
   Assessment limits:
   • In the text or a portion of the text

d. Summarize or paraphrase
   Assessment limits:
   • The text or a portion of the text

e. Identify and explain information or ideas peripheral to the main idea or message
   Assessment limits:
   • In the text or a portion of the text

f. Analyze relationships between and among ideas
   Assessment limits:
   • In the text or a portion of the text
   • Relationships between and among ideas in one text or across multiple texts

g. Synthesize ideas from text
   Assessment limits:
   • From one text or a portion of the text or across multiple texts

h. Explain the implications of the text or how someone might use the text
   Assessment limits:
   • Application of the text for personal use or content-specific use
   • Issues and ideas within a text or across texts that may have implications for readers or contemporary society

i. Connect the text to prior knowledge or experience
   Assessment limits:
   • Prior knowledge that clarifies, extends, or challenges the ideas in the text or a portion of the text

INDICATOR
5. Analyze purposeful use of language

OBJECTIVES
a. Analyze specific word choice that contributes to the meaning and/or creates style
   Assessment limits:
   • Significant words and phrases (e.g., figurative language, idioms, colloquialisms, etc.) in the text or a portion of the text
   • Connotations of grade-appropriate words in context
   • Denotations of above-grade-level words in context
   • Discernible styles such as persuasive, informal, formal, etc.

b. Analyze specific language choices to determine tone
   Assessment limits:
   • In the text or a portion of the text

c. Analyze the appropriateness of tone
   Assessment limits:
   • In the text or a portion of the text

d. Analyze repetition and variation of specific words and phrases that contribute to meaning
   Assessment limits:
   • In the text or a portion of the text

INDICATOR
6. Read critically to evaluate informational text

OBJECTIVES
a. Analyze the extent to which the text or texts fulfill the reading purpose
   Assessment limits:
   • Connections between the content of the text and the purpose for reading

b. Analyze the extent to which the structure and text features clarify the purpose and the information
   Assessment limits:
   • Connections between effectiveness of format and text features in clarifying the main idea and/or purpose of the text
   • Connections between effectiveness of organizational pattern and clarity of the main idea and/or purpose of the text

c. Analyze the text and its information for reliability
   Assessment limits:
   • Connections between the credentials of the author and the information in the text
   • Currency of the information in the text
   • Verification of information across multiple sources
d. Analyze the author’s argument or position for clarity and/or bias  
Assessment limits:  
- Evidence of opposing points of view  
e. Analyze additional information that would clarify or strengthen the author’s argument or viewpoint  
Assessment limits:  
- Information that would enhance or clarify the reader’s understanding of the main idea of the text or a portion of the text  
f. Analyze the effectiveness of persuasive techniques to sway the reader to a particular point of view  
Assessment limits:  
- Significant words and phrases that have an emotional appeal  
g. Analyze the effect of elements of style on meaning  
Assessment limits:  
- Stylistic elements (e.g., formal versus informal language, varied sentence structure, or the use of non-sentences)  

Standard 3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text  

TOPIC  
A.  

INDICATOR  
1. Refine comprehension skills by reading and analyzing a variety of self-selected and assigned literary texts including print and non-print  

OBJECTIVES  
- a. Listen to critically, read, and discuss a variety of literary texts representing diverse cultures, perspectives, ethnicities, and time periods  
- b. Listen to critically, read, and discuss a variety of literary forms and genres  

INDICATOR  
2. Analyze and evaluate text features to facilitate and extend understanding of literary texts  

OBJECTIVES  
- a. Analyze text features that contribute to meaning  
  Assessment limits:  
  - In the text or a portion of the text  

INDICATOR  
3. Analyze and evaluate elements of narrative texts to facilitate understanding and interpretation  

OBJECTIVES  
- a. Distinguish among types of grade-appropriate narrative texts such as short stories, folklore, realistic fiction, science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, essays, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, personal narratives, plays, and lyric and narrative poetry  
  Assessment limits:  
  - Grade-appropriate narrative texts  
- b. Analyze the events of the plot  
  Assessment limits:  
  - Exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution  
- c. Analyze details that provide information about the setting, the mood created by the setting, and the role the setting plays in the text  
  Assessment limits:  
  - Details the create the setting and/or mood in the text or a portion of the text  
  - Connections among the characters, the setting, and the mood in the text or a portion of the text  
  - Connections between setting and theme  
- d. Analyze characterization  
  Assessment limits:  
  - Character’s traits based on what character says, does, and thinks and what other characters or the narrator says  
  - Character’s motivations  
  - Character’s personal growth and development  
- e. Analyze relationships between and among characters, setting, and events  
  Assessment limits:  
  - In the text or a portion of the text or across multiple texts  
- f. Analyze the actions of characters that serve to advance the plot  
  Assessment limits:  

In the text or a portion of the text or across multiple texts

g. **Analyze** internal and/or external conflicts that motivate **characters** and those that advance the **plot**

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

h. **Analyze** the author's approach to issues of time in a narrative

**Assessment limits:**
- **Flashback**
- **Foreshadowing**

i. **Analyze** the **point of view** and its effect on meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- Connections between **point of view** and meaning
- Conclusions about the narrator based on his/her thoughts and/or observations

j. **Analyze** the interactions among narrative elements and their contribution to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- Connections among narrative elements and meaning

**INDICATOR**

4. **Analyze** and evaluate elements of poetry to facilitate understanding and interpretation

**OBJECTIVES**

a. **Use** structural features to distinguish among types of poetry such as ballad, narrative, lyric, elegy, etc.

b. **Analyze** language and structural features to determine meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- **Literal versus figurative meaning**

c. **Analyze** sound elements of poetry that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- **Rhyme**, **rhyme scheme**
- **Alliteration** and **other repetition**
- **Onomatopoeia**

d. Identify and explain other poetic elements such as **setting**, **mood**, **tone**, etc., that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- Elements of grade-appropriate lyric and narrative poems that contribute to meaning

**INDICATOR**

5. **Analyze** and evaluate elements of **drama** to facilitate understanding and interpretation

**OBJECTIVES**

a. **Use** structural features to distinguish among types of plays

b. **Analyze** structural features of **drama** that contribute to meaning

**Assessment limits:**
- **Literal versus interpretive meaning**

c. **Analyze** how dialogue and stage directions work together to create **characters** and **plot**

**Assessment limits:**
- In the text or a portion of the text

**INDICATOR**

6. **Analyze** and interpret important ideas and messages in literary texts

**OBJECTIVES**

a. **Analyze** main ideas and universal themes

**Assessment limits:**
- Of the text or a portion of the text
- Experiences, emotions, issues, and ideas in a text that give rise to universal themes

b. **Analyze** similar themes across multiple texts

**Assessment limits:**
- Experiences, emotions, issues, and ideas across texts that give rise to universal themes

c. **Summarize** or **paraphrase**

**Assessment limits:**
- The text or a portion of the text

d. **Reflect on** and explain personal connections to the text

**Assessment limits:**
- Connections between personal experiences and the **theme** or main ideas

e. Explain the implications of the text for the reader and/or society

Assessment limits:
- Ideas and issues of a text that may have implications for the reader

INDICATOR
7. Analyze and evaluate the author's purposeful use of language

OBJECTIVES
a. Analyze and evaluate how specific language choices contribute to meaning
   Assessment limits:
   - Signiﬁcant words (e.g., idioms, colloquialisms, etc.) with a speciﬁc effect on meaning
   - Denotations of above-grade-level words used in context
   - Connotations of grade-appropriate words and phrases in context
b. Analyze and evaluate language choices that create tone
   Assessment limits:
   - In the text or a portion of the text
c. Analyze the appropriateness of a particular tone
   Assessment limits:
   - Connections between tone and other narrative elements
d. Analyze and evaluate ﬁgurative language that contributes to meaning and/or creates style
   Assessment limits:
   - In the text or a portion of the text
e. Analyze imagery that contributes to meaning and/or creates style
   Assessment limits:
   - Speciﬁc words and phrases that create sensory images or contribute to style in the text or a portion of the text
f. Analyze elements of style and their contribution to meaning
   Assessment limits:
   - Common elements of style such as repetition, hyperbole and rhetorical questions

INDICATOR
8. Read critically to evaluate literary texts

OBJECTIVES
a. Analyze and evaluate the plausibility of the plot and the credibility of the characters
   Assessment limits:
   - In the text or a portion of the text
b. Analyze and evaluate the extent to which the text contains ambiguities, subtleties, or contradictions
   Assessment limits:
   - Questions and predictions about events, situations, and conﬂicts that might occur if the text were extended
c. Analyze and evaluate the relationship between a literary text and its historical, social, and/or political context
   Assessment limits:
   - Implications of the historical or social context on a literary text
d. Analyze the relationship between the structure and the purpose of the text
   Assessment limits:
   - In the text or a portion of the text

Standard 4.0 Writing

TOPIC
A.

INDICATOR
1. Compose texts using the prewriting and drafting strategies of effective writers and speakers

OBJECTIVES
a. Use a variety of self-selected prewriting strategies to generate, select, narrow, and develop ideas
   - Evaluate topic for personal relevance, scope, and feasibility
   - Begin a coherent plan for developing ideas
   - Explore and evaluate relevant sources of information
b. Select, organize, and develop ideas appropriate to topic, audience, and purpose
   - Organize information logically
   - Use techniques such as graphic organizers and signal words to complete and clarify organizational structures
   - Verify the effectiveness of paragraph development by modifying topic, support, and concluding sentences as necessary

INDICATOR
2. Compose oral, written and visual presentations that express personal ideas, inform, and persuade

OBJECTIVES
a. Compose to express personal ideas by experimenting with a variety of forms and techniques suited to topic, audience, and purpose in order to develop a personal style, a distinctive voice, and a deliberate tone
b. Describe in prose and/or poetic forms to clarify, extend, or elaborate on ideas by using evocative language and appropriate organizational structure to create a dominant impression
c. Compose to inform using relevant support and appropriate organizational structures while maintaining an objective perspective
d. Compose to persuade by supporting, modifying, or refuting a position, using effective rhetorical strategies
   - Write an assertion and use evidence that appeals to audience emotion, reasoning, or trust
   - Organize ideas to construct a logical progression
   - Use diction and syntax that is sincere, honest, and trustworthy
   - Use connotation, repetition, and figurative language to control audience emotion and reaction
   - Use authoritative citations when effective and document appropriately
e. Use writing-to-learn strategies such as reflective journals, metacognitive writings, and projections based on reflections to analyze and synthesize thinking and learning
f. Manage time and process when writing for a given purpose

INDICATOR
3. Compose texts using the revising and editing strategies of effective writers and speakers

OBJECTIVES
a. Revise texts for clarity, completeness, and effectiveness
   - Eliminate redundant and irrelevant words and ideas
   - Clarify meaning through the placement of antecedents, modifiers, connectors, and transitional devices
   - Clarify the relationships among ideas through coordination and subordination that are purposeful, logical, succinct, and parallel
   - Clarify meaning and purpose by using active voice and consistent person, number, tense, and mood
   - Vary sentence types and lengths to clarify and extend meaning, to demonstrate style, and to sustain audience interest
b. Use suitable traditional or electronic resources to refine presentations and edit texts for effective and appropriate and conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and pronunciation
   - Self edit
   - Peer edit
   - Dictionary
   - Thesaurus
   - Spell checker
   - Language handbook
   - Grammar checker
   - Style book
c. Prepare the final product for presentation to an audience

INDICATOR
4. Identify how language choices in writing and speaking affect thoughts and feelings

OBJECTIVES
a. Choose a level of language, formal to informal, appropriate for a specific audience, situation, or purpose
b. Differentiate connotative from denotative meanings of words to make precise word choices
c. Consider how readers or listeners might respond differently to the same words

INDICATOR
5. Assess the effectiveness of choice of details, organizational pattern, word choice, syntax, use of figurative language, and rhetorical devices in the student's own composing

OBJECTIVES
a. Assess the effectiveness of diction that reveals his or her purpose
   - Language appropriate for a particular audience
   - Language suitable for a given purpose
   - Words/phrases/sentences that extend meaning in a given context
b. Explain how the specific language and expression used by the writer or speaker affects reader/listener response
c. Evaluate the use of transitions and their effectiveness in a text

INDICATOR
6. Evaluate textual changes in a work and explain how these changes alter tone, clarify meaning, address a particular purpose, or fulfill a purpose

OBJECTIVES
a. Alter the tone of one's own writing by revising its diction for a specific purpose and/or audience
b. Justify revisions in syntax and diction from a previous draft of his or her same text by explaining how the change affects meaning

INDICATOR
7. Locate, retrieve, and use information from various sources to accomplish a purpose

OBJECTIVES
a. Identify, evaluate, and use appropriate sources of information on a self-selected and/or given topic
b. Use various information retrieval sources (traditional and/or electronic) to obtain information on a self-selected and/or given topic
c. Use a systematic process for recording, documenting, and organizing this information
   - Appropriate strategies for taking notes
   - Information to include or exclude when using a note taking method
   - Advantages, disadvantages, or limitations of a given strategy or procedure for recording or organizing information
   - Advantages, disadvantages, or limitations of sources of information such as bias, accuracy, availability, variety currency
   - Use a recognized format for documentation such as MLA
d. Synthesize information from two or more sources to fulfill a self-selected or given purpose
e. Use a recognized format to credit sources when paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting to avoid plagiarism

Standard 5.0 Controlling Language

TOPIC
A.

INDICATOR
1. Recognize elements of grammar in personal and academic reading

OBJECTIVES

INDICATOR
2. Apply knowledge of grammar concepts and skills to control oral and written language **

OBJECTIVES
a. Consider the meaning, position, form, and function of words when identifying and using all grammatical concepts
b. Combine and expand sentences by incorporating subjects, predicates, and modifiers and by logically coordinating, subordinating, and sequencing ideas
c. Differentiate grammatically complete sentences from non-sentences
d. Compose simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences using independent, dependent, restrictive, and nonrestrictive clauses; transitions; conjunctions; and appropriate punctuation to connect ideas

TOPIC
B.

INDICATOR
1. Recognize examples of conventional usage in personal and academic reading

OBJECTIVES

INDICATOR
2. Comprehend and apply standard English usage in oral and written language **

OBJECTIVES
a. Apply appropriate English usage, involving subject/verb agreement
b. Apply consistent and appropriate use of the person, number, and case of pronouns; pronoun/antecedent agreement; special pronoun problems such as who - whom, and incomplete constructions; active and passive voice; and verbal and verbal phrases
c. Recognize and correct common usage errors such as misplaced and dangling modifiers; incorrect use of verbs, double
negatives; and commonly confused words such as accept - except
d. Use available resources to correct or confirm editorial choices
e. Explain editorial choices

TOPIC
C.

INDICATOR
1. Explain and justify the purpose of mechanics to make and clarify meaning in academic and personal reading and writing

OBJECTIVES

INDICATOR
2. Apply standard English punctuation and capitalization in written language **

OBJECTIVES

a. Punctuate at the word level
   a. Hyphen
   b. Slash
   b. Use the mechanics of writing correctly
c. Use available resources for all mechanics of writing rules that may be in flux

INDICATOR
3. Explain editorial choices involving mechanics

OBJECTIVES

TOPIC
D.

INDICATOR
1. Recognize conventional spelling in and through personal and academic reading

OBJECTIVES

INDICATOR
2. Apply conventional spelling in written language

OBJECTIVES

a. Use conventional spelling in personal writing
   b. Develop self-monitoring strategies for frequently misspelled words
c. Use suitable traditional and electronic resources as a spelling aid

INDICATOR
3. Maintain a personal list of words to use in editing original writing

OBJECTIVES

TOPIC
E.

INDICATOR
1. Produce writing that is legible to the audience

OBJECTIVES

a. Write fluidly and legibly in manuscript and cursive
   b. Use word processing technology when appropriate

Standard 6.0 Listening

TOPIC
A.

INDICATOR
1. Apply and demonstrate listening skills appropriately in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes

OBJECTIVES

a. Respond to a speaker's cues appropriately
   b. Identify regional and social language differences

c. Determine and apply criteria to evaluate oral presentations

**INDICATOR**

2. Demonstrate comprehension and literary analysis strategies and skills for a variety of listening purposes and settings

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Evaluate the effectiveness of the elements of the speech or performance or presentation
b. Interpret the speech or performance or presentation
c. Analyze a speaker's purpose and viewpoint
d. Identify and evaluate a speaker's stylistic devices such as clear organization, clear viewpoint, use of support, language appropriate to audience, topic appropriate to audience
e. Evaluate a speaker's credibility such as bias, hidden agendas, use of research/information from reliable sources
f. Explain and support a personal response to an oral presentation

**Standard 7.0 Speaking**

**TOPIC**

A.

**INDICATOR**

1. Demonstrate appropriate organizational strategies and delivery techniques to plan for a variety of oral presentation purposes

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Refine a presentation using varied media
b. Uses a combination of organizational structures such as narrative, cause and effect, chronological/sequential order, description, main idea with supporting details, problem/solution, question/answer, comparison and contrast, making appropriate transitions within a presentation
c. Speak to persuade by including a well-defined thesis, differentiating fact from opinion, and support arguments with detailed evidence, examples, reasoning and persuasive language

*New Standards identifies the need for students to process 1 million words per year to maintain academic progress.

**At each grade level, curricular options include more complex examples of previous years' objectives.

***Emphasis is on application of conventions rather than memorization of terms.

Indicators/objectives that include assessment limits are assessed on MSA *New Standards identifies the need for students to process 1 million words per year to maintain academic progress.

11/15/07
Agenda for today 12.6.10

1. Get out something to write with.
2. Take out your homework, text feature booklet, and book
3. Take out your journal and complete the entry for today. What is the main idea about Richard and his self esteem? Back it up with details from the play.

Understanding Text Structures

What is a text structure?

- A "structure" is a building or framework
- "Text structure" refers to how a piece of text is built

What is a text structure?

- Builders can use different kinds of structures to build different things
- A skyscraper, for example, is a different kind of structure from a house

What is a text structure?

- Writers use different structures to build their ideas
- Each text structure communicates ideas in a different way

Chronological order

- Authors use chronological order to explain how things happen in order
- Chronological order is also called sequence or time order
Chronological order

- You will know that you are reading a text in chronological order because you will see words like first, next, later, then, and finally.

Chronological order

- You will often see chronological order in directions:
  Have you ever made macaroni and cheese? It's simple! First, boil some water and make some macaroni. Then, make your cheese sauce. After the cheese sauce is ready, mix it with the macaroni. Bake the entire thing in the oven. Finally, it's time to eat!

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  Have you ever made macaroni and cheese? It's simple! First, boil some water and make some macaroni. Then, make your cheese sauce. After the cheese sauce is ready, mix it with the macaroni. Bake the entire thing in the oven. Finally, it's time to eat!

Which paragraph is in chronological order?

Through the ages, Pennsylvania has seen many interesting events. The state was founded in 1681 by William Penn. Later, Pennsylvania was the site of important Revolutionary War battles. After that, Pennsylvania was home to new factories during the Industrial Revolution. Today, Pennsylvania continues to make history.

Pennsylvania has many historic sites. You can visit Revolutionary war sites, like Valley Forge. You can also visit important locations from the Civil War, like Gettysburg. Finally, you can also see the site of the First oil well in Titusville. Pennsylvania has many places to visit!

Which paragraph is in chronological order?

This is the paragraph in chronological order. Can you find the clue words that show this order?

This is the paragraph in chronological order. Can you find the clue words that show this order?
Think about it!

- What is a structure?
- What does chronological order mean?
- What are some clue words that show chronological order?

Another text structure

- But what if an author doesn't want to show how something happened in sequence?
- The author would need to use another text structure.

Another text structure

- Suppose an author wanted to explain how these two birds are similar and different.
- Chronological order wouldn't work—there is no order of events.
- The author would need to use compare and contrast.

Another text structure

- The cardinal and the cedar waxwing are two common birds.
- Both have crests on their heads.
- Both are common at bird feeders, but the birds have some differences.
- The male cardinal is a bright red, while the waxwing is brown. The cedar waxwing often migrates from place to place. On the other hand, the cardinal stays in one place year after year.

Compare and contrast clue words

When authors use the text structure of compare and contrast, they often use special clue words to show this text structure.

Can you find the clue words in the paragraph?

Can you find the clue words?

- The cardinal and the cedar waxwing are two common birds.
- Both have crests on their heads.
- Both are common at bird feeders, but the birds have some differences. The male cardinal is a bright red, while the waxwing is brown. The cedar waxwing often migrates from place to place. On the other hand, the cardinal stays in one place year after year.
Here they are!
The cardinal and the cedar waxwing are two common birds. Both have crests on their heads. Both are common at birdfeeders. But the birds have some differences. The male cardinal is a bright red, while the waxwing is brown. The cedar waxwing often migrates from place to place. On the other hand, the cardinal stays in one place year after year.

Compare and contrast graphic organizer
- To organize details from a paragraph in compare and contrast, use a Venn diagram.

Review
- Can you explain the difference between chronological order and compare and contrast?
- How can clue words help you as a reader?

Another text structure
- Sometimes, a writer will want to explain how one event leads to another.
- This kind of text structure is called cause and effect.

Cause and effect clue words
- When authors write paragraphs to show causes and effects, they use words like cause, effect, as a result, consequently, and so

Can you find the clue words?
The night’s snowstorm had many effects. People were out shoveling snow from their sidewalks. The power lines were draped with ice. Snow plows drove down every street. Children were the happiest of all. The unexpected snow caused school to be cancelled!
Can you find the clue words?
The night’s snowstorm had many effects. People were out shoveling snow from their sidewalks. The power lines were draped with ice. Snow plows drove down every street. Children were the happiest of all. The unexpected snow caused school to be cancelled!

More with cause and effect
Baby painted turtles spend all winter in their nests. They have special chemicals in their blood that can keep their blood from freezing. As a result, baby painted turtles can survive freezing temperatures!

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This is the cause
This is the effect

Review
- Which text structure tells about how things are similar and different?
- Compare and contrast
- Which text structure explains how things happen in time order?
- Chronological order

Another kind of text structure
- Sometimes, an author will want to explain a problem, and then show one or more solutions
- This kind of text structure is called problem and solution
An example of problem and solution

Park School had a terrible problem. Every day at recess, students would argue over the slides. Teachers had to spend time every day taking care of the arguments. Finally, one teacher came up with a great solution. They bought another set of slides that everyone could enjoy.

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Here is the problem

Here is the problem

Here is the solution

Here is the solution

Of course, problem and solution is not always so simple

- Often, authors will signal problem and solution structure with clue words like problem and solution, just like in the last paragraph
- Sometimes, authors will use related words

Of course, problem and solution is not always so simple

- Synonyms for problem include difficult, struggle, uncertainty, worry, threat, and trouble
- Synonyms for solution include possibility, hope, bright spot, answer, and future
A more difficult problem and solution paragraph

The Chesapeake Bay faces an uncertain future. Issues such as pesticides, too many nutrients, and habitat loss all threaten the Bay's water quality and animal life. However, scientists are hopeful that the future may be brighter if everyone in the Chesapeake Bay watershed works together, solutions may be found.

Text structures we've learned so far

- Chronological order
- Compare and contrast
- Cause and effect
- Problem and solution

Match the clue words!

Can you figure out the text structure that these clue words point to?

however, on the other hand, similarity, like, unlike

Compare and contrast

as a result, consequently, therefore, so, cause, effect

Cause and effect
Match the clue words!
Can you figure out the text structure that these clue words point to?

- problem, solution
- threat, difficulty, hope
- answer, possibility

Problem and solution

Are there any other text structures?

Most paragraphs that we write in school can be called main idea, description, or statement and support paragraphs.

Main idea paragraphs

- In this kind of paragraph, the author offers a main idea statement, and then supports that statement with several details.

Main idea paragraphs

- The pond was a beautiful place to visit. The falling leaves, all different colors, decorated the surface of the water. At the edges of the pond, small wildflowers grew. The golden forest glowed faintly in the distance.

Main idea paragraphs

Main idea

- The pond was a beautiful place to visit. The falling leaves, all different colors, decorated the surface of the water. At the edges of the pond, small wildflowers grew. The golden forest glowed faintly in the distance.

Main idea

All of the other sentences explain why the main idea is true.
Main idea paragraphs

- Clue words in these paragraphs may include:
  - One reason, another reason, and for example

Now it's your turn!

- On the next few slides, you will read some paragraphs about the Great Chicago Fire.
- Your task is to decide on the text structure for each one.
- Understanding the text structure will help you to understand each paragraph.

What's the text structure?

- Chronological order
- Cause and effect
- Problem and solution
- Main idea

Daniel Sullivan was the first to notice the flames coming from the O'Leary barn at around 8:30 pm on October 8. A problem with the alarm box made it impossible for the people in the area to call for the fire department. By 9:30 pm, the entire block was blazing. In another 3 hours, there were fires all over Chicago. The heavy wind coming from the lake only made the fire bigger; it would be another day before the fire would be completely out. By that time, 17,500 buildings had been burned.

What's the text structure?

- Chronological order
- Compare and contrast
- Problem and solution

Daniel Sullivan was the first to notice the flames coming from the O'Leary barn at around 8:30 pm on October 8. A problem with the alarm box made it impossible for the people in the area to call for the fire department. By 9:30 pm, the entire block was blazing. In another 3 hours, there were fires all over Chicago. The heavy wind coming from the lake only made the fire bigger; it would be another day before the fire would be completely out. By that time, 17,500 buildings had been burned.

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What's the Text Structure?

- Chronological order
- Notice how the paragraph shows how events happen in time order

Daniel Sullivan was the first to notice the flames coming from the O'Gara barn at around 8:30 pm on October 8. A problem with the alarm box made it impossible for the people in the area to call for the fire department. By 9:30 pm, the smoke from the buildings, in another 3 hours, there were fires all over Chicago. The fire was coming from the lake only made the fire bigger. It would be another day before the fire would be completely out. By that time, 17,500 buildings had been burned.

Try another!

- Chronological order
- Compare and contrast
- Cause and effect
- Problem and solution
- Main idea

Why was the Great Chicago Fire so disastrous? After all, Chicago had fire departments and fire alarm. One reason for the terrible fire is that the alarm malfunctioned. The local fire company noticed the fire by accident as it was returning from another fire. Another reason is that the wind was blowing, and by another 3 hours, there were fires all over Chicago. The fire was coming from the lake, making the fire bigger. It would be another day before the fire would be completely out. By that time, 17,500 buildings had been burned.

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- Cause and effect
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What text structure is here?

- **Chronological order**
- Compare and contrast
- Cause and effect
- Problem and solution
- Main idea

**After the fire, thousands of people were left homeless. Many escaped the fire with nothing except the clothes on their backs. Providing all of these people with food, clean water, and shelter was a huge task. Luckily, the city quickly formed a Relief and Aid Society. This group started giving out the food donations that were pouring in from other cities. The society built shelters for people to live in, gathered the clothes that people needed to rebuild their houses, and even vaccinated 64,000 people against smallpox.**

What text structure is here?

- **Problem and solution**

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What text structure is here?

- **Problem and solution**
- Here is the problem

**After the fire, thousands of people were left homeless. Many escaped the fire with nothing except the clothes on their backs. Providing all of these people with food, clean water, and shelter was a huge task. Luckily, the city quickly formed a Relief and Aid Society. This group started giving out the food donations that were pouring in from other cities. The society built shelters for people to live in, gathered the clothes that people needed to rebuild their houses, and even vaccinated 64,000 people against smallpox.**

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What text structure is here?

- **Chronological order**
- Compare and contrast
- Cause and effect
- Problem and solution
- Main idea

**Chicago changed in many ways after the fire. Before the fire, most of the buildings were less than five stories high. The buildings that were constructed after the fire were some of the first skyscrapers in the country. Before the fire, most of the houses were made of wood. After the fire, people chose to build stone houses out of stone or brick. There were changes in entire neighborhoods as well. The poor people in the city moved close to the center of the city before the fire. After the fire, they moved into neighborhoods that were further away from the downtown area.**
Mrs. Kayhill and Ms. Jackson's Classroom Layout

Front Board

Rules and Procedures
Bulletin Board

What's New
Bulletin Board

* Focal Students

Smartboard

Teacher's Desk

Bookshelf

Table

Excellent Work

Quinton
Josh
Darshay

Michael
Cedric

Briana
Lasha

Avary
Alicia

Devon
Robert
Marcus

Domique
Arya
B'Andre