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Literature suggests that the effective implementation of the freshman academy promotes positive achievement outcomes for students of color. This study examined the perceptions of freshmen students of color who attended a ninth-grade academy in a racially diverse high school in North Carolina. The intent of the study was to provide educators with insight into how race and ethnicity play a factor in the educational experiences of ninth-grade students of color and to determine if there are patterns or characteristics in their experiences. The study provides insight about programs and practices which may lead to improved educational experiences for students of color and result in higher student achievement and a decrease in the dropout rate. From a socio-cultural perspective and through the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, when a student's social and cultural capital works cohesively with the capital within the context of the school, it promotes academic achievement.

A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTION OF

STUDENTS OF COLOR OF THEIR NINTH-GRADE

ACADEMY EXPERIENCE

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Mrs. Nora C. Woods; my wife, Mrs. Maki Kamizato; my mother, Mrs. Karen Blackwell; my father, Mr. James Barnes; and my daughter, Anika. I love you, and I thank you for all your support.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

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Last, but not least, to my grandmother, Granny, who recently passed away. She was always there for me and a source of inspiration. I know Granny is rejoicing in heaven right now. I love you.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Educators have a great disconnect with students of color (African Americans and Latinos) from impoverished backgrounds (Neild, 2008). Students of color generally do not feel appreciated and the results are reflected in their disproportionate achievement (to Caucasian students) in high school (Neild, 2008). When students enter high school, Noguera and Wang (2006) argue that if they are not successful that first year, then those students are twice as likely not to graduate. As a result, those children do not have a chance to obtain steady employment or contribute to society.

Even though no school of thought is a panacea, some can serve to help educators understand and connect with students of color. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the education community can learn how to understand and forge meaningful relationships with students who have historically been neglected by the dominant culture. CRT is a way of looking at race relations, particularly within the United States in a broader context than the civil rights approach (Delgado, 1995). This theory began in the mid-1970s, as a number of lawyers worried about the slow rate at which laws were changing to promote racial equality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Transition from the eighth grade to ninth grade is a major factor in the success of students. Knowing the relationship of ninth-grade transition to school success is crucial to understanding strategies and procedures that may help students graduate from America's public high schools. Looking at the freshman academy through a CRT framework for ninth graders of marginalized groups can help educators to understand past and current practices, and what types of strategies are successful. This study will seek to understand the freshman academy through the experiences and perspectives from students of color.

A disproportionate number of students of color perform weakly academically, drop out of high school, and suffer long-term consequences like low waged jobs in adulthood. Also, inner-city school districts, which have mainly a Latino and African American student population is not meeting the academic requirements of programs like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and Title I.

School districts nationwide that fail to close the achievement gap will face closer scrutiny and the threat of takeover from state agencies. It could be that historically, past attempts at addressing reform focused on part of the problem. While focusing on raising academic standards for every student, teachers and administrators could be overlooking an important component in changing the academic achievement for students of color in particular. As Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2001) note:

> A dropout prevention class here, a mentor there, a new math curriculum,
> rewards for attendance or good grades, a new discipline policy-none of these

piecemeal solutions will have an appreciable impact on urban students who are vulnerable to failure. The issue is too complex, the problems of traditional high school organization too interlinked. Instead, we will need to think of quite radical solutions. (p. 28)

Personal Role

My personal interest in ninth-grade transition stems from a former supervisor's efforts to increase the academic achievement of his ninth-grade students. In an attempt to help ensure the academic success of all ninth-grade students, I hope that this research will assist practitioners, policymakers, and researchers with strategies of how to increase the graduation rate of high school students. If students are successful their ninth-grade year, they are more likely to be able to graduate from high school and become productive citizens (Morton, 2005). I examine a high school with a ninth-grade academy in North Carolina. This school has implemented a freshman academy within the past five years. Based on my findings, I gained insight about the ninth-grade academy experience for students of color. My study of this school's triumphs and failures, as perceived by its students, can serve as a guideline for other struggling high schools that seek to increase student achievement through a ninth-grade transition program.

Professional Role

Prior to my current position (assistant principal) I managed a grant through a university that helped to increase the graduation rate of struggling schools. I directed the formation of a ninth-grade academy and career academies within this school. That

role enabled me to conduct staff development within the school. I used this experience to help me to conduct my research. My ability to work with the administration, teachers, parents, and students was enhanced by my understanding of ninth-grade education through the lens of CRT. My findings from this study should help others to better serve schools that have high dropout rates for students of color.

Problem Statement

Education in the twenty-first century faces many challenges. One of the major concerns of educators is the topic of student achievement (Barton, 2005). Despite increasing concerns and efforts, 30 percent of today's students are leaving high school without a diploma (Barton, 2005). In an effort to prevent students from dropping out of school, schools should be responsive to the needs of today's students. Increased disengagement and declining motivation are predictors of school dropout (Swanson, 2004). Anderson (2008) identifies ninth grade as the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation. Students face academic, procedural and social challenges transitioning successfully from middle school to high school (Ascher, 2006).

The topic of transition has been and continues to be an area of concern for educators, students, parents, and the community and has gained increased attention in the present era. Walsh (2002) maintains that when students have been discontented from school, their experiences in the ninth grade may be a determining factor in whether they graduate from high school.

Researchers identify ninth grade as the pivotal point for intervention in the educational process to increase motivation and prevent drop outs (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Ninth graders encounter academic, procedural, and social challenges. Academically, they are often entering new schools, in different locations, that are larger, and that have an increased number of adults to whom to be accountable. Students, for the first time, face the challenge of everything now counting toward credit for graduation (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Students fear getting lost in their new environment. Socially, students worry about being accepted by their peers (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Ninth graders also experience psychological adjustments that affect the social transition (Ascher, 2006).

Educators must find a way to bridge the gap in achievement that is sometimes exacerbated during the transition from middle school to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). In order to effectively address the challenges of ninth-grade transition, educators must be proactive when offering activities that address the challenges, thus increasing student success and the graduation rate.

A strong consensus exists in the literature about the challenges ninth-grade students encounter entering high school as well as the need for transition assistance. Collins (2005) writes that transition is a process and not an event. In order for successful transitioning to take place, there must be planning for that process. A student's success his or her first year of high school often determines his or her success for the remaining

years of high school. Reents (2002) states that more students fail ninth grade than any other year in high school.

Research, additionally, indicates that many of the students who are promoted to the tenth grade, but are off track as demonstrated by failed grades in ninth grade, often drop out of school (Williams & Richmond, 2006). Literature on student success in high school (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1999) and the related studies on the importance of intervention at ninth grade (Akos & Galassi, 2004) stress the need for schools to address the transition issue for students entering high school. The literature does not indicate what constitutes the best practice for ninth-grade transition.

A few researchers reinforce this issue with statistics. Mickelson (1990) argues that underrepresented students (African Americans and Latinos) obtain lower grades, dropout from school more, and achieve less academically than Caucasian students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) reports the dropout rate of different racial groups. African American students average 5% compare to Caucasian students with 3.7%. Even though African American and Latino students are completing high school at a greater rate than in the past, the dropout rates still affect these populations. This report issued by the Civil Society Institute's Results for American Projects and Advocates for Children of New York states that children of color have a half of a chance of graduating from high school ("Minorities", 2004). Ogbu (1991) suggests that some of the reasons for poor academic performance for African American and Latino students include poor academic preparation, racism, fear of "acting white", and the students'

socioeconomic status. Ogbu (1991) also asserts that the majority of African American

youth view academic achievement as being the domain of whites. He notes that the

youth of color (particularly African Americans and Latinos) do not value education. As a

result of the substandard schooling, low school performance and limited social and

economic opportunities, students of color do not understand nor benefit from an

education. O'Connor (1997) argues that the poor performance by underrepresented

groups may connect to issues with the students' lack of relevancy.

Given the problems related to the achievement by students of color and the

significance of the ninth grade for the successful matriculation of students, my study will

examine how students of color experienced their first year in high school through the

freshman academy (Fall 2009-Spring 2012).

The main focus of the ninth-grade academy is to ease the student's transition

into high school. Ninth-grade academies are designed to create smaller, more

personalized environments that help freshmen adjust to the larger setting of the high

school. These academies function in a similar manner to the middle school concept, and

incorporate teacher teaming, advisor/advisee programs, developmentally appropriate

curricula, parent and community involvement, and a variety of extracurricular activities.

With the ninth-grade academy concept, students are housed separately from the

rest of the school. They may have one wing in a school building, part of a floor, or some

other arrangement where they are segregated. This arrangement is supposed to keep

ninth-grade students away from upper class students whom they may find intimidating.

It is also intended to assist students in developing a sense of cohesion. Ninth-grade student share the same group of teachers for their classes: English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Because they share the same groups of students, teachers can see if their students' behaviors and academic performances are consistent with others. Also, by sharing the same groups of teachers, students can connect among themselves.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

This section starts with a historical overview of the literature regarding factors linked with low student academic achievement. The historical reasoning behind students achieving low sheds light on the current issues. This overview examines the disparities in achievement between students of color and Caucasian students. Also, this section reviews literature on the barriers that continue to hinder students from underrepresented groups. The chapter in addition examines how specific school districts and organizational structures have effectively implemented programs and practices that led to high performance in the high schools where students of color are the majority. Finally, this chapter will examine how race, from a CRT perspective, influences a student of color's perception about schooling.

Academic Achievement

The role of public schools in student achievement appears to have resurfaced in the past fifty years. Stemming from the 1966 Coleman report to the present legislation from the "No Child Left Behind" act, educational institutions have undergone various reforms that are intended to benefit American students (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

In 1966, Congress published the Coleman Report. This research analyzed data from 600,000 students, 60 teachers, and 4,000 schools nationwide. They can be characterized by noting that the quality of education a student receives accounts for 10 percent of the variance in student achievement (Marzano et al., 2001). Coleman hypothesizes that the other 90 percent of students achieving academically was based on factors that schools did not have control over. He cites factors such as the student's natural, the socioeconomic status of the student, and the student's home environment (Coleman, 1988).

The Coleman Report was corroborated in a 1972 study by researcher Christopher Jencks. He concludes that differences in test scores are based on factors that the school does not control (Cook& Ludwig, 1998). In 1983, Terrell Bell, Secretary of Education, presented *A Nation at Risk*. It cautions the public that inadequacies in American education will endanger its standing in a competitive global economy (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This document emphasizes that education should be the top priority in every United States presidential election and every other political election since its time of publish (Danielson, 2002).

This alarm brought many reforms in education as it relates to the student's academic achievement. Many states increased graduation requirements, raised teacher salaries, and enforced minimum competency tests for students and teachers as a result of this reform to decrease the achievement gap (Loyacono, 1992). Even though

education earned more attention from the public, the Center for Educational Reform determined various areas that did not meet expectations (Marzano et al., 2001):

1. In 1998, the TIMSS study revealed that American 12th graders ranked 19th out of 21 industrialized nations in mathematic achievement and 16th out of 21.

2. A 1992 survey estimated that 20% of the adult population had elementary reading and writing skills. These adults can identify the main idea of a news article, for example, but cannot draft a letter explaining an error on their bills.

3. The literacy rate of young adults ages 15-21 dropped more than 11 points from 1984-1992.

4. 25% of 12th graders scored below "basic" in reading on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

5. In 1995, nearly 30% of beginning college freshmen enrolled in at least one remedial course and 80% of all public four-year universities offered some remedial courses.

6. In 1998, 40% of all 17 year olds did not have the mathematic skills and 60% lacked the reading skills to hold down a productive job in a manufacturing company.

Marzano et al. (2001) report that this reform is unbeneficial because states and school districts nationwide fail to recognize that variation between the schools and the students' needs. A new law was enforced in 1994 and amended in 1996, *The Goals*

2000: Educate America Act. This law describes a comprehensive approach for improving the educational system for students (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act,* Title III, Sec. 302, 1996).

This document was the catalyst for the "standards movement" because it supported school reform designed around the following criteria (*Goals 2000*, 1996):

1. Students learn best when they share their ideas and expectations with teachers, administrators, and parents.

2. Student achievement improves in academic settings that support learning to high expectations. The educational environment should support fulfillment of those expectations.

3. Academic improvement needs to incorporate broad parent and community involvement, school organization, and resources including educational technology, teacher preparation and professional development, curriculum and instruction, and assessments all aligned with core standards.

4. Students should understand and concentrate on their results. The educational systems should focus and report on progress in meeting the pre-set standards.

5. Continuous school improvement requires carefully developed accountability standards for interpreting and addressing results that will lead to the overall improvement of the students.

The National Education Goals, written in the Act (Sec. 102) made the year 2000 the deadline for the following goals (Paris, 1994):

1. All students in America will begin school willing to learn.

2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

3. Every student will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated proficiency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and economics, the arts, history, and geography. Each school in the United States will ensure that every student learns to use their minds well so that they may be prepared to become responsible and respectful citizens.

4. American students will be first in the world in science and math achievement.

5. Each adult in the United States will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global market and exercise his rights in a responsible manner.

6. Each school in America will be free from violence, drugs, alcohol, and firearms.

7. The nation's education force will have access to programs for the ongoing improvement of professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to actively engage students.

8. Each school will promote partnerships with parents and the community that

will increase the social, emotional, and academic growth of the children.

Although the deadline has passed, the results are not impressive. Out of the 28

key indicators chosen by the National Education Goals Panel, sixteen have shown either

no improvement or declined (National Education Goals Panel, 1999). Even with these

results, the Goals Panel states that the initiative in various ways was successful:

> We believe that the National Education Goals have moved America forward and, on balance, encouraged greater progress in education. We are clearer about what appropriate goals are and how to measure progress toward them at the national and state levels. There is no doubt that the National Education Goals have encouraged a broad spectrum of educators, parents, students, business and community leaders, policymakers, and the public to work toward their attainment. Reporting progress toward the goals has provided valuable information to states and inspired them to reach higher. Can we do better? Of course, we can. However, we are convinced that our gains have been greater because we have had National Education Goals to grade our efforts. Ten years of progress have shown us that the Goals are working. ("Conclusions," para. 1)

The panel reported that the goals were working, however, there were many who

had not been successful under the standardized testing of accountability movement.

Cizek (2001) notes how diligent students are denied a high school diploma because of

the results of high stakes testing. He describes how testing narrowed curriculum,

frustrated the teachers, and produced anxiety among the students. There are various

factors to consider when assessing student achievement data. Male students,

particularly of color, and those living in poverty frequently do have the same advantages

of white females, or those that affluent students possess (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2000).

In addition, boys earn 70% of the D's and F's on school report cards. They are more likely to be retained, and three to five times more likely to be labeled learning disabled. Males also get 71% of all school suspensions (Hunsader, 2002).

Despite the decades of efforts and the great amount of funding, low-income and students of color tend to perform the lowest at academic levels. They drop out of school more often in postsecondary institutions at lower percentages than their white middle-class peers (George, 2002).

The latest government incentive targeted at solving the challenge that students faced was the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, signed into law on January 8, 2002 by former President George W. Bush. The act contained the president's four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on instructional methods that have proven to be effective (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This law united the democrats and republicans to declare that success in school would be measured by the success of all students. For the first time in history, the nation made the commitment that every student will achieve regardless of gender, race, family background, or income (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Academic Self-Concept, Academic Achievement, and Racial Identity

The connection between self-concept and academic achievement by students from underrepresented backgrounds has mixed results from researchers. Some have noted a positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement

(Chavous, 2000; Haynes, Hamilton-Lee & Comer, 1987; Jordan, 1981). Other researchers have not noted a positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement (Crocker & Major, 1989; Demo & Parker, 1986; Osborne, 1997).

Academic self-concept basically refers to one's perception of his or her academic abilities when compared to other students (Coakley, 2000; House, 1992). Other researchers (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997) have more specifically defined this concept as a perception one has towards his or her academic skills. Whether defined generally or specifically, academic self-concept pertains to how well a student does academically according to the perception of that student.

There is little research on the academic self-concept of students of color (Brown & Medway, 2007). However, from one of the studies based on this concept, Coakley (2000) examined 98 freshmen to find out whether the academic self-concept was a great predictor of academic success among students of color and low-socioeconomic college students. He discovered that academic self-concept was the greatest predictor variable for academic success (Coakley, 2000). He also noted that African American students who attended historically black colleges and universities (HBCUS) had a greater academic self-concept than African American students at predominately white colleges and universities (PWCUs) (Coakley, 2000). An additional self-concept study that Coakley (2000) researched involved 206 African American undergraduate college students, who attended three private HBCUs and two public PWCUs. He concluded that no significant difference could be measured between those who attended HBCUs and PWCUs. This

discovery confirmed that study that Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) conducted and indicated that a student's academic self-concept was not influenced by the type of school attended. Coakley (2000), however, does not note a difference in the student's GPA, interactions between the students and faculty, or perceptions of fairness with regards to the African American student's academic performance. Those who attended HBCUs had a more positive experience and perception of their school than those who attended PWCUs. Coakely (2000) also maintains that the student's GPA is the greatest self-concept, and at HBCUs the quality of the student-faculty interaction was the strongest predictor of academic self-concept.

Research on racial identity and academic achievement has addressed the question of whether one's connection to their racial identity is beneficial or detrimental. While examiners (Chavous et al., 2003; Lockett & Harrell, 2003; Robinson & Biran, 2006) state that the connection between racial identity, academic achievement and academic self-concept, landmark studies (Fordham, 1998; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Steele, 1997) note that students of color, due to their racial identification choose to not academically achieve.

There has been little research on the relationship between racial identity and high school achievement (Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997), and less on academic self-concept of those from underrepresented backgrounds (Gerardi, 1990). Research currently has paid little attention to teenagers, which has been noted as a critical period in identity development. Despite the fact that many students of color value their

education (Cook & Ludwig, 1998), high dropout rates continue to greatly affect them

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The research suggests that African American and Latino adolescents are resistant

to achieving in schools (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). While these groups have historically

been labeled as underachievers in the realm of education, African American and Latino

students who attempt to achieve in education are often seen as assimilating and

rejected by members of their own community as "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu,

1986). This issue correlates with the fact that the educational system is centered on a

Eurocentric/Western worldview what is being taught in school is not a reflection on the

culture and norms of non-European descendants. For example, information that is being

taught in schools, in reference to African Americans, is that slavery was the starting

point in the lives of African Americans. A lack of information about who you are can

impact the self-concept of how that individual sees himself or herself. Understanding

the past and the impact of that past can greatly influence the future for many students

of color (Coley, 2008). As a result, having a strong connection with one's racial identity

can have a positive influence on that person's academic achievement.

There is a strong relationship between one's racial identity and academic

performance. Zoblotsky (2003) argues how a person feels about his or her race

influences his or her participation in school. For African Americans and Latinos, the

connection between racial identity and academic achievement can be attributed to their

treatment from the majority white society (Zoblotsky, 2003). When those of color do

not think that their culture is appreciated nor understood, it may translate into poor

academic achievement or a rejection of their own, or the majority culture. Hemmings

(1998) mentions, "African American adolescents, especially those residing in urban

areas, make daily crossings between disparate worlds-including those of their families,

schools, and peers which often are characterized by conflicting cultural expectations for

defining their social identities" (p. 332).

When those from underrepresented backgrounds feel that they are forced to

choose between accepting themselves and taking pride in their culture, and rejecting

that culture to gain academic achievement and acceptance from the white society,

students of color encounter a big dilemma (Hemmings, 1998). Goodenow (1992) found

a connection between expectations and achievement for African American and Latino

students. She studied 198 and 103 seventh through ninth-grade students in two

different junior high schools in a working-class, middle-sized city in the Northeastern

United States. African Americans and Latinos primarily participated in this study.

Goodenow (1992) examined how the association between the psychological senses of

school membership, defined as the subjective sense of belonging, and measures of

motivation and achievement. Goodenow (1992) concludes that for students of color and

Caucasian students, success in schoolwork and achievement-related behavior correlated

with the extent to which the students in the study put forth effort and persisted despite

difficulties in their academic work. She also found a low correlation between

psychological membership and motivation for students of color.

In a study with similar results, Ford (1995) interviewed 149 sixth through ninth-grade African American students in five mid-Atlantic school districts to examine their perceptions of factors that positively and negatively affected their academics. The students were grouped as either (a) gifted, as formally identified by school district criteria, (b) potentially gifted, as identified by the researcher based on standardized test scores, or (c) average in academic achievement. These students also categorized as achievers or underachievers based on discrepancies between their standardized test scores and GPA. From the 152 students interviewed, 27% were in the ninth grade (Ford, 1995). Based on achievement ideology and effort, Ford (1995) found that students of color had a favorable attitude toward the learning environment, and positive attitudes toward academic subjects. 38% of those, however, reported that their teachers encouraged them to work harder (Ford, 1995). In addition, 39% responded that they did not spend quality time on homework, two-thirds spent more time watching television than studying, and half spent more time with friends than doing their homework. This contradiction between words and actions can be representative of the contradicting feelings that students of color have toward academic achievement.

Academic Achievement and Students of Color

Racial identity is important within the realm of academics for students from underrepresented backgrounds (Coley, 2008). In African American culture, for example, it has been the extent to which one's ethnicity is essential to his or her sense of self (Quintana, 1998). Racial identity is a complex procedure and critical element in the

identity development of many students of color, particularly in teenagers (Quintana, 1998).

Academic achievement can be defined by various factors. It can correlate with a student's grade point average (GPA), completion of academic grades, and the individual's accomplishments on standardized tests (Robinson & Biran, 2006). Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke (1998) argue that research on racial identity and academic achievement have posed that question of whether or not a strong identification with being underrepresented in the public school system is detrimental or beneficial for students of color and their academic achievement. Smith (2007) for example, contends that an African Americans' racial identity has a significant impact on their academic achievement and attitude towards school.

Assimilation. Scholars noted that students from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly Latinos and African Americans, choose not to succeed in school because achievement is viewed as "acting white" (Ogbu, 1994). Ogbu (1994) argues that students and the cultural orientation of their underrepresented communities have equated academic achievement with assimilation and academic success as "acting white." He conducted a study of African American students at a predominately African American high school; located in a historically African American section of Washington, DC. Ogbu (1994) analyzed the external factors (e.g. substandard education) and within-group factors (e.g. African American's response to each other), coupled with fictive

kinship and how those elements impacted on the education of African American students.

Fictive kinship is a relationship between individuals not related by heredity, but individuals who demonstrate some mutually social and economic relationship that is based on more than skin color (Fordham & Ogbu, 1996). Fictive kinship is prevalent in the African American and Latino community, and represents a collective identity for both cultures. This identification represents the labeling of one "acting black" or "acting Latino" and embodies a sense of resistance against the dominant white society (Fordham & Ogbu, 1996). Fordham & Ogbu (1996) used the term fictive kinship to stress the point that this concept carries great weight in how African Americans and Latinos relate to one another.

Other examiners argue that assimilation was not equated with avoiding high academic achievement. Bergin and Cooks (2002) for example examined 38 African American and Latino students who achieved a lot in school. These researchers did not find that the students changed their behavior, denied their racial identity, or earned poor grades in order be accepted by their peers. Instead, they identified themselves with positive role models and professionals in their community (Bergin & Cooks, 2002). Cook and Ludwig (1998) also analyzed whether African Americans and Latinos differed on social standing and high and low levels of academic effort. These researchers argue that when African American teenagers taunt one another for "acting white," their insults do not keep those particular students from achieving.

Racelessness. Fordham (1998) suggests that if students of color are going to academically excel, they must disconnect with their culture. She further contends that it does not matter whether they attend public or private schools. Ford, Harris, Webb, and Jones (1994) challenge Fordham's assertion that high-achieving students of color should renounce their culture. They feel that Fordham misunderstands some of the responses given by the students as racelessness instead of interpreting the answers as a reflection of individual differences.

Other examiners find a correlation between racial identity and success, contrary to Fordham's (1998) remarks. Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, and Linz (1996) for example, report that African American and Latino students are able to connect with their cultural identities and academically achieve simultaneously. In a study conducted with African American adolescents in the inner-city, Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, and Harpalani (2001) contend that high self-esteem and achievement goals are connected with high Afrocentricity. Ward (1990) notes that how an African American youth views himself reflects on that individual's academic achievement. Both theories of assimilation and racelessness have explained why students of color tend to not excel academically based on the disconnection with their community. Other concepts that attempt to explain why students of color traditionally do not excel academically are academic self-concept, academic achievement and racial identity.

Achievement Gap

Weinstein, Gregory, and Strambler (2004) note that historically, education has

been for the elite and the masses are trained in the vocational arenas. This popular

belief reflected in the pathways of achievement for people of color and whites. For

many years, schools across the nation were segregated-separate and unequal. This

inequality was reflective in limited funding for schools, poor facilities and resources, and

inadequately trained educators (Ratvich, 2000). This practice of segregation was legally

supported by the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which

legalized a separate but equal doctrine. The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board*

of Education in 1954 overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, prohibiting racially

segregated schools and ordering desegregated education. Race-based educational

inequalities existed, and it provided grounds for the modern day civil rights movement

for disenfranchised groups of people. Access to educational opportunity was extended

through federal legislation and court decisions. Including Title I of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act in 1965, Title IX of the Educational Amendment Act in 1972,

Lau v. Nichols in 1974, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975

(Weinstein et al., 2004).

Regardless of the changes that occurred from *Brown* in 1954, more than 60 years

later there is a disparity in the public school systems. The disparity continues to exist

between students of color and the dominant white culture. Inequality in schools and

discrimination in practices have led to higher dropout rates and discipline issues among

African American and Latino students (Education Trust, 2004). Gardner and Miranda

(2001) for example suggest that fewer African American and Latino students are

enrolled in advanced placement courses and entering college with continued

disproportionate placement in special education, especially under the eligibility of

emotional disturbance or mental retardation.

The trend of African Americans and Latinos being enrolled in special education

programs are greater than any other ethnic group (Skiba et al., 2005). Skiba et al. (2005)

also argues that African American and Latino students are overrepresented among

students with mental retardation because that particular disability is linked to poverty

and a greater number of that population lives in poverty compared to other ethnic

groups. Coutinho and Oswald (2000), arguing from a different perspective suggest that

the overrepresentation of students of color labeled intellectually challenged is not the

manifestation of overt racism, but is based on cultural or race-based expectations for

what is considered appropriate behavior. The patterns of identification were often

ignored at the risk of admitting that there could be a continued reproduction of

historical patterns of inequity (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000).

In 2004, the Education Trust reported that in fourth grade reading and eighth

grade mathematics African American and Latino students scored below the Caucasian

students. Fewer students of color took advanced placement classes and more scored

lower than white students on the advanced placement tests. Fewer students of color

graduated from high school and college than did the Caucasian students (Johnson,

2002). The same report indicated that one in four of all secondary classrooms was taught by a teacher lacking either a major or minor in his or her subject area (Education Trust, 2004). Students in high-minority and inner-city schools were far more likely than those from wealthier and nonminority areas to be taught by teachers out of their field of expertise (Johnson, 2002).

There are disparities in academic achievement between African American and Latino students and their white counterparts (Education Trust, 2004). These disparities have been analyzed from various perspectives, including educational, racial, economic, socioeconomic status, psychological, and cross-cultural (EdSource, 2011). The diverse point-of-views on research and practice embodies the different academic fields that attempt to address the relationships among the social, cultural, and cognitive aspects of education (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003).

Various researchers argue that the achievement gap is the manifestation of inequitable access to opportunities for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). Inequitable educational opportunities were the result of inadequate structures and systems within the learning environment, including school finance, assessment, curriculum, instruction, and support networks (Weinstein et al., 2004). Tach and Farkas (2006) propose that the achievement gap begins when students enroll in school as a result of the coupling of placement and teacher judgment of learning related behaviors associated with various cognitive development levels. There is, however, little research in this field.

There is evidence to illustrate that the education gap could be caused by the differences in cultural and social orientation between home and school (Ogbu, 1995a, 1995b). Vygotsky's fundamental premise concerning the learning process is centered on an understanding of cognition and learning as social and cultural and not on individual phenomena (Kozulin et al., 2003). He spoke to the cognitive schema that students bring to the learning process to facilitate the learning of new knowledge (Ormrod, 2006). If there is a disconnection between the existing schema and new knowledge, learning becomes complicated. This schema has been elevated by the child's social and cultural orientation. However, a disparity in academic achievement can result from the disconnection between existing schema and a new knowledge and limited inclusion of culturally relevant pedagogy in the instructional procedure (Bennett, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model reveals learning from a socio-cultural perspective, consistent with other researchers like Vygotsky (Kozulin et al., 2003).

While Brofenbrenner's ecological model views a child's education from a sociopolitical point of view, like Vygotsky's theory, it speaks to the disconnection between cognitive schema. This model is the result of social and political orientation and new knowledge. Bronfenbrenner's "nested systems" are within the ecological model views behavior and development as shared functions of biological and personality factors and the environment which is comprised of the social, physical, and cultural aspects of one's environment (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005). The atmosphere, which includes family, school, and neighborhoods, functions in concert with the current

and historical context of which there are integral components. Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky emphasis the importance of cultural and social systems work as the framework for learning taking place.

Even though the achievement gap has been documented for many years, the trend in the disparity between the minority and the majority has existed for half a century. Lyman and Villani (2004) contend that efforts have been made within recent years to improve high poverty schools; however, both race and poverty continue to be linked to educational inequities. As a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ordered a national survey of the availability of educational opportunities for students (Marzano, 2003). The resulting report, *Equality in Educational Opportunity*, published in 1966, became known as the Coleman Report. This document notes that the student's background accounts the most for student achievement, with only a small variance due to the impact of schooling. This document sparked a reexamination of the educational system, leading to the beginning of reform efforts that have included standards-based instruction and the implementation of accountability systems for greater monitoring of instruction and student progress.

In a time of accountability, the nation struggles with how to achieve educational equality, with high-stakes testing and standards-based reform lingering. Marzano (2003) maintains that the gaps in achievement appear across socioeconomic strata and race. Many underrepresented groups such as African Americans, Latinos, and indigenous

peoples are achieving at lower levels than most middle and high-income whites

(Johnson, 2002).

Singleton and Linton (2006) reference the achievement gap as a racial gap due to

the variation in performance between different skin pigmentation. They contend that

one's racial, social, economic, and political factors are oftentimes blamed for the

achievement gap. They purport that the rapid change in the racial composition of the

nation's student population is opposite the population of the educators; meaning, the

majority of the educators are Caucasian and the most of the students are of color. As a

result, organizational support networks should be in place to assist educators in

developing cultural proficiency and instructional effectiveness (Singleton & Linton,

2006). Those strategies can be a way of eliminating the achievement gap.

Singleton and Linton (2006) also argue that the achievement gap exists not only

due to socioeconomic disparities; it exists among students with the same socioeconomic

status. Poverty alone, however, does not provide and explanation for the achievement

gap. Singham (1998) addresses the premise that there are social pathologies with the

African American and Latino community that cause the achievement gap, in his analysis

of the premise espoused as the reasons for the gap. A genetic explanation for the

achievement gap suggests that African Americans and Latinos are not as intellectually

smart as Caucasians and are not capable of competing with them (Herrnstein & Murray,

1994). Others argue that the racial achievement gap is the consequence of an

educational system that is not designed to educate students from underrepresented

backgrounds and that educators continue to be unwilling to or lack the skills or knowledge to address racial diversity (Singleton & Linton, 2006). However, concerns about the achievement gap continue to be reflected throughout educational discourse. To that end, national reports since the Coleman Report have been presented and analyzed regarding the achievement gap in an attempt to ascertain the reasons for this educational disparity and to suggest reform efforts to address this problem. The main reports are reviewed in the following sections.

A Nation at Risk

In 1981, the Reagan administration created the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) to examine the quality of education in the nation. Within the 18-month timeframe for completion of the report, the commission created practical recommendations for educational reform. The commission report addressed the disenfranchisement of those who did not possess the literacy skills and training necessary to perform competently and participate fully in mainstream society. Various indicators of the risks were in the report, which compared student achievement at the time of the report to that of a previous decade and discussed functional illiteracy in adults and teenagers, especially those of color (NCEE, 1983). The report also focused on the decline of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, the dip in mathematics and science achievement, and the increase in remedial courses for college-level students.

The reform from educational leaders and politicians was their attempt to look for solutions for the myriad risk factors highlighted in the report. Their concept of

reform centered on teaching and learning in every academic area. Most salient to the

reform focus as stated in the report was the term *"excellence in education"* (NCEE,

1983), a reference to equal treatment of the nation's diversity in student population,

thereby suggesting that the goals of equity and high quality in schools should be

simultaneous.

In contrast, a critique of *A Nation at Risk* (Willie & Willie, 2005) provides an

oppositional view of the arguments made in the report. It claims that the research on *A

Nation at Risk* provides little evidence to support its arguments, describing it as a

drawback from the *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. It contends that, due to the

lack of sufficient evidence to support its claims researchers label the reform movement

for which *A Nation at Risk* is the impetus as a fabricated issue (Berliner & Biddle, 1995)

and that, although an achievement gap continues to exist, it is lessening over the 50

years since *Brown*. This narrowing was largely attributed to reforms centered on

equality espoused by *Brown*, in contrast to excellence and exclusion, which Berliner and

Biddle (1995) claim has become so dominant in the past 20 years of educational reform

(Willie & Willie, 2005).

While *A Nation at Risk* served as the basis for the reform movement in the

nation, its implications led to minimal transformation to the educational system. Fifteen

years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, another report illustrated the extent of

the changes that had been anticipated. *A Nation Still at Risk* (Hoover Institution, 1998)

served as an educational doctrine that outlined the continued inequities in the

educational system nationwide. Students continued to display poor performance in mathematics and science. Illiteracy in the nation equated to the millions. Millions of high school students reached the 12th grade without learning to read at the beginning level, and were unable to compute basic mathematics. In addition, 25 million Americans did not have the general knowledge about U.S. history. During the same timeframe, however, 6 million Americans dropped out of high school. For underrepresented groups, 13% of African American students, ages 16 through 24, were not in school and did not have a diploma, and 17% of first-generation Latino students dropped out of high school. This number included 44% Latino immigrants. Thirty percent of the entering ninth graders needed some type of remediation in reading or mathematics.

The Hoover Institution (1998), consistent with other research (Ladson-Billings, 1999a; McCarty, 2004; Weinstein et al., 2004) reports what seems to be the re-creation of a two-tiered educational system, separate but unequal, just over half a century after *Brown* leads to the dismantling of unconstitutional government-sanctioned segregation. Students of color, mainly those living in poverty, frequently attend inferior schools with little or no resources available (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). *A Nation Still at Risk* notes that those recommendations for reform listed by *A Nation at Risk* go unheeded and that there remains a lessening sense of urgency.

Education is still controlled by a few privileged citizens (Hoover Institution, 1998). The split between educational opportunity for the privileged citizens and the less privileged ones is facilitated by the former group's ability to control the system. To

renew the commitment to reform, the report made two suggestions: (a) assessments and accountability; and (b) pluralism and competition of choice. Recommendations were also made for power shifts and structural changes. Public education was viewed as a threat to the status quo. Even though *A Nation Still at Risk* addressed various inequalities in the educational system, an analysis of this documentation provided very little data to support its arguments.

Obstacles to Academic Achievement

Mitchell and Mitchell (2005) purport that regardless of the attempts to eradicate the disparities between students of color and their Caucasian counterparts through academic reform, structural and systematic obstacles continue to persist and impede achievement and equality in the schools. Tracking, continued lower levels of funding, lack of rigor in the curriculum, and the lack of qualified educators impede equity in access to knowledge and resources (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Tracking. Studies on tracking reveal differences in the demographics in multi-track year-round schools, perpetuating a form of re-segregation. Underachieving students are usually placed in one track with the less-qualified and least experienced teacher (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005).

Experienced teachers. The teacher's experience has been identified as a critical predictor of the student's academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Unqualified educators are least likely to plan and enforce the appropriate instruction, and may not take responsibility for their students learning if the teaching is not effective (Diamond,

Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). The concentration of ill-prepared teachers in inner-city school districts serving low-income students of color is often the result of funding inequities, local power distribution, and dysfunctional hiring practices, all which lead to a shortage of teachers. As a result of seniority concerns, more-experienced educators are more likely to be assigned to higher-achieving suburban schools, leaving the less-qualified teachers to teach the students who are in the greatest need of credentialed teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Cultural differences. In addition to institutional barriers, cultural differences and motivational factors can be barriers to a student's achievement. After the *Brown* decision, Ogbu (1986) emerged as a critic of the biogenetic arguments of Jensen and others who legitimatized de facto segregation in the nation (McCarty, 2004). Alongside other researchers within recent years, he addresses the significance of culture and its impact on the student's academic achievement (Bennett, 2001; Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gay, 2000; Ogbu, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Ormrod, 2006). Based on the oppositional cultural framework, Ogbu and Simons (1994) conducted a mixed-methods study of 16 schools in the Oakland School District that included 2,245 students in grades 5–12. Based on this research, they conclude that variations in racial groups are reliant on their incorporation in the nation. *Incorporation* pertains to involuntary disenfranchised groups being incorporated into the United States against their will through conquest or slavery, while *voluntary minorities* choose to come to this nation (Ogbu & Simons, 1994).

Between the different ethnic groups in that study, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians, the students respond that *voluntary minorities* consider education to be the gateway to success in society (Ogbu & Simons, 1994). They demonstrate less concern with racial issues and a greater willingness to conform with the dominant society's culture as a means to success. The students were afraid that crossing cultural boundaries could compromise their racial and ethnic identity. Also, this group was willing to assimilate into society. In contrast, the educational model for the involuntary African American students was hostile. This group reported ambivalent educational strategies involving claims of parental support and high student and parent aspirations. There were exaggerated assertions of academic success and less effort than those exerted by the Asian students. Ogbu and Simons (1994) maintain that academic success for African American students is stigmatized by other students. Such contradictions in beliefs may result in a lack of effort within the context of classrooms where expectations are low, which will compromise the school's success.

Based on their findings, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) contend that African American youth sabotage their academic success by taking a rebellious posture toward their academic success, with culture being an important factor in that action. Among members of an involuntary minority group (proposed by Fordham and Ogbu, 1986) education may be rejected as an avenue to success, as it can be a mechanism for breaking what disenfranchised groups perceive as the permanence of obstacles caused by discrimination. Working in the labor market can be interpreted as impossible as a

consequence of discrimination. Therefore, education that may lead to facilitating that entrance is not perceived as valuable (Mickelson, 2003).

In opposition to that conclusion, Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) argue that African American adolescents are basically achievement oriented and that the peer pressure linked with race proposed by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) is not evident in every school. Additional research has provided little evidence to suggest that African American teenagers are indifferent to achievement (Tyson et al., 2005). However, the adoption of Ogbu's oppositional framework might be faulty as stated this literature. If Ogbu's claim is true, the oppositional attitudes of African American adolescents are not likely to be attributed to ethnicity, but connected to the daily experiences of inequality in placement and achievement. These inconsistencies in study could suggest that a greater understanding of the causal factors of these oppositional attitudes may be more contextual in nature. As a result, researchers note that there should be a concentration on systemic changes in school structures nationwide rather than culture, may yield greater insight and more consistent results. The patterns of social inequality based on systems like tracking, teacher quality, and discipline may exacerbate the student's opposition to academic achievement (Tyson et al., 2005).

Motivational obstacles. Studies reveal that obstacles to achievement from a sociopolitical perspective are motivational in nature, especially for African American and Latino males. Qualitative research engaging high school African American and Latino males (Irving & Hudley, 2005) and African American and Latino, second, fourth, and

seventh graders (Taylor & Graham, 2007) address barriers stemming from the

expectancy value theory perspective. The expectancy value model for motivation is the

basis from which these examiners approached the possible obstacles to academic

achievement. This theoretical perspective describes human behavior as the result of the

influences of one's expectancy of a successful outcome when engaged in a specific

behavior (Weiner, 1992). Learners are motivated by the perceived likelihood that an

achievement outcome will be obtained (expectancy) and the desirability of the outcome

(value). Values are more linked to cultural experiences that serve as the basis for the

appeal and use of goal-oriented activities. The expectancy of success and perceptions of

value are the factors in a student's willingness to achieve towards a goal (Eccles &

Wigfield, 2002). There is a connection among the perception of cultural barriers,

educational outcomes, expectations, and values. Cultural mistrust can lead to low

outcome expectations and outcome values (Taylor & Graham, 2007). Rather than

present themselves as incompetent, those who perceive structural obstacles between

personal effort and achievement might discount academic endeavors to be successful in

favor of social or athletic activities in order to maintain their self-esteem (Taylor &

Graham, 2007).

Within the topic of motivation, another obstacle to academic achievement noted

in the literature is the stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). Steele researched how the

cultural stereotypes associated to African American intellectual inferiority affected the

academic performance of highly capable African American students. He argues that this

stereotype is a component of the fund of knowledge in every African American student. His experimental data demonstrates that cueing about race before engaging in a task facilitated lower achievement in high-achieving African American students than in students who did not receive such cues. Steele (1997) posits that the stereotype threat inhibits academic performance by African American students because these students were reluctant to engage in intellectual challenges for the fear of validating the stereotype by attempting to fail. Their anxiety unconsciously leads them to disengage, and disengagement undermines their academic performance (Mickelson, 2003).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

NCLB of 2001 is the reauthorization of the ESEA of 1965. NCLB has focused greater attention on low-performing schools by setting higher expectations for schools and creating clear expectations for mediocre performance.

Having claimed the spotlight in the national accountability arena, NCLB has set the goal to improve education through a performance-based accountability system that focuses on the student's tests results. The emphasis on performance-based accountability systems represents a significant paradigm shift from federal educational initiatives of the past, which centered on ensuring that the proper services were provided.

Supporters of NCLB argue that evaluating student performance is a mediating factor of student improvement. To that end, researchers analyze accountability systems from the economic sector to ascertain their applicability in the schools. The systems

include specific methods for encouraging excellent performance and professional accountability mechanisms. Despite the uniqueness of the educational setting, which was very different from other organizations, it was concluded that each model could improve performance of schools and districts (Rand Corporation, 2006).

Disparities culminated with NCLB to close the achievement gap results from the entrenched achievement culture of schools (Weinstein et al., 2004). However, NCLB fails to address the underlying impact of higher expectations on academic achievement. High standards were set, holding every stakeholder responsible except the entity that voted on the law, the government. This legislation failed to establish how the goal of standards would be achieved. High standards and consequences have heightened the salience of achievement differences in assigning descriptions to all students and schools as low-performing. The ineffective consequences, such as school closures, grade retention, failure to graduate, have created an achievement culture that has compromised the positive expectations of the law (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Even though NCLB failed to address the achievement gap in many aspects, there have been recommendations for closing the gap in literature (Lyman & Villani, 2004). The practice of culturally relevant pedagogy has been acknowledged as effective (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The creation of trust in the educational process and connecting between the home and school is a vehicle for enhancing community involvement (Morris, 2004). Morris (2004) suggests that teachers take a more parental role in this process. Extending learning from school to home maintains collaborative

relationships with parents and encourages their active involvement in their child's learning process.

Organizational Structures and Systems

Even though obstacles exists that comprise academic achievement for students of color, there are research-based structural and systematic practices that contribute to high student performance in inner-city, high poverty school districts (Marzano, 2003). Several researchers have been noted previously in this review for their recommendations on closing the achievement gap. Edmonds (1982) reveals various characteristics of effective schools that are seen in the current literature (Levine, Cooper, & Hilliard, 2000; Marzano, 2003) are evident in inner-city, high poverty school districts. These features include high expectations for students, strong administrative leadership, emphasis on learning fundamental skills, monitoring student progress, and a safe and orderly environment (Levine et al., 2000). Organizational structures recommend those policies and procedures that serve as mechanisms for school functions, such as funding mechanisms, class size, program regulations, and personnel issues.

Systematic practices facilitate goal achievement for school through the provision of coordinated utilization of resources like professional development, parental involvement, accountability systems, data-driven decision making, school leadership, and academic climate (Fermanich et al., 2006). In addressing organizational structures and systems Marzano (2003) developed a triangulated approach in assessing the impact

of these factors on student achievement: school, teacher, and student factors. School

factors include a guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and feedback,

parent and community involvement, and collegial professionalism; instructional

strategies, classroom management, and curriculum design are designated as teacher

influencing factors. Home environment, intelligence, and motivation complete the

triangle as student factors. A comparison of research on factors affecting student

achievement can be seen in Table 1. Even though there is a variation in terms among

researchers, the same conceptual themes remain the same. These organizational

structures have been effective and have compromised the racial theories that have

been the basis for previous instruction. The triangle chart in the following page shows

the hierarchy of structures leading to the student's academic achievement.

Leadership. The dominant style in high-performing, high-poverty urban schools

appears to follow the *structural* model revealed by Bolman and Deal (2003).

Administrators collaborate with parents to facilitate involvement and assistance for the

school's mission and provided consistent professional development to support teachers'

skills and knowledge of curriculum and instructional strategies. They use creative

methods to sponsor academic programs (Morris, 2004) and are problem solvers who

create a peaceful environment, have control over personnel practices like hiring and

firing teachers, and have control over the curriculum (Izumi, 2002). Concurrent with this

characteristic was their political expertise, a leadership characteristic viewed in the

political frame of Bolman and Deal (2003). These researchers understand what

resources are available within the district and how to obtain them by effectively navigating the political landscape of the district.

Many researchers see strong leadership as a major component in effective schools (Izumi, 2002; Marzano, 2003; Morris, 2004). It is essential for effective reform at all levels in the school building: student, teachers, and school. School leaders are visionaries for change, and they can communicate effectively. They assist the staff and guide them through curriculum and instruction, and facilitate monitoring student success. Leaders in high-performing, high-poverty urban schools understand that students are capable, and they practice on that belief (Carter, 2000). They are able to perpetuate that belief system through acceptance in all key-players. They insist on a challenging curriculum, stress personal relationships, and bring about change through abandonment of negative feelings about the student's intellectual abilities (Lyman & Villani, 2004).

Parental and community involvement. Lawson (2003) notes that the educators' and parents' perceptions of the purpose of parental involvement are not always identical and can overlap when considering school-based versus community-based activities. In high-functioning schools, researchers discover that parental involvement is more school centered as it focuses on assisting students to learn within that setting. Marzano (2003) views participation and communication as the most important feature in parental and community involvement. Lyman and Villani (2004) maintain that in high-performing, high-poverty schools, consistent communication exists between school and

parents. They also suggest that home-to-school correspondence reflects the school's

belief that parents are concerned about the students' academic achievement and want

to work collaboratively with the school to foster achievement. Parents are invited to

school programs and events that are specifically designed to show appreciation for their

support. The parents engage in reciprocal reading activities at their home (Lyman &

Villani, 2004). Parents receive communication through email, work in the media center,

and conferences. In some schools, parent councils were started to monitor specific

expenditures. Most often, they participate in activities that relate to student instruction

surrounding curriculum and instruction (Izumi, 2002; Morris, 2004). Carter (2000) notes

that parental involvement extends into the home through parent contracts to assist

students' efforts to learn. Educating parents to read to students, check for homework,

and make inquiries about school assignments through weekly updates is effective.

Morris (2004) underscores the significance of establishing relationships with parents

and the community, understanding the social capital that students possess and how it

can be used to assist in the student's achievement.

High expectations. In effective and high-achieving high-poverty schools, high

expectations are espoused by all parties: administrators, teachers, and parents. There is

a shared belief in this atmosphere that every student can learn and overcome (Towns,

Cole-Henderson, & Serpell, 2001). School mottos are created to mirror success and

achievement. Principals work individually with students who are experiencing academic

issues. High expectations are demonstrated through a challenging and rigorous

curriculum, which critical race theorists argue to be lacking for students of color. There are high expectations for teachers as well as students, with teachers being held responsible for the student's learning.

Goal setting/feedback. The literature supports goal setting and feedback as major predictors in a student's academic success (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). There is evidence at high-performing schools that goal setting is an integral part of the school's culture (Lyman & Villani, 2004). School-wide tangible goals are found to be the focus in some high-performing high-poverty schools. Goals, standards, and long-term outcomes for students are clear and measurable, and challenging (Marzano, 2003).

Goal setting is essential for students, but should also be a part of the teacher's development. In high-performing high-poverty schools, professional development is the mechanism by which goals are fully explained. The professional development is goal oriented and ensures that teachers are aware of what areas of focus should be enforced in order to achieve them. Setting school-wide academic goals has a triangular effect, impacting administrators, teachers, and students leading to student success as well as effectiveness and collaboration within the whole school (Marzano, 2003).

Professional development. Fermanich et al. (2006) argue that professional development is a major component in the success of high-achieving schools. They maintain that much time should be spent on professional development to assist teachers in improving instruction, building professional development relationships, and developing a shared instructional vision. Ongoing professional development with a focus

on instructional strategies and assessments is consistent among the other researchers

(Carter, 2000). Professional development for leadership is found to exist in high-

performing schools, along with subject-based professional development to provide

assistance to teachers through coaches who provide materials and sample lessons

(Izumi, 2002). While professional development to address instruction and testing is

evident in the literature, various studies suggest that professional development should

focus specifically on teacher expectations and teacher self-efficacy (Diamond et al.,

2004). Table 1 illustrates an overview of the research in school organizational structures

and systems that are evident in high-performing, high-poverty-urban schools.

Adolescent Development

An adolescent is "a young person whose reproductive system has matured, who

is economically dependent upon adults, whose chief source of need gratification are his

peers, who has open interest in the opposite sex, and for whom status and roles as

defined for children and adults in his culture are confused" (Carriker, 1963, p. 141).

Torres (2004) notes adolescence as a phase that begins at biology and ends in society.

This stage includes biological, cognitive, and psychological changes, as well as, social

characteristics that evolve from what is considered childlike behavior to what is adult-

like behavior. Stanley Hall, the first scholar to recognize the concept of formative

behavior claims that adolescence is a period that occurs between the ages of 14 to 25

(Torres, 2004). He also argues that the needs of schools should address this

developmental stage of life and organize schools and curricula to meet the needs of this

specific group.

During the teenage years, young people may or may not be developmentally

ready to face the many challenges that lay before them. White-Hood (2001) points out

that by the time the student graduates from high school, most have made a number of

different decisions that will affect their futures: choices regarding lifestyles, friendships,

education, and vocations. Teenagers also face challenges regarding peer pressures or

the vices of life (White-Hood, 2001).

An adolescent's physical development during puberty is controlled by the

activation of hormones that brings forth a growth spurt (Irvin, 2007). Primary and

secondary sex characteristics begin to develop during this phase and teenagers begin to

develop increased sexual libido and fertility. Physical changes during this period include

bone growth, and changes in motor performance and body composition (Irvin, 2007).

Besides the change from the irregular growth spurts, young people also experience a

change in basal metabolism. This phase is often embodied in the form of various levels

of restlessness (Torres, 2004). This change in the metabolism also creates an increased

appetite. These physical changes impact an adolescent's identity development and

social interaction.

As part of the maturing process, the cognitive development of adolescents

begins a transition from concrete to more abstract thinking. Rice (1997) narrows this

development to four stages: the sensorimotor stage from birth to two years of age, the

preoperational stage from two to seven years of age, the concrete operational stage

which occurs between seven and eleven years and up. The formal operational stage is

the category where most ninth-grade students fall. The formal operational stage is the

period during which adolescents' thinking becomes more open and they are able to

think more abstractly. Forte and Schurr (1993) write that during this time, adolescents

prefer active to passive learning experiences and are highly curious. Optimal learning

occurs when teenagers become inductive thinkers. During this time, they have the

ability to connect with real life problems. Since not all adolescents are at the same stage

of development, some students can become frustrated by the intellectual demands of

the classroom. These emotions can lead to feelings of alienation, self-doubt, and

underachievement in academies (Epstein & MacIver, 1990).

Prior to adolescence, a young person's identity is an extension of his or her

parents. Youngsters tend to hold their parents' beliefs. As they enter adolescence,

young people begin to recognize their unique qualities and begin to separate from their

parents. At this age, they struggle between the supportive relationships with their

parents (Torres, 2004).

As teenagers search for their identity, they feel the need to be the same as their

peers and are often concerned with their looks and peer acceptance (Irvin, 2007).

Teenagers are often erratic and display inconsistent behavior. They can be highly

moody, restless, and sensitive to criticism (Forte & Schurr, 1993). Forte and Schurr

(1993) also write that during this time period, new school and social settings can create

confusion and fear among teenagers. Rebellion toward parents and authority figures

typically conflicts with fierce loyalty to peer groups. Despite this aggression, they often

need nurturing from adults (Forte & Schurr, 1993). Also, Forte and Schurr (1993) note

that an important indicator of how well students successfully navigate high school is the

degree to which young people are able to socialize with other students and become part

of an accepting peer group.

As young people mature, they exhibit and experience an array of intellectual,

social, physical, and emotional changes. These changes can range from developing the

ability to think critically at higher levels to the sudden displays of immature behavior.

This incongruence is often due to a lag in their child's mental and social development

(Torres, 2004). Paired with this developmental phase are the different changes that

teenagers encounter in their academic program. Not only are adolescents in a period of

developmental transition, they are also in a period of academic transition. During this

period, adolescent ninth graders move from the isolated and protected world of middle

school to a new world full of diverse and often conflicting social and academic pressures

where they are expected to make decisions as independent individuals (Adamczyk,

1994). It is during this time of dealing with the changing pressures, that the

disengagement of adolescents in learning starts, and the rate of absenteeism, poor

academic achievement, retention, and dropping out begins (Torres, 2004).

Table 1 represents the intellectual and social developmental characteristics of

ninth graders. According to this table, ninth graders are at a stage where they become

more curious and are easily impressionable. They may display a wide range of behaviors that may be different from their earlier years in elementary and middle school years. In order to understand these young adolescents Table 1 points to trends in their thinking and behavior. Similarly, Table 2 illustrates the physical and emotional developmental stages of ninth graders. This table suggests that ninth graders are going through major physical changes. They want to seek approval from their peers, and may act deviant as a result. Ninth graders are very emotional and increasingly independent.

Historical Overview of the Traditional Ninth-Grade Organization

The ninth-grade academy is a historical study of the context that the ninth grade became the first year of high school. Many changes in the educational structure of secondary education started in the last half of the twentieth century in the United States. Standards of grade organization changed as a result of the growing student population, and the efforts of an increasingly industrialized society (Kerr, 2002). Educators placed greater emphasis on the special needs of the students. Traditionally, in the first half of the twentieth century, junior high school consisted of grades seventh through ninth. Alexander and George (1981) note that by 1960, four out of five high school graduates experience a sixth year, third year, and third year organization moving through elementary grades (1-6), junior high grades (7-9), and high school grades (10-12).

Table 1. Intellectual and Social Developmental Characteristics of Ninth Graders

Intellectual Development	Social Development
1. Display a wide range of intellectual development 2. Are in danger of making decisions about their immediate academic future that could have long-lasting consequences 3. Are in transition from clear thinking 4. Are developing a capacity to comprehend higher levels of humor 5. Are very curious and have a wide range of intellectual pursuits, all of which could be unattained 6. Are basically concerned with social and personal interests rather than academic interests 7. Prefer active over passive classroom instruction 8. Are insecure about adults, oftentimes questioning them 9. Are oftentimes watching adults to see whether they are fair and predictable 10. Insist on interaction with peers than adults 11. Respond positively to opportunities to participate in real-life situations 12. Oftentimes are self-centered 13. Have a strong need for approval and can be easily discouraged 14. Develop and nurture an increasingly better understanding of personal abilities	1. Have a strong desire to belong to a group; peer influence increases and adult influence decreases 2. Model behavior older students, or non-parental adults 3. Exhibit immature behavior because their social skills often lag behind their cognitive and physical development 4. Use new slang terms and behavior as they look for a social position within their group, oftentimes discarding these identities at a later date. 5. Must adjust to the social acceptance of early or late maturing boys or girls 6. Are reliant on parental beliefs and attitude, but try everything possible to be independent in decision making 7. Want recognition for their efforts and achievements 8. Like fads, especially those shunned by adults, by emphasized by the media and their peers 9. React strongly to ridicule, embarrassment, and rejection

(Torres, 2004)

Table 2. Physical and Emotional Developmental Characteristics of Adolescents

Intellectual Development	Social Development
1. Encounter rapid, irregular growth spurt 2. Lack physical fitness, with poor levels of endurance, strength, and flexibility; and as a group are not in good physical condition 3. Forego bodily changes that can cause awkward, uncoordinated behavior 4. Have varying maturity rates, with girls maturing one and one-half to two years earlier than boys, as well as becoming more developed physically, socially, emotionally, intellectually; late-maturing students are often at a disadvantage that could require protection by caring adults 5. Experience restlessness and fatigue because of biological changes 6. Require daily physical activity because of increased energy 7. Develop sexual awareness that increases as secondary sexual features begin to appear 8. Are concerned with bodily changes that accompany sexual maturation and changes resulting in limbs and awkward posture 9. Prefer junk food over nutritional substance	1. Have a wide variety of moods with peaks of intensity and unpredictable as emotions shift between feelings of superiority and inferiority 2. Need to release energy, seldom times resulting in immediate, and apparently meaningless outbursts of activity 3. Desire to become increasingly independent, searching for adult identity 4. Have an immediate concern for peer approval 5. Apt to be self-conscious, lack self-esteem, and are easily offended by and sensitive to criticism 6. Display intense concern physical growth and maturity as physical changes occur 7. Act in ways associated with their sex as sex-role identification strengthens 8. Are preoccupied with major societal issues as personal value systems develop 9. Believe that they are the only ones encountering issues or problems common to everyone else

(Torres, 2004)

During the time period between the 1960s and 1970s a restructuring of schools occurred in the middle grades, as Kerr (2002) referred to as the Middle School Movement. Its purpose was to provide a better transition for students from elementary school to high school through the process of providing a more continuous educational experience in the middle school grades. Alexander and George (1981) contended that the need for an effective transition experience was necessary as well as was the attention needing to be paid to the special needs of students in the middle school grades. Schools saw grade configurations of sixth through eighth with the placement of fifth and ninth graders differing according to the needs of individual school districts (Kerr, 2002). Lower secondary education experienced a middle school configuration change.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1986 to place challenges of the teenage years higher on the United States's agenda. Their report titled *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989) established the principles for middle school educational instruction that addressed the students' needs. Alexander and George (1981) note that the decision to move ninth graders from middle school grades are oftentimes for more practical reasons than being based on theoretical goals associated with middle schools. In addition to eliminating overcrowding is the major reason cited, as well as moving ninth grade would provide better specialization opportunity for the students in grades sixth through eighth (Epstein & MacIver, 1990).

Examiners have developed several conclusions about the organization of students into the ninth through twelfth grade model for high school. George and McEwin's (1999) study, for example, coincided with other researchers' studies in that ninth graders led the list in the number of times they were tardy to school and had the poorest attendance rate of all four grades in high school. The matriculation rate, also, decreased in the ninth grade as students failed to acquire enough credits to proceed to the tenth grade which oftentimes resulted in students dropping out of school (Reents, 2002). Reents (2002) also writes that the relationship between educators at the middle school and high school levels deteriorate because one department blames the other for the challenges that ninth-grade students face in the transition to high school.

Educators still question the best placement for ninth graders in the organizational framework of schooling (Anderson, 2008). Despite the complexity of this issue, it appears that the current model of middle school sixth through eighth grade and high school ninth through twelfth grade will remain for the immediate future (Anderson, 2008). Fix (2000) maintains that there is a relation with the middle school distinction and the academic achievement of students. He states that about a third of middle school students across the nation scored below basic level in National Assessment of Educational Progress tests, and about a quarter scored at the proficient level indicating a need for attention to be placed in the organizational aspect of students as it relates to their achievement ultimately affecting their ninth-grade year. Anderson (2008) suggests

that continued research is needed to address the challenges that ninth-grade students face in transitioning to high school.

Characteristics and Examples of Ninth-Grade Academies

During the 1960s, the American public's concerns about providing a supportive environment for early teenagers started the Middle School Movement that advocated replacing junior high schools serving grades seventh through ninth with middle schools comprising grades sixth through eighth (Mizelle, 1999). The number of middle schools, according to the United States Department of Education, over the past 20 years has mushroomed from 3,916 to 10,205. This transformation shifted most with ninth-grade students from junior high schools. Black (2004) argues, however, with many students struggling to make this transition, some educators second guessed the wisdom of subjecting 14-year-olds to the intense academic and peer pressure of high school.

Peasant (2006) contends that over the years, the challenge of helping 14-year-olds reach academic success continues to be an issue. During the mid-1990s, high schools faced crises that included a 70 percent attendance rate, student unruliness, and high rates of academic failures. Educators then started to rethink the design of high schools that encompassed ninth through twelfth grade students. One approach school personnel considered to combat these issues was the school-within-a-school model (Peasant, 2006). While ninth-grade students attend classes within the high school building, they detach themselves from the 10th through 12th grade students. Black (2004) suggests that the ninth-grade academy is designed with interdisciplinary team

teaching, block scheduling, and curriculum and instruction focusing on core academic subjects.

Houston County High School, located in Georgia, for example, created a special program for ninth-grade students to aid them in successfully making the transition from eighth to ninth grade (Chmelynski, 2004). This school was plagued with issues as high discipline referrals and grade retention. In a school with a population of 2,200 students, ninth-grade students accounted for more than 60% of the discipline referrals. Chmelynski (2004) maintained that six years after the creation of the program, the ninth-grade discipline incidents decreased to 55% and grade retentions were down 46%.

During the first five years of the Houston County Ninth-Grade Academy, students attended classes on a different wing of the high school (Chmelynski, 2004). During the sixth year, the academy moved to its own building. School administrators and counselors created an elective class called High School 101 (Chmelynski, 2004). The curriculum for this subject consisted of time management, conflict resolution, test-taking tactics, learning styles, computer research, study skills, and note-taking tactics.

Freshman academies, in another example, have been incorporated in the Philadelphia school system over the past years. The academies are part of the Talent Development initiative (Chmelynski, 2004). School officials reported a 41% decrease in suspensions and a 50% decline on arrests at schools where ninth-grade academies were a part of the transitional concept. By the fifth year of this model, all 54 high schools within Philadelphia's school system had ninth-grade academies because of the

overwhelming success from the incorporation based on this transition technique (Chmelynski, 2004). The curriculum for the ninth-grade academy curriculum includes two classes each of English and mathematics along with study skills and comprehension classes. The purpose of the academy was to make sure that students succeeded in high school according to Chmelynski (2004). Brough, Bergmann, and Holt (2006) note that students who lacked the basic academic skills in reading, mathematics, and writing became more at risk of failure as the level of content material and expectations increased. These researchers maintain that some students develop coping skills and are passed from grade to grade narrowly. This situation becomes a challenge for teachers to meet the needs of students with such learning challenges. Teachers who are willing to try various techniques, to ensure that students do not get lost in the system, can possibly discourage students from dropping out of school. One school in Tennessee was ready to conquer this issue.

The ninth-grade academy concept started at Chattanooga Central High School, located in Harrison, Tennessee, in 2003 (Chmelynski, 2004). Educators wanted to create a nurturing program that would assist ninth graders in acclimating to high school with less pressure from older students. The program also focused on providing more opportunities for teachers to interact with students in order to assess their needs and help them learn. The Tennessee school reported a drop in suspensions from 29.4% to 17.8% during the first year of the academy (Chmelynski, 2004). Chmelynski (2004) reports similarly that Albany High School, located in New York state, is still effectively

maintaining its ninth-grade academy. The academy is located on the entire third floor of

the high school. Administrators of the 2,600-student school find that the separation

allows the students to more easily learn the building and the teachers to better know

the freshman class (Chmelynski, 2004).

In the South, Dudley High School in Greensboro, North Carolina, during the 1999-

2000 school year decided to experiment with a ninth-grade academy. School officials

took the 100 most academically challenged ninth-grade students and placed them in the

academy. Administrators found that retention and discipline problems decreased while

academic achievement increased (Peasant, 2006). As a result of the success in the first

year, educators expanded the academy to include all ninth-grade students except those

enrolled in the early college program. The school district provided professional

development for the ninth-grade academy teachers at North Carolina A&T State

University. The curriculum for the program included double-dose classes of English,

mathematics, and freshman seminar classes (Peasant, 2006).

A Midwestern high school took a different approach for combating transition

problems as they pertain to ninth graders. The administrators and teachers at this

school created a three phase project with which they surveyed students and assessed

their academic abilities in phases one and two. In phase three of this project, educators

identified students who showed weaknesses by placing them in smaller homerooms.

This arrangement was known as the "Freshman Academy" where students received

instruction in study skills and strategies for organization (Fulk, 2003).

Two large urban high schools experimented with a program to test the effectiveness of a set of reforms at improving ninth-grade students' attendance and academic performance (Quint, Miller, Pastor, & Cytron, 1999). Pulaski High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin implemented the program during the 1995-1996 and 1996-1997 school years and Schlagle High School in Kansas City, Kansas embarked on their program during the 1996-1997 school year. This program, Project Transition was organized with three strategies and a purpose of developing a supportive environment for ninth-grade students and teachers. The first strategy incorporated the establishment of teams that consisted of four core academic teachers on each, with approximately 120 students who rotated through these classes (Quint et al., 1999). The second strategy required the teachers from each team to collaborate on a daily basis to discuss professional development and solutions to student problems. The third strategy included a coach to support the teachers' professional development and attempts to improve instruction in the ninth-grade classes. The coach acted in a "non-supervisory peer" for the teachers. The main function for this person was to improve their professional growth including one-on-one assistance (Quint et al., 1999). Quint et al. (1999) state that Project Transition is successful in improving the environment of the school for ninth-grade students and their teachers. Student relationships with other classmates improved at Pulaski High School, while student relationships with teachers improved at Schlagle High School.

Mizelle (1999) conducted further research on the middle school environment and found that students had a more successful transition when they stayed together using the cohort concept. The students' success was heightened because they stayed with the same teachers through sixth, seventh, and eighth grades where they experienced more hands-on, life–related learning activities, integrated instruction, and cooperative learning groups. Mizelle (1999) reports that these students are more successful than students from the same school who had a more traditional middle school experience.

Holland and Mazzoli (2001) examined a similar program, the Community for Learning Program (CFL), at Sunrise Middle School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Their investigation concluded that the CFL program participants had a greater success rate in their transition to high school than students that did not participate in the program. The CFL program comprised of the following components: (a) support and training for teachers, (b) a learning management system created to help middle school students develop a sense of responsibility for their learning and behavior, and (c) an emphasis on community and family involvement with academies.

Gladston, a midsized Midwestern city, received one of the largest gifts of money offered to a single public school system (Peasant, 2006). The leaders of an industrial company pledged $10 million to rebuild this district's high schools which had been faced with economic problems. School leaders used this opportunity to revamp the high schools by forming a series of academies that focused on a variety of career paths from

which students could choose. The core of the series academies was a school facility designated for ninth-grade students (Peasant, 2006). This section of the school was intended to help freshmen make the smooth transition from middle school to high school. The first stage of the freshman academy, in the 1999-2000 school year; was intended to house approximately one-third of the ninth-grade students from the school district (Peasant, 2006). Eventually, all freshmen attended this academy before entering the tenth grade. The ninth-grade school operated in two sessions (one in the morning and another in the afternoon) and students attended the regular school during the other half of the academic day. The freshmen academy faculty concentrated on developing ways to keep "at risk" students involved in the learning process. Teachers created assignments and tests that allowed students to experience success and achievement (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001).

McIver (1990) found fewer students were retained in the ninth grade when they experienced a high school transition program that contained several diverse expression activities. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) conducted a study of 56 high schools in Georgia and Florida that confirmed schools with extensive transition programs had significantly lower failure and dropout rates than schools that provided students with few expression activities. McIver (1990) concludes that the best transition programs included a variety of activities-in particular, counseling, school visits, and special summer courses to assist students in understanding their new school. In addition, it is essential that there are practices in place at the middle school to help the student transition to the ninth grade.

Ninth-Grade Transition

Adolescents making the shift to high school are taking the beginning steps towards establishing the direction their lives will take. The ninth-grade year especially is the benchmark that determines the future academic success or failure of the student. Either being overage for the grade or repeating a grade can be the top predictor of one dropping out of school (Zoblotsky, 2003).

These realities are reflected nationwide in major urban school districts. In the Memphis City Schools, for example, in the 2009-2010 school year 37% of ninth-grade students were overage for their grade level (defined as 16 or older as of the first day of school). From this particular group, exactly 17% were retained at the end of the year. Also, the cohort dropout rate for the 2009-2010 graduating class was 25.2% with exactly 23% (*N*=566) of the total number of dropouts for the cohort (*N*=2,457) occurring in the ninth-grade class dropped out, and freshman students made up exactly 25.7% of all dropout grades 9-12 for the year.

Exactly 7% of these same freshman students active at the end of the 2009-2010 academic year, failed all four major classes (English, mathematics, science, and social studies). Nearly 16% failed at least one major class. The major class failure rate for males was more than one and one-half times the rate for females (8.7% and 4.9% respectively), and the rate for African American males (9.2%) was more than one and one-half times the rate for African American females (5.4%). Almost 30% of these students failed mathematics, and nearly 22% failed English. The rate for males failing

mathematics (33%) and English (27%) was greater than the rate for females (24% and 16% respectively). The rates for African American males repeating mathematics and English (35% and 29% respectively) were also greater than the rates for African American females (26% and 17% respectively).

The move from middle to high school can be a great adjustment for beginning students. In the transition from middle to high school, students encounter discontinuity from their: (a) environment, (b) educational policies, and (c) social structures (Zoblotsky, 2003). The use of specialized transition programs for freshmen is one tactic the high schools use to help these students adjust to the challenges connected with the transition from middle school to high school. Rice (1997) suggests that research on the effectiveness of these interventions are conflicting, and oftentimes demonstrated the lack of consistency on the definite types of activities school use in the various incarnations of these transition programs (Zoblotsky, 2003).

For instance, while a school-within-school arrangement where students are categorized in teams which share a common set of teachers is a common practice in the ninth-grade academy, various schools differ in their use of other activities such as career orientation and education, social skills development, study skills training, and counseling. Programs also vary in length (e.g. one semester vs. an entire school year), and whether they are focused toward every student or selected students (Zoblotsky, 2003).

The research on freshman transition programs also differs in quality. Various studies do not give the number of students involved, the racial makeup of the participants, or do not take place in school located in the South. Also, none of ninth-grade transition programs featured in research articles explored for this study added on-going professional development for educators or systematic assessment of students as part of its activities. The ninth-grade transition program that will be examined in this study is different from other programs featured in the literature because it explores a ninth-grade transition program in an inner-city, and includes the perspectives of students of color who attend that program.

Ninth-grade framework. It has been previously stated that there is a variation of the maturation process of teenagers. This process varies from three and one-half to five years old (Torres, 2004). As a result, the characteristic needs of middle school students are the same as high school students. Thus, the logic behind the creation of the ninth-grade academy is based on two landmark reports: *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* and *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*.

As more middle schools began to reform, a call for the reformation of education took place (Torres, 2004). In 1989, for example, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development sent off a report for middle school reform titled *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. This report recommended that middle schools take the following steps:

- Set up small communities for learning where students can develop stable, close, friendly relationships with peers and adults. The key components of this recommendation were schools-within-schools, where students were together as teams and small groups to ensure that each student connected with at least one adult (p. 9).

- Enable active, engaged thinking in the middle grades through a common core of academic program where students can critically think. Also, each student should lead a healthy life, behave ethically and awfully, and take the responsibilities of becoming a productive citizen (p. 42).

- Adjust instruction for the students through changes in the curriculum, instruction, or scheduling to ensure that all students achieve (p. 52).

- Conduct staff development that encourages adults who know the students best, teachers, administrators, and counselors (p. 54).

- Hire middle school teachers who have a grasp on working with middle school students, and can serve as mentors to other teachers (p. 9).

- Transform middle schools to meet the need of having adolescents who are physically fit by promoting a healthy environment (p. 61).

- Create an alliance with families and middle grade schools through trust so that teenagers are able to succeed in school. This connection with family could happen by offering parents roles in school governance, informing

them, and offering opportunities for families to support their child's learning

process in school (p. 67).

- Insist that community organizations share responsibility for the middle

    school student's success (p. 70).

Briefly after this publication, middle schools began to reform on a major scale across the

nation (Torres, 2004).

A publication by Gallagher-Polite (2001) notes that various core practices had

begun from research since the release of *Turning Points* that described an efficient

school. These are the following:

- A common commitment to a philosophy that focuses to the student's needs.

- Structures within the school that promotes the use of time and resources.

- A coordinated support system that organizes all parties, students, parents,

    and teachers, into teams.

- A broad-based and integrated curriculum.

- Emphases on advocating for the students.

- Classroom practices that incorporate and challenge students.

- The use of assessments that reflect the content taught in class.

Elementary and middle schools have encountered successful reforms (Torres,

2004). The National Association Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 1996) noted that

the efficient implementation of the middle school concept has led to greater academic

achievement, more personal development, and a positive rapport between the students

and the teachers.

The implementation of the middle school concept called for a reorganization of

primary grades 5-8. Consequently, the traditional grade 7-9 junior high school

disappeared from most school districts. This middle school restructuring meant that

most of the high schools now contained grades 9-12 instead of 10-12. This

reorganization also created a predicament where 25 percent of the high school student

body was younger than their counterparts in previous years (George & McEwin, 1999).

Although a change such as this had great changes for the program and the staff

at the high school level, careful planning for the new ninth-grade students was not

evident (George & Alexander, 1993). A lot of the high school staff members thought that

this change was a simple increase in the number of students. However, in a majority of

the high schools, ninth graders rapidly became the biggest group of students with poor

attendance, lower academic achievement, an increased number of discipline issues,

greater retention rates, and higher dropout rates (George & McEwin, 1999).

In 1996, NASSP with the help of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement

of Teaching published a report that envisioned the modern-day high school titled

Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution. NASSP and Carnegie gave 82

recommendations for the restructuring of American high schools. This research was the

counterpart to the Carnegie Foundation's previous report *Turning Points: Preparing*

American Youth for the 21st Century, which, as stated earlier, was the beginning for the

reorganization of the middle school grades. The 82 recommendations centered on nine

purposes that represented the committee's vision for this nation's high schools. The

nine purposes are the following:

- High schools are a learning community and should commit to achieving

  academic excellence for all its students.

- High schools should function as a traditional experience, getting every

  student ready for the next stage in life, being a productive citizen to society.

- High schools should be a pathway to many other options.

- High schools must prepare students to become life-long learners.

- High schools must provide a basis for good citizenship and for total

  participation in the life of a democratic society.

- High schools must play a part in the personal development of adolescents as

  social beings who have needs that go beyond academic.

- High schools should lay the foundation for students to be able to participate

  effectively in a technical society.

- High schools should assist teenagers for life in a society in which

  interdependency will link their destinies to those from different

  backgrounds.

- High schools must be an institution that unconditionally advocates for its

  students (p. 3).

Using these points as a beginning point, combined with the insight gained from research and the best practices stated in literature, a basis for making recommendations was formed. Using this framework, eighty-two recommendations were set forth by the NASSP and the Carnegie Foundation. These suggestions were placed into three major groups: priorities for renewal, network of support, and educational leadership. Using these areas, major recommendations were enforced for the freshman academy (Torres, 2004).

Key suggestions that the ninth-grade academy adopted were the following:

- The creation of a curriculum that gives knowledge that is necessary for students to succeed and is taught in a way that enables students to make connections with the "real world."

- The use of teaching strategies that engage students to learn. Teachers will assess students and determine which learning styles best serve them. The educator will develop a student who is able to thinking critically think and problem-solve. The success of Latino students, or of any students can often be measured by the extent to which children feel connected to their schools. It is crucial to have teachers that care and help ensure that students want to go to school and have a support network in place (Berkel et al., 2010).

- The creation of an academic environment that encourages an atmosphere of productive teaching and learning. The high school should recognize the various talents and ways of learning to assists adolescents obtain the

meaningful success that leads to further achievement. Each student needs an advocate to help him or her succeed in school (Valenzuela, 2000).

- The organization space and time should be restructured for a more flexible education. High schools need to create small units in which anonymity is dismissed. Gallagher (2002) who interviewed students that dropped out of school maintained that the reorganization of the traditional departmental structure should occur in order to meet the needs of a more integrated curriculum. The creation of flexible scheduling will allow for various uses of time in class in order to meet the requirements of the core curriculum.

The second of the categories developed by *Breaking Ranks*, provided the framework for the implementation of a lot of the reorganizations outlined in priorities for renewal. The recommendations can strengthen or weaken the overall component.

- The creation of a learning community that recognizes the intellectual development of its members and meets the cognitive ability of those involved.

- An understanding and respect for diversity among students and staff. Learning to agree to disagree in a respectful manner.

Lastly, leadership stated in *Breaking Ranks* was an essential element. Without it, little improvement in high schools will occur. Leadership qualities by all individuals need to be recognized and nourished. The components that focus on leadership are as follows:

- The principal should provide leadership by connecting with the high school community and maintaining the vision, direction, and focus on student learning.

- The principal must foster an atmosphere that encourages teachers to take risk for the betterment of the students.

- The central office administrators should play an active role in the long-term strategic planning for the improvement of the schools.

The recommendations and steps noted in *Breaking Ranks* were similar to those stated in *Turning Points*. Torres (2004) suggests that the most implemented suggestion since the release of *Breaking Ranks* is that high schools break into units of no more than 600 students so that teachers and students develop a connection. The implementation of this recommendation shifted to the study of the ninth-grade academy concept.

Research on Ninth-Grade Transition

Ninth-grade transition is a complex process where young adolescents develop physically as well as emotionally and intellectually. Jerome Bruner's educational theory puts value on understanding the goals of education and contends that knowledge and skills are valuable to the learning process. Bruner (1983) maintains that the goals of education are to assist students in developing their full potential, and for them to experience intellectual mastery. Bruner also notes that as students understand what they learn, they can apply new information. The examiner contends that the function of an educator is to assist with the student's intellectual development (Bruner, 1983).

Understanding the cognitive development of adolescents will enable educators to better meet the needs as they transition to high school.

Hirschi's social bonding theory provides a foundation for the positive effects of a high school transition program that places emphasis on the students' social concerns. Chapman and Sawyer (2007) include the research of Hirschi in addressing the need for transition programs from a social aspect. While Hirschi understands that for many students the attachment to school, commitment to academics, and self-belief are not strong, his suggestion is for schools to offer a transition program that addresses the importance of helping students maintain a new pattern of behavior throughout the transition to high school (Chapman & Sawyer, 2007). Although the research is from a period of thirty years prior, the information regarding bonding is essential to ninth-grade transition.

Essential to the topic of ninth-grade transition is the understanding that learning for students (generally) does not happen in the same manner. McCarthy (2000) addresses the topic of learning through what is termed the natural cycle that each one goes through when learning. This researcher suggests that obtaining an understanding of the process will benefit our lives and create more opportunity for society (McCarthy, 2000). McCarthy (2000) describes his experiences as a teacher who attracts those students who dislike school and act out their hatred, to his classroom understanding. He also contends that the anger is in reality fear. McCarthy (2000) attributes his quest for

understanding the educational process to his teaching experiences where he observed

those who hated school as those capable of achievement.

The International Resilience Project (2002), for example, explored ways of

assisting children to cope with transitions through an emphasis on feelings of well-being

and the promotion of resilience. Researchers conducted this project to address

teenagers with disabilities or social needs as they moved from one school to another in

transition. However, the points made in this study are consistent with the challenges of

transition for all young people. Anderson (2008) argues that the key quality needed to

trigger resilience and recovery is the ability to see childhood adversities in a new way

and to recognize that one has power over their destiny (Blackburn, 2002).

Coping with change and transition is a complex process even for those students

who are self-confident and resourceful. Walker (2000), for example, contends that this

process involves an evolution in which the mind reconstructs itself and adapts to new

circumstances. He also suggests that an understanding of the construct theory may be

relevant where a person experiences a rapid breakout from the crisis phase and begins

the restructuring or recovery process.

Teacher expectations. Researchers have examined how students' responses to

school-leveled structures and practices have contributed to social reproduction

(Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The interplay of these factors contributed to continued

inheritance of privilege for the dominant culture and pervasive disadvantages for poor

students and students of color. One of the possible explanations of these patterns lies in the teacher's expectations.

The importance of relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement is viewed as both a reason and a solution to the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teacher expectations, reflecting teacher beliefs, tend to shape what the teacher attempts to elicit from the students and what students expect of themselves. Table 3 reflects some of the research pertaining to teacher expectations and teacher self-efficacy and their impact on student achievement.

The research on teacher expectations notes that teacher expectations for academic ability are lower for low-income African American and Latino students than for their counterparts in the dominant culture. Low teacher expectations lead to reduction of the student's self-esteem and lack of motivation in terms of effort in school and they lead teachers to give less-challenging assignments and have fewer to no connections with the students (Diamond et al., 2004).

Teacher expectations can be examined from the perspective of teacher-student interactions or from an organizational focus to demonstrate school context conditions and how teachers evaluate and behave toward students. Teacher beliefs about the students' capabilities along with their own sense of responsibility for student learning affect student achievement (Diamond et al., 2004). Diamond et al. (2004) purport that for students in mainly low-income African American and Latino students and low-

income students than on Caucasian students. They also argue that racial stereotypes influence teacher expectations.

The school's climate gives direction to beliefs about student capabilities, suggesting that the current set of beliefs and practices within the school context tend toward lower expectations, followed by a reduced sense of responsibility for students (Diamond et al., 2004). One such organizational indicator of teacher expectations for student learning is collective responsibility (Lee & Smith, 2001). In school where teachers and administrators collectively have high expectations for student-learning, students demonstrate greater academic achievement. For Lee and Smith (2001), collective responsibility entailed the teacher's internalization of responsibility for student learning, their willingness to adjust teaching to student needs, and a sense of self-efficacy in their instructional practices. Diamond et al. (2004) posit that teacher expectations have a positive impact on student achievement when teachers feel responsible for student learning, despite students' academic challenges. School leadership works to increase teacher expectations and to create organizational structures and occasions intended to increase a sense of responsibility in teachers through professional development.

Teacher expectations can be influenced by the teacher's sense of personal self-efficacy, which is the understanding that the teacher is capable of bringing about the desired outcomes of the students' learning. Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy believe that their students are capable of learning and mastering the curriculum, and

that they (teachers) are capable of motivating and instructing students (Ormrod, 2006).

Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy themselves are highly motivated. They are

more willing to experiment with new ideas and instructional strategies, have high

expectations and set high goals for students, put more effort into their teaching, and

show more persistence in helping students to learn and master the material (Ormrod,

2006). Efficacy and expectations affect teachers' choices, goals, and persistence and are

in part the result of teachers' attributions for student success or failure. A strong

connection exists between teacher expectations and teacher self-efficacy, resulting

from the similarity of the effects of each (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000).

To comprehend how teacher expectations influence their actions in the

classrooms, the construct of self-regulated learning should be examined. Self-regulated

learners judge their performance in relation to goals, generate feedback about progress

toward goals, and make adjustments to goals or further actions or behaviors based on

that feedback (Marzano, 2003). Within the context of teaching this would translate into

holding high expectations of students, monitoring student progress toward

understanding those expectations, and adjusting instructional methods or strategies

when existing actions do not result in the desired outcomes.

Goals are central to self-regulated learning because they drive what is focused

on and determine the monitoring and feedback that are the catalysts of self-regulation

(Marzano, 2003). Goal setting, feedback, and the monitoring of student progress are

characteristic in efficient schools. Feedback, in turn, regulates engagement and

decisions and actions. Together, they provide information about goal achievement and the teacher's ongoing engagement in the task of improving student achievement in line with the goals. Low expectations yield limited incentive to change student goals or the methods employed to achieve the goals. In contrast, high expectations suggest that those goals that may positively affect expectations and the sustaining of the goals are more likely to be obtained. Timperley and Phillips (2003) posit that teacher expectations, self-efficacy, and self-directed learning provide the conceptual framework for positing the possibility of changing and maintaining expectations through professional development. Consideration of the impact of teacher expectations and the structures and systems highlighted in the literature leads to further inquiry into the significance of an efficient classroom pedagogy that facilitate the achievement by students of color.

Teacher expectations of student achievement are often centered on beliefs about race and student ability (Brown & Medway, 2007). The social construct of race can produce attitudes and funds of knowledge that affect the teacher's perspective about students of color. As permeable mental structures, belief systems are susceptible to change according to experience. The dual relationship between belief and practice is centered on beliefs being influenced by practical achievement by low-income African American and Latino students. This suggests that stigmatized groups are prone to adverse expectations by educators and likely to have such expectations lead to self-fulfilling prophecies of poor academic achievement. Low expectations are likely to have

sustaining effects on children's performance and might be powerful for young African American and Latino students as they begin their schooling. As a result, these perceptions become the goals of these students and the instructional curriculum correlate with those expectations (Timperley & Phillips, 2003).

Despite claims of having great expectations for students of color, teachers often demonstrate no visible signs of disappointment when students of color perform poorly academically. Such nonverbal demonstrations suggest the actual level of teacher expectations. A teacher's construct of race influences the teacher's self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy increases when teachers address issues of race at the classroom level because there is a reduction in teacher anxiety about the capabilities of African American and Latino students (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

The cognitive perspective stresses that one of the most effective ways to change beliefs is to present information that is discrepant with those beliefs. The change process may be iterative in that changes in beliefs, actions, or outcomes are shaped and built by each other (Timperley & Phillips, 2003). Timperley and Phillips (2003) propose that professional development should address student achievement, teachers' sense of self-efficacy, and provision of domain-specific new knowledge, such as how to teach a task or the nature of a task. This triangulated focus assists to shape teacher goals for students, cues to which teachers attend, such as achievement, self-esteem, and behavior, and monitoring of their behavior through self-regulating activities, leading to more efficient instructional practices.

Classroom instructional practices that have been efficient for students of color in high poverty school districts differ in the literature, even though many are consistent throughout. Instructional strategies connected to constructing meaning for comprehension, writing, developing oral language skills and phonics, and vocabulary development have been effective. In some cases, instruction based on Vygotsky's theoretical tenet of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been noted (Levine et al., 2000). He reveals that implementation of the comprehensive development instructional strategies program was effective for students of color. The instructional strategies embedded in this program used higher-order thinking skills and meta-cognitive strategies included regular classroom instruction as a result of large-scale ongoing professional development.

Morris (2004) suggests that highly qualified teachers and stability of staff are contributors to increased achievement in African American and Latino students. There should be a heavy reliance on the interrelationship between parents and teaches and a value of the African American and Latino repertoire and interaction styles (Gay, 2000). Their establishment of trust is crucial. Supportive classroom climate transcends race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender (Brophy, 2000). He purports that the teacher is a model, displaying maturity and caring, connecting with and building on prior knowledge and experiences, including culture. Cultural affirmation displayed in various school milieus, such as assemblies and hallway displays, rather than specifically through curriculum, suggests culturally responsive pedagogy and respect (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

An ambience and interaction style that fosters understanding of history and culture, such as culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy, can contribute to greater achievement by students of color (Lynn, 2006). Schools with strong leadership and a school culture that promotes great expectations for students' achievement promote high performance for African American and Latino students (Izumi, 2002). Cooperative learning groups as an instructional strategy have been shown effective for students of color (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). Academic achievement increases with this group and with students from underrepresented groups as a result of the implementation of this strategy. Culture can be a causal factor in this achievement, as cultural patterns within the historical context of their community are centered more on cooperation and interdependence than on competition and individualism, which is the Eurocentric classroom instructional model. This speaks to the importance of considering student culture in instructional program development and implementation (Ormrod, 2006).

Issues Reflected in the Purpose of the Ninth-Grade Academies

Educators have concerns for their ninth grade transition programs (Bourdeaux, 2002). Bourdeaux (2002) notes that general problem of concerns are data management, collection and lack of support. Data management and collection are a major weakness in the ninth-grade academy's purpose. Bourdeaux (2002) maintains that oftentimes it is limited and inconsistent. Without a systematic study of data over time, it is difficult to determine whether or not the program is meeting its goals. Also, administrators cannot

be certain what sustains the transition programs or how much students actually gain

from its participation without the proper management.

Schools do not know whose responsibility it is to collect the data for ninth-grade

academy students (Bourdeaux, 2002). Assistant principals generally keep this data;

however, this practice has its limitations. For example, the assistant principals do not

have the expertise or the time to collect, manage, and assess the data. Generally,

neither the principal nor the staff in central office seems to understand the full purpose

of the ninth-grade academy. In short, ninth-grade transition programs have not become

embedded in the school organization (Bourdeaux, 2002). They are a fragile intervention

effort that depends on the goodwill of a handful of educators. The programs are subject

to the pressure of the economy or the political climate from central office. Whether

ninth-grade transition programs continue in the future may depend on how well

administrators collect and present data that shows a compelling need for such programs

(Bourdeaux, 2002).

Support for the ninth-grade transition programs in Torres's (2004) study, for

example was limited. Freshmen Seminar classes rested on the work of a committed,

caring team of teachers and a determined assistant principal who watched over the

program and secured the resources from the principal. Principals generally have limited

involvement in the transition programs and relied on the assistant principals to keep

them informed (Torres, 2004). Other teachers and administrators who are outside the

ninth-grade academy typically take little or no interest in ninth-grade affairs because

they have their own tasks to perform. Many times, teachers actively criticize the effort, claiming that the transition programs were too expensive, in terms of personnel, and placed a burden on the rest of the staff. Torres (2004) also states that sometimes, the central office contributed to the demise of the ninth-grade academies. Whenever the central office administrators are cutting programs, or weighing what programs benefit the greatest number of students, oftentimes, ninth-grade academy classes (e.g. Freshman Seminar) will get cancelled, no matter how well it meets the needs of the students.

Educators who seek to design and implement a ninth-grade transition program may find the following recommendations when developing a plan of action. First, it is critical to understand the nature of the problem and to collect data, especially on academic achievement (grades) and behavior patterns (attendance, tardies, and referrals) of ninth graders. From this information, the school staff can determine what, if any additional support of the ninth graders is needed. Second, it is important to take the time to determine the needs of ninth graders in school. Program planners should talk to students, teachers, and parents about the need for a transition program. They should visit other schools with ninth-grade programs and talk to educators about their experiences with transition programs. School leaders should hold team meetings with staff from various departments and send the teachers on visits to other high schools in search of practices that might improve instruction at their particular school.

Accountability. Understanding and rectifying the achievement gap between Caucasian and students of color is an important task for various reasons, especially in light of federal and state mandates that hold schools and districts responsible for ensuring that academic achievement of all their students (Zoblotsky, 2003). The use of standardized tests to measure student achievement, the disaggregation of data by factors such as race, gender, English speaking ability, and special education status, the publication of assessment results for public consumption, and dramatic consequences for failing to raise achievement for all student subgroups are becoming a reality in many school districts across the nation.

For many large school systems, emphasis is placed heavily on testing to determine the fate and worth of students, teachers, and administrators. A look at the number of states using criterion-referenced tests aligned to state standards at the high school level illustrates the number is high, and will continue to rise. During the 2001-02 academic year: (a) 45 states had an English/language arts assessment, (b) 42 states had a mathematics assessment, (c) 24 states had a science assessment, and (d) 20 states had a social studies/history assessment (NCES, 2002).

Based on the 2002-2003 academic year, almost half of every public school student, and more than half of all minority public school students, lived in the 18 states with exit exam requirements. These assessments were important because either alone or in conjunction with other requirements, they were used to determine if a student would graduate from high school. By 2008, nearly 70% of public school students and

80% of students of color were subjected to exit exams in at least 24 states (Zoblotsky, 2003). Again, the outlook for African American and Latino students appear bleak, compared to Asian and white students, were less likely to pass their exit exams on their first attempt. In Indiana, for example, in the 2001-2002 academic year only about one-third of African American students passed mathematics and English/language arts exit exams on their first attempt (Chudowsky, Kober, Gayler, & Hamilton, 2002). The state takeover of the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania public schools was one example of the aftermath of poor achievement in a district populated heavily with students of color. In addition, there were 23 states that have passed laws authorizing state or municipal governments to seize control of school districts under crisis (Zoblotsky, 2003).

The majority of districts in crisis have a large population of students of color. *Education Week*, for example, reported that all but 3 of the 21 public school districts have relinquished power to mayors or state agencies in recent years had predominately African and Latino student enrollments, and most were at least 80% nonwhite. Also, six out of eight districts that were threatened with takeovers were predominately minority, and three were at least 93% nonwhite (Reinhard, 1998).

Current national legislation could further the burden on school districts with great numbers of low performing students. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* had as one of its stated goals, "Closing the achievement gaps between . . . minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., "Statement of Purpose," para. 3). This law

demands that: (a) states create standards for what students should know and learn for each grade, (b) states assess the students' progress toward achieving standards beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, (c) every state, school district, and school make adequate yearly progress toward meeting state standards for every subgroup of students (e.g. economically disadvantaged, racial groups, and exceptional students), and (d) school and district performance be publicly reported (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Consequences under the legislation for schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress toward achieving state standards include allowing parents with a child enrolled in a failing school to: (a) transfer their child to a higher performing public school or public charter school, and (b) use federal education funds for supplemental education services like tutoring, after school services, and summer school programs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). After four consecutive years of failure, school districts would have to replace faculty. After five consecutive years of failure, schools would be identified for restructuring, which could include a state takeover, hiring a private management contractor, converting to a charter school, or major staff restructuring (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Student attendance. The student's attendance plays an important role in their academic success. If the child is not in school, they cannot possibly learn. A non-profit organization in Princeton, New Jersey, the Mathematics Policy Research, analyzed that the greatest predictor of dropouts were high absenteeism (Martinez & Martinez, 2002). Although very little statistics related solely to ninth-grade attendance is available, public

school attendance in high school is available. The National Center for Education Statistics (2006), in another example, found that an average of six percent of all students were absent on a typical school day in 1993-1994, in a study of public, private, urban, and rural schools. From each urban site examined, the public school students were more likely to be absent than the private school students. When public schools were the focus, the absentee rate was lowest in rural schools and highest in urban settings. Importantly, statistics from this research denote that in public urban settings, the absentee rate increases with the school grades (Torres, 2004).

Income, race, and the transitioning to high school. Out of all students, African American and Latino students are most likely to struggle from their transition to high school. Legters and Kerr (2000), for example, posit that ninth-grade students in high poverty, high minority schools have lower attendance and promotion rates, a lower percentage passing their state (Maryland) mathematics test, and a greater dropout rate than students in low poverty, low minority schools.

Neild and Weiss (1999) define a high poverty, highly attended minority school as one with more than 50% student of color representation and more than 25% eligible for free or reduced-priced meals while, a highly low minority school had a less than 20% minority presence and less than 10% of students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. Neild and Weiss (1999) also note that a significantly greater percentage of ninth-grade students whose families receive public aid fail their core classes of English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Social and cultural capital. There are studies that support social and cultural factors that affect the academic achievement gap, even though they are not revealed in national reports about the achievement disparities (Bennett, 2001; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ogbu, 1995a, 1995b). Consideration should be given to the capital that the student brings to the learning process and how they are used within the educational system. As a result, there is a need to elaborate on social and cultural capital as it pertains to achievement.

A study of educational outcomes from the perspective of social and cultural capital has been addressed by various researchers in the field (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Regardless of the contradictions in their studies, there are common themes. For example, Bourdieu (1986) views social capital as an investment in the dominant class to reinforce and maintain group solidarity and to preserve their dominant position in society. In other words, it is a means from which the controlling class maintains its dominance through networking in terms of information and resources. Bourdieu's definition operates on the premise that people who are successful in society have resources to continue to be successful. He argues that social capital is comprised of social obligations or connections that can be converted into economic capital (Dika & Singh, 2002). Bourdieu (1986) views this as the cause for injustices in academic achievement and the lack of development in human capital. Based on the organizational structure of public schools nationwide, the social capital of educated middle-class Caucasian families is more conducive to educational success than

is the social capital of less-educated or families in poverty (Mickelson, 2003). The rationale for creating this sort of social reproduction lies in the construct of race created by Caucasians that ensures that people of color are viewed as less than equal to Caucasian Americans and therefore less entitled to equal access to resources.

In contrast, Coleman (1988), whose research is frequently referenced to in educational literature (Dika & Singh, 2002) views social capital as intangible, taking the forms of trust as evidenced by obligations and expectations, information channels, and norms and sanctions that promote the general good over self-interest. Coleman's (1988) theory suggests the significance of social networks, as does the work of Bourdieu (1986), however, it centers generally on the inherent structure of relationships that serve as the social structure facilitating the emergence of effective norms. Coleman (1988) contends that it is the expectations and involvement of such social structures as the family that determines their child's opportunities for academic success and that social capital should stem from family relationships. Thus, Coleman's (1988) research supports the idea that it is the family's responsibility to the values and norms required to advance their children's opportunities for academic success. Bourdieu's (1986) work, however, stresses the structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources resulting from class, race, and gender (Dika & Singh, 2002).

The focus on relationships as the core of social capital rings true from Stanton-Salazar's (1997) perspective. His social capital conceptual framework addresses the socialization of underrepresented groups in the context of the intrinsic mechanism of

mainstream institutions, such as schools, that account for difficulties in the

accumulation of social capital for low-socioeconomic status students (Bennett, 2001).

Stanton-Salazar (1997) researched the inequity of opportunities for entering various

social and institutional contexts that led to the establishment of relationships with

teachers and others at school. These individuals have control over resources that

facilitate greater access to social capital.

The importance of multicultural competence, as noted in Bennett's (2001)

research on multicultural education, is within the context of cultural capital. If the

educational system is not inclusive in its consideration of attributes of the diverse

cultures of its students as they relate to the value systems and learning styles of the

students, then it continues to maintain a system that perpetuates the advancement of

the dominant group at the expense of minority groups. This is evident in the

disproportionate number of African American and Latinos in special education classes

(Bennett, 2001; Skiba et al., 2005). Even when students of color attain a level of

education that is competitive with that of the dominant group, particularly at the

secondary level, the dominant group creates methods that systemically continue to

keep others from attaining a higher level of education. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977)

and Bowles and Gintis (1976) address this in reference to cultural capital. Lareau and

Horvat (1999) show that the value of cultural capital is reliant on the social setting and

the skills of parents and students at utilizing their cultural capital resources, in addition

to how schools respond to and legitimize their social capital. Mickelson (2003) maintains

that these factors create moments of inclusion or exclusion for families. The combined effects of historical racial discrimination and school structures and operations make it more problematic for African American and Latino parents, regardless of their socioeconomic status, to use their cultural capital on behalf of their children.

Other studies (Monkman, Ronald, & Theramene, 2005; Ream, 2005) have researched academic achievement through the conceptual framework of social and cultural capital. Each of the studies involved students between first and eighth grades in urban schools with students of low socioeconomic status who were either Mexican American or immigrants from Central America. The researchers studied their effects on achievement from different perspectives, even though the key constructs were social and cultural capital. Ream (2005) for example, studied the relationship between the two constructs and student mobility in order to demonstrate a connection between low average test scores and the instability of the students' social networks. The instability of these networks was argued to be linked with high transient rates. The research also made comparisons between the utility of various forms of social capital, taking into consideration the impact on achievement of teenagers close peer relationships. This longitudinal study incorporated data from the National Education Longitudinal study of 1988. The results indicated an increase on test scores, especially since the correlation of scores from each year was large during high school. The student's mobility may compromise the cumulative effects as a result of the negative impact on peer social capital.

In conjunction with Ream's (2005) study on the relationship between social and cultural capital, Monkman et al. (2005) reveals their function not on mobility, but on how they function on literacy and socio-cultural contexts of learning. Teachers assign greater social and educational value to social and cultural knowledge than to academic knowledge. This is in contrast to what other researchers have concluded regarding the devaluation of social and cultural knowledge by the dominant culture (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999a, 1999b; Lopez, 2003; Ogbu, 1995a, 1995b).

Discourse regarding the social capital theory works on the premise of disconnectedness among African American institutions (Morris, 2004). Historically, each African American school was an integral component of African American families and communities. In various ways, policies of desegregation fractured those relationships as the policies were centered on the notion that African American students would have more access to social capital if they attended middle-class white schools. In many instances, once enrolled in these schools, the students encountered discrimination through such systems as tracking and disproportionate discipline, as well as disproportionate referrals to special education programs (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005), which led to lack of access to social capital. As a result, social capital, as explained by Coleman (1988), did not provide a sufficient explanation in terms of African American educational experiences because it ignores: (a) the importance of the dominant group's interest; (b) the impact of race and racism on the extent to which African Americans can obtain social capital in White settings (Lareau & Horvat, 1999); and (c) the socio-

historical experiences of African Americans (Morris, 2004). Thus, Bourdieu's (1986) view

of social capital explains how the ideology of "whiteness" has ensured the continued

domination of African Americans in education and society. Regardless, African

Americans have demonstrated efforts amid adverse structural forces and have used

their social and cultural capital to positively influence African American students'

education.

One of the setbacks of social and cultural capital, Dika and Singh (2002) argue, is

that the current framework serves to describe rather than explain the effects of

inequality on educational outcomes, thus having the potential of being viewed from a

deficit perspective. The issues of power and domination are not addressed nor are the

connections between lack of connections to institutional agents, forces, and patterns of

discrimination. Knowledge of the social and cultural resources accessible to or denied to

students of color creates a greater comprehension of their impact on achievement.

However, the construct of race continues to determine educational opportunities and

pathways to achievement for underrepresented groups. The most recent theoretical

framework to focus on this phenomenon is CRT.

Critical Race Theory

A study of the organizational structures and systems as they connect to

underrepresented groups of students should incorporate an explanation of racism and

its implications, which are oftentimes overlooked (Lynn, 2006). To that extent, CRT has

been explored within the past years as a theoretical framework through which these

structures and systems can be explored. An outgrowth of the dissatisfaction with the pace of racial reform in the post-civil rights era, CRT begins from the challenge of researchers of the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in the American legal system. Legal scholars key to this theory include Bell (1995a), Lawrence (1993), Matsuda (1995), Delgado (1995), and Crenshaw (1995).

CRT started in the 1990s with an increasing critical analysis of scholarship in education (Neal, 2008). Based on evaluating certain educational policies, supporters of CRT concluded that the law restricted the educational access for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). Ladson-Billings's (1999b) study provides exposure to qualitative research in education essential to CRT. Based on this study, CRT is examined as a lens through which to explore educational practices. It is a method of examining the impact of racism on education (Neal, 2008).

Even though obstacles exist that comprise academic achievement for students of color, there are researcher-based structural and systematic practices that contribute to high student performance in inner-city, high poverty school districts (Marzano, 2003). Several researchers have been noted previously in this review for their recommendations on closing the achievement gap. Edmonds (1982) reveals various characteristics of effective schools that are seen in the current literature (Levine et al., 2000; Levine & Ornstein, 1993; Marzano, 2003) are evident in inner-city, high poverty school districts. These features include high expectations for students, strong administrative leadership, emphasis on learning fundamental skills, monitoring student

progress, and a safe and orderly environment (Levine et al., 2000). Organizational

structures recommend those policies and procedures that serve as mechanisms for

school functions, such as funding mechanisms, class size, program regulations, and

personnel issues.

Systematic practices facilitate goal achievement for school through the provision

of coordinated utilization of resources like professional development, parental

involvement, accountability systems, data-driven decision making, school leadership,

and academic climate (Fermanich et al., 2006). In addressing organizational structures

and systems Marzano (2003) developed a triangulated approach (seen in Figure 1) in

assessing the impact of these factors on student achievement: school, teacher, and

student factors. School factors include a guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging

goals and feedback, parent and community involvement, and collegial professionalism;

instructional strategies, classroom management, and curriculum design are designated

as teacher influencing factors. Home environment, intelligence, and motivation

complete the triangle as student factors. A comparison of research on factors affecting

student achievement can be seen in Table 3. Even though there is a variation in terms

among researchers, the same conceptual themes remain the same. These organizational

structures have been effective and have compromised the racial theories that have

been the basis for previous instruction. Figure 1 shows the hierarchy of structures

leading to the student's academic achievement.
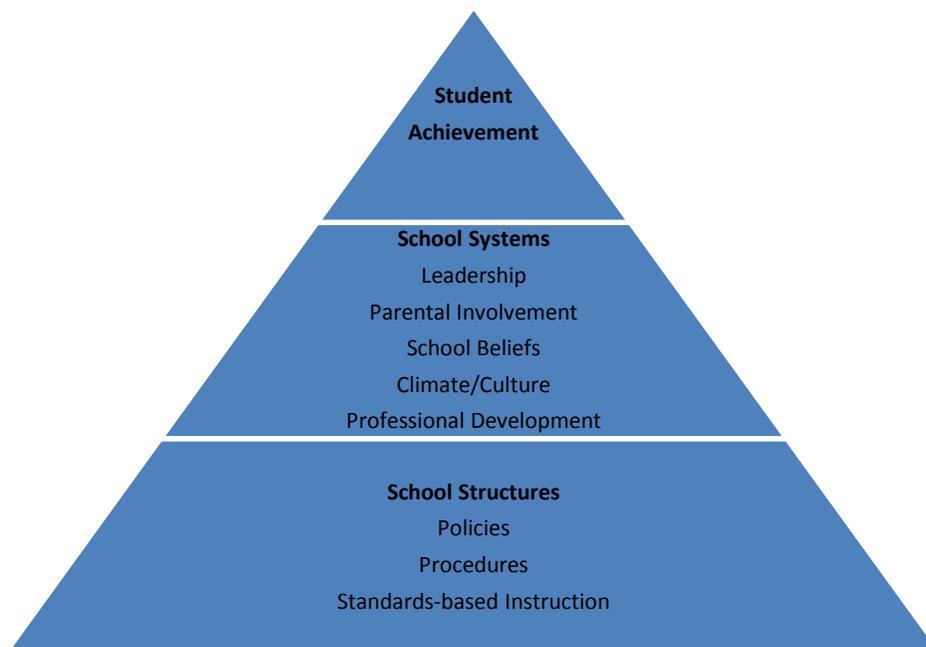
Figure 1. Implementation of effective school structures and systems that lead to student achievement.

Table 3. Effective Systems and Structures

Researcher	Date	Participants	Methodology	Effectiveness
Carter	2000	21 schools (3 charter, 3 private, 1 rural, 1 religious, 15 public) at or above the 65th percentile; 75% or more qualify for free and reduced lunch; multiethnic but mainly African American and Latinos; grades Pk-12	Qualitative: interviews and observations	-Strong leadership -Systems of accountability -Parental involvement -Qualified teachers -Professional development -Time on task -Cohesive curriculum -Funding

Table 3 (cont.)

Researcher	Date	Participants	Methodology	Effectiveness
Barth et al.	1999	336 elementary and secondary schools; low income; multiethnic, rural and suburban	Qualitative study: surveys	-Standards-based curriculum and instruction -Assessment system -Professional development -Parental involvement -Monitoring student progress -Accountability system -Support for "at risk" students -Increased instructional time
Morris	2004	350 PK-5 students; African American; average 97% on free/reduced price lunch; Chapter 1 funds 2 schools	Useful sampling: case studies which included surveys, interviews and observations	-Strong leadership -Parental involvement -Teacher collaboration -High expectations -Culturally relevant curriculum
Izumi	2002	8 high performing high schools in California; 80% of students on free/reduced lunch at each school; elementary schools of mainly African American and Latino students; API scores 7 or below	Qualitative study: included observations and interviews	-Professional development -Goal oriented -Strong leadership -High expectations -Parental involvement -Frequent assessments -Teacher collaboration -Cohesive planning; curriculum, standards and assessments aligned

Table 3. (cont.)

Researcher	Date	Participants	Methodology	Effectiveness
Pressley, Gaskins, Solic, & Collins	2006	206 students; ages 6-14; majority Caucasian (11 African American, 2 Asian, 3 Latino; middle and upper middle class	Qualitative, including observations and interviews	-Strong leadership -Parental involvement -Qualified teachers -High expectations -Professional development -Frequent assessments -Safe and orderly environment

Learning to critically and analytically examine race relations is a key component of CRT. Recognizing that racism is a part of society, and working to improve the conditions is more progressive than the simplistic "color blind" approach. Examining what sociologists assert as "micro-aggressions" can help society to understand the extent of racism in the United States, and through critical analysis, we can begin to work past it (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Even though CRT began within the legal profession, it has spread through many other disciplines. For instance, educators may find CRT very important to their understanding of classroom dynamics, academic testing, and curriculum bias (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

One of the more recent developments in CRT is a questioning of the normative acceptance of the dominant culture. It looks at such issues as how certain groups, e.g. the Irish began as an "other" category, before "becoming" white (Dixson & Rousseau,

2006). CRT also looks into how racial pride in being white can manifest in acceptable

ways, and how it can grow into white supremacy. In addition, it may consider what

whites can do to aid the critical examination of race without abusing their position of

power (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Key theoretical elements of CRT are as follows:

1. A criticism of the limitations of an immediate and simplistic approach to
   resolving racism

2. Story-telling and counter-storytelling

3. Revisionists interpretations of American civil rights laws and programs

4. Applying insights from social science writings on race and racism

5. How do race, sex, and class connect

6. The significance of cultural nationalism/separatism

7. Legal institutions and critical pedagogy

8. Criticism and self-criticism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

One major component of CRT is the creation of space where those from

marginalized groups feel comfortable and are encouraged to share their perspective.

Through the theoretical lens of CRT, the stories of students of color in the freshman

academy can be legitimized as they engage with viewpoints that challenge the status

quo. This legitimization of students' stories is an example of counter-stories (Stovall,

2005). These counter-stories will enable the examiner to take as the starting point for

analysis the first-hand experiences of those people who have intimate knowledge of racism in their lives.

Historical Overview

The educational trends in the United States suggest that the development of an educational system is based on the dominant culture's belief that education is for those of high socioeconomic status (Neal, 2008). The inequality of schools, evidenced by limited funding, inadequate facilities, and poorly trained teachers, is the result of legally sanctioned segregation, which has created a dual system of education. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 validated the doctrine of separate but equal. The Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. This case meant discontinuing racially segregated schools and mandating desegregated education.

Race-based educational inequality was recognized, and it provided an important stimulus for the modern-day civil rights movement for marginalized and other disenfranchised peoples of color (Weinstein et al., 2004). Opportunities for education were expanded through additional federal legislation and court decisions, including Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, Title IX of the Educational Amendment Act in 1972, *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974, and the Education for All Handicapped Children in 1975 (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Despite the changes resulting from the *Brown* case, more than 60 years later, there is a disparity in the educational outcomes between students of color and their

counterparts of the dominant culture (Neal, 2008). The results from the National

Assessment of Educational Programs (NAEP), a national test of school districts for

grades 4, 8, and 12 revealed that in the 1970s and 1980s, there appeared to be a

narrowing in the achievement gap among diverse populations (Johnson, 2002). The

narrowing of this gap was attributed to President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty,

and the federal government's increase in funding for public schools (Johnson, 2002).

The 1990s, however, showed a reversal of this trend, the gap widened again

(Marzano, 2003). There were higher dropout rates among students of color. The data

from the Education Trust (2004) reveals greater discipline rates, such as suspensions,

and fewer students of color enrolled in advanced placement courses. Gardner and

Miranda (2001) show evidence of the disproportionate placement of these students in

special education classes. The gap exists among the aforementioned group regardless of

socioeconomic status, and is evident from elementary through postsecondary

education. As a result of this issue, there is a concern involving equity and educational

opportunity for everyone (Neal, 2008).

In light of the inequity in education highlighted in this historical perspective,

actions have been taken to narrow the achievement gap through reform of school

organizational structures. These reform efforts started with the study of educational

opportunities for students of color during President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty

(Marzano, 2003). As part of that strategy, the results from a survey in educational

opportunities for students of color in the Coleman Report spoke to the variance in the

impact of schools and family backgrounds on the student's achievement. In addition, this report suggested that public schools did little to change the variance in achievement between the wealthy and poor students (Marzano, 2003). Also, little evidence exists to suggest that the school's reform can improve its influence on the student's achievement.

A Reinterpretation of Ineffective Civil Rights Law

Students of color currently are more segregated than ever before. Bell (1983) suggests even though African Americans constitute 12 percent of the national population, they are the majority in 21 of the 22 largest urban school districts (Banks, 1991). Bell (1983) argues that instead of providing better educational opportunities, school desegregation has meant increased "white flight," along with a loss of African American educators. Lomotey and Staley's (1990) study of Buffalo's "ideal" desegregation program reveals that African American and Latino students receive little support from their school system. The academic achievement of the African American and Latino students dropped, while their suspension rate increased. On the other hand, the desegregation plan provided special magnet programs and extended daycare of which whites took advantage (Lomotey & Staley, 1990). Dixson and Rousseau (2006) argue that Buffalo has a "model" program because of the benefits that the whites receive from school desegregation, and their support of the school district's desegregation program. Lomotey and Staley (1990) concluded that the "model"

desegregation program became one that ensured that whites were contented, regardless of whether students from marginalized groups achieved or not.

Research on Critical Race Theory

CRT should operate as a call to work in addressing the predicament of children of color in education. Stovall (2005) suggests that CRT is not the total cure all, but instead a means by which to identify the function of racism as an institutional and systematic phenomenon. As a challenge to educators, CRT operates as a call to get from behind the desk and actively challenge the issues we understand to be "endemic" throughout urban education. Through the efforts from various groups (parents, teachers, and administrators) the work aims to forge alliances with existing groups who have engaged in a collaborative effort to meet the needs of African American and Latino students.

Also, CRT calls for the necessity of non-conventional approaches in challenging hegemony in urban schools. Community-based programs are included in this model. Coupled with CRT, educators should work with community-based organizations in expanding theoretical constructs to reveal an untold story (Stovall, 2005). By doing so, CRT supports the ability of African American and Latino students to see themselves as worthwhile individuals. Within the process, the inclusion of their experiences in the school setting is essential. As Yamamoto (1999) challenges legal scholars to engage in praxis to tackle complex issues, the same disputes should confront the educators.

Moreover, CRT can aid in the network between community members, educators, parents, and students (Bonner, 2009). Although the work is often difficult and trying, it

does not dilute its importance. Conflicting opinions and approaches often complicate the establishment of solutions. Sometimes, the failures outnumber the success, but none serve as an excuse not to grapple with the realities of urban education (Bonner, 2009). When educators bring issues of oppression to the forefront of the students' consciousness, then educators no longer passively perpetuate the cycle, because they are using student diversity as a positive means to facilitate productive discussions about issues of oppression, race, and the status quo (Bonner, 2009).

One of the recurring themes that characterize CRT is the battle for equal opportunity (Neild, 2008). This notion of equality is associated with the idea that students of color should have equal access to the same school opportunities such as curriculum, instruction, funding, and facilities as children from the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). Neild (2008) asserts that CRT speaks to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school funding which may also be included as components of school organizational structures and systems.

CRT theorists suggest that, under the guise of scientific rationalism, intelligence testing has long been a means by which to legitimize African American and Latino students' deficiencies (Neild, 2008). The system of assessment has led to disproportionate representation in special education. This inappropriate curriculum in conjunction with ineffective instruction manifests in poor student performance on traditional assessment measures that often fail to assess what the students actually know and are capable of doing. Also, Ladson-Billings (1999a) notes the differentiated

methods of school funding, such as property taxes leave schools in high-poverty areas with limited fiscal resources to implement an educational program consistent with that of their Caucasian counterparts in more affluent areas of the district. This structure puts high–poverty students at an academic disadvantage and further extends the achievement gap (Neild, 2008).

One of the setbacks found in the research of CRT is that there is limited research on the specific outcomes of its application in the classroom (Neild, 2008). Researchers speak to curriculum, assessment, instruction, and other areas of the educational system that have been affected by racist practices (Ladson-Billings, 1999b). There is research on CRT as it applies to teacher education and specific legal cases in education (Neild, 2008). There appears to be minimal statistical evidence to indicate a direct correlation between the application of CRT and educational outcomes. However, there is evidence of qualitative research that suggests that, when applied to organizational structures and systems, CRT provides greater awareness of the need to ensure equity for all students (Neild, 2008).

Theoretical perspectives on CRT. CRT is a school of thought that holds to the premise that race lies at the core of American society and that racism is an integral part of society. Figure 2 provides an overview of researchers supporting the theory and their areas of concentration.

Understanding the existence of racism is crucial to educational discourse. CRT, as applied in organizational structures and systems within the educational system provides

a basis for researching the application and implications of race for educational

structures, such as policy and procedures, as well as systems at the local school and

district levels. CRT offers a point of view on instruction, curriculum, assessment, school

funding, and desegregation for which there have been major implications for the

educational outcomes of African American students along the spectrum of

socioeconomic levels (Ladson-Billings, 1999a).

Figure 2. Critical Race Theory: Theoretical framework of the study.

The importance of CRT was introduced in the 1990s with the increasing application to scholarship in education. In evaluating various educational policies, critical race theorists concluded that the restrictive nature of the interpretation of the law limited educational access for African American students (Crenshaw, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) provided a greater focus on the subject in educational academia. Further research (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Tate, 1997) provided exposure to qualitative research in education crucial to CRT. From this study, CRT is viewed as a lens through which to examine educational policies and practices. It is a methodological venue through which to facilitate revelation of the ontological and epistemological foundations of the impact of racism on education as viewed presently and from a historical perspective (Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, & Parker, 2002).

Historically, African Americans and Latinos in the United States have been systematically disenfranchised as a result of the deeply embedded tenets of racism in the culture throughout social, political, economic, and educational institutions. African Americans in particular have been denied an equal access to education. From the early 1900s through about the 1960s, public policy determined that schools focus on practical vocational training for African American students in preparation for their future employment (Ravitch, 2000). The aim was to train African Americans for servitude and not to educate (Ravitch, 2000). This doctrine of curriculum differentiation was intended to relegate African Americans to an inferior education that would perpetuate limited access to economic and political capital (Ravitch, 2000). Currently, African American and

Latino students are more likely to be placed in lower-level vocational and curriculum tracks in U.S. schools.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* provided the catalyst for dramatic changes in the U.S. educational system by striking down the long-held doctrine of separate but equal schools for Caucasians and African Americans. Thus, the Civil Rights and Economic Opportunities Acts and *Lau v. Nichols* furthered social justice and its implications for education. These historical events of social justice started the transformation for modern-day education. However, the continuing power of the construct of race poses a new segregation with the significant demographic shifts in language and underrepresented student groups. The split stemming from implicit and explicit ideologies of those with versus without access to educational, economic, and social capital is evident in rates of educational attainment of family incomes (McCarty, 2004). The connection with ideologies of meritocracy and privilege stemming from these gaps facilitates the persistence of current power structures, which suggests differences from the norm as deficiencies or disabilities that increase placing those of color as a greater risk for inequitable opportunities to learn in school.

As the critical race theorists are devoted to social justice in general, their focus is on the pervasiveness of racism as it affects the experiences of students from marginalized groups and in structures and practices in educational institutions. Regardless of the scientific refutation of race as a legitimate biological concept and attempts to marginalize race in a lot of the public discourse, race continues to be a

powerful social construct (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Thus, defining race and racism in exact

historical and social contexts are major components of educational research in

addressing this theory. They are deeply embedded components of the educational

system through historical conscience and ideology (Lynn et al., 2002). Even though they

are seen as a social construct, the incorporation of race and racism have had a negative

effect on underrepresented groups and has caused critical race theorists to draw from a

legal studies framework to focus on the role that the law has played in racializing

citizens and in legal construction of citizenship, both of which lead to educational

entitlement and a denial of equitable educational opportunity (Bell, 1995a). In studying

the present organizational public school structures and systems, the application of CRT

creates an analysis of those systems and structures and is a beneficial tool of the

connection between education and race.

CRT addresses curriculum, instruction, testing, and school funding (Ladson-

Billings, 1999a) as components of school organizational structures and systems. Even

though not the focus of this study, the importance of curriculum, instruction, testing,

and school funding as mitigating factors is duly acknowledged. Researchers, including

critical race theorists, argue that the academic curriculum is oftentimes not culturally

incongruent (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999a; Ogbu, 1995a, 1995b; Ogbu & Simons,

1994). The rigor of school curriculum is also analyzed through the lens of CRT, just as are

the distortions, omissions, and stereotypes of school curriculum. In examining the rigor

of school curriculum, this theory addresses access to what is determined enriched

curriculum through academically accelerated classes. Some researchers (Kozol, 1991;

Ladson-Billings, 1995) have subscribed to the idea that curriculum on predominately

white schools reinforces higher-order thinking skills but is not the case for students of

color, especially in high-poverty, inner-city schools. Specific learning activities that foster

creativity, critical thinking, and reasoning skills are often not accessible for children from

underrepresented groups. This restricted access to the curriculum illustrates the

purpose of intellectual property in terms of an organizational structure that promotes

gaps in achievement. Curriculum represents a form of intellectual property. The quality

and quantity of the curriculum differs with the property values of the school. The

availability of rich or enriched intellectual property diminishes opportunities to learn.

There is the assumption that, along with providing standards that detail what students

should know and be able to do; they should be given material resources to foster their

education. Also, intellectual property should be supported by real property, such as

science labs, computers, and various technologies, as well as qualified teachers. This is

often not the case in high-poverty schools (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Ladson-Billings &

Tate, 1995). Lack of real property (e.g. sufficient resources and qualified teachers)

affects the level and quality of instruction in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2000;

Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Critical race theorists contend that the current instructional strategies within the

school system work from a deficit model for students of color (Bell, 1995a; Ladson-

Billings, 1999a). If specific strategies are not effective with this group, the assumption is

made that there is something wrong with the child rather than the method of instruction. This mentality promotes instructional approaches that generally involve some form of remediation for the student (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). The deficit model is slowly being rejected as a result of current research through the investigation and affirmation of the integrity of effective teachers of African American and Latino students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

Critical race theorists point out that intelligence testing has historically been a means of oppressing students of color in the educational system. The system of assessment has led to disproportionate representation in especially special education (Skiba et al., 2006). Insufficient curriculum in conjunction with ineffective instruction in evident in poor student performance on traditional testing measures that often fail to assess what students really know and are capable of doing.

As illustrated by CRT, no other area serves as a better example of institutionalized racism than school funding (Ladson-Billings, 1999a; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Differentiated methods of school funding, such as property taxes, leave schools in high-poverty areas with limited fiscal resources to enforce educational program consistent with that afforded to their Caucasian counterparts in wealthier areas (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). This structure places high-poverty students at an academic disadvantage and extends the achievement gap.

One of the setbacks in CRT is that there is little research about the exact outcomes of its application in the classes. Researchers speak to curriculum, testing,

instruction, and other areas of the educational system that have been impacted by

racism (Gay, 2000; Weinstein et al., 2004). There is research on CRT as it applies to

teacher education and specific legal cases in education (Ladson-Billings, 1999a).

However, from this research a person can only determine the probability of improved

educational outcomes for students of color. There seems to be very little statistical

evidence to suggest a direct connection between the application of CRT and educational

outcomes. However, there is evidence of qualitative research that suggests that CRT,

when applied to organizational structures, provides a greater awareness of the need to

ensure equity for each student (Ladson-Billings, 1999a; Lopez, 2003). Despite the

inequity in education outlined, actions have been taken in school reform of

organizational structures and systems to attempt to lessen the achievement gap

revealed by NCLB.

Challenging claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy. A

theme of storytelling and counter-storytelling is ingrained in the work of CRT theorists.

A lot of them contended that the form and substance of scholarship were closely related

(Delgado, 1989). These schools use chronicles, poetry, and revisionists histories to

illustrate the irony of the current civil rights doctrine. Delgado (1989), for example,

states that there are three reasons for naming one's reality in legal discourse:

> (1) much of reality is socially constructed; (2) stories provide members of out-groups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation; and (3) the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious conviction of viewing the world in one way. (p. 73)

Delgado's first reason demonstrates how political and moral analysis was conducted in legal scholarship (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). CRT theorists argue that political and moral analysis is situational: "truths only exist for this person in this predicament at this time in history" (Delgado, 1991, p. 111). For the CRT theorists, social reality was constructed by the formulation of stories from individuals. These stories serve as interpretive structures that change our lives.

The second reason that CRT addresses the theme of naming one's reality is its goal of the psychic preservation of historically discriminated groups. Delgado (1989) asserts that one further contributing fact to the demoralization of marginalized groups is self-condemnation. He argues that those from marginalized groups internalized the stereotypical images that certain elements of the dominant groups have constructed around them in order to maintain their own power (Crenshaw, 1988). Delgado (1989) suggests that storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds caused by racial oppression. The story of one's situation leads to realizing how one came to be oppressed, and enabled one to stop inflicting mutual abuse on oneself.

Third, the naming of one's story can affect the dominant culture. Lawrence (1987) posits that most of the oppression by the dominant culture does not seem as such. Delgado (1989) similarly contends that the dominant group legitimizes its control with stories, in order to maintain its own privilege. Furthermore, the dominant group rationalizes oppression, causing it to make few attempts at self-examination. When

people of color tell their stories, they "can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar

dysconscious racism" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 21).

Conclusion

For the past decades, the education arena has encountered a gap between

students from underrepresented groups and students from the white dominant culture.

There have been various attempts to address the casual factors for the gap from

different perspectives, including racial, socio-cultural, and cognition. The literature

supports theoretical perspectives on race and culture and suggests that motivation is a

possible explanation. Attempts have been made to lessen the gap through legislation

such as NCLB as part of a nationwide thrust toward school reform. Despite this

achievement gap and the historical trends of underachievement noted for African

American and Latino students, research-based structures and systems have contributed

to high student performance in high-poverty urban schools with a high concentration of

students of color. Throughout this literature review, research has shown the significance

of professional development, leadership, data-driven decision making, goal setting,

school climate/culture, parent involvement, and expectations as organizational

structures and systems enforced in high-performing high-poverty schools. All of the

studies in the literature review were qualitative in nature and did not distinctly identify

racialized structures and systems. However, the literature has opened further inquiry as

to how the construct of race influences the development and implementation of these

structures and systems. Under the overarching socio-cultural framework, CRT serves as

the overarching conceptual framework for analyzing racialized school structures and systems. Inquiry into how these systems and structures are enforced is warranted, as well as inquiry regarding the instructional practices resulting from their implementation.

Inconsistencies in the research on barriers to academic achievement, such as stated in Ogbu's oppositional theory, suggest a more contextual nature to achievement barriers. Therefore, focus should be placed more heavily on systemic school structures, rather than culture, and patterns of social inequality stemming from these systems. The present research leads to studies on motivational factors connected to these structures and systems in addition to the generalization of these structures and systems.

The literature reflects a history of research on teacher and student expectations. The impact of the construct of race as part of student and teacher belief systems has led to discourse on its influence on student achievement. What still is not certain is what school-wide organizational structures are in place to address this issue and its influence on student achievement. Therefore, this study examines a high-poverty ninth-grade academy in an urban school within the context of race and how it effects the students' of color perception of their ninth-grade academy experience.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This section will describe the methodology of the study. The methodological

assumptions are highlighted, the research site is described, and the selection of

participants, methods of data collection, description of the data analysis process,

benefits and risks of the study, subjectivity, credibility/trustworthiness, and ethical

issues are outlined.

Research Questions

The following research questions are the basis for this study:

- How do students of color at the selected high school experience the ninth-

   grade academy?

- Based on their perceptions and experiences, what programs and practices in

   the ninth-grade academy are effective for students of color?

- How does race impact the experiences on students from marginalized groups

   in the ninth-grade academy?

Research Approach

This study examined the experiences of ninth-grade students of color. I sought to

understand the meaning of these students' interpretations and perceptions of their

experiences in the ninth-grade academy. Since I examined students' experiences, a phenomenological study was one of the research approaches to use. In order to understand why phenomenology is the most appropriate methodology for my study, I will examine its philosophical assumptions and methods for the data collection and analysis.

Phenomenology was founded by mathematician Edmund Husserl and further developed by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ronty (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological research is the examination of human, subjective-lived experience of a phenomenon. Creswell (2007) maintains that the purpose of this research is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence of the experiences for those who encounter the phenomenon. Phenomenological inquiry is a study of conscious experience from the subjective of the first-person point of view (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenology is an ideal research process for examining common experiences with a phenomenon, understanding it in greater detail, and formulating meanings common to those with who it involves. Whereas Creswell (2007) describes phenomenological research as a descriptive methodology in that it is oriented toward the lived experiences of individuals and the interpretation of life texts, Heidegger (1993) contends that the way we can gain access to various phenomenon is through the interpretation of one's lived experiences, where understanding and interpretation are regarded as an essential component of the human being. Heidegger (1993) also argues

that to gain access to a different phenomenon is to experience it from the interpretation of one's lived experiences, where understandings and interpretations are regarded as parts of the individual. He believes that to gain access to people's lived experiences, it is necessary for the research to relate with and share other people's life worlds by meeting and talking to them, listening to their narratives, and observing their use of tools and the environment.

A variety of methods can be used in capturing experiences, such as narratives, images, observations, diaries, biographies, fieldwork, and interviews (Berndtsson, Claesson, Friberg, & Öhlén, 2007). In a phenomenological study, interviews combined with observations offer a way of the understanding the core of a participant's experience (Beekman, 1984).

Giorgi (2008) describes the procedures that are essential when using the phenomenological method of inquiry. He first asks the subjects to describe the experience of the phenomenon that is of interest to the researcher. Next, the researcher seeks a description of a situation as lived and understood by the participant from the perspective of the participant. From this process, the researcher assumes the attitude of phenomenological reduction, a psychological perspective, and ascertains sensitivity toward the phenomenon being studied. The researcher starts the procedure of discovering the psychologically relevant lived meanings in the data by reading the entire description to get a sense of the whole.

The researcher then returns to the beginning of the description and rereads it to break it into manageable parts called meaning units (Giorgi, 2008). With this established the researcher then transforms the participant's natural expressions into ones that adequately convey the psychological meanings contained in the natural attitude of expressions. In addition, Giorgi (2008) notes that once all meaning units have been transformed, the researcher uses the transformed meaning units as a basis for writing the typical structure of the experience. Next, the researcher checks the structure against transformed meaning units in order to be sure that all key components are implicitly included. Giorgi (2008) explains that the last step occurs when the researcher dialogues the structure with the transformed meaning units and raw data in order to elaborate in full the findings of the study. Giorgi's (2008) outline of phenomenological research procedures result in the researcher providing a comprehensive understanding of the human experience.

Phenomenological research is the most appropriate approach for my study because it affords the opportunity for students of color to share their experiences of the ninth-grade academy. The research will fill a gap in the literature about how those from marginalized groups experience the ninth-grade academy environment.

Research Setting

The academy where I conducted this study was located in an urban school system of a mid-Atlantic state. The selected site had a ninth-grade academy with a diverse student population in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture. In addition, the

school had implemented the ninth-grade academy within the past five years. The school

has a low staff turnover rate. The ninth-grade academy at this school has a staff that

exclusively works with ninth graders and an administrator who mainly works with its

students and staff. This academy also has a counselor who works with the ninth graders.

She worked there since it first began.

All the classes in this academy are taken in an annex building of the high school.

There are eight classrooms in this building. Some teachers "float" because there is not

enough space to accommodate the estimated 250 student body that the academy has

each school year. Students are heterogeneously grouped into two teams in this ninth-

grade academy.

The academy operates on a block schedule. Teachers have the same group of

students in the fall and spring semester. If the student is advanced or ahead in credits,

he or she takes classes outside the ninth-grade academy, or enrolls in extra elective

courses. Ninth-grade academy teachers have fourth period common planning, where

they attend to administrative concerns, counsel their students, hold parent conferences,

plan lessons participate in staff development, and work on other needed tasks. Ninth

graders, in the meantime, take their elective classes outside the academy during this

period. In order for students to get promoted to the next grade level, they need to pass

six of their eight classes. Those students who do not pass are not allowed to repeat their

courses in the ninth-grade academy. They will take their courses with upperclassmen in

the general high school.

Participants

This study was conducted using current and recent ninth-grade academy students in a small urban public high school with an ethnically-diverse student population. Proceeding institutional approval, a letter was sent to ninth-grade parents and students to get permission to participate in this study. The students returned the parent and student forms, and the initial interviews were conducted over a three-month period. This study's aim was to understand the experiences of students of color in an ethnically-diverse high school. Student interviews were a major source of data collection.

All the data were collected at Success Academy. Success Academy's administrator was the initial contact person. I made contact at this school through email, letters, and telephone calls sent to the school's superintendent and principal seeking permission to work with the students.

A copy of the approved proposal, additionally, was sent to the administrators in order to provide them with background information about this study. Personal contact was made and a letter of institutional consent was obtained from this high school. Informed consent and student assent forms were taken to the school to get parental and student permission for students to participate in this study. These forms assured the parents and student participants about the nature of the research.

Assent and consent forms were explained and distributed among freshman seminar and homeroom classes for ninth and tenth graders. A week later, 60 students

returned the forms to participate in the study. A week after that, the participants were narrowed to 24 respondents. Those students who returned either the assent or consent forms were automatically excluded from participation in this study. Since the focus of this research was the experience of students of color in a ninth-grade academy, the assent and consent forms returned by the white students were excluded. Students were selected based on race, gender, and grade level that corresponded with the student population (see Table 4).

Table 4. Demographics of the Participants

Name	Black Male	Black Female	Latino Male	Latina Female	Asian Male	Asian Female	9th Grade	10th Grade
Shawn	X							X
Ron	X						X	
Bob	X							X
Jake	X						X	
Rick	X						X	X
Stephanie		X						X
Beth		X						X
Wendy		X						X
Kristie		X						X
Annie		X						X
Tammy		X					X	
Lori		X					X	
Mark			X					X
John			X				X	
Jeff			X				X	
Mary				X				X
Michelle				X			X	

Table 4 (cont.)

Name	Black Male	Black Female	Latino Male	Latina Female	Asian Male	Asian Female	9th Grade	10th Grade
Leslie				X				X
Taylor					X			X
Brian					X			X
Nate					X		X	
Ashley						X		X
Claire						X		X
Erin						X		X
JT	X						X	
Inis				X			X	

As indicated in Table 4, since the female students outnumber the male students by 10% during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, I interviewed 12 males and 14 females. During the 2011-2012 school year, an African American male and a Latina female were interviewed multiple times to mirror the ninth-grade academy's population.

After the interviews with the 24 students were conducted, it was determined that richer data were needed. Subsequently, two more students (Inis and JT) were interviewed over an additional six-month period on a bi-weekly basis.

<div align="center">

Inis's Story

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When I interviewed and observed Inis in class, she appeared shy and reserved. She did not talk a lot, and her voice was low. I observed her in two classes for three

hours. She sat in the back of the room, and the class had about twenty students. Both of

her teachers called on her no more than two times. Inis mentioned in her interview:

> I'm Mexican and I moved to the U.S. when I was five years old. I had to move from one school to another and it was kind of hard. When I went to a new school I didn't know anybody, and I didn't want to ask for help. My brother used to go to this school, but he dropped out. I don't have a lot of friends. I like science because I want to be a medical doctor.

Inis's comments gave me a new perspective on her. When I interviewed and observed

her, I viewed her as bright and articulate. The challenges that she faced in Success

Academy are unique to her. Being a non-native English speaker, coming from another

country, not knowing a lot of students, and having a prior relative who had a negative

experience at Success Academy influences how she perceives school. Inis mentioned

that her teachers knew little about her. She appeared to feel isolated from school. Inis

also elaborated:

> My parents aren't involved with school. My aunt comes to school whenever there's an issue or concern. No one helps me with my homework. I just do it all on my own. When I first started school, my brother helped me, but my brother dropped out after his second year in high school. One of the best experiences that I had was when we worked on photosynthesis. We worked in teams, and turned in the assignments after the end of the work. We went over our reports on Smartboard along with the other groups.

Inis's statement illustrates that even though she is shy and has few friends, working

collaboratively, problem-solving, discussion, and presenting enables her to conquer her

fears. When students work out their problems in a collaborative arena, they tend to

develop a mutual respect for one another (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Inis's brother had

a negative experience, dropping out of high school. Success Academy does not have an

outreach program to attract students like him back to school. Inis, like many other

participants, mentioned that the school did not have translators for parents or non-

English speaking students. Having a translator illustrates a support system for the

parents, therefore; making the transition to the ninth-grade academy easier for the

student.

JT's Story

When I interviewed and observed JT in class, he appeared comfortable and

talkative. I observed him in two classes for three hours. JT raised his hands a lot, and

was eager to participate in class. In one class, the teacher ignored his continuous raising

hands and outburst. The teacher in the other class gave him along with the other

students an individual assignment. Both classes had a diverse group of students. JT

mentioned:

> I'm African American. I was born and raised here. Everybody I knew here were
> with me at elementary school or the middle school at least. I got cousins who are
> upperclassmen at this school. I play football and I'm also interested in basketball.
> I want to go to UNC-CH and become a computer engineer.

After I heard JT's story, I understood more about him. He knew a lot of people at

Success Academy, and was popular with the students. When I analyze his counter-story

from the CRT perspective, I understand that ignoring JT's extroverted tendencies only

hurts his growth. Children of color who are not successful in school undergo changes in all aspects of their being caught up in destructive cycles. They become angry, frustrated, and either disruptive or apathetic. They stop trying and fail, and cannot learn (Hixson, 1993).

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with 26 students of color in the ninth-grade academy in order to get an understanding of the ninth-grade transition program's effectiveness from the perceptions of the students. The 24 students were interviewed three times, and the last two case study students were interviewed eight times. The SIMS operator provided the student's schedule. The participants were questioned from the spring 2011 to spring 2012. For student confidentiality, the interviews were conducted in a private room in the media center. Participant's responses to the questions lasted an average 25 minutes. After all the interviews were completed, a pizza party was held as part of the promise made on the assent/consent form. Students were the only group that I interviewed. Since I conducted research from this group's perspective, there were three to eight interview sessions with five questions each. I was conscious and careful to gain the trust and support of the students. For example, as my interview sessions got more in depth, I knew that I connected well with the participants from their responses to the interview questions. Those who I connected well with elaborated in their responses, and those who did not elaborate in their responses I felt that I had not made a connection. I met with my selected students from January 2011 to April 2012. Students interviewed

were in the freshman academy between 2009 to2012. Based on the assent/consent

forms returned, I selected 17 students who took honors classes, as well as 9 students

who were enrolled in remedial classes. I interviewed students with documented

disciplinary records from the school's resource data, as well as those with no

documented disciplinary records. I also selected a varied group of African American,

Latino, Asian, and English as A Second Language (ESL) ninth-grade students and a

relatively even number of males and females. The intent of this diverse sample was to

help me to determine whether there were patterns or trends in the participants'

responses based gender, race, academic ability, or behavior.

Table 5. Participants' Profiles

Categories	Female	Male
African American	7	6
Latino	4	3
Asian	3	3
ESL	7	6
Honors	11	6
Remedial	4	5
Behavior Documented	2	5
No Behavior Documented	11	8

During the first interview session, January 2011, I asked general information

questions about the students (see questions on p. 127). The second session focused on

their experiences at the ninth-grade academy (see questions pp. 128). Finally, the last

interview session probed the students' perception of whether and how race tied into their success or failure in the freshman academy.

Upon completion of these interviews, due to my need to gain richer data, I added a case study component for the final two participants. Data for these case studies were collected via interviews with the participants, document collection (attendance, discipline referrals, and grades), and observations (classroom and school-function events). The two case study participants were an African American male and a Latino female. These students were chosen based on the teachers' recommendations in Success Academy. I interviewed each participant once every two weeks during their first semester (September to December). Each interview session lasted 20 to 30 minutes. I also observed each student in three different classes for at least three hours each. In total, I interviewed and observed the two participants in class eight times, from September 2011–April 2012.

Data for the study also came from documents and archival records (Yin, 2003). I collected documents on the school including:

- letters and memos;

- school website;

- administrative documents; and

- news-clippings and other articles appearing in mass media.

These examples of documentation corroborated and supported evidence from other sources.

Finally, observation was a beneficial source of data collection. Through this process, I examined certain features as the technology that all participants use, as well as the conditions of the learning environment. This aspect of data collection helped to develop a bigger picture of the environment where the ninth-grade students and staff learn and interact (Yin, 2003).

Student Interview Questions

The first interviews with the 26 participants were conducted using the questions below:

- (Demographics) What is your name? Where are you from? What is your ethnicity?

- (Icebreaker) What activities or hobbies do you like to do in your spare time?

- How do you like being in high school? What have been the good parts about being a high school student? What have been the bad parts?

- How was your experience in middle school? What were the good and bad parts? What did you like better, middle school or high school? Why?

These questions were intended to gain personal information about the students. The questions were general, and helped shed light on the demographics of the participants who comprised the ninth-grade academy. This session was also intended to serve as an "icebreaker." Through this session, the students were supposed to talk about their background, and their general impression of the ninth-grade academy. As I categorized students by race, gender, and grade level, the responses to the questions helped clarify.

The first interview session transitioned into the second session where students elaborated about the practices and experiences in the ninth-grade academy. The questions below were ones asked from the participants:

- Tell me about your experiences in the ninth-grade academy? What has it been like for you? What have been the good parts? The bad parts?

- Has your race or ethnicity influenced how you've experienced the ninth-grade academy?

- Are you participating in any afterschool activities? If so, what is your favorite?

- Who are your favorite teachers? Please explain why they are your favorite?

- Are you currently facing any issues in the ninth-grade academy? If so, what are they and how are you coping?

- What do you like most about the ninth-grade academy and the least?

The questions from the second session allowed the students to express their experiences in the ninth-grade academy. From these interview questions, I was able to determine which practices were the most and least effective. These follow up questions also determined whether there were patterns in the student responses that correlated with scholarly literature. The second session led to the final interview session which focused on the student's perception of race in the ninth-grade academy, and whether or not the ninth-grade academy serviced the needs of students of color. The following

questions addressed the participant's perception on race and the ninth-grade

academy's effectiveness for students of color:

- Is your perception of the freshman academy's effectiveness now different

  from when you started? If so, in what way?

- What are your personal and academic goals? Is the ninth-grade academy

  preparing you for them, if so, how?

- This is a diverse school. Do you think that students are treated differently

  because of their race or ethnicity? If so please explain.

- How well does the ninth-grade academy serve the needs of students of

  color? Please explain.

- Is there anything else that you want to explain or clarify?

These questions concluded the student interview sessions. Based on the third set

of questions, the respondents talked about their perception on race, the academy's

effectiveness, and long term goals. The interviewees elaborated more in depth about

the questions from the previous sessions as we concluded.

Case Study

Follow-up student interview sessions were conducted the next school year in

Success Academy with two incoming freshmen. In order to gain greater insight, the

participants were observed and interviewed on a bi-weekly basis. Similar questions

addressed the participant's perceptions on race and the academy's effectiveness for

students of color. The focus of the first interview was an introduction. The second and

third interviews focused on student scheduling. Subsequently, I observed the participants' classes. The fourth and fifth interviews centered on the ninth graders of colors' perception of the ninth-grade academy and school in general. The sixth interview focused on the students' perception of race and whether or not it relates to their ninth-grade experience.

I studied Inis and JT for four months (fall semester). I conducted a follow-up interview in the spring semester. Unfortunately, I still did not feel that I had enough data to properly address my research questions. Thus, I added to my observational component and observed 23 additional classes in the ninth-grade academy.

Classroom Observations

After conducting my individual interviews with 24 participants and conducting a case study of 2 additional students, I observed Success Academy classrooms to supplement the data needed to draw my conclusions. Over a five-day period, in April 2012, I observed 23 classrooms in the freshman academy. These observations lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. I observed the classes that only students in Success Academy took. I observed each classroom once. I used the Observation Protocol sheet (see Figure 3) as my guide through the classroom observations.

Observation Protocol

Meeting Observation: Evaluation of Success Academy

Date: _____

Time_____

Classroom:_____

Purposes:
- To learn more about the ninth grade academy;
- To get a glimpse at the ninth grade academy's makeup;
- To understand how Success Academy's philosophy get infused into the curriculum and daily operations of the school.

Research Questions:
1) How did students of color experience the 9th grade academy?
2) What strategies/practices in the freshman academy are effective for students of color?
3) How does race impact the experiences on students from marginalized groups in the freshman academy?

Observation of class:
a. **Description of the ninth grade teacher** (Description of the ninth grade teacher; their years of teaching experience as well as credentials, and ethnic makeup)

b. **Description of the ninth grade students** (Description of the ninth grade academy student, their race, ethnicity, gender, and academic ability)

c. **Teacher/student interactions** (How do teachers instruct the students? How is learning assessed? What type of relationship did I observe? Is there a rapport? How is instruction differentiated? Are student's needs being met?) **(Research Questions, 1, 2, 3)**

d. **How are students of color interacting in the class?** (What is the student dynamics like in the classroom) **(Research Question 1 and 3)**

e. **What equipment/technology is in the classroom?** (Computers, overheads, etc…evidence of technological instruction) **(Research Question 2)**

f. **How is the room arranged?** (Student learning centers, furniture, desks, etc…that enables students to learn) **(Research Question 2)**

g. **What books or curricular materials are evident?** (Are there enough materials to meet the needs of students of color? Do the students have equal access to the materials?) **(Research Question 2)**

Reflection/ lessons learned from classroom observation:

Figure 3. Observation protocol.

Document Analysis

The Ninth-Grade Academy Evaluation form below illustrates the overall

evaluation of the freshman academy. I used the Ninth-Grade Academy Evaluation form

as a guide for observing classrooms (see Figure 4). This handout laid the foundation for

personal insight and, conclusions. Furthermore, this form assisted me in linking student

testimonies as to what actually took place in the classrooms.

Ninth-Grade Academy Evaluation

Observation Protocol: Evaluation of a ninth-grade academy.

Purposes:
- To learn more about the ninth-grade academy;
- To help me ask more informed questions in the interview;
- To get a glimpse a the ninth-grade academy's makeup;
- To understand how the high school philosophy gets infused into the curriculum and daily operations of the school.

Description of the ninth-grade staff (Description of the ninth-grade staff. Their years of teaching experience, as well as credentials, and ethnic makeup)

-There were 12 freshman academy teachers. The majority of them had over 4 years of teaching experience. (10 freshmen academy teachers returned and 2 freshmen academy teachers were new to the ninth grade at LSHS). Nine of the staff was Caucasian and three were African American. Most of the teachers were females.

Teacher/student interactions (How teachers instruct the students. How is learning assessed? What type of relationship do I observe? Is there a rapport? What's the ethnic makeup of the student/teacher population? How is instruction differentiated?)

-The racial makeup of the freshmen academy was more evident in the elective classes. Based on percentage, the majority of the Caucasian students were in the honors classes, and more students of color were represented in the standard level or remedial level classes. Most teachers had a class size of 20 or more students. Overall, teachers had a rapport with the students. They were able to differentiate instruction through use of the Smartboard, laptop computers, teaming, etc….

What equipment/technology is in the school? (Computers, overheads, etc…evidence of technological instruction)

-Teachers had access to Smartboards and projectors. Each student had their own laptop and access to the media center's computers. Computer labs were reserved for classes.

How are rooms arranged? (Student learning centers, furniture, desk, etc…that enables the students to learn)

-The majority of classrooms sat in rows, and individual desk faced the white boards. Most teachers established an area where students could work collaboratively. The teacher's desk was typically behind the classroom.

What books or curricular materials are evident? (Are there enough materials to meet the needs of the students?)

What types of books does the media center have? Do the teachers and students have equal access to these materials?)

-The materials appeared sufficient for the student's needs. Various books were evident that correlated with student achievement (SAT, tutorials, fictional books, novels, etc…). A counseling department was available to students needing guidance.

Figure 4. Ninth-grade academy evaluation.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data and organizing it were a continuous process throughout the study with the goal of obtaining useful and "rich" information. The data were analyzed using coding of themes, looking for patterns, and identifying gaps in the data. I took the following steps in collecting the data:

1. I organized the responses of the interviews and compared them to the observation data.

2. I coded interview responses and observations by attaching basic marks to describe potential themes.

3. I analyzed the notes and codes looking for the meaning and themes in the data.

4. I examined the meaning and I formed a classification system for individual meaning.

5. I attempted to form a collective meaning capturing the essence of the collective data.

6. I translated my interpretation into information that was understandable. For example, I included quotes, narrative texts, and any other types of representation which captures the essence of that interpretation.

Observation field notes and tape-recorded interviews allowed me to listen to the tapes and use notes repeatedly to identify themes and seek patterns. The multiple data collection methods required me to continuously organize and reflect on the data

collected while applying a basic coding system to reflect patterns and themes evolving

from the data. An ongoing analysis of the data throughout the research study ensured

that data collected connected to the research questions (Merriam, 1998).

The first procedure in analyzing the data was to look for patterns of repeated

information emerging from the interviews. This process allowed for checking the data

against information from the scholarly literature on ninth-grade transition and the

questions that guided the research. The analysis of taped and transcribed interviews

with the respondents was then compared with the document analysis in an attempt to

draw conclusions about the successfulness of the academy. While I suspected certain

outcomes, I never discussed my perceptions with any of the participants while

conducting the research. The analysis of data was based on the three research

questions.

The methods that I incorporated were "organizing, abstracting, integrating, and

synthesizing" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 236). I searched for patterns and themes

that appeared to emerge and from doing so, began to sort and categorize the data. I

turned my attention to summarizing the information based on the interview data

information that I compiled. Thomas and Brubaker (2000) offer guidance as I began this

process ". . . the purpose of summarizing data is to simplify an otherwise

incomprehensibly complex mass of information so the substance of the information can

be readily grasped" (p. 191). Based on what I had initially deduced from the research

questions, I confirmed or denied ideas that I had determined during data collection. I

noted emerging themes and began to frame my findings around them such as

gratification, relationship building, racial awareness, and colorblindness.

Stemming from the responses recorded by the students and the qualitative data

collected, the information was further analyzed in light of the research questions. I

stated each interview question, followed by the information specifically addressing that

particular research question.

My Subjectivities

Learning to see through the eyes of others in understanding and accurately

describing their experience is very difficult. Glesne (2006), for example, reminds the

researcher that developing awareness about one's subjectivities and monitoring is a

productive undertaking. Kilbourn (2006) points out that it is essential to be cognizant of

the subjective self and the role that this self plays in research. I was the primary

instrument or research tool, rather than an inanimate mechanism.

Researchers should engage in the self-reflexive process of "bracketing,"

recognizing and setting aside their a priori knowledge and assumptions (Starks &

Trinidad, 2007). The purpose of "bracketing" is to attempt to attend to the participant's

account without a bias. Lincoln and Guba (1986) write that qualitative inquiry should be

measured by dependability (a systematic process closely followed) and authenticity

(reflexive consciousness about one's perspective), appreciation of the perspectives of

others, and fairness in depicting constructions in the values that under-gird them.

My subjectivity plays a role in this study in two significant parts: (1) my adolescent experience in high school, (2) and my professional work as an educator. I grew up in North Carolina. I was the only child born to middle class parents who strived to make a good life for me. My mother was an educator and my father was a pharmacist. As a child, my parents taught me to value education. My mother made sure that I completed my assignments before participating in extracurricular activities. My school was close to my house, and I remember my mother being a regular visitor and classroom volunteer each academic year. She came to school many days during the school year, meeting with my teachers.

The high school is located in the city and it is ethnically diverse. Many of the children in my classes and several of the teachers were from the surrounding neighborhoods. Most of the teachers were white and collectively did not seem to look for uniqueness in an individual. I do not remember a single incident of my teachers emphasizing racial awareness. For example, the school did not collectively celebrate Black History Month. When I took a U.S. History course, I did not study the plight of the Native Americans nor the Civil Rights Movement in great length. I relied on my parents and analytical skills to seek the truth. Fortunately, I had plenty of support at home, but others were not so lucky.

In the majority of the classes, the white students took the honors classes, and the students of color took the remedial classes. The high school that I attended reinforced racial segregation. My parents were my role models, and they reinforced the

belief that I could accomplish any task that I wholeheartedly pursued. Furthermore, I

performed well in high school, graduating in the top ten percent of my class.

As I reflect on my high school experience, my ninth-grade year sticks out. That

year was the first time that I felt intimidated about school. It was the only phase where I

struggled academically. I felt nervous about transitioning to a school where the student

population neared 2,000, and the teachers spent only one hour with me each day. My

high school did not have a freshman academy, so during my first year I took some

classes with students who were seniors. In addition, because most of the students were

of a different race and culture than my own, I had a difficult time fostering lasting

relationships.

As an educator, I taught for seven years in two of the lowest performing high

schools in North Carolina. I taught primarily freshmen at one school, and directed a

ninth-grade academy at the other school. Both of these schools had a majority

population of students of color, as well as being in poverty-ridden areas of the city. Even

though the parents overall were supportive, they did not challenge the schools in the

same manner as my parents. For example, when my parents were discontent, they went

to the central office and immediate results occurred. However, from my experiences as

an educator, when students' parents complained, results oftentimes remained the

same.

By examining my academic and professional experiences, I gained a deeper

understanding about the plight of students of color and low economic status children in

the public schools. My work as an educator and my interest in improving achievement for all students, led to my interest in this study. A major commitment that I bring to this study is to contribute to the improvement of the ninth-grade academy. I desire to make ninth-grade academies more accessible and accountable for its student populations.

The topic on ninth-grade academies has a high personal and emotional appeal to me. My feelings reflect an educational leader who works to improve student and educator relations in ninth-grade academies. I emphasized closing the gap in educational opportunity. This study is intended to develop a more complete understanding about how students of color experience the ninth-grade academy.

Trustworthiness

Member checking, peer review, and negative case analysis were the steps that were put in place from the data collection and analysis to demonstrate trustworthiness in this study. These measures enabled me to hold myself accountable to the research process in a manner that would not compromise my efforts to ensure that the study's findings were reflective of the students' and educators' experiences, rather than a creation of my own biases. In addition, to avoid unnecessary bias, I did not conduct a case study on any of the schools where I previously worked.

The concept of trustworthiness speaks to the merit in a qualitative study. Merriam (2009) asserts that components in a qualitative study are the researcher's presence, interaction between the researcher and participants, data collecting, and the

interpretation of perceptions. I addressed the components of trustworthiness through member checking, peer review, and negative case analysis.

Member checking is a crucial tool because it measures the authenticity of the information attained from interviews that the researcher transcribed. After completing the participant interviews, I transcribed and analyzed the data and developed conclusions. I shared it with my participants to validate that I was able to capture their experiences in the ninth-grade transition program. I provided the participants with a copy of my data analysis to ensure that the findings were supported by data, rather than resulting from my bias or perspective.

Peer review was another method of assessing the rigor of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method incorporates the findings being reviewed by practitioners that who are familiar with the subject matter of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the role of the peer reviewer as an individual who keeps the researcher honest. That reviewer asks difficult questions about methods, meanings and interpretations. In addition to seeking the feedback from my dissertation committee members, I sought assistance with peer review from particular students in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The extra check by this group of peer reviewers provided constructive feedback that added to the credibility of the study.

Finally, I used the negative case analysis to enhance trustworthiness. I conducted follow-up interviews with participants whose interviews did not fit specific patterns, or

were outliers from the majority of the participants. This effort helped to understand

what made their situation different from the majority of the other participants.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In Chapter III, I explained the methodologies that I used for my data collection. I also posted my research questions, tools I used to observe classrooms in Success Academy, and a demographic description of my participants. In this chapter, I give a description of Success Academy, and I present an analysis of the data from the previous chapter. After analyzing this data, I identify concepts and themes each participant discussed during their interviews. At the conclusion of this chapter, I return to my conceptual framework to discuss new insights I have gained as a result of conducting this study.

Success Academy Demographics

Success Academy has an ethnically-diverse student population. The school's diversity is reflected in its mission statement, "*To support an environment where high expectations foster lifelong success within a positive climate of diversity*"(Success Academy's Mission Statement, 2011). Table 6 indicates that the ninth-grade academy is comprised of African Americans, Latinos, Caucasians, Asians, and multi-ethnic students. During the 2009-2011 school years, African Americans comprised the largest ethnic group, Latinos the second largest, Caucasians the third, and the Asians were the

smallest ethnic group. As shown in Table 6, Success Academy total enrollment in the

2009-2010 class consisted of 228 students, the 2010-2011 class consisted of 287

students, and the 2011-2012 class consisted of 317 students. The racial composition

between the two latter classes remained similar. The 2009-2010 freshman class,

however, had 59 less students than the 2010-2011 freshman class.

Table 6. Freshman Academy Total Enrollment 2009-2012

School Year	Caucasian *n* (%)	African American *n* (%)	Latino *n* (%)	Asian *n* (%)	Other *n* (%)
2009-2010 (*N* = 228)	57 (25.0)	108 (47.4)	48 (21.1)	12 (5.3)	3 (1.2)
2010-2011 (*N* = 287)	76 (26.5)	113 (39.4)	75 (26.1)	18 (6.3)	5 (1.7)
2011-2012 (*N* = 317)	139 (43.8)	101 (31.9)	69 (21.8)	8 (2.5)	0 (0)

The participants in the study corresponded with the population of the general

freshman student body (see Table 7). The racial composition of the freshman academy

for the 2011-2012 school year has drastically shifted compared to the previous years.

Caucasian students were the largest racial group within the ninth-grade academy for the

2011-2012 school year. In the two years prior, the Latino and African American

population were the largest racial groups. Business closings due to the poor economy

were the main contributors in this recent trend.

Table 7. Sample Study Enrollment 2009-2012 (*N* = 26)

School Year	Caucasian *n* (%)	African American *n* (%)	Latino *n* (%)	Asian *n* (%)	Other *n* (%)
2009-2010 (*N* = 16)	NA	8 (50)	3 (19)	5 (31)	0 (0)
2010-2011 (*N* = 8)	NA	4 (50)	3 (38)	1 (12)	0 (0)
2011-2012 (*N* = 2)	NA	1 (50)	1 (50)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Location and Funding

The school district started Success Academy during the 2008-2009 school year as a solution to the freshman scoring poorly on their EOC exams, dropout rates, and discipline issues. This academy consists of 12 teachers, counselor, and an administrator who work closely with the ninth graders. The majority of the ninth-grade academy classes are located in an annex building where the incoming students cannot interact with the upperclassmen. The ninth graders take most of their classes with each other. The ninth-grade academy principal's office is situated in that building. She spends the majority of her day observing classes and disciplining students. Success Academy has had three freshmen principals in the three previous years. There has not been much continuity in leadership. The counselor has been with the academy since it began. She works yearlong, and schedules students according to their teacher recommendations from middles school. The freshman academy building has eight classrooms. These rooms are adjacent to each other. The remaining six classrooms are located elsewhere in the campus. The science and gym classes are situated outside the academy because

the equipment that the freshmen use is generally shared with the school. For example, the science laboratory is difficult to relocate to the ninth-grade academy building, as well as the weight room and basketball court. The counselor groups the students into two teams in the Success Academy annex building. Each team has a mixture of honor level, standard level, and remedial level students to avoid tracking. Teachers within the academy have a common fourth block planning. During the planning, teachers collaborate with one another, conduct conferences with students, parents, and engage in other planning and managerial tasks. Teachers have the same students in the academy all year long to develop a positive rapport. Success Academy students take an elective class their fourth block period, either physical education (PE), or a freshman seminar class.

Since grants are scarce for the Success Academy, the leaders are constantly looking for ways of funding the program. Success Academy also receives funding from Gateway Computers, Inc. (One-to-One Laptop Initiatives). Each ninth grader uses a laptop for academic purposes in this program. The ninth graders keep the laptop if they graduate from high school. If not, the students turn over the laptop to the school. Teachers at Success Academy participate in a professional development workshop for one year as a follow-up to the students getting laptops. Gateway, Inc. expects the teachers to integrate and encourage use of these laptops in the classrooms. The incentive is geared towards high poverty inner-city schools, with a diverse student population. Another source of funding for Success Academy comes from a federal grant,

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). This funding is responsible for providing Success Academy speakers, college visitations, and fieldtrips. It provides students with early access/exposure to colleges/universities, and encourages them to attend a four-year institution after high school graduation.

Schedule and Program

Each student has a locker in the ninth-grade academy building. During classroom changeovers, they have the option of going to their lockers. Classes last 90 minutes, and students take four classes each day. The academic year is divided between the fall and spring semester. After the end of the first semester, students take four new classes. In order to get promoted to the tenth grade, freshmen have to pass six of their eight classes.

There are twelve Success Academy teachers. The majority of them have over four years of teaching experience. Ten ninth-grade academy teachers have returned, and two ninth-grade academy teachers are new to teaching at Success Academy. Most of the teachers are females. The racial makeup of the ninth-grade academy is more evident in the elective classes. In the required classes, most teachers have a class size of 20 or more students.

Overall, teachers have good rapport with the students. They are able to differentiate instruction through the use of the Smartboards, laptop computers, teaming, projectors, and counseling. Students have their own laptops and access to the media center's computers. Computer labs are reserved for classes. The majority of the

classrooms are situated in rows, and individual desk face the whiteboard. Most teachers

establish an area in their classroom where students work collaboratively. The teacher's

desk is usually at the back of the classroom. Materials appear to be sufficient for the

students' needs. For example, various books are evident that correlate with student

achievement. The counseling department, with a ninth-grade academy counselor, is

available to students needing extra assistance.

Question 1

How did students of color experience the ninth-grade academy?

The majority of participants at Success Academy expressed satisfaction with

their ninth-grade experience. As interviewed participants' opinions and my observation

data were analyzed, I realized that Success Academy's staff worked diligently to thrive

as a school-within-a school devoted to the success of students of color. The mechanism

behind what is being accomplished is a concentration on achievement and meeting the

goals from NASSP's (1996) *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. During the

interviews with the students, sixteen out of twenty-five mentioned that they had

positive experiences with Success Academy. Each of these sixteen participants reflected

on their past and present classroom experiences, and the effect it had on socialization

and relationships. The other nine participants felt that their experience with Success

Academy did not have a positive impact on them. However, as they explained why they

were dissatisfied with Success Academy, their discontent appeared to be geared more

towards high school transition rather than the ninth-grade academy itself.

The introductory interview sessions consisted of four or more questions. The focus of the first session correlated with the first research question. The overriding theme from this meeting was how students of color perceived Success Academy. Table 8 illustrates the responses to the questions:

Table 8. Responses to Student Interview Question Session 1 (*N* = 26)

Question	Response	Frequency *n* (%)
1. I am glad that I participated in the program.	Satisfaction	17 (65)
2. I regret that I participated in the program.	Dissatisfaction	9 (35)

Perceptions of Schooling and Career Opportunities

My classroom observations and participants' overall responses mainly indicated positive attitudes and beliefs about the schooling and career opportunities stemming from involvement at Success Academy. This success stems from the students' positive racial identity and critical race consciousness. Each participant emphasized a desire to continue their education beyond high school. JT, for example, said:

> Being a black male is hard in society and not too many of us get the chance to do well and succeed. I'm proud to be black because statistics are against me. I'm determined to prove them wrong. So me, I can't forget who I am. I think it's very important [to see myself as African American].

The students' achievement mentality supports Perry's (2003) assertion that those from marginalized groups have a long history of viewing education as a mechanism for

upward economic and social mobility. Also, many students wanted to go into business

for themselves, after obtaining a four-year degree. When I asked if they looked forward

to going to Success Academy and what were some of the advantages of doing well,

participants' responses mirrored a genuine understanding that doing well in the ninth-

grade academy and completing high school, then going to the workforce immediately

afterwards was the best option for pursuing their goals. In this spirit, Inis and JT

highlighted the importance of maintaining good grades in high school as a way to build

networks later in life. Inis, for example, mentions "[Success Academy] builds up your

knowledge from my standpoint, and when you do well in school somebody later will

recognize it. And that somebody can help you get into college and a decent job." JT also

echoed similar feelings:

> One advantage (making good grades) is getting to college and understanding
> what you're doing there . . . You get to interact with people, which is very good,
> especially in the job field where you have to interact with others who don't know
> you well.

Both Inis and JT understand that their first year in high school is a stepping stone to

positive and productive career opportunities. They realize that performing well at that

level will assist them in developing the essential skills to succeed at the postsecondary

level. Rick, another study participant, also expressed the need for schooling as central to

his ability to provide for the family that he envisioned himself in the future.

>It's [Success Academy] gave me the opportunity to show everyone that blacks just don't go through high school and then say, 'You know, I'll go the next year,' and then never go and just do plant work or street work. So, this is the chance for me to go to school and make something of myself so I can look back and be proud.

For Rick, completing the ninth-grade academy and graduating from high school is important because he wants to create a financially stable environment. He understands a societal stereotype that many African American students do not pursue education beyond high school and wants to prove it wrong. Rick also understands that a high school education alone will not allow him to maintain a quality of life that he desires for his future. Nate, a participant, provides a complete explanation for why schooling is a viable option for upward mobility in society.

>Cause there's no way to get ahead. There's no other was to get ahead in a positive way than being credentialed. There's no decent, adequate jobs out there on the job market. . . . Doing well in school can get you a degree, and it can, if you do your networking, it can put you with the means and people to help you move forward in your career. . . . You take everything from it [Success Academy] that you can and try to apply it to the world because you can succeed with an education.

Nate demonstrates a pragmatic attitude about the freshman academy as a necessary step in his plan to maintain a decent lifestyle. His outlook evidences a strategic approach to school as the place where one takes as many materials and ideas as possible that can be beneficial to pursuing future goals. He understands schooling in the ninth-grade academy as valuable for building lasting relationships.

Perceptions on the Importance of Socialization Opportunities

Most of the respondents expressed that not only would they not be progressing

to the next grade level, but that they would have dropped out of school without the

academy's influence and assistance.

> I participate in sports, cross country . . . I like high school a lot. You get to choose
> what you're interested in such as electives, and that's better . . . My goal is to
> graduate and to attend a four-year college or university . . . I had teachers that
> just stood behind you and then helped you get where you wanted to be. (Taylor)

This participant's response mirrors the purpose of Success Academy. This school-within-

a school is an academic environment that recognizes various talents and assists

adolescents in obtaining meaningful success that leads to achievement beyond

graduation. In alignment with *Breaking Ranks*, the teachers in Success Academy serve as

advocates for their students (Valenzuela, 2000).

Other students similarly mentioned that they enjoyed having their own space in

the academy. They liked the concept behind the standard mode of dress (SMOD). The

respondents had a sense of autonomy which ultimately led to a sense of camaraderie.

"It's [ninth-grade academy] been very well being around people you've known for a

while. It makes it feel more comfortable in the learning environment. . . . There is

nothing negative about being around people you know" (Nate). Nate's comments

mirrors the suggestions made from *Breaking Ranks* that high schools should break into

smaller units of no more than 600 students so that the students develop a connection

(Gallagher, 2002). The organization of space (Success Academy) fosters a small unit in
which anonymity is erased.

Perceptions Reflecting Discontent

Although the majority of the participants enjoyed the ninth-grade academy, the
35% that did not like the experience expressed disappointment grounded in false
expectations they held for it. These concerns are based on high school transition rather
than Success Academy as a program. They expected more freedom and liberty to do
what they wanted. When most students expressed displeasure, they mentioned SMOD.
For example, "In middle school we wore uniforms, but we didn't have to wear the same
color tops. We wore any color tops with a different color on it" (Stephanie). Many
students who mentioned discomfort with SMOD did so because they initially expected
the ninth-grade academy to represent more individuality instead of them being treated
as clones.

Others from the interviews expressed displeasure over the amount of
schoolwork given. During middle school, students are promoted regardless of their
academic achievement, whereas in high school they have to earn credits to be
promoted (a minimum of six credits for tenth grade promotion). Also, in the ninth-grade
academy, students take classes on a semester basis, whereas in middle school, they take
year-long courses. Students in high school have half the amount of time to learn new
material than they do in middle school. "The middle school didn't really prepare me. At
middle school the lowest grade they would give you was a 70 so they just passed you

along. I wasn't prepared for that (work) when I attended high school" (Brian). Thus, some students were more stressed because the ninth-grade demanded higher academic standards than to what the student was accustomed.

Along with the discontent around academic achievement, many students expressed displeasure over their ninth-grade experience because of the increased accountability for infractions. Brian says, "I feel I had more freedom in middle school, we could have our electronic devices. It wasn't that big of a deal." For many others, the rules appeared stricter in high school than in middle school, and they did not understand the reasoning. "I thought there would be more freedom, experience the real world, but there are a lot of things you can't really do . . . We couldn't do anything, we'd have lockdown" (Stephanie). The concerns from these participants seemed general to high school transition rather than specific to Success Academy.

Summary of Question 1

Most students of color have a positive experience at Success Academy. They feel that they learn from their teachers and received support. They also favor the enclosed environment. The participants who do not enjoy Success Academy are unable to distinguish their displeasure from issues they would face in transitioning to high school in general.

Question 2

Based on their perceptions and experiences, what programs and practices in the ninth-grade academy are effective for students of color?

Miller (2011) maintains Vygotsky asserts that learning is a social process, and that the social and cultural backgrounds of students form the cognitive schema from which they approach the learning process within the school setting. The social and cultural context of classroom practices and the school's organizational structures and systems can be equal with those already established in the student's social and cultural background, affecting academic achievement as a result. I investigated how instructional and social structures are perceived by students of color in the ninth-grade academy, and how it impacts their overall achievement.

Based on the participants' responses, race does not play a role in the programs and practices affecting their perceptions and experiences in Success Academy. The participants describe and advocate for programs and practices that benefit students of any racial or cultural background. Quality teaching, personal relationships and "real-world" experiences were the responses the participants gave that impacted their perceptions and experiences in Success Academy.

A total of 26 students participated in the second interview session. The focus of the second session corresponds with the second research question. The responses that the participants gave differed from what I observed in the classroom. Based on my student interviews and classroom observations of Success Academy, the participants have overlooked the racial aspect of their freshman experience because they have not interacted with a predominately white student population. Most students mentioned they did not encounter racial conflicts, nor that racial matters were discussed. However,

my classroom observations suggest differently. Racial conflict was evident, and the teachers integrated it into their curriculum.

Learning Aids for Non-English Speakers

I identified various learning aids during my observations at Success Academy. They were geared towards non-English speakers. For example, I noticed in all English and social studies classes that the teacher provided the Latino ESL students with Spanish dictionaries. These students are not required to use them; however, they are used as a resource for students needing extra assistance. Students are not singled out who need those books. The dictionaries are subtle and placed next to the other English books in the classrooms.

In other classrooms I observed the teacher speaking Spanish to non-native English speaking students. The conversations were not long, but judging from the students' expressions, it was meant to assist the students in understanding the content in class. The teachers spoke phrases whenever there were a large percentage of Spanish speaking students in the classroom. The students afterwards appeared to understand the instructions better.

Translators are available in other classrooms with ESL students. They act as a second teacher in the classroom, and they are a support mechanism for the students. Judging from the students' expressions, they appeared to understand the activity or assignment better. They also do not appear to be isolated from the classroom arena. Dictionaries in another language, teachers translating English into Spanish, and

translators are examples that I witnessed of how Success Academy meets the needs of its non-English speaking students of color.

Positive Steps to Foster Racial Consciousness

Besides positive racial socialization, I observed steps that the staff at Success Academy took to facilitate the development of racial consciousness for their students. First, the ninth-grade academy is committed to being counter-hegemonic in its practice (Perry, 2003). It serves primarily low-income and students of color. While the students are mainly members of marginalized groups, the power structure in the academy suggests high expectations, an adequate curricula, and highly-qualified teachers. African American and Latino students see that being themselves included achieving at high levels. I also observed classrooms in this ninth-grade academy explicitly talk about the structural inequities that represent potential obstacles to academic success for low-income and racial minority students (e.g. reading and discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird*). This approach coincided with Success Academy's fostering of a critical race consciousness among the students of color, where staff and students worked for a common goal.

Quality Classroom Instruction and Its Impact on Students of Color

Table 9 indicates that the majority of students believe that how the teacher instructs the class has the most influence on their ninth-grade academy experience. The table similarly suggests that from the 26 students interviewed, 98% stressed that classroom instruction shaped their views, 1% stressed their peers, and 1% stressed that

the out of school activities had the greatest influence on the student's perception of the

ninth-grade academy.

Table 9. Responses to Student Interview Question Session 2 (*N* = 26)

Response to Questions	Responses	Frequency *n* (%)
1. Classroom instruction had the greatest impact on my freshman academy experience.	Quality Classroom Instruction	22 (98)
2. My freshman academy peers were the greatest influence on my experience.	Relationships	2 (1)
3. Fieldtrips and other activities greatly influenced my perception of the freshman academy.	"Real-World" Connections	2 (1)

When most of the participants voice that teacher have a great impact on their

first year experience, they equate an effective instructor as one who was able to

connect well with the students. They knew the content well enough to simplify it for

others. When asked about an effective teacher, for instance, Stephanie replies,

"Whenever I'm learning something, the teacher actually breaks it down so I can learn it

and understand." Many of the students reply that an effective teacher not only knows

the material, but has a great personality and connects well with them. For example,

"Coach Smith, he's my favorite teacher. I like his class. The subject he teaches computer

science, and I'm really good with that so I can really relate to what he talks about"

(John). John, like many other respondents, expresses their admiration towards an

instructor because of a subject that they like, and the teacher makes them feel positive

about themselves. Coach Smith is also John's track coach, and he developed a rapport

with the student outside the classroom. The students trust this teacher as a result. Some

participants express that the afterschool tutorials helps prepare them for high school.

They are impressed that the instructor takes the extra time to work with them. Many

participants view this act as a sign of caring about them.

Students offered different perspectives on the characteristics of an effective

teacher in the ninth-grade academy. Research also points out that certain

characteristics that correlate with effective teaching strategies in high-poverty and

culturally diverse schools (Edmonds, 1982). An effective teacher is characterized as one

who coordinates with other professionals, is engaged in continuous professional

development, promotes student engagement and knows the subject matter in different

ways for special education and general education. Inis, for example mentioned:

> I tend to get along with the teachers who give me the most freedom like my first
> period teacher. I like the way she teaches and she's very direct and to the point,
> and my second period teacher I don't really like because I don't think that what
> she teaches has anything to do with what we have to do in life. My third and
> fourth periods are okay because the teachers are very direct and to the point.
> (Inis)

JT similarly responds that his lasting memories of the ninth-grade academy stemmed

from his classroom experience. He said:

> I did an experiment in biology where we worked on photosynthesis. We worked in teams and turned in the assignments after the end of the week. We went over our reports on the Smartboard along with the other groups. (JT)

As perceived by most students in the ninth-grade academy, effective teachers educate to the students' interests and incorporate those interests into the curriculum to increase student engagement. The classrooms that I observed reflected teacher interest in facilitating student-led assignments as well as active dialogue and creative writing activities. Patience, humor, and flexibility are noted as characteristics of an effective instructor. An effective teacher is also described as a person who plans and is willing to modify assignments based on the needs of the students and demonstrate respect for the demographics of the school.

The Development of Personal Relationships with Students of Color

Others from the second interview session believed that being around other ninth-grade academy students had the greatest influence on their perception of the ninth-grade academy.

> I think it's better for them [freshmen] to have the freshmen academy because it will prepare them for life and what they're going to have in the future. It's better that they stay to themselves because if they mingle with the upperclassmen, it might bring some trouble. (Brian)

Other respondents expressed that being in a sheltered environment with students with whom they were familiar made school less stressful and intimidating. Ninth graders can positively feed off one another in a closed environment. "It's been

very well being round people you've known for a while. It makes you feel more comfortable in the learning environment" (Nate).

In another instance, peers can have negative influences on a student's ninth-grade academy experience. For example, a participant's brother attended the freshman academy two years earlier and dropped out. The participant disliked school as a result. When I asked about the brother, she said, "The year before I came here [school] there were five fights a day. People would fight over stupid stuff. My brother, for example, would fight you if you looked at him the wrong way" (Inis). Inis said that she never went to Freshman Orientation nor had a mentor. Her parents never met with the teachers, and they did not speak English. As a result, Inis had a negative outlook on school compared to JT who had relatives with a positive ninth-grade experience.

"Real-World" Experience and Its Impact on the Participants

One student remarked that his fondest memory of Success Academy was the extracurricular activities that took place. He noted that partaking in fieldtrips had a positive influence on his ninth academy experience and were his lasting memory of the ninth-grade academy experience. "Even though we were treated like little kids, they [teachers] did treat us and we did do good things. They [teachers] took us to the park. It sounds really childish, but we had fun" (Brian). Brian, saw this experience as a mechanism to escape the rigors of testing and everyday schoolwork. He perceived this function as a reward for his diligent work as a student.

Another student emphasized that one of his most positive ninth-grade experience was receiving a laptop computer. Success Academy received a grant during the 2011-2012 school year for laptops. Each ninth grader was given a computer. JT says, "I like it; I can use it for all my classes. When I go to the tenth grade next year, I can take it with me. If you graduate you get to keep it, but if you don't graduate within four years you don't get to keep it, you have to give it back" (JT). During my classroom observations, I saw that the majority of instructors required their freshmen to use the laptops. Overall, I think that the students have a sense of belonging and feel proud about what their school has done for them.

Summary of Question 2

The participants gave general responses to question two. The majority of them believe that quality instruction was the most effective practice that influenced them in Success Academy. Others elaborated on personal relationships and "real-world" connections. Overall, the responses from the participants were universal. Even though all of the participants were of color, none of them identified with programs or practices that affected a specific race or culture. However, when I observed certain classrooms at the ninth-grade academy, I witnessed some practices that connected with students based on race (quality instruction, developing personal relationships, and "real-world" experiences).

Question 3

How does race impact the experiences on students from marginalized groups in the

ninth-grade academy?

This question uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework and

provides a vehicle for examining the student's achievement from an asset model. Based

on this framework, I analyzed the overall experiences of participants at Success

Academy. None of the 26 participants mentioned that race played a major factor in their

ninth-grade academy experience. From a CRT perspective, when people admit that

racism does not exist, problems such as colorblindness, lack of counter-story telling, and

stereotyping are often present (Parker & Stovall, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Feelings of cultural alienation, physical isolation, and silence are commonly expressed

from students of color who attend predominately white schools (Datnow & Cooper,

2000). Ninth-grade academies nation-wide, however, tend to be located in urban areas

where students from mainly marginalized groups attend (Torres, 2004). Based on my

student interviews and classroom observations of Success Academy, the participants

have overlooked the racial aspect of their freshman experience because they have not

interacted with a predominately white student population.

Classroom Observations/Trends that Suggest that Race is Relevant

I observed 26 classrooms during the 2011-2012 school year at Success Academy

for anywhere from thirty minutes to ninety minutes. Based on my classroom

observations, a teacher's race plays a significant factor in the participants' experience,

despite their responses to the interview questions. If the teacher was nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and energetic, the participants held the teacher's class in high esteem regardless of race. However, if teachers were of color and they had the previously stated attributes, they were perceived to be the most effective teachers at Success Academy. Teachers who lacked any of the five attributes (i.e., nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and energetic) tended to have the most difficulty teaching the participants, especially if that teacher was of color.

Whenever I observed a teacher interacting positively with one class, they encountered a similar experience with the other classes regardless of the classroom demographics and students' abilities. Those teachers who the participants viewed unfavorably tended to struggle with the students in all the classes that I observed. Participants who I observed off task for one teacher were on task for another one, and vice versa. Most participants' responses and classroom demeanor suggest that a teacher's race is not the only major factor in their ninth-grade academy experience.

The teacher who was held in highest esteem by the students at Success Academy was an African American female in her early thirties, Ms. G. She taught for seven years, and had been at Success Academy for five years. She was professionally dressed, wearing a long skirt. She had tattoos and was about six feet tall with high heels. She was the current Teacher of the Year not only for Success Academy, but for the high school as a whole. Ms. G.'s students had high marks on their EOC exams in mathematics. She taught algebra I and geometry to the ninth graders. When I observed her class, I noticed

that the students admired her because she was able to connect and communicate well.

For instance, when she instructed students to solve algebraic equations in word

problem format, she incorporated the student's names in the equation (e.g. Luis,

Miranda, and Keshia) instead of giving generic worksheets. Also, she spoke a little

Spanish to the students (e.g. por favor, gracias). Ms. G. posted outstanding student work

in her classroom, and notes from students like, "I love U. Ms. G." Another Latina student

talked about bringing the teacher a Latin dish, alvahores. Most of Ms. G.'s students were

Latino and African American. Even though their seating arrangement was according to

race, whenever the class worked collaboratively on an assignment, Ms. G. grouped them

cross-racially. Students were engaged, and Ms. G. constantly monitored them.

Participants appeared to have a beneficial experience of the freshman academy in Ms.

G's class because she held high expectations for herself and others, and was

nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and energetic. When the principal

walked into the classroom to observe, the students did not look shocked or surprised.

They continued to work as usual.

Another African American teacher in Success Academy who the students held in

high regard had similar qualities as Ms. G. Unlike the previous teacher, Ms. M. was an

experienced teacher who taught for about twenty years. She had worked with ninth

graders at Success Academy since it started. Ms. M. was about 5'7" tall and had

dreadlocks. She was in her later forties. Ms. M. taught honors environmental science

and standard environmental science. She has predominately African American and

Latino students in her classes. The students' demeanor was the same in each of her classes. Students treated her and each other with respect. For example, students raised their hands, addressed Ms. M. with "Ma'am." When Ms. M. assigned students in groups, they did not complain or protest. The classroom was decorated with exceptional student work.

Equally important, the teacher assigned a project that was pertinent to students and centered on race. The Punnett Square assignment, for instance, required the students to interview their relatives and determine the probability of dark skin, dark hair, etc. in their families. Afterwards, students were expected to present their findings to the class. Each student had a different finding. Based on this project, students learned the differences/uniqueness not only about themselves, but from others as well. Like Ms. G.'s classroom, Ms. M.'s walls were decorated with admiration notes from students (e.g. "You are the best," etc.). In the eyes of the participants, Ms. M. was nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and energetic.

Even though the most effective teachers were of color at Success Academy, the least effective teacher was of color as well. Although he was respectful to the students and others, he was not caring/nurturing, organized, confident, creative, nor energetic. The participants likewise gave Coach A. the most difficult time of any teacher who I observed in Success Academy. Students liked, but did not respect him. For example, when Coach A. gave an assignment, the students worked on homework from another class. They constantly left the classroom without permission from the teacher. Students

sat together by race, and talked about topics that did not relate to the class. Even

though Coach A. was an African American male in his late twenties who was 6'5" and

assisted in coaching the football team, since his voice did not project like Ms. G. and Ms.

M's voices, students rarely paid attention. Even though he taught world history, I did

not observe artifacts in his classroom to indicate that the students studied non-Western

civilizations or cultures that reflected their heritage, such as posters, charts, or maps.

Instead of circulating when students worked collaboratively, Coach A. sat at his desk

grading papers. The teacher had magazines and papers scattered around his desk in an

unorganized manner. When I appeared at Coach A's classroom, a student asked me,

"Are you the sub for today?" Within the first 20 minutes of observing Coach A.'s class,

he told me that he had another job, and was not planning on returning to Success

Academy the following year.

When Coach A. gave the class the Native American assignment during the pre-

Colombian era, he did not present guidelines to the students. There was not a rubric or

model available to the class. During the collaborative assignment, students surfed the

internet instead of researching material on Native Americans. Predominately African

Americans and Latinos were in Coach A.'s three classes. The same behaviors in his three

classes that I observed suggested that for students of color, in particular, a teacher's

race is not enough. They must be nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and

energetic as well. JT and Inis had Coach A. the previous semester, and his teaching

corroborated their assertion that race was not discussed in class.

Evidence of Racial Recognition versus Colorblindness at Success Academy

The participants' responses suggested that they did not adopt a victim mentality. This defense motivated them to counter societal stereotypes about members of their racial groups and persevere in their academics (Carter, 2008). The teachers I observed were instrumental in socializing students of color in Success Academy to have positive racial identities that include awareness of racial discrimination. Same-race teachers were not the only ones implementing this practice, but all teachers were consistent with the freshmen students of color. The participants identified African American and white teachers as being consistent in reiterating the counter-narrative of African American and Latino achievement that produces the development of positive accomplishments in society. For example, when I observed and English class in Success Academy, the teacher listed the objectives, followed the state's guidelines, and assigned his students extra books to read. These books were counter-narratives about people of color. His classroom library consisted of *When Marian Sang*, *Maritcha: A 19th Century American Girl*, *Novio Boy*, *The Great Migration*, *La Mariposa*, *The Bluford Series*, *Voices from the Field*, *Children of the Dust Bowl*, and many other books explaining how people of color overcame diversity. Once the students read the books, they would give an oral report to the class, and have classroom discussions. Other ninth-grade academy English classes conducted a similar activity with their students.

Many of the teachers shared their personal stories with the class, whether they were of color or white. For example, each Success Academy teacher had their personal

pictures of family and friends on display near their desks. Instead of decorating the classrooms, many teachers posted exceptional work from the students, for motivation. Classroom rules and expectations are posted throughout classrooms, with the students' signatures as a sign of collaboration and understanding. Many of the Success Academy teachers served as coaches or advisors for afterschool activities where the ninth graders are involved.

Having these types of teachers as role models is essential to the success for students from marginalized groups (Carter, 2008). In many of the classes that I observed, the teachers' willingness to be explicit with students of color about the structural barriers that can potentially impede their social and economic mobility was a sign of ethics and care (Nieto, 2004). The support of caring adults from marginalized and non-marginalized groups in academic environment has proven to be a major factor in the academic performance of high-achieving students of color (Nieto, 2004). These kinds of teachers in the academy are cultural brokers and advocates who provide students of color with the skills they need to persevere in school and become upwardly mobile. As teachers nurture positive racial socialization for African American and Latino students, they help them to become high achievers who have strong racial achievement and self-concepts (Carter, 2008).

In addition, I saw artifacts that suggested Success Academy's staff reaching out and educating others about student cultural and racial differences. For example, posted on the academy's bulletin board, near its entrance, the staff makes the students aware

of other cultures. They posted Spanish words and phrases for the students to learn (e.g.

colors, numbers, weather, phrases, etc.). The staff changes the bulletin boards every

month, and each month there is a cultural or aspect. The information one month might

pertain to African American culture, the next month to Asian culture and so on. This

bulletin board reflects the student diversity in Success Academy. When others read this

information, it educates them about the cultural backgrounds of their fellow students so

that there will be a deeper appreciation of differences and uniqueness among students.

**Evidence of Race as a Factor in Students' Ninth-Grade Academy Experience versus
Denial from the Participants**

Several observations that I made in the ninth-grade academy indicated that race

was a major component in the lives of students of color. When I interviewed JT, Inis, and

the other participants about how race affected their ninth-grade academy experience,

most responded that it did not have an impact. However, when I observed the

interactions with students in the classrooms and social settings, I witnessed something

different. Students tended to socialize with each other according to race. Many teachers

connected with students by using race and ethnicity as a focal point.

For instance, as I conducted a pizza party as an incentive for the participants, I

allowed them to invite their friends within Success Academy. The friends who came to

the event were all the same race and ethnicity as the students who had invited them.

Students sat and socialized with each other in various corners of the classroom

according to their race. Students tended not to leave their particular group during the

pizza party. Students did not appear to be uncomfortable with the scenario. These

same-race students were the closest friends of the participants who mentioned that

race was not a major factor in their freshman academy experience. Similarly, when I

observed students at Success Academy eating lunch, they sat together according to

race. Staff from the academy monitored the students, and some sat with them

randomly. The lunch tables are segregated and the students appear to be comfortable.

Students sat together willingly. When I asked JT about the seating arrangements in the

cafeteria he responded:

> I sit with these guys because I've known them my whole life. They play football
> and basketball with me. They live near me, and I don't get to see a lot of my
> friends during the day because they're on a different [9th grade] team. This
> [lunch time] is a time to relax. A lot of other students feel the same way I do. (JT)

When I observed JT in his science and English class, he socialized more with the

African American students. He sat near two of his friends who were African American

males. They chatted continuously in class, oftentimes about non-curricular concerns.

Other students in the class behaved in a similar matter. Whenever the class worked

collaboratively on an assignment, the teacher randomly grouped the students. These

activities were the only instances that I observed the classrooms in Success Academy

being integrated.

I also asked Inis about why she sat with the particular group of students at

lunchtime and she said:

I like to hang out with these guys because they're cool. I take a lot of classes with them and sometimes see them afterschool. We formed our own clique shortly after school started. In the cafeteria, Hispanics, whites, and blacks sit with each other. There's nothing wrong with it, it's just been a habit. (Inis)

Within Inis's group, the students all spoke Spanish and everyone was Latino. In the classrooms that I observed, similarly Inis sat with other Latino students. She spoke mainly English, but to her friends she spoke Spanish.

JT's and Inis's responses represented the complexity in the observation of Success Academy. The students reported that race was not central in their freshman experience, however, when I observed that setting, I saw how students congregated according to race and ethnicity. Freshmen did not socialize according to the Success Academy teams to which they were assigned.

Students sat together based mainly by race whether it was in the classroom, or when they worked together collaboratively. Students worked in cross-racial groups only if the teacher assigned them in that way. Most often, when students worked or sat in groups according to race, males and females sat together in those teams. Whenever Latino students sat together, they communicated in Spanish. These conversations did not bother the other students or the teacher. If there were more females than males in a particular class, rather than sit with a male of a different race in the class, the male sat with females of the same race. I observed that trend in many of the Success Academy classrooms.

Race Addressed in the Curriculum

Whereas most participants responded that race was not discussed in the classrooms, I observed it being discussed when the English I honors class covered *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Some African Americans were in that class, as well as white and Latino students. The English teacher (white male) had a discussion with the students about the content of the story. I witnessed, for example, how frustrated and uncomfortable the African American male students were in the classroom when the class addressed the sentencing of the African American character (Jim), falsely accused of raping a white woman, then executed. Whereas the students who were non-African American had no problems objectively discussed the sentencing of Jim, the African American male students appeared angry over the character's portrayal in the story. The book had the constant use of the word, *nigger*. Most students did not have a problem reading it in class; however, the African American students appeared very uncomfortable. The teacher acted as the facilitator in this situation. He used this assignment as a "teachable moment." The teacher led the class to the understanding that whites oftentimes falsely accused African Americans of crimes and punished them accordingly. He connected the story according to what happened in the present day legal system with African Americans or other people of color. The students appeared engaged in the assignment, and the African American students appeared to understand how race is central to ones' lifetime experience.

When I observed each of the world history classes, the students appeared

engaged in a similar assignment. Each student in this class conducted research on a

Native American civilization of their choice. The teacher paired students and they chose

a pre-Columbian society (e.g. Mayans, Aztecs, Incas, etc.) and presented their findings.

For the project, students had to go beyond researching materials from the textbook and

the internet. They went to the media center and local library to find sources. Students

had to create an artifact from that era, as well as, write a report and present it in front

of the class. The teacher also required the class to give a Power Point presentation

based on their findings. This project gave students an opportunity to learn about an

oppressed society. Each group conducted research on a different Native American group

so that the students learned new information about the plight of those in pre-

Columbian societies (e.g. diseases, slavery, wars). The teacher coordinated this activity

that was student led, instead of him taking over and lecturing to the class. Also, students

identified how historically, oppression has existed in society.

In the earth science classes, students worked on an assignment where they

tracked hereditary traits (Punnett Squares). The class worked collaboratively in class to

determine what the probability was for one inheriting brown eyes, dark skin, brown

hair, etc. and the students solved Punnett Squares (hereditary charts). Afterwards, each

student created a Punnett Square based on their family's dynamics and presented it to

the class for a grade. Students examined how characteristics of race were inherent in

their family. Most important about this assignment, students had the opportunity to

share with others their uniqueness.

Evidence of Colorblindness and Race in Success Academy

The appeal of colorblindness can be an ideological strategy to obscure the

maintaining of hierarchies of racial power (Crenshaw, 1995). For example, the Success

Academy's mission statement reflects that it recognizes and strives for student

achievement:

> To support an environment where high expectations foster lifelong success
> within a positive climate of diversity . . . 90% of graduates will enroll in 2 or 4
> year post secondary institutions, 0% of those students will require remediation
> at the 2 or 4 post secondary institution. (School's Website).

I did not, however, observe many specific strategies as to how the academy planned to

assist students of color. The website, for instance, does not have translations in foreign

languages or mention mentorship programs from African American or Latino students.

When I asked a Latino participant about Success Academy assisting and recognizing non-

English speakers, he was very complimentary about the efforts of the staff. He replied

like most students:

> I actually want to get at least accepted to a university or somewhere because my
> parents are not the type to have a lot of money. I hope to get scholarships to get
> accepted to some kind of university. . . . Sometimes Latinos don't really get
> certain English words. They (teachers) will help you and explain it a little. (Mark)

Mark's comments reflect the Success Academy's attempt to address his needs. However, I was not sure that the academy laid down a concrete solution to his needs. For example, I did not observe that Success Academy established a workshop for Latino students who want to go to college and need financial assistance or Latino mentors.

Teaching Assignments

Most of the teachers at Success Academy were white, and the remaining three were African American. This ninth-grade academy's staff population was slightly less racially diverse than the rest of the school. The three African American teachers taught only standard level and a few honors level ninth-grade academy classes. The Advanced Placement (AP), highest level in academic achievement, at Success Academy was taught by the most seasoned Caucasian teachers. These teachers had been at the high school before the creation of Success Academy. They were in their mid to late forties, and each teacher had at least twenty years of teaching experience. The student demographics in the AP classes contained slightly more Caucasian students than the other ninth-grade academy classes.

The participants remarked that the AP classes were challenging and gratifying. However, when I observed Coach A.'s standard history class, and Mr. W.'s AP history class, the students responded to the teachers differently even though they taught the same content using similar instructional styles. In Coach A.'s (African American male) class, the students were off task the majority of the time. He had the rules/expectations posted for all to see. He constantly told students to be quiet and get on task. Mr. W.

(white male), did not do anything different instructionally from Coach A., however, the African American and Latino students treated him with respect. They took notes, listened, and even paid attention the whole time he lectured for 30 minutes. JT and Inis sat in the front of the classroom, and participated in discussion whenever there was an opportunity.

Mr. W. did not once tell the students to get on task. Student discipline in Mr. W.'s class did not seem to be an issue, whereas, in Coach A.'s classes it was. Also, the ninth-grade counselor, who assigns teachers to the classes, mentioned that Coach A. taught AP history the previous year at Success Academy, and "It was a disaster, the students and parents love Mr. W. . . . The students scored well on their AP tests." As a result, of the low AP test scores, the administration assigned Coach A. to teach the standard level and honors classes currently at Success Academy. I got the understanding from the counselor that the students and parents in those current classes did not complain as much. However, from my observation of Coach A.'s classes, the students did not seem content with his teaching style either. Those classes had a higher percentage of African American and Latino students than the AP history class.

In the science classes, Ms. M. (African American female) taught standard and honors environmental science, while Ms. T. (white female) taught AP science to the ninth graders. Both teachers were about the same age, and had similar years of experience in teaching. The participants thought highly of both teachers, and they both incorporated similar teaching methods. However, the administration gave a similar

reasoning behind Ms. T.'s assignment. "She's a wonderful teacher, and the students performed well on their tests." Slightly, a larger portion of African American and Latino students were in Ms. M.'s classes than Ms. T.'s classes.

In Ms. G.'s (African American female) class, who was the most highly regarded teacher at Success Academy, almost all of her students were of color. She taught standard and honors mathematics to classes; while students taking upper level mathematics courses had Mr. Z (white male). Mr. Z had been teaching at the high school for more than ten years. There were not enough freshmen to make up a class in the academy, so those students left the academy only for this mathematics class. They took the course with upperclassmen. Even though Mr. Z. was more experienced than Ms. G. at teaching, he was not nominated Teacher of the Year like Ms. G.

The teaching assignment trends at Success Academy indicated that the most experienced white teachers tend to work with the work with the highest academically achieving students; while the only three teachers of color teach the remaining ninth graders, regardless of their ability. Although I did not ask the participants about their opinions on the teaching assignments at Success Academy, I imagine that it has a negative impact on their psyche. When students of color do not see professionals who look like them teaching upper classes, they might not be encouraged to take those upper level courses. From observing Ms. G.'s and Ms. M.'s classes, if they taught the AP courses, and since the students who admired them were mainly of color, more of them would enroll in their AP classes, so that they can reach their maximum potential.

Likewise, since Mr. A. struggled with standard and honors history, mixing up his

schedule of standard, honors, and AP history would give him an even balance of classes,

so that the participants do not stigmatize him as a poor teacher because he taught AP

history the previous year and was unsuccessful.

Racist Remarks Made about Others in Success Academy

In educational settings, stereotypes can be used to justify: (a) having low

educational and occupational expectations for students of color, (b) placing students of

color in separate schools and in separate classrooms within schools, (c) remediating the

curriculum for students of color, and (d) expecting students of color to one day occupy

lower status and levels of occupation (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). In Success Academy, I

observed a stereotypical comment from a participant. Based on her remarks, I was

unable to determine if the academy took procedures to clarify the misunderstanding.

As I interviewed Inis, she shared her concerns with me about her classes. Inis

was upset that her freshmen classes had disruptions. She articulated:

> I get along with some black people who are cool, but there are some black kids who are really loud and they be all up in your face. Then they think they are all that. The white people are cool and so are the Mexicans. It's just that the black people, most of them that I went to Concord with were really cool. Here they all be mad and they be like 'what do you want?' In class they be yelling for no reason, laughing and acting crazy, and that just gets me mad. The [teachers] calm them down, but it takes a long time to get them to stop and start tending to class again.

Inis further elaborated on her views on students from different races at Success

Academy:

> They're [other races] okay, but some people are in groups like the blacks, who
> think they're better than everyone, stay in one group where there's the ghetto
> blacks and the cool ones. And there's the weird Mexicans and the cool ones who
> I hang out with. And there's a little bit of the same situation when you get to the
> tenth grade.

Based on this student's stereotyping remarks, I checked to see if Success

Academy had a system where students could voice their concerns or issues. In dealing

with racial stereotypes in classrooms, students need to hear about, discuss, and analyze

those racial experiences that people of color encounter in their public and private

worlds. Not only do students need to discuss blatant racial stereotypes and attitudes,

but they need to listen, understand, and analyze racial micro-aggressions (Solorzano &

Yosso, 2001).

I checked with the academy's principal to determine if the teachers were trained

to facilitate classroom discussions on race. According to her, the teachers took

professional development focusing on curriculum and instruction, such as Marzano et

al.'s (2001) *Classroom Instruction that Works*. The administrator of Success Academy

mentioned that students had the option of going to guidance or the social worker if

there were concerns. Since Inis, however, did not think that she had a problem with her

stereotypical view, she did not see it necessary to consult with an academy resource. I

did not notice in the syllabus, discussion about racial stereotypes in the Freshman

Seminar class nor on the agenda for Freshman Orientation.

When I was not able to determine what steps the academy took to eradicate or

address stereotypes, I concluded that racial stereotypes persist among students. The

academy's staff will listen and assist students on an individual basis. However, as a

whole program, the problem of stereotyping will continue to persist as long as there is

no open forum for the students to discuss and analyze their concerns.

Summary of Question 3

Many respondents did not acknowledge racism within Success Academy nor the

existence of an open forum where racial issues were discussed or analyzed. As I

analyzed the data from a CRT perspective, issues arose in the classroom such as

colorblindness, lack of counter-stories, and stereotypes. After observing classrooms,

speaking with the academy's administrator, and reviewing the Success Academy's

website, I concluded that race had a major impact on the experiences on students from

marginalized groups in the academy.

Concluding Thoughts

> My goal is to attend college and become something because I see too many
> people around me not doing anything, and I don't want to be like them. My
> motivation is to become something and be a role model for others. (JT)

Many ninth-grade students of color in Success Academy want to do the same

things as JT mentioned in the previous quote. In many instances, however, these

dreams are not reached because they were not equipped with the proper academic or social skills necessary for college. Often, these students have objective probabilities for their future, but their subjective realities result in lowered aspirations or delayed dreams. Embodying a critical consciousness about racial inequalities in schools enables students of color to situate their academic and life goals in realities of social inequity. This type of consciousness does not have to result in students ignoring or internalizing a victim mentality; rather, it can foster academic motivation and perseverance.

JT's earlier quote indicates a critical race consciousness is a counter-narrative because it stands in opposition to the dominant society's notions about the intellectual capacity of those from marginalized groups. It is not the end-all to high academic achievement, but the connectedness to one's racial identity, awareness of racial discrimination, and self-perspective as a succeeding member of the racial group can be the buffer students of color experiences with structural barriers that they encounter in achieving their lifetime goals.

In Chapter V, I will provide concluding comments to this study, summarize what I learned from this ninth-grade academy, and provide implications and recommendations for those academies seeking to serve the needs of ninth-grade academy students from marginalized groups.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, & CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This chapter summarizes the study and makes recommendations for

practitioners, policymakers and researchers. Finally, conclusions based on the study are

noted.

Summary

Students of color in particularly are experiencing difficulties in high school at a

higher rate than their white counterparts. The dropout rates have increased since the

1970's (Smith, 1997). Nationally, the dropout rates are 11% for students between the

ages of 16-24 with a much greater rate reported for students of color (Hess & Lauber,

1985). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in 1995 that 381,000

students dropped out of school. Most of them left school before the tenth grade.

As stated in Chapter II, the creation and implementation of the middle school

concept occurred in the early 1990's. The development of the middle school concept

called for grades sixth through eighth (Loundsbury, 1992). Ninth-grade students,

formerly part of the junior high school organization, automatically went to high school.

The development of middle schools without the restructuring of the high school to

provide a systematically appropriate program has exacerbated the high school dropout rate, particularly for Latino and African American students.

Success in the traditional high school curriculum was based on a student's ability to use formal reasoning. The majority of students fail to reach formal operational thought (Stefanich & Piaget, 1990). Van Hoose and Strahan (1988) suggest that only about one-third of the eighth-grade population demonstrates formal reasoning on a consistent basis. If this assertion is true, then the majority of students reaching ninth grade are still in the operational reasoning stage of development. This dilemma creates cognitive dissonance for freshmen students.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) report, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (1996), was published in conjunction with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It argues for the need for a major restructuring of the traditional high school. Among the report's 82 recommendations are various strategies like teaming, mentoring, integrated curriculum, and lessons designed to address the various learning styles that are part of the middle school concept.

Many high schools with ninth-grade academies are located in urban areas where students of color live. Like many diverse high schools facing a dropout problem, Success Academy developed a transition program for students entering the ninth grade. The goal of this program was to provide a venue where 'at-risk' freshmen could successfully progress and successfully earn a high school diploma.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the ninth-grade academy at Success Academy for students of color. As a formative assessment, it provides that ninth-grade academy with useful data to use in improving its program. As a summative assessment, it provides data to other schools that find similarities to their own contexts.

In this inclusive environment, the diverse student population at Success Academy has numerous opportunities for participation in events and organizations that reflect its cultural diversity. The respect for this diversity and the cultural capital that students bring to the academic environment work with the social capital resources resulting from relationship building to foster learning opportunities leading to greater academic achievement. The inclusivity of the school culture contradicts the concept of social reproduction, the basis which lies in the construct of race created by the dominant culture. Social reproduction began from the concept of social capital, which is viewed as an investment by the dominant culture to maintain and reproduce group dominance. Working on the premise that those who are successful have the resources to continue to be successful means that students must have social capital in order to be successful in school. The inclusive culture at Success Academy provides students an opportunity to break through the cycle of social reproduction and access the resources available from teachers, school intervention programs, which promotes their success.

CRT presented a difficult point of discussion. The majority of teachers at Success Academy were Caucasian, while the majority of students were of color. There were

various perceptions about how race was or was not factored into the instruction and achievement, perceptions that were not drawn along the racial lines. A 'colorblind' approach was evident in discussion with most of the students when they described their teachers' methods of instruction. Evidence of a belief in the ability that all students can achieve and be successful offers a paradox to the consideration of race and the importance of incorporating culturally relevant instruction into the educational program. However, there is evidence to suggest the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy, and most teachers have embraced a belief system of achievement with an understanding that the incorporation of the student's cultural repertoire into the instructional program may foster improved student performance.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The recommendations of this study connect to issues that assist teachers, counselors, administrators, and students in developing ways to enhance students of colors' experience in ninth-grade academies. Teachers, counselors, and administrators play a vital role in the decision of the students' feelings about school. By working with parents and community, the ninth-grade academy staff can positively affect the future of its students. It is crucial that teachers, counselors, and administrators understand that their influence impacts a student's freshman academy experience, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

For teachers, an important lesson learned from this study is the impact of teachers on students of colors' perception of their ninth-grade academy experience.

Teachers, counselors, and administrators' behaviors have an effect on student's decisions to excel or fall behind in the ninth-grade academy. Inis and JT recalled their experiences of entering Success Academy and how they now feel a connection with the school. It is essential that teachers, counselors, and administrators (ninth-grade academy staff) exhibit respect each day to every student as well as treat them as an individual contributor to society. For example, educators should promote and foster racial awareness among the students, and develop a forum where students can articulate their thoughts and seek solutions to complex issues like racism.

Ninth-grade academy staff should also provide assistance when students need academic or social support. Students who feel that teachers give up on them usually shutdown and typically drop out of school or become defiant. This is true of Inis's brother who dropped out of school after his first year of Success Academy, and took a minimal paying job. Inis mentioned how her brother tried to do his work without assistance from the teachers. He eventually dropped out because of boredom, not understanding the content in class, and his not advocating for himself.

On the other hand, students like JT felt a definite connection with the staff at Success Academy. He actively participates in classes, and pays attention to every teacher. He felt they were concerned about him since he was smart and had high self-esteem. It is necessary for educators to encourage students who are highly motivated to remain on track, especially when they are involved in a high school transition program. Otherwise, these individuals will give up and tune out teachers. Teachers, counselors,

and administrators should treat all students with respect and have high expectations for everyone. It is their duty as educators to assist all students in being successful.

Along with treating all students fairly and having high expectations, the purpose of the ninth-grade academy should reinforce that students of color are not made to feel invisible. JT and Inis indicate that the staff at Success Academy encouraged and supported them throughout their first year in high school. The majority of participants needed assistance during their transition year, and received it from the ninth-grade academy's staff. When teachers address students' needs, they send the message that students are important.

If students believe they are ignored in the classroom, they become frustrated with the education process, and their self-esteem is lowered. While being ignored by the teacher, these students will feel isolation and humiliation by not being recognized and a feeling of being less intelligent than other students in the class. Teachers should be sure they do not overlook each student's worth or value and treat them with respect. Nieto (1996) notes that teachers who care, take time with students, and use their students' backgrounds in teaching are the most successful.

Social support of incoming ninth-grade students of color can be enhanced through staff development for classroom strategies to make and keep classroom instruction interesting and engaging; school staff to meet with eighth graders several times each year; and planning sessions between middle school and high school teachers. Student sense of belonging may be enhanced with evening meetings with parents of

incoming eighth grade students of color and ninth-grade students of color several times during the school year; an incentive program for good grades, attendance, and citizenship; a high school practice day for new ninth graders with only them in attendance; and a ninth-grade project to beautify or improve the school resulting in creating student ownership.

Academic expectations may be built through offering character education. Ninth-grade academies should offer an individual learning plan, for "at-risk" students, and those not ready for high school. Ninth-grade academy staff should also have in place, grade retention and remediation practices. Staff should invite parents and community members to present their careers to students for motivation. Also, they should consider evening classes for families of entering ninth graders. Incentives such as free meals, information about the academy, and tours could be provided to families.

Another lesson teachers can learn from this study is the need to develop a professional relationship with students where they feel safe and equity exists in their classrooms. If students feel devalued and intimidated in voicing their opinion in class, they will not enjoy the educational process and become disengaged from school, either dropping out of school or becoming silent. If teachers in ninth-grade academies become facilitators of student learning, they should be cognizant of how students learn and develop strategies that will enable them to be productive critical thinking individuals.

Most important in this study, my data suggest that students of color in the ninth-grade academy find the most effective teachers to be caring/nurturing, organized,

confident, creative, and energetic. Teachers who have those characteristics, regardless of their race or ethnicity, manage their students effectively, and are highly respected. Ninth-grade academy teachers must be passionate about their profession, and realize that ninth-grade students of color respond best to those who care about them and are competent. Effective teachers in this environment should be intrinsically motivated instead of extrinsically motivated. The driving force behind these successful teachers is their wanting students to achieve instead of making a lot of money. They should stress to students that racial awareness is important, and make it part of their daily interaction with students. For instance, they can invite speakers of color to speak to students who have encountered adversity and achieved, or read alternative literature about the plight of people of color.

As a critical resource for students of color, guidance counselors are significant distributors of information that shape future academic and career opportunities. Ninth-grade academy counselors should develop a college-going culture that includes and supports students of color going to college. Counselors should foster a culture supportive of advanced study. Student participation in rigorous academic courses should be the counselor's goal when scheduling courses. Counselors should strive to provide intensive academic support to "at-risk" students in the ninth-grade academy.

Administrators can also ensure that students of color have a successful year in the ninth-grade academy by helping build connections with community leaders and local businesses managed by people of color. Building administrators can support

business partnerships by allowing businesses to speak to students in class, or setup an

allocated time for students to intern at selected businesses. For administrators, it is

their duty to be visible in classrooms and around ninth-grade academy functions to

make sure that all ninth graders receive the best education possible. They can also make

sure their psychological and sociological needs are met as well as their academic needs.

The ninth-grade academy administrator in this study was competent in all these

categories. Upon entering Success Academy, the administrator did an excellent job in

meeting all of the needs of the participants. Administrators should assist in structuring

and shaping the ninth-grade academy into a student-centered environment.

Ninth-grade academy administrators must continue to develop ways to better

serve students in danger of dropping out of school, mentally and physically. This effort

must be ongoing and diligent. Administrators in the ninth-grade academy should be

willing to do some homework, and look at what has been done or not done earlier to

assist these students in making school a positive experience. They must make it a

priority to reach out and make sure no students fall behind. Administrators can also

reassure that students do not experience any negativity by teachers that cause them to

become disengaged with school.

Administrators should continuously provide teachers with staff development and

resources to improve teaching strategies to reach every student. Sensitivity workshops

must be incorporated to understand racial and cultural differences as well as behavioral

and learning differences. Parents should be included to provide support in the

academy's endeavors. Administrators can look at specific academic programs, extracurricular activities, and other support systems that address achievement gaps between white students and students of color.

Also, ninth-grade academy students of color need to be cognizant that racism exists in society. They should accept it and collectively work with other classmates to find solutions. Ninth-grade academy students of color need to get actively involved in their transition from middle school to high school. They need to attend all outreach programs that the ninth-grade staff sponsors, whether it is Freshman Orientation or club activities. When students are visible to the staff, they are sending the message that they care about their education, and they take responsibility for themselves. Also, freshman academy students of color need to connect with a staff member or upperclassman. They need role models who are the same race and culture that have overcome adversity. Finally, students of color in freshman academies need to establish a timeline. They should set personal and career goals and make deadlines for what they want to achieve. Making a timeline is also a mechanism for incoming students of color to take ownership for their actions, and become responsible their first year in high school.

Parents can assist in this transition process by being supportive of their child's schooling. They should be highly visible at functions sponsored by the ninth-grade academy, as well as constantly check their child's progress. Parents need to join the Parent Student Teacher Association (PTSA), and volunteer to serve at functions that

benefit the ninth-grade academy, whether it is volunteering to mentor others, or voicing

the academy's concerns to the proper network (e.g. policymakers). They should meet

with their child's teachers on an ongoing basis to monitor the progress. Parents can also

create a means of communicating to the public the needs or accomplishments of the

ninth-grade academy whether it is in the form of a newsletter or a school webpage.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Policymakers**</div>

Greene (1988) recommends that in order for policymakers to achieve a

"democratic community," we must consider a "fresh and sometimes startling" pedagogy

(p. 127). This pedagogy would mean providing opportunities to hear the community

voices, involving participants who are often students of color. If the needs of African

American and Latino students are to be met, public schooling requires major changes.

Schooling for students of color must be crafted to meet the various learning styles of

their cultures.

Since ninth-grade academies are separate entities within a high school,

policymakers should set aside funds so that each ninth-grade academy has its own

building space. Ninth-grade students need an area where they can interact with one

another without distractions from upperclassmen. Freshmen need an academic

atmosphere where they can get the personalized attention from the ninth-grade

academy staff. For example, policymakers should hire enough ninth-grade academy

staff so that the teacher/student ratio is 1:15. As students build a connection their first

year in high school, they will have a better chance of achieving in grades ten through twelve.

A student's meeting and building relationships with others who look like them and live in the same vicinity will create a belief system for that student. The student will think that if he or she works diligently in school and sets goals, the student will be as successful as the local business leaders. Students will understand the connection between academics and careers. Policymakers can further assist students of color to succeed in ninth-grade academies by incorporating technology, and ensuring that it is accessible for all. For example, the government should set aside funds so that each ninth-grade academy class has internet access, student laptops, and teachers who are incorporating technology with classroom instruction. To support teachers, policymakers should fund workshops that instruct teachers on how to use and integrate technology in the classroom. The government's support for technology is a means of bringing relevancy to education for students of color.

Furthermore, policymakers can take measures to ensure the success of students of color in freshmen academies are providing more resources and advocating for the highest qualified teachers. State curriculum should be revised to incorporate courses on race relations. This course should be required for all ninth-grade academy students. Students have an open forum where they share their experiences with one another as well as with the teacher. Students should take this course for a credit instead of a grade, to provide a more relaxed atmosphere. The government should pay for male and female

speakers from universities or businesses of all ethnicities to speak to students about race and race relations in society. The teacher in this course acts as the facilitator. She or he establishes the rules and procedures for the course along with the syllabus. The final project for this course should be how students can improve race relations in society. Each student in this course should have the opportunity to communicate. Furthermore, students should learn to agree to disagree on controversial topics, and to understand rather than tolerate differences in others.

Since the majority of ninth-grade academies are located in poor areas of the school district, policymakers can ensure that funding is allocated in an equitable manner. They need to avoid raising high property taxes in those areas of the city, and lowering property taxes in the more affluent areas of town, which ultimately lead to segregation and an achievement gap in the district. Ninth-grade academies need more support and funds allocated by the government since many serve students who have no other alternative plan for an education.

Recommendations for Researchers

Researchers who conduct future studies on ninth-grade academies are encouraged to collect data from as many sources as possible. I initially did not have enough data for this study because I relied solely on student interviews. When, I also observed classes, interviewed a counselor and spoke to teachers, I developed a better understanding. Researchers must gather as much information as possible about this subject matter so their interpretations will not be skewed or narrowed in scope. They

should question the validity of their data and question why there is a discrepancy. For example, the participants' responses that race was not evident in Success Academy differed from my classroom observations.

Researchers should also develop and maintain a lasting relationship with the participants. When I learned more about the students, I was able to extract more information. Researchers must similarly gain the trust and credibility of the participants. They can gain the trust and credibility of their subjects by being honest and communicating about the research process to them. Researchers should confirm and notify the participants' guardians as well. Also, the researcher needs to follow through with the promises given. For example, I sponsored a pizza party for my subjects for their participation in this study. After that event, those same students were more willing to share information with me than before their interviews. Visibility is another way that researchers can earn credibility with the subjects. My experience taught me that the more students see the researcher and understand that he or she is not trying to manipulate them they will share information more readily.

Since researchers are experts in recognizing and identifying the characteristics of an effective teacher, they should actively serve on hiring committees for the ninth-grade academy's staff. They need to collaborate with the ninth-grade academy's teachers, counselors, and administrators in this selection process. A researcher's input should be weighed as equally as any other staff member in choosing the appropriate person to work in the freshman academy.

Most importantly, since the focus of this study is to examine the experiences of students of color in the ninth-grade academy, the conclusions drawn should give other researchers more insight into this subject matter, such as researching the best teaching practices focusing on racial awareness and cultural sensitivity. Researchers must work collaboratively with administrators, counselors, teachers, and students in the ninth-grade academy. For example, they can lead or facilitate professional development on racial and cultural sensitivity training for the staff. Researchers can also invite experts on racial and cultural sensitivity training, or they can share with the ninth-grade academy staff their findings and encourage dialogue and problem-solving. Based on this study, the students' lack of racial awareness or colorblindness presented a big issue. Researchers should stress to the staff their importance of making racial conscious imperative to the students' educational development. Every ninth-grade academy student should be required to take a class developed by the researchers and ninth-grade academy staff that addresses inequities in society.

In order to fully utilize CRT in education, researchers should remain critical of race and how it is deployed. Since CRT implies that race be the center of focus, they should critique school practices and policies that are both overtly and covertly racist. In doing so, many of the respondents who are not aware will be cognizant when it comes to their school experiences with race and racism.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate how students of color experienced their first year in Success Academy. It focused on a school's efforts in addressing the problems associated from ninth-grade transition. From this study, educators will hopefully develop a bigger picture on the pros and cons of the ninth-grade academy for students of marginalized groups. Literature suggests that the effective implementation of the freshman academy promotes positive achievement outcomes for students of color. From a socio-cultural perspective and through the theoretical framework of CRT, a student's social and cultural capitals work cohesively with the capital within the context of the school to promote academic achievement.

Not much dialogue about race occurs within the context of education. In addition to school organizational structure, an examination of issues relative to bilingual programs, and ethnic studies in high school is highly suggested. Success Academy has structures and systems in place that provide a comprehensive educational program for the students. There is evidence of a belief in the student's ability to achieve and excel.

Even though there was evidence of the acknowledgement of racial and cultural diversity, programs and efforts targeting non-English speakers were not evident. However, the absence of artifacts does not suggest that Success Academy is not reaching out to students who are non-English speakers.

Findings from Success Academy suggest that high expectations were mainly espoused by teachers and administration. Their expectations were communicated to

every student. However, the parent's perceptions of expectations were not included in the research. Further studies of ninth-grade academies could examine students of color's perceptions of the freshmen academy versus those students from the dominant culture.

Evidence from the study suggest that neither race, gender, culture, nor teaching credentials played a major role in the student's perception of an effective teacher. Students of color identified the most effective teacher as one who was energetic, caring, well-organized, and creative. Those teachers who possessed these attributes were the most beneficial, especially if they were of the same race as the participants. However, those teachers who lacked any of those attributes had the most difficult time teaching, especially if they were of color.

There is evidence to suggest that students at Success Academy are motivated to learn. They were actively involved in most of the classrooms observed. Those who were not engaged in classes were honest and greatly concerned. What actually motivates these students is not clear, and could be researched in the future. It is the hope that, from this study, educators will enhance their knowledge base of ninth-grade academies, so that they can effectively serve students of color, and reduce the high school dropout rate.

This study provided a detailed examination of a ninth-grade academy from the student of color's perspective. However, there were limitations to the study. This limitation did not allow examining a freshman academy in a less diversified school. The

perspective on the freshman academy from students of color in a less racially diversified school may or may not differ from those in a more racially diversified one. Also, time constraints did not allow for follow-up interview sessions from students of the previous school year to determine whether or not their perspectives had changed.

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