INFORMATION TO USERS

"GIVE ME A CHANCE, I WANT TO LEARN":

NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN

HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS'

ORIENTATIONS TOWARD

SCHOOL

by

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A Dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
1995

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Date of Final Oral Examination

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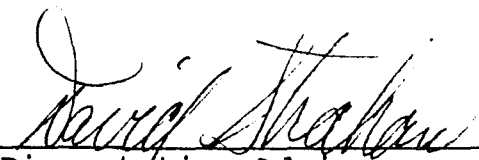OLIVER, DONNA H., Ph.D. "Give Me A Chance, I Want To Learn": Narratives of African American High School Seniors' Orientations Toward School. (1995) Directed by Dr. David B. Strahan. 258 pp.

The purpose of this investigation was to magnify the "voices" of five African American high school seniors to better understand their orientations toward school. The narratives of these students were analyzed to identify the factors affecting their perceptions of school, their views of themselves, and their experiences in school. The three components thus defined their successes and/or frustrations in school.

Narrative research methodology was used to collect each student's narrative individually. The student narratives were individually analyzed, creating mini-stories reflecting the uniqueness of each student and, analyzed as a group, creating a metastory based on the collective themes of the narratives.

The personal narratives of these students revealed that they perceived school as both a system for maintaining inequity and as an arena for change. School as a system for maintaining inequity, inequality, and exclusion, however, was the emphasis of these students' narratives. The students focused on unfair school practices: the curriculum and disciplinary actions; their personal interactions with teachers; parental involvement

in the school; the lack of administrative support; and how they perceived themselves in the context of the school as factors affecting their perceptions of school.

Implications of this study include ways to make school more inviting for African American students: (1) the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum and culturally relevant teaching may increase the academic success of African American students; (2) implementing fair and equal school practices may alleviate students' perceptions of school as a system for maintaining inequity, inequality, and exclusion; and (3) better communication among school personnel, African American students and their parents may prevent these students from feeling so alienated from the school. Utilizing the information in these students' narratives may decrease the number of African American students who ultimately drop out of school.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most grateful to my advisor and mentor, Dr. David B. Strahan, for his tireless guidance and support throughout the preparation of this dissertation. He was never too busy to share his wisdom, experience, or enthusiasm with me. He consistently inspired me to become the best scholar I was capable of becoming.

I will forever be indebted to my other committee members: Dr. Ceola R. Baber, my special mentor, who guided me through the process of becoming a true multiculturalist; Dr. Sam Miller, who directed my early days of synthesizing and focusing the research literature; and Dr. John Van Hoose, who always asked questions to extend my thinking.

My deepest gratitude is extended to my husband and partner, James C. Oliver, who has been unselfishly supportive and faithful throughout my graduate studies. His love and patience have sustained me, and his constant belief in my abilities kept me forging ahead. I share this achievement with him and our daughter, Rachel, whose love and unyielding faith in me provided the spark I needed to persevere.

Special thanks to my loving and proud mother, Annie P. Hill, who prepared many meals for me and my family; my devoted sister and friend, Laura A. Woods; and other family members, in-laws, and friends who were encouraging and understanding as I pursued my education. May the peace of God be with each of you always.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

As an African American teacher and mother, I have always been concerned about the lack of academic achievement of many African American students. I have never believed that these students were unsuccessful because of the families they were born into, or the financial circumstances they inherited. It is no secret that many Blacks from the 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's, and 60's emerged as outstanding scholars and dynamic leaders even though they were products of segregated schools, single parent homes, low socioeconomic environments, and many other less than desirable circumstances. They attended one room schools with no heat but they eagerly engaged in learning. They viewed school as arenas for change, as places where they would learn how to increase their economic status. Their only hope for first class citizenry was to obtain an education. Within the African American narrative tradition, the strength and tenacity of the belief in the importance of learning reads like a manuscript (Perry, 1993). Even after emancipation, schools for African Americans were unemancipated in that

they were still separate, unequal, and dehumanized. Yet, African Americans continued to believe in learning. Every time their hope for better schooling was crushed by the courts, legislation, or the educational establishment, it rose again. This history indicates that African Americans have had and continue to have a strong desire to acquire an excellent and equitable education.

Unfortunately many of today's African American students, other students of color, and poverty disadvantaged students leave school because they view school as maintaining inequity, inequality, and exclusion. Today schools are desegregated with a variety of instructional resources including technology, counselors, school psychologists, Chapter I programs, and many other educational programs, but large numbers of African American students continue to drop out of school and many graduate unable to read.

The reason many African American students graduate unable to read or drop out before graduation is because of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" that students perform in ways teachers expect (Nieto, 1992). Too often classroom teachers believe African American students

> perform poorly in school not because they lack
> basic intellectual competencies or specific
> learning skills, but because they have low
> expectations, feel hopeless, deny the importance of
> individual effort, or give up in the face of
> failure. (Graham, 1994, p. 55)

Yet, the literature (Gay, 1994; Graham 1994; Slavin, 1994; Stipek, 1993) indicates that most African American students desire to experience success and to participate in activities that are dependent on personal effort and abilities for their success. However, if they are not made to feel safe, secure, accepted, competent, and effective in the classroom, they begin to feel insecure and incompetent and are no longer motivated to try (Slavin, 1994; Woolfolk, 1993).

As a result of changing demographics, teachers are destined to teach children with backgrounds different from their own; therefore, they must be willing to make all children feel accepted, competent, and validated. This move is urgent and necessary because statistics indicate that the enrollment of ethnic minority children range from 70% to 96% in 15 of the nation's largest school systems. Children with a variety of linguistic and cultural heritages occupy our nation's schools, and according to the United States Department of Education 20%--12.6 million children are estimated to live in families with incomes under the official poverty rate. This presents quite a contrast between the demographic profile of the typical teacher who is White and middle class (Ross & Smith, 1992).

These enormous demographic changes in America have made it imperative that classroom teachers and

administrators have a clear and in-depth understanding of the increasing ethnic and social-class diversity in the nation's schools and classrooms. If teachers are to function effectively in multicultural classrooms and schools, educators need to acquire an understanding of how it feels to be an ethnic minority whose cultural differences have been ignored for more than a hundred years and melted away in the so-called "melting pot" of which they were never a part. They must examine their meanings of ethnic diversity in order to analyze and clarify their own ethnic attitudes to develop the pedagogical knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with students from diverse ethnic groups. Teachers must be better prepared to meet the needs of all students. A multicultural education curriculum that requires teachers and all educators to clarify their attitudes and perceptions of ethnic and social class prejudice must be implemented.

One means for studying how African Americans perceive their life experiences as students in the school context is to conduct a race homogeneous study allowing them to create order and construct text in their school contexts via personal narratives.

Statement of the Problem

Schools as they are currently structured, conceptualized, and organized, are not able to help African American students--especially those who are poverty disadvantaged--obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in the remainder of this century or the next (Banks, 1994). As a result, African American students are overrepresented among students who drop out, are suspended, or expelled from school; and many of those who do remain in school often achieve far below their potential. Bennett (1990) reports the following statistics on the nation's dropout rate:

American Indians/Alaska Natives	42.0%
Hispanics	39.9%
African Americans	24.7%
Whites	14.3%
Asian/Pacific Islanders	9.6%
(p. 13)	

These statistics confirm the fact that schools have not attained excellence nor equity in education due largely to the failure of schools to educate the nation's ethnic minorities and the poverty disadvantaged. Another alarming statistic is that

> African American children are three times more likely than European American children to be placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded and only one-half as likely to be in classes for the gifted. (Nieto, 1992)

Based on the belief that the purpose of education
is to empower all students to become productive members of
a democratic society, it is important to hear the
"stories" of students, who are not being empowered in
school, to identify what influences their successes or
frustrations in school. This is necessary because "as the
elements of cultural pluralism increase in society, so
does the challenge of negotiating it in schools . . ."
(Gay, 1994, p. 2). Cultural pluralism must be celebrated
if schools intend to further the democratic principles of
social justice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this race homogeneous study was to
analyze the "stories" of five African American students to
identify their orientations toward school, the factors
affecting their perceptions of school, and their views of
themselves and their experiences in school to define their
successes and/or frustrations in school. Furthermore,
this study provided the opportunity to magnify "voices,"
historically suppressed, to speak out on a subject that
has and will continue to affect the future of African
Americans. These "student stories" offer teachers and
other practitioners information that is culturally
significant and that will positively influence their

teaching styles and expectations towards African American students.

Research Questions

The specific research questions in this study were:

1. How do selected African American high school seniors describe their successes and frustrations in school?

2. What do the student "stories" reveal about the relationship between students' views of themselves and their experiences in school?

3. What suggestions do the "stories" of African American high school students offer for assisting classroom teachers in better understanding African American students?

Significance of the Study

It is important to understand how African American students view school, in order to better understand how to structure school to meet the needs of its diverse student populace. A number of research studies indicate that how African American, other students of color, and poverty disadvantaged students view school is positively correlated to their success in school (Rist, 1978; Fordham, 1986; Ogbu & Fordham, 1986; Swartz, 1992; Nieto,

1992; Perry, 1993; Gay, 1994; Banks, 1994). To understand why students' orientation toward school is one of the school as a system for maintaining inequity, inequality, and exclusion or one of school as an arena for change, will assist educational and political leaders in restructuring schools so that they will empower all students and truly educate for democracy. Gay (1994) suggests that

> education has the obligation to prepare
> students to critically question inequities;
> to be morally outraged and intolerant of all
> forms of oppression, exploitation, and
> injustice; to understand the nature and effects
> of these problems--personally, nationally,
> and globally; to realize that their personal
> lives and the fate of society are inextricably
> interwoven; and to engage in constructive actions
> to eliminate all restrictions on individual rights
> and social possibilities. When ingrained, these
> attitudes, values, and skills create the kind of
> critical inquiry, civic responsibility, and
> communal interdependence that are essential to the
> preservation and extension of democracy. (p. 101)

This study examined the "stories" of African American high school seniors to discover how they perceive school and their successes and/or frustrations in school. Its findings can contribute to the knowledge base describing the orientations of African American students toward school and the structural factors influencing their capability to prosper in school which may assist teachers in functioning more effectively in multicultural classrooms.

A large body of research has explored the orientations African American students have toward school, critical structural factors affecting their perceptions of school, and African American students' views of themselves and their experiences in school. These studies indicate that Black students' quest for their own identity and self-image, racial self-esteem, and school success is dependent on the belief that they have been the recipients of just and equitable treatment as they prepare for adult life. Moreover, when Black adolescents receive adequate support and encouragement from their parents and teachers, academic excellence is the end result (Fordham, 1986; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1987, 1991, 1992; Nieto, 1992; Perry, 1993; Gay, 1994; Banks, 1994). Few studies however, describe African American students' perceptions of school by allowing them to "tell their own stories." This study provided insight for understanding how African American students view school and the factors that influence their successes and frustrations in school from their point of view.

If society is ever to become a true democracy, then the voices of all people must be heard, every individual's "story" must be deemed important enough to tell, meritocracy must not be the practiced philosophy, and social justice must become a reality. Then and only then will there be true equity and excellence in education.

Definitions of Significant Terms

Many different definitions, strategies, and
approaches to multicultural education exist. The term
multicultural education has many meanings to many people
and is often misinterpreted because of misinformation.

Bennett (1990) defined multicultural education as

> . . . an approach to teaching and learning that is
> based upon democratic values and beliefs, and seeks
> to foster cultural pluralism within culturally
> diverse societies and an interdependent world.
> (p. 11)

She further defined multicultural education as an ideal
state of society that is characterized by equity and
mutual respect among all groups. She also ascertains that
"the major goal of multicultural education is the
development of the intellectual, social, and personal
growth of all students to their highest potential" (p.
14).

Nieto (1992) supports Bennett's definition of
multicultural education by stating that it is basic
education that emphasizes antiracist education. She
extends Bennett's (1990) definition by stating that it is
pervasive education for social justice, a process,
critical pedagogy, and important for all students.

Sleeter (1991) defined multicultural education in
terms of race, ethnicity, language, gender, multiple forms

of oppression, social class, and disability. She
perceived multicultural education as a multifaceted
approach encompassing all types of people.

Combining and building on the definitions of the
above authors, I define multicultural education as a means
of empowering all students through teaching and learning.
Empowerment validates the experiences and identities of
students, promotes equality and equity by nurturing
cultural pluralism, and incorporates a process for social
justice. It is basic education, perhaps even as basic as
reading, writing, and arithmetic, because it allows
students to develop the social skills to understand and
empathize with a wide diversity of people. As Bennett
(1990) states, "multicultural education . . . confronts
the fact that this is a racist society with a history of
White supremacy" (p. 17).

Existing racism (individual, cultural, and
institutional) presents the main reason for curriculum
reform in education. Why? Because racism is a complex
concept that includes attitudes of racial superiority,
institutional power that suppresses members of the
supposedly inferior race, and a broadly based ideology of
ethnocentrism or cultural superiority. The focus of my
research is with cultural racism which is defined as

> the belief in the inferiority of the implements,
> handicrafts, agriculture, economics, music art,

religious beliefs, traditions, language, and story
of non-Anglo-European peoples, and the belief that
these people have no distinctive culture apart from
that of mainstream White America. (Bennett, 1990,
p. 46)

Just like the many definitions that exist for
multicultural education, many approaches to multicultural
education exist (Banks & Banks, 1993; Sleeter & Grant,
1987). Three major groups of approaches have been
identified in the literature: (1) curriculum reform -
which involves the additions to or changes in the
curriculum content to transform the canon and paradigms on
which the curriculum is based; (2) achievement - which
includes theories, practices, and strategies designed to
increase the academic achievement of students from
different ethnic, cultural, and gender groups; and (3)
intergroup education - the inclusion of knowledge,
content, and processes designed to help students develop
positive attitudes toward diverse racial, ethnic, and
cultural groups and to help victimized and marginalized
groups develop more positive attitudes toward their own
cultural group (Banks, 1993; Bennett, 1990; Sleeter &
Grant, 1987).

So, what is culture? Spradley and McCurdy define
culture as "the acquired knowledge that people use to
interpret experience and to generate social behavior . . .
it is like a recipe for producing behavior and artifacts"

(study cited in Bennett, 1990, P. 46). Culture is equated with behavior and with the standards that govern behavior according to Goodenough (1981). If "culture, then, consists of standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it" (Goodenough, 1981, p. 62), then it is imperative that teachers understand that culture is not biological, but learned. Nieto (1992) makes the following interpretation of Ward Goodenough's definition of culture which best describes my interpretation:

> A society's culture consists of whatever it is
> one has to know or believe in order to operate
> in a manner acceptable to its members, and do
> so in any role that they accept for any one of
> themselves. Culture, being what people have
> to learn as distinct from their biological
> heritage, must consist of the end product of
> learning: knowledge, in a most general, if
> relative, sense of the term. (p. 2)

According to Bennett (1990) Goodenough explains his definition of culture by stating that

> . . . we should note that culture is not a material
> phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people,
> behavior, or emotions. It is rather an
> organization of these things. It is the forms of
> things that people have in mind, their models for
> perceiving, relating and otherwise interpreting
> them. As such, the things people say and do, their
> social arrangements and events, are products or
> by-products of their culture as they apply it

to the task of perceiving and dealing with their circumstances.   (p. 46)

Banks (1994) defines culture as

> the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies, and not artifacts, material objects, and other tangible aspects of human societies. Values, norms, and perspectives distinguish ethnic groups such as Native Americans, African Americans, and Jewish Americans rather than the foods they eat or the clothes they wear. [. . .] Cultures are dynamic, complex, and changing. Teachers should help students to understand the complex nature of ethnic groups in order to prevent them from developing new stereotypes when ethnic groups are studied in school. (p. 51)

Equally important in creating excellence and equity in

schools is an understanding of ethnicity and the

sociological concept of race (a subset of ethnicity).

Longstreet (1978) defines ethnicity as

> that portion of cultural development that occurs before the individual is in complete command of his or her abstract intellectual powers and that is formed primarily through the individual's early contacts with family, neighbors, friends, teachers and others, as well as with his or her immediate environment of the home and neighborhood. (p. 19)

An ethnic group, according to Bennett (1990),

> is a group of people within a larger society that is socially distinguished or set apart, by others and/or by itself, primarily on the basis of racial and/or cultural characteristics, such as religion, language, and tradition. People differ in their sense of ethnic identity. Everyone, however, belongs to an ethnic group. (p. 39)

James Banks (1979) further supports Bennett's definition when he states that:

> All Americans are members of an ethnic group, since each of us belongs to a group which shares a sense of peoplehood, values, behaviors, patterns, and cultural traits which differ from those of other groups. However, one's attachment and identity with his or her ethnic group varies greatly with the individual, the times of his or her life, and the situations and/or settings in which an individual finds himself or herself. Ethnicity is extremely important for some individuals within our society and is of little or no importance to others. (p. 10)

Although a complex process, "everyone in a pluralistic society has ethnicity" (Baber, 1994, p. 19).

Race is a term that often projects an erroneous concept used to divide mankind into broad groups or categories according to physical characteristics, such as size and shape of head, eyes, ears, lips, nose, and the color of skin, eyes, and hair. As Bennett (1990) indicates, even Darwin attacked the scientific use of race and many "anthropologists point out that there are greater physical differences among individuals within a given race that there are between people of different races" (p. 43). Although the concept of race is totally irrelevant for defining humanity, has not given any helpful knowledge in understanding human nature, and cannot be easily defined, the concept persists and remains a primary basis for categorizing self and others within our American and other

societies, as well as being used as an important basis for ethnic identity.

"Race and culture are certainly not synonymous" (Bennett, 1990, p. 44) yet they are often spoken of in the same vain thus confirming myths and stereotypes associated with race such as Blacks have more rhythm and are natural athletes and Jews are misers and highly intelligent . Throughout this paper, race is used only as one attribute of ethnicity and not as a concept for dividing humankind into groups based on physical phenotypes.

These terms--multicultural education, racism, culture, and ethnicity--are defined to provide the reader with a frame of reference for better understanding the use of these terms in the research. In an effort to better understand the problems African American students face in school, this research will present a collection of African American students' "stories" that reflect their beliefs about their academic successes or failures. They will be based on the premise that language, degree or level of compassion, and racism are inextricably intertwined. Language here is defined as "the way in which human beings make meaning, as well as the world views which have been socially constructed in that process (Casey, 1993, p. 3), while compassion is defined as being empathetic and understanding, and racism which is understood in three forms: cultural, institutional, and individual, is

intolerance for those who are different because of taught stereotypes and the belief that one group of people is superior to another. Problems that arise from the failure to address diversity issues are very serious and getting worse. A beginning step for decreasing the drop-out rate among ethnic minorities and increasing motivation and achievement may be to hear the "stories" of these students in order to identify possible reasons for their successes or failures--the purpose of this researcher's work.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

Looking at the current status of education it is
obvious that schools are not meeting the needs of
multicultural populations in general and ethnic minority
and poverty disadvantaged students in particular. It is
no secret that African American students, when compared to
non-minority students, "achieve less well in school,
attend college less frequently, and have high unemployment
rates" (Griggs, 1992, p. 1). This disparity clearly
demonstrates the urgent need for increased race
homogeneous research on minority students in the context
of the school (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990; and Graham,
1994). According to a 1992 report to the North Carolina
State Board of Education by the North Carolina
Professional Practices Commission (NCCP) minority students
fail and drop out of school at rates greatly disparate to
their numbers. One of the reasons this occurs is the
school curriculum often reflects a Eurocentric cultural
bias with the achievements and cultures of various ethnic
minority groups often going unrecognized. As a result,
the confidence, self-worth, initiative and achievement of

ethnic minority students are diluted and non-minority
students are deprived of a true understanding of the
society in which they will have to function.

> Any possible solution to the high school dropout
> problem must entail programs based on the
> perceptions of students rather than on educational
> theory. (Farrell et. al., 1988, p. 489)

This statement becomes the driving force for this research
investigation. The literature reviewed for this study
explores African American students' orientation towards
school, critical structural factors that influence their
perceptions of school, and students' views of themselves
and their experiences in school. Each factor was
consistently identified in the literature as a variable
affecting students capability to thrive in an educational
environment. How African American students view school is
critical to their success in school.

Differing Orientations of Schools as Systems:
Schools for Maintaining Inequity Versus
Schools as Arenas for Change

Students' perceptions of school are based on how
their parents introduce school to them, and their initial
experiences and interactions with their teachers,
principals, and peers. The works of Ogbu (1987, 1991,

1992) and Perry (1993) suggest two differing orientations for African American students' perceptions of school. According to Ogbu (1987, 1991, 1992), African American students perceive schools as systems to maintain and perpetuate inequity while Perry (1993) contends that African American students perceive schools as arenas for change. Ogbu (1987, 1991, 1992) argues that because African American students perceive schools as systems for maintaining inequity, they distrust schools and school personnel. He states that African American students tend to have academic difficulty because teachers fail to utilize and recognize their areas of competence and confidence, i.e., attitudes, values, language, learning styles, culture, and their general understanding about their world. Often their attitudes, values, language, and learning styles within their culture are in conflict with those demanded for success in the public school environment and in the greater community. This perhaps, more than any other factor, signifies students' lack of expectations for success. Teachers' failure to utilize and recognize areas of competence and confidence in African American students perpetuates the poor school performance of the students through: (1) inferior schooling and unfair treatment by White people in the schools; (2) the tendency of African Americans to develop coping tactics that further confine their striving for

success; and (3) inadequate rewards for their educational achievements as adults by imposing a job ceiling.

Ogbu further states that African Americans, unlike other minorities, are caste-like, racially oppressed, minorities who "wish they could get ahead through education and ability, but they know that they can't because of racial barriers which they interpret as part of their undeserved oppression" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 14). Ogbu (1991) also credits African American students' expectations for failure to the fact that they are involuntary minorities. He describes involuntary minorities as "people brought into their present society through slavery, conquest, or colonization" and as "perceiving the social, political and economic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression" (p. 9). As a result they have problems crossing cultural/language boundaries due to the oppositional nature of what they know to be true in their lives, meaning their cultural frame of reference and of what they perceive themselves and their race to be, meaning their identity. The status of being an involuntary minority causes African American students to lack a cultural frame of reference that encourages success, and prompts them to equate the school behaviors and activities that enhance academic success and social adjustment with "acting White." Therefore, the language, culture and identity of

involuntary minorities is threatened and a conflictual relationship to schooling exists (Ogbu, 1987).

Perry (1993), while agreeing that schools have historically perpetuated inequity, presents another orientation for how students perceive schools. She argues that African American students perceive schools as arenas for change because historically they have been able to acquire, through schools, decent educational opportunities against almost overwhelming odds. She points out that even though schools were often segregated and unequal, African Americans continued to believe in learning and schools as institutions for learning. From slavery to the present African Americans have succeeded in producing a leadership and intellectual class, in spite of a long and persistent denial of full educational opportunities. She contends that African Americans have historically viewed schools as linkages to their struggle for citizenship, and preparation for leadership. Thus, historically, African Americans have viewed schools as arenas for change, and as primary sites for their struggle to redefine democracy. To create this necessary change, and to enhance achievement in school, Perry (1993) contends that African American must be able "to negotiate multiple identities" (p. 13). She defines multiple identities to include membership in: (1) mainstream society; (2) the Black

community defined as a racially discriminated group; and
(3) a cultural group in opposition to which "Whiteness"
has been constructed as a social category (p. 13).

Contrary to Ogbu's (1987) point of view, Perry
(1993) argues against defining the relationship of African
Americans to schooling as conflictual without looking at
the historic relationship of African Americans to
schooling. Historically,

> schooling and literacy were a context for the
> oppressor class to confine African Americans to a
> certain status . . . as a context in which African
> Americans could struggle to redefine their
> relationship to the larger society. (p. 23)

Perry further states that even today the literature of
young Black Urban America reveals that formal schooling
has not provided African American children with a
knowledge base of their heritage. Perry agrees with
Ogbu's (1987) findings as they attempt to explain school
achievement by understanding the individual and collective
consciousness of the African American child and how that
consciousness has been affected by the job market ("glass
ceiling") and the schooling experiences of Black children
in general, and their families and communities in
particular. However, she finds Ogbu's interpretation of
the educational history of African Americans and its
influence on contemporary attitudes somewhat problematic.
Perry explains that Ogbu's work would be strengthened if

he had explored the meanings African Americans have
themselves attached to their struggle for education.
Perry points out that her review of African American
history and the writings of African American educators and
leaders from the political and cultural arenas reveal
that the epistemology of schooling for African Americans
is one that connects "schooling to citizenship, leadership
and racial uplift" (p. 21). Whether students' orientation
follows Perry's perspective of schools as arenas for
change or the perspective of Ogbu--schools as systems for
maintaining inequity--there are critical structural
factors that influence students' perceptions of school.

Structural Factors That Influence African
American Students' Perceptions of School

According to the literature, how students of color,
especially those who are poverty disadvantaged, view
school is influenced by numerous structures: the
curriculum, tracking, testing, pedagogy, the physical
structure, and disciplinary policies and leadership
(Banks, 1994; Gay, 1994; Nieto, 1992; Griggs & others,
1992; Swartz, 1992; Perry, 1993; Hilliard, 1991; Bennett,
1990; Ogbu, 1987, Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fordham, 1986).
Regardless of whether or not African American students
view school as perpetuating inequity or school as arenas

for change, their perceptions will most likely be affected by the schools' structural factors.

The Curriculum: Practices That Separate
Versus Practices That Promote Efficacy

Curriculum is the organized environment for learning in a classroom and school, according to Nieto (1992). If this definition is accepted as a model, it is never neutral as it represents what those who are dominant in the society believe to be important and necessary knowledge. Research on the inadequate school curriculum demonstrates that it alienates many students.

As a result of schools continuing to perpetuate inequality rather than restore equality, the existing school curriculum does not educate for democracy and thus affects how students perceive their life in school. Negative perceptions toward school may be the result of inadequacies in the curriculum which create inequality, inequity, and exclusion of African American students. Studies cited in the research indicate how the current curriculum promotes negative perceptions toward school by African American students (Hilliard, 1991; Swartz, 1992; Fordham, 1986; Griggs, 1992).

Negative perceptions of school are perpetuated by a curriculum that is not centered in truth, according to Hilliard (1991). As such Hilliard suggests that lies are

taught. Curricula not centered in truth promote and perpetuate inequality, oppression, and injustice. He proposes that the current curriculum be shifted to a pluralized curriculum--a curriculum centered in truth which would reflect human culture as the product of the struggles of all humanity, not the possession of a single racial or ethnic group.

The studies of Swartz (1992) generally support a notion similar to Hilliard's argument for a curriculum centered in truth. Swartz suggests that indeed there is a public school debate over curricular content which "pits the constructed supremacy of Western cultural knowledge against the inherent primacy of the multiple and collective origins of knowledge" (p. 341). The public school currently imparts a Eurocentrically bound "master script." Master script, according to Swartz, is defined as

> referring to classroom practice, pedagogy, and instructional materials--as well as the theoretical paradigms from which these aspects are constructed--that are grounded in Eurocentric and white supremacist ideologies. Master scripting silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily by legitimizing dominant, White upper-class, male voicings as the 'standard' knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation (p. 341).

The denial of "others" in the master script, means that the work of African Americans and other ethnic minorities is practically removed from historical thought and prevailing practices of these disciplines. When African content does appear it is limited and is usually a misrepresentation because master scripts are clearly monovocal expressions.

Fordham (1986) agrees that African American students tend to be underachievers because of the current curriculum. From an ethnographic study on Black student school success in a large urban public school system, she concluded that the existing curriculum causes "many Black students to view some of the curricular requirements as 'theirs' [White Americans], not ours . . . which will surely result in the continuation of the present massive underachievement" (p. 46) of African American students.

The most significant finding of Fordham's (1986) study on Black adolescents' success in school was that school success is rooted in the dilemma of racial and personal identity, i.e., "Who am I?" These phenomena, according to Fordham and Perry (1993) are emphasized very little in the school context. Instead, most high school curricula encourage presenting information which alienates African American teenagers from the school and society because the information presented does not assist them in answering the question, "Who am I?" The curriculum at the

high school which Fordham observed had no requirement in African American history or culture. Fordham did conclude from her research that "when Black adolescents are given support and encouragement, academic excellence is the end result . . . ." However, "when the support, encouragement, and expectations of school personnel are low, massive underachievement on the parts of students is the unacceptable end outcome" (p. 58).

Griggs and others (1992) investigated factors that influence the academic and vocational development of African American and Hispanic youth. A phenomenological approach was used to conduct this research because the investigators were more interested in discovering plausible insights into the world of human beings than they were in creating theory to explain or control the world. Using a questionnaire and structured interviews they collected data from 36 college juniors and seniors with above average grades. These data were significant because the students were asked to recall personal experiences about their academic and vocational development. Students responded to what they would have done differently if given a chance, and speculated on how their life experiences were different from their peers whose achievements did not equal their own.

The study identified six influences affecting the school success of these students: (1) participants had a

high level of internal motivation and control over their vocational choices; (2) participants were confident of their academic ability, even when their performance did not match their confidence; (3) many experienced a very special personal and academic relationship with a teacher in their high school and teachers generally had high expectations of them; (4) most determined their vocational choice by middle school; (5) their models for vocational choices were real and fictional, television being a primary source for their models; and (6) parental influence played the major role in their development through high expectations for academic and/or vocational achievement.

These participants, when asked, "What is the difference between you and someone similar to you who does not have the same accomplishments?" answered that their peers probably lacked a strong self-esteem, self-confidence, personal motivation, willingness to persevere, determination, willingness to break with a family history of dependence, control of personal destiny, parent and family support, and information about the world of work and vocation. They suggested that their peers who had less well-developed plans and aspirations could be helped by: (1) teachers with high expectations of them; (2) more academic and vocational counseling; (3) more courses relevant to their needs, interest, and backgrounds

which would help increase their internal motivation and control over their academic and vocational choices; and (4) more racial, ethnic, and same-sex role models in work settings and instructional materials. These students proclaimed that the curriculum needs "ethnic, racial, and same sex vocational role models in their instructional materials, work settings, and other learning experiences" (p.17). They also felt that tracking and experiencing some academic failure in school cultivate feelings of worthlessness.

Tracking, defined by Nieto (1992) is

the placement of students in groups of matched ability, or homogeneous groups, within classes (e.g., reading groups in self-contained classes), subject areas (e.g., a low level math group in seventh grade), or even specific programs (e.g., academic or vocational programs at the high school level). (p. 70)

Tracking is viewed by many teachers and educators as one of the most inequitable and undisputed practices in schools. It begins with students when they are very young and continues through high school.

African American students whose schooling is limited to courses in the low track tend to get locked into these tracks with little or no hope for mobility, regardless of their academic ability. As a result, teachers and school administrators tend to have negative

perceptions of African American students trapped in these tracks. They perceive these students as: (1) lacking ambition; (2) unwilling to work; (3) unmotivated; (4) having no desire to go to college; (5) living their lives mainly on welfare; and (6) having no desire to change their socioeconomic plight (Fordham, 1986). In addition, Tracking decisions are often based on the most tenuous of grounds. Such unsubstantiated decisions usually result in disastrous consequences for children, especially children of color and poverty disadvantaged children. These children are generally placed at the lowest track levels, their advancement is slower, they have lower self-esteem, and their dropout rate is much higher (Nieto, 1992; Banks, 1994; Gay, 1994). Nieto (1992) concludes that "tracking, senseless and ineffective as it may appear, actually reflects and perpetuates class, race and gender stratification in our society" (p.72).

Like tracking, testing perpetuates inequality, inequity, and exclusion. The relationship between the two is symbiotic in that tests, especially IQ and other mental-ability tests, have routinely been used as a basis for separating and sorting students. Consequently, African American and other students of color, poverty disadvantaged students, and linguistic minority students continue to be highly represented in classes for mentally retarded students and underrepresented in classes for

gifted and talented students (Nieto, 1992; Banks, 1994).
Human talent, as well as low mental ability, is randomly
distributed across human populations. Intelligence is not
standard and therefore cannot be measured by standardized
tests (Gardner, 1983, 1993).

When former President Bush launched "America 2000,"
his national panel suggested higher standards and more
tests to assess students' achievement of those standards.
Their plan, however, did not call for changes in
curriculum or instructional practices, or improvements in
teacher education. These factors, according to Nieto
(1992), not more tests, will most likely lead to higher
standards and increased learning among African American
students.

Another way testing prevents equity in the
curriculum is by promoting the practice of "teaching to
the test." When students score poorly on local and/or
state required tests, teachers feel compelled to succumb
to this practice. Excessive testing also impedes teachers
from creating curricula that respond to the real needs of
the learners. As a result, teachers lose their autonomy
for creating curriculum and that autonomy is passed to the
school, district, city, or even state level. The further
the curriculum is moved from the teacher at the school
level, the less the curriculum reflects the culture of the

students (Nieto, 1992), and African American students'
perceptions of school become more negative.

According to Banks (1994), "assessment techniques
[must] be used that enable students from diverse cultural
and ethnic groups to be assessed in culturally fair and
just ways" (p.12). Nieto (1992) concludes that tests are
used to (1) sort students and (2) create a callous cycle
of failure. Students who are recognized as requiring more
academic assistance are put into classes where the
curriculum is diluted and higher levels of thinking are
not mandated. This causes students' academic achievement
to fall even further behind.

Tracking and testing are clearly practices that
separate and sort students and lessen the quest for
equity, equality, and inclusion. In order to create
positive perceptions about schools with African American
students, a curriculum centered in truth, emphasizing the
integration of multiethnic and global perspectives into
the traditional curriculum is needed (Bennett, 1990; Ogbu,
1991; Hilliard, 1991; Griggs et al., 1992; Perry, 1993;
Banks, 1994, Gay, 1994). This curriculum would present
lessons which would increase knowledge and understanding
about cultural differences and the history and
contributions of contemporary ethnic groups and nations
(Bennett, 1990). No longer would African Americans and
other ethnic minorities be denied in the master script,

and the ethnic learning styles of students within the school would be respected allowing for learning differences. Finally, this new curriculum paradigm would call for a better understanding of intelligence--acknowledging multiple intelligences to ensure that every student would receive an education that would allow for the maximization of his or her own intellectual potential (Gardner, 1993).

It is essential then that African American students be provided with instruction that includes a variety of ways to learn so that their learning will be in harmony with their cultural backgrounds. School curriculum then must include instruction centered in multicultural education which includes learning styles instruction, and mindful learning strategies based on Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. Incorporating these inclusionary strategies into the curriculum will enable schools to become more "user friendly" for African American students and all ethnic minority students while deemphasizing and eventually eliminating practices that separate and sort students.

Multicultural Education as a Curriculum

Approach to Promote Efficacy

Multicultural education scholars agree that an important goal of multicultural education is to increase educational equality, equity, and inclusion for: (1) both gender groups; (2) students from diverse ethnic and cultural groups; and (3) exceptional students (Banks, 1994). This approach will create schools that promote efficacy among African American students. African American students might develop more positive perceptions toward school because a multicultural education curriculum would allow them to participate in heterogeneous groups, interact in synergetic relationships, and retain their individual ethnic identities (Banks, 1994). This curriculum approach would promote instruction that would enable students to "view concepts, events, issues and problems from different ethnic perspectives and points of view" (Bennett, 1990, p. 95). This inclusion process is described as "giving voice to previously silenced or muted cultural groups and traditions by allowing them to tell their own stories" (Gay, 1994, p. 110). Voice then becomes an empowering process.

Once a new canon and new paradigms are in place for curriculum design and implementation, achievement and intergroup education will evolve. A multicultural

education curriculum approach would be one means for ridding the school of divisive forces and promoting schools that would empower all students. It would be a process for changing the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups would have an equal chance to achieve academically in school (Banks & Banks, 1989).

In developing a conceptual framework for multicultural education, Nieto (1992) argues that, "No educational philosophy or program is worthwhile unless it focuses on two primary concerns: (1) raising the achievement of all students and thus providing them with an equal and equitable education and (2) giving students the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a democratic society" (p. 1). Functioning within this conceptual framework promotes multicultural education as one approach to eliminating educational failure. This has certainly been the goal of all of the educational reform movements of the last two decades, but this goal has not been achieved.

Nieto (1992) makes a number of assumptions about multicultural education that impact curriculum. The first is that multicultural education is for everyone regardless of ethnicity, race, language, social class, religion, gender, or sexual preference. Another assumption is that

"teachers are the products of educational systems that have a history of racism, exclusion, and debilitating pedagogy" (p. xxvii). Therefore, if we are to ever have hope of educating all children, multicultural education must become a vital part of our schools' agendas.

Excellence cannot be realized until equity and equality are achieved. Bennett (1990) asserts that there is a common thread throughout all the educational reform reports, and that common thread is the demand for a national commitment to true excellence in education. However, she states, "that many of these reports do not acknowledge that educational excellence in our schools cannot be achieved without educational equity" (p. 13). Bennett believes that our only hope for true excellence in education is true attainment of equality and equity for students. Bennett reminds us that equity in education is not the same as equality or sameness of result or even identical experiences. Multicultural education however, is one of our best hopes for achieving all three: excellence, equality and equity. Excellence, equality, and equity can be achieved through a multiculutural education curriculum only if an expanded repertoire of pedagogical skills exist.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy means more than the techniques or strategies that teachers may use to make learning fun or interesting. It refers to "how teachers perceive the nature of learning and what they do to create conditions that motivate students to learn and to become critical thinkers" (Nieto, 1992, p. 77). Teachers today are pressured to finish the course of study so that students will pass the required tests. This pressure prevents teachers from having the time to creatively present content that will motivate all students. This pedagogical stagnation can be avoided if teachers are trained to provide instruction based on the learning styles and multiple intelligences of students.

Learning Styles Instruction

If African American students are to have positive perceptions of school, then instruction must meet the needs of all students. Children learn differently and the instruction taking place in classrooms must reflect learning differences. Learning styles, a subset within the multicultural education curriculum framework, is one means for providing instruction to meet the needs of all students. According to Bennett (1990) instruction utilizing the learning styles of students is revolutionary and unsettling in that it "triggers the fear that we

sometimes create the conditions of failure for some students" (p. 139). Fortunately, research on learning styles has progressed enough that definite instructional approaches, such as field-independent and field-sensitive, have been identified and can be used to affect learning and assist students in learning the way they learn best. Learning styles can be defined in terms of the range of instructional strategies through which students typically pursue the act of learning. Proponents of learning styles theory believe that students learn best when the style as well as the pace of instruction is varied within the classroom (Smith & Renzulli, 1984; Gay, 1994).

According to Bennett (1990) learning styles are an important variable in the success or failure of ethnic minorities in American schools and teaching to the learning styles of students is promising in that it magnifies cultural variables that can influence ways children learn while assisting teachers in discovering means for strengthening academic achievement among learners of diverse cultural backgrounds. Bennett, however, cautions against using learning styles to foster stereotypes. Rather, learning styles should be used in a more positive sense to focus on how individual students learn which forces teachers to make the assumption that students can learn. Utilizing learning

styles instruction in K-12 classrooms would allow students to become more involved in structuring how they will learn what is taught, thus making them empowered independent learners.

Bennett (1990) identifies four strategies for discovering learning styles: (1) field independence-dependence; (2) students' need for structure; (3) perceptual modalities; and (4) the learning style inventory. The field independence-dependence approach is the most widely researched approach. Learners are described as field independent or field dependent/ sensitive. Field independent learners are analytical, inductive, independent thinkers who prefer a curriculum that emphasizes inductive learning and the discovery approach. Field dependent or field sensitive learners are global, deductive, highly sensitive thinkers who like to work with others to achieve a common goal and who prefer a curriculum that emphasizes the global view (description of wholes and generalities).

Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) purport that the concept of field independence/field dependence can also be helpful in implementing cultural democracy in the classroom. Currently, "most school environments reflect the field independent style, the style unfamiliar to most Mexican-American children" (p. 65). According to Griggs and Dunn (1989), Ramirez and Price-Williams in a 1974

study of learning styles of ethnic minorities "found that
young Mexican-American and African-American students were
more field dependent than their Caucasian counterparts and
stated that it was not unreasonable to conclude that child
socialization practices and cultural influences
contributed to this phenomenon" (p.150).. However, it is
not reasonable to generalize about the cognitive styles of
various groups because, as Griggs and Dunn (1989) report,
there is considerable variability on the field
dependence/independence dimension within groups of ethnic
minorities. If all students are to be successful in
school and if equity is to exist throughout schools in
America, then school curricula must reflect both field
independent and field sensitive environments. Teachers
must be trained to utilize field sensitive/field
independence strategies as the conceptual framework for
linking culture to intellectual and affective behavior in
children, as well as a tool for implementing cultural
democracy in the classroom (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974).
Unless teachers make a conscious effort to do just this,
they will continue to teach the way they learn best rather
than the way their students learn best.

Learning styles have been identified as an
important variable in African American students' success
or failure in school. A number of African American
scholars (Banks, 1994; Gay, 1994; Perry, 1993; Ogbu,

1987; Fordham, 1986) report that schools tend to take an Anglo-Eurocentric studies approach in both subject matter and teaching strategies. African American children who are not bicultural and who haven't had the opportunity to grow up within the macroculture, tend to process information and instruction differently from the predominate way it is processed by the macroculture in schools. Consequently, many African American students believe that schools do not promote equity and equality for all students and this belief cultivates the development of their negative orientation toward school.

Instruction Recognizing the Existence of Multiple Intelligences

Another framework for guiding instructional efforts that may increase students' success in school and how they perceive schooling is that of multiple intelligences as introduced by Howard Gardner (1983). One means for achieving effective instructional programs that will allow students the opportunity to work at their own pace and become involved in challenging and interesting cognition, is to teach to the multiple intelligences which Howard Gardner (1983) believes exist in each individual.

Gardner (1993) states that people do not have the same interests and abilities and therefore do not learn in the same way. In his theory of multiple intelligences

(hereafter referred to as MI), he describes each human being as being capable of several relatively independent forms of information processing and each of these is a specific "intelligence": logical-mathematical, linguistic (the two most emphasized in school success), musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Intelligence, according to Gardner and Hatch (1989) entails "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings or community" (p.15). In their view, intelligence relates to what it takes to be an effective member of a community.

Gay (1994) supports the work of Gardner when she states that "African American culture is anchored in relational logic and oral, musical, and performance traditions . . .", and therefore, "exhibit high levels of musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences . . . ." Gay further reveals that these particular skills "are not highly valued, transferable to school settings, or assessed by standardized tests, given the dominant value orientation of schools" (p. 81). Her argument that intelligence is contextual is further strengthened by the fact that competence in one setting does not necessarily transfer to other settings. She uses as an example, students who cannot write a coherent

paragraph in class, but can very eloquently express their ideas outside of school.

Gardner's (1993) analysis of current educational research is that education should move in the direction of individual-centered schooling. The educational process should ensure that everyone receives an education that maximizes his or her own intellectual potential. To educate the multiple intelligences a uniform curriculum is out because today, "no individual can master even a single body of knowledge completely let alone the range of disciplines and competencies" (Gardner, 1993, p. 72). This means that in order to teach to the multiple intelligences, uniform schooling must cease to exist. True school reform will mean developing models of schooling that take seriously individual profiles of intelligence and seek to maximize the educational achievements of each person.

Educating the intelligences would not eliminate core disciplines. Instead, it would encourage students to use knowledge attained from the core disciplines to solve problems and complete the tasks that may confront in the larger community. Educating the intelligences would mean encouraging the unique blend of intelligences in each student and assessing their development regularly in intelligence-fair ways. A multicultural education curriculum that promotes the tenets of multiple

intelligence would create an atmosphere where students would feel free to (1) explore novel stimuli and unfamiliar situations; (2) engage in sustained projects with the guidance of an expert; (3) address problems that confront professionals in the discipline; and (4) carry out small-scale experiments (Gardner, 1993). Schools utilizing these frameworks: multicultural education, learning styles instruction, and multiple intelligences would recognize and foster students' different interests and styles, thus affirming them as valuable contributors to their own lives and to the world (Faggella & Horowitz, 1990).

Using these frameworks would mean implementing a curriculum that would educate for understanding. "Educating for understanding is a radical foreshortening of the curriculum" (Gardner, 1993, p. 191). The educational implications of the MI theory are many. A few specific examples according to Gardner (1993) are: (1) students would participate under a curriculum that would cease to cover everything, thus enabling students to understand the identified concepts better; (2) students would be introduced explicitly to these concepts and performances early in their careers, affording them the opportunity to revisit the concepts numerous times during school, consequently, students would learn more and feel better about themselves as learners; (3) students' talents

and intelligences would not be overlooked, and the
single-funneled approach to the mind would be eliminated;
(4) students would be able to fill unfilled or poorly
filled niches in society by guiding individuals with the
right set of abilities to these billets; (5) individuals
would become increasingly maximized in terms of their
particular abilities and the kinds of talents they
possess, the end result being variance in what it is that
youngsters are able to do (Fowler, 1990, p.26); (6)
schools would no longer be an impediment to those
youngsters whose intelligences are in modalities other
than the ones that are currently emphasized (linguistic
and logical); (7) teachers would be forced to examine
their teaching practices and identify their learning
style; (8) a new assessment strategy for evaluating
student success would be used; (9) an instructional
program that would be both challenging and interesting for
all students would exist; and (10) a better understanding
of how different cultures tend to value and develop the
different areas of intelligence would prevail.

Nieto (1992) states that "Gardner's work on
multiple intelligences has important implications for
culturally compatible education." How? She concludes
that "the salience of what may be cultural differences in
intelligence becomes apparent. These differences may be
due to what is valued in the students' culture. The

importance of this research lies in the fact that because
a broader range of abilities is considered, the talents
and abilities of individuals previously considered
inferior or unexceptional may be brought to the surface"
(p.113).

Nieto (1992) and Bennett (1990) stress that the
implication of the MI theory is significant because it
extends the narrow definition of intelligence that is
valued in school today. This theory allows teachers and
all educators to view their students with a different
perspective. However, they both caution that there is
always the danger that some educators will identify an
intelligence that is common to a cultural group and not be
able to extrapolate from individual cases to an entire
group. Nieto (1992) asserts that certain cultures are
highly developed in bodily kinesthetic intelligence, but
it should not be concluded that all its members will
manifest this kind of intelligence equally. The real
danger would be educators assuming that individuals from
this culture would be primarily or only intelligent
bodily-kinesthetically, and not able to manipulate any of
the other intelligences, such as language (pp. 113-114).

If we are serious about making education more
meaningful to all students, then a new curriculum paradigm
must be put into place (Gardner, 1983; Fordham, 1986;
Griggs, 1992; Banks, 1994; Gay, 1994)--one that will

enable schools to truly meet the needs of all students and perhaps decrease and eventually eliminate the dropout rate. Teachers, however, must also be willing to listen to the "stories" of minority students and to make changes in their behaviors as necessary to teach all children. One thing is certain, the traditional school curriculum is practically void of a sense of purpose and is now obsolete. To prevent increasing numbers of drop outs, we must change our current purpose for schooling. Schools should not be places for domesticating students into passive, obedient citizens who are memorizers of single, simplistic answers (Conrath, 1993). Our new curriculum paradigm must promote schooling where students will be (1) active problem solvers; (2) self-reliant thinkers; (3) empowered by teachers who are sensitive to and tolerant of cultural diversity; (4) taught according to their existing learning styles; and (5) recognized as individuals with multiple intelligences who can be successful if they are taught according to the way they learn best.

In addition to providing a curriculum that will foster different learning styles and intelligences, we must ensure that this "new" curriculum will educate for democracy. Gay (1994) stresses that "diversity in curriculum and instruction is the best way to prepare all students for the wide variety of situations and

experiences they will encounter in life and to be effective and responsible members of a democratic society" (p. 26). She further claims that "we cannot assume that students will learn how to live democratically in a multiethnic, multicultural, and multiracial society and world without being taught how to do so" (p. 21).

The Influence of Teachers and Teaching on
African American Students' Perceptions
About School

Teachers must be empowered to educate African American and economically disadvantaged youth, who have been victimized by discrimination, to master the knowledge and skills they need to be productive and successful in the mainstream society in the next millennium. According to Hodgkinson (1991) teachers must develop high expectations for low-income and minority students and school districts must implement on-going staff development programs that will help teachers better understand the cultural experiences of these students. When this happens, teachers will then be empowered to teach people of color and those who are economically disadvantaged. This is imperative because more and more students in school today are from single-parent homes, have parents with special needs, and have cultural experiences that are quite different from that of their teachers.

Rist (1978) concurs with Hodgkinson in that he believes all teachers must be trained to teach to diversity and to implement a curriculum that reflects the contributions of a pluralistic America. He declares that it is imperative to continue and sustain integrated classrooms where both white and minority students can excel and develop. Educators must make a moral, political, and ethical commitment to create multiracial educational settings for children that will be as humane, lively, and supportive as possible. Rist (1978) professes that classroom teaching should be much more than the imparting of objective knowledge. It should be "a system for drilling children in cultural orientations" (p. x). He further ascertains that African-American and poor ghetto children, with proper excitement, can achieve as well as the average child. Any cognitive disadvantages that these students may bring with them to school during their first year, can be overcome by highly motivated teachers who can relate to children in ways that children find rewarding. Rist (1978) concludes that "teachers create for themselves a paradoxical position. On the one hand, they view themselves as teachers--as those who seek to aid children to learn of themselves and their world. Yet they respond to the socioeconomic differences in their students in a way that precludes for some the very opportunity for learning" (p. 246). Teachers actually

create failure in some of their students while believing
that they desire success for their students.

Another study supporting the research of Ogbu 1990,
1991, 1992; Gay, 1994; Banks, 1994, which declares that
teachers must learn about their students' cultural
backgrounds in order to teach them appropriately, is that
of Judith Shulman and Amalia Mesa-Bains (1990). These
researchers developed a casebook including cases written
by teachers that focused on the problems of teachers who
teach ethnically and racially diverse young people.
Fourteen narrative cases were presented in their casebook.
Two, however, appeared most relevant to this research.
These were two studies that focused on White teachers'
interactions with individual or groups of African-American
or poor students. In each case the teacher misjudged
students' behaviors and interpreted them as unruly, and
unwilling to learn. Through observations of students,
asking students questions about their behavior, reflecting
on their own biases and fears of the "culturally unknown,"
the teachers were able to write narratives about how to be
successful with African American students.

These teachers concluded from their observations
and interactions with African American students that to be
successful with these students, teachers must be committed
to their students and to the school where they teach.
Additionally, they must become knowledgeable about their

students' needs and their own needs as reflective educators and finally, they must create a classroom atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. It is unprofessional and unethical for teachers to indict all African American students as demonstrating ghetto stereotypes just because a few African American students' behavior is not in keeping with mainstream America. African American students are not typically crude, rude, low achievers, drug users, or violent as some of the teachers in these cases believed before trying to understand the culture of their African American students. Rather they came to find that most African American students defied these ghetto stereotypes, and were courteous, well-behaved, and capable. It was revealed in these teacher cases that they were able to learn about their students by seeking help from all the resources they could locate: parents, counselors, and other teachers. The teachers' realization that their problems with African American students were a result of (1) their lack of much experience with other races; (2) their inexperience with the effects of poverty; and (3) their lack of commitment to teach to diversity enabled them to seek the knowledge that they needed to be successful with all of their students. The following suggestions, which offer powerful insights for teaching culturally diverse students, were made by one teacher in the study.

1. No matter what kind of students you have, always establish teacher control first. Students expect you to do this and won't respect you if you don't. They are not intimidated by reasonable control; they are reassured by it. Nobody wants to be in a confused situation. Be careful not to sound too idealistic. Students mistake altruism for weakness. Firm (but humane) discipline programs are needed in class and throughout the school.

2. Hispanic and African American students do not fear or resent White teachers; they are used to them! If you take these students into your life and heart, they will become individuals to you--real people.

3. Race and poverty are not necessarily synonymous.

4. It is poverty that is the real enemy. Teachers must help students get over "poverty mentality"--the apathy, laziness, and hopelessness that will surely doom them to perpetual poverty if they can't see beyond it. Teachers must believe that students, by their own efforts, can succeed. Most students feel they can. (p. 53).

As a result of the experiences reported from these teachers, the authors of this casebook conclude that teachers must learn more about the students they teach. They must understand that African-American students and other minorities are part of a historic and cultural

custom and that if they choose to teach in diverse cultural settings they will need greater cultural resources and a definite understanding of the importance and significance of certain traditions and behaviors. Their conclusions agree with the research of many multicultural education scholars: Gay, 1994; Banks, 1994; Bennett, 1990; Nieto, 1992; and anthropologist Ogbu, 1987, 1991. Shulman and Mesa-Bains (1990) further explain that "When Black students engage in 'playing the dozens' (name-calling), 'signifying' (instigating), or 'selling woof-tickets' (intimidating) along with a host of other behaviors, they are unaware of their cultural significance. At the same time, the classroom teacher finds these behaviors threatening and disruptive" (p. 55). When teachers and principals lack an awareness of cultural and social factors associated with African American students' behavior, they often misinterpret their behavior and draw faulty conclusions which lead to suspending these students far more often than they suspend white students. Disciplinary policies created and implemented by the current leadership in American schools, actually encourage African American students to leave school. African American students leave school because they perceive these disciplinary practices as unfair and ineffective, creating more negative perceptions of school (Nieto, 1992; Banks, 1994; Fordham, 1986). A better understanding of the

root of these behaviors and why they are critical can provide both students and teachers with (1) a better affinity for these behaviors and interactions; and (2) more dynamic ways to use student culture as a bridge to school learning (Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1990). "Students who experience the least success in school are those who bear the brunt of rigid school policies" (Nieto, 1992, p. 79), and drop out.

An examination of the issues described in these two studies according to Shulman and Mesa-Bains (1990) reveals the need for a greater spectrum of teaching styles, disbursement of opportunities, and educational accommodation for students whom teachers may perceive as "different" or "slow". Finally the authors agree that teachers' perceptions play an enormous role in many African-American students' participation in the classroom learning process. Shulmann and Mesa-Bains (1990) sum it up best in the following quote:

> Longstanding stereotypes, stemming largely from media coverage of real issues of crime and violence, distort the public image of the Black community and contribute to unconscious teacher notions about Black students. In addition, students growing up in low-income communities, particularly those living in housing projects, are conditioned by their limited opportunities and day-to-day hardships to expect little benefit from education. (p. 1)

Edith King and Marjorie Milan (1981) conducted a study in the Denver School System to identify techniques teachers could use in teaching ethnically diverse children in the elementary school. This study was initiated because the school system, like other systems in the United States, was becoming a "minority institution." They observed mostly non-English speaking Vietnamese, Laos, and Mexican-American children, ages four to eight, in 32 classrooms from seven different Denver Public Schools. The director of the project also interviewed each principal from each of the seven schools to determine general background information about the elementary school.

Three instruments--(1) The Multicultural Classroom Checklist for Identifying Promising Practices in Ethnically Diverse Classrooms, (2) The Teacher Assessment of Non-English Speaking Children's Achievement and Progress, and (3) An Interview with Teachers of Ethnically Diverse Children--were developed for use in observing and interviewing the classroom teachers involved in the study. The results from the data collected from these instruments revealed the following:

1. One fourth of the teachers exhibited behavior conducive to fostering a positive classroom climate for working with ethnically diverse children.

2.   One fourth of the teachers exhibited classroom
behavior that was not conducive to an optimum learning
environment.

3.   One half of the teachers were doing a somewhat
adequate job of teaching ethnically diverse children.

Although these researchers assessed many broad
areas in the classroom, the area most relevant to this
dissertation study was their assessment of the social
interactions in the classroom, including the cultural
continuity in the classroom, and the innovative strategies
used by the teachers.   An analysis of the narrative
responses of the teachers revealed that the teachers'
style in teaching involved the majority of teachers moving
about the classroom to interact with their students.   The
oral interviews with teachers, which were transcribed in
narrative form, produced the following responses: (1)
63% responded that they work with parents; 93% replied
that they received teacher preparation at the primary
or elementary level; (3) 13% responded that they spoke a
language other than English; and (4) 76% indicated that
they enjoy contacts with people of other nations and
cultures.

King and Milan (1981) concluded that elementary
school teachers and principals had few new or unique
practices to suggest for working with the children.   In
most classrooms, the observers found that bulletin boards

and borders were not representative of differing racial and ethnic heritages; highly structured and traditionally organized classrooms characterized the majority of classrooms observed; and the curriculum in the classroom was almost totally set forth by the Denver Public Schools administration. Therefore, teachers attempting to perform their assigned tasks on schedule made few attempts at innovative strategies.

However, from the classroom observations, a profile was drawn of the type of teacher who would be most effective in an ethnically diverse classroom. This model teacher would

1. individualize the entire curriculum for each child.

2. interact in a positive and supportive manner with each child.

3. display a teaching style that would give much praise and encouragement.

4. have classroom decorations that reflect the ethnic background and heritage of all the children.

5. refer to aspects of the children's culture during learning activities.

6. maintain close contacts with parents.

7. attempt to learn a few words of the languages the children speak.

8. arrange the classroom so that children work face to face.

9. not stereotype children by ethnic or racial identity or academic ability.

Of the 32 teachers observed in this study, only seven displayed all or nearly all of the above characteristics and behaviors. The researchers also conclude in this study that the most effective strategies for teaching ethnically diverse children and for teaching ALL children are to foster individualizing instruction, provide many alternatives for learning, and stimulate active learning approaches.

Banks (1994) provides a nice plan for innovative teaching strategies that will reflect this paradigm shift. He states:

> The multicultural curriculum should be implemented with teaching strategies that are involvement oriented, interactive, personalized, and cooperative. The teacher should listen to and legitimize the voices of students from different racial, cultural, and gender groups. Multicultural content is inherently emotive, personal, conflictual, and involving. Consequently, it is essential that students be given ample opportunities to express their feelings and emotions, to interact with their peers and classmates, and to express rage or pride when multicultural issues are discussed. (p. 96)

Ladson-Billings (1992) supports Banks' curriculum plan by suggesting that culturally relevant instruction for African American students is necessary for their

academic survival. She reached this conclusion after asking African American mothers to name teachers they felt were successful with their children. According to these mothers, successful teachers were defined as those who encouraged students "to choose academic excellence, while at the same time allowed them to maintain a positive identification with their own heritage and background" (p. 382). As a result of these parental nominations Ladson-Billings was able to talk with, observe, videotape, analyze, and interpret the practices of eight of these successful teachers of African American students. She coined the term "culturally relevant teaching" to describe these practices and defined the term as:

1. A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

2. Teaching that encourages students "to develop a sense of interdependence, to rely on and support each other, instead of emphasizing individual competitiveness . . . [which allows students to see] each individual success as a group success and each individual failure as a group failure that the group must work to correct" (p. 387). Ladson-Billings notes here that this practice prevents African American students from feeling that the only way they can succeed in school is to get caught up in the

"acting white" phenomenon described by Fordham and Ogbu (1986).

3. Teaching that expresses a level of concern about the workings of U. S. society, promoting justice and equal opportunity for all.

As she observed and interviewed these teachers, she recognized many commonalities among them: (1) a strong sense of purpose; (2) a keen awareness of the position of African Americans in society and how their position plays a part in the school's expectations for these students; and (3) a genuine perception of their role as helping students see the contradictions and inequities that exist in their local community and the world.

Finally, she notes that teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching are those who "desire to prepare students to effect change in society, not merely fit into it" (p. 382), allowing schools to become arenas for change. Teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching will not allow students' past histories to negatively impact their present achievement. Rather, they will take those "students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are most tenuous and help them to become the intellectual leaders of the classroom" by making their "culture a point of affirmation and celebration" (p. 386). Teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching never ridicule or insult

students. They quickly discourage put-downs and insults among students and keep all students engaged in learning so that they have little time to misbehave or practice off task behaviors. Gay (1994) promotes this idea with the argument that all teaching and learning are embedded in particular cultural contexts, and therefore, teaching should be culturally responsive in order to make classroom dynamics more sensitive and responsive to the diverse needs of ethnic minority and poverty disadvantaged youth.

Another confirmation of teachers' importance in determining how African American students achieve in school comes from African American and Hispanic youth who were questioned in a study conducted by Griggs (1992). They reported that teachers who had personal and academic relationships with them tended to validate them as good students which made them feel special and caused them to try not to do anything academically or behaviorally to jeopardize their status with these special teachers. They also stated that they were more motivated to achieve and had greater confidence in their ability to achieve their goals when teachers gave them implicit approval. If African American students are not able to interact with teachers, principals, and peers who respect and celebrate the pluralism of this nation and the world, they are not likely to develop positive perceptions of school. When these negative interactions begin with their very first

school experience, their positive beliefs about themselves
and who they are are eradicated causing them to have
negative beliefs about themselves.

Students' Beliefs About Themselves (Self-Concept)
as Influencing Their Perceptions of School

African American students are seldom empowered
through the curriculum or pedagogy to develop a positive
cultural identity or self-concept through their
experiences in school. In addition, the physical
structure of school also perpetuates inequity, inequality,
and exclusion. It disallows for relevant and culturally
appropriate pictures, posters, and other instructional
materials that promote positive self-images among ethnic
minority and poverty disadvantaged students. As a result,
some African American students rarely experience a sense
of control over their own lives while in school, and lack
the confidence and motivation to succeed academically.
African American students, other students of color, and
poverty disadvantaged students receive information in
school, both formally and informally, that often causes
them to develop a sense of shame in their background, thus
a negative self-concept. When students are made to feel
devalued because of their ethnicity or economic plight
they become further alienated from their educational

experience (Nieto, 1992) and develop even more negative perceptions of school.

It is often believed that many Black students perform poorly in school because they have low expectations, feel hopeless, deny the importance of individual effort, or give up in the face of failure rather than not having basic intellectual competencies or specific learning skills. Research on academic self-concept, reveals that individuals who do not think well of themselves are believed to be less motivated to succeed (Gay, 1994; Graham, 1994). Gay (1994) contends that by the time most African American and other students of color begin their formal education, negative values have already been attached to their group and culture by racist and ethnocentric forces in mainstream society. When they arrive at school and find that the curriculum presented denies their groups' heritages, cultures, and contributions in the content and climate of learning, they are further validated as being unimportant in contributing to society. As a result, they develop "feelings of isolation, alienation, anger, and helplessness" (p. 72). When school denies African American students caring and supportive environments promoting maximum learning, and when "their programs and personnel ignore, distort, or demean culturally pluralistic identities, cultures, or experiences, students' sense of selfhood is diminished"

(p.72). When this occurs, students no longer believe in their ability to achieve and the quality, as well as the frequency of their participation in the instructional process declines. These negative perceptions of "self" eventually direct them to drop out of school.

In Graham's (1994) review of the race comparative literature reviewing the need to achieve, she found that even though African Americans appeared to be lower in the achievement motive they reported educational and vocational aspirations equal to or higher than their White counterparts. This indicates that African American students want to be successful regardless of the barriers preventing success. Newman & Schwager's (In Au, 1994) review of the literature on student perceptions concluded that

> how students perceive themselves in terms of their academic competence, degree of control they have over school outcomes, and their purposes, goals, and reasons for going to school are major components of their system of beliefs about themselves. Children who perceive themselves as academically competent tend to display high levels of task engagement and have high achievement. [. . .] children who perceive themselves as competent students are relatively likely to seek assistance in the classroom, whereas children who perceive themselves as poor students are relatively likely not to seek assistance. (p. 128)

Graham (1994) has compiled from the literature a list of four topics about the relationship between motivation and ethnic minority status. These topics

include: 1) Personality Traits: It is assumed that
African Americans have not been adequately socialized to
develop the personal characteristics that are thought to
be the essential determinants of achievement-related
behavior because they come from impoverished
circumstances; it is further assumed that African
Americans display motivational deficits because they lack
certain personality traits thought to be essential
determinants of achievement-related behavior; (2) Causal
Beliefs: More than any other construct, locus of control
plays a central role in the study of motivation among
African Americans in that perceived control, more than the
school, the teacher or family background, accounts for
most of the school achievement among African Americans;
limited suggestive research indicates that Blacks believe
in external control more than Whites do; Blacks and
Whites are equally likely to display what is thought to be
an internal attributional pattern--that is attributing
success to one's ability and effort and one's failure to
lack of effort; 3) Expectancy: Poor school achievement
and economic disadvantage have led African-Americans to
have low expectations for the future and negative
self-views about ability. Data collected from research
studies indicate that African American research subjects
remain remarkably optimistic about the future even in the
wake of achievement failure; and 4) Self-Concept:

Individuals who think well of themselves are believed to be more motivated to succeed. Graham's (1994) review of empirical literature on general self-concept in Blacks indicates that they do not have negative self-views, and they tend to attribute poor performance to external factors, in an effort to protect self-esteem. African Americans are particularly prone to make external attributions for failure but they also tend to value achievement.

Griggs' (1992) study, designed to identify factors that influence the academic and vocational development of African American and Hispanic youth, support the findings of both Graham (1994) and Gay (1994). When questioning these youth they reported

> confidence in their academic ability; however, frequently their perceptions of their academic ability were not consistent with the level of their performance . . . they did not work up to their ability . . . they attributed this to lack of motivation and self-discipline, involvements in extracurricular activities, not wanting to put themselves under too much pressure to achieve at a higher level, lack of feeling pushed by teachers, and not interested in subjects. Several students said they were more motivated to achieve up to their potential when their friends were doing likewise, especially when they were in the same classroom or work group. (p. 15)

Gay (1994) contends that another component of identity that is equally as important as personal self-concept and gender is ethnicity. When reflecting on

what it means to be African American it becomes difficult
to fashion a positive and clear ethnic identity because
society and schools frequently ignore or demean ethnic
groups and heritages. This makes students' quest toward
ethnic self-acceptance frustrating and often agonizing.
"Once schools and teachers accept ethnicity and culture as
legitimate elements of psychological and educational
development, adults can intervene appropriately to assist
students through the process" (p. 78). It is important
that teachers and educators place heavy emphasis on
helping students develop positive self-concepts,
self-esteem, and self-image (Gay, 1994; Graham, 1994;
Banks, 1994; Nieto, 1992).

Fordham & Ogbu (1986) discovered from their
research study with African American students in the DC
Public School System at Capital High School that African
American students do not want to risk their relationships
with peers or their sense of belongingness in the Black
community by "acting White." This would ruin their
self-image as a Black person. Some of the behaviors that
Black students at Capital High identify as "acting White"
are:

> (1) speaking standard English; (2) listening to
> White music and white radio stations; (3) going to
> the opera or ballet; (4) spending a lot of time in
> the library studying; (5) working hard to get good
> grades in school; (6) getting good grades in school

(7) being on time; (8) reading and writing poetry; and (9) putting on "airs." (p. 186)

These authors contend that a major reason Black students don't do well academically in school is because "they experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success" (p. 177). This excessive ambivalence and emotional dissonance arises because (1) White Americans have traditionally refused to acknowledge Black Americans as capable of intellectual achievement and (2) Black Americans subsequently started doubting their own intellectual ability; defined academic success as White people's prerogative; and discouraged their peers from imitating white people, "acting White" in their academic striving. As a result, many African American students who are capable of achieving academically, do not. "Their perception of schooling causes them to resist high academic aspirations. They oppose adopting appropriate academic attitudes and behaviors because they are considered White" (p. 183). Ambivalence, affective dissonance, and social pressures are the reasons for African American students' lack of effort and perseverance in their school work when they are academically capable of performing much better. Even Black students who do not fail generally perform well below their potential for the same reasons. This practice on the part of African American students is an effort

to project their "Blackness" even when the structures of school seem to be doing all they can to deny them their "Blackness" - who they are.

African American students' beliefs about themselves often dictate their view of school as a system for maintaining inequity. If they have a negative self-concept about their cultural identity, they are more likely to struggle with the indigenous conflict between Black people and the dominant institution--to achieve academically and socially yet retain group support and approval. They are constantly faced with the challenge of "how to obtain good grades and meet the expectations of school authorities without being rejected by peers for acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 198).

On the other hand, African American students who have positive self-concepts tend to be quite successful academically, even though they are faced with the same challenge of coping with "acting White." They succeed because they develop strategies that allow them to cope with this dilemma. One of these coping strategies include a conscious decision on the part of African American students to pursue academic success at all cost. Whereas the main strategy for coping with "acting White" is avoidance for the underachiever, high achieving African American students tend to resort to behaviors such as:

(1) "lunching"--acting crazy, being the class comedian;
(2) claiming they have a special gift or natural talent
for academic success--they give the impression that they
don't have to study or put forth much effort to do well
academically; (3) choosing friends who will protect them
from bullies in exchange for helping them with their
homework assignments and tests; (4) maintaining low
profiles at school--going underground so as not to be
conspicuous, bringing little attention to themselves; and
(5) attending class inconsistently to give the impression
of cutting class. The other primary coping strategy
includes the values, attitudes, and messages parents
communicate to them including their parents strong desire
for them to have a better chance in life than they had
(Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

How African American parents introduce school to
their children is a critical factor in how African
American students perceive their relationship to school
and the degree of control they have over their school
success. Contrary to the long lived and widespread
stereotype of poor parenting in African American families,
African American parents are interested in their
children's academic performance and attempt to encourage
them to excel in school. One of the ways they do this is
to create positive feelings in their children about their

culture and heritage early in life and then reinforce this cultural pride throughout adolescent development. This helps create a positive self-concept in their children. When African American and other children of color receive this kind of cultural reaffirmation and valuing of self, a sense of worthiness develops. Even though this home reinforcement is not always sufficient to counteract many of the negative messages young people pick up about their devalued status in the society in which they live, it prevents many of them from rejecting their culture when they attend school and discover they have been left out of the "master script." They also better resist forming a negative self-concept about who they are--their cultural identity.

African American students' beliefs about themselves in relation to how they perceive school is determined by both (1) external factors: teachers, principals, the curriculum, the physical structure of the school, their white peers and societal forces; and (2) within-group factors: family and how they respond to their African American peers. Both are critical in determining the outcome of their successes and frustrations in school, thus their education (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Summary

Every aspect of the educational processes of school must be culturally pluralized--policy requirements; official and unofficial curricula; pedagogy and materials; school climate, philosophy, icons and ethos; administrative leadership; counseling and guidance; and diagnosis of needs and performance assessment (Bennett, 1990; Nieto, 1992; Gay, 1994). Schools need policy mandates and practices that will cease to exacerbate the inequities that exist in society. Structures in school that affect some students in negative ways: tracking, testing, the curriculum, pedagogy, physical structures, disciplinary policies and leadership, and the lack of student, parent, and staff engagement continue to ostracize African American students. Consequently, these students develop negative perceptions of school and eventually drop out mentally (they work below their potential) or physically (they leave school). These practices, quite effectively, limit access to learning for a great number of students.

No longer can schools continue with business as usual. They must be willing to explore ways to meet the educational needs of all students. Schools are charged with the obligation to tear down barriers that deny the values of democracy, freedom and equal access to all

students. Education must be betrothed to cultivating a
common national culture. This kind of commitment would
require schools to challenge and reject racism and other
forms of discrimination in school and society, leading to
an acceptance and affirmation of the pluralism that
students, their communities, and teachers represent (Gay,
1994). Schools must implement curricula that will
validate the experiences of all students and promote
excellence, equity, and inclusion. The "master script"
must reflect the contributions of people of color and all
those who helped build this nation revealing the pluralism
of America. The curriculum must be centered in truth.
Instructional methods and materials must be diverse with
teachers teaching to the learning styles and multiple
intelligences of students. Instructional materials must
show events, situations, and concepts from the
perspectives of a range of cultural, ethnic, and racial
groups. The school environment must be celebrative, just,
nurturing, caring, intellectual and disciplined, fostering
respect for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity,
gender, or handicapping condition. The philosophy of the
school must clearly demonstrate the belief that all
students can learn, regardless of their social-class or
ethnic-group membership. Knowledge must be perceived as a
social construction that has social, political, and
normative assumptions. The teachers and school

administrators must have high expectations for all students. These school leaders must also show positive attitudes toward all students and respond to them in caring and positive ways. The school counselors must help students of color set and realize positive career goals. In other words, all educational leaders must be transformative in orientation with a vision of the future and the skills and abilities to communicate that vision to others. Schools can no longer afford transactional leaders who refuse to motivate people to do what is necessary and right to meet the needs of all children (Banks, 1994). Recognizing and overcoming structural factors and practices that divide students present a tremendous challenge for education, and schools must take the lead in correcting these inequities. Teachers are morally obligated to take responsibility for their own actions, challenge the actions of school and society that affect learning for students and help effect positive change. Current statistics indicate that it will be imperative for schools to be inviting and purposeful for all students. By the year 2000 over 30 percent of all school-age students will be people of color. Today over 20 % live in economic poverty, 10% are White. Not only must teachers increase their knowledge of the diversity of their students, but they are also required to be familiar

with the information about how this diversity may affect learning (Bennett, 1990).

Unfortunately, most teacher education programs continue to function within a framework that is exclusively Eurocentric, therefore, few teachers are prepared for different cultures, languages, life-styles, and values in their classrooms. The outcome is the attempt by many teachers to treat all students the same, sustaining the assumption that equal means the same. The same pedagogy perceived as appropriate for students from mainstream backgrounds is used for all students (Bennett, 1990). In simple terms, the pedagogy utilized in schools today perpetuate an education for powerlessness. Teachers must be trained to teach to diversity.

Ladson-Billings contends that

> teachers must come to realize that if African peoples can withstand policies that lead to enslavement, genocide, separate and substandard living conditions and education, underemployment and unemployment, and still produce artistic, scientific, and literary geniuses while building institutions such as churches, schools, and political and social organizations, then clearly they are educable to levels of intellectual excellence . . . [and teachers] must be willing to engage in culturally relevant teaching that empowers all students because that empowerment ensures the expansion of our democracy. (pp. 389-90)

When schools empower students by assisting them in developing positive cultural identities, African American

students will experience a greater sense of control over their own lives and develop the confidence and motivation needed to succeed academically. To empower students means schools will foster cultural pluralism by including diversity in the curriculum and in instruction. A multicultural education curriculum is the best means for empowering students because it promotes celebrating diversity, paradoxically, it is a means for binding people together, not separating them (Gay, 199*).

How African American students perceive their relationship to school and the factors that determine their successes and/or frustrations in school is contingent upon: (1) African American students' orientation towards school; (2) critical structural factors that influence African American students' perceptions of school; and (3) African American students' views of themselves and their experiences in school. African American students' perceptions of school are based on one of two orientations toward school: (1) school as a system for maintaining inequity (Ogbu, 1987, 1991, 1992); or (2) school as an arena for change (Perry, 1993). If schools truly want to be viewed as systems for perpetuating equity and creating social change, then the educational system must be opened up to African American and all ethnically diverse students. School can no longer continue to make African American students feel socially

and educationally disenfranchised by defining the educational system as ideologically and culturally neutral. Rather, an educational system that will reflect the voices, struggles, hopes, and dreams of its diverse populace--a true democratic environment must be opened up to students. This kind of educational system will: (1) create a society that recognizes and respects the cultures of its diverse people; (2) understand and affirm all cultures; (3) ensure that the culture of the school is congruent with the cultures of its students in an effort to end academic failure among minorities; and (4) better understand students' perceptions--self-perceptions and perceptions of school and the classroom by eliminating all practices the promote inequity, inequality, and exclusion (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1987, 1991; Bennett, 1990; Swartz, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Perry, 1993; Gay, 1994; Banks, 1994; Graham, 1994).

It is important to remember that in a racially stratified community, all minorities encounter and endure social and economic discrimination and are victimized by racism, stereotyping, and a "glass ceiling." Consequently, it is important to recognize that caste-like minorities have had to endure the status of oppressed peoples. They have had little or no political power and mostly low-level jobs which have led them to have negative attitudes toward school and school people. They believe

that they can't trust the system or those responsible for the system. They hoped to excel through education and ability, but knew racial barriers, part of their undeserved oppression, would not allow them to do so. Immigrants on the other hand tend to trust White Americans. Immigrant minorities tend to enthusiastically embody the fundamental American icon that hard work and education reciprocate a better life. Caste-like minorities, on the other hand, tend to believe that education does not necessarily lead to a more prosperous life. They reached this conclusion by monitoring the lives of their parents and other members of their communities over the years. Consequently, they have come to realize that the same oppressive forces that limit opportunities in the school are simply a mirror of such forces in the macrosociety.

Still, many African Americans express a passionate faith in the importance of education for getting ahead and making it in this world, thus projecting the orientation that schools can be arenas for change. At the same time however, they express to their children an ambivalence about whether society will really reward them for their school achievement, again projecting the orientation that schools are systems for maintaining inequity. This creates inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in African American students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). No

matter how much effort they put forth, there will always
be a glass ceiling on how much they can achieve in the
world of work. Ogbu (1990) refers to this as a lack of
"effort optimism" (p. 81). Maintaining effort optimism,
according to Perry (1993), "would be a psychological issue
of significant importance for African American school
children, particularly if they experience discrimination
in school and society, without the benefit of environments
or institutions which consciously develop and sustain
effort optimism " (p. 30).

Hearing the silenced voices of African American
students in authenticity will provide us with better ways
to educate students for a democracy thus the need to
conduct this study. As Baber (1993) states, " . . . unity
and diversity are complementary, not oppositional forces .
. . we can only celebrate our commonalities when we truly
respect (not merely tolerate) our differences" (p. 10).
It is only through African American students'
constructions of their own reality of self and environment
that we will learn more about those structural factors:
the curriculum, tracking, testing, pedagogy, the physical
structure, and disciplinary policies and leadership
identified in the literature as affecting African American
students' perceptions of school. Casey (1993) contends
that effective prescriptions for change do not come simply
from policy-makers but can indeed be the result of

authentic and emancipatory voices bringing more attention to the need for progressive change within the system. She contends that no longer can the less dominant--but no less important--voices of African American students and other oppressed peoples be ignored.

Whatever the orientation of African American students toward school, the current organization of schools, the existing curriculum and instruction, and teachers' approaches to teaching present ecological conditions that tend to cause African American students to have negative perceptions of schools, thus the need to hear from today's African American students. Perhaps they can offer some insights for better meeting their needs by identifying structural factors that negatively influence their learning and achievement in school. They might also offer some prescriptions for remedying these factors and practices that promote inequity, inequality, and exclusion.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Narrative research is traditionally known as oral
history. Life history and personal narrative are two of
the various forms of oral history, which as a research
tool can be quite controversial. Conflicts over oral
history theory and methodology in academic research have
been debated by many scholars. However, the use of
narrative methods of research allow for the development of
descriptions of an individual's or a group's culture which
preserves their voices. An increasing number of scholars
are suggesting that narrative research offers a way for
hearing the voices of those who are generally silenced in
an effort to understand their culture from the inside
(Cortazzi, 1993; Riessman, 1993; Casey, 1993; Carter,
1993; Lather, 1986; Mishler, 1990). To appreciate
narrative methodology, it is necessary to understand its
meaning, how it is structured and how it works as a
reliable and valid research method.

What is Narrative?

Narrative research has been defined in many ways: (1) the means or designing individual or group identities through "stories about a specific past event," with "common properties" in which the informant not only tells about past actions, but s/he understands those actions, which constitutes meaning (Riessman, 1993, p. 17) (2) "a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs" (Carter, 1993, p.6) through "constructions that give meaning to events and convey a particular sense of experience and have the power to direct and change lives" (p. 5); and (3) a means for "opening a window on the mind, or, if analyzing narratives of a specific group, as opening windows on their culture" (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 2).

Studies that utilize the narrative research approach are based on the premise that reality is socially constructed and exists only when humans describe it (Mishler, 1990). The narrative research approach seeks to give "voice" to those who are usually voiceless in a particular social discourse, thus empowering those who usually have no autonomy (Casey, 1993). This research approach allowed participants to (1) become the authors of their life story; (2) tell their story like they wanted to; (3) create their own interpretation of their perceived lived experiences; and (4) have the opportunity to

practice self-reflection (Riessman, 1993). Lather (1986) categorizes the narrative approach as emancipatory research or praxis. Praxis, described as having rigor and relevance, provides information that helps produce a more equitable world through the existence of emancipatory knowledge--knowledge derived from human action, the organizing principle of narrative research methodology (Lather, 1986; Riessman, 1993).

Trustworthiness of the Research Method

As an educational researcher I believe that good research is that which gets us as close to "the truth" as possible. If one believes, as I do, that reality is socially constructed and exists only when human beings describe it, then narrative research methodology is one means for getting us closer to the truth. A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world. One must understand that absoluteness or "the one" right answer cannot be expected when conducting research with humans.

Good research is that which provides explanations for phenomena and enables others to better understand those phenomena. Two questions should frame the pursuit for any educational research: (1) Are warranted conclusions obtained from the research about an important educational question or questions? and (2) Is the research

trustworthy? (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990).

Research is trustworthy when it explains and increases understanding of phenomena. Cronbach (1984) supports this belief in that he believes that the end goal of the validation of research is explanation and understanding. Messick (1989) argues that validation is essentially a type of "scientific inquiry," and a validity judgment is an "inductive summary" of all available information. Therefore, as one moves away from positivism to constructivism the focus is on interpretation, social contexts and values. Mishler (1990) redefines "validation as the process(es) through which we make claims for and evaluate the 'trustworthiness' of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations" (p. 419). He further explains that if the overall assessment of a study's trustworthiness is high enough for one to act on, then the findings can be granted a sufficient degree of validity for investing time and energy necessary to put at risk one's reputation as a competent investigator. Collins (1985) argues that the only evidence of the proper conduct of an experiment is the proper experimental outcome, not the precision with which the work was done.

One way validity can be achieved with narrative research is to determine whether or not the researcher's interpretation makes sense to the respondent. As Mishler

(1990) confirms, validation is the social construction of a discourse through which the results of a study come to be viewed as sufficiently trustworthy for other investigators to rely upon in their own work. Quantitative researchers describe validity as measuring what it is supposed to measure and reliability as measuring what it measures consistently. Qualitative researchers get both valid and reliable research through discovery by uncovering information thus validity, and reliability through patterns, metaphors, and themes. If you can find definite patterns in the narrative research, and it can be repeated, it is valid. According to Casey (1993) to validate "you are" means "I" validate you when I let you tell your story. With narrative research every text has a context. As a narrative researcher, one does not study behavior as the ethnographer, but rather they study peoples' construction of language (Riessman, 1993).

Riessman (1993) identifies four ways of approaching validation in narrative work: (1) persuasiveness, making interpretations reasonable and convincing; (2) correspondence, conducting member checks--taking the work back to the individuals and groups who participated in the study; (3) coherence, to show that an interpretation is more than ad hoc; and (4) pragmatic use, the extent to which a particular study becomes the basis for others' work. Mishler (1990) argues that "knowledge is validated

within a community of scientists as they come to share nonproblematic and useful ways of thinking about solving problems" (p. 422).

Narrative research methodology is trustworthy because as an example of oral history, it brings us as close to "the truth" as we can get. Its focus moves away from traditional historians and towards the interpretations of groups of people. Oral history is a way to give history back to the people in their own words. And in presenting a past, it also helps them create their own future (Casey, 1993). Having grown up in the fifties and sixties, my attraction to oral history is ignited by those versions juxtaposed with civil rights projects especially those that centered on an education that would be based on both equity and equality for all students. One hundred years later we're still trying to achieve equity, equality and inclusion as well as an education for democracy.

The most important influence on my neonatal research has been the work of Dr. Kathleen Casey who, in writing her narratives of women teachers involved in social justice activism, cites M. M. Bakhtin whose theory of self, she explains, is "not only social; it is also fundamentally moral and political; . . . more than a creation of discourse; she can alone be one of its makers; . . . this self is not a jumble of fragments; she can

articulate her own coherence. Acting within the limitations constructed by the other, she nevertheless has some choice, and she has some power" (p. 24). Just like, Casey, asking the students to "tell me the story of their life as a student" became an interrogation for social purpose. Their responses revealed a theory of self that is truly social, moral and political, with choices and power.

Finally, narrative methodology is only one approach to research, not a panacea. It is suitable for some research situations but not others. Riessman (1993) describes it as:

> a useful addition to the stock pot of social science methods, bringing critical flavors to the fore that otherwise get lost. Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects (p. 70).

This study was designed to give "voice" to African-American high school seniors in an effort to have them author their own stories about their lives as students. To prevent the problem of representation, how we represent life in scientific work, Riessman's (1993) five levels of representation in the research process were utilized: (1) attending-making certain phenomena meaningful; (2) telling-the performance of a personal narrative which involves re-presenting the event to the

listeners with all the opportunities and constraints the form of discourse entails; (3) transcribing-taping the conversation to create a fixation of action into written speech; (4) analyzing-to identify similarities across the moments into an aggregate, a summation in order to tell what the interview narratives signify; and (5) reading-circulating an early draft of the written report to colleagues and to the people it is about and incorporating their comments into the so-called final product (p. 10). This process was cyclic: telling, editing, and reshaping to form the story.

The Researcher's Self-Analysis

Before a researcher can interview participants for their narratives, s/he must do a self-analysis to prevent too much subjectivity from entering the study. Therefore, at this point, I conducted a self-analysis to make sure I understood my own personality and assumptions about school.

I agree very strongly with Catherine Riessman (1990) when she states that "The construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it" (p. v). With this in mind, I firmly believed that before I, as a researcher, could emerge competent to analyze others I had to submit to a self analysis. If as a researcher I

did not understand my own personality, I would not be able to understand others. Going through an analysis of myself brought some of my personal background to consciousness and allowed me to better control my interpretations of the interpreters. This self analysis also made me more aware of my own subjectivity. As Alan Peshkin (1988) stated, ". . . one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life" (p. 17).

As I entered this project I knew I had certain underlying assumptions about why many African American students are not motivated to achieve academically. I tried to identify as many of these assumptions, biases, and emotions as I could prior to beginning the interviews and analysis of data. Although I continued to discover my subjective "I's" throughout this research, I committed myself to a formal, systematic monitoring of "self".

I have always assumed that the extent to which we celebrate ethnic diversity cannot make education reasonable let alone excellent unless we deal with ethnic issues such as achievement, attrition, attendance, and teacher recruitment. I also believe that cultural diversity and ethnicity permeate all dimensions of the human process and the schooling process. Therefore, multicultural education is the best means we have for creating positive perceptions of school which ultimately

lead to increased academic and social school success for ethnic minorities. I believe that if ethnic minority students could receive a multicultural education that would allow them many opportunities for success in classroom environments that are free from fear and prejudice then their perception of school would be more positive because their experiences would be validated and they would feel empowered. I also firmly believe that if we want multicultural education to work for students, especially ethnic minorities, then we must know how to select or identify cultural heroes but not impose our own ethnicity or cultural orientation on others. I do believe it is easy to shade what we do through our cultural lenses. I further believe that cultural diversity and multicultural education have to be perennial, a persistent presence that we go into with cautious intent. Changes in education to address multicultural education must be adequate, accurate, and authentic. The holistic approach must be utilized in multicultural education, this is fundamental. Fundamental is not special plays, foods, or special celebrations--this is exotic, not fundamental.

I have always believed that understanding ethnic diversity is critical, not automatic. It is a developmental process. I am convinced that a positive sense of ethnic diversity is fundamental for children to have a positive self-concept which is important for

learning. Learning, from a curriculum centered in truth, increases knowledge, and this kind of knowledge is necessary for liberation, emancipation, freedom, and a sense of positive cultural identity. Issues and challenges in multicultural education require new research and interpretation paradigms. This paradigm shift must include listening to the students. What students describe as detrimental to their academic success must be HEARD and acted upon.

Finally, beliefs drive behavior and it is my assumption that "teachers are the products of educational systems that have a history of racism, exclusion, and debilitating pedagogy" (Nieto, 1992, p. xxvii). Thus listening to the students themselves might just be the beginning of the needed paradigm shift in the perceptions of educators about how students learn, especially poverty disadvantaged and minority students. We all know that teachers are human and therefore, they carry their cultural perceptions, values, morals, hopes, and dreams with them into their classrooms. Their values and perspectives are thus interwoven with what they teach and thus influence the way they communicate messages to their students.

Sleeter (1991) states that it is imperative for teachers to first reckon with their own personal and cultural values and identities if they want to help

students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups develop clarified cultural identities and be able to relate positively to each other (p. 139).

Other than these underlying assumptions I also recognize that I have certain feelings that lead to my subjectivity and thus affect my research. Using the words of Peshkin (1988), I shall describe some of my "I's" which made me aware of my own subjective feelings.

The first "I" that I became aware of was the "Ethnic-Maintenance I" (Peshkin, 1988). Being African American shapes my life therefore, I know I identified with the ethnic-maintenance behavior of the students I interviewed. I also believe in hard work and taking charge of your own life and not letting anyone tell you you can't achieve. Ethnic identity can't be used as an excuse for not achieving and being successful in life. I am not sympathetic with people who use this excuse for their lack of success in life. I, as an adult, had to be aware of how I communicated with the young people I interviewed and I tried extremely hard to be understanding of their lexical items (choice of words) and made sure their words were used in the transcriptions and when appropriate, in the narratives to ensure authenticity in communicating meaning. This I knew was important to be aware of because African Americans' patterns of communication are expressive, dynamic, and dramatic.

Since the African American students who participated in this study were allowed to tell their "stories" in a relaxed, informal atmosphere, they were made to feel they could "talk their talk,"--using the rich oral communication tradition of the African American cultural legacy passed on to all African Americans from generation to generation (Baber, 1987).

As Baber (1987) attests:

> Black communication is an expressive way of "talkin that talk" and "walkin' that walk" that is steeped in the oral tradition of Afro-America. Whether it is preaching, teaching, fussin, cussing, styling, profiling, promenading, or just simply being, the Black communicator is ritualistically eloquent, dramatic, and elaborate in getting the message across (p. 76).

Equally important was for me to be understanding of their home backgrounds, especially their growing up in single parent homes. I value the traditional family and sympathize with children who have not had the love and security of both a mother and a father as I had as a student and as my daughter has today. I could not allow this sympathy to cloud the interpretation of their stories.

Another aspect of my "being" that had to be considered was my having been among the first black students, in the mid-1960's to integrate the local high school in my home town. It was during the height of

desegregation that I attended and graduated from this high school, the same high school that the students I interviewed attended and graduated from on June 2, 1995, twenty-seven years after me. I am sure this caused me to listen intently for improved racial conditions.

The next "I" that I became aware of was the Professional Teacher I. As a teacher I expect students to respect authority and be cooperative with teachers if the teacher is reasonable. I expect students to spend at least two hours a day studying and/or doing homework. As a teacher I expect students to model appropriate behavior in the classroom. As a teacher I also expect other teachers to do whatever is necessary to help ALL students learn. I expect teachers to have well planned lessons that address the various learning styles and intelligences of students. I expect teachers to be sensitive to diversity and be prepared to teach to diversity. I expect teachers to care and to be genuine with all students. I expect teachers not to be sarcastic or demeaning to students. I am most intolerable of these behaviors, and when cited by the students as reasons for their lack of success and increased frustrations in school, I was appalled. I tried constantly to be aware of these biases in an effort to not allow them to enter into my analysis of the data.

In conclusion, as a researcher I believed it was important not to present myself as the expert to these students. Instead, I was intent on making students feel that they were the experts because they were. I worked hard to make them realize that their stories were important and would be taken quite seriously. Equally important, I realized that my identity and experiences helped shape my research as I progressed through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data. This required me to consciously manage my subjectivity.

The Narrative Research Study

This study analyzed the narratives of five African American high school seniors to gain an authentic account of how they view school. Their perceived notions about their orientation toward school, the structural factors which influenced their perceptions of school, and their views of themselves and their experiences in school contributed new insights for better understanding their successes and frustrations in school and ultimately in life.

Selection of the Narrative Research Paradigm

The narrative approach was chosen because of the findings from a pilot study I conducted in 1994 using

narrative research methodology. During this pilot study, four African American students were interviewed: two females and two males. All four students were seniors with a range of abilities. Their grade point averages ranged from 1.16 to 3.8. These students' perceptions of school indicated the need for their voices to be heard. Their "stories" were powerful in their implications for making school more attuned to the needs of African American students. The frustrations these students felt due to the perceived racism in their school, beginning with the sixth grade, revealed a need to hear more "stories" from African American students. Their frustrations clearly indicated that school was perceived by them as a system for maintaining inequity.

When describing their successes in school, their "stories" clearly demonstrated how school can come to be perceived as empowering institutions, promoting motivation and success in school. The collective narrative of these students point out the many tensions that exist in school today due to changing demographics and the need for school to meet the needs of poverty disadvantaged and ethnic minority students. Their narratives further implied that minority children are usually forced to examine, confront, and question their cultural assumptions when they enter

school rather than having their culture validated and
confirmed. As Banks (1994) affirms:

> Students who are born and socialized within
> the mainstream culture of a society rarely
> have an opportunity to identify, question, and
> challenge their cultural assumptions, beliefs,
> values, and perspectives because the school
> culture usually reinforces those that they
> learn at home and in their communities.
> Consequently mainstream Americans have few
> opportunities to become free of cultural
> assumptions and perspectives that are monocultural,
> that devalue African and Asian cultures, and
> that stereotype people of color and people who
> are poor, or who are victimized in other ways (p.
> 7).

Only recently have schools begun to implement practices
that make the school environment more receptive of diverse
student populations and that include all ethnic, racial,
and cultural groups of people in the curriculum's
knowledge base. Unfortunately this attempt is not
consistent or widespread.

So it was with these four students' stories about
the power of having their "group" validated and racism
eliminated from the school, that I knew without a doubt
that the narrative approach was the best means for
conducting this study. To begin educational reform that
would decrease the dropout rate among ethnic minority and
poverty disadvantaged students was to hear more "stories,"
and these students' story made me passionate about giving
"voice" to ordinary, anonymous African American high

school seniors whose ideas had only been known in their immediate circle of adolescent peers and family members. Their stories revealed the frustration devaluing African American culture has caused for the educational success of African American students.

Participants' perceptions of school were analyzed, and the data was used to tell what the interview narratives signified by creating mini-stories and a metastory about how African American students view school. The purpose of this investigation was "verstehen," which Smith (1983) defined as

> the attempt to achieve a sense of the meaning
> that others give to their own situations through
> an interpretive understanding of their language,
> art, gestures, and politics (p. 12).

To achieve this level of understanding, a paradigm that allows for grounded theory to emerge from the data was appropriate and necessary. The narrative research approach, facilitated what Riessman (1993) referred to as the "systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects" (p. 70) so that "culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story, [making] it possible to examine gender inequalities, racial oppression, and other practices of power that may be taken for granted by individual speakers" (p. 5).

Context of the Study

The high school, selected for this study, is one of

two high schools in this city school system. It has been

at the heart of this North Carolina city since the school

opened in 1951 for white students only. Desegregation was

mandated in 1968. Beginning with the early 1960's, around

1964, Blacks had the option of attending this high school.

Located on the city's major thoroughfare, the high

school was built to meet the needs of an expanding

community, and became the cornerstone of a developing

neighborhood. In recent years the school has been

remodeled to reflect many modern features. It is fully

air conditioned; the biology, chemistry and physics

laboratories are fully stocked to complete all Advanced

Placement laboratories; the school publications are

computer assisted, utilizing the latest in desktop

publishing and laser printing technology; the media center

is computerized and the Mathematics Department has a

computer science laboratory. In addition to its classroom

sets of graphing business computer laboratory, a computer

assisted drafting laboratory, and a computer assisted home

economics and clothing laboratory also exist. The school

even has a fully equipped television production studio

that produces cable television spots.

The school's community is largely middle class with a school population of 984. The minority population has become more culturally diverse in the past three years, with a particular rise in the Asian population. The racial/ethnic composition of the student body is:

.1% American Indian or Native Alaskan

2.3% Asian or Pacific Islander

22.0% Black, not Hispanic origin

.4% Hispanic

75.2% White, not Hispanic origin

There are 8.5%, or 82 students who qualify for free/reduced price lunch and only 4.7%, or 46 students receive special education services. There are 4 full time administrators in the school: 2 White and 2 African American; 60 classroom teachers: 53 White and 7 African American; 2 library/media professionals: 1 White, 1 African American; and 3 counselors: 2 White and 1 African American. Other school support personnel include: psychologists, nurses, paraprofessionals, clerical staff, custodians, and food service employees make up the staff.

According to faculty and administrators as well as printed materials, instruction is viewed as extremely important. One policy that supports this was the strengthening of graduation requirements with the class of 1992: three math credits, including Algebra I, and 22 overall credits to graduate. They have also strengthened

their curriculum by adding a World Cultures class. This was the vision of one teacher to make the curriculum reflect the larger cultural diversity of their student body. In 1994 one section of African American history was added to the curriculum.

The faculty indicate that they believe all students can and must learn, and they guarantee the quantity, the quality, and the integrity of instruction. The written philosophy of the school indicates that the student is the most important component of an educational system and the faculty and staff attempt to serve individual needs and honor individual rights. By serving those needs and honoring those rights, the school endeavors to increase knowledge, improve and expand skills, strengthen self-concept, and encourage the development of positive values. They describe education as the cornerstone of democratic activities, and believe that school must provide for participation of democratic activities to help students become concerned and responsible members of society. Recognizing that education is not static, faculty evaluate and revise the school's programs to meet the demands of a changing society. The school attempts to prepare each student to improve and enrich not only their own life, but also the world by training them to be as intelligent, as responsible, and as productive as they can possibly be.

To put this philosophy into action, the school offers courses in each subject area at the basic, technical, academic, and advanced levels. Students enroll in courses appropriate to their ability level based on test scores and achievement in previous classes.

To assist potential dropouts or other at-risk or underachieving students, the school has the assistance of counselors, psychologists, and social workers who work with these students as soon as they are identified. The dropout prevention counselor at the school teaches nurturing classes and academic enhancement sessions. The In-School Suspension program attempts to keep students in school rather than put them out of school. Flexible scheduling of classes (they offer early morning and extended day classes) allows students to accumulate the number of credits they need to graduate while holding jobs.

Based on their written and oral articulation of the school's philosophy, the school makes every effort to be a total educational program. Extracurricular activities are believed to be an essential part of the students' growth process. There are 37 interest, service, honor, and competitive clubs in the school. Athletics is also essential and during the 1992 academic year, approximately 300 students, roughly one-third of the student body, were involved in athletics.

The faculty, administration, and staff are committed to maintaining an environment conducive to teaching and learning; disciplinary procedures are intended to support that goal. Quality education is the primary mission of the school and a disciplined environment is necessary for quality education.

The teacher is the legal authority in the classroom just as the principal is the legal authority in the school. When deemed necessary, appropriate actions will be taken as corrective measures. It is anticipated that most disciplinary referrals will be handled without loss of school time. Action may include a warning, a combination of in- and out-of-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, long-term suspension, or expulsion. The administrative response to any disciplinary referral is contingent upon the nature of the infraction and prior disciplinary history of the student.

Since the school won the 1992-1993 Secondary School Recognition Award the administration, faculty, and staff have declared in their Blue Ribbon School Program Report that "we enthusiastically look forward to our future role of educating people for a global community" (p. 7). The Social Studies Department has since made a special effort to resist relying on a single, specific historical position about events in American history, government, and economics. Teachers and students consult a variety of

sources in order to understand the perspectives of various groups of people before the students are asked to draw conclusions. The faculty and administration further describe their curricula as attempting to examine the contradictions between the promise of "America" and the reality of life in the United States. Teachers also profess that our history as a multicultural society is a thread that runs throughout the formal academic program.

Other efforts outside the formal curriculum have been instituted to increase the awareness of faculty and students of our cultural diversity. The Guidance Department recently participated in a staff development program on multicultural education. The World Cultures Club is a student-initiated institution designed to increase awareness. In the past five years the school's community has hosted foreign exchange students from such countries as Brazil, Columbia, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The foreign language classes sponsor days highlighting foreign cultures, and students take school sponsored trips to foreign countries. Two of the school's students visited Japan under the auspices of the Konica Youth Exchange. Finally, it is stated in the Blue Ribbon Report that the faculty has changed from a group dedicated to the education and success of the academic level student to a faculty that focuses on providing quality education to all

students. Unfortunately, the African American students interviewed for this study indicate just the opposite is true for most of the faculty. The "stories" of the five African American students who participated in this study, all of whom attend this school, do not agree with what the teachers and administrators believe they are doing with students.

Selection of the Participants

The Student Information Management System's coordinator, with the assistance of the school counselor, provided me with a list of 46 African American high school seniors attending the high school during the 1994-1995 academic year. From this list, 28 students were identified as living with only one parent or guardian. From this pool of 28 students, 15 were randomly selected by placing their names in a box and having my daughter draw 15 names from the box. Students from both genders were considered for the study. Criteria for participation in the study required students to: (1) be of African American descent; (2) be high school seniors; (3) reflect a range of abilities based on cumulative grade point averages (GPA's); (4) come from low socioeconomic backgrounds; and (5) have been reared predominantly by a single parent. The reason for the last three criteria was to eliminate the stereotype that all minority students

with low socioeconomic status and reared by only one parent have low expectations of themselves and can't do well in school. Additionally, these three criteria were selected in order to hear from students why some experience success and make it academically and why others do not. Students who did not meet these criteria were not interviewed, or asked to tell their "story".

The 15 names selected were given to the principal for approval. The principal, at my request, located these students, reviewed their schedules and arranged for me to meet with them as a group. While he was working on scheduling a meeting time that would be convenient for all parties involved, I spent my time observing in the school to collect data that would assist me in describing the context of this school. I had planned to observe in the school for two weeks, but this was extended for three weeks because the first time the students were scheduled to meet with me, it snowed, and students were dismissed early. However, I remained in the school to visit the professional library. So for three weeks I visited the school twice a week, four hours each day. During this time I observed the culture of the school by doing the following: (1) visiting the school's library where I observed students interacting with teachers, the media specialists, other students, and working independently; (2) spending two hours in the professional library taking

note of the books available to teachers and how recently
the books had been checked out by teachers; (3) walking
the halls during the changing of classes to observe
student-student interactions, student-teacher
interactions, and student-administrator interactions; (4)
talking informally and randomly with five teachers, one
media specialist, two counselors, one resource teacher,
all three assistant principals, the principal, three
secretaries, and one housekeeper; and (5) visiting the
cafeteria on two occasions to observe student interactions
with each other as well as their decorum. The purpose of
these observations and conversations was to collect data
to assist in establishing the discourse of this study and,
as stated earlier, to describe the context of the school.

I also collected copies of the following printed
materials to extend my collection of data base descriptors
of the school: (1) the High School Faculty Handbook
(1994-1995); (2) Preparing for Success at the High School
Student/Parent Handbook (1994-1995); (3) the 1992-1993
Secondary Blue Ribbon School Recognition Program Report;
(4) the School Board Policies; and (5) Building a
Community of Life-Long Learners (1994-1995) The City
Schools Handbook. Each document was read and pertinent
information, which would help identify the context of the
school these selected African American students were
attending, was extracted. In addition, I also received

and became quite familiar with the daily bell schedule and the master schedule of the school which revealed the subjects offered each day and the teachers who taught them. These data base descriptors--informal and formal interviews with the administrators, faculty, and staff, printed materials, and my observations along with the descriptors provided by the student research participants were analyzed and interpreted to develop the context of the school with as much accuracy as possible.

By the time I had collected the data base descriptors, the principal had arranged for the students to meet with me during lunch on a Friday during the month of February. The principal chose this month and day because he was allowing seniors to go off campus for lunch on Fridays only during the month of February as a trial activity that, with good behavior, could lead to a permanent senior privilege. On this day, all students functioned on a modified class schedule and the lunch period was extended for one hour with all students attending lunch at the same time. Of the 15 students invited to attend this first meeting, 12 attended. The other three students were contacted individually at the school and they indicated that they had changed their minds and did not want to participate in the study.

During the meeting, I introduced myself in a nonthreatening manner and immediately tried, with the 12

students who attended, to establish good rapport with the students by telling them portions of my personal and professional "life story" as a student, mother, teacher, and community activist seeking to make education better for all children. I then presented an overview of my research project including my plan of action, the time frame for the study, and a description of the student's role in the research project. Students were invited to ask questions. Their questions ranged from, "Will I be in a book?" and "What day, what time, and how many times do we have to meet with you?" to "Can I say whatever I want to in my story about school?" After answering their questions, the researcher invited all 12 students to participate in the study.

At this point, they all appeared interested. Before leaving, they were each given the short form of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Consent to Act as a Human Subject permission form with a written outline of the study (Appendix A). They were asked to take the form home and discuss it with their parent or guardian, secure the appropriate signatures, and return it the next day to the Assistant Principal, an African American female, in a sealed envelope, if they decided to participate in the study. Upon receipt of each student's permission form, I contacted them by telephone to schedule a private interview on a day and time most convenient for

both the informant and the researcher. Of the 12 students who accepted the permission forms, 7 returned them. However, when called, only five students scheduled an interview and attended the session at the scheduled time. The five students who did agree to participate in the study included one male and four females, and their GPA's ranged from 1.16 to 3.0. Since these five students met the criteria required for research participants, and both genders were included, I decided to stop the number of participants at five and collect their narratives.

Although I did not know nor had I ever met any of these students prior to the day of that meeting at the High School, I felt quite comfortable with each student. I very quickly tried to make them feel as comfortable, relaxed, and trustworthy of me as I was of them as I drove them from their homes to my home. All of the interviews were conducted at my home at the student's request, except one which was conducted at the home of the student at her request. There was a common bond between these students and me. We were all African Americans who had attended the same high school where we experienced individual, institutional, and cultural racism. We had all experienced feeling "invisible", and non valued. We had been embarrassed and ridiculed by a teacher not of our race or culture. We all came from families where at least one parent cared a great deal about our successes and

tried to do as much as s/he could for us with the limited resources available to them. And, finally, in spite of the hardships of school and society, we all graduated from the same high school.

Data Collection and Analysis

The following sources and procedures were used to collect the narratives and conduct the analysis:

1. Each student attended a private interview session with me in order for me to hear and record their stories. This private session allowed me to observe the student's mannerisms as they talked. These sessions lasted from 45 minutes to 2.25 hours each.

2. At the first interview session the student completed the following forms: the <u>Student General Information Form</u> (Appendix B); the <u>Daily Schedule</u> (Appendix C); and the <u>Student Activities Questionnaire</u> (Appendix D).

3. In the initial interview, each student was asked five questions (Appendix E) to guide their "stories."

4. The interview tapes were then transcribed and analyzed in order to make connections to the models identified in the literature review by identifying patterns that ran through and across the narratives, establishing categories of the students words and

eventually selecting themes to draft the narratives.
Colored highlighters were used to highlight the themes
that ran through all of the narratives. Unique themes for
the mini-stories were circled with colored markers.

5. Member checks of the drafted themes were
conducted by having each student informant meet with me
and read and discuss my interpretation of their narrative
to validate its authenticity. At this meeting I discussed
with each informant the emerging themes to be used in
drafting the final narrative.

6. After the member checks, necessary revisions
were made to the analysis of the transcribed data
collected in the initial interviews and new categories
emerged.

7. Copies of the full transcriptions were then
circulated among the external auditors (dissertation
committee) for review. A meeting was then scheduled with
two of the external auditors to discuss the emerging
themes and the best means for capturing these "students'
stories."

8. At the auditors' request, a second set of
interviews were scheduled with Ethel, Wilma, and Ricky to
have them reflect more on their earlier comments. These
interviews were more structured to make connections with
the models identified in the literature review and to give
these students an opportunity to reflect on some of their

earlier responses. Questions for this interview were not determined until after the initial round of transcript analyses (Appendix F). Second interviews were also conducted for Lucy and Betty to have them reflect on some of their comments that did relate to the issues identified in the models of the literature review during their initial interviews. Each of these second interviews lasted about one hour each.

9. Their second interview tapes were transcribed and member checks were held with each of them to verify my interpretation of their transcripts and their narratives were redrafted.

10. The final analysis of the student narratives were then made individually and as a group, even though they were all collected individually, to create a metastory. Because the students' stories were all unique, and quite different in many instances, mini-stories were created for each individual student's narrative. I engaged in coding the transcriptions and writing the narratives as the analysis focused the themes more clearly as issues which seemed to create tensions based on the students' perceptions of the school. Each student reviewed their coded transcript for accuracy.

11. In reporting my analysis at the end of the study, the context of the school was defined according to data-based descriptors, and perceptual descriptors.

12. Once the final narrative was written, each student was asked to read Chapter 4, the analysis of their narratives and to give their thoughts about my interpretation of their stories. This was my final attempt to validate this narrative research study.

Riessman's (1993) five levels of representation: attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, and reading (identified earlier), were used to frame the discussion of the narratives and to help focus the writing of the narratives. According to Riessman (1993):

> Framing discussion of the research process in the language of representation rather than as stages or perspectives, emphasizes that we actively make choices that can be accomplished in different ways. Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal (p. 15).

After making the phenomena meaningful, the interviews were edited and reshaped into a hybrid story.

Utilizing these levels of representation, I realized that I could best tell the stories of these African American students by developing themes to describe their orientation towards school, the critical structural factors that influence their perceptions of school, and their views of themselves and their experiences in school. Each narrative, while unique, provided similar patterns to every other narrative. These themes would be the foundation of the metastory which would include how

African American students: (1) describe their orientation towards school; (2) describe the critical structural factors that influence their perceptions of school; and (3) view themselves and their experiences in school. Using common patterns identified in each narrative, the issues were identified to create the story of these five African American high school students. Their stories of personal experience and meaning presented deep insight for better understanding those factors that influence African American students' successes and frustrations in school. The meta- and mini-stories also provided deeper insights for understanding African American students as an ethnic minority group who has historically been excluded from the school curriculum. My analysis was an attempt to create order and construct texts in particular contexts using these story themes as issues which create tensions in the school environment because of the way African American students perceive school and the way the school thinks it is perceived.

In framing my text I emulated the work of Casey (1993) who stated that "life history narratives are oral histories which have been collected and analyzed in a particular way . . . Analysis is impossible without pattern-making of some sort" (Casey, 1993, pp. 24 & 25). Therefore, instead of reducing the diversity of African American high school seniors to a single dimension, I have

assembled them into a group with a number of connected common self-identities. I have tried to create "a social space where the collective creators of a discourse can engage in a group conversation" (Casey, 1993, p. 25).

Reporting the Study

Narrative research analysis is an interpretive process. Deciding what to tell and what to leave out and imposing structure and meaning on events is what the very act of story making is about. A story, according to Carter (1993) "is a theory of something. What we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe" (p. 9). She further ascertains:

> Stories are not merely raw data from which
> to construct interpretations but products
> of a fundamentally interpretive process that
> is shaped by the moralistic impulses of the
> author and by narrative forces or requirements.
> And these interpretive elements operate regardless
> of who the author is. (p. 9)

To ensure that the students' stories clearly reflected their perceptions of school and were interpreted accurately, Reissman's (1993) validation model: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use was applied to this study. Her model views validation as "the process through which we make claims for the trustworthiness of our interpretations" (p. 65). She points out that "trustworthiness" not "truth" is a crucial

semantic difference: truth assumes an objective reality, whereas trustworthiness moves the process into the social world.

Procedures described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for conducting member checks: data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions were tested with the participants from whom the data were originally collected. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) if the investigator's reconstructions are recognizable as reasonable representations, credibility is increased. Therefore the final validity check for this research included taking the work back to the individuals who participated in the study.

CHAPTER IV

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

> . . . school is still separate and
> not equal.
>
> My recollection of anything bad that
> ever happened in school was a whole
> bunch of racism, . . .
>
> . . . they [White people] think that
> Black people are not as smart as White
> people.
>
> I asked questions and she didn't even
> want to answer me or nothing.
>
> It's hard to argue with thirty White
> people in the class when I'm the only
> Black in there.
>
> I feel I'm going to graduate. Ain't
> letting nobody stop me.

The voices of African American students talking about their experiences in school do not produce what teachers, administrators, and parents expect to hear. Millions of scrambled sentences can be heard simultaneously creating an unbelievable chatter. Lucy's chatter would support school as a system for maintaining inequity:

> School is a place where you are supposed to achieve
> but you don't because of racism and family history.

It's a place where you are supposed to learn, but it don't get done. Yea, school is still separate and not equal.

Ethel's chatter would support school as an arena for change:

But it does help you change your life because it helps you communicate better and gives you direction for your life.

Direction is one of many goals students seek to attain through their experiences in school. The voices of Black students discussing their memories of school indicate disappointing directions as described by Lucy:

My, lets see. My recollection of anything bad that ever happened in school was a whole bunch of racism, and if there's anything that ever sticks out in my school life all 13 years, it is racism. People are very racist. Right now, I'm a library assistant at school and when some of the students need something they won't come to me. They go to the White library assistant, who's my partner. She sits right beside me. But, there's nothing that I don't know that she knows. I mean, we were taught the same things. We both know how to use the computer and stuff and like that, and it kind of hurts my feelings sometimes when people overlook me for other people or something like that because of my skin color. Maybe it's because of the stereotype. Maybe it's cause of society. I mean, they [White people] think that Black people are not as smart as White people. And you know, a lot of us have experienced it. When we achieve something good, like that, we don't get as much credit and as much praise as White people would. And so you don't even try as hard.

In the milieu of chatter are strands of personal conflict and student teacher conflicts. Ricky voices such conflicts:

> And I thought it was too hard for me, but I tried hard to do the work the first two nine weeks. It got hard and I still couldn't pass and I mean she just, she didn't even help me out or nothing. I asked questions and she didn't even want to answer me or nothing. And my average was real low, 'cause I got mad and I just didn't do nothing else. I had got to the point where I didn't even care no more about school. I'd have to say I didn't like her.

When African American students are in the minority the system expects for them to be the spokesperson. Lucy finds herself speaking for many constituencies:

> When I speak, I'm saying something for the whole Black race. Plus I have to speak for women. Then I have to speak for being a single teenage parent. And it's like a whole bunch on my shoulder. It's hard to argue with 30 White people in the class when I'm the only black in there. But, I do voice my opinion. There's a whole bunch I want to get out in the open. I'm blunt, I speak my mind, and I would just bring up the issues and we could talk about it.

Despite the disappointment, direction, conflict and expectation as Ricky shares they all have an unyielding desire to get an education:

> I just don't want to have it hard all my life. So I just, I want to get an education. I feel I'm going to graduate. Ain't letting nobody stop me.

African American students' own understandings and interpretations of their experiences reveal significant information about their perceptions of school and their successes and frustrations in school. There are certainly millions of words to describe how African American students perceive school today. But the best way to understand African American students' perceptions of school is to let them become the authors of their own life history narratives, of their own lives, and, of social change.

The voices of five African American 1995 high school graduates, one male and four females, have been recorded for this research study. Their narratives have been examined for constructions unique to each individual and for constructions common to the group. The narrative begins with the "story" of each individual--who they are, and their first memories of school. Next, the common patterns of the group are assembled in the form of a discourse--the metastory, beginning with their common high school years and their perceptions of school now. The narrative ends with the individual's vision of their future--where they are going and where they are at the conclusion of this study.

The Individual Student Stories

Five African American students sat in a conference room at their local high school waiting to hear about my research. They were all born and reared in a small county in North Carolina and attended local public schools. They have all been reared predominantly by their mothers; they are all from low socioeconomic backgrounds; three of the five considered dropping out of school because of unfair practices by teachers and administrators; they all wish that when they speak, someone would listen; and yet they are all very determined to use the education they have acquired in school, in spite of the hardships endured, to make life better for themselves and others.

Lucy

Lucy, a small, petite, fiery, energetic, enthusiastic, talkative, strong willed, and determined young lady. A self-described high achiever, she has always been self-motivated to do well in school:

> I want to be all that Lucy wants to be. If I don't succeed in what I want to do, it won't be because I didn't try, and it won't be because I gave up. Being that I'm kind of smart and stuff, I look for the hardness in things. I look for something that's really going to make me work. When I was in second grade, I read my 2000 book limit and won $20.00.

Lucy's earliest memories about school began with her very first day in kindergarten. This was easy for her to remember because it was such an unpleasant day.

> I remember going to school my first day, and everybody's parents were there, but mine were not. I went to school the first day by myself, because my mother and my parents my mother and my father really weren't together. I came from a dysfunctional family. And, so I started off kindergarten by myself. Everybody was kissing their parents and stuff goodbye and I didn't have anybody to kiss, and from the first day school, I will never forget that I've always been jealous of other folks 'cause of what they have and what I don't have.

The absence of Lucy's parents was really a traumatic experience for her on this first day of school. Since that day, she has always wished for a family life that included both of her parents, lots of love and support from them, and many of the material things she saw other children in her circle have access to--clothes, money, vacations, and a nice home.

> Like shoes and clothes and stuff, I do alright. I have clothes. I have money. I buy my son what we can afford, but going to school with people who if they're sitting around, well let's go to the beach, call your mom and ask her can she let you have any money and stuff. And their parents bring $500.00 and $600.00 up to the school with the snap of the finger. It makes me kind of say, you know, well why can't I be like that. I mean, I used to sit back and used to cry myself to sleep.
>
> I used to beg and I used to ask God to let me have White parents. I thought that if I had White parents, I would have money and I would get the love and attention that I see my White friends and

stuff getting. Come to find out, now I've come to
realize that it's not the white parents and stuff,
I mean maybe on the outside, it looks good, but
I haven't been in their shoes so I really don't
know what they're going through, so I'm just going
to take my life and deal with my life and try to
get my life straight instead of taking on
somebody's else's problems and trying to deal with
theirs too.

And, in a way, I'm glad I had to grow up like
this because it's teaching me to be strong. It's
teaching me to be independent. I know, you know,
that no matter what I really need, people are there
for me, but if I didn't have anybody, I would be
alright. I'd still be able to survive and that's
something that I'm always going to keep with me.
I mean, I'm always going to be strong no matter
what. Nobody will ever be able to just do what
they want to me because I'm always going to have my
guard up.

At age twelve, her paternal grandmother took over
the role of parent when Lucy's parents finally separated.
She lived with her paternal grandparent until her junior
year in high school. After an incident with her father,
that occurred in her grandmother's presence, in which Lucy
experienced physical and emotional abuse, she left and
went to stay with her great aunt, who already was taking
care of Lucy's 92-year old great grandmother, and two of
her younger first cousins (her mom's sister's children).
Lucy was very hurt that her paternal grandmother made no
attempt to stop her son, Lucy's father, from being violent
with her. To this day she does not understand why her
grandmother did not help her or stop her father
from abusing her.

My grandmother sat on the couch like she was blind to the whole fact. I mean, it was like she couldn't even see what was going on. And my son was already born, and he was sitting on the couch and you know, I'm thinking my daddy is doing this in front of my baby. So I got up to go outside and he [daddy] opened the door and pushed me off the steps and I fell down the steps. It's like my grandmother, she knows things are going on. It's like she's scared to say anything or maybe because it's her son. It's not that I hate my grandma, but I really dislike her for not standing up for me. You know, I'm a child. I felt that she needed to guard me. Somebody needed to step in and do something, but they didn't. And you know, that's why I have this wall. I have to be so tough to everything. I mean I cry a lot, but nobody knows. I mean it's something I do to comfort myself. And everybody else thinks that everything is good because they haven't seen what's going on in the inside. And so my [great] aunt came to pick me up that night and I've been staying here since May 8th of last year [1994].

Lucy also speculates that her grandmother did not protect her because her son was drunk. The incident ended with Lucy calling the police and her great aunt to the scene. Lucy appreciates having had someone take care of her but she has always been saddened by the fact that her parents did not accept their responsibility as parents. She acknowledges that her grandmother and her great aunt did the best they could but, it was not all that she needed.

Being that my grandmother is about three decades away from me, away from my century, she can't really relate with what's going on with me today. She really couldn't help me with my homework. She couldn't really do a whole lot of things that I needed a parent to do.

Lucy also indicated that her great aunt didn't really have any time for personal needs because both of her nieces, Lucy's mom and her mom's sister had abandoned their children and it was up to this great aunt to provide for them.

> My great aunt has it hard too. She works two jobs and you know, she cusses and all that. But I kind of understand because she's had so much I mean, on her. She has my great grandmother, she has all of us, including my child because you know she's the one that really has to do for him too. I can see where her pain is coming from, but sometimes she takes it out on us. She calls us names and it's bad, you know. And I try to talk to her, but she thinks that by me being a child, I'm trying to bad mouth her or trying to talk back or trying to tell her something she doesn't already know, but really I'm not.
>
> And everybody says, well why don't you go and stay back with your grandmother. I don't want to stay back with my grandmother. I know she told me, you know, she begged me and begged me to come back. But, I've said it hurt me so much when she did not stand up for me when the incident was going on with me and my father, that I don't really feel that if I went back there that I would be safe enough where I felt my grandmother would do anything about it. The end of this year, it's March now, but in June, well in May, I will have been living in this house a whole year. I used to come here when I was little on the weekends, and I never really noticed some of the stuff I see now inside the house. And, it's like, really, really shocked me, some of the stuff that I've seen. But, I always said that I was gonna tell it and I still am. I mean, it's part of my life that I really have to be honest about and I really have to tell what's going on and stuff.

Lucy continues to talk about the hurt she experienced because of her parents being uninvolved in her life.

I remember field days, how everybody's parents
would come to field days and watch them and nobody
ever came with me. Everything in school I did by
myself. When I read my 2000 book limit and got a
$20.00 prize in the second grade, I had to accept
it by myself and it kind of and everybody always
asked, well, where's your dad. Well, I don't have
a mom and I don't have a dad and when my friends
sit around and say, well, my mom's taking me, then,
I would make up a story and I would say well, my
mom took me there. And I'll say well, me and my
dad did this and it was just a way to get them to
like me, to make me think that I had what they had,
but I really didn't.

Lucy then quickly reflects back on the early days when her

parents were together and they were somewhat of a family.

When my parents were together and I was little,
before the fighting and stuff started, it was me
and I had an older brother and a younger brother
and my younger brother was having a lot of
breathing problems and they were told to read to
him a lot. And they would all put us in the bed
and we would all read a book or something like
that. And after my little brother, he passed and
after he passed, it was like my parents split up.
And the only thing I had that we did as a family
was read and that's something that I always went
back to. It's a comfort for me to read. It's like
peace. It's like security and it brings back all
that and I just read. It's like, I mean, I don't
know, it's like I say I'm in my own world. I'm
happy. I'm secure. Nobody can get to me and
really, that's just how I got to reading. I never
stopped. I mean, I read, I read. If it's a good
book and I have homework, it might take me a week,
but it probably never takes me more than three
weeks to read a book no matter how big it is.
And,I always give a book at least the first two
chapters and then if I don't like it, then I won't
read it. And if it's something that I think I need
to read, regardless of whether I like it or not,
I'll still read it for the memory, you know, the
knowledge to get out of books what I need to know.

And I've always said that after I go to school and
stuff, I want to write a book. And I said, I want

to write a book starting from when I was little--
What I could remember up to the point I would be.
Then when I write the book, and I always said I
didn't care whose toes I stepped on, I don't care
who got mad. I am going to tell it like it was.
And I really, really, really, really was going to
get down and just hurt people the way they did me.
I really don't want to hurt people. It's just that
I want people to know what I've been through
because authors and stuff they write books, but you
know there's always something bad that happens that
they never will tell exactly like it happened.
Well, I don't want to be one of those authors. I
mean, I want to tell about the hurt and I want to
tell about the crying. I want to tell about the
staying up all night. I want to tell them about
the being scared of the dark. I mean, it's just a
whole lot. It's something that somebody else has
to know. It's like, I need for somebody else to
know and if somebody else knows it, maybe they
don't have to go through exactly what I did. If it
helps out one person, just one person. Then I
know it did some good. So, I really want to write
a book. I want to wait until I get old, but I do
want to write a book.

Lucy's words indicate the strong desire to have a loving,

supportive family in her life. But Lucy quickly lets the

reader know that not having her family, although it caused

her a lot of pain, did not stop her from achieving and

being successful in school. Instead she used her

situation to strengthen her academically, mentally and

physically. Even having a baby at age 16 did not cause

her to give up. Yes, she thought about it a few times but

she reached down into her deepest inner strength and

decided that no matter what, she wasn't' going to let

anyone or anything stop her from achieving that which she

knew she was capable of achieving.

I'm a teenage parent and I plan on doing a whole
bunch of stuff and I don't plan on letting anybody
or anything stop me from achieving my goal, because
I feel that just because I'm a teenage parent I
don't think that my son should be deprived of
anything that anybody else's child has. So, I made
up my mind that I 'm going ahead and go to college
and do everything it takes to get him right and
it's not only him that I'm doing this for I'm doing
it for me but I'm also doing it to show other
people, especially my family, that just because I
had a set back, doesn't mean that I'm never going
to get there. And, everything that I do is without
the help of my mother which most folks at this age
really, really, really need. Like, I'm a growing
young woman and I really need my mother or somebody
I can talk to. Somebody I can relate to, but she's
not there and so I'm very independent, and I'm very
strong minded.

Today, Lucy feels she has a small family consisting

of her older brother, her son, and her boyfriend (not the

baby's father). She stated emphatically that it's this

small family that keeps her going. Her boyfriend is

extremely important to her. For the first time she

feels like she has someone who really loves her and who

will not leave her; something she has desired throughout

her life.

Back to my boyfriend. He's like the greatest
person. No matter what's going on, he pushes me.
"Don't give up, do this." I mean, I really had
never sat down and wrote my goals and how I expect
to achieve them and he did that with me. And you
know, it was like the first time that I realized
that anybody was worried about what I was going to
do, that anybody cared about, you know, what I
wanted to do and how I was going to achieve it.
And, it was like he was really telling me, well if
you want to get here, you got to do this and you
got to start here, and I will be there for you. I
will help you. And it's like the first time in my

life somebody has actually been there for me and
somebody I don't think is going to leave. I mean,
I hope he don't leave me. My God, that would
really break me down. And I tell him all the time
I'm scared of losing him and it's not that I'm
insecure or jealous, it's just that every good
thing in my life has been taken apart or taken away
from me and the only good things I have now are
him, my brother, and my son. It's like, everything
good in my life now ends up negative.

Like going to school now, I mean, I want so much to
go to Bennett and stuff. And I think if I don't go
to Bennett, that's going to be a major let down.
And I think that if I don't achieve my college
degree it's really really going to pull me down.
And it's like I'm going to be setting my life up.
You know, when somebody ask me what was my life
like, I'd say my life was a whole bunch of
failures. A whole bunch of trials and
tribulations. Trials, and then disappointments.
And, you know that little statement, "If at first
you don't succeed, try, try again," well people
say it and they mean it, but when I say it, it
really means something to me. I mean like if I
failed school this year, even though I know I'm
not going to, I would try, I mean I would really,
really try and try and try until I got where I
wanted to be. I feel like this, if there's
something Lucy wants to do, Lucy can do it. I mean
people say you know you can be whatever you want to
be and I think, well, I want to be this and maybe I
can, but really it's really set in me to where I
know if it's something I want to do, then nobody's
going to do it for me. Nobody's going to hand it
out to me. And I've learned by growing up by
myself that and virtually being woman, and not
really having anybody to go to and discuss things
with that I . . . it's something that I'm going to
have to do myself.

Yes, my parents and my life and stuff have really
been a set back for me. And most folks would have
quit a long time ago. But, me, I use these
setbacks as energy. I mean, when something bad
happens to me, I say, well, I'm not going to let
this get me down. I'm going to move on. And if
the same thing happened to my brother, it would
take him a while to get out of it. My brother,
it's like he's not my brother. He doesn't have

that "I can do." He doesn't have that potential to really want to do something. I mean, it's in me. It's really really driven to the bottom of my bones. This is something I got to do. This is something, no matter what, I got to make it.

For my brother, it's like if he tries and he fails, you know, he doesn't try again. And, I don't think that my brother is strong. He's strong minded, but I don't thing that he's strong willed enough to really go after it. I think he's scared of failing. And I'm scared of failure too, but I feel like this, if I do fail, it's not because I didn't try. And he's to the point where he's scared of failure so much that he's not going to try. He's not going to risk another set back like our parents and stuff.

Lucy has endured many hardships but as she stated, she did not give up. Prior to the birth of her son she had a 3.3 grade point average which she was very proud of. After the birth, her GPA slipped to a 2.8. Her final grade point average was 2.934 which she is not proud of because she feels she could have done better. Lucy participated in track and field, was a member of the school's black gospel choir, and the ABUSUA Club (an ethnic organization) while in high school. She has remained in the academic track throughout her four years at Williams High School taking courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) Chemistry and AP Physics. She often had to deal with her black peers accusing her of "acting white" because she took the advanced classes that were mainly filled with White students. Lucy quickly let her peers

know that she wanted to learn just as much as the white kids and this did not mean that she was trying to "be White."

Ricky

Ricky, a medium sized young man, is gentle, reserved, soft spoken, and easy going. He was in the technical track at school taking courses like Auto Body and Introduction to Algebra during his senior year. Ricky described himself as a slow learner. He never felt he could achieve very highly in school because he was too slow to catch on. He felt he had accomplished as much as he could under the circumstances. He believed he could have done better if his circumstances had been different, meaning if teachers would have taken more time with him and given him more time to process the new information they introduced in class.

His earliest memories of school began with the first grade. His very first memories are of the learning activities moving too fast for him. Actually this is all he talked about for elementary school.

> Uhh, first grade I had trouble in school. I wasn't, I couldn't learn as fast as the other students, so I failed that grade. I would try to keep up but before I could learn the first lesson, the teacher would be moving on to the next lesson. So, I'd try that lesson and before I could get it, she move on to something else. So, I could never keep up or learn so I just gave up.

Ricky's inability to learn at the pace the teachers

taught, made his attempts at learning a cycle of failing.

Ricky's memories of middle school include only the fact

that he wanted to play sports.

> Uhh, when I reached middle school, I got interested
> in sports in the eighth grade, so I tried out
> football and uh, I really didn't, I wasn't as good
> as some of the other athletes so I didn't get much
> playing time and I ain't like that, but I still
> tried hard and I played a little bit.

After his trial with sports in the eighth grade, he

tried wrestling in the ninth grade. Following

disappointment with both sports, he did not get involved

in any other extracurricular school activities. Even

though he failed two courses: biology and introduction to

algebra, he retook these courses and passed--he didn't

give up. He tried to do well in school, but teachers went

too fast and would not slow down to help him. As a

result, he stopped trying to excel, he knew A's and B's

were not achievable for him. He just wanted to pass and

get out.

> Some people just don't understand quick as others.
> Some people just don't catch on quick like that and
> they [the teachers] just keep flying on through and
> after they get to the point where you still didn't
> understand the first part of it, and they go on and
> they just don't, I don't think that they should, I
> mean, I mean they should just slow down everything.
> I mean let a person work at their pace. That will
> help a lot of students in school, I think, like me
> myself.

Most of his remaining memories of school centered around

his high school.

> I reached ninth grade, and as a freshman I did mess
> up things and I got in trouble for those things. I
> used to play jokes on other students, put tacks in
> their seats and stuff like that. But, as the years
> went on, I matured a little bit and so, I mean, I
> think everybody is able to change and, but people
> at school, the teachers, they made it kind of hard
> for me. I didn't want to go to school no more
> because they still saw the old Ricky. I would tell
> them that I changed, but I guess they ain't believe
> me. Every time something went wrong, I always got
> called to the office. So it was like I had a
> reputation that I couldn't get rid of. It
> even kept me from doing well in school, although I
> had changed and I wanted to uh do better. The
> teachers just wouldn't believe me.

In addition to school, Ricky found his family,

especially his mom, to be a significant influence in his

life as a student. Ricky, one of four children, lives

with his mom, his two sisters, his one brother, and one

niece. Ricky credits his mom, a minister, for keeping him

in school. He knew that she would not allow him to live

in her house if he didn't go to school. He appreciates

her for all she has done to keep the family together, and

he wants to please her by making something of himself.

> My mom always kept me in church all the time. And,
> everyday, before she went to work, I had to be in
> the house and my friends be laughing at me 'cause I
> have to go in so early, but I realize, and I thank
> my mom for uh, making me come in like that and
> watching me like that. My mom is really a nice
> mom, but she just strict. My mom, she work hard
> just to keep my family up. My dad, my dad he don't
> help like my mom. My mom's got me where I am now.

Having grown up in a neighborhood that was alcohol and drug infested, populated by many high school dropouts, and less than desirable socioeconomically, also encouraged Ricky to stay in school. Even though he did not perform that well academically, he knew he had to do enough to get through the process. Going to school for Ricky was somewhat like going to work in a factory, where one goes through the motions of the job to get a pay check but knows there is no real chance for an upgrade.

> But some things that made me want to continue
> going to school was, I lived in a bad neighborhood.
> I stayed in a down neighborhood, and I look at
> the elder folks round there and I just, I see,
> I say to myself, I don't want to be like that.
> I want to make something out of myself. So I
> try hard. I'm staying in school 'cause, I seen
> my brother quit, he really ain't doing too much
> so I don't want to follow in his footsteps. I
> don't want to be like that and I look at my father
> and he didn't go through all the way through school
> and I'd be like the first male in my family to
> finish high school, so that's a goal I'm trying
> to make.

It appears that Ricky's real motivation to stay in school stems from what he has seen in his immediate environment. The lack of success of the older people in the community and the way they have to work so hard just to have minimal needs was enough to make him know he wanted better.

> I say, it's more important that I finish school
> because it ain't nothing I see--it ain't nothing

to do out here if you ain't in school. I don't see
how my mom work so hard just to take care of her
family and in my future, I don't want to have to
work as hard as she did to take care of my family.
I learned from her mistake what she did.

And then there's my grandma. Well, my grandma, I
mean Christmas would come and we send her presents
and she just open the gift and she wouldn't ever
read the card. And I hadn't never noticed that and
later on my mom told me that my grandma ain't know
how to read and so they used to have to read the
bills out to her. I mean, I like to keep my
financial stuff to myself and so I would want
to be able to read and I just don't think I could
make it if I couldn't read. So that right there
makes me want to keep attending school so I can
learn a little more.

During adolescence, peer groups become the desired

audience, the wanted companion, the people who must be

pleased. Being accepted by peers is of utmost importance.

However, Ricky claimed that he was better off without many

friends, especially a steady girlfriend.

I ain't got many friends at school now. They
all dropped out and stuff. At first, no friends
at school, I didn't want to be there myself. But,
I mean, I think sometimes if I ain't got no
friends and if I ain't got no girlfriend or
nothing like that, I can do my work a lot better
'cause sometimes girlfriends make me not do my
work. 'Cause she'll want to go somewhere or
something and that right there interferes with
some of my school work.

Ricky sees himself as barely making it in school

which he attributes to his use of marijuana and teachers

going too fast for him.

> I have experienced marijuana before and I was just
> curious, so I wanted to see what it would be like,
> but it didn't, it didn't do nothing to me and I
> just saw it as a waste of time. I mean, after I
> experienced marijuana, I got slack or something. I
> believe that's the downfall of my life.

Truly in Ricky's words, "I ain't letting nobody stop me!" Ricky too, has endured hardships, mostly at the hands of teachers who didn't take the time to work with Ricky at his own pace. This prevented Ricky from reaching his full potential academically, but he was tenacious enough to stick to it and do what he could to complete the requirements to receive his high school diploma.

Ethel

Shy, quiet, extremely timid, somewhat unassured, yet polite and mannerable, and at times almost uncommunicative, Ethel lives with her mom and her two sisters, who she described as very important to her and her school success. Her father is in a nursing home and she cannot remember him spending any time with her. She described herself as shy and as not ever wanting to be with anyone except her one best friend throughout her entire school tenure. She also perceived herself as an average student in the academic track at school.

When telling her life story as a student in school, Ethel could not get into a story telling mode. I'm sure this was due to her shyness. As the investigator, I had

to constantly ask Ethel questions, ask her to speak rather than make gestures which the tape recorder could not pick up, and I had to constantly ask her to elaborate on everything she said because of the short statements she would make. Her voice was so low I had to repeat almost everything she said in order to ensure that the recorder picked it up. It was very difficult getting Ethel to tell her story because Ethel is a young lady of few words.

Her first memories of school were scary because of having to meet new people.

> I was shy so I didn't really be with nobody but my best friend. I'm still shy. Sixth grade, it was scary to me 'cause you got to move up from elementary to middle school. You don't know anyone and you had to meet different people from other elementary schools. I had a hard time adjusting to it 'cause I didn't know anybody but my sister and my cousin.

Ethel liked to gossip with two of her teachers in high school, however when asked to define this relationship she indicated that it was talking about other students or teachers, it was just gossip. She disliked teachers who had too many restrictions in class such as folding papers a certain way or writing your name in specific place on the page. She enjoyed classes where teachers were friendly and knew their subject matter. She hated the fact that African American students often got blamed for misbehaving in class when they were innocent.

Ethel found her family to be very important to her and she was content with her family life. Ethel's mom, her now deceased grandmother (who was tragically killed last year), and her sisters influenced her the most about school. They made it clear to her that school was a place where she could get a good education and it was important for her to accomplish her goals in life. She was told that school would give you direction for life. This she declared made her try her hardest to be successful in school.

> Well, my mama, she always tell us that we should do good in school 'cause the teachers got their degrees and stuff and we should be getting ours. That we shouldn't let nobody put us down so we should just go forward and succeed in life. My grandma always said that, um, that a you should get a good education in order to succeed in life, 'cause most people don't care about you and whether you get it or not. My older sister just tells me the courses to take and the courses not to take because she was there first. My sister goes to a community college.

Ethel graduated with a 1.8 GPA in the academic track at school. She identified math as her favorite subject in school and science as her worst subject. She was active in her high school's Gospel Choir and her Church Gospel Choir. She is an active church member. She is proud of who she is but acknowledges that she could have studied more and done a lot better in school. Ethel sees herself as a trailblazer in her family because she

wants to be the first to attend a four-year college. "I want to set the path for others to follow." She wants to be a role model for her one younger sister who is now sixteen.

Betty

Proud, self-assured, intolerable of pettiness, gossip, and pretentious situations, witty, outgoing, and academically talented but unwilling to give 100% of her ability--these words and phrases best describe Betty. She lives with her mother and one younger brother. She is the only girl in her family of eleven siblings. Having ten brothers with nine of them older than she is, she has been well prepared for "life" in her community. She is in charge of herself and she demands respect from everyone, especially young men. She talked freely about young girls getting pregnant and not being able to care for their child. She is adamant about not having a baby until she is capable of taking care of it without the help of her mother and with the help of the father whom she would be married to.

She admits she was not challenged by her teachers in school and therefore, did not do as well as she could. She described herself as smart and as not having to work hard to pass a test. Yet, she found fooling the teachers

with her homework a joke because she could do half the

work and get by with "B" grades by passing the tests.

>Well . . . I mean you can do little bit of
>homework, but you don't got to finish it.
>You can like start it, you know, but you don't
>got to do the whole thing, you know, just don't
>do everything. You do little bit of everything,
>you know, just to throw the teacher off and make
>them look bad.
>
>I could have did that better, but, it take too
>long and it's too much writing and whatever, I
>didn't feel like writing. I could pass the tests,
>so that's all I did.

Betty didn't really see a need to work up to her

fullest potential until her junior year in high school.

At this point she realized that if she wanted to continue

her education in any fashion after high school, she needed

good grades.

>I started to straighten up a little bit then and
>do a little bit more work 'cause I knew if I didn't
>then I wouldn't be graduating in no next two years
>and so when I got to the eleventh grade it was like
>you know, you waited all that long time to get
>there 'cause you was anxious to get out 'cause you
>were tired of school but then once you got there
>you was thinking about how much you was going to
>miss after the next year was gonna be over 'cause
>you wasn't gonna be there with the friends that you
>usually be with and you know, y'all probably split
>up and go different ways and you wouldn't see 'em
>for a long time if you ever saw 'em again. And so
>you know, you knew it was high time that you really
>got to doing it then.
>
>And now since I got to the twelfth grade, I look
>back on all of the years where I didn't want to go
>to school and then when I look forward to going to
>school because I knew I had to get where I am now
>so I could get out of school and then you know, you

think about how you use to cut up in class and then
you know how the teacher always tried to keep you
after school and they always called your parents,
but you wouldn't listen, what a waste. Now I know
my responsibilities and I got to do it myself in
order to get where I want to 'cause nobody else is
"gon" do it for you.

Because Betty realized that she wasted a lot of

valuable time in school thinking grades didn't matter as

long as you made "B's" and "C's" even though you could do

better, in her junior year she became what she described

as a peer motivator. She wanted to help the underclassmen

avoid the mistakes she made in school.

O.K., I try to influence the children in class
to straighten up and act right even though they
are ninth and tenth graders. They really think
that it really don't matter 'cause they don't
have to make good grades until they like get up to
the eleventh or even their twelfth grade year.
But,it's really not that, cause you really need to
try your best in school the whole time you're there
in order to really get the grades that you need to
go to college. But they don't listen to me. I
mean, they be like, you the teacher's pet and you
know, but you're not the teacher's pet. You
already done went through it and experienced it and
you just trying to tell them before they wreck
their little chance. And, then, by the time they
get where you are and then they gone be like, "Well
I should have listened to her cause she tried to
tell me." I just don't want them to make the same
mistakes I made and then they be regretting it. I
don't want them thinking that they don't have to do
anything in school until they get 'bout ready to
graduate.

From Betty's earliest memories of school, she

didn't like school. She didn't want to leave her mama,

whom she was really attached to.

> Kindergarten was ok, because you could call
> your mama and go home but when you got to the
> second, third and fourth grades, you had to go
> to school and you know, you couldn't stay with
> mama no more. But then you had friends and you
> wanted to hang out with your little friends and
> stuff and then half of them didn't like going to
> school and they was like staying out and getting in
> trouble and stuff so right about that time I
> decided it was you know, time that you got to go to
> school 'cause you can't just stay out.

Having ten brothers with nine of them older than she is, she has been well prepared for "life" in her community. Her older brothers instilled in her the importance of steering clear of drugs and drug abuser, alcohol and alcoholics, and males who are not interested in her but in pleasing themselves. She is independent and very much in charge of herself because of her brothers' influences.

Family is important to Betty. She described her mom as being trustworthy of her to do her best in school.

> My mom knew that I wouldn't let my grades
> like go, you know where I was gonna have to
> repeat a grade. She didn't really give me
> any encouragement or anything because she knew
> that I knew what to do. After she had a heart
> attack I straightened up. I tried to do what
> I knew I should in school. I had the ability,
> I just didn't like school. My mom wasn't on my
> back to learn, learn, learn, but if she had been,
> I probably would have made all "A's" and "B's."
> My older brothers quit school and got jobs and my
> younger brother can't see the need to go to school,
> so it's on me.

Betty further affirmed that if her mom had been more insistent on her doing the best she could in school, she would have achieved more and possibly worked up to her fullest potential. Betty had a 3.0 GPA in the academic track at the end of the first semester of her senior year, and ended up with a 2.42 GPA at graduation. This she achieved without working to her fullest potential. She however, must recognize that she has been blest with intellectual talents she is not using and decide to apply them.

Betty did not participate in any extracurricular school, church, or community activities. She did work four hours a day as an executive receptionist and computer data entry specialist at a local industry. Betty, who admits she was tired of school, found the work to laborious, most of the teachers not serious about the work and uncommitted to the students, and her peers immature.

Wilma

Wilma, a mentally challenged young lady, is very outgoing, talkative, polite, gentle, sweet, and hardworking. She enjoys getting out away from her apartment and socializing with friends. She loves people and enjoys talking on the telephone. She described herself as being in special education classes every since

she's been in school and as being very successful in her classes. She described school as easy and fun.

Wilma's earliest memories of school center on students making fun of her and not including her in their circle.

> When I was in kindergarten, I use to get picked on and stuff like that. My mama had to come to the school one day to calm everything down. And they put me in a different classroom and they kept going--picking, picking, picking. The teacher said be quiet, leave her alone, but they didn't. And, when she turned her back they start picking again, calling me names and stuff. I didn't get picked on when I went to middle school.
>
> When I got to high school, the same thing, picking back over. I had to leave this high school, 'cause a certain student was picking, calling me names, trying to show off in front of her friend. And it kept going on since the sixth grade and I got tired of it in the eleventh grade so I left. When I went to [school], the first year I got picked on, they looked over it, I looked over it, I wasn't paying no attention to them, so it stopped.

Wilma enjoyed her last two years in her high school because she had a teacher whom she described as being like a mom to her. This was important to her because her mom never really was the mom she desired. Wilma says her mom never really talked to her about school or helped her learn her ABC's or anything.

> She (mom) don't talk to me about school. When I come in from school or work she don't never say "How your day went?" or nothing.
>
> I wish my mama would have stayed with me when I went through school, but she didn't 'cause she was

drinking at that time when I was in school. And
she didn't help me on my ABC's or writing. I had
to learn it on my own. Then when she started
drinking, I just left the house 'cause I didn't
wanna see it. Then she'll cuss me out trying to
show off in front of her friends. Tell me to
go in the other room and I just be sitting there
watching T.V. I don't need to watch T.V. now
'cause he watch all the tabloid news. That's
everyday for her. Then when her other children
come there she don't talk to me. She'll fuss and
when they come there, it's Wilma do this, and Wilma
do that. I have to serve them, get them water
or something. Grown children, and they can't get
off their lazy butts and do it themselves. I have
to do it for 'em. I wish my mom's attitude toward
me would change. In a way I think she loves me,
and in a way I don't. It's certain things she do
around me to make me hate her one day and love her
the next.

In spite of these comments about her mother, Wilma

always wanted me to meet and talk with her mother whenever

I went to her home to pick her up for the interviews. She

also talked about how her mom was helping her with the

baby. But she did indicate that sometimes her mama forgot

who the baby's mama was and she had to remind her.

She lives with her mother and her new baby boy who

was born May 11, 1995. Wilma's father died before she was

born. Her sister and brothers are all grown and live away

from the home. Wilma described her sister as the biggest

influence in her life and her best friend until she became

pregnant by her sister's husband at age 18. Wilma said it

wasn't her fault but her sister is mad at her anyway.

She [her sister] use to take me anywhere I wanted
to go then she asked me, "Do you want something to

eat?" She'll pay for it and stuff. Take me to the
mall and walk around. She still do that now but
she, right now she mad at me 'cause I'm carrying
her husband's baby. Well it actually happened
'cause' one day they just left me at home, so I
just went out there to talk to her husband and
that's when he did it 'cause he was drunk at the
time. And she [her sister] called me all kind of
names in the book. She won't talk to me. Every
time I call her, she, she'll fuss at her
husband like Wilma want some money, Wilma need
pampers, baby "gon" need this, baby "gon" need
that, and she won't say it to me, she'll say it to
him, she won't even talk to me. He says he was
sorry, but mama don't believe him. 'Cause mama
hadn't really said "nuting" to 'em. And nobody
wanna talk to me about it in my family. Most of
the time my sister blames me. (Note: Wilma's
sister and brother-in-law are both 37 years old
according to Wilma). They suppose to get divorced
anyway. But I don't want him 'cause he on that
alcohol. He get off and drink til he go to bed.
That's 'bout two cases of beer.

Today my birthday. The only thing I got for my
birthday was a cake, that's it. Mama made it.
It's one of them box cakes. I don't like homemade
cakes. I didn't go nowhere. I thought I was going
somewhere on my birthday but they didn't take me
nowhere.

Yep, that birthday is gone. When the baby gets
here they probably want to buy him something, I'm
gonna say nope! If he [baby's daddy] don't help me
with the baby then he going in a jail cell, that's
what mama said.

Yeah. They wouldn't take me to the mall "foe" all
this happened, "foe" I got pregnant they wouldn't
still take me to the mall. If I wanna go
somewhere, I ask my sister's husband to take me. I
had to beg my family to take me anywhere. Then
they wanted money.

Wilma moved quickly from the family dispute about her

pregnancy to her birthday. This happened probably because

she sees both of these incidents as disappointing and unfair.

Although this part of Wilma's story is presented last in this narrative, when she told her story, it focused first on these events in her life. They obviously were of primary importance to her at this time.

Wilma maintained a grade point average of 2.8 in the special education (basic) track in high school. She participated in no extracurricular activities at school but she worked a part time job. Wilma indicated that she recognized her mental limitations but she could still do a lot of things and wanted to be treated as any other human. She resented her mama always reminding her that she was mentally handicapped after she got pregnant. To Wilma, school is a place where you can go and communicate and talk and gossip, and make better friends. She also felt that school is a safer place than being on the street. Finally she described school as being fun and easy and she felt that she was successful in school and that there had been no barriers to her success in school.

The Collective Narrative

March, 1995, less than three months away from graduation for Lucy, Ricky, Ethel, Betty, and Wilma. They all know they are going to graduate. They are determined to let nothing or any one stop them. They will work hard

to make their dream of walking across the stage to receive
their diploma a reality. Not quite sure where to begin,
when asked to tell the story of their life as a student,
they began to reflect back on the last 13-14 years they've
spent in school. As they began to talk, they painted a
picture that is rich, compelling, surprising,
enlightening, and most of all it is an authentic story.

The picture has three basic scenes. And, although
the scenes are painted with different strokes by each of
the five artists, each artist ends up with the same scene.
The picture is of school and how they perceive school from
their experiences over the years. The scenery of this
school includes: (1) the school community scene which
focuses on teachers and the unfair practices of the
school; (2) the family scene and their influence on the
students's success or frustration in school; and (3) the
individual students' views of themselves and their
experiences in school.

Knowing that these are African American students
from single parent or single guardian homes living in low
socioeconomic environments where alcohol and drug abuse is
prevalent, and violence is rampant, may cause many to
assume that these students are not capable of high
achievement. One might automatically assume that these
students' environment would caused them to model this same
kind of behavior. None of them fell into that trap. One

might assume that the lack of a father in the home, no college educated family role models, and the lack of an intellectual environment would prompt these young people to have little hope of being successful in school, or in life, it did not. Instead, these five young African American students wanted more, tried more, and achieved more than most of the other members of their family.

Each student indicated that based on their own initiative they could have done even better academically. Each student believed that changes in certain school practices and policies could have made their path to academic success more accessible and more enjoyable. Each student also verbalized what they could have done, and what administrators and teachers could have done to increase their level of achievement. Their words are different, but their meanings are the same. They will also explain that teachers alone are not responsible for their failure or their success. These students acknowledge that they must accept responsibility for their actions in school. But, they quickly add, teachers can make them lose their belief in their own abilities and their belief that school is truly a just and equitable institution. When teachers do not have high expectations of their African American students, and the students are not serious about their scholarship, the result is an

awakening that comes too late to make a major difference in their academic success.

As their collective story unfolds, the source of the students' motivation to accept school as it is structured and to do what they must to at least "make it" in school will be better understood. Ultimately, they each made a conscious decision that they would do what was necessary to complete their high school program and receive their diploma, which everyone indicated to them would be their ticket to a better life.

The metastory evolves with these five African American students expressing their views of school and the factors they perceive as having influenced their successes and frustrations in school. The narrative includes actual student quotes to describe the tensions created around the three common issues: the influence of teachers; unfair school practices; and "self."

Tension Around Teachers: Positive Perceptions vs Negative Perceptions of Teachers Based on Students' Interactions with Teachers

The classroom teacher plays an important role in the formation of students' attitudes and self-perceptions. In both subtle and overt ways, teachers influence their students' perceptions of school, their academic success, and their self-perceptions. Next to parents, teachers are

the most significant others in students' lives. According
to these five African American students, teachers who help
them answer the question, "Who Am I?" and protect them
from the insults and unfair practices of others are
teachers who really want them to be successful in school
and in life. Their perception of teachers are based on
their interactions with teachers.

One teacher who made a real impression on Lucy was
her history teacher. This teacher had students answer the
question, "Who am I?" by examining their cultural history
through the eyes of their elders. Lucy talked with her
grandmother about of how life used to be for African
Americans.

> And, you know, like one day I had this great
> teacher, Mrs. H. She's like the best teacher
> I ever had. She told me, she said, "Lucy, for
> your homework, I want you to go home and I want
> you to sit down and talk to your grandmother.
> Talk about some stuff that was going on and you
> never will guess what you will find out". I came
> home and I sat down and talked to my grandma. My
> grandma told me about how they had to sit in the
> back of the bus and I thought about how now we want
> to go to the back of the bus where we can cut up
> and the driver won't see us. But, back then,
> it wasn't an option. Just talking to my grandma
> made me realize I can't take all that history for
> granted. So now I read only books about African
> American people. And, it's not that I'm racist
> or nothing, I read white people's books too, it's
> just that I'm really trying to find the cultural
> experience within me. Like now, I'm reading Cool
> by Toni Morrison and after this I'm going to be
> reading Beloved. I've already read Tar Baby, Son
> of Sam, and Bluest Eyes. I mean it's like when
> they talk about pot liquor and stuff, hey, I know
> what pot liquor is. And, when they talk about, you

know, hambones, I know what that is. An, you know, like all my white friends be like, "Ooh, you eat that? What is that?" Reading these books enhances my knowledge.

Yeah. She took time to care about what was really going on with us. We weren't just a student. We were like her extended family. You know, somebody she really nurtured or she was like a big eagle and we were all under her wing.

Ricky talked about a teacher who affirmed him as an African American male which made him feel important.

Teachers, some teachers I got, I mean some teachers are nice and look out for you, talk to you and make you feel like you can be somebody. Mrs. M. was a teacher that really thought about me. She really made me feel like somebody. I mean she bought me a set of encyclopedias when I was in the first grade. That right there, I had never had nobody really give me nothing, so that right there made me think that she did want me to stay in school and stuff like that. She made me believe that I was somebody.

It was vital for these students to be validated by their teachers. This validation included being respected as a person, as an African American, and as a human being who could contribute to society. As Wilma stated, teachers who make you feel you can do anything and that they will help you are those who, "understand you, respect you, do not embarrass you in front of other students," they protect you. Betty talked about how teachers could enhance students' self esteem and perceptions of who they are and what they can achieve.

> My eleventh grade English teacher was the best.
> She would stay after school to help you and she
> had her own family and kids at home. She wanted
> you to learn. She wanted you to get all the book
> sense you could. She would talk about everything
> with you, not just English. She knew "our talk"
> you know, our slang stuff. She was really down
> with us. She listened to us and tried to help
> us with our problems in or out of school.

Ethel talked about teachers who motivate you to do well in

school by demonstrating that they genuinely want the

individual to learn regardless of their race.

> My seventh grade teacher, Mrs. J. and my
> environmental science teacher, Mrs. H., they were
> always telling us that we could succeed in life no
> matter what color we were. They wanted all the
> kids to learn no matter what color they were. Mrs.
> J. said that she didn't want African American
> students to just walk around the school, to just be
> there. They wanted us to succeed in life, to
> achieve our goals and dreams.

When these students were asked to describe what

makes a good teacher, they eagerly responded. Lucy's

response was:

> Miss H.. She has a glow. She's always happy,
> always happy. Nothing you can say or do can ever
> get her down. If she's having a bad day, she
> doesn't let it come off on you like most folks do.
> She wasn't like all the rest of the teachers. If a
> student didn't understand something, she would go
> out of her way, she would change her busy schedule
> you know, to fit that student in, so that student
> could have time to learn, 'cause she did it for me.
> I mean, and it's just, I don't know, it's something
> about her. I never will forget her.
>
> We really learned. And not really by reading
> chapters and answering questions, we learned by
> discussions. We learned by personal stories. You

know, how we related to what was going on. I mean,
she really let us involve ourselves. But most
people think as teenagers you know, well, you don't
know anything about that. She made sure that
anything that was going on was brought to our
attention. She wants to know you know . . . if
somebody said something and we disagreed, we would
have to back up why we disagreed. If you said you
didn't like something or you did like something in
the class you should, you better have something to
support your reason. And I mean, that's what I
liked about her. She didn't let you get away if
you missed a question on the test. She wanted to
know what you thought the right answer was. Why
you thought it was that. And I mean, she was more
personal with us. She wasn't a teacher by the
Board of Education, she was our friend more. I
mean, she really got down and she talked to us
about what was going on and it was like something
special that no other teacher had done with me. I
mean, they [other teachers] didn't care if I
answered the question right or got it wrong.

She would come by and she would commend you when
you did something good. And, you know, when you
get in high school, you stop getting stickers, you
stop getting the smiley faces, but just a pat on
the back sometimes when you really did good on this
test,or a I'm proud of you for you know, bringing
up your grades and stuff, I mean, it really just
makes you feel something for her [the teacher].
Everybody says that. Anybody that ever has her
class, really wants Mrs. H. again.

Ricky's best teachers were described as teachers who just

don't tell you they care, they show you.

She really helps a lot of students. I mean, I
think she cares about her students. Other teachers
tell me stuff and I be like they don't care, but
she makes it seem like she do care about you.

My environmental science teacher, Mrs. T., she's
nice. She, I mean I can't . . . well the other
people in the class they had experience with
computers and stuff and I don't know where any of
those keys are and so I be moving a lot slower.
And, so she'll take the time and stay after school

> and help me out and see my grades was a lot better
> this time. I put some effort in staying at the
> school and turning in all my assignments because
> she helped me out. I never thought I'd pass
> science with close to a "B." I mean, I was one
> point off of a "B." I think that's good for
> someone who never made a "B" before.

Ricky emphatically stated that good teachers will not move
too fast for the students who are slow. They will work
with you at a slower pace until you learn the information
before moving on to the next lesson.

> Teachers should take more time with the
> students that really don't understand quick
> as others. Some people just don't catch on
> quick as others. Some people just don't catch
> on quick like that and they [teachers] just
> keep on flying through and after they get to
> the point where you still don't understand the
> first part of it, they go on and they just don't
> slow down. I think they should just slow down
> everything. I mean, let a person work at their
> pace.

Unfortunately, Ricky didn't have a teacher who was
willing to do this until he met his environmental science
teacher. He was in the twelfth grade. He also indicated
that good teachers will not let your past history dictate
that you cannot change for the better. He suggested that
good teachers will give students the chance to prove
themselves rather than looking at what they did last year
and deciding that they are not going to do anything during
the current year.

> I was always getting blamed for something I didn't
> do. I told them I changed, but .they didn't believe
> me. They didn't believe I really was trying to
> understand and learn. I wanted to do my work but
> I didn't understand it and when I asked questions
> they wouldn't answer me 'cause they thought I
> wasn't serious. They just wouldn't give me a
> chance.

Ethel's best teachers were those who gave her a

chance to redo work she did incorrectly; teachers who

would not let students fail. These teachers required

students to repeat the work until they were successful

with it. They would guide the students and assist them

with completing the assignments and/or tests successfully.

> She was always telling us that, she would not let
> us have bad grades. She made us redo the work over
> until we get good grades. And she would always let
> us make up a test if we failed it or something to
> get a better grade so we could pass our class.
> And she was always on our backs about doing our
> homework. Mrs. C. always gave us a whole bunch of
> work, but it paid off in the end. Mrs. C. was
> enthusiastic, she like to have fun, even if she
> make you work hard. She always said positive
> things and didn't ever put you down. She would
> never let you just come in her class and not do
> anything. She made us do our work. She treated
> everybody equal. She had a lot of student friends
> because everybody liked her. She liked to joke
> around with us. She knows a whole bunch of
> students individually. She like to say the things
> we be saying like slang words and stuff. She keeps
> up with slang and all, she could talk our talk.

Betty, a person who received a lot of attention

from her ten brothers, wanted and needed that same

attention from her teachers. Therefore, for Betty the

best teachers took the time to nurture her.

> I liked my English teacher, Mrs. R., a lot. She
> really, really cared. She'd help you with other
> homework you were having trouble with. She'd stay
> after school and help you. She even gave out disks
> to students who didn't have any to help you do your
> papers on the computer at school. When I had to do
> a term paper one time, she stayed after school
> every day for two weeks till 6:00 p.m. working with
> me, one paragraph at a time. She made us do our
> work and you knew she meant it. We understood each
> other. She didn't bug me. She knew I could do the
> work and she let me do it my way without being on
> my back all the time. She didn't jump on my case.
> She was very helpful and understanding.

Negative or demeaning personal interactions with

teachers can cause students to dislike school and not want

to be there. They make students feel worthless, and

incapable of succeeding. Lucy, Ricky, Ethel, Betty, and

Wilma described their worst teachers as those who: won't

give you a chance to succeed; won't listen to you; don't

want you to ask questions and won't answer your questions

if you ask; don't treat all students equally; don't care

if you don't do your homework and won't help you with it;

talk about you to other students and/or other teachers;

don't understand who you are--can't talk your talk; and

yell and curse in class. Ricky's words are representative

of all the student authors.

> Well, the teacher I disliked the most is the
> teacher I had in the ninth grade, Mrs. M. who
> didn't help me out or nothing. I didn't understand
> it was an academic class and I thought that was too
> fast for me anyway. And I thought it was too hard
> for me, but I tried hard the first two nine weeks.
> It got hard and I still couldn't pass. I asked

questions and she didn't even want to tell me
nothing and I mean my average was real low 'cause
I got mad and I just didn't do nothing else. I got
to the point where I didn't even care no more about
school. . . . I guess I had a reputation. I mean
she think I'm trying to be funny or something, but
I told them I could change. I changed. I had
started going to church and everything. So they
[teachers] say just because you go to church don't
mean you done changed. Yeah, they told me that a
couple of times--teachers. But I said I believe I
changed though and they'd be like, Ricky, you ain't
changed. That was not like giving you a chance
then. Well, I don't think she was racist, but I
don't know why she wouldn't really help me out.
She wasn't nice to me like she was to everybody
else . . . and I could tell she didn't like me. I
mean, I could see that she ain't [didn't] like me.

Students with low self-esteem are very sensitive to

personal challenges. They don't feel good about

themselves and public attack only serves to give their

peers more reason to talk about and berate them. Betty

identified her "worst" teacher as one who embarrassed

her in front of the class.

"Bad" teachers make students look dumb in front
of the class. They won't answer your questions and
they talk about other students to students in a
negative way, and don't respect students. Like my
English teacher. I think she's too old to teach.
She don't know what's going on with students today.
All she does is put on a big old show in class,
always trying to put somebody down or embarrass
them.

Lucy was vulnerable to a "know-it-all" teacher who held

his knowledge and her lack of knowledge over her.

My worst teacher was my chemistry teacher. He was
just really, really insensitive. I mean he was.
he really didn't care. I mean, you ask a question,
he got smart with you. And it's not that you were
asking a question trying to offend him or trying to
say you weren't paying attention, it's just you
didn't understand. And you know, that's what
you're taught to do. If you don't understand,
raise your hand. Ask again. Have it explained to
you in depth. And you know how some teachers
they'll come to you one on one if you need a little
bit more assistance after everybody else has
learned and let me tell you, he wouldn't even do
that. He'll tell you well, ask your neighbor. You
ask your neighbor, he'll get you for talking. I
mean, if you can't deal with the students and the
questions they're going to ask, he doesn't need
to teach that class.

Tension Created By Unfair School Practices

The second issue that emerged from the students'

stories was that of unfair school practices including

disciplinary actions and the curriculum. This issue

created another tension for how these students perceived

school. Their stories revealed that early in their school

careers they expected school to be a safe haven where they

could question the moral being of the world, grow

cognitively and socially, discover who they are, and where

justice and democracy would prevail. However, after

attending school for 13 years, these five African American

students' revealed that school was not all that they

anticipated. Consequently, they became quite frustrated

with school. Their frustration with school increased when

teachers, principals, assistant principals, and counselors, who said they were committed to serving all students, but in reality, as these students saw it, they often failed to address the needs of poverty disadvantaged and ethnic minority students.

The School Disciplinary Procedures

Their stories expressed the need for increased fairness in: (1) determining appropriate disciplinary actions to be taken against African American students; (2) deciding if African American students are indeed guilty of the accused misbehavior; and (3) making concessions for their requests for more equitable practices. They further contend that if school leaders would listen to the student's version of the story, when their behavior is questioned, then school would be a more positive place for learning. The main concern of the students is that black students get blamed for all the inappropriate behavior that goes on in the classroom. They also believed that when they were sent to the office they did not have a chance for justice. They were convicted and sentenced without having their side of the story or defense heard. And finally, they believed that they were often accused of complaining about unfair treatment rather then being taken serious about what they perceived as legitimate needs.

When Ricky reflected on unfair disciplinary practices, he just bowed his head and shook it from side to side in disgust. His face had the look of disbelief and disappointment. His look clearly communicated how perplexed he was about teachers and administrators consistently implementing these unfair practices and not being able to see that they were unfair.

> Another thing that turns me off, that like to made me quit school, is a teacher who sent me to the office. She was wrong, and the Principal, he didn't even let you talk, he didn't listen to what you say. He ain't hear nothing. He just tell you, "You're suspended!" He didn't take the time to listen. I used to say, can you listen to me? Can I tell you? I mean every time a person go to the office, the teacher is right, every time. That's all.

> I always got blamed for something I didn't do. I was innocent and they [teachers] still put me out of the room. I say, I can't learn out here, I'm just going to get more behind, and I already can't learn as fast as everybody else. But, they put me out anyway. They don't listen. I really hate they won't listen.

Ethel, shy and apprehensive, quickly made her observation about teachers' unfair disciplinary practices in the classroom.

> They can point out the troublemakers in their class and most of them be African Americans and the white kids be doing the same things that we be doing. Our principal last year didn't even know nobody names, no Black people names. He didn't really pay no attention to school no way.

And Betty, with her zest for making it right for those African American students who will follow her, quickly provides a remedy for teachers and administrators overcoming these unfair disciplinary tendencies.

> All teachers, and the principal, and the assistant
> principals and the secretaries should listen
> to what students have to say. Just listen!
> One day my English teacher said I wasn't doing
> my work and I tried to tell her that I was, but
> she wouldn't listen to me so I wouldn't listen to
> her. So, she took me to the office. Most
> schools are on the teachers' side even if the
> teacher is wrong. So, they wouldn't listen
> to me. They sided with her. So my mom came
> to school and got me back in. I should have
> never been taken to the office because the
> teacher was wrong. She was always trying to
> show off in class.

Betty continues with her remedy to successful practices for African American students:

> If I could change one thing about my schooling
> that would have made me more motivated about
> school and learning and that would have made
> life happier for me as a student, well, ah,
> I would have had a less white populated school.
> See, White parents buy their children's way out
> of crime. They get their children out of trouble
> with money or influence. Black students get in
> trouble all they parent can do is come to school
> and talk to the teachers or principals and they
> don't care about what they say, they still punish
> us. But, when white parents come, everybody is
> smiling and nice and something's worked out right
> then. What we need is a whole new staff at
> our school. We need a new school. But if I
> could make just one change, it would be that
> they would listen more to Black students and
> parents. If a Black student and a White student
> have a run in, or if a White teacher takes a Black
> to the office, Blacks get the worst end of the
> deal. They just won't listen to us.

We really need a more understanding staff at
school. Don't always put students down. If you
feel they (the staff) don't care, why should you
try to please them? So, I don't. I know I could,
but I don't because they don't care about me, not
really.

Wilma, although limited in her contacts with

teachers still observes the fact that:

they [teachers and administrators] need to
listen to parents and students and what they
have to say to hear the whole story. Don't
get loud with you in front of other people.

Ricky continued to talk about what he perceived as

the school's obsession with him being a troublemaker

because he "messed up" his freshman year. He often spoke

of how no one would believe he had changed. He even

stated that at this school, once you mess up, they

won't let you change because they don't believe you can.

When asked to complete this sentence: My life in school

has been like a . . ., Ricky said, "Like a path where you

can only walk one way. No turning back. You have to stay

on the path you choose." Ricky has been judged,

convicted, and done the time; however, the system refused

to give him credit for paying his debt and moving on. No

one believed he had reformed.

Every time something went wrong, I always got
called to the office. Tenth grade, somebody
set a fire, couple of fires, at school, and so
I mean, I was in class and the school blames it
on me. If it wasn't for a teacher up there in the

office when they blamed me, I probably would have got blamed for it. I know they wouldn't have listened to me.

One time I asked my environmental science teacher to let me go to the bathroom and she ain't give me no pass or nothing, she just told me to hurry back and, while I was in the bathroom, somebody told the office Ricky was in the bathroom dealing drugs and they called the police and stuff. And, when I got back to the classroom, they told me to go to the office. And when I got there, the police were there and they searched me. They ain't find nothing and I say, man, this ain't right.

I used to just, I used to play jokes on other students, put tacks in their seats and stuff like that. But as the years went on, I matured a little bit and so, I mean, I think everybody is able to change. But people at school, the teachers, they made it kind of hard for me. They saw the old Ricky. I would tell them I changed, but I guess they didn't believe me. Every time something went wrong, I always got called to the office.

In conclusion the students believed many of the unfair disciplinary practices were the result of their being black. They justified these beliefs as racist because the school was structured to empower white students while systematically belittling Black students. Lucy's story demonstrates such a practice.

And, I'm in an "AP" physics class and that's like the highest science you can take without being in college and stuff and it's a very hard course, and one day I walked in class, and everybody was standing around the grades, and I said well O.K. I'm going to see what I made, thinking that I made a "B" or "C". Well, there was only one "A" posted up on the chart, and my name was beside it, and everybody was asking me well how did she have the "A" and why did she get the "A". Like I didn't deserve it, like I didn't work hard for it. It got

into such a heated discussion that the teacher had
to open up the grade book and show where I, and
prove that I, that I really really worked hard
enough to get this A.

In a way it kind of hurt my feelings 'cause it made
me think that they were saying that because I'm
black, maybe he just gave it to me, you know,
because I'm Black --something like that. Um, I
just, I'm tired of this high school and tired of
being the only black in my classes.

Lucy couldn't believe that the teacher would feel the need

to prove her grade to the class. Being the only Black in

that class, Lucy felt this teacher's behavior sustained

the belief that Black students can't, or usually don't do

as well academically as white students. She continues:

I mean, there's a whole lot of little bitty
things that happen to black students that we
let pass, but there's a lot of bigger things
that happen and stuff. Like, we were having
a race fight at school about things that happened
and White people were chasing around Black
people with knives and not getting in trouble.
People were keying [scratching] people's cars.
Colored signs were taped on the water fountain.
They were saying that we were not allowed to walk
on certain sides of the hallway, and the whole
administration didn't do anything about it.
But, if it would of been some Black students that
started something like this the first little thing
they would have heard about it, they would have
got suspended.

And, it's a Black man, he's a, I guess
he's an assistant principal at my school.
He is head of disciplinary problems and stuff
like that, and a lot of times I mean we tell him,
and he's aware of it, but he has to do it
sometimes, he kisses up to the white people to be
able to keep his job. A whole lot of times he
sends black folks home for doing little minor
things. When the White person can come in having

done something very very very worst and more worst
than the person before him has done and would get
something a very very light sentence. And,
we would talk to him about it, and you know
he will tell you well I have to keep my job.

The School Curriculum

All five of these students perceived the curriculum

as not including, to the degree that it should, the

contributions of African Americans. They also perceived

the faculty, White students, and administrators as not

wanting more Blacks included in the curriculum. Four out

of the five, all but Wilma, talked about Black History

Month and the procedure for getting the African American

History class started last year. Lucy very precisely

speaks for the group.

>Last month was just Black history month and
>you know, a lot of people speculate on whether
>or not it should be a Black history month. And
>I'm saying you know, there's twelve months in the
>year. Eleven of them are yours [White people].
>You can do what you want to. Nobody says anything
>about it. Like they think that we're wrong. That
>we're asking too much to have this month be ours so
>we can celebrate our history. Well, you know, like
>I said, we need something where us as Black people
>can get together and talk about what our ancestors
>did and stuff.
>
>Now our school is offering a course in African
>American history. But, last year when we were
>trying to get this course passed and stuff, we had
>to sign a petition and if so many people signed the
>petition, then the class could be brought in the
>school. If they didn't, it wouldn't. The only
>names on the sheet were Blacks. The people who
>didn't want it in there were White. And you know
>people are saying well, why do we have to have a

Black class? From kindergarten, I have been
learning how James the King did this, how Arthur
Henry and whoever did this. All these people were
White. I mean, it's about time that I, as a Black
student, learned something about me. And all of
the names that were left off of it were White, but
they finally let this pass. I'm saying, all these
years, I've been learning about White people and
stuff and it's not that it wasn't interesting, it's
just like I said, me as a Black student, I finally
needed to learn something about what's going on
with my people.

And the Black club that we have now called ABUSUA,
which I am a part of, was founded by Black students
and we were trying to get the club in. They
were like, well there's no need for a Black
history club at this high school, but I'm
saying there was. The Key club, the Civinettes,
you know it was all these things for the white
people to go to and when Black people, which some
of them did attend these clubs and stuff, but we
felt out of place because we were out numbered by a
lot of White students and stuff. So we needed
something where we could get together and we could
sit back and talk about what was going on with us
and you know really feel . . . good about who we
are.

Ethel supports Lucy's dialogue.

I didn't have enough courses at my school that
taught me about my culture. They have one course,
an elective or social studies course, African
American History. But I didn't take it because,
uh, some students before us they were saying it
wasn't all about African American history. It was
telling about slavery and stuff instead of the good
parts of being an African American. I wanted to
hear positive things about my culture.

Ethel also stated that

the books used in school say what they want you
to learn, they don't present the world as it is.
They don't include a lot on Black people, just the
White people.

When asked if the school curriculum had affirmed them culturally, all but one responded no. They felt that the most emphasis black people got in the curriculum was during Black History Month and even then many of the activities were questioned. They also described the school as being almost void of Black culture in its physical surroundings. By this they meant there were few paintings and or posters to depict the black culture.

Once again, Lucy sums up the group's perception of school as a place that they believed was supposed to be a place where every student is affirmed and assisted in achieving high academic success. These five students, however, concur that in reality African American students miss out when it comes to faculty and staff encouraging and expecting high academic achievement from them.

> Most Blacks are discouraged to learn, because teachers put them down in front of the class. Instead they [teachers] should help them [Black students]. Let them know they can achieve and help them.

Tension Created by Students' Perception of
Self and Their Experiences in School

The third issue which emerged from the students' "stories" deals with the tension created by their high school being a national award winning school for meeting

the needs of all students. But, as these five African
American students see it, their school does not totally
meet their needs because they do not address "who they
are" culturally. In addressing this issue, the students
give their perception of themselves and their experiences
in school.

Lucy believes that how she views herself has been a
definite asset to what her experiences have been in
school. She feels that her strong will and
self-motivation to achieve academically and be successful,
at all costs, have enabled her to get through the
educational system in spite of racism and family
hardships.

> I made up my mind that I was, no matter what
> anybody said, I wasn't going to let anyone
> bring me down, and I'm still not. I plan on
> doing a whole bunch of stuff and I don't plan
> on letting anybody or anything stop me from
> achieving my goal.

From these remarks, it is obvious that Lucy unequivocally
believes that her success in school and in life was and is
due to her decision to make it. She feels that she is the
initiator of her success. School nor her family really
did much for her. She believes that if she had not been
strong and determined she would have been one of the

many uneducated, illiterate, unemployed African American adults who exist in society today. She was, and still is, determined not to let this be her plight.

As a coping mechanism Lucy has built a wall around herself to protect her and to ensure that the disappointments she faced in life would not interfere with her success in school. This self-made wall has protected her throughout her life.

> And now, it's real real hard to get close to me because I've built up a wall around myself and I'm very, very insecure about a whole lot of things that I do and stuff. I'm tenacious. If I start something, I will finish it, but it's real real real hard to get close to me. I mean, like people they say, "Well why are you, are you so mean?" Or, "Why did you say this or why did you say that?" It's like I have to make sure that I'm alright and if anybody gets inside me and I start getting vulnerable to anybody, it's like I'm scared I'm going to get let down or I might get hurt or this love that I'm experiencing with somebody is going to be taken away like it always is. It's like no matter what good, and I set myself up for all this good, I end up with a negative downfall. So that's why I'm so reluctant about what I want to get into, what I want to do.

Lucy also credits her success in school to hard work and effort.

> People say I take stuff to heart and I don't know I'm just, I don't know. They say I take everything too serious and that's's why I'm always letting myself down because I put too much into it. But excuse me, my grandma told me that you get out of something what you put in and I know if I continually try to put a 150% in something, I'll get that, if not more, back. And so, that's what I've always wanted to do and I'm just saying

> classes and stuff at my school, it's kind of hard
> being the only black. When something is said, I
> feel out of place about saying something because
> it's like when I speak, I'm saying something for
> the whole Black race.

Being the only Black in her classes is no fun, as Lucy

described, but she endured the isolation in order to get a

quality education. For Lucy, her desire to read was

another reason for her success. She promoted her own self

knowledge by reading profusely even when reading was not

assigned by her teachers. For Lucy, her desire to read

was another reason for her success.

> Most folks don't want to read unless it's a
> criteria or the teacher makes them. But, I
> take out of my own time anything that, you know,
> that I want to do, I want to read. And before
> I got pregnant, I used to read all the time and
> it used to just make me feel so good, but I was
> really just reading to be reading. But now that
> I have a baby and stuff, when I read, it's like
> my own chance for me to get away free. To be able
> to become, you know, whatever this person is or, I
> can just sit down and I can be them. I can feel
> them. I can act out the part if I want to and
> nobody, nobody including my son, can get inside
> this little world with me. I'm with his book. I'm
> reading the words. I'm feeling the part and it's
> something of mine, that I have and it's something
> that reading allows me to do. I'll always treasure
> that and let's see . . .

Reading is somewhat of an escape mechanism for Lucy. It

has helped her to survive the hardships of her life.

Another concern of Lucy's is the fact that so many

black students won't take the higher level courses. She

uses her brother as an example for why other African

American students are not as academically successful as she is in school, and why they tend to settle for less academically.

> And um, I have a brother. He also goes to my high school and he's running track and stuff. And like I said, my brother is one of those people who would take the lower level classes just to get out of doing the work, and I know from personal experience. And knowing my brother all my life, that he's not, you know, slow. He's not dumb. He's not incapable of doing the work that I can do. It's just that he thinks that he should be around his friends and he should be able to do easy homework that doesn't give him any kind of struggle or anything so . . . most of the Blacks are in the lower level classes.
>
> I think that most Blacks are there because they think they are going to be really really judged. They're going to really be judged if they go ahead and make that step up. And like I said, most Blacks, when they are put up to something, most of them experience a defeat. And when they go back to try it for the second time, you know, they don't think that, you know, that maybe they can make it that time or something like that. So I mean, a lot of them I know they have the will to want to do it and they think to themselves, well I can do this work. Maybe I need to take this class. It's mainly the peers and stuff telling them well you know, you stay back here with us. Well, who you gonna talk to and stuff? I want to be all that Lucy wants to be.
>
> And I tell my brother that all the time. I say, well you know you smart, why you keep on taking these technical classes and stuff like that. He say, well I'm not going to college. And I say, well, it doesn't matter. He say, well it ain't nobody for me to talk to. And I'm just like, you know, if you wait on your friends, excuse me, for um, you to move up and all ya'll move together, somebody's going to get left back anyway. And you know, all of you may not get up there and stuff so why not just go ahead and do it. He's hardheaded. I can't get through to him. And so, he's another one of those people that I have to show. That I

can do this, I can really make something out of myself.

In addition to the school factors that may have caused her brother to feel that he could not achieve high academic goals, Lucy offers another possible explanation, the influence of her family, for her brother not having the same goals as she does.

> My grandparents you know, my peers and stuff, and really not my parents because they were hardly ever around. But my brother, he got the C's and D's and you know, they say when I came home, when I got my first C. They, well Lucy, you got a C and you know it hurt me because my brother had been making worse grades and all they would tell him is you can do better. And I guess it's like my brother thinks well, it doesn't matter what I'm going to do, they're going to praise her. He look at it in a way that I get all the praise and I look at it as he gets all the praise or he gets the easy way out.

Lucy always opted for the more difficult route. She refused to take the easy way out. For example she did not enroll in the African American History class when it was offered. She feared the class would be filled with African American students who would not approach the class in a scholarly manner. She enrolled in the AP Chemistry course where she was the only black student. To her dismay she faced the teacher's stereotyping of Black students.

> I was the only black in his class . . . the Black
> people, they're always complaining about something.
> You know I didn't want to hear that. I just had to
> show him that I can do my work. And it bothered
> me, but I didn't say anything, because I didn't
> want him stereotyping me as another complaining
> Black person.

When asked if she could have changed one thing about her school that would have enabled her to be more motivated about school and learning or that would have made life happier for her as a student, what would it be, she responded:

> I'd erase all racism. I really would. I'd
> put everybody on an equal basis from start.
> From birth to finish. I mean because that's
> really what separates the school system. It's
> not really the classes you take. Anything that
> happens in school is about race. If a teacher
> writes you up, it's because you're Black. If
> you get to go to this because, it's because
> you're White. I mean, I really would. I would
> just. . . all of us would have to be pink. We
> would all have to be the same size. All have
> the same eyes, same ears and nothing would be
> different. Nothing, any little thing that anybody
> could pick out and start something over. You know,
> a difference. It would not be there. We would all
> be the same. I mean, it's bad, you know. People
> say if everything is the same you won't never get
> anywhere. You won't never learn, but it would
> be a whole lot easier. I think it would be.

Lucy perceived school as a place where you are supposed to achieve but most don't because of racism and because the African American students lacked strong family support. School is an arena for change in that you can learn if you, the individual, will take full

responsibility for your learning. That responsibility includes recognizing that you may not get a lot individual support.

Lucy's experiences in school convinced her that was difficult to get close to white teachers if you are Black and poor, even if you are smart. The biggest barriers to her success in school, as she perceived it, have been: (1) her lack of support from her mom and dad; (2) teachers who don't care; and (3) being a teenage mother. And finally, she describes her life in school as being like a roller coaster with many ups and downs where she experienced both positive and negative times. Lucy's most negative experiences in school were not having her parents take her to school the first day, and after having her baby, having school personnel tell her she was not going to be anything. Her most positive experience in school was having a teacher who was sincere and trustworthy. The teacher related to her culturally and was a friend who cared about her. After Lucy's baby was born this teacher continued to instill in her that she could succeed in school. She credits this teacher with keeping her from dropping out of school. She also indicates that this was her most positive year in school because she had a teacher who really cared about who she was, helped her understand who she was, and what she could become.

Lucy adamantly believed that had she not been so strong willed and determined to do well in school, school, as it exists now, would not have motivated her to achieve to her fullest potential. This she believes is the reason most blacks don't succeed in school. They are not internally motivated and schools are not doing all they can to validate the experiences of African American students or to teach African American students in a way that will cause them to believe that they too can, and are expected, to succeed in school.

As Ricky's story unfolded it was obvious that he believed that his lack of success in school was mainly his fault. He quickly admitted that he could have studied more and/or done all of his homework. But he also acknowledged that there were other barriers to his success in school. Teachers, according to Ricky, were also responsible for his lack of success. When they taught him, they did not use teaching strategies that were beneficial to students like him who learn differently and at different paces. Ricky felt that all but one of his teachers covered the material too fast for him and never allowed him time to learn the new material before moving on to the next lesson. Teachers also accused him of misbehaving when he wasn't and therefore, many teachers, unnecessarily, put him out of their classes which caused him to get even further behind. And finally, he believed

that the administration was responsible for many of his

academic failures because they too, often accused him

unjustly of inappropriate behavior and even suspended him

from school. So Ricky perceived himself as one who did

not take school seriously his first year of high school,

but who matured, and wanted to change, but he was not

allowed to by the teachers and administrators at school.

These two experiences, he believed, were the reasons for

his frustrations in school and the cause for his low

academic success in school.

> Well, I played around at the beginning because I
> viewed school in a negative way. I view it
> as a positive way now. Because now that I
> graduated I wish I would have tried harder and did
> better because now I wish I could go to college,
> but I messed around and now I can't get into
> college. While I was in school I viewed it as
> negative because I had my mind made up that I could
> just get out of school and get a mill job and I'd
> be alright. But now that I've experienced a mill
> job, I see, that that's not what I want.

Ricky also viewed school as both a place for change and a

place where some people were made to feel inferior to

others. He expressed that school could make life better

for some students but for others it was an unhappy place

because there was a lot of racial conflict. Ricky

didn't really didn't see himself as being involved in the

racial conflict. It existed, but it didn't bother him

because he was not involved.

As Ricky continued his story he indicated that school also did not affirm who he was as a Black male. He believed that not much time was given to helping him understand his own culture and who he is.

> You wouldn't have much [about Blacks], only when Black History Month, and you only have a little of that 'cause they be trying to move along to keep up with others classes, so you don't have much, and sometimes you don't cover a lot. But I didn't think about it much, 'cause we ain't never had it, so that's how I feel about it.

Ricky saw school as a bridge to help him reach his life goal: having a good high paying job.

And what could his mom have done to have helped him be more successful in school?

> Well she [mom] graduated from school but she didn't remember all the stuff we were doing. She could have gotten me a tutor or something like that. They [parents] shouldn't down their own kids. I see some grown ups who tell their kids they ain't "gon" be nothing. Man, that's not right.

When concluding his story, Ricky gave a most interesting view of his life in school.

> My life in school has been like a path where you can only walk one way. Because, I see, when I was trying to change the teachers didn't see me, uh like they didn't think I could change. They made me want to just like give up and keep going the way I was going. There was no turning back.

Ricky's best and most memorable experience in school was when a teacher gave him a set of encyclopedias, in the first grade. His worst experience in school was getting searched for drugs all the time, when he was innocent. If he could change one thing about school that would have made life happier for him, it would be to have had teachers who would have slowed down their instruction so that he could have learned the information and kept up with the new lessons.

Ethel's story tells of her belief that her shyness is definitely one of the reason for her not being as successful in school as she could have been. She acknowledged that her inability to talk out in class and ask questions caused her not to be recognized in class and to miss out on a lot of learning.

> Being shy has effected my success in
> school because I don't talk much. I'm
> proud of who I am, I know I can learn
> and achieve, I just don't talk much.

Her earliest memory of school was that she had to meet new people. Ethel, never liked to be around a lot of people. She preferred only being with and talking with two or three friends. Meeting new people was, in Ethel's words, scary and hard. She explained that she didn't really have any memories of her elementary school because she didn't

know anybody there. Clearly Ethel's view of herself as being shy was significant in determining her experiences in school.

> I remember sixth grade. It's scary to me
> 'cause you got to move up from elementary
> to middle school. You didn't know no one,
> and you had to meet different people from
> other elementary schools. I had a hard time
> adjusting to it 'cause I didn't know nobody
> but my sister and my cousin.

Other than her shyness, Ethel identified two other barriers to her school success: her teachers and family trauma. In October of 1994, Ethel's grandmother was shot and killed. This was very traumatic for Ethel and she admitted that this death affected her performance in school.

Ethel believed that she could have done better in school if she had worked harder and if she had had teachers who taught according to her learning style. Because she did not do as well as she would have liked, her perception of school was mixed.

> School is a place to get a good education and
> where you can accomplish most of your goals in
> life. It is a place that lets you know what
> you want to major in, it gives direction for
> life. School was structured a little bit to
> meet my needs. In math and science it was,
> but in history it was not. Socially we only
> had an African American Gospel Choir, and
> that was only during Black History Month.
> During Black History Month, the white people
> thought we got too much attention. The
> chorus teacher wanted her choir to sing.

She was offended that only the Black Gospel
Choir sang during our Black History Program.

According to Ethel, school would have better met the needs

of African American students if the curriculum had

included more current information about ethnic minorities.

They should teach us more about what's
happening in the Black world today rather
than what happened in the past. They should
put more African American courses in school,
get more teacher role models--more Black
teachers and make school enjoyable as well
as a learning place. We need more African
American courses. You could learn more about
Black people other than Martin Luther King
and Malcolm X.

Ethel's life in school was complete with peaks and

valleys.

My life in school was like a hard
beginning, rewarding end. It was hard
because it was a whole bunch of work, and
I had to meet new people, and I had to
discipline myself. It was a good end
because I graduated.

My best and most memorable school experience
was graduation. My worst was having racial
tension at my high school. It didn't happen
this year, but last year and year before last.
A whole bunch of people got into a fight. Black
and White students wouldn't talk to each other.
They stayed separated. The Black students
wouldn't let White students out of the library
and they wouldn't let the Black students go in.
They blocked the door. There was no communication
with the Black and the White students. It was
bad.

Betty described herself as having the ability to be quite successful in school. She described the academic work required in school as easy to achieve and felt that she was never really challenged, except for fourth grade. Consequently, she did not apply herself to her fullest potential and humorously admits that she just didn't want to do all the work teachers assigned because it was too much and it became boring. She was always able to pass the tests without doing the homework, so she saw no need to do it. She resented so much, the large amounts of homework and the frequency with which tests were given that she decided to take a break from school. She does not want to continue school after graduation.

> The work can interest you but they just give too much of it. You know, if you just keep doing the same thing over and over a whole lot of it, you know, you just loose interest.

> If I had been in a higher level, track, I would have been challenged more and I would have given a little more output to meet those qualifications. I really wasn't challenged in the academic track.

> I'm not turned off to school, I just been in school too long. I need a break, a change of pace for a while.

For Betty, school was just not a place where she felt challenged and therefore it became a place for playing jokes on teachers and gossiping with her friends. She refused to apply herself because she believed that

school was a place to just have fun. It didn't matter how
much you learned as long as you learned enough to pass the
tests.

> And then I use to think it was a joke to
> go to class and get on the teacher's nerves
> or whatever, but you know, it was really
> hurting yourself cause it wasn't hurting the
> teacher, cause they got theirs and they can't
> really force you to learn if you don't want to
> so it just hurts you in the long run. So when
> I got to tenth grade, I straightened up in case
> I wanted to go to college.
>
> School is a place where you go to talk
> to your friends, suppose to learn but it
> don't get done. Because you don't get to
> see your friends and your mind is not on
> your work, it's on talking to your friends
> and catching up on the latest gossip.
> Nothing can keep you from learning, if you
> really want to learn, then you gonna learn.
> But talking to your friends can keep your mind
> off learning. Learning does not occur as
> often as it should or as much because you
> don't have your mind on it.
>
> I could have done better. You can only
> please yourself because, no matter how good
> you are at something, or how well you do it
> people might talk about it a little bit but
> they not going to go all out about it. Really
> no point in it unless you are trying to go to a
> specific college and you want the grades,
> otherwise you just do as you feel.
>
> Don't make excuses, just do what you feel.
> If you let racism direct you in your own
> certain path that you trying to go then you
> ain't going nowhere. 'Cause it's always going
> to be there I don't care where you living, who
> you living with, it's still going to exist from
> now until who knows when. You just learn to
> live with it and not let it dictate what you
> can do.

Betty pretty much sees herself as doing "just as she feels," without letting anyone or anything dictate what she can do, even when it concerns her intellectual abilities.

Betty also perceived herself as a peer mentor/coach for the African American students in the ninth and tenth grades. She was passionate about preventing them from making the same mistakes she had made--not taking school seriously and not working up to her fullest potential. She saw herself as a student counselor, compelled to give advice.

> O.k. I try to influence the children in class to straighten up and act right you know, even though they ninth graders or tenth graders, they really think that it really don't matter 'cause they don't have to make good grades until they get up to the eleventh grade, you know, or even their twelfth grade year. But, it's really not that 'cause you really need to try your best in school the whole time you're there in order to really, you know, get the grades that you need to go to the college that you want to or the school that you really, really, truly want to attend. I'm trying to tell them because I'm already experienced. I knew that you couldn't just make E's and D's, but I was thinking that it really didn't count until you got further up in high school. I could pass the tests, so that's all I did.

Betty believed that if the school had really been about meeting her needs as a student, teachers would have detected that she had the ability to do much better, and

they would have encouraged her to do so. Teachers would have allowed her to learn the way she learns best rather than just giving her a lot of homework. Instead, teachers assumed that her lack of effort, her incomplete homework, and her boisterous behavior were indicators that she could do no better. They allowed a very good academically talented student to perform just enough to get by rather than requiring her to work up to her ability.

Betty described her ideal school as one where teachers would teach her the way she likes to learn.

> If we had more hands on work I would like
> it better. Teachers would teach me the way
> I like to learn, because I want to learn.
> Teachers would have more time with each
> student.

Betty's overall view of school, from her thirteen years of experience, was that it is a place for both continuing inequity and creating change.

> Society today, no one is going to get equal
> punishment I don't care who they are or who's
> doing the punishment or what. And, secondly
> of all there's always reason for change, but
> people have to be willing to change. Students,
> teachers, faculty, and even the parents around
> the students in school or the school can't cause
> change.
>
> Discipline is not going to be equal because I
> don't care if you have a White principal or a
> Black principal. If you have a White principal
> of course he's going to take more action on the
> Black person, and if it's a Black principal he's

going to try to hold his position cause he don't
want to be kicked out by the board or whatever so
he's going to try to kiss up to them to keep his
job or whatever. They always taking the White
person's side, or whatever. We just there.
We just there, basically. There's no one for us.
If you there everyday you'd see, that's just the
way it is.

Betty identified racial separation among students as being

the primary factor that affected her early views of

school.

In elementary school you didn't see as much
favoritism in children as you do now that
you're in high school because. It started
when you got to middle school. In middle
school they start to separate and they begin
to go to their little groups and hang with a
certain little crowd. And, then the little
White kids didn't like a certain White kid if
they hung around little Black people and then
if some Black kids hung around a lot of White
people and then the Black people say they were
trying to "act White" and be "Miss Preppy" or
whatever. And then once you get to high school,
bam! there it was. There was the little preppy
section of White people and Black people didn't
like them and the White people didn't want to be
associated with Black people but I don't know,
it was just a mess, when they all need to realize
that ain't nothing different about them but they
skin color.

Betty divorced herself from all involvement in these kinds

of behaviors. She viewed them as petty and ridiculous.

She does not allow herself to get caught up in racial

"games," and she does not affiliate with persons who do.

I don't associate with too many people,
because I feel like all they want is your
money, your man, or use your car, and they

> ain't getting "nare" one from me, not one.
> You can't really trust anybody. If you tell
> them something, they be done told fifty
> people before you see them again.

School can be improved, according to Betty. She talked about what would need to be done to make school a more equitable place.

> They can first of all get some teachers
> who really care, who are there to help
> people, not just there for a job. Second
> of all they [school faculty and staff] can
> have equal punishment for the children. If
> two students are involved in the same thing,
> they both should receive the same punishment.
> And third of all make the classes a whole lot
> smaller because with 30 or 35 in a class, you
> can't learn in it. It's like the teacher just
> talking to you because by the time the teacher
> finishes talking and it's time to ask questions,
> the class period is over. With less students
> in there it'd probably be more better for you
> to understand. Because somebody might have
> their hand up before you and by the time they
> get to you, there's no time for your question
> and that's just basically about all. Teachers
> could have taken more time out of their busy,
> all day schedule to tend to your needs and
> help you understand more about certain things
> or whatever. Principals should just be your
> own person, don't be phony.

Even though Betty viewed herself as smart and as knowing what to do to be successful in school she didn't really give it her best because she believed that school was not structured to meet her needs as much as they were to meet the needs of her White student peers.

> They supposed to be teaching everybody the
> same thing, but it doesn't seem like they are

there to teach both Blacks and Whites the same
thing. They might put them in a classroom,
but it seem more like they give the White
people more attention as far as them needing
help and you know, little things like that.

Moving to the social aspects of school, Betty

indicated that she did not participate in any clubs at her

high school, whether they were predominantly Black clubs

or predominantly White clubs. When talking about the

extracurricular activities, Betty seemed to be on the

outside looking in as though it was impossible for her to

be involved.

Few Blacks join the white club because
they think it's too many White people in
there and they would be left out if it came
down to them having to pick someone to go
on a trip or to room with. If they spent
the night somewhere, I'm sure no White person
would want to stay with a Black person unless
they friends or something and that ain't too
often you find them friends.

The Black students went and got them a club.
They only got one White student in it. They
just wanted to start one so they could have
something that's Black just to spite the White
students. That's just stupid. I don't belong
to any of them. Ain't no need for that.

To sum up her life in school, Betty revealed:

My life in school has been like a roller
coaster that goes fast and then slows down.
Maybe speeds up again. When I was a little
bit younger I just couldn't stay still, I
don't know what it was. I guess cause I was
a little bitty child then. And then start
getting in school more, you got slowed
down because it was like all this work and

> then when it's about time for you to graduate
> and it's getting closer and closer you try to
> speed up. You want to do your work 'cause you
> trying to prove yourself. And then that day
> come and you just stop again.

Notice how Betty talked in the second person when she was
talking about herself. Again, this affirmed how she
perceived herself as being on the outside looking in. She
felt that she was not a part of the negative practices
that go on in school, she saw them and she knew she had a
remedy for them, but she was not a part of the situation.
When telling her story she always talked about the
negative practices she observed in school as though she
was on the outside. It appeared that she did not see
herself as being an active participant in her own story.

Betty's most memorable and her best experience in
school was the year she spent with her fourth grade
teacher, whom she described as the best.

> I just liked her. We worked. We had fun and
> we learned a lot. She got me ready for the
> next level of school. She didn't just work
> us to death. She worked us but she didn't over
> do it. I had a personal relationship with her.
> I liked how she teach. She let us get in groups
> and stuff. She didn't just stand up there and
> preach, you know, she let us get together and work
> by ourselves. I always did my work in there. For
> some reason I wanted to please her because she
> pulled the best from me.

Wilma perceived herself as having been as
successful in school as possible with her limited mental

abilities. She had no reservations acknowledging that she
is mentally challenged. Wilma believed that her school
years, all spent in special education classes, were most
successful and that her life in school had been fun and
easy. When describing how she perceived school, she
declared that

> school is a place where you communicate
> and talk and gossip and make better friends,
> and meet new people. It's a place where
> you learn. You go to school to learn what
> you need to learn.

For Wilma, the primary purpose of school was to provide
you with a safe haven and give you the opportunity to talk
and be with friends. She talked about learning as though
it was a mere by product of school. Wilma also indicated
that she had often been treated unfairly because she is
Black.

> One principal treat other students
> differently because one day I walked
> to school, and he thought I was still
> in school, he didn't know I was homebound
> at the time. And there was this White
> student out of class and he told him to
> go on to class but he wasn't going to let
> me go to class until he found out why I
> was out of class. He don't give Black
> people a chance to talk. If you tell your
> story, he go against you anyway.

In spite of this kind of perceived unfair practice, Wilma
perceived school as a positive place. Her positive view

of school existed because of her special education

teacher.

> Mrs. T. stays on your back 'til you get
> finished. Other teachers go to White
> students and help them a lot and they
> won't help you but a little bit. School
> has always been a positive place for me,
> it's the safest place for you, where you
> can talk to your friends. It's better than
> getting in trouble on the street.

When asked what she would tell teachers and

administrators that would help them better meet the needs

of African American students, she responded:

> They need to listen to the parents and
> to the students. If they don't listen,
> ain't nothing they can really do about
> the problem until they sit down and listen
> to the whole story. There are some nice
> teachers but some mean ones too. They
> need to change their attitude first to
> be more cooperative with the students.
> Some teachers won't help you. You can't
> ask no questions. I was on the computer,
> they [the other students] were on the
> typewriter and I sit there bored, because
> she wouldn't help me. I was doing something
> different from the rest of the class. I know
> I'm different.

If she could tell her mom what she should have done

to help her be more successful and less frustrated in

school, she would

> tell mom --I would ah, tell my mom she should
> have came to most of the assemblies we had and
> sit down and talk to my teachers when I had
> problems, but she didn't do that.

In summing up her life in school, Wilma stated:

> My life in school has been like fun, easy.
> My most memorable experience during my
> thirteen years in school was walking across
> the stage getting my diploma. My worst
> experience in school was getting picked
> on in school by your best friend going
> behind your back and talking about you.

When I asked Wilma if there was anything she wanted to say
that would help African American students experience more
success in school and less frustration she cited the
following:

> Don't drop out of school;
> don't have no baby while you in high school; and
> don't cuss out the teacher when they send you to
> the principal's office.

Where are They Now and Where are They Going

June 2, 1995 has come and gone and all five of
these students graduated. So where are they now and where
do they go from here? Four of them are planning to
continue their education and one just wants to get a job
and take care of her baby. They all, however, have a
plan.

Lucy is working six days a week at the local
Wal-Mart. She has saved every penny she has earned to
help finance her college education. Her dream has come
true. She has been accepted to Bennett College in
Greensboro, North Carolina. Lucy will be a participant in

the Challenge For Opportunity Program which is designed to provide academic and social structure for mothers and their children. She plans to major in Business and Social Work. One day she expects to be quite successful and have many of the things she was deprived of as a child.

> I can see TV and I see the guys coming
> home in the suspenders and the ladies coming
> home in their business suits. I really,
> really, think that's going to be me one day.
> Not sarcastically. I really, really think
> that's going to be me one day. And I'm
> really going to work hard for that. I mean
> I really am going to work and if I don't
> succeed in what I want to do, it won't be
> because I didn't try. And, it won't be
> because I gave up. I would never ever give
> up because I can.

After graduation Ricky was hired by a local company to work in the shipping department. His original plans have been revised.

> When I get out of school, what I think about,
> what I plan to do is go to the military, the
> Navy. So I went, took a couple of tests up there.
> I didn't do too good on the tests so I'm going
> to take it again 'cause I didn't like the job
> that they were going to give me. So I'm going
> to try harder and see if I can do better at
> another thing.

After working a while, he would like to attend Barber's school and one day own his own business. He now wishes he had performed better in school and achieved better grades in high school so he could have had the option of

attending college. Ricky will continue to live at home
for now.

Ethel is employed at Bojangles. Her job will help
her save funds to meet her goal of continuing her
education. In an effort to improve her scholastic
standing and one day be accepted by a four year
institution she plans to attend Alamance Community College
in North Carolina in the Spring of 1996.

> First I'm planning to go to a community
> college, then I'll transfer to a four
> year college and major in criminal justice.
> One day I want to be a lawyer. I'll
> probably go to Central or Shaw University or
> Barber Scotia College.

Ethel plans to remain at home until she completes her
college education.

Betty knew at the beginning of her senior year that
she needed a break from school. Now, more than ever, she
believes that school is not for everyone, no matter how
smart you are. She is totally ready for a break from the
routine of school work. She will be leaving for Illinois
the last week in July to begin her career in the Navy.

> No, I do not want to go to college now.
> I want to travel around the world. So
> I decided to go to the Navy. That way I
> can travel free and go to school and only
> have to pay 25% of the cost. I won't have
> no insurance payments. The Navy will pay
> most of it. After I retire from the Navy,
> about 20 years I plan to be a psychiatrist

and have my own practice. I'll go to school
in the Navy.

Betty is anxious to leave her home town and begin what she

calls a new and exciting life.

Wilma's present and her future avocation are as a

mother. She and her son will live at home with her mother

until she can get her own apartment. She is currently

working at a summer camp for special children ages five

and six. She will continue to work jobs which her social

worker assigns her. She looks forward to rearing her son,

alone.

Ten years from now I plan on being moved
out from my mom. That's my apartment now.
I'm paying for that apartment, not my mama
because my check come every month. So she
have to pay rent when my money come. She
won't let me talk on the phone, embarrass
me in front of my friends. She needs to
change her attitude towards me. I'm going
to move, but she don't know it. She thinks
she the baby's mama.

Despite all obstacles, these five African American

young people are moving forward with their lives and

laying the foundation for becoming productive members of

society.

Final Student Comments on the

Validity of Their Story

To ensure that I had interpreted these five students' stories accurately and thus preserve the quality of the study and secure the validity of the research, I had them read Chapter IV. After reading the chapter they made the following comments about my interpretation of "their story."

> Everything I heard is correct. It's everything I said. It's told like I want it (Ricky, 7/2/95).

> Well, in words that come from me this chapter describes how life was the last four years and the things that have been going on with teachers and school and the community and how we interacted with one another and the things that have gone on between us (Betty, 7/3/95).

> It's right (Ethel, 7/2/95).

> I'm pleased with it and I really think you captured a lot out of the feelings and things I was trying to get across--things I was trying to share. I like the way the book is going to be structured. I like the way you have the individual's personal words quoted, and that really let's the reader know the individual and that's the individual's words and exactly how they [the individual] felt and everything. Overall I'm just really really glad. I like what I see and I'm glad you perceived it in the right way. You didn't take some of the things I said and make something negative out of it. You just captured it exactly how I thought you would (Lucy, 7/6/95).

> Yep, that's it (Wilma, 7/9/95).

It is important to these five African American students that their story be read by teachers, principals and other school personnel, parents, and their peers--both black and white. They have high aspirations for their story having a positive effect on the structuring of school, teacher behavior, parental support, and peer behavior. They also hope their story will serve as an impetus for changing the "business as usual" attitude about educating African American students in school today. So once again their voices cry out:

> . . . start treating people with the same disciplinary actions.
>
> Hopefully teachers that care will learn from our story . . .
>
> . . . the ones that really don't care, hopefully they will be encouraged to go to a different field of work where they don't have to be around kids . . .
>
> . . .if they're not really going to care just get another job and not ruin real people's lives and keep them from learning things. . .
>
> If teachers would take out just a little time to get personal and not just let it be a job, then everything would be all right.
>
> [Teachers and principals] should act on it instead of just reading it!

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This investigation was conducted to analyze the "stories" of five African American students in order to identify: (1) their orientations toward school; (2) critical structural factors that influence their perceptions of school; and (3) their views of themselves and their experiences in school. Their orientations towards school were the result of the critical structural factors they identified: their personal interactions with teachers, the curriculum, and unfair school practices; family support and involvement in their school experiences; and how they perceived themselves in the context of the school. Their successes and frustrations in school were the result of their orientation toward school. These stories illustrated the environmental factors which hampered progress even before the students arrived at school. Emotional trauma in the family and limited parental guidance, encouragement and support while in school was experienced and reported in each student's story. Despite these personal barriers each student found ways to put their problems in a meaningful and workable

perspective which enabled them to function in school. The narrative methodology gave voice to each student and allowed them to tell their story in their own way and allowed them to be their own historians. These stories revealed insightful information for restructuring schools to meet the needs of today's diverse student population. Teachers, parents, school administrators, school board members, community members, and all educators need to be more attuned to the cultural needs and behaviors of young African American students. Compatibility between the cultural behaviors of ethnic minority students and classroom pedagogy (teaching styles and curriculum content/structure) leads to improved academic achievement in school. Until adults change their behavior to show respect for, have tolerance of, and increase their sensitivity to ethnic minority and poverty disadvantaged students, this growing group of future adults will continue to be at risk.

Summary of the Results

The five African American students who participated in this study identified their successes and frustrations in school as the result of (1) teacher attitudes and/or behavior; (2) the lack of administrative support in their school endeavors; (3) unfair school practices; and (4) parental involvement in the school. More specifically,

their school success was attributed to (1) teachers with
whom students shared a very personal and academic
relationship; (2) the students own willingness to
persevere, their determination to break the cycle of a
family history of economic dependence, and their own
decision to complete high school; and (3) external
factors--a less than desirable community environment and
negative African American adult role models. Their school
frustration was attributed to (1) unfair school practices
--disciplinary actions, employing too few ethnic
minorities, a monovocal curriculum, and the lack of
culturally relevant pedagogy; (2) uncaring teachers; (3)
being susceptible to negative labels such as "acting
preppy"; and (4) making poor choices--"goofing off," not
doing homework assignments, not studying for tests, and
misbehaving. The foundation for success and a
prerequisite for the success of African American students
are (1) strong parental advocates; (2) fair and equal
school practices; (3) committed, caring, dedicated, well-
trained teachers who are not hostile and genuinely want to
teach them; and (4) the students' desire to persevere in
school as it is currently structured.

According to the metastory of these five African
American high school seniors their successes and
frustrations in school were described as being the result
of one or more of the following: teacher attitudes and/or

behavior; the lack of administrative support in their

school endeavors; unfair school practices; and parental

involvement in the school. Their stories all centered

around three common themes: their personal interactions

with teachers and the teacher's influence on their success

or frustration in school, unfair school practices, and

their perception of themselves and their experiences in

school.

Students' Perceived School Success

Each one of these students credited their school

successes first and foremost to at least one teacher with

which they shared a very personal and academic

relationship. As they each described this "wonderful"

teacher, whether she was their first grade teacher or

their twelfth grade teacher, a Black teacher or a White

teacher, a smile immediately came to their face, and they

got a sudden burst of energy when they talked about her.

These special teachers were never described as easy or

slack in their preparation for class or in their

dealings with students. Instead, they were described as

knowing their "stuff," working students hard, not letting

students get by without doing their school assignments,

yet they made class fun. More importantly they described

these special teachers as teachers who really cared about

students, who knew them individually, could talk their talk, and knew where they were coming from (understood them culturally). They were teachers who would remain after school to help students achieve academically in areas they were having trouble with, and took the time to know more about their lives. These students' descriptions of "good teachers" parallel the investigation conducted by Griggs and others (1992). In their investigation African American and Hispanic college juniors and seniors identified their academic and vocational success as due, in part to having enjoyed at least one very personal and academic relationship with a teacher.

Secondly, these five African American seniors identified their own willingness to persevere, their determination to break the cycle of a family history of economic dependence, and their own decision to complete high school as key to their success in life. They knew that the only means to a better life, was to achieve a high school diploma. With this in mind they each, at various times during their high school career, committed themselves to work harder and achieve as much as they could with or without the help of teachers, and in spite of the unfair practices they perceived as occurring in school. For most of these students, this decision was made during their second or third year in high school when it was too late to increase their grade point averages.

Finally they credited their school success to external factors: community environment and negative African American adult role models. The desire to break the family history of poverty and limited education caused these students to want to be successful in school. They did not want to continue the cycle of poverty, violence, alcohol and drug use, and low socioeconomic living standards. Rather, they desired to be the first in their family to receive their high school diploma and/or their college degree. This desire increased their efforts to be successful in school.

Students Perceived School Frustration

Lucy stated that her frustrations with school began in elementary school, while middle school was the onset of frustrations for all other student participants. All five of the students reported that the primary source of their frustrations was unfair school practices: disciplinary actions, employing too few ethnic minorities, a monovocal curriculum, and the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy. As a result, these students implied that they distrusted teachers and principals. The stories of these students reflected the conclusion of Ogbu (1987) that African American students perceive schools as systems for maintaining inequity, causing them to distrust schools and their personnel.

The second source of their frustration, also of prime importance, was having uncaring teachers who did not take their work seriously or attempt to teach them according to their learning style. They resented teachers who had low expectations of them. As a result, three of the five students began to feel insecure and incompetent and were no longer motivated to work at their maximum potential. The "self-fulfilling prophecy" that students perform in ways teachers expect them to was demonstrated by Graham (1994) and Nieto (1992). All five of the African American students in this study experienced having teachers who did not work with them individually according to their learning style or at their pace. When they were made to feel hopeless and that their individual effort accounted for nothing, they gave up. Consequently they experienced either complete failure or they performed well below their fullest intellectual ability. The data from this study replicates the findings of Fordham's and Ogbu's (1986) conclusion that Black students do not do well academically in school because they experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success. Each of these students perceived some White teachers as not acknowledging Black students as capable of intellectual achievement, which caused them and many other Black students to doubt their own intellectual ability. Their stories further revealed that they were

susceptible to labels and they only wanted to be labeled by phrases that they viewed as positive. Therefore, doing well academically would mean they were "acting preppy." "Acting preppy," a negative label in their vernacular, would mean unlike their African American peers they would take the upper level courses and "hang with" the White students. This contemporary phrase is synonymous with the phrase "acting White" as described by Fordham (1986). Lucy and Betty refused to be labelled either "preppy" or "acting White" and openly told Black students they were not trying to be White, they just wanted to learn as much as the White students were learning and associate with their peers, Black or White. For this reason Betty proclaimed that she would associate with whomever she pleased and Lucy explained she was going to take "their" classes.

"Their" classes, based on Eurocentric practices, minimized the contributions of Africans and African Americans according to the students' narratives. This reflects the "theirs not ours" dogma as reported in Fordham's (1986) study. These African American students did not complain about learning the material, however, they had the desire to learn more about their own heritage. They each indicated that they are hopeful that teachers and other significant educators will read their story and act upon it. Having this opportunity to tell

their school life story has given them hope of making a change in the way school is structured so that the needs of all students can and will be met. As Farrell and others (1988) concluded, any possible solution to the problems in school must be based on the perceptions of students rather than educational theory. Narrative research according to Cortazzi (1993) allows the individual to give first-hand account of their experiences of learning and of being in school which is an important and powerful dimension in understanding students. Perhaps the best means for better understanding African American students in the context of the school is to give them "voice"--the opportunity to speak about their experiences in school. If educational systems, curriculum, and classroom practices are to be improved then we must hear students' perceptions of school. Narrative research methodology is the best vehicle for accomplishing this.

Finally, in retrospect the students admitted making poor choices which increased their level of frustration. They accepted responsibility for their rate of learning, past behaviors which they were not proud of, and thinking grades didn't matter until they were juniors or seniors. They each wished someone--parent, teacher, counselor, or peer--had made them realize earlier how important it was to work hard each year in school. They all believed they could have put forth more effort and applied themselves

more. As a result of their frustration, they, in their own individual ways, became peer counselors to other African American students in their high school. They almost made it a mission to try to get other students to realize the importance of not "goofing off" and taking their school work and their teachers seriously. It was as if they knew they had to do this for other African American students because no one else would. They did not want to see other African American students become frustrated and fail to achieve their goals.

Their metastory is clearly a call for better conditions in school for ethnic minority and poverty disadvantaged students. They want to be successful, and to be treated in a fair and equitable manner. They have all, with the exception of one, decided to continue their education at a community college, the military, or a four year college. The one exception, Wilma, is the student who has made the choice to care for her son and work to support them. These African American students signal the need for change in school and provide insightful reasons for changing: to increase the academic success of African American students through the implementation of fair and equitable school practices for all students.

Conclusions

- There is a gap between the faculty's perceptions about the experiences they think they are providing for all students and the students' perceptions of what they are actually experiencing in school.

- These students feel a form of alienation from school because they do not perceive it as "their place."

- A culturally relevant curriculum should be implemented to validate the experiences of all students, to better meet their learning styles, and to prevent them from feeling that the only way they can succeed in school is to "act preppy" or "act White."

- The lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and African American students results in teachers misunderstanding African American students' behavior which often becomes a diagnosis for lack of intellectual ability.

This study focused on the school life stories of five African American students. Both data base descriptors--observation of the students, formal and informal talks with the faculty, staff, and administrators, and official school documents--and perceptual descriptors (the students' perceptions) were utilized to identify how they perceived school and how their perceptions of school affected their successes

and/or frustrations in school. While the interview questions were the primary data source, the other data sources were instrumental in interpreting these students' orientations toward school.

After observing in the high school of these five African American students, talking formally and informally with the principal, faculty and staff, and reading many of the official documents of the school, it is quite clear that the faculty, staff, and local, state, and national agencies perceive this school as a school of excellence meeting the needs of all students who attend it. Surprisingly, the five African American students interviewed for this study have perceptions of their school that are in direct contrast to the view held by the faculty, staff and the general public.

The faculty and staff of this school are quick to point out that this school has enjoyed a state-wide reputation for excellence since it opened in 1951 and was named a Blue Ribbon School in the 1991-1993 Secondary School Recognition Program for its perceived outstanding curriculum and school practices. Yet when these five African American students told their stories about life in this school, they clearly had a different perception of their school. These conflicting views beckon the need for increased communication among faculty and staff in the school with students who are not meeting the academic

excellence standards set by the school. This situation, which is probably not uncommon in many American schools, could be avoided by taking the time to simply ask students how they perceive their lives in school. Thus, it is extremely important to hear from students whose needs, historically, have not been met. Perhaps if we listened and heard these students' message, we would understand why many of them drop out of school, are placed in the lower academic tracks or even in special education classes.

The perceptions of these students indicated a form of alienation from school, because they did not perceive it as "their" place. In essence, they entered foreign territory on a daily basis which indicates the need for restructuring the curriculum, for employing more ethnic minorities in the school, understanding ethnic diversity, and conducting classes that will challenge African American students and give them a sense of belonging and ownership. To accomplish this goal, teachers need to be trained to implement a pedagogy that will empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Ladson-Billings (1992) calls this culturally relevant teaching. Practicing culturally relevant teaching will prevent students from feeling that the only way they can succeed in school is to "act preppy" or "act white."

Banks (1994), Bennett, 1990), Gay (1994), and Nieto (1992) all support the need for curriculum reform and suggest the implementation of a multicultural education curriculum as a means for negotiating cultural pluralism in school. The stories of these five African American students clearly called for a more pluralistic curriculum. They each stated that they wished they would have had the opportunity to learn more about their own heritage as well as the heritage of others. Hilliard (1991) refers to this kind of curriculum as a curriculum centered in truth. It can be concluded from these African American students' stories that they each desired an educational environment that would promote social justice, democratic values and beliefs, and empowerment of all students. They also wanted instruction that promoted antiracist education and included more positive information about ethnic minorities who contributed to the growth and development of this nation. A multicultural education curriculum is the best means for educating all children, not only African American children, because it allows students to develop the social skills to understand and empathize with a wide diversity of people. It also promotes antiracist education, social justice, democratic values and beliefs, and empowerment of all students. Once students are empowered their experiences and identities will be validated and equality and equity will exist. If the

cycle of inequality, oppression and injustice is to be broken, then a pluralized, culturally relevant curriculum must be implemented.

Until this study no one had asked the African American students interviewed for this study why they were frustrated or unsuccessful in school. These students' narratives focused on what the school had done to assist them in being somewhat successful and on what the school had done to cause them much frustration in school. Student successes rather than student failures gained more attention of the faculty and staff and probably served to enhance conflictual views in the school.

The school, as described in its Blue Ribbon Report (1993), is a place where

> . . . instruction makes things happen, [and]
> student achievement is the main thing happening
> as [the school] moves forward in its mission to
> teach all students. A strong philosophical
> position keeps us headed in the right direction.
> We believe all students can and must learn, and we
> guarantee the quantity, the quality, and the
> integrity of instruction. (p. 8)

The school's Blue Ribbon Report also indicated that: "The strongest tradition [of this school] is the drive to instill a lifelong love of learning and a healthy self-esteem in every student who enters (p.6). These five African American students disagree. They have not been

the beneficiaries of a quality education and they know it.
According to them, they have not been pushed to their
maximum and in three cases, they were left behind because
they couldn't keep up and no one tried to assist them.
This happens more often than not because teachers do not
individualize instruction, teach to the multiple
intelligences of students, or practice learning styles
instruction. The research of Bennett (1990) and Nieto
(1992) on multicultural education including learning
styles and multiple intelligences supports the contention
that educational excellence in our schools cannot be
achieved without educational equity.

Bennett's (1990) conclusion that teachers' failure
to utilize the learning styles of students is a means of
creating the conditions of failure for some students was
strongly supported by the data in this study. The
students in this study believed that instruction should
have allowed them the opportunity to work at slower paces,
and to have had more hands on activities. The research of
Griggs and Dunn (1989), Gardner (1993), and Gay (1994)
indeed support these findings. Griggs and Dunn (1989)
launched an investigation which concluded with
considerable variability in the field sensitive/field
independence dimension within groups of ethnic minorities.
From this finding they concluded that school curricula
must reflect both field independence and field sensitive

environments. Gardner (1993) further asserted that because people do not have the same interests and abilities, they do not learn in the same way. He concluded from his research that each human being is capable of several independent forms of information processing which he calls multiple intelligences. According to Gardner (1983) each individual possesses all seven intelligences he identified. However, at least one of the intelligences is stronger than the others. Gay (1994) endorses the work of Gardner (1983 & 1993) by identifying the skills which are most valued in the African American culture: high levels of musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences, which have traditionally been anchored in relational logic and oral, musical, and performance traditions of the African American culture. These skills, she argues, "are not highly valued, transferable to school settings, or assessed by standardized tests, given the dominant value orientation of schools" (p.81). These students' stories amplify Gay's (1994) beliefs when they inferred that teachers did not teach the way they learned best.

The individual narratives documented the desire of each student to be successful in school. They want the same opportunities as their White peers to achieve and be successful in society. They want to become productive members of society. They want to go to college and

receive college degrees. They want teachers to help them be knowledgeable. They want to be empowered to become the best they are capable of becoming. They become saddened and disappointed when they graduate high school with low grade point averages and are not able to enroll in college or enlist in the military. They strongly believe that school has failed them in that teachers should have demanded more of them and connected with their parent or guardian to get the best from them academically. Each of these students stated that had their parents and teachers been connected, they would have performed better academically. Because their teachers and parent/guardian were not in tune with what they were or were not doing academically in school, they found it easy to just "get by." They felt the only time their parent/guardian was involved with the school was when a discipline problem occurred and their parent had to come to the school to attempt to prevent their child from being suspended or receiving a punishment that was much stiffer than their white peer when they both had been accused of the same inappropriate behavior.

They also believed that teachers' training should have made them expert enough to understand that students will "goof off" and not take their education serious without their help. They believed that it is the teacher's role to expect more, care more, and require more

to get students where they need to be developmentally and academically. These students' beliefs echo Hodgkinson (1991) conclusion that teachers must develop high expectations of poverty disadvantaged and ethnic minority students and school districts must implement on-going staff development programs that will help teachers better understand the cultural experiences of these students.

The cultural experience is critical for establishing an effective relationship between African American students and teachers. Based on these students' stories, they want: (1) teachers to understand them as individuals, whose culture or socioeconomic status may be different from theirs, but who are quite capable of achieving at high academic levels; (2) teachers and administrators to listen to them when they are accused of misbehaving and then give them a fair chance to explain their behavior, take their explanations seriously, and impose fair sentences; (3) equal treatment when they are involved in an inappropriate activity with a White student--the same treatment as their White peers receive; (4) their parents to be listened to and not patronized when they come to the school on their child's behalf; (5) teachers to individualize instruction and teach them the way they learn best, slow their pace when necessary; and (6) to be rewarded for good behavior and for their

academic successes and not have their grades questioned
when they make "A's."

Their metastory also disclosed that they resented
the following practices in school: (1) being labeled a
behavior problem because their culture is misunderstood;
(2) being labeled as a slow learner because of a
stereotype associated with African Americans; (3) being
perceived as a thief, drug dealer, or "hell raiser"
because of the common stereotype that Blacks steal, deal,
and are violent; (4) being perceived as uninterested in
school because they can't keep up with the teacher's pace;
(5) having their past history of immaturity and low grades
ruin them for the rest of their school career; and (6)
having teachers embarrass them in class by talking about
them in negative ways, to other students and/or teachers;
and (7) being falsely accused and sentenced unfairly for
inappropriate behavior.

Many factors hinder African American students from
becoming as successful in school as they are capable of
becoming. These factors cause them to have little hope in
being successful in school and many of them drop out
perpetuating a life history of illiteracy and low
socioeconomic status. Graham's (1994) expectancy theory
supports this finding when she concludes that poor school
achievement and economic disadvantage have led African

Americans to have low expectations for the future and
negative self-views about their ability.

Other factors--family trauma, uncaring teachers,
teachers and administrators who refuse to listen to them,
an environment that seems to be structured to meet the
needs of only the majority students (White students), and
the fear of being perceived by other ethnic minorities as
"preppy" or "acting White,"--cause many ethnic minority
and poverty disadvantaged students who choose to remain in
school to perform well below their academic potential,
thus they get placed in the lower academic tracks in
school. Consequently these lower tracks are predominantly
occupied by poverty disadvantaged and African American
students.

According to these five African American students,
these injustices are so common that they no longer devote
time, energy or effort to thinking about them or their
effect. They feel powerless to change anything because,
as their stories revealed, they have no advocate in the
school to champion their needs and make things better
for them. Giving voice to those who are usually voiceless
in a particular social discourse is a means for empowering
those who usually have no autonomy. Educators need to
hear from today's students if excellence is to be achieved
in education. Educating all students equally and
equitably requires giving "voice" to African American,

other ethnic minority, and poverty disadvantaged students.
My only question is why haven't students, whom we have a
history of underserving, not been asked before now why
school is not meeting their needs?

All participants with the exception of Lucy
indicated that they did just enough academically to
complete the school process. They did not feel they could
become a part of the social activities at school, unless
they were all Black or predominantly Black organizations,
and they also believed they had very little say when it
came to how their school should be structured to better
meet their needs. When they tried to approach the
administration or teachers about their concerns, they got
very little attention and few if any of their requests
were honored. The demographic makeup of their school
environment made it clear that the majority of Black
students were the financially poor and underachieving
students while the White students were the financially
rich high achieving students. The way the school district
lines are drawn, most of the White students attending this
school come from the Country Club side of town while most
of the Black students come from the housing projects. In
every facet of school the Black and White students
constantly see racial and materialistic differences.
Unfortunately, students were divided along these lines and
according to these students' narratives this division

perpetuated their perception of school as a system for maintaining inequity.

The narratives of the five student participants in this research study did not reflect Perry's (1993) view of school as historically advancing the achievements of the African American race. Historically African Americans have viewed school as an institution for promoting, uplifting, and advancing the status of the entire race. All of the students in this study desired to know more about their cultural heritage, and perhaps their lack of knowledge about their own history precluded any discussion of school as a place where African American could reinforce their heritage within the larger society.

The contemporary generation of students is a product of a community which struggled with its own identity and fought for the rights enjoyed by students today. Students of the 50's and 60's clearly understood the lives of slaves. Therefore, they joined the Civil Rights movement with the knowledge of why it was important to gain the privilege to attend integrated schools, live in a certain neighborhood because they could afford it, be employed in a diverse work force, and vote. According to Perry (1993) African Americans of the past saw schooling as a connection to citizenship, leadership, and racial uplift. Thus school was the central focus of the African American struggle to redefine democracy. Today, African

American students lack the historical perspective, knowledge and understanding of what it took for them to enjoy the rights and privileges of American citizenship.

What was not heard in the students' narratives is just as important as what was heard. Omission of Perry's view of school suggests that the students in the study have accepted their position in society and will defend their right to just be. They are not concerned with the larger picture of bettering the race, but instead concentrate on self. So, if the teacher won't help them, so what? They won't fight the system, but, will acquiesce just to get by. As long as they can skate through that is all that is important. These students's narratives did not reflect the belief that learning and school as an institution for learning were primary sources for continuing the African American struggle. Their inability to relate to the Black struggle prevented them from perceiving school as an arena for change.

Implications for Making School More Inviting

Each of the students interviewed for this study received their high school diploma, but what does this diploma mean? Does it mean they can read and write properly? Does it mean they can communicate articulately? Does it mean that they can solve mathematics computations and word problems? Does it mean they are prepared to deal

with political and moral issues in society? Or does it simply mean they survived thirteen years of a schooling process that never intended to produce an educated, empowered, high esteemed African American or poverty disadvantaged student? What do we, as educators, really want for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or handicapping conditions?

If we want an equitable and excellent education for all students so that they may live productive peaceful lives, then it is time we not only listen to what these African American students have to say about how they perceive their school experience, but take the necessary action(s) to serve all children equally and equitably. It means that academicians must recognize that qualitative research is highly important when striving to improve the conditions of students. Until we listen to students, they will be the ones to continue to lose out educationally. Students have many of the answers to their educational plight, we just need to listen, plan, and then act upon their perceptions and suggestions. This, however, cannot be achieved if we do not take the time necessary to better understand the needs of all children and to address for all students, including Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and poverty disadvantaged youth, the question, "Who Am I?" African American and other ethnic

minority students must be made to feel proud of their heritage, with every intention of keeping it and of upholding it.

Teachers must be committed to helping ethnic minority students who might not be able to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered by predominantly White, mainstream establishments because their culture is different or they don't speak and write standard American English--but are quite capable of learning. These students must be encouraged to succeed despite the stumbling blocks. Teachers must realize that they can motivate African American students to succeed by treating them with worth and dignity, and letting them know that they really do care about their success in school and in life. Students need to have their culture reaffirmed. This reaffirmation cannot be achieved unless students have the opportunity to read about, observe, and discuss ethnic minority people and events that have positive historical implications for society.

Each of the African American students who shared their story indicated that they all want, in their words, "the good life," which they defined as a good job, money, a car, and a home in a decent neighborhood. They all believed very strongly that they had to graduate from high school and receive their diploma in order to be in a position to get that "good job." They also recognized the

need to have good grades. However, their stories revealed that unless they had the ability and the motivation to pretty much do it on their own, there was little hope of achieving high academic grades. These students firmly believed that most teachers, especially White teachers, will not help them because they don't really care about them. They also believed that teachers' refusal to listen to them, when they had been accused of inappropriate behavior, also resulted in their inability to achieve at higher academic levels. Although each of these students stated that they could have studied more in school to help them have better grades, they also stated that they lost their desire to do more because they knew that their rewards, for academic achievement, from teachers would be minimal and that they might even be ridiculed or embarrassed by the teacher in front of the class when they did ask questions or attempted to make a contribution to class.

These students could have received a better education, whether they were intrinsically motivated or not, had they had teachers who were committed to pushing and pulling them to get the most from them. No doubt, filling American classrooms with caring teachers who would be understanding of all students regardless of racial or cultural differences is imperative for increasing academic

success among African American students according to these student authors. The students' narratives revealed that many teachers have prejudicial attitudes and perceptions of racial and lower socioeconomic groups. These teacher attitudes and perceptions influenced their verbal and nonverbal interactions with students and impacted students' behavior and attitudes.

Unfortunately teachers often fail to realize that African American students are experiencing feelings of neglect and disrespect as a race because they are not in tune with their culture and their history of oppression. Teachers need to become sensitized to how little they know about different cultural experiences, and create an attitude of receptivity toward these difference. Teachers must come to accept students for whom and what they are. This means learning how to be nonjudgmental and nonpejorative about behavioral patterns and value systems that differ from those of teachers. It means developing an attitude of openness, a willingness to become less dogmatic about a given conception of what is the right way to behave in the classroom. When teachers care and are sincere about wanting students, all students, to learn, students know it. When teachers and other school personnel change their beliefs and behaviors about racial, ethnic, cultural, and social issues, the product will be

teachers who will truly be in the business of nurturing, developing, and producing student success. When teachers open the doors of educational opportunity for educational excellence to all students, there will be no need for students to feel that teachers don't care about them. When African American students feel that white teachers don't care, they immediately credit it to racism or classism.

Finally, the following practices should be implemented by school personnel to assist African American students in becoming more successful, academically, socially, and emotionally:

1. Develop a personal relationship with students.

2. Implement a culturally relevant curriculum.

3. Value and treat students in a fair and equitable manner.

4. Set high expectations and standards for African American students.

5. Individualize instruction.

6. Employ more African American and other ethnic minority teachers and administrators.

7. Avoid stereotyping students.

8. Judge students according to their current demonstrated behavior rather than on their past histories.

9. Be prepared to lend guidance if racial
   problems arise.

10. Give students voice.

Implications for Future Research

Recommendations for further research, based on the
findings of this study could include the following:

- Narrative research with more African American
students.

- Narrative research with other ethnic minority
students.

- Narrative research with poverty disadvantaged
students across ethnic groups.

- Narrative research with pre- and in-service
teachers.

- Narrative research to collect comparative stories
of faculty and students' perceptions of school.

- Race homogeneous research studies with other
ethnic minority groups.

- Gender and class race homogeneous studies.

- Cultural homogeneous studies.

- Longitudinal studies on the effect of a
culturally relevant curriculum and culturally relevant
teaching on the academic success of ethnic minority
students.

- Longitudinal studies to examine how effective communication among the powers to be in school with ethnic minority students and their parents affects these students' academic success.

This study is only a beginning but significant data has been collected for understanding how African American students perceive school. As a result, it is important to conduct more narrative research to explore African American students' individual perceptions of school. More student narratives would increase the pool of common themes. These themes could then be analyzed to assist in making school more inviting for African American students. Likewise, narrative research methodology could be used t collect comparative stories of faculty and students' perceptions of school. More race homogeneous research is needed to investigate the academic successes and frustrations of African American students without comparing them to any other ethnic group. Both theoretical and practical knowledge could be derived from both narrative and race homogeneous research. Students' narratives tell us about their ways of seeing and thinking--these we also need to know more about in order to better meet the needs of African American students. Race homogeneous studies could also be conducted with other ethnic minority and poverty disadvantaged students. Factors of class and gender race homogeneous studies would

be valuable to better understand differences within ethnic groups.

Race homogeneous and cultural homogeneous studies could be conducted on schooling and African American and other ethnic minority children that would emphasize achievement rather than failure in order to better understand the affective and cognitive competencies of African American children who experience high academic achievement in school. Research on the relationship of racial socialization to school achievement considering the nature and source of the epistemology of schooling transmitted to those children who succeed definitely warrants exploration.

This study identified a strong desire for more knowledge of African American and other ethnic minorities in school course content. A longitudinal study on the effect of culturally relevant teaching and a culturally relevant curriculum on the achievement of ethnic minority students would be quite beneficial. Perhaps implications of such a study would suggest a means of including ethnic minorities in the master script of the curriculum.

Narrative research studies with pre- and in-service teachers on their attitudes about working with African American students would provide a wealth of knowledge for better understanding why some teachers are successful with African American students and others are not. Teachers'

narratives could provide stories of their actual
experiences in the classroom. As Cortázzi (1993)
indicates:

> In narrative, teachers not only recall and report
> experience, they repeat it and recreate it.
> Through narrative, the meaning of experience is
> reorganized and reconstructed, both for tellers,
> and audiences. In telling their narratives,
> teachers are rehearsing, redefining and
> regenerating their personal and professional
> selves, since self is what we believe ourselves to
> be, our self-narrative. (p. 139)

These students' stories clearly signaled that a
contributing factor to their alienation from school
centered around the lack of communication among them,
their parents, and the powers that be in school.
Consequently, research on how to communicate better with
African American students and their parents would provide
a data base for making school more inviting for African
American students.

Summary of Conclusions

This study described significant factors associated
with African American students' perceptions of school that
result in their successes and frustrations in school. The
interpersonal context between students and teachers was
described as a lack of cultural synchronization, a
situation in which teachers did not share a common

understanding of these five African American students verbal and nonverbal language, their personal mannerisms, and their ways of processing information and knowledge. When teachers have a cultural responsiveness deficiency, cynical expectations by teachers and by the students themselves results. The obvious outcome for African American students is a no win situation. The students are angered by this and because no one will listen to them or try to understand their behaviors they retaliate with more inappropriate behavior. The cycle continues and African American students end up failing or being placed in low academic tracks in school. The lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and African American students often results in teachers misunderstanding African American students' behavior. Lack of understanding the culture then becomes a diagnosis for lack of intellectual ability.

There are no quick and simple solutions for creating more positive perceptions of school among African American students and thus reducing the number who drop out mentally or physically. There is no one single way to teach African American children or no single packaged program. But, according to these five African American students' narratives the foundation for success and a prerequisite for their success are strong parental advocates, fair and equal school practices, and committed,

caring, dedicated, well-trained teachers who are not hostile and who genuinely want to teach them. Once this foundation is put into place fewer African American students will be at risk culturally, socially, cognitively, and economically, and fewer students will have to say: "Give me a chance, I want to learn!"

Closing Remarks

As a multiculturalist, teacher, and parent, the most disturbing aspect of this study was the omission of the view of school as an arena for change. The fact that these students saw school or only spoke of school as a means for improving "self," signals that we as a culture may be losing the strength we once found in helping each other survive and persevere through the injustices prevailed upon us.

As a student of the 1950's and 1960's, I know that there were poor Black children who attended school with me who were academically successful. The African American community was filled with poor, working-class, and middle-class people. This was a community where everyone was concerned about everyone else. The motivation of this community was for everyone to excel academically. The community accepted the responsibility of helping young Black children recognize the importance of an education. Parents, teachers--especially Black teachers--

grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and the church
community encouraged Black children to seek excellence in
school. They constantly reminded Black children of their
history. The old Black adage that a person without
history is like a tree without roots was the driving force
in my own community to pass our history on so that it
became the source of our motivation to go to school and do
well academically.

It was not uncommon in the 1950's, when I grew up,
to find Black doctors, dentists, teachers and Black maids,
janitors, and garbage collectors living in the same
neighborhood, belonging to the same social organizations,
and attending the same church. Our heterogeneous
community at that time was stabilized by and revolved
around common middle-class values and aspirations. Today,
as the narratives of the five African American students
who participated in this study revealed, poverty
disadvantaged African American students live in isolated
homogeneous neighborhoods where they seldom see or know
people who live in two-parent families and have achieved
both academic and economic success. Rather, they are
surrounded by drug dealers, drug and alcohol abusers, and
high school dropouts. This homogeneous Black community is
often divorced from middle-class African Americans. The
break up of this community has lessened the critical

values, aspirations, and desires for the entire race to advance.

If we re to reclaim the enduring strength of our African American heritage, then we as an African American race and culture must move expeditiously to reclaim the values we once revered. We must move just as quickly to ensure that educators accept the challenge of culturally relevant teaching. Culturally relevant teaching will bring back those school practices that enabled poor Black children, forty years ago, to be academically motivated and to experience academic success in school.

Giving voice to these five African American students brings attention to the need for better serving poverty disadvantaged African American students. This study clearly parallels the research of Ogbu (1987, 1991, 1992) and Perry (1993) which suggested that the schooling of African American students is conflictual. However, Perry's (1993) argument that one cannot talk about African Americans' schooling as conflictual unless one examines the view of school as an arena for change also prevails in this study through the students' omission of this discussion in their "stories." Historically, as Perry points out, school as an arena for change has enabled African Americans to acquire decent educational opportunities against overwhelming odds. Therefore, when the linkage between school and the African American

struggle for citizenship and preparation for leadership is disconnected, the struggle to redefine democracy is mute. The narratives of these students strongly implied that they will not fight the system. When these students believed that their teachers did not care whether or not they experienced academic success, they simply responded by not doing anything, they quit and gave up in the face of academic failure. These students felt that if teachers did not care, why should they. When I was a student during the early days of desegregation, I, too, experienced teachers who made me feel as if they did not care whether or not I experienced academic success. However, as a result of my community influence, I was challenged to prove that I could achieve high academic success. I was compelled to prove these teachers wrong. Accepting this challenge, I believe, was my contribution to the African American community; a community which now needs to refocus its attention to reconnect all of its parts. Regardless of socioeconomic status, class, or gender, all African Americans must be included in the community.

The findings of this study, then, suggest a restructuring of school to include a culturally relevant curriculum and culturally relevant teaching. I have no doubt that if implemented, the critical thinking and problem-solving skills of all students would be increased.

Too, there would be an increased understanding of diversity which would cultivate a sense of harmony among students. Having a curriculum that is inclusive of the contributions of all Americans would promote self-esteem and be a confidence booster for ethnic minority students. This would possibly eliminte poverty disadvantaged ethnic minority students from feeling any form of alienation in school. More importantly, no student would experience the feeling of being left out or excluded from the knowledge foundation upon which all learning in school is based.

I am also confident that one all teachers become "bicultural--thoroughly knowledgeable and sensitive about African American children's language, style of presentation, community values, traditions, legends, myths, history, symbols, and norms" (Irvine, 1991, p. 126)--and have high expectations for all students, achievement and acaemic success will be experienced by all students. Consequently, the frustrations African American and other ethnic minority students experience in school will decrease and eventually become extinct. Their successes, on the other hand, will increase.

Another important finding from this study that merits attention is the current debate about the education of the African American male. Ricky's narrative clearly supports the alarm regarding the educational plight of African American males in school today. Ricky's needs as

a student were definitely not met while a student in his
local high school. Most of the teachers and
administrators in this system gave Ricky little
opportunity to change his past history of misbehavior in
school. They were not willing to believe that he really
wanted to learn or that he could learn. Ricky's decision
to behave appropriately following the school's standards,
allowed him to slip through the system somewhat unnoticed.
As long as he behaved and didn't cause any problems for
his teachers, they just let him be. Fortunately, he did
not get placed in special education classes as is often
the case for many Black males whose cultural behaviors are
misunderstood. Ricky's story indicated the Black males
can be, and want to be saved from academic failure. The
school must give more attention to meeting the needs of
this specific ethnic and gender group.

Although the focus of this study was poverty
disadvantaged African American students, if the narratives
of other poverty disadvantaged students had been collected
and analyzed, I predict that some of the same themes that
were identified in this study would be identified in their
stories. I wonder what the results would have been if the
narratives had been taken from middle-class African
American students. How would their themes compare with
the students' themes of this study?

As a multiculturalist I believe that education is a human enterprise with a fundamental responsibility to nurture the humanity of all students. Therefore, the findings of this study have implications for all students but are especially significant for those students who are traditionally left out of the system. My goal for all students is that they have the opportunity to experience both academic and social success while in school and ultimately in life. As a teacher, I want all students to receive an excellent and equitable education that will prepare them for future success. Ideally educators must create a school environment where all students receive a high quality education. To achieve quality education for all students, we must have a vision and we must also have the will to act. That vision must include how to achieve educational quality, equity, and excellence for all students.

The narratives of the five African American students who participated in this study provided insightful information that stressed the importance of "giving voice" to the voiceless. Their narratives provided an impetus for acting instead of giving "lip service" for what needs to be done to ensure that we provide an equal and equitable education for all children. Through their voices we can identify the strategies

necessary for teaching the whole child and thus increasing the number of students who experience success in school.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

Consent to Act as a Human Subject
(Short Form)

Subjects's Name_____

Date of Consent_____

I hereby consent to participate in the research project entitled _An Analysis of African_

___American High School Seniors' Narratives_____

An explanation of the procedures and/or investigations to be followed and their purpose,

including any experimental procedures, was provided to me by __Donna H. Oliver____
_____. _Donna Oliver____ informed me about benefits, risks, or discomforts that I
might expect. Any questions I had regarding the research were answered. _Donna Oliver_____
told me that I am free to withdraw my consent to participate in this research at anytime without penalty or
prejudice. _Donna Oliver_____ also told me that I will not be identified by name as a
participant in this project.

The research and this consent form have been approved by the UNC Greensboro Institutional Review
Board which insures that research involving people follow federal regulations. Questions regarding the
research and my rights as a participant in this study can be answered by calling Beverly Maddox-Britt at
334-5878. Other kinds of questions will be answered by Dr. David Strahan at 334-3449.

Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to me if the information might
affect my willingness to continue participation in the project.

_Donna Oliver_____ has described any compensation/treatments or the lack of
compensation/treatments I will receive should I be injured.

_____   _____
Subject's Signature   Witness to Oral Presentation
                                 and Signature of Subject

If subject is a minor or for some other reason unable to sign, complete the following:

Subject is ___ years old or unable to sign because _____

	Content Outline For Oral Presentation
	1. Explanation of research purpose and procedures
	2. Benefits
	3. Risks
_____	4. The opportunity to withdraw without penalty
Parent(s)/Guardian Signature	5. The opportunity to ask questions
	6. The amount of time required of subjects
CONSENT FORM 1/94	7. Confidentiality of data and final disposition of data

APPENDIX B

GENERAL INFORMATION FROM

STUDENT GENERAL INFORMATION FORM
Please answer each of the following questions.

Name _____ Date of Birth _____ Age _____
    (first, middle & last)
Address _____ Home Phone _____
                                               (Optional)

_____

Grade _____ Years in Attendance at this school _____

Grade Point Average (GPA-According to Records Office) _____/_____
                                                  (letter grade) (numerical GPA)

Major courses taken: _____ General _____ College Preparatory _____ Honors

Have you had to repeat courses?: _____ Yes _____ No If yes, name them:

_____

_____

Have you had any disciplinary action taken against you by the school as a result of any behavioral problems? _____ Yes _____ No

- -

Who lives at home with you: (Check below)

You live alone	____ Yes ____ No	
Father	____ Yes ____ No	
Mother	____ Yes ____ No	
Grandmother	____ Yes ____ No	
Grandfather	____ Yes ____ No	
Brothers	____ Yes ____ No	How many? ____
Sisters	____ Yes ____ No	How many? ____
Nieces	____ Yes ____ No	How many? ____
Nephews	____ Yes ____ No	How many? ____
Aunts	____ Yes ____ No	How many? ____
Uncles	____ Yes ____ No	How many? ____
Cousins	____ Yes ____ No	How many? ____

- -

Does your mother have a job outside of your home? _____ Yes _____ No

How many brothers and sisters do you have? _____ Brothers _____ Sisters

APPENDIX C

DAILY SCHEDULE

Daily Schedule
Spring Semester, 1995

Name_____   Homeroom_____
                                          _____

Period	Time Begin-End	Subject	Teacher	Room Number
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

APPENDIX D

EXTRACURRICULAR AND COMMUNITY

ACTIVITIES FORM

Name_____

Date_____

Please indicate below the activities you are currently involved in, such as clubs and organizations.

<u>School</u>

<u>Church</u>

<u>Community</u>

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Tell me the story of your life as a student beginning with kindergarten or as early as possible.

2. Tell me how your family, i.e., mom, dad, grandparents, siblings, etc., influenced you as a student.

3. Tell me about the teachers you've had throughout school. What have they done to help you want to learn and continue your education?

4. Tell me about your best (most favorite) teacher in twelve/thirteen years. Your worst (least favorite) teacher.

5. If you could change one thing about your schooling that would have enabled you to have been more motivated about school and learning, or that would have made life happier for you as a student, what would it be?

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT

PARTICIPANTS, SESSION II

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS
Session II

1. Tell me how you would describe school by completing this
   sentence: School is a place . . . .

                        -or-

   Choose one of the following statements and tell why you chose
   it.

   I view school as a system for maintaining inequity.

   I view school as an arena for change.

2. Was school structured to meet your needs as an ethnic minority.
   Tell me about it.

3. What specific factors have affected how you perceive school?

4. Has the school curriculum affirmed who you are culturally? Tell
   me about it.

5. What do you see as having been barriers to your success in
   school?

6. If you could tell teachers and administrators 3 or 4 things they
   could do to better meet the needs of African American students,
   what would they be?

7. What could you tell your mom, teachers, principals, school
   secretaries, or peers that they could have done to have helped
   your school experience been more positive?

8. Were you in the basic, technical, or academic track at school?
   Why?

9. Complete this sentence: My life in school has been like a_____.

10. What is your most positive memorable experience in school, from
    K-12?

    What is your most negative memorable experience in school, from
    K-12?