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The topic of turning around a struggling or high priority school is currently a heavily contested space with involvement from federal, state, local and private entities all jockeying to influence the school turnaround agenda. While there are many voices affecting the school turnaround movement, one voice is alarmingly muted in the discussion: the voices of those charged with transforming these schools. Research shows that high priority schools are likely to be led by African Americans. This qualitative study examines the experiences, perceptions, and thoughts of four African American males who lead high priority schools in North Carolina. It investigates the type and quality of support they received from their communities and interrogates the effect leading a high priority school has upon them. Concurrently, utilizing a Critical Race Theory (CRT) conceptual framework, the school leaders' thoughts surrounding the role race plays in their being assigned to a high priority school and the role working in a turnaround school may play in their career progression (or regression) are examined.

The intent of the study is to extend the research base in educational leadership relating to this marginalized group while at the same time capitalizing on the counter-narrative aspect of Critical Race Theory to give voice to this segment of educational leaders. The findings of this study illuminate the close kinship these leaders feel towards their school and their students, while also showing the depths, despair, and solitary existence leading a high priority school can elicit. Leaders of high priority schools are vulnerable to high levels of career derailment most often aligned to the negative stature of

the schools they lead. As such, the leaders of these schools are in dire need of support to help them elevate their schools to higher levels of academic success. The research that emerges from this study holds the potential to help add a human element to the school turnaround puzzle by recognizing the school leader as a human and not a super principal. This understanding could help lead to policies and procedures more fully grounded in supporting educational leaders, allowing them to better serve their school and its student population.

INVISIBLE TO VISIBLE, UNHEARD TO HEARD: AFRICAN AMERICAN

PRINCIPALS LEADING HIGH PRIORITY SCHOOLS

IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

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To my sources of inspiration.

My Grandmother, Mary Beatrice Lunsford

My Aunt, Fannie Talley Blaine

My Mother, Johnnie Wilkerson

Daryn and Dayna Wilkerson

And the mighty Men of Black and Old Gold, The Brothers of

The Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In North Carolina, schools designated as "turnaround" or "high priority" have historically been marked by high concentrations of minority students and low levels of academic attainment, and have generally been located in communities with low socio-economic standings (areas from which the schools draw their student population). Interestingly enough, these schools have also been overwhelmingly led by African American principals. During the 2011-2012 academic years 72.1 percent of the bottom 5% of North Carolina's schools as identified in the state's Race to the Top grant application was led by African American principals (NC DPI, 2011). Due to the precarious position in which turnaround schools (or high priority schools) find themselves, the leadership (principals) of these schools need an even greater degree of support in order to provide high levels of success for all (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Supporting principals, especially principals of high priority schools, should be a moral imperative in promoting a fair and equitable educational system.

This study captures and explores the experiences, perceptions, and thoughts of male, African American principals who have led (or are leading) turnaround schools in North Carolina. Through this study, I attempt to expand the current research on African American male principals in high priority schools by: examining the principals'

experiences leading turnaround schools; investigating the type and quality of support they received from their communities (including their staffs, their Central offices, their Superintendents, and / or the State educational department); and, interrogating the effect leading a high priority school has upon them. Concurrently, utilizing a Critical Race Theory (CRT) conceptual framework, I examine the school leader's thoughts surrounding the role race plays in their being assigned to a high priority school and the role working in a turnaround school may play in their career progression (or regression).

Chapter one provides the background against which this study is undertaken. In this chapter, I introduce some of the demographic data that influences the study and the underpinnings of Critical Race Theory as it relates to this study. This chapter will also include a statement of the research problem contextualizing the current issues faced by educational leaders serving in high priority school communities. The chapter provides the research framework, research questions that support the study, and key terms that are related to a thorough understanding of the subject matter.   Chapter one also frames the purpose of this study and attempts to situate the significance of the study's findings in an attempt to extend the research base on this subject in the field of educational leadership.

A key concept in the growth and development of principals is providing support (Buntrock & Robinson, 2011; Seashore-Louis, Wahlstrom, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). A failure on the part of district leadership to provide the requisite levels of support, to invest in the development of its organizational members (principals), and to take the chance that leaders (principals) need to continuously learn, and a failure on the part of district leadership to create environments where people (principals and teachers)

will take risks, tackle difficult problems and feel supported is an organizational malfunction that hinders the academic growth of the students served (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Brubaker & Coble, 2007; Buntrock & Robinson, 2011). This basic tenet underscores the importance of growing and developing principals.   This importance magnifies when viewed through the dual lens of race and education in schools that have substantial challenges. In addition, denying children access to a sound, basic education while also failing to adequately support the leaders of challenged schools obstructs the professional development of both the teachers and principals of the schools while also potentially serving as a "career-derailing" event (Brubaker & Coble, 2007, p. 25) for the principals charged with leading the school.   As such, there is an intrinsic and indispensable need of support for the principals tasked with leading turnaround schools. The experiences of the male, African American principals who participated in this study help establish a reference point from which to examine leadership in North Carolina's high priority schools.

Background

Beginning in 1997 the state of North Carolina began providing support to schools having difficulty in meeting academic performance criteria. From 1997 to 2006, the state of North Carolina, by way of the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction utilized an Assistance Team model. Assistance Teams were assigned to schools deemed as low performing (as defined by state statute) in an effort to provide intensive support. By 2006, the state recognized that the time was ripe to try something new and the state launched the Turnaround Schools Program.   In the turnaround schools,

instructional coaches (who provided teacher support) and leadership coaches (who provided building-level administrative support) were assigned to schools. Of the 35 schools the Turnaround agency was initially tasked to support, 27 were headed by African American administrators. Approximately eighty percent (77%) of the lowest performing schools in the state were headed by African Americans. As I processed this information, I wondered about the support given to these African American administrators: *Is it given? What type? How much? What would they prefer to have? What do they need?* I wondered about their career prospects as a result of leading a turnaround school: *What happens to a principal who turns around a school? What happens to a principal who is unsuccessful at turning around a high priority school?* And I wondered: Why there is a preponderance of African American administrators placed at low performing schools in the state? These questions not only piqued my curiosity but they also have shaped my research agenda and as such the direction of this study.

In 2010, the State of North Carolina was one of twelve states (and the District of Columbia) to receive a Race to the Top (*RttT*) grant from the Federal government. By virtue of the increased focus on low performing schools attendant to *RttT*, the issue of principal support has also taken on a greater degree of significance. As a result of receiving the *RttT* grant, North Carolina has agreed to provide focused interventions to the bottom 5% of the schools in the state in an effort to turn around their academic performance. As such, this brings the number of schools intensively served by the Department of Public Instruction to 118. The percentage of these schools headed by an African American principal is now 72.1%. While this figure is slightly less than the

percentage of turnaround schools headed by African American principals in 2006-2007, the total number of 118 schools today also represents a sizable increase from the 35 schools the Department's Turnaround agency started with in 2006. This figure further highlights the high concentration of African American principals at high-priority schools. Supporting these principals, leaders who serve an already fragile educational populace, is critical to the efforts of turning around a school (Buntrock & Robinson, 2011). The quality and type of support necessary to help these leaders contribute to providing an equitable education for their students is essential. In addition, effectively supporting principals also advances a social justice notion in terms of enhancing the life and career prospects of the leaders of high priority schools.

Statement of the Problem

What are the experiences of the African American males who led high priority schools in North Carolina? What circumstances do they face and how are they supported as they work to provide the students they serve a fair and equitable education? And what impact (personally or professionally) does carrying out this arduous task have on these men? These questions frame the direction of this study. The precarious academic position of turnaround schools demands an intensive amount of support in order to elevate their performance and improve student outcomes (Buntrock & Robinson, 2011). Equally as important is the prospect of adequately preparing and supporting the leadership in these schools. Buntrock and Robinson (2011) state that the leaders of high priority schools, by virtue of the position these institutions find themselves in, necessitates an even greater degree of support (p.24) as they attempt to provide high

levels of success for all. As such, examining the support structures that promote or

impede the success of these principals proposes a fascinating study. Additionally, as I

examined the broad topic of African American leadership in education, I found numerous

articles that focused on educational leadership from a generic African American

perspective or directly examining the plight of female African American administrators

(Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Loder,

2005; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012). I also found literature that focused on African

American educational leadership in urban schools (Gooden, 2005; Gooden, 2012;

Khalifa, 2012). However, this study intends on specifically targeting the experiences of

African American male principals who currently lead high priority schools.

Consequently, by focusing on this population and this particular subject area, this study

seeks to expand the research bases of African American educational leadership,

leadership in high priority schools, and educational leadership from the minority male

perspective by giving voice to their leadership experiences through a Critical Race

Theoretical perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions and experiences of African

American males who are employed as principals of high priority schools. More

specifically this study used a responsive interviewing model that incorporated open-

ended questions to capture principal perceptions. Authors Rubin and Rubin (2005) state

responsive interviewing is a qualitative research technique that "assumes that what

people have experienced is true, and that by sharing these experiences, the researcher can

enter the interviewee's world" (p.7). Respondents were asked to share their perceptions concerning whether or not race played a factor in their appointment to their school, their perceptions of the support they did (or did not receive), and the global impact (both personally and professionally) leading a high priority school has upon their lives. After collecting the interview data, I analyzed principal experiences from the perspective of each individual, applying a Critical Race Theory framework to frame participant's experiences (Milner, 2007; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). The usage of participant's counter-stories allowed these minority educators a platform to share their experiences in an effort to shape their future professional practices and maybe influence those of others as well. Counter-stories also referred to as counter-narratives are tools espoused by Critical Race Theorists that allow persons or groups of persons who are marginalized or silenced groups to share their own depiction of the reality that they see (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of counter stories provides the opportunity for those marginalized to have their voices heard as their stories are crafted in their own words reflecting their own reality. The study considers many of the assumptions, hiring practices, and positionality the research subjects may have experienced while also seeking to identify trends and recommendations for improving the support of, career prospects, and practice of African American male principals who lead high priority schools. In short, in the spirit of CRT's counter-narrative theme, this study seeks to give voice to these leaders.

While looking at their perception of impact on their career prospects and opportunities, I also explore the career derailment and promotion prospects of these

African American principals. I look at whether or not they are destined to always or

usually serve schools considered to be "turnaround" or "high priority" (these terms will

be used interchangeably in my work) or if they are able to be principals in other schools..

The intent was to test the theory advocated by McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007),

who examined the type of schools African American principals are most likely to lead

and arrived at the conclusion that African American principals are most likely to be

placed in schools that have an overwhelmingly African American student body.

Operating at the core of this study is the examination of the levels and sources of

support each principal received in order to ensure success for their schools. Special

attention has been paid to exploring the adequacy of support from the federal and state

government and in attempting to identify levels of local support (i.e., Central Office

support, Superintendent support, etc.) available to ensure the success of the principals

studied. Principals were also asked to detail the support they believe that they need in

order to be successful at a turnaround school as another means of introducing the counter-

narrative in providing voice to the African American principals studied. It is the intent

that this study will extend the research base regarding this segment of the educational

population while also advancing the ideal of counter-narratives as means of providing

voice to this historically marginalized group, allowing them to tell their story in their own

words. Through the use of interviews, the narrative form, the analysis of documental

data, and field observations this study hopes to capture the feelings and attitudes towards

the job of leading a high priority high school from the perspective of African American

males. These men joust at the metaphorical windmills of historical deficits, limitations,

and poverty while seeking to provide the students they serve with a quality education. But at what cost… personally or professionally?

Significance of the Study

African American principals have been found to be far more likely to lead schools serving large percentages of minority students, high concentrations of students affected by generational poverty, and schools that are plagued by constant and persistent patterns of low academic performance (Brown, 2005; McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007). In addition, research by authors Seashore-Louis, Wahlstrom, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) shows that "principals need to be in their schools for about five years in order to have a positive impact" (p. 168). Adding even more impact to this notion is the fact that, according to the Seashore-Louis, et al. (2010), when examining the tenure of principals of high priority schools, that the average tenure of the leadership is less than three years. More to the point, the leadership in place at high priority schools (generally African Americans) may not receive the requisite amount of time commonly recommended to implement positive, impactful change in their schools due to the intensity to turn schools around quickly (Fullan, 2001; Seashore-Louis, Wahlstrom, Leithwood, and Anderson, 2010). This study examines the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male principals who lead high priority, comprehensive high schools in North Carolina. The study also aims to examine the impact leading high priority schools have on its leaders. The study investigates the placement, support, and outcomes of principals in high priority schools in an effort to contribute valuable information on the experiences of African American males who lead the schools.

School district, Central Office personnel, and Superintendents may utilize the findings presented in this study as they critically examine human resource practices as they relate to the placement and support of male, African American leaders in high priority schools. Providing dedicated mentors, extending contract terms, or preferential support for teacher hiring (and/or dismissal), are but a few of the suggestions that school districts may employ as they support the work of principals of high priority schools.   In addition, school districts and Superintendents may re-evaluate recruitment and retention strategies for principals of high priority schools that may emerge from the findings of this study. Schools of Education and Leadership Academies may find the results of this study beneficial as they work to prepare leaders especially equipped to lead high priority schools.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to help contextualize the language used in my study while also providing a common language in order to promote a deeper understanding.

High priority school / low performing school - In the state of North Carolina schools become designated as low performing or low achieving (terms used interchangeably) as a result of registering a performance composite (as measured by End-of-Course or End-of-Grade tests) below 50% two of three consecutive years or having a graduation rate of below 60% in one of two previous years. Accordingly, due to the consistent pattern of low academic performance as described above, providing support for the school becomes a high priority (also used interchangeably).

Turnaround School / Model – School turnaround efforts are those actions taken at state, district, and school levels to improve student performance in the group of lowest performing schools (Dorman & Clotfelter, 2013). As a result of prior academic performance a school receives its designation as a school to be turned around. In short, a turnaround school is targeted for intensive support geared to re-culture or restructure a school with persistently low achievement levels as measured by End-of-Course / End-of-Grade tests or graduation rates. The schools receive tiered levels of support ranging from instructional coaching or leadership coaching to central office support (Dorman & Clotfelter, 2013).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) - Critical Race Theory is defined by Delgado and Stefancic in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (2001) as a movement "interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 1). The authors proceed to state that acting upon its foundational element of activism, CRT "not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out to not only ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better" (p. 2). Using this theoretical framework, this study examines the role race has in the placement of African American principals in transformation schools in North Carolina.

Race to the Top program (RttT) - The Race to the Top initiative was a competitive grants program funded by the Federal government and United States Department of Education. The grant program encouraged and rewarded educational reform and

innovation in American schools. Grant recipients were assessed in terms of their readiness to engage in four key areas:

- Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;

- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals;

- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and

- Turning around our lowest-performing schools (US DOE, 2009).

Invest in Innovation (I3) Fund - According to the United States Department of Education's website, the I3 fund, which is part of the historic $5 billion investment in school reform in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), will support local efforts to start or expand research-based innovative programs that help close the achievement gap and improve outcomes for students (US DOE, 2009). The I3 fund set aside approximately 650 million dollars to "drive reform, reward excellence and dramatically improve the nation's schools" (US DOE, 2009).

Mentor – A mentor is someone who provides counsel and moral support for building level administrators. "Good mentors provide the day-to-day feedback and coaching" (Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2007, p.11) to help grow and develop educational leaders. Mentors are defined by Kay, Hagan, and Parker (2009) as "experienced advisors and supporters who guide and train a junior colleague" (p.70)

Conceptual Framework: Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the early to mid-1970s as an outgrowth of a legal movement known as Critical Legal Studies (CLS) as a growing number of lawyers, activists, and scholars began to realize that many of the victories of the Civil Rights Movement were slowly being eroded. These activists were interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 4). So as the hard fought gains of the Civil Rights Movement were being rolled back or those in power were finding creative ways to circumvent these gains, the fertile soil was being prepared to launch the intellectual theory known as CRT.

From an educational standpoint, I frame the historical plight of African American educators in the post-*Brown* era through a Critical Race Theory lens. Historically, African Americans have long identified education as rung on the ladder of social equality. Be it the quest to learn to read or write during the days of slavery or the establishment of separate schools during times of segregation, African Americans have long sought a quality education. In 1954, the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision mandated the abolishment of legally segregated schools. The *Brown* decision sought to ensure the integration of public schools both from a student standpoint and from an employee standpoint. The impact of *Brown* on the employment of African American educators in the periods following the historic decision was devastating professionally and economically and the impact of the decision extends to current times (James 1970; Karpinski, 2006; Tillman, 2004a; Tillman, 2004b).

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Pre-*Brown*, African American educators were often the most highly educated members of their community. They also, by virtue of their educational and professional accomplishments were also some of the most financially successful members of the community as well. The economic impact of these financially successful individuals carried a trickle-down aspect when these individuals circulated their dollars through Black-owned businesses. Against this historical backdrop, when the participants in the Southern power structure were in the midst of deciding how to implement the mandate of integrating public schools, they came up with variety of methods that diminished the social, financial and professional impact of African American leaders of the day. Implementing *Brown,* in an effort to mitigate the impact of the historic decision, many school districts and citizens not in favor of integration used different methods ranging from the establishment of private schools (where the school's population could be better regulated) to the closing of many segregated (all-black) schools. Either of these two methods led to the dismissal or demotion of many African American educational leaders / principals. By many accounts, these leaders, once well respected in their former educational communities pre-*Brown* now found themselves demoted to assistant principals in integrated schools, or forced to take positions as teachers in these same integrated schools, or found themselves unemployed (James, 1970; Karpinski, 2006; Tillman, 2004a; Tillman, 2004b).

As early as 1970, author J.C. James recognized the perilous plight of African American principals in the post-*Brown* era. James (1970) not only noted the great lengths that the Southern school systems took to circumvent the implementation of the

Brown decision but also noted the ensuing result of implementing *Brown*, which rendered African American principals "a prime victim of this disaster" (p. 18). During the 50th Anniversary of the *Brown* decision Linda Tillman (2004b) posited "the displacement of Black educators after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was an extraordinary social injustice" (p.280). While the integration the *Brown* brain trust desired did come slowly, the side effects of the *Brown* decision, such as the displacement that Tillman references, have had long lasting effects, many of which have helped birth the CRT movement.

> At its core CRT is committed to advocating for justice for people who find themselves' occupying positions on the margins – for those who hold 'minority' status. It directs attention to the ways in which structural arrangements inhibit and disadvantage some more than others in our society. CRT seeks to give voice to those who are victimized and displaced. Critical Race Theory seeks not only to name, but to be a tool for rooting out inequality. (Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008, p. 8)

Another "side effect" of the *Brown* decision "and the subsequent desegregation of America's schools was the loss of Black principals and thus the exclusion of voices and perspectives that were critical to the education of Black children" (Tillman, 2004b, p.294). Actions such as these render African American principals to "occupy positions on the margins" of educational society necessitating the need for CRT. While CRT emerged from the legal field, there are numerous intersections that apply to the educational arena; among these are the continued importance of race in education, the value of property rights in terms of access to education and jobs in education, and the critical need to capture the "excluded voices" of which Tillman (2004a) speaks. More

directly, employing a Critical Race Theoretical framework provides the opportunity to interrogate the very premises that education has been established upon in an effort to ensure that equity is afforded to all.

According to Critical Race Theorists, race is merely a social construct. Critical Race Theorists believe that the existence of racism is the norm, "par for the course" per se. More to the point, Critical Race Theorists critique the ideal that racism is "normal" in American society because it "appears both normal and natural to the people in this culture" (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 21). Loosely translated, "it's always been that way and it always will." The late Professor Derrick Bell, in his 1992 work, *Faces at the Bottom of The Well*, posits the notion that racism appears as a "permanent component of American Life" (Bell, 1992, p. 13). This realization requires Critical Race Theorists to interrogate issues of race in an effort to draw attention to unfair, inequitable conditions, and pose solutions to the injustices caused by the permanence of racism in our society. This ideal of racism as a permanent component of American life may manifest itself in many ways; for the purposes of this study I examine the issue of predominantly placing African American males in high priority schools as being just one example. Many of the core tenets of Critical Race Theory are particularly difficult conversation points, but they are necessary conversation points. A failure to address these issues in a critical, non-confrontational manner limits America's ability to move beyond the privileges centuries of history have afforded to the White majority while denying others.

Another central tenet of Critical Race Theory is the notion of Whiteness as property (Harris 1995). Critical Race Theorists assert that the issue of property ownership and the fictional construction of "white" are inextricably linked. Originally emanating from John Locke's "life, liberty, and property" and then extending into different historical eras in our country's history, the concept of Whiteness as property bestows power to a chosen few. Extending into the realm of education, many principals of color often do not have access to the social capital of the majority culture. A form of social capital that allows principals of color to be invited (and feel comfortable and accepted) into the majority culture's churches, country clubs, or other social events; where privilege and power are brokered and social capital is exchanged sometimes between district administrators and principals and prospective administrators (Echols 2006). These are actions that are often times extensions of both social capital and privilege that may also influence the principal placement process. The absence of effectively participating in activities, which necessitate social capital, may also have career-derailing effects on principals of color if these same principals do not have the same equal access to these informal circles as their white peers. Therefore, supporting and helping principals of color, especially those of high priority schools is essential to helping these leaders experience success.

Counter-storytelling, another essential component of Critical Race Theory, is defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) as a method of telling a story that intends to cast doubt upon the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). Counter-

storytelling highlights the voices of those traditionally silenced through

qualitative narrative data. It particularly provides people of color avenues to

challenge privileged and/or racist discourses by illuminating the thoughts,

feelings, and experiences of minority group members. Counter-storytelling then

uses the discourse to explore race relations in an effort to challenge the dominant

story. For the purposes of this analysis dominant stories are defined as narratives

told by non-minorities. Opposing these dominant stories are counter-narratives or

counter-stories that lend voice to marginalized entities (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Delgado (1989) elucidates the importance of this concept by stating that dominant

stories allow members of the in-group to maintain their hierarchal positionality in

relation to out-group members and "provides a shared reality where its own

superior position is viewed as natural" (p.229). Counter-storytelling challenges

this paradigm by providing voice to historically marginalized groups, allowing

them to tell their story in their own words in the form of stories referred to as

"counter-stories" or "counter-narratives." Counter-narratives typically challenge

privileged narratives that promote racial stereotypes, colorblind analyses, and/or

racist portrayals of history and social and political phenomena. In this study, I

utilize counter-storytelling as a conceptual framework allowing participants to

shape and craft a narrative of their experiences in leading high priority schools.

In examining the plight of African American male principals who lead high

priority schools, normative statements such as "I treat everyone the same" or "I don't see

race" or "one day an African American can…" all hold the power to retard the growth

and development of these school leaders because they fail to take into consideration the unique, nuanced experiences of people of color. Experiences such as these must be subject to a deeper analysis using CRT. Furthermore, capturing these experiences is vital to the field of education and educational research. Researcher Lisa Delpit (1998) captures this importance by stating that non-minority educators may consciously or unconsciously silence the experiences and viewpoints of minorities by failing to acknowledge their viewpoints. Consequently, as a result of failing to acknowledge minority viewpoints, minorities may stop expressing their experiences (Delpit 1998). By capturing the experiences of these African American male principals through the framework provided by Critical Race Theory, I hope to help the educational community promote, protect, and preserve this fragile community of educators. It is my intent that this study empowers these leaders to more effectively serve what in many cases are the neediest segments of our population while at the same time ensures that all students have a fair and equitable opportunity at a sound, basic education.

In order to further understand the perilous status of African American principals, I submit a deeper look at Critical Race Theory and its application to contemporary school leadership is in order. Gooden (2012) narrows the focus of Critical Race Theory and applies it to school leadership. I posit, and I would think that Gooden would agree (Gooden, Personal Conversation, November 19, 2011), that African American principals (especially African American male principals) find themselves in a very precarious position. Many are so dedicated to their mission (fulfilling the idea that "I want to work with a certain population") of serving those less fortunate that they may fail to see their

own peril coming around the corner. African Americans are more likely to lead a high poverty, lower socio-economically situated, under-performing academic school with a high minority student concentration. The school has a high probability of being overwhelmingly staffed by ill-prepared, ill-equipped, teaching staff.   Combine all of these items and you will most likely find an African American principal at the helm of this school. Research conducted by McCray, Wright, & Beachum (2007) indicate that African Americans are more apt to lead this type of school than a school fitting the converse of the description that I have provided. If this vision is true, African American principals must know how to "advocate, recognize, and address race-based inequities" (Gooden, 2012, p. 82) before these issues consume them and constitute a career derailing prophecy. "The time has surely come to impress upon more African American principals to do this lest we risk losing more dedicated educators who burn out fighting racism in a race-neutral, colorblind way" (Gooden, 2012, p. 82).

Critical Race Theorists Richard Delgado and Gloria Ladson-Billings further frame the usage of CRT in contemporary education. Delgado (2001) states, "everything must change at once, otherwise the system merely swallows up the small improvement one has made, and everything remains the same" (p. 57). Gloria Ladson-Billings also posits her thoughts on the future of Critical Race Theory from an educational perspective. Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings (2009) insist that:

> Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it. We will have to take bold and sometimes unpopular positions. We may be pilloried, figuratively, or at least vilified for these stands. (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 33)

The prodding to action, promoted by the words of Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings and Taylor, should serve as a catalyst for Critical Race Theorists and for that matter all educators to stand up and band together to make the appropriate changes to propel the American educational system forward. America needs change agents; the children in American schools need change agents. And I submit that it is the duty of all concerned about the future prospects of education, of those concerned with equity and social justice, and of those charged with ensuring that challenged schools are led by effective change agents to act now to guarantee the basic right of education to all.

Research Questions

In this study I examine one major, focusing question: *What are the experiences of African American male principals who lead high priority schools?* Emanating from this basic question I have identified three sub-questions that will allow me to delve deeper into my subjects and their experiences. The sub-questions each center on examining the principals' experiences leading a turnaround school. For example, I explore the factors and the preparation of these leaders that lead them to a turnaround school. I also investigate the type and quality of support they receive and examine the effect leading a high priority school has on these men, both personally and professionally. More directly, the following encapsulate the sub-questions that drive this study.

1. What factors lead to a principal's interest in and appointment to leadership in a turnaround school?
2. What support (type, quality, etc.) do turnaround principals experience?
3. What effect / impact does leading a high priority school on have on these principals?

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Limitations

This study has the following limitations.

Number of school districts - The number of school districts (and therefore subjects) partnered with in this study is limited by district constraints and participation. Some of the principals in North Carolina that were approached to participate in this study were employed in districts that wanted equal control over the data included in this study which opened the potential to influence the outcome of the study. Principals in these districts, while male, African American, and leaders of high priority schools were omitted from this study due to district constraints.

Subject employment – Principals in high priority schools are constantly changing as districts continuously seek that "one best hope" to turn their schools around. To this end, as districts replace principals, several of the gentlemen I approached were removed during the course of data collection. The principals then either moved away from the area or declined further participation in the study. Consequently, the data from these former principals was not collected and they were excluded from this study as their employment was terminated.

Time - The study is limited by the amount of time that the researcher spent with each participant. While over 30 hours were spent with the four participants, the researcher is left to wonder what else is left to be uncovered from these men. More attention to this limitation will be devoted in chapter five.

Delimitations

The findings in this study examines the perceptions of four African American, male principals, who lead high priority schools in North Carolina. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) state that delimitations are "self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study" (p.134) for the purposes of this study, only four principals, who fit the research criteria were solicited to participate in this study. These participants were selected based upon the fact that they fit predetermined characteristics, i.e. African American, male, and employed in a high priority school at the time of the study. Two interviews were conducted with each of the four subjects during the spring semester of 2013 extending into the fall semester of 2013. As such, the method of data collection was delimited to interviews conducted in person. The researcher also directly observed participants in their actual educational setting as they went about their daily activities of leading the high priority school.

The findings of this study may or may not be transferrable to other African American principals. However, the researcher attempted to mitigate this limitation by employing intentionality in selecting the subjects participating in the study. The researcher also employed intentionality by directly studying principals (the subjects participating) that cover the span of the state and by ensuring that participants serve in varied districts: rural, urban, and suburban and large districts as well as small.

Assumptions

This study was conducted based upon the following assumptions: (1) that each respondent answered each question asked truthfully and honestly; and (2) that this sample

of respondents is typical of the total population of male, African American principals of high priority schools in North Carolina.

Organization of Study

Chapter one of this study is comprised of the introduction, the background, and a statement of the problem relating to African American males who lead high priority schools in North Carolina. This chapter also included the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and a section dedicated to providing an understanding of the key terms relating to this topic. The conceptual framework underpinning this study is also included in this section as well as a listing of the research questions guiding the study. In addition, the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions that operate within this study are also addressed. Chapter two provides a literature review, which begins with an examination of the current educational trend of turnaround schools and examines African American educational leadership research from both a historical and a contemporary context. The chapter also examines various themes such as Critical Race Theory, and recruitment, retention, and career progression trend in education. In addition, chapter two also includes an examination of the various roles African American educational leaders hold in their communities. Chapter three frames the research design used in this study and an overview of the participants in the study. Chapter three also provides information relating to the instrumentation, data collection and data analysis procedures implemented in this study. Chapter four presents the results of this study and an analysis of the data. Chapter five offers a summary of the study along with a discussion of the finding, implications and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two provides a review of the literature and it is categorized into themes. The first section examines the skills and characteristics turnaround school leaders possess. The next section then addresses the issue of principal support, followed by an examination of principal placement and retention. The section concludes with a look at the infusion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in educational leadership and the historical context in which African American educational leaders operate. Each section of the literature review works together to state the importance of supporting African- American leaders of high priority schools. These leaders represent an already fragile population supporting learners attempting to overcome tremendous deficits. Or are the principals also attempting to overcome tremendous deficits - personally, professionally, and historically?

In examining literature pertaining to African American male principals, the scarcity of material on this particular subject was startling. Several authors including Gooden (2005, 2012), Tillman (2004a), and Murtadha and Watts (2005) all note that little attention has been given to the experiences of African Americans in educational leadership. The CRT theorem regarding the permanence of racism may explain the dearth of coverage on this issue or just a failure to see the importance of focusing on this segment of the educational community. At any rate, Gooden (2005) posits, "little has

been done with African American secondary principals in secondary schools," (p. 630) describing the attention this subgroup has received as "scant" (p.630). Tillman (2004a) extends this commentary stating, "research by and about African Americans in school leadership positions has not become a dominant strand in the scholarship on educational leadership, leaving gaps in terms of an African American perspective" (p. 171). These two convergent positions help to frame the work of this study. While both scholars examine the coverage (or more specifically, the lack of coverage) that African Americans in educational leadership have received, this study attempts to fill that research gap by focusing on male, African American principals who lead high priority schools.

Reviewing the literature available on African American educational leadership, strands were noted pertaining to African American females in educational leadership or African American leadership in primary grades. However, a negligible amount existed concerning African American males who lead high priority schools. As such the following analysis reflects a review of the available literature concerning each separate topic: African Americans in educational leadership, males, and leadership in high priority schools. By examining each individual topic collectively this study attempts to craft a framework to operate within. In addition, narrowing the focus of this study attempts to examine an isolated, under reported area of educational leadership in an effort to extend the knowledge base of our profession; while at the same time give voice to those thus far under served by the research.

School Turnaround: Why? If Not Now, Then When; If Not You, Then Who?

As part of his educational agenda, President Barack Obama, unveiled plans to improve, turnaround, or transform 5,000 of America's lowest-performing schools. By promoting the *Race to the Top* (*RttT*) program, the impetus to reform America's educational system was thrust into the forefront of American consciousness. With a dedicated $4.35 billion dollar payday by virtue of *RttT*, educational reform became big business (Peck and Reitzug, 2014). Buoyed by Davis Guggenheim's 2010 documentary, *Waiting for Superman,* the attention focused on "turning around" America's public schools increases day-by-day. According to a 2010 White House press release (Ed. Gov. 2010), the President also revealed a companion program to *RttT*, the *Invest in Innovation Fund*, which provided an additional $650 million dollars to "incentivize excellence, spur reform, and promote the adoption and use of effective policies and practices" (p.1). These issues highlight the importance educational reform currently receives in American society. Furthermore, with the substantial financial incentives attached to the concept of educational reform, it is imperative that educators do the right things, for the right reasons not for the money.

The notion of social justice calls for all students to receive a high quality education. Instrumental in helping all students achieve this right is providing an excellent teacher in front of each child and a capable, competent, and effective principal at the helm of the school. Guiding, mentoring, and supporting principals, especially those leading high priority schools, is a critical element in promoting the type of social justice-based leadership that "investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and

reproduce societal inequities" (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 17).   English and Papa (2011) further assert this proposition stating, "the big issue of school turnarounds relates to social justice and a leader who can bring together constituents in a participatory effort" (p. 8). Contemporary school leaders cannot operate in silos or in isolation. Leaders in turnaround schools should be mindful of the dichotomous challenge that faces them as they strive to become leaders capable of transforming their schools. As pointed out by Cooper (2009) "the ultimate challenge of this work is that of striving to be a freedom fighter and a coalition builder all at once" (p. 717). As such it is imperative that building-level administrators build coalitions within their schools to help them turnaround the school. However, it is equally if not more important that they be surrounded by a coalition of support outside of their school buildings strategically helping them turn around their school.

The concept of "turning around" a school is not a new idea. Research shows that some of the earliest school turnaround efforts occurred in the 1980s. While school turnaround is not a new phenomenon the importance of turning around schools in recent years has certainly increased. As such, numerous guides, documents, books and articles have been written on the subject (Peck & Reitzug, 2014).   Recommendations from this turnaround literature include: the necessity of strong, effective school leaders and teachers; that new leaders clearly communicate the need for change to all staff members and stakeholders, set clear goals for success, establish and set high standards for the school and the staff; and, that leaders focus on improving instructional quality, aim for quick fixes early in their tenure, develop positive relationships with staff members and

the community and also acquire and effectively train staff members committed to school improvement (Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Finnegan & Stewart, 2009; Johnson, 2011). However, many of the documents referencing the task of turning around a school happen to focus on elementary schools. This focus could be due to the fact that there are more elementary schools in the United States or it could reflect a concern for ensuring the foundational years are made successful. In either case, high school principals involved with turning around a school have been underreported and therefore underserved, and high school principals of color even more so.

Authors Daniel Duke and Martha Jacobson (2011) address some of the "impediments to changing high schools" (p. 34). Specifically, they identify change barriers including the large size of most high schools, their fragmented, departmentalized nature, and the fact that high schools bear the brunt of "previous failures" (p. 34): students sometimes get passed on educationally unprepared from elementary to middle to high school and find themselves with nowhere to get passed on to from there. The age of the high school population is another factor that also complicates the issue as to why high school turnaround is such a difficult proposition. Duke and Jacobson (2011) state,

> The age of high school students also reduces the odds that high school reforms will work. High school students are more likely to be influenced in negative ways by peers, and because parent involvement declines sharply in high school, the schools lose this leverage for addressing academic, behavior, and attendance issues. (p. 35)

While these factors may have a great deal of validity, there is a body of literature that exists in the field of education that suggests that schools can successfully be "turned

around" (Buntrock & Robinson, 2011). However, most research shows that school turnarounds are short-termed activities (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). While turnaround efforts often lack sustainability, the lack of sustainability contributes to the work of this study as the lack of long-term success in turning around a school often leads to changes in leadership. And as noted by several scholars, most notably Brown (2005); along with McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007), that African Americans are most likely to lead these schools. Consequently, providing these vulnerable leaders with the proper support is one way to ensure that this fragile populace has a fair and equitable opportunity at long-term career success. I contend that effective principal support also contributes to providing the students they serve with comparable access to the quality education they deserve.

Principal Support

In 2006, the state of North Carolina began to intensively focus on improving the 35 lowest performing high schools by providing instructional support to the teachers in these schools and by providing leadership development support to the principals of these schools. The support provided to principals varied with the needs of the school and its leadership but most often consisted of using data to make decisions, helping leadership to establishing performance goals for the school, and incorporating strategies for monitoring and improving instruction (NC DPI, 2010). Each of the initiatives mentioned above has, at its core, the notion of help-- helping schools improve, helping children receive a high quality education, and helping teachers better perform their instructional tasks. However, each of the tasks is procedural and operational in nature. These tasks do not reflect the

ideal of promoting social justice notions like all children can and will succeed nor do they promote effective leadership styles that people tend to follow. Instead they are functional, organizational steps to improve schools that do not necessarily improve leaders.

As such principals of high priority schools themselves are often left to chance. Where is their help?   What plans are in place to help them grow professionally, as a leader?   For a large majority of high priority schools there will be no *Superman* walking through their doors or flying in to save the day--and the days of the charismatic "Joe Clarks" (Gooden, 2012, p. 73) of the world have largely passed necessitating the growth and development of principals. Supporting principals is important not just for the purpose of advancing social justice notions but also for helping leaders cope with an oft-described challenging profession. Many school leaders report suffering from isolation and burnout as a result of high-stakes testing and increased accountability demands brought about as a result of an increased attention paid to school reform issues (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004).   Factors such as this speak to the need to support principals as they attempt to create conditions favorable for educating students. Spillane and Lee (2013) also detail the difficult conditions principals face upon entry, describing principal work as fragmented and fast-paced. They also characterize the environment of the principalship as involving "long hours and a relentless workload" (p. 2) and pressure as a result of having to serve varied stakeholders, all of which contribute to a stressful existence. The matter of principal support, then, is important in leading any school, but it is vital in the process of turning around a high priority school. When the

factors described above are layered with issues of race and the sometimes internally adopted pressure to overcome years of educational inequity, the difficulties of an already challenging profession are intensified.

One way to mitigate the many pressures school leaders face is by way of focused principal induction programs. Woods, Woods, & Cowie (2009) found that planned, coordinated, intentional induction programs for principals new to a district are few and far between. The failure to purposefully create principal induction programs and implement them with fidelity contributes to Duncan and Stock's (2010) findings regarding novice principals that discovered that principals were often "placed in highly demanding and stressful situations and frequently left to learn on their own" (pg. 292). While much of the literature available concerning principal support focuses on supporting new principals, many veteran principals may also benefit from a formal and consistent support network. For example, principals who may be new to their schools or new to districts or simply believe they could benefit from the collegial conversations that may emanate from mentoring / support experiences could find value from induction or other support programs (Duncan & Stock, 2010). In addition, other examples of formal support structures, like mentoring, (usually a role served by district personnel to other district personnel) or coaching (generally a role played by someone outside of the system supporting the principal) may also prove beneficial in advancing the cause of educational reform and supporting those charged with leading high priority schools.

An additional benefit to principal support networks is professional development (Thomas & Kearney, 2010). Principal support networks provide the opportunity to not

just promote coaching and mentoring opportunities but also work to create professional learning communities among school leaders. Providing principals opportunities to dialogue and share questions, comments, and concerns in a safe space (outside of the monthly, mandated, principals' meeting with the district office) affords principals the chance to learn "best practices" from peers in a non-threatening environment (Aguilar, Goldwasser, & Tank-Crestetto, 2011). In order to accomplish this level of support, according to Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010), school districts (and state agencies) have to proactively create the appropriate conditions that allow school principals to effectively lead school improvement efforts. As such, school districts must understand that how they craft, explain, model, and monitor principal expectations, professional learning opportunities, principal evaluations, and principal support models coincide with principal growth and retention efforts if school reform efforts are expected to successfully bear fruit (Thomas & Kearney, 2010).

Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey (1995) stress the importance of mentors in the dual roles of socializing principals of color in the profession and in the helping educational administrators obtain success. Moreover, the authors state that the lack of mentorship opportunities can "stand in the way of promotion" (Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey, 1995, p. 411) and in the way of moving troubled schools to higher levels of academic success. Mentorship and coaching opportunities must also be strategic as some administrators of color may not feel comfortable opening up to mentors or coaches of the majority group. Some leaders of color may feel that the ability of majority group mentors to relate to, empathize with, or understand their reality may be compromised or diminished by a lack

of commonality in experiences. Other circumstances must also be considered with regards to mentoring principals of color. More specifically, Valverde and Brown (1988) posit that some opportunities for administrators of color to interact with higher-ranking, majority group administrators are not made available thereby diminishing career growth potential. As such, taking into consideration the myriad factors discussed here, school districts must practice intentionality in the crafting of a formal mentoring program for principals of color. School districts must also focus on making positive, productive matches between principals and mentors that are beneficial to the principal involved and therefore the school being served.

Mentorship matches are especially valuable as there are varied forms of educational leadership preparation routes leading to the principalship. As such, mentorship becomes an important factor in developing success for African American leaders and the schools they serve. Many new principals report feelings of being over-whelmed by situations for which their training left them unprepared (Spillane & Lee, 2013). Feeling unprepared for school leadership often causes leaders to experience feelings of isolation and fear. These feelings, described by Duncan and Stock (2010), intensify when the factor of race is injected into the paradigm of school leadership and more specifically, turnaround school leadership. Gooden (2012) suggests that the principalship of high priority schools demands a great deal more than a principalship of a suburban school in which the school's leader may not have to deal with as many inequities or challenges coupled with the expectation of turning around the school. Interrogating the issue of race as it plays out in principal assignment and the necessity of

support due to the intense needs of the types of schools typically led by African

American principals interjects a Critical Race Theoretical framework into this study.

Critical Race Theory in Educational Leadership

The issue of support takes on added importance when race is overlaid onto the

principalship due to the fact that African American principals are much more likely to be

at the helm of a high priority school according to Brown (2005), McCray et al. (2007),

and Valverde & Brown (1988). Findings provided by these authors show that African

American administrators are more often paced in predominately African American

schools. The principal placement practices at the types of schools described by Brown

(2005) and McCray et al. (2007) imply that only certain ethnicities tend to serve at certain

schools. For example, African Americans principals at predominately African American

schools and White principals at predominately White schools; I contend that this

practices is a by-product of Whiteness as property. This concept of White privilege

contributes to the practice of Whites traditionally leading some schools while African

Americans are left to lead certain others. Consequently, this system of White privilege, a

central tenet of Critical Race Theory, is a "system of opportunities and benefits conferred

upon people simply because they are White" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). Brown

(2005) advances the notion that group privileges take on a critical role in any discussion

concerning a social justice agenda in American schooling.

At its core, applying CRT to educational leadership seeks to understand the

intersection between race, racism, and power as it relates to schools, school leadership,

and education (Milner, 2007). According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001) CRT

"challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p.2). More specifically, in looking at the practices of placing African American principals in positions of leadership, primarily in challenged schools, CRT offers a vehicle to discuss and dissect these practices such as those that limit and restrict the types of schools African Americans principals are allowed to lead. Principal placement practices like those described here and supported by other scholars (Brown, 2005; McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007; Tillman, 2004a) suggest that race and racism are real and pervasive in American society and therefore the American educational system. As such the factors of race and racism have according to Critical Race Theorists become normalized and accepted in society. Consequently, placement practices that position African Americans principals at predominately African American schools is accepted as normal and generally goes unquestioned. However, Critical Race Theorists seek to disrupt the status quo; in this instance, placement practices such as those described here must be interrogated. More to the point, authors McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) propose "a thorough inquiry as to whether there is an implicit thought pattern in regard to Whiteness as property to place African American principals in predominantly Black schools" (p. 7). It is my intent that this study extends the scholarly research base on the plight of African American principals in highly challenged schools, and that this work contributes to the field in a significant and scholarly manner.

In order to accomplish this task, this study is rooted in examining the counter-narratives of male, African American principals who lead high priority schools in North

Carolina. Counter-stories or counter-narratives are but one key tenet of CRT. Employing counter-stories is one method of capturing the real-life experiences of people of color in an effort to discount or dismiss ill-conceived myths or falsehoods that the dominant society may hold. According to Milner (2007) "knowledge can and should be generated through the narratives and counter-narratives that emerge from and with people of color" (p. 391). CRT's application of counter-stories values the stories and experiences of people of color. The application of counter-stories, grounded in the experiences of those marginalized (Stovall, 2004; Milner, 2007; Solorzano & Yasso, 2002) uses the experiences of the principals in this survey to examine the effect leading a high priority school has on these men. Richard Delgado (1989) captures the importance of these voices of color stating, "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p. 2436). This notion undergirds both the importance of capturing these marginalized voices and the value of mentoring, as mentioned earlier. A principal who has someone to confidently confide in can promote the professional survival Delgado references. For principals of high priority schools both the opportunity to have their experiences captured and respected can be invaluable. Counter-narratives provide just that opportunity.

A third component of Critical Race Theory upon which this work rests is the concept of interest convergence. Interest convergence is defined as a process by which the majority group supports efforts by the minority group to obtain equality when and only when the attainment of the goal of which the minority group seeks benefits the majority group as well (Bell, 1980; Milner, 2007; Gooden, 2010). Succinctly put, I

(majority group member or group) will support your (minority group member or group) quest to obtain "X" (e.g., a principal position) as long as it benefits me (the majority group member or group) as well. This notion is particularly valuable in examining principal placement patterns, especially given the fact that African American principals are much more likely to be at the helm of a high priority school (Brown, 2005; McCray et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004a; Valverde & Brown, 1988) is taken into consideration. Issues of race and politics, I contend are central in the principal placement practices, as "hiring committees, governing boards, and ultimately the community decide who fits as a leader" (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2009, p. 109). However, getting a Superintendent or other Central Office personnel to admit this may be difficult if not impossible. Consequently, researchers are left to observe data and patterns to draw conclusions regarding what it is that we see. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s ringing admonition to the country in 1963 urging America to judge a person on the content of his character not by the color of his skin (Oates, 1982) is slow in affecting principal placement patterns for African Americans. Access to a job is a different status than access to THE (implying a job of a higher level or quality) job. Interrogating principal placement trends in education calls into question issues such as privilege on the part of the majority group. It calls into question hiring practices and the impact leading certain types of schools (high priority) may have upon a leader's career, health, or relationships. And it calls into question the place that race and racism continue to have in the field of education. At the heart of each of these issues lay the concept of principal placement, which ensures that the issue of principal placement remains a part of this discussion.

Principal Placement and Retention

As critical as the issue of support is, equally as important is the interrogation of the question of principal placement as it relates to African Americans. As previously stated, approximately 72% of the high priority schools in the state of North Carolina (as identified in the State's *RttT* documentation) are being led by African Americans. Authors McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) found through the course of their research that African American principals have a higher likelihood of being chosen to lead schools where the majority of the student body is African American while also finding that, in general, African American principals had an almost infinitesimal chance of leading a majority white school compared to their chances of leading a largely minority populated school. This finding takes on added impact when viewed alongside Frank Brown's conclusion in his 2005 article "African Americans and School Leadership: An Introduction".

In his article, Brown (2005) posits that "the majority of African American leaders are employed in large, urban school districts that are underfunded, have scare resources, significant numbers of uncertified teachers and low student underachievement" (p. 587). Many of Brown's findings could also apply to many rural areas as well, especially in eastern North Carolina (Redding & Walberg, 2012). These findings undergird the difficulties that many African American principals face as they attempt to practice their leadership craft and the difficulties that accompany turning around a challenged school. Authors Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch (2009) states that school leadership demands a different set of behaviors

and actions for those whose identities are marginalized in some way by the communities they serve (p. 117). This analysis crafts a rich depiction of the experiences of principals of color who lead high priority schools.

Providing all principals with the support necessary to turn around a school is essential. It is essential because "not all school principals possess the vast array of knowledge and expertise the principalship now requires and many school leaders feel unprepared for the task" (Duncan & Stock, 2010, p. 296). Duncan and Stock (2010) note, "beginning school leaders, placed in highly demanding and stressful situations are frequently left to learn on the job as best they can with many feeling isolated and overwhelmed" (p. 296). The situations that Duncan and Stock describe coincide with the sentiments of many principals of all levels and in many different types of schools. However due to some of the more intense constraints turnaround schools find themselves digging out of, it is conceivable that the principals of these schools find their feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed magnified, thereby rendering the issue of support a key component in a principal's survival.

An additional benefit to principal support networks is professional development (Thomas & Kearney, 2010). Principal support networks provide the opportunity to not just promote coaching and mentoring opportunities but also professional learning communities. Providing principals opportunities to dialogue and share questions, comments, and concerns in a safe space (outside of the monthly, mandated, principals meeting with the district office) affords principals with the chance to learn "best

practices" from peers in a non-threatening environment (Aguilar, Goldwasser, & Tank-Crestetto, 2011).   In order to accomplish this level of support, according to Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010), school districts (and state agencies) have to proactively create the appropriate conditions that allow school principals to effectively lead school improvement efforts. As such, school districts must understand that how they craft, explain, model, and monitor principal expectations, professional learning opportunities, principal evaluations, and principal support models coincide with principal growth and retention efforts and more so if school reform efforts are successful (Thomas & Kearney, 2010).

Historical Contexts of African American Educational Leadership

The issues of principal placement and the necessity of supporting the African American leaders of high priority schools is clarified when viewed through the lens of history. At different points in American history, African Americans were denied the right to an education or allowed to have an education as long as said education was deemed separate (and unequal). In 1954, the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision ruled the separate but equal doctrine unconstitutional and with that decision integration was mandated accomplished with all deliberate speed (Leflar, 1957, p. 4). While the goal of eradicating white superiority within the context of a segregated educational system was and remains admirable, the lingering effects of desegregating education in America's remains problematic.

While it could be argued that the quality of education during the segregated era was of a higher quality, what cannot be argued is the fact that segregated education was

just that: separate and inherently unequal. However, there were benefits to the segregated educational system that African Americans received. During the era of segregated education African American educational leaders were deemed as pillars of African American society (James, 1970; Karpinski, 2006; Tillman, 2004a; Tillman, 2004b). As such these leaders were respected and revered as authority figures in the African American community. These leaders also helped to comprise a Black middle-class and they helped sustain the Black economic system. However, as positive as some of these attributes were, African American educational leaders were relegated to only certain schools: schools that were for African American students.   This issue of the types of schools that African Americans are allowed to lead is an issue that according to that many scholars (Brown, 2005; McCray, et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004a; Valverde & Brown, 1988) extends to contemporary education and lay at the heart of this study.

But the aftermath of the dismantling of legally segregated education proved to be damaging to African American leaders, albeit in a different way. In 1970, just sixteen years after the *Brown* decision, J.C. James (1970) noted that in "the process of desegregating students, black schools were being phased out and black principals and teachers along with them" (p .19). The "phasing out" of black educational leaders was swift and detrimental. The desegregation of America's schools saw the closing of some black schools and the consolidating of others. The desegregation of America's schools saw African American principals demoted to serve as assistant principals at consolidated schools or worse being forced back into the classroom (James, 1970; Karpinski, 2006; Tillman, 2004a; Tillman, 2004b). While not as pervasive as during the period

immediately after *Brown*, the prospects of demotion still frame the reality of many African American educational leaders. To explain, African Americans educational leaders are more likely to lead schools that that are saddled with and complicated by a myriad of issues ranging from academic deficiencies to socio-economic inequities among other maladies. As such schools of this caliber are more difficult to turn around. Consequently, a failure to turn around a school of this caliber can often lead to a career demotion, while success in turning around a school of this type can most often net leaders another school of this type (Beteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb, 2012). Accepting the premise that most African American educational leaders will be employed at schools with large African American student populations, we can surmise that even accounting for upward career mobility this type of school will remain the domain of African American leaders.

In examining the literature related to African American males that lead high priority schools, an additional area of historical insight emerged: an historical leadership spectrum. This historical "spectrum of tolerance," as I define and conceive it, situates African American leaders along a continuum ranging from the degree of acceptance (or rejection) from the majority the leader may experience as a result of his personality, leadership style, or philosophy. This spectrum when viewed through the three-part lens of education, history, and CRT draws parallels between historical educational leaders and contemporary educational leaders that may extend and explain aspects of contemporary school leadership and hiring practices today.

To explain, African American leaders who have sought civic equality have long viewed education as a medium to accomplish societal equity. As such, leaders operating in the sphere of education have traditionally been juxtaposed against one another. During the late 19th century and the early parts of the 20th century an intense debate raged between two leading African American intellectuals: W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. While these pre-eminent educational and cultural leaders of the time both advocated the elevation of the African American race, the vehicles they advocated in their efforts to obtain a higher quality life differed substantially. Historically speaking, Du Bois advocated what would be considered a liberal arts education while Washington advocated the learning of a vocation, commonly referred to as a trade (Franklin & Moss, 1988, p. 246). While this analysis is not to argue the merits of either school of thought, it is however an attempt to place in context how African American leaders can be positioned to serve as polar ends of an educational philosophical spectrum.

In the 1960s, African Americans and the greater society in general saw the ascension of two young leaders in the broader American consciousness: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X (Malcolm Little aka El Haji Malik Al Shabazz). These two mighty leaders also wanted African Americans to receive a quality education, but what constituted a quality education may have been framed by their educational experiences. King grew up in the segregated South but attended what some consider the finest post-secondary institutions America had to offer: Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary, and the Boston University School of Theology. On the path to obtaining a doctoral degree, Dr. King was able to craft his views on education and civic

equality based upon the quality, depth, and amount of readings that he was exposed to including but not limited to the readings of Mahatma Gandhi, which influenced his views on non-violence (Oates, 1982, p. 30).

On the other end of the spectrum, Malcolm X received his "education" from what some may consider the school of hard knocks. Malcolm X was known as a very gifted student whom had his beliefs in the traditional education system drenched when he told a white teacher that he wanted to be a lawyer. To which the teacher responded that being a lawyer was "no realistic job for a n****r" (Haley 1991, p. 86). Malcolm later dropped out of school, pursued a life of crime, and was sentenced to prison. While in prison Malcolm's thirst for continuous learning was sparked as he worked to become a "self-made" scholar.

These two icons for the ages came about the concept of education in different ways and their initial philosophical beliefs shaped their views on what equality in American society looked like and how to go about obtaining it. Again, this study chooses not to dissect each individual philosophical belief of these two great leaders, but instead seeks to craft an analysis around the juxtaposing of these two leaders along a continuum that may still affect contemporary African American educational leaders today as they viewed by the majority society through a prism I define as a "spectrum of tolerance."

The late Joe Clark, of the 1980s movie *Lean on Me* fame and the real-life turnaround of Eastside High School in Patterson, New Jersey, is but one example of the juxtaposition that faces African American school leaders. "Crazy Joe" was hailed as just the cure for failing schools. A tough-talking, bat-wielding, suspension-granting male

African American principal was just what the proverbial *those kids* needed to bring discipline and order to Eastside. Gooden (2012) characterizes Clark's get-tough persona as portrayed in the movie as "a well-received model of African American school leadership" (p.70) by some invested in educational leadership. More to the point, Gooden's (2012) analysis of Clark's leadership reverberates in contemporary African American educational leadership because it speaks to what or how some (White) people think African American principals lead or should lead troubled schools (p. 71). Clark, a one-man gang, armed with a big-stick (in this case with a bat), a bull-horn, and low-tolerance for anything short of turning around dear old Eastside set the stage for what African American educational leadership should look like in the minds of many.

While there are many different African American types, facets, and forms of educational leadership for the purposes of this study, a brief synopsis of Marcus Foster will be positioned on the spectrum of tolerance against that of "Crazy Joe." Marcus Foster began his career in the 1960s as a principal in Philadelphia, where he was characterized as a "new breed" of principal. Foster as an educational leader was the antithesis of "Crazy Joe"; whereas Clark often acted as a "one-man gang," Foster operated in a collaborative sphere. John Spencer (2009) captures Marcus Foster, the educational leader citing his experiences in mobilizing the community to speak truth to power against school over-crowding and engaging the "total school community" in school revitalization efforts (p. 287-288). Speaking to the collaborative nature that Foster employed in turning around his school, Spencer (2009) notes that Foster's practices recognized that "principals cannot transcend, by themselves, a social and economic

context that may severely hamper their efforts to raise achievement" (p. 287). What Foster recognized was that school leaders could not operate in silos or in isolation.

Marcus Foster also believed in the academic abilities of all of his students. He came to Philadelphia's Gratz High School after having previously turned around other troubled schools.   Foster believed that as an administrator that he was to be held accountable for student performance, in addition to others. Foster aspired "to make the principal's office and the teachers more responsible for results, as sought by parents, students, and the larger school community," while also holding the "whole society" responsible for student academic success (Spencer, 2009, p. 292). While Foster focused on improving student academic attainment he still grounded this belief in a collaborative experience. This hallmark characteristic of collaboration stands in stark contrast to the lone, confrontational leadership style employed by Joe Clark, suggesting how the "spectrum of tolerance" held true in the more recent past.

African American educational leaders still confront many of the same issues that existed immediately post-*Brown* today. Whether the issue centers on types of schools African American principals are assigned to (overwhelmingly minority centered and pervasively low academic performance) or the career prospects of leading these schools African American educational leaders continue to face difficult personal and professional pathways. As such, supporting these principals, leaders of high priority schools, should be a moral imperative in the effort to promote a fair and equitable educational system.

Summary

Chapter two provided an analysis of the relevant literature on school turnaround efforts, principal support, and Critical Race Theory as it relates to African American principals. In addition, this chapter provided an examination of the issue of principal placement and an overview of the historical context that frames the issues these principals face today. Of note, I defined a "spectrum of tolerance" that has affected African American leaders in the past. Finally, strategies for providing support for these educational leaders were also provided in an effort to shape future practices as we pursue educational and professional equity. Chapter three describes the research methodology of the current study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perspectives of male, African American principals who lead high priority schools in North Carolina. This chapter includes the design of the study and a description of the study's population. Also included in this chapter is an explanation detailing the setting of the study, and the data collection and data analysis procedures employed. Study limitations conclude this chapter.

Research Design

This section describes the research methodology used in this study. This qualitative study has been crafted utilizing a phenomenological case study methodological design that infuses ethnographic features. As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people. As such qualitative research attempts to understand situations that groups of people (or individual people) experience (Creswell, 2009). Resting firmly upon these qualitative research themes, this study has been crafted to interrogate the experiences of the selected subjects. Phenomenological forms of qualitative research attempt to share and find meaning in the lived experiences of the individuals studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Ethnographies look at "human groups [in this case African

American male principals who lead or have led high priority schools], seeking to understand how they collectively form and maintain a culture" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 19).

The researcher employed an in-depth interview protocol to interrogate the experiences of the participants in the study. In-depth interviewing allows for a deeper, more detailed picture of a participant's experiences to be captured during the data collection process. The researcher employed this method to create as comfortable of an interview environment as possible, allowing participants to openly and confidently share details of their personal and professional life in a relaxed atmosphere. By creating a relaxed atmosphere the researcher was able to probe and delve deeper into participant responses, which yielded an informational depth that moved beyond superficial levels of knowledge referred to in qualitative research as "thick description". The term "thick description, as defined by Ponterotto (2006) describes the researcher's "interpretation of what is being observed or witnessed" (p. 542). Commonly used in qualitative research "thick descriptions", seek to help make sense of what a researcher observes while placing observation data in a cultural and social context (Ponterotto, 2006, p.542).

Accompanying the in-depth interview process, the researcher also conducted on-site field observations of each study participant in an effort to gain greater insight into how these men led their school on a normal, day-to-day basis. Therefore, by combining interview transcripts and participant observations with an in-depth analysis of the participant's discourse, this study examined the lived experiences of four African

American male principals who currently lead high priority schools. This study seeks to both support and promote a larger discussion on supporting these principals.

This study employs a semi-structured, open-ended interview question format. Using this method, the researcher composed 30 open-ended questions. These open-ended questions focused on key thematic issues related to this study: general background of the participant, preparation for leading a high priority school, support in leading a high priority school, career issues and experiences, and Critical Race Theory (encompassing Race and Social Capital issues). Questions were arranged in the interview guide to not only address each thematic issue but also structured to begin with easier questions leading into more difficult, complex questions. Questions were also crafted to avoid typical "yes" or "no" responses and instead crafted to generate in-depth responses. Follow-up questions were spontaneous and allowed the researcher to function as a partner in the interview process and to also ease the comfort level of the participant. Great care was taken to end each interview with questions that validated the participant's experiences and the value they offer to the profession.

The researcher conducted interviews in a conversational manner and utilized pre-crafted questions that allowed each respondent the freedom and latitude to answer as they each saw fit. The researcher explained the purpose behind the interviews and took great care to make sure respondents were made comfortable throughout the interview process. Based upon these answers the researcher asked follow up questions to probe for clarity, obtain greater understanding, and explore new themes that emerged. Using these preplanned questions provided a framework with which to conduct the interview but the

latitude provided by the semi-structured, open-ended interview format allowed for a greater degree of depth to be explored within participant responses.

This study focuses on the perspectives and experiences of African American male principals leading high priority schools for various reasons. As stated earlier, the precarious position turnaround schools and their leadership find themselves in necessitates an even greater degree of support in order for these schools to provide high levels of success for all. As such, this study examines the support structures that promote or impede the success of these principals and looks at the impact leading a high priority school may have upon these men both personally and professionally. Additionally, when examining the broad topic of African American leadership in education, numerous articles were found that focused on educational leadership from a generic African American perspective or directly examining the plight of female African American administrators (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson 2003; Loder, 2005; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012). Literature was also discovered that focused on African American educational leadership in urban schools. However, there was a limited amount of literature that focused specifically on the experiences of African American, male principals who currently lead high priority schools. Consequently, this study focuses on this population as a way of expanding the research bases of African American educational leadership, leadership involved in high priority schools, and educational leadership from the minority male perspective by giving "voice" to the experiences of these four African American male principals through a Critical Race Theoretical perspective.

This study particularly focuses on analyzing the principals' perceptions of their career prospects (as a result of leading a high priority school), their perception of whether or not race played a factor in their appointment to their school, their perception of support, and the impact of leading a high priority school has upon them. Extending from the data shared by these men, the study analyzes principal experiences from the perspective of each individual, allowing for the application of a Critical Race Theoretical paradigm to frame each participant's experiences. The study intends to challenge many of the assumptions, hiring practices, and positionality the research subjects may have experienced while also seeking to identify trends and recommendations for improving the careers and practice of African American male principals who lead high priority schools. In short, in the spirit of CRT's counter-narrative theme, this study seeks to give voice to these leaders.

Counter-narratives are valued in Critical Race Theory as they provide an opportunity for individuals to share their personal experiences. This study employs counter-narratives as a means of providing participants an opportunity to share their counter-narratives. These experiences, experiences, which may otherwise go unheard, are vital in expanding the professional and the racial dialogues principals of color face.

While looking at participants' perceptions of the impact leading a high priority school has on their career prospects and opportunities, the study will also explore the career derailment and promotion prospects of these African American principals. More specifically, the study intends to examine (based upon participant perceptions) whether or not they are destined to always serve turnaround schools or if they are able to be

principals in other schools that are not considered to be turnaround. The intent is to test the theory advocated by authors McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) who examined the type of schools African American principals are most likely to lead and arrived at the conclusion that African American principals are most likely to be placed in schools that have an overwhelmingly African American student body.

An examination of the levels and sources of support each principal receives also serves as a key tenet in this study. Participants will also share their opinions on the support that they stated that they received from federal, state, central office staff members, teachers, and other principals within their districts. Principals will be asked to detail the support they believe that they need in order to be successful at a turnaround school. Finally, principals will be asked what they see as the impact leading a high priority school has upon their career and on other facets of their lives (emotionally, physically, socially, etc.). Collectively, the answers to these questions will serve as another means of introducing a counter-narrative in providing voice to the African American principals studied.

Setting

The participants interviewed are all principals who currently lead low-performing schools in North Carolina as determined by state accountability test data. All interviews will be conducted at the school sites of the principals who decided to participate in the study. The researcher chose to interview participants on their "own turf" in an effort to allow participants to feel more comfortable and afford the researcher the opportunity to

watch participants interact in their own environment, thereby providing an additional source of data.

Each interview was scheduled to last approximately two hours, leading to a minimum of (3) two-hour interview periods (one two hour session with each participant done in three separate intervals) with each principal. Digital interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Each tape and transcript is labeled with the date of the interview, a pseudonym of the participant, and the duration of the interview. Per Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols, all interviews have been stored and locked in a desk drawer in the home office of the researcher. The researcher also shadowed each participant at his school, which afforded a greater insight into the life of each participant. Depending on the scheduled interview time established by each participant, the researcher would arrive earlier or stay later than the assigned interview time for the purpose of observing each participant carry out his daily activities. This practice was described to each participant beforehand and each agreed to have the researcher shadow his day. Observation logs were kept and labeled with each participant's pseudonym.

Participants were provided with the researcher's phone number to allow for phone conferences with the researcher as a means to better manage their time limits and their busy schedules. These phone conferences may have allowed for a deeper probing of content and subjects uncovered over the course of in-person interviews and observations. Participants were afforded the opportunity to participate in phone conferences if they desired, although no principal took advantage of this opportunity. They each participated in face-to-face interviews for each part of their participation in this study.

Population and Sample

Four (n = 4) African American male principals who lead high priority schools in North Carolina were chosen for this study. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction maintains a master contact list of each of the principals in the state. It is from this list that the researcher sorted the excel data file and separated the principals by race and then by gender to identify the potential subjects. The master principal data file of African American male principals was then cross-referenced with a list of the 118 individual schools served by the Department's District and School Transformation division. The District and School Transformation division, as a part of its Race to the Top monitoring processes, has compiled a list of the principals of the bottom 5% of the schools in the state (those deemed low performing or high priority schools). After cross-referencing these two lists in an attempt to identify the potential subjects, 21 subjects were found that fit the defined criteria. The data showed that six of the subjects are high school principals, five are middle school principals, and ten serve as elementary school principals. Purposive sampling was employed to give the researcher a variety pool of principals. The sample for this study consists of three (n = 3) high school principals and one (n = 1) middle school principal. Participants in this study represent schools classified as rural, urban, and suburban. Participants in this study also had varied terms of educational experience as a building leader, ranging from three years of administrative experience to twenty-one years of administrative experience.

Sampling Procedures

The researcher used a blended sampling technique to identify participants for this study. Initially, criterion sampling was employed as a sampling method to help identify participants in this study. The previously identified criteria of race (African American), gender (male) and employment status (employed leading a high priority school) were established as the criteria the used to identify the participants in this study. The application of criterion sampling yielded 21 potential participants that met the defined criteria. Using the core pool of 21 potential targets for this study led to the utilization of purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher attempts to use knowledge of the population in order to target participants. The application of purposive sampling allowed the researcher to utilize his prior knowledge of high priority schools and their leaders to identify potential schools and districts to target.

Participants self-reported their identification, relative to these criteria, in documents submitted to the state of North Carolina. School districts collect demographic data (race, gender, and type of school - elementary, middle, or high they lead) and reported it to the Department of Public Instruction. Using the database complied by the Department, the researcher pre-screened participants for their position as of employment as a leader of a high priority school in the state of North Carolina. The researcher identified personnel in each Central Office that served the 21 principals, soliciting permission to approach their principals. One Superintendent and three Assistant Superintendents (four school districts) approved the researcher's request to submit approval to conduct research forms in their districts. Potential participants were then

contacted by the researcher directly, initially by email then by phone, inquiring as to whether or not they would like to participate in this study. Before the first interview, an introductory meeting was held with each participant. The purpose of this meeting was to detail the scope of the study, to identify their role in the study, and if they chose to continue in the study, the delivery of consent forms. All four principals identified chose to continue with the study. They then signed and dated official consent forms and returned them to the researcher for storage and record-keeping purposes. The following is a description of each participant at the time each was interviewed. Pseudonyms have been assigned to protect individual identities. The information provided reflects the spring semester of 2013 and the fall semester of 2013.

Research Participants

African American male principals in low performing schools participate in this study. Three of the four schools are in the bottom 5% percent of schools in the state of North Carolina. The fourth school is in the bottom 15% percent. Each of the principals serve schools with high minority populations, high free and reduced lunch numbers, and based upon North Carolina's accountability model each school experiences low levels of academic attainment. Each principal is currently working at different levels of their professional career and they serve at different academic levels (three high school principals and one middle school principal). These principals were chosen according to these demographics in an effort to allowing for diversity of experiences. Written informed consent documents are on file to protect the integrity of the study and to provide anonymity to each participant. The following names are pseudonyms.

Stephen Grant - is a 39 year old African American male. He serves as principal of a suburban high school in the central part of North Carolina.   He has been principal for four years. He is enrolled in a doctoral program studying educational leadership. He has one child. He is a member of an African American fraternity.

Michael Tucker - is a 40 year old African American male. He serves as principal of a rural middle school in the eastern part of North Carolina. He has been principal for two years. His school is a Title 1 school. He has a wife and three children.

Darren Walker - is a 46 year old African American male. He serves as principal of an urban high school in central North Carolina. He has been principal for two years at his current school and a principal for 13 years in total in three different districts. His school is a Title 1 school. He has a wife and one child.   He has taught adjunct college courses at a local university. He is a member of an African American fraternity.

Robert Daye - is a 53 year old African American male. He serves as principal of a rural high school in eastern North Carolina. He has been a principal at his current school for three years. His school is a Title 1 school. He is enrolled in a doctoral program studying educational leadership. He has a wife and two adult children. He is a member of an African American fraternity.

Data Collection

Data was compiled for this study by interviews, observation notes and transcripts, tape recordings in an effort to triangulate information. Each participant in this study was asked the exact same core questions in an effort to maximize dependability in this research study. Additional questions, questions of clarity, and follow-up questions were

asked of each participant based upon the answers that they offered in the oral interviews. Interviews were audio recorded and each participant was given the opportunity to opt-out of audio recording. No participants elected this option. Interview notes and transcriptions provided the researcher the opportunity to craft preliminary notes in an effort to identify early, emerging themes. Audio data files were manually transcribed. After each interview, the researcher listened to each recording multiple times: once immediately after the interview and multiple times during the transcription process and then again after each interview was transcribed. Listening to the interview while reading the final transcribed copy allowed the researcher to note any errors in transcription and to also note any new findings that emerged after reviewing the data file multiple times. Listening to the audio file multiple times also allowed the researcher to ensure that no errors or omissions were included in the final transcript. Assuring the accuracy of the study's transcripts was addressed in an effort to increase the dependability of the study. Confirming the accuracy of the transcripts was especially important as the process of member checking was introduced to the participants.

In a process commonly known as member checking in qualitative research studies, each individual's transcribed and collected data sources were shared with each of the participants (Creswell, 2009). The member checking process was employed in an effort to promote researcher neutrality. In short, by employing member checking participants could read and offer clarity in an effort to ensure that researcher biases do not creep into the research findings. In addition, member checking allowed each participant to provide clarity in the data, make corrections to the data ensuring its accuracy, and to

allow follow-up with additional perspectives.   For example, Stephen reviewed his data

source (transcripts, audio files, etc.) and the same opportunity was afforded to Michael,

Darren, and Robert. Member checking allowed each participant to provide additional

information while also having the opportunity to provide any clarifications needed. The

results of this study were garnered solely from the responses of the four participants.

Interviews and transcripts (complete with pseudonyms) were shared with a peer

review team of fellow doctoral students. The intent for using the peer review team was to

counterbalance findings in an effort to eliminate as many sources of bias as possible. An

audit trail was kept throughout the research process detailing research steps along with

complete and accurate records of all of the procedures employed and outcomes observed

while conducting this research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After mining the data, findings

were shared with the participants. Sharing data (complete with pseudonyms) with the

participants elevated the credibility of the researcher as it promoted an atmosphere of

transparency. Any personally identifiable information or other sensitive information of

the life was kept confidential at all times of this study. Member checking again allowed

participants the opportunity to clarify any inaccuracies that may have occurred in

transcribing or interpreting their thoughts to provide for transparency and accuracy. It

also allowed for the authentic voice of each participant to shine through the work, another

example of promoting the participants' counter narrative in this work while at the same

time embracing a tenet of Critical Race Theory.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Office of Institutional Research

authorized this study on April 5, 2013. After permission was granted to begin the study

from the University the researcher began making contact with individual school districts to gain their approval. Prior to beginning data collection the researcher contacted each participant to gauge their interest in participating in this study. Contact was made with each principal by email and by phone, to set up a face-to-face meeting. Contained in the email was a copy of the interview questions. The researcher provided the potential participants with the questions in advance in an effort to promote transparency, to allow participants to feel comfortable with the content, and to allow participants to opportunity to jot down key thoughts related to the questions prior to the interviews. At each introductory meeting the scope of the study was discussed along with a discussion of participant roles in the study, and if they chose to continue in the study, the delivery of consent forms was completed. All four principals identified chose to continue with the study. They then signed and dated official consent forms and returned them to the researcher for storage and record-keeping purposes. Personal contact information was also exchanged with each participant and the researcher only. Preceding each initial meeting an individualized data collection folder was created for each participant. Subsequent to the initial meetings documents inside the folder included the signed consent form, a copy of the interview questions, and other documents related to the study. An electronic file was created on the researcher's computer for each participant. Therefore participants had a hard-copy folder and an electronic folder for their research materials. The electronic file was password protected and held each respective participant's audio interview files and each written transcript.

Three interviews were scheduled with each participant. For this study, the interview protocol was read to participants and participants' questions or concerns were addressed. After the researcher and each participant discussed the participant's roles in the study, the researcher began the interview with questions on the less challenging end of the spectrum in an effort to build collegiality and comfort between the researcher and the participant. Interview questions were intentionally crafted in an open-ended format in an effort to allow participants to provide example in their answers and to allow them to elaborate when necessary. These open-ended questions also allowed the researcher the opportunity to probe participant responses for a greater degree of clarity. Great care was taken by the researcher to serve as an active listener and not interject in participant responses. Interview sessions were approximately two hours in length in duration. The researcher used an electronic timer feature on his cellular phone in an effort to help monitor interview time and show that the researcher valued the participant's time. Notes were taken electronically on the same device that was audio recording. The researcher used this particular device because it offered time stamps that corresponded with the notes that the researcher captured. This allowed the researcher to refer back to the specific item that prompted a note to be entered at exactly the point and time in the interview. This feature was especially helpful during the transcription process. These additional notes also served as potential follow-up questions in subsequent interviews. Additional interviews were scheduled, at the convenience of the participant, after the first round of interviews were transcribed, read, and re-played.

After each completed interview, the audio file was transcribed and filed in the secure filing system created by the researcher. Each participant was then provided with an electronic copy of the transcript or the researcher took a hard copy to the participant's school site (which ever was requested by the participant). When the participants each received copies of their transcript they were given the opportunity to make corrections electronically (if they requested to be sent electronic transcripts) or on the actual hard copy itself, if necessary. Afterwards the researcher made the corrections identified by the participant and filed the corrected version in the participant's file. If no corrections were noted, the researcher made note of this fact indicating that the participant had the opportunity to change something but the opportunity was denied. Each transcript was then re-read entering the data analysis phase of this study.

Data Analysis

In order to begin the data analysis process, the researcher utilized the Dedoose Research Analysis program to electronically analyze the interview transcripts. The researcher uploaded each transcript to the program including pseudonyms. The Dedoose program allowed the researcher to read, code, and color passages that emerged from reading the transcripts. In short, utilizing the program to read the transcripts allowed the generation of codes from the data. After having identified the codes the process of interpreting the codes began in an attempt to find the meaning of the codes through the lives of the subjects. After codes were established for each transcript, the researcher re-read the transcripts again seeking out additional codes. Simultaneously, while using the Dedoose platform, the researcher also marked each transcript with colored gel pens

(black, red, green, and blue) to hand code each transcript. The researcher also used colored plastic flags to identify sections and additional codes to review.

While interpreting the codes, the researcher catalogued the codes while looking for patterns or themes that can help explain / answer the questions that frame the study's research. In short, the researcher reviewed each transcript multiple times looking for patterns of phrases or experiences shared by each participant. Color coding, available by-hand and by way of the Dedoose program also allowed the researcher to examine the frequency of codes emerging from each transcript. The Dedoose program has a code definition feature embedded in the program. This feature allowed for the defining of each code as it was discovered. Using this process identified a total of 36 codes. Applying the principle of data reduction allowed the researcher the opportunity to organize data into useful, meaningful chunks of information and boil those chunks of information into five key thematic issues: principal placement in a turnaround school, principal relationships with student population, support and professional growth in leading a high priority school, the impact of leading a high priority school, and the career prospects of leading a high priority school. Each of these themes was analyzed through a Critical Race Theoretical lens to provide for a clear, thorough analysis of interview data. After identifying these themes, the researcher then compared these themes to the literature leading to the study's findings. The findings of this study are presented in chapter four and interpreted in chapter five.

After gathering a picture of what the subject's experiences are, the researcher is then able to interpret the data. Referring back to the data in chapter two, based upon the

interpretation of the data from these participants, the researcher intends to address, challenge, affirm or refute some of the findings that authors Brown (2005), McCray, Wright, Beachum (2007), and Tillman (2004a) posit about the types of jobs African American principals are most likely to receive. Additionally, it is the intent of this researcher that this work will allow the voice of the study participants to shine through, illuminating the counter-narrative of the participants. It also is this researcher's desire that through the experiences of the participants and the analysis of the study's findings that this work is able to frame implications that may drive future practice. Lastly it is the hope of this researcher that the recommendations that will be disclosed in chapter five will allow all educational professionals a fair and equitable seat at the [professional] table.

Subjectivity

The fact that I am an African American male educator, interested in educational leadership, influences my objectivity, in my opinion, in a positive way. The commonalities that the participants in this study and I share (African American males in educational leadership) helped to create a rapport that allowed for a deeper level of conversation. By virtue of being an "insider" to a certain extent, a richness of conversation lent itself to promoting a positive discussion between each participant and me. In order to bracket any researcher subjectivity, I solicited the help of a peer work group of fellow doctoral students to serve as a counterbalance and to offer impartial feedback assuring bias was limited as much as possible. This workgroup also pushed and questioned me in an effort to ensure that any personal or professional background issues

did not sway the data. I also attempted to suspend any personal beliefs about the topic and used the guiding principle of their voice, the subject's voice, their counter-narrative to guide the study's development. As such, employing member checking as a tool allowed participants to review all aspects of the work (interviews, transcripts, etc.) for accuracy. Finally, in an effort to adhere to the tenets of Critical Race Theory, I focused on promoting the participant's voice, allowing the study to permit participant voices to be heard.

Trustworthiness

This study provided a forum for participants. Employing a member checking process also encouraged participants to review the work of this study for accuracy. In addition, this study incorporated outside reviewers to test the work of this study, to in short make sure that this product flows logically, is accurate, and that it makes sense. Furthermore, this research study has been crafted in part to provide a voice for African American male principals who lead high priority schools because these men occupy a marginalized space in educational leadership. The "Joe Clarks" of the education world are viewed by some as some sort of a 'Super-Principal," (Walker 2009). This study allows their voices to frame this narrative. This study also promotes reliability by examining pre-existing research data along with study participant data for trends in an effort to determine if participant experiences fit the aforementioned Super Principal phenomena. The study will also maintain conformability, i.e. diminishing the presence of the researcher (or any bias he may have) from the research, so that the participants show through the work and not the researcher.

Benefits and Risks

Participation in this study provided minimal risk to the participants. Pseudonyms have been utilized to conceal the identities of each participant and any people the participants may have mentioned. The researcher has undertaken every precaution to protect the confidentiality of each participant, his school, and school district. The benefits of this study are that this study may show that principals in turnaround schools need a tremendous amount of support. Also, specific courses of action may be identified relative to the type of support needed for these principals and their schools to be successful. Also this study draws attention to the possible career derailing ramifications of placing a principal in a turnaround school without the proper supports in place. The risks are minimal in number but large in impact. As an African American male researcher looking at an issue largely concerning African American male principals, the majority society may dismiss my findings and see them as narrowly focused, even though this was done intentionally.

Limitations

The findings in this study examines the perceptions of four African American, male principals, leading a high priority school, in a southeastern state in the United States. For the purposes of this study, only four principals, who fit the research criteria were solicited to participate in this study. As such, the findings of this study may or may not be transferrable to other African American principals. However, the researcher will attempt to mitigate this limitation by employing intentionality in the subjects participating in the study and by studying principals (the subjects participating) who hail

from across a broad spectrum of the state.   Additionally, while the researcher was very

cautious to remain unbiased, the nature of this type of analysis makes that a possibility.

Summary

Chapter three outlined the research methodology employed in this study. The

design of the study and a description of the study's population and sample were discussed

along with the interview questions used in this study.   Also included in this chapter was

an explanation detailing the setting of the study, and the data collection and data analysis

procedures employed. Study limitations conclude this chapter. The research findings are

presented in chapter four.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the research study. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of male, African American principals who lead high priority schools in North Carolina. Critical Race Theory was used as a conceptual framework. The experiences of four male, African American principals were studied through interview sessions during the spring and fall semesters of 2013. Educators were chosen based upon their identification regarding three criteria framed in this study: race (African American), gender (male) and employment status (employed leading a high priority school). This chapter begins with a brief overview of the school setting the respective principal leads. This demographic data is provided to contextualize the suppositions of authors Brown (2005), McCray, Wright, Beachum (2007), and Tillman (2004a) who posit about the characteristics schools African American principals are most likely to lead possess: schools with majority African American student populations, schools with low levels of student achievement, and schools impacted by poverty among other criteria. While the principals participating in this study may not have been at the school they are currently assigned for all three years of the data set presented, the data set still serves to frame the "type" of school to which each principal is assigned. The chapter continues with a brief biography of each respective principal prior to an analysis of the findings each participant shared.

The compilation of each of these pieces help to answer the research question that guides this study: *What are the experiences of African American male principals who lead high priority schools?*

The participants in this study range from ages 39 to 53. Of the four principals included in this study, one was employed in an urban setting, one in a suburban setting, and two in rural school settings in North Carolina. One principal moved to his current school at the request of his current Superintendent (from a middle school within the district). The other three were principals who served outside of the district, but hired in their current schools by district personnel. One principal leads a middle school (grades 6-8); the other three principals lead traditional high schools (grades 9-12). They each had over ten years of educational experience, either as a teacher, assistant principal, or a principal. Their term of leadership as a principal ranged from two years to thirteen years. Combined the participants spent over 25 interviewer hours with this researcher over the course of this study. What follows is summary of three-year trend data for the schools that each principal serves.

Table 1

Stephen Grant, Ithaca High School

Year	Performance Composite (scores on Assessments)	State Average on Assessments	Graduation Rate	State Graduation Rate	% Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch	State average % Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch
2012-2013	27.6%***	44.1%	67.7%	82.5%	52.64%	56.14%
2011-2012	64.7%	81.4%	75.1%	80.4%	47.17%	55.94%
2010-2011	68.3%	79.7%	68.3%	77.9%	45.92%	53.86%

*** **In 2012-2013 the State of North Carolina implemented new assessments that coincided with national Common Core standards. Test scores were re-normed and test scores dropped precipitously. There is no correlation between 2012-2013 assessments and assessments given in previous years. However, state averages are provided for each year to make comparisons if necessary.**

Table 2

Michael Tucker, Spartan Middle School

Year	Performance Composite (scores on Assessments)	State Average on Assessments	% Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch	State average % Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch
2012-2013	28.7% (R)*** 14.6% (M)***	43.9% (R) 42.3% (M)	71.19%	56.14%
2011-2012	51.9% (R) 74.9% (M)	71.2% (R) 82.8% (M)	79.53%	55.94%
2010-2011	48.1% (R) 70.3% (M)	70.7% (R) 82.4% (M)	76.65%	53.86%

*** **In 2012-2013 the State of North Carolina implemented new assessments that coincided with national Common Core standards. Test scores were re-normed and test scores dropped precipitously. There is no correlation between 2012-2013 assessments and assessments given in previous years. However, state averages are provided for each year to make comparisons if necessary. R = Reading M = Math.**

Table 3

Darren Walker, DuPree High School

Year	Performance Composite (scores on Assessments)	State Average on Assessments	Graduation Rate	State Graduation Rate	% Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch	State average % Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch
2012-2013	13.0%***	44.1%	73.8%	82.5%	94.64%	56.14%
2011-2012	51.9%	81.4%	72.6%	80.4%	87.48%	55.94%
2010-2011	59.2%	79.7%	66.9%	77.9%	86.86%	53.86%

*** In 2012-2013 the State of North Carolina implemented new assessments that coincided with national Common Core standards. Test scores were re-normed and test scores dropped precipitously. There is no correlation between 2012-2013 assessments and assessments given in previous years. However, state averages are provided for each year to make comparisons if necessary.

Table 4

Robert Daye, B. F. Mae High School

Year	Performance Composite (scores on Assessments)	State Average on Assessments	Graduation Rate	State Graduation Rate	% Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch	State average % Of Students receiving Free and reduced Price Lunch
2012-2013	27.5%***	44.1%	67.7%	82.5%	77.67%	56.14%
2011-2012	62.1%	81.4%	81.6%	80.4%	85.49%	55.94%
2010-2011	62.7%	79.7%	74.4%	77.9%	88.22%	53.86%

*** In 2012-2013 the State of North Carolina implemented new assessments that coincided with national Common Core standards. Test scores were re-normed and test scores dropped precipitously. There is no correlation between 2012-2013 assessments and assessments given in previous years. However, state averages are provided for each year to make comparisons if necessary.

Chapter four contains the results of each participant's responses during the interview sessions conducted by the researcher. An analysis of interview transcripts with study participants allowed this researcher to uncover 36 codes with an average of 27 codes per transcript. An additional analysis of the transcript codes yielded five themes and one sub-theme. A description of the relevant themes revealed in the transcripts follows. The first theme, *Principal Placement at High Priority Schools: "Go where you are needed"*, captures participant reflections as to why they are serving the school to which they are assigned. A subtheme detailing the *Barriers to turning around a High Priority school* is also discussed.

A second theme, illuminating Kofi Lomotey's (1993) ethno-humanist perspective, entitled *Ethno-humanism: "I see myself in my kids"* follows. In discussing this theme principals openly affirm another reason why they serve in the schools they serve. They personally relate to their students and feel a desire, a calling if you will, to serve what is traditionally a fragile educational populace. The third theme to emerge from the data examines issues relating to *Supporting and Growing Principals*. In looking at this theme, participant responses center on their collective experiences about receiving help in performing the critical task of ensuring that all of their students receive the sound, basic education to which they are entitled.

As participants discussed the support they received equipping them to lead their schools their responses revealed an additional theme: *Impact of leading a High Priority School*. This theme focused on participants' experiences regarding the impact leading a turnaround school has on their families, personal relationships, and health. Emanating

from this discussion the fifth theme emerged concerning the implications leading a high priority school may have on the careers of these leaders. In discussing the issues surrounding, *My Career: Present Vision / Future Prospects*, leaders shared their perspectives on what life is like leading the schools they serve and offer insight as to what they perceive their futures hold as a result of leading their schools.

Theme One: Principal Placement at High Priority Schools

In addressing this theme participants were asked to respond to why they felt they were leading their respective schools. Participants had the latitude (provided by the interview protocols) to discuss their personal decision to assume the helm of their school or to discuss any experiences they may have had that prepared them to lead their schools. The researcher also used interview questions to probe any life experiences that may have led them to want to lead a high priority school as well. Over the course of these interviews some participants shared some deeply personal life stories. The depth of emotion in some of the comments shared permeate some aspects of this work and further underscore the importance of capturing the counter-narrative identified in Critical Race Theory.

Entry into Administration

Two of the participants detailed their upbringings from childhood as reasons they went into administration as a career while another came to education as a mid-life career change. Uniting the elements of this theme were tenets of having a desire to "fix" the school and a desire to seek out and accept a challenge. Darren spoke of his desire to take on and face the challenge of leading his school.

Well now you see here population decreasing, not necessary the quality of student, but decreasing. So I wanted to come here where the challenge was. And when I came it was a challenge. You had [students] walking up and down the hall; you had [students] hanging out at the fire alarm. You had [students], just chillin', the bell rang, forget it – it rang – it didn't mean nothing. I came here because I knew it was a challenge. I worked with [the former principal] for a year and I knew then it was my job. And I wanted to see could we restore order. So he [the former principal] and I decided we can fix this. We can get off this damn failing list. And we went about the business of hiring teachers and restoring some kind of structure to this place. So that's why I wanted to come here.

Robert added to this sentiment, replying.

This is where I operate well because with my experience [being] most of the time with priority schools. See, I have never been afraid to go to a school. If you've got somewhere that's all the way down here [gestures downward with his hand] and there's nowhere (to go) but up.

Ringing true in the comments of these two participants are the words of Gooden (2012) who questioned whether or not many African American principals were cognizant of the employment choices they made. Gooden (2012) noted that African American principals find themselves in a very precarious position. Many are so dedicated to their mission (the message echoed by Darren and Robert of "I want to work with a certain population") of serving those less fortunate that they may fail to see their own peril that, for some, leading a high priority school can be a career-derailing proposition. Darren specifically addressed this theory.

I will tell you, I told my Superintendent, I will tell anybody – I'm not looking for my next job! Up there you have to go along to get along, play politics. These are kids we are talking about man! And I'm not the kind of guy who can just go along to get along. When I came here I was looking and when I leave I will be looking. But I want to be judged by what I do while I am here. My greatness is in the children that we graduate. Judge me on that!

"Go Where You Are Needed"

Each of these participants, in varied ways, spoke of how they entered

administration. And at the heart of each comment was the sentiment that they felt they

were "needed" at their respective schools. This notion of being "needed" or that their

students or the school "needed" them was a prevailing one. Darren stated.

> When I went to undergrad, I once asked a Dean, I said, "Dean how do you know
> what's best for your life? How did you know to come here?" He [the Dean] said,
> "people can tell you all kinds of stuff and lies, but son, I'm gonna tell you
> something very simple I learned a long time ago. Walker, when you graduate, go
> where you're needed in life" and then he just walked off. A week later I saw the
> Dean again and asked him about his response and he said. "If you go where
> you're needed you'll see your talents. Your talents will come to the forefront,
> because you'll go where you are needed. And those talents that you don't even
> know you had will avail themselves. You'll begin to find things in you, whatever
> the situation or the circumstance is, that will expose your talents. But the bottom
> line is you go where you are needed." And ever since I heard that, I have
> modeled my [Walker's] professional career after this advice.

This mantra of "go where you are needed" drives many of the professional

motivations of these men. They look at their schools, they see the data displayed above

and they feel a sense of urgency to make a positive change for the students. But more so

they look into the faces of their students and they see themselves. This ideal will be

further unpacked as the theme of *Ethno-humanism: "I see myself in my kids"* is

introduced. But before exploring the theme of *Ethno-humanism*, a sub-theme emerged

from examining the participants' entry into administration in their schools and that sub-

theme is *Barriers to turning around a High Priority school.*

Barriers to Turning around a High Priority School

Frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed were evident in the comments of each participant in this study concerning their work at high priority schools. Frustration stemmed from a lack of control over many of the issues they face concerning their school, from staff and staffing issues, to the need to elevate teacher expectations on the part of the students they serve. Participants expressed feelings of being overwhelmed due to the sheer number and magnitude of things they felt need to be fixed in their schools. While these feelings may be common to any principal, the feelings surrounding these issues are magnified when the issue of race is layered due to the type of school's most African Americans normally lead. The work of Brown (2005) and others who posit the notion that African American educational leaders are more likely to lead schools that that have significant barriers to contend with in some way supports the feelings these participants share. Two particular participants captured the impact of these barriers. Grant, for instance, alluded to these feelings of frustration. Grant explained.

> I'm stressing man. I'm having to deal with stuff I didn't have – I had stuff – its stuff that I didn't even have control over. Everybody keeps telling me how they're going to personally hold you responsible this year. It's just so much around here, man; I don't even know where to start and it's so much. And most of the things ain't got nothing to do with Common Core or instruction! I need to tell myself that progress is a four-year process, I need to stop being so hard on myself because if it took my mentors four years to turn a school around then I can't expect to turn it around in a year. And it's going to take time because it didn't happen – we didn't go down like this in a year; it took time to do that. So it's going to take time to improve. But I usually keep a lot of this stuff bottled in and don't talk about it much.

On the surface, Stephen's sentiments speak to the some of the barriers principals of high priority schools face. Controlling external factors, dealing with overwhelming amounts of issues, not knowing where to start the change process, trying to do too many things at one time, or feeling that you don't have time to change things are all potential barriers to changing high priority schools. These barriers are exacerbated without support, mentors, or guidance in navigating the constantly churning waters of turning around a school. However, the stress level that Stephen depicts in this brief interchange also speaks volumes of the level of frustration these participants share. In addition to this bout of frustration, this interchange shows how principals in high priority schools may have to be their own cheerleaders, their own support network in order to exist in these pressure-filled environments. Also, examining these sentiments shows the impact of external (and sometimes internal) pressures these principals face. Each of these barriers independently could negatively impact these principals – collectively they could prove devastating to the careers of these leaders.

Other barriers to turning around a high priority school were also shared by the participants in this study. Stephen Grant also shared frustration in putting the "right staff in place" and staff limitations. Grant said:

> Some teachers still have the mentality of I've given it to the kids, I mean I've given it, I've done my job. Whether they get it they get it, if they don't they don't. But I have done what I can. I can't do any more. The staff here, overall, just seems to have low expectations for our kids and you have to hold your kids to high expectations.

Grant also stated an equally pressing concern with his staff, that "They're (some of the teachers at his school) are scared of the kids but if you are telling a kid to do the right thing you should never be scared."

Robert also cited staff concerns as a barrier to positively impacting high priority schools.

> Getting all the staff on board with good instructional techniques is the best thing to do in a school like this but it's also the hardest thing to do in a school like this. Some teachers here work really hard but they're doing things the same way they did 30 years ago and they are frustrated. I've got jokers like "I still remember when I used to do such and such and I'm not changing and I'm gonna be here when you are gone." In a priority school you have to take care of these people first thing. But sometimes you just can't and that adds to the time it takes to turnaround a school.

Having the right staff in place can be a major boon or a major bust in the process of changing a school's culture and in changing the educational outcomes of students. Districts can serve as a support or an impediment in obtaining new staff members for a high priority school or in moving ineffective staff members out of a high priority school. The effective and proactive management of the prickly issue that is staffing high priority schools and the monitoring and management of change process in the same schools holds the potential to remove or manage the stress and frustration level that principals face allowing them to better serve the schools and students to which they are assigned. In addition, management of these two issues may improve the career prospects of the challenged population that is principals of high priority schools.

Theme Two: Ethno-humanism

Principals of high priority schools often see themselves in their students. Kofi Lomotey (1993) references this relationship in his work, *African American Principals: Bureaucrat/Administrators and Ethno-Humanists*. Lomotey (1993) states that principals who are ethno-humanists have a "commitment to the education of all students, confidence in the ability of all students to do well, and compassion for and understanding of, all students and the communities in which they live" (p. 396). More specifically Lomotey (1993) notes that "these principals are not only concerned with the students' progress from grade to grade; they are also concerned with the individual life chances of their students" (p. 396). The four principals that participated in this study reflected Lomotey's work in multiple ways.

"I See Myself in my Kids"

In determining subject positionality within this theme, the participants expressed beliefs concerning coaching teacher–student relationships, improving teacher beliefs regarding student academic capabilities, and drawing strength from student success in spite of the hard work necessary to help students achieve the success they deserve. Participants also discussed their individual relationships with students. They discussed the fact that they could empathize with students no matter their socio-economic status because they felt that they (participants) had been there (in difficult socioeconomic circumstances) themselves. Participants valued the 'been there, done that' aspect of their personal lives and endeavored to bring that context to their work as a principal incorporating it into their relationships with students. I juxtaposed participant responses

against the characteristics shared by Lomotey (1993) in order to provide greater clarity to these principal's experiences in leading a high priority school. What follows are the participants' embodiment of Lomotey's (1993) ethno-humanism.

Stephen Grant proclaimed his belief in his students and where this passion came from in this manner.

> I am somebody that is invested in the school, invested in these kids. Like I always say (and I tell my teachers this) 'there but for the grace of God, goes I'. What I mean by this is that I could be any one of the students in your classrooms, at any time. And where would I be if somebody had not taken a strong interest in me and my future? That's why I try to push teachers to see the whole child and realize that he has value – regardless of his zip code, where he comes from, or the type of clothes or shoes he's wearing. The socioeconomic status of my (school's) community has lowered but that doesn't mean that our expectations (of children) have to. We need to think the best of these kids and expect the best from these kids and most importantly give our best to these kids.

Darren Walker also echoed the message of "seeing himself" in his students and explained how it affects his work as a principal.

> So many people helped me get to where I am right now and I know I would not have made it here were it not for them. One of the reasons I do what I do for these kids is because somebody did it for me! They did it for me! So many of my kids, I understand. What people did for me, former coaches, principals, even a former county commissioner, what they did for me, I am passing it on. Not only is it my job, it's my obligation! These men would talk to me and tell me 'man you can't do this sh*t, all this crazy sh*t you doing. You gotta straighten up man'. And it's because of them not giving up on me, that I won't give up on these kids, even though so many others have. I know these kids can succeed, I know better! Because guess what? I came from these same schools that the state labels as mediocre. I'm from here! This is me! I can't give up on them. I know what they can become, because I am one of them!

Each participant was unwavering in his ability to relate to their students and they each capitalized upon this ability to relate and to motivate students to pursue success. Two participants saw the commonalities between themselves and their students emanating from their collective emergence from rural, agricultural settings; in essence, moving from the fields to a professional position. These leaders related the work ethic necessary to succeed in the "fields" with the work ethic needed to achieve academic success. They leveraged both student and family understanding of this work ethic with a relationship of care, in an effort to access student success. Michael Tucker framed the experience in this manner.

> I grew up in a little rural town much like this one. I was the oldest. I grew up on the farm, and so it was one of those things where, you know we'd be out before the rooster, you know, and so Granddaddy worked sunup to sundown in the summer. Granddaddy said you don't work you don't eat. We were up digging the potatoes, putting them up under the house, having the banter rooster, going and get your eggs, the well to get your water, the slop bucket, and I mean we had an outhouse, you know what I mean? Back then it was a humbling experience, you know, when you think about it now I wouldn't trade it for nothing. When I got to college, it took me seven years to finish due to financial reasons, but it was a new world to me. I was in and out of school, I had to take one class, sit out a semester, take two classes. It was tough. When I was finally able to get into a profession, I tried several before I became an educator. But when I came to this job I brought those experiences with me. When I came here I started looking at the school report cards going back to 2003. I am trying to understand how the school district has been able to perform at such a low level for so long. I mean it was kind of heartbreaking, I'm thinking these kids need some help. Their teachers need some help -something! And I rode out here to the school and I saw people digging sweet potatoes on the way to the school, I saw people pulling tobacco, and it was just bringing back memories of my life. How I grew up. I could see myself as one of these kids. And I figure, 'hey, for my background and me growing up like I did. If I can be successful, so can these kids'.

Darren Walker also echoed the commonality that exists between the upbringing of many

of the participants in this study and that of their students. Walker stated.

> I'm not saying that all principals have to, I mean you don't have to be hungry and
> poor and broke and born like that all the time to understand [these kids]. But that
> damn it, it helps because let me say something: I just took a boy home. I just got
> back 10 minutes ago and walked into another altercation between two dudes but
> anyway – I said son why are you in my building with bedroom shoes on and your
> damn socks are dirty. He said, Mr. Walker, I ain't got no [more] socks, all you
> see is what I got. I took the young man home and his house looked like the house
> on Green Acres, hell the house on Green Acres looked better! Well he asked me
> to let him off at the corner, because he was embarrassed about where he lived. I
> said, look I ain't judging you, hell I done been here playa. He looked at me and
> said, Walker, you crazy…but you aight. You my nigga, you understand and I
> know you got my back!

Robert Daye echoes many of the sentiments expressed by both Walker and

Tucker. Daye described his experiences as they relate to his ability to lead a high priority

school.

> For me this is home, I'm from [a nearby county]. I see what I am doing here at
> B.F. Mae High as giving back, because someone did the same thing for me. See,
> I have grown up around here and know many people here. So I have connections
> with the people here. I connect with them because we come from the same
> environment. I know a lot of these kids, their parents, grandparents or somebody
> in their family. And they know I'm not afraid to call or show up at their house or
> wherever they are staying whenever I need to. I tell them anytime and I tell their
> parents too that I made it out of here and I can help you get out too. And their
> parents believe in me because they know that I'm right and they know I'm a man
> of my word. Many of these parents know where I lived growing up and we both
> can point and say 'that's where Daye grew up' or 'I remember when Daye used to
> work with me and Daddy in that tobacco field'. I don't just talk a road of
> academic success for my kids and I show 'em. I try to show 'em a living example
> of 'just because you live in this county it does not mean you have to be limited.'
> You can do more than me, more than your parents, you can achieve and achieve
> at a high rate. I want my kids to have a shot at a successful life and I will do all I
> can to at least give them a chance at that shot. And I use relationships to get to
> this goal. These relationships and our common experiences are at the root of a lot
> that we do here at B.F. Mae High School.

Lomotey (1993) states that principals who are ethno-humanists have a "commitment to the education of all students, confidence in the ability of all students to do well, and compassion for and understanding of, all students and the communities in which they live" (p. 396). The participants in this study all demonstrate some level of relationship with the students they serve. Whether these relationships are grounded in the field experience or the look I've been poor like you experience or grounded simply in the I'm not going to give up on you no matter what because someone did this for me experience, these leaders use their understanding of these students and their experiences to connect with their students. The common experiences they share and the ensuing connections established allow participants a deeper understanding of the students they are charged with leading and they each leverage this inter-personal knowledge base to narrow academic gaps in a pursuit of improved life outcomes for their students. The participants in this study manifest their leadership styles in different ways; however each person's leadership style is grounded in an ethno-humanist approach. This approach is but one example of how these participants cope with the task of leading high priority schools.

Theme Three: Supporting and Growing Principals of High Priority Schools

The development of leaders at high priority schools is of critical importance as these schools are most often affected by multiple issues that impede high levels of academic achievement. These issues could range from low accountability (test score) performance, high levels of teacher turnover, and elevated numbers of inexperienced teachers, poor classroom instruction, poor communication, low morale, high leadership turnover, insufficient professional development, high dropout rates, or poor student

attendance. Any one of these issues alone may take exceptional leadership to solve; when combinations of these issues are clustered (as they are in many high priority schools) the ability to address and solve the myriad of issues faced becomes a daunting task. It is because of this reality that the issue of supporting principals of high priority schools is so critical.

Within this theme participants discussed their availability or access to mentors, avenues to improving growth areas in terms of professional performance, their accessibility to Central Office (staff members, support, etc.), the impact of personal and professional relationships within the school community, and the importance of their religious faith. The researcher examined the underlying forces at play regarding the relationships that were reported by the participants. These relationships were examined for their productivity in helping the school's leadership grow and develop, but also through the lens of the school's development. The effect of these relationships, positive or negative, is also examined.

Mentors

Of the four participants in this study, only one classified himself as having a formal mentor. The other three participants cited loose affiliations with people in education who also happened to be principals. The loose affiliations generally occurred by way of one of three mechanisms: through fraternal affiliations (one respondent explained, "I call my Frat and bounce ideas off of him"), familial relationships (one participant noted, "My cousin is a former associate superintendent–in a different district-- so I just call him up when I have a question") or through loosely connected, ad hoc

educational circles (on interviewee stated, "Well, the principal at 'X school' has been in the game a long time. When I have a question I call him"). As such formal, strategic, mentor / mentee opportunities were not provided for a majority of the participants of this study.

Stephen Grant stated that he was assigned a formal mentor through his district. He characterized his experience as positive, detailing its benefits and how it has helped him. Grant described his interactions with his mentor as follows.

> Because I am in a small, close-knit district where I can be paired with a mentor from the district and I have a shadow mentor in my assistant superintendent. I have a good relationship with my mentor, we text, do Google chat over issues, and even with the other principals in the district I'm like 'guys, what do you think about this' and they respond. And my mentor is a high school principal as am I so that works out great especially with me returning to the high school level coming from the middle school. And my shadow mentor is very responsive. Like if I had a question I'd call her and she would get back with me. It wasn't like I'd call and she'd take two days to get back with me like if I was in a huge district. She'd get back with me within a couple of hours if not a couple of minutes, depending on if she was in a meeting. That support is great because I am probably one of the first principals that they brought in from outside of the district. When I first got here I kind of felt like an outsider. Because everybody else knew each other because they worked here, they were APs here and they were promoted here. But they (my mentors) kind of brought me in and supported me. I would also like to think that they support me because I can do the job and because they know that this school didn't slide to this level overnight and it won't get better overnight either.

Grant details accessibility and access to his mentor as positive aspects of his mentor relationships. He also cites the size of the district as an aid in supporting a mentor / mentee relationship.

Similar mentor benefits are expressed by another participant in this study; although slight differences exist in the formal versus informal nature of the mentor /

mentee relationship. Initially, Michael Tucker, a first year principal in this study, did not

have a mentor. Over the course of subsequent interviews he was assigned an informal

mentor to start the new school year. In our first interview session Michael shared the

following thoughts.

> Being new to the middle school model, I have a lot of questions. I have spent my
> entire career as a high school teacher, coach, and assistant principal. So I know I
> have a lot to learn about the middle school piece. And I'm just trying to get as
> many resources and as much knowledge as I can. So I know I got to talk around a
> little bit. I got some colleagues and a fellow principal over in a neighboring
> county who is also at a middle school and got some other friends and I kind of
> throw some ideas off of them; like what do they do? Then you know I am starting
> to build my network of resources, to begin working on some stuff for next year so
> I can have my ducks in a row.

Michael realized that there were some gaps in his knowledge base that he needed help in

filling and initially he had to independently seek out resources to fill those gaps. He

capitalized on loosely connected, ad hoc educational circles to fill those gaps without

district support. At the start of the next school year, Tucker was assigned a formal

mentor.

> My superintendent has been very supportive of some of the new things we are
> doing here at Spartan Middle. He has been throwing ideas at me and I have been
> throwing ideas at him and we have really been working collaboratively. And now
> I kind of have a mentor in Mr. Chuck Lawson who came over from a neighboring
> county. He's a veteran in education. Now he is the principal over at the Early
> College. We have been talking and bouncing ideas off each other and he did
> middle school, I think for 12 – 15 years, if not longer, and that's been a good
> resource for me as well. He actually comes over and checks on me about every
> two weeks and we kind of text back and forth and everything. I kind of copy him
> in on some of my emails just to get his feedback and vice versa. It's coming
> around, I feel better, more supported, more secure.

Tucker details some of the benefits that a mentor relationship can offer principals of high priority schools. Stephen Grant, another principal in the early years of his career, also echoed the benefits a mentor provides him as a tool of professional growth and development.

However, the other two participants in this study were left to craft mentorship opportunities independent of their district and often turned to informal connections cultivated through their personal connections. Robert turns to family members explaining his circumstances as follows.

> I don't really have a mentor. But I bounce things off of people kind of like a mentor. One of the people is my cousin. He's an assistant superintendent [in a neighboring school district] and I know that he has his own district to run so I try not to bother him too much but if I need him I can call him personally. That's the closest that I can think I have to a mentor.

Robert stated that he realizes the importance of mentoring relationships and makes an effort to mentor younger principals in his district. He also shared a perception that he gets from the district; that mentoring opportunities are not as important as is the end result: "test scores."

Principal Support Structures – Central Office

While formal (or informal) mentor relationships were not always a part of participants' professional growth and development, several had close access to Central Office support. Stephen Grant detailed the prompt, responsive nature of his Central Office staff stating that personnel generally responded to his requests "within a couple of

hours if not a couple of minutes." Michael Tucker described his access to Central Office support as "unique".

> Right now, I'll be honest. I got a Superintendent that is kind of unique. I can call him up right now and run some ideas by him or whatever and he's available. In my previous district that wouldn't have happened. And so I'm finding out now there are some advantages of having the small district where being able to reach out and talk with your superintendent, who's actually the boss you report to.

Supportive relationships like those described above were not common experiences amongst all participants in this study. Darren Walker described his relationship with Central Office in this manner.

> Let me tell you what they (Central Office) do. Not a lot in terms of – see I can beat the bushes and keep going before 'em and make sure that I have the personnel here that I need. I had to make the case for an Assistant Principal – and I got it. Every other high school, the maximum APs they have is three. I have been able to maintain four here. They (Central Office) do realize that there is a need for additional support here. I have four counselors; schools with 2,000 kids have four counselors. You know they could make a legitimate argument 'Walker, we would be within our rights to strip you of some of that help.' That's why I don't raise a whole lot of hell, even though I could. So they (Central Office) could make it tough over here; they could and be within the guidelines prescribed by the state. They could if I poke and prod. But now let me tell you this – that's [the reason that they do it] to keep niggas off of 'em. That's not because they are in love with DuPree High School or its clientele. They pretty much give, what they give, to keep niggas off of 'em and to have a reason to keep us over here.

Walker describes his perspective on the support that he receives as leader of his school. On the surface, the relationship between Walker and his Central Office could at best be characterized as contentious – maybe even mutually contentious. However, reviewing the interest convergence principle of Critical Race Theory may lead to a greater

understanding of this complex dynamic. This analysis will be explored in a subsequent chapter.

Identifying Growth Spots

When discussing the issue of support, each of the participants framed the support they received in terms of either financial support or in terms of personnel. While these are two important support areas essential in turning around high priority schools, support in the area of growth like curriculum and instruction was not referenced. Nor was the issue of the Central Office shielding or protecting these leaders from impositions that got in the way of leading their school. In this current age of accountability, deficits in the area of curriculum and instruction can severely impede a principal's development as well as career prospects. And varied outside interests can deter leaders from focusing on the key issue of student learning. Stephen recognized his need to grow in the area of curriculum and instruction but felt restrained from doing so due to the numerous issues that he faced daily as principal of a high priority school, noting that instruction fell down on his daily "principal to-do list." He shared some of the experiences that he felt negatively impacted his growth.

> I mean depending on what's going on, I mean I might have parent calls to return, emails to return, or a request from Central Office. I might get wind that somebody has something on campus, drugs or a gun or something that they are not supposed to have on campus that I got to go take care of myself. I mean here's an example – because of the political nature of my school, it's nothing to have a Board member bring something directly to my attention. Well, recently one Board member felt that our grass needed to be mowed and stopped by and wanted to meet with me over the issue. We're talking about grass here! And added to that, another Board member, who has only been in my school two times this year, recently stopped by to discuss a concern about the prom that someone had brought to him. And I'm like you haven't been in my building but one time

before today and you are criticizing what we are doing here? And neither of those situations was about teaching and learning, you know what I mean, instruction! A lot of this stuff does not have anything to do with Common Core or instruction in general. It makes you wonder what is really important here. But back to your question, I know my growth spots. I know that I need to get stronger on Common Core and instruction and make sure my Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are fully-functioning. Besides what I get in graduate classes, from my mentor, and from my colleagues that is about all the support I get in those areas. Internal support instructionally might come from a principal's meeting but that's not the same as someone sitting down with you going over some of these things or doing walkthroughs with you or some other form of direct instruction.

Participants also described support as conditional. Earlier Darren in describing his contentious relationship with his Central Office alluded to having Central Office support but questioned the motives of the support. Other participants described support as conditional, generally hinging on whether Central Office is mad with the principal or not. Stephen Grant framed the issue like this.

Again, going along with that support question, I'm gonna say that they support me until maybe something they don't like. And at this point, I'm not gonna say they don't support me, but they'll express their disapproval of something I may have done. They just haven't thrown me under the bus yet. But I have often wondered if I have a longer leash in the Central Office. I mean do I have a longer leash because of the type of school I lead? Do my White colleagues have a longer leash than I do? I mean I don't know the answer to either of these questions but I'd be lying to you if I said I hadn't thought of them. But to answer your question, I haven't had anybody just come out and just, you know, kill me. But I know people are going to do what they need to do to get the best for their own interests.

Robert Daye also spoke to the conditional nature of Central Office support. Daye stated.

When I ask him [the superintendent] for things, he looks at what does it bring to the table. And the main thing he does is what you are supposed to do and that is

question does the data support it [what's being requested] and how is this going to benefit the students, staff, and the community? And if it's going to benefit, he'll go with it. But that's basically the thing – the data. If the data shows it's a good thing, he's going to try it. One thing about it, now, he's real tight on the budget. But most of what we are talking about now is financial. Other issues it's not that cut and dry, take personnel for example. In a small town relationships are key. A lot of people are related to one another so getting rid of somebody has serious repercussions. If you want to get rid of this teacher, who is the sister of an employee in another school, who also is niece of a Board member, the connections make it harder to move someone. These decisions are affecting multiple households and families. So navigating that micro-political piece you often find yourself out on a limb by yourself. So while you can count on support from him most times, I have learned which things I can go to him with and which things I can't even approach him with.

While each of the participants in this study felt that they received some form of support from their Central Office staff they also recognized that this support came with limitations. And even with these limitations the mandate from their Central Office was to turn the school around By Any Means Necessary. Balancing these two seemingly diametrically opposing points added a degree of complexity to the task that is leading a high priority school. This study will examine the toll balancing these two ideals (and other weighty issues) may have on these leaders in a subsequent theme entitled: *Impact of leading a High Priority School*.

External Support

Supporting principals of high priority schools does not fall solely on the shoulders of the school district in which the principals are employed. In North Carolina, the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) also provides support to these principals, primarily from its District and School Transformation (DST) division. By virtue of North Carolina's receiving a federal award from the Department of Education as a part of the

Obama Administration's *Race to the Top* Grant, the District and School Transformation division expanded its personnel to serve the thirteen lowest performing districts and 118 lowest performing individual schools. The District and School Transformation division of DPI has primarily provided services to under the *Race to the Top* grant by way of professional development sessions and by deploying personnel into schools and districts. As such, state level support is another form of external support provided to some of the participants in this study.

The participants receiving DST service expressed varying degrees of value and frustration with the services provided by DPI. Michael Tucker stated positive experiences with DPI support.

> The professional development provided by DPI has been good. We talked about "Irreplaceables," [a professional development session provided by DPI] how you need to identify those teachers that you cannot replace and you need a campaign to show them that they are appreciated and you need to keep them in your building. And ever since we had that meeting I've been doing that, planting seeds like 'hey listen, you're good, you do a good job for students and we need you here – I need you here for what I want to do,' you know what I mean? And so those make some good sessions.

Grant also expressed satisfaction with the personnel DPI provides to work directly with him as a school leader and that works directly with his staff members to improve instruction. Grant stated.

> I have been assigned a School Transformation Coach (STC) to work with me and my teachers have Instructional Coaches (IC) that work with them on instructional improvement. But for me personally, my STC, Mr. Rockford has helped me a lot. He is a sounding board for me, somebody I can kind of throw ideas off because I mean I'm new to this, and I am willing to admit that. So any advice I can get, I'm

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all about that. Mr. Rockford, who's been in this profession, you know, a little bit longer and he, you know can articulate some good ideas based upon his experience that I can learn from. He also has some good ideas and I just like throwing things off of him, you know, and he kinda sharpens some ideas that I have or he might give me some thoughts to consider. And it's good to have that kind of support there.

Robert Daye also shared his positive experiences with his STC.

My STC has been very helpful because anything that you ask her she will help you with. Just like yesterday, she and I were working on some School Improvement Plan (SIP) information. She and I are going to go back and I'm going to start looking at the DPI template more for the SIP and were going to try to make it more effective, something that truly drives our school's processes and procedures. Then we are both going to meet with the leadership team to chart the course of the school.

While two participants shared positive experiences with DPI services, one participant expressed displeasure with the services received. Darren Walker, not only expressed displeasure with the services, he also felt that his concerns had fallen on deaf ears. He equated the fact that his concerns were not heard with the invisible nature of the children he served. Walker shared his feelings providing the following statement.

I have had two STCs the past two years and I just think DPI doesn't understand what we have going here at DuPree. I mean they sent me one woman who was scared to come in here, didn't try to establish any relationships or anything. If you gonna come in here to DuPree you need to understand my teachers, my students, and what we are dealing with every day. And I just feel that her cultural background wouldn't allow her to do that. The second dude was the same way black dude, but couldn't understand my school. Either they don't understand DuPree or they don't care about making the proper fits between school and STC. And you see if we can't get past establishing a collegial relationship, an understanding relationship, we can't possibly begin working together on some of the issues we got around here.

Walker also felt the professional development activities offered by DPI as a part of its

Race to the Top Grant also missed the mark.

> The professional development that we are required to go to is one size fits all. I mean look, everywhere in education—buzzwords, jargon—everything is preaching differentiation. And what do we go to? A professional development where everybody, rural school, urban school, elementary school, high school, middle school, big district or small district all get the same thing. I mean come on! I mean I suggested to one of the presenters during a break that we should break out by some defining characteristic academic levels (elementary, middle, and high) or something and have some discussion ad learn from people experiencing common issues. But we have had about ten of these sessions and nothing has changed yet. It's crazy!

Michael Tucker, while seeing value in the learning opportunities provided by the

professional development, also shared Walker's criticism.

> I'm still learning at all of this stuff. I wish that these workshops we go to would give us an opportunity to get together by grades or whatever and really talk to one another, see what each other is facing and how they handled it. I think that would be one of the best forms of professional development. I'm not saying what they have done thus far is bad, I'm just saying what I think would benefit me more. And I suggested that to somebody, I suggested it on my survey at the end of one of our sessions. But nothing has changed yet. I think that could be very powerful if they would you know, just give 30 to 40 minutes to groups to do scenarios, or discussions, or just get to know our peers on similar levels to put a name and face together for networking purposes.

Principal support services provided by the state Department of Public Instruction

are at best characterized as inconsistent through the lens and experiences of this study's

participants. Whether these services are deemed beneficial or not, the real impact lay in

the "eyes of the beholder." And for these participants additional issues limited the value

of the services. With the value of the services limited, in the opinion of these leaders, the

ability to support these academically fragile schools is also called into question.

Family and Faith as Forms of Support

For the participants in this study, while support from a mentor, the Central Office,

or support from the state Department of Public Instruction may or may not be viewed as

consistent or valuable, the relationships participants had with family, friends, and their

faith-based community were reported as bedrocks of support. Darren Walker frames his

family support from a spousal perspective explaining that, because of this job, "if you are

married you got to find somebody who understands all it takes to run a school like this."

Robert Daye described how personal relationships help him to lead a high priority school.

> Now schools like this, this is where I feel most comfortable, where I operate well
> because with my experience most of the time being with high priority schools, it's
> just where I fit well. Now having said that, I gotta be honest these schools will
> take a lot out of you. But for me, when things get rough, I know I got God and
> that I'm doing the right thing. See that's the thing, as long as you are doing right
> by kids you are going to be in the right. I hold positions in my church that keep
> me grounded in my faith. And some days, around here, you need your faith and
> your family; you need somebody [laughter]. And my partner, my better half, she
> is very understanding and provides me with a lot of support. I really don't think I
> could do this job without her. She lets me know a lot of times, 'it's going to be all
> right' and some days I really need that.

Michael Tucker also stressed the importance of his faith as he attacked the

challenge of leading a high priority school.

> We are going to do good work here and I know it. It may take some time, but I
> know it. See, I believe in God. He's going to provide opportunities for me and
> what's meant to be I'm going to get it. Can't nobody stop me! I really believe
> that.

Each participant cited the importance of strong personal relationships with family and the faith-based community while acknowledging that leading a high priority school takes a great toll on the relationships that are so essential to their existence. This impact will be covered within the next theme: *Impact of leading a High Priority School*.

Theme Four: Impact of Leading a High Priority School

Participants were asked to describe their experiences leading a high priority school. Examples of sub themes included participant's fishbowl experiences, their attempts to cope with negative perceptions of their school, and the negative impact leading a high priority school has on their personal relationships, personal health, and family.

Fishbowl Experiences

The term fishbowl has a vast amount of definitions, connotations, and meanings. A simple Internet search yields many variations; but for the context of this work, the researcher defines the term "fishbowl" as an environment in which everyone watches the subject as if the subject is on display. In this setting, the African American, male principals of high priority schools are the subjects within the fishbowl, feeling as if their every move is watched. The pressure that evolves from having your every move watched, scrutinized, and sometimes criticized frames the experiences of these participants. Stephen Grant states his perception of his fishbowl experience.

> In my school, we have two schools in one: we have a portion of high socioeconomic standing kids and parents and we have a lot of low socioeconomic standing kids and parents. The high socioeconomic parents hold a lot of positions in the county and they feel like they are entitled to many things, like access for

one; access to me and to the superintendent. So if any decision I make here that certain folks don't like, I know that it's going to the superintendent. The amount of access people have school and district staff here or that they think that they should have is crazy! And I told you that I already felt like an outsider to some degree, so I feel like I am watched and scrutinized in everything I do. I mean, sometimes it feels like I'm under a microscope. I could let it paralyze me, but I just keep focusing on the fact that I got a job to do in turning around this school. I'm trying to do my best.

The impact of being under a microscope or in a fishbowl with your every move analyzed is also a sentiment that Michael Tucker shared. Tucker described his experience in this manner.

I know that as a person of color, I always have to have my stuff together because somebody is always watching. Watching and waiting to see if I'm on my game, if what I am saying or presenting is tight [i.e. correct, accurate, etc.]. Every time I present something to the staff or the school community I have to go over it two or three times. I have to make sure that I have my data correct because I know that I don't have room for a mistake. Either consciously or subconsciously I think some people want other people to fail and it may or may not be about skin color but that's my perception. I know that I am always watched and my decisions are always scrutinized. And I will add this, I have worked for principals of other ethnicities and I would ask them if they felt the pressure that I do, that I am describing and they said no. They told me that I was putting too much pressure on myself. And maybe I am, I don't know, but what I do know is that there will be consequences if I am not on point [correct, accurate, etc.].

Darren Walker echoed the feelings of both Grant and Tucker, but in a different more complex manner. Walker described his perception and experiences.

You know, I've been in education about 20 years. I've been in all different types of schools and what I have found is that in education, like in life, not everybody wants you to succeed. My kids here [at my school] are invisible and so am I. As long as we are out of sight, we are out of mind and people are ok with that. People at the Central Office are ok with that and people at the state are ok with that. But when we do something negative, and negative stuff happens at all types of schools, it gets magnified here and then we are in a fishbowl or under a

microscope or whatever you want to call it. Now when we do something positive, we [are] still invisible. These kids, this school, hell even me, we are forgotten, and overlooked. We are the 'least of these.' I know this, my staff knows this, and my kids know this. White folks come in here all the time with their pieces of paper, trying to tell me how I am doing, how the school is doing. But let me tell you what I am doing, I'm trying to give these kids a way out the best way I know how. And that might not be how the superintendent would do it or how the state would do it; but the job I'm doing with my kids, don't fit on y'alls charts and graphs. Let me tell you something Brother, when a person have to live this, they know what reality is. And I know what it is; I lived in the same situations, if not worse, than many of these kids. I know that and they know that and together we are going to make something good happen here. But remember, if it's something positive that we do, ain't nobody gonna know it, so you be on the watch for it cause they ain't gonna tell you.

Coping With the Perception of the School

The outside perception of many high priority schools is negative and with this impression comes a great deal of assumptions and fears. Overcoming these assumptions and fears while positively changing the academic trajectory of the school is a trying proposition. Navigating and managing these two propositions (the fears and assumptions) adds to the stress and pressure of leading a high priority school, according to the participants of this study.   Darren Walker shared his perceptions as follows.

My school is considered tough. I'm not in a place where they (the students) all gonna come in here and sit in a chair all perfect and raise their hands all perfect and do exactly what they teacher asks. Here, you have to work. You have to teach children, you have to engage children, and you have to make learning real to my students. All the stuff other folks talk about doing, you have to do here or you won't survive. You can't find many people that even want to come to this school and work this job. Every time the job goes up on the board in the district nobody raises their hands to come here. You know why - because we are the 'least of these.' Who do you think wants the headache?

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Stephen Grant shared Walker's views on managing the challenging perceptions of high priority schools.

> When I took the job here I had people say to me, 'it's a mess over there" or "God, I don't envy you at all.' I came in and I found out that staff members were afraid of the kids! But this is not a school where you have to be afraid of the kids. It's just that as the school's demographics changed, student teacher relationships didn't change with them. So teachers never really learned how to deal with a diverse population of students. Now let me tell you: when there are multiple schools, sister schools if you will, in your school district there will always be competition and there will always be rankings. Both of those lead to somebody being on the top and somebody being on the bottom. So just stemming from that creates a perception of your school from the community, students, parents, the district everybody. And my school hasn't always been on the bottom and we won't be here for long. But it is what it is right now. Selling this reality to future teachers, parents, students, and district leadership is hard and you have to be part salesman in this job. You have to convince people of your vision for the school and where you think the school can and will go. I sometimes wonder what my peers at the schools that are considered "good" have to deal with along these lines. I mean everybody has problems and issues to deal with, but if you are at a high performing school, I wonder do you have to sell your school to others. And to be honest everything is based on numbers–accountability numbers as well as enrollment numbers and if your accountability numbers are low then there is a chance that your enrollment numbers may dip too and that affects employment and so many other issues. And in a community like this, that has taken such a large socioeconomic hit, that impact is magnified. So yes, there is a lot of pressure that goes along with changing the perception of high priority schools.

Robert Daye tackles the issue of turning around the perceptions of high priority schools, noting.

> When I first got here, people didn't think the school was safe. You know with fights and stuff like that, I mean we didn't have anything like Columbine. But the community thought the school was unsafe because of fights. So we had to address safety, the fights, you know discipline first. We needed to make sure kids felt safe and that parents felt comfortable sending them here. You have to make safety a first priority in my opinion and you have to have time to make things like discipline work. Because you can't have school if the environment isn't ripe for teaching and learning and safety is an important part of that. So managing your

school's discipline is just as important as managing your school's curriculum in a high priority school. Teachers have to be able to teach and students have to be able to learn and a positive environment is needed for that. If your school has a reputation of being unsafe or any other negative perception you have to solve those first. In every high priority school I have ever been in we have had to figure out which 'fire' needed to be put out first so education could occur. You have to be committed to changing the perception of your school and you are going to need some C.O. (central office) help and you are going to need some time. Then and only then can community perceptions change – then your school will improve.

Safety, socioeconomics, the student population, school location, and accountability are just a few of the factors that leaders of high priority schools have to manage as they work to change the perception of the schools they serve. While the issues each participant faces may be different, the resounding toll that it takes to create the change in perception is huge. Each participant discussed how difficult it is to change the perception of high priority schools and, in their own way, shared the pressure changing the perception becomes for them. But changing school perception is but one of the many crosses these principals' bear. The next sub-theme examines the impact leading high priority schools have upon the participants of this study.

Personal and Familial Impact

Leading schools in this current era is a challenging proposition to be sure. In examining this sub-theme, participants were asked to share their impressions of the impact leading high priority schools had upon them personally. Participants mentioned how their leading of a high priority school affected their health, and their personal and familial relationships. The researcher examined the differences in participant experiences based upon age and tenure in the role of principal. The role of health care for participants was also examined.

Participants expressed concerns that personal and familial relationships were often sacrificed due to their professional obligations. Both Robert Daye and Stephen Grant mentioned how they feel compelled to stay for every after-school event. Darren Walker expressed the same concerns and pressures stating, "That's my name out there on that sign. If something goes wrong, that's my name out there. I have to be here." The pressure to constantly be on site impacts familial relationships, according to Walker.

> When you are a high school principal the job becomes your life, you know? I mean my name is on that sign out there. And if you are married you have got to find somebody who understands that this job is going to be your life. Here with my children (students), I have to pump and prime, pump and prime to make them believe in us and make them believe in themselves. So I'm constantly pumping and priming. And you know what? It takes a certain [long pause]… it takes something out of you as person to do all of that. It does something to a human. So when you get home with your family there is not a lot left to give. And you need to understand that about these kinds of schools. Here, you are in a place where people need your life because they may not have anyone at home with them. This school drains the capacity of a human being because you are constantly giving.

Robert Daye extends the notion of balancing school commitments with community involvement while holding firm to familiar relationships. Daye stated.

> You have to make the rounds at as many local churches as you can. That's where you are actually going to get your parent and community involvement; cause that's where you are going to see a majority of them. So you gotta try to get to at least about four of 'em one or two Sundays a month. Now see, this place right here is unique. They don't like anything to go on until after 2:00pm on Sunday. The pastors in this county have a…everybody, even the thugs and the drunks, and the crack heads, they go to church at least every other Sunday so if you want to catch somebody, a parent or what not, you have a better chance of catching them on Sunday. Next best chance is at sporting events like baseball, Holiday tournaments, etc. You show up at a youth soccer league game on Saturday, show up at all the home games they have. Everything, even show up at some of the Boy Scouts stuff you are invited to, that helps you gain more community support

and makes you appear to the community as more approachable. But it takes a tremendous toll on you, your body, and your family. It just makes you tired to always have to give and give, and give.

Stephen Grant is a non-married leader of a high priority school; however, he is father to a young child. His response to the impact leading a high priority school has upon him is slightly different, as he is not married. But his response is equally as powerful. Grant said.

> Personally this job has taken a toll on me. Relationship-wise I talked about it a lot of times. I can't remember the last time I have gone on a date. Maybe it was the last one we talked about. Sometimes I don't feel like going out and sometimes I just don't feel like doing anything when I get home. I want to come and kind of be by myself. I don't want to talk to anybody. It's some me time, to just be, you know…free. I stress a lot about this job and I constantly take it home with me. I know I have got to a better job of finding a balance between work and personal but it's hard, because work demands so much from me. And when I'm here, I'm here. I have to be totally engaged the while I'm here during the day. And after school I'm at everything. I'm at everything I can be, meaning that I am at 90 percent of our events. But even that takes a toll. I mean I don't get to see my daughter much. The thing that has saved me is that she has a phone and now we text. I'm a text and social media person, so that helps. But I would say that I don't see her that much. I would say a couple of times – you now what? I don't think I've seen her in about two or three weeks to tell the truth. Now I talk to her and one of my goals this week was to see her. But I think this is normal because I have been in challenged schools the whole time with her. So I would say I don't spend as much time as I need to with her.

Michael Tucker also recognized the challenges that leading a high priority school can have on personal and familial relationships. Because of Tucker's close proximity to his place of employment he has been able to cobble together a support system that works for him. Tucker explained.

Well my wife understands education and she understands the long hours I put into it, and that is a blessing! Her profession is equally as time-consuming so that kind of balances us out. As I continue to learn this job, I know that I am going to have to be willing to trust my APs and other people more.   And to be honest, I struggle with that mainly because I am so used to doing it myself. But I have learned that one person can't do this job by himself. Now getting back to my wife, sometimes, rarely she don't understand every now and then when I get some down time I, you know, I have to check e-mails and get you know, stuff squared away for this upcoming school year. For the most part she understands and it's very supportive. As far as my kids, that's another blessing because my kids will be going to school here so we will be together. Now for me personally I used to do activities to relax like, play basketball or lift weights but it's at the point now where my focus, I've really been trying to get to school because ideally, new person coming in, there has been some naysayers and I've got to stay on top of that. But as far as working out, here recently it just don't seem like I have the time to do those things. And I try to find time for my family so in dealing with them, sometimes you don't have a chance to really decompress. So for me finding that personal, family, work balance is hard. Right now I have to say work gets most of me, then family, then some personal time and not much of that [laughter].

The participants in this study all share varying degrees of personal and familial strain that comes with leading a high priority school. Their ability to cope varies with the strength of their support network. Even with a strong support network, these participants still share what could be characterized as negative aspects of leading high priority schools. This notion is extended when the aspects of the participant's physical and mental health is added in. Two participants openly admitted to having ulcers and one mentioned high blood pressure. When they were asked about the monitoring of these health conditions–again issue of time emerged. Participants weighed the value of taking time to see a physician versus time in their building. In the following quote, Darren Walker summed up his physical maladies.

Well, you see I have gray hair [laughter] but seriously. I have been diagnosed with ulcers and chronic migraines. I am over-weight and a lot of that in my opinion, is that I grab a meal when I can. And a lot of times it may be fast food. And that is based a lot on my schedule here. I get up at about 5:00 a.m. – 5:30 a.m. and my day can extend to 10 p.m. – 11 p.m. at night, depending on the season and what's going on. I try to get to the doctor regularly, but if I can get a visit once a year I consider that good. But that doesn't often happen. I know I need to do a better job taking care of my health. But when do I do it? There is always something here 'cause you have to remember that here, you're dealing with a population of kids that from kindergarten through eighth grade for the most part have been told that they're nothing, that you ain't gonna make it, that you come from nothing, that you'll never amount to anything. They have been given that for eight years. And I have four years to convince them otherwise. I don't have the time that other grades, those other schools have. They have eight years; I only have four. And with a lot of them, I only have two, because by the time they get to be 16 they can drop out if they haven't experienced any success here. So when do I have time to go see a doctor?

Stephen Grant also detailed his mental and physical ailments and sounds a familiar refrain. Grant stated.

I mean I know that I suffer from stress. I don't need a doctor to tell me that. I can judge that just based upon the way I am feeling. But physically, I don't really know how I am because I need to find a doctor. My old doctor moved and I haven't found a doctor here. Now the last time I went maybe a year or two ago, my cholesterol was up, but not any other major problems at that time. I need physical. But you know, now that you have made me think about it, I can tell sometimes that I wake up with headaches and I think it's just stress like I said. And I know I have problems sleeping. But I chalk that up to I have never slept well. So I don't think I'm unhealthy, but like I said I do need to find a doctor, since my old one moved. But you know, I was just thinking, when do I have the time to go find a new doctor? 'Cause, man my schedule is so crazy. I don't even really have time to eat until after school.

Michael Tucker frames the impact of his experiences on his physical and emotional well-being.

Well for me stress weighs on me really badly because I want everyone to want to change this as much as I do. So when you don't have those people that kind of have that upbeat or sense of urgency it's really frustrating and I don't really see an outlet for those emotions, those feelings. So I keep a lot of that stuff built up inside of me and I have heard that that is not good. But I don't know what the alternative is.

Participants clearly alluded to the fact that care for their physical and emotional well-being takes a back seat to their professional pursuits. Whether their goals were to push aside physical and emotional health for the gain of professional gratification or if physical and emotional health was pushed aside because of their deep and abiding kinship affiliation with the students and schools they serve is unclear. However in either case, the impediment of time was a common, unifying theme that wove together the tapestry that makes up the experiences of the African American males who lead high priority schools in this study. In light of the experiences the participants share, the researcher was led to inquire about the career prospects these men see ahead of them by virtue of leading a high priority school. The findings relative to this question will be covered in the final theme of this study: *My career: "Present Vision / Future Prospects"*.

Theme Five: My Career: "Present Vision/Future Prospects"

The preceding theme examined the impact leading a high priority school has on the participants in this study. More directly, the previous theme focused on the physical, mental, and emotional impact participants faced as a result of leading a high priority school. This theme, *My Career: Present Vision / Future Prospects*, focuses on the impact leading a high priority school may have on the participant's professional aspirations. Three particular sub themes consistently surfaced. Those sub-themes include

helping people understand the reality of the participants of this survey, individual

participant perceptions of what they think their professional futures hold as a result of

leading a high priority school, and race matters.

Understand my Reality

The participants in this study frequently referred to conditions that reflected their

current reality as leaders of high priority schools. Two participants in particular, Stephen

Grant and Darren Walker, used words and phrases the researcher refers to as loaded

language. For example, both referred to their current roles as principals as being a

"fireman." They also mentioned the political nature of their schools. Through an

analysis of this theme, understand my reality, the researcher is able to extend the counter-

narrative notion of Critical Race Theory, and allow these leaders to frame their own

narrative…in their own words. What follows are participant expressions of their reality.

Stephen Grant describes his reality of working at Ithaca High School in this

manner:

> I've often heard that high school principals tend to be like firemen. You go
> through your whole day putting out fires. And the bad thing is that if you ignore
> those fires they're going to burn down your building. So while I realize that I
> definitely need to work on more instructional things, you know improving at
> becoming an instructional leader, the reality is that I'm a firefighter putting out
> fires.

Darren Walker expounded upon Grant's fireman analogy while echoing many of the

same sentiments.

> Sometimes people come in here and question what we are doing here because we
> are not as successful as some other schools. But you know what? I don't listen to

that stuff because I know what I do here. I know Monday my day is gonna be spent on undoing the weekend stuff, you know the negative coming in to the school. These children leave me at 3:00 today (Friday) and I already know what my Monday is gonna be like. I know it's some fires that I'm going to have to put out.

But putting out fires is not the only portion of reality as explained by these leaders. The political nature of their schools and districts and the entanglements wrought by politics also affect these leaders. Stephen Grant, in his second year of leadership at Ithaca High School, details the political nature of his school and therefore his existence.

As I reflect back to when I took this job, I wish that someone had of told me of the highly political nature of this school and the community. I mean one of the things that's stressing me now though is and I'm going through it is I got this – you know, we're in a real crazy community here, like real conservative. I mean it's really hard to explain, I'm in a whole other world here man! Politically it is totally different here navigating through some of the political aspects here. Here's an example, access. Board members, community members, Central Office personnel, everybody has access to the superintendent and therefore expect, no feel entitled to that same degree of access with me. But access is just the tip of the iceberg. Some of the issues that get brought to me by virtue of this entitlement to access take so much time away from the business of educating our kids. For example, in just the past few months I've had to deal with parents over student parking issues, the location of the prom, to the types of clubs, to when the grass is supposed to be cut over here. I mean, which one of those things focused on Common Core? Educating our kids? And you can best believe that if they got to me to talk about these issues they also got to Central Office and the superintendent. That's what I mean when I say I wish somebody had told me just how political this place is.

The political pressures of any school are complex and dealing with them with aplomb is challenging for any school leader. Adding the issue of turning around a troubled school to the highly politicized nature of schooling only adds additional layers of pressure to leaders like those participating in this study. But issues like politics and

low levels of academic success are but a few of the issues the participants in this study face on a daily basis. Issues ranging from Walker's high rate of teen pregnancy (he explained, "I just got my updated count, we have 25 in here now!") to the low amount of financial resources that limit what Tucker would like to do (he stated, "stuff costs money and right now I'm kind of thin on that") for his students permeate high priority schools. Understanding the grim reality these leaders face is vitally important because the issues in high priority schools extend far beyond the academic focus that typically force schools on a high priority list or that render schools to be labeled as high priority.

Perceptions of Future Professional Prospects

Each participant was asked to share their thoughts on what professional impact leading a high priority school would have upon their career. The participants in this study saw obtaining a Master's of School Administration as not only an educational milestone, but also felt accomplishing this task was a way of opening more professional doors. Of the four participants in this study, only one saw leading a high priority school as a springboard to a potential Central Office position or other promoted positions in education. The other three participants saw their current positions as places where they intended to be for a prolonged period of time. The same three also did not state at this time a desire to hold higher positions in education - albeit for different reasons. Stephen Grant recognizes the challenges that he faces in leading his school but he also holds out hope that in finding success at his school; he can one day move to a Central Office position.

I think this place, this school with the amount of challenges and obstacles here; I think this place gives me credibility to show that I can manage a high school. Because there's not a lot of people that can be high school principals. So I think just on top of me being a high school principal— showing that I can manage that—that's number one. And then probably people within Central Office, knowing the issues here and knowing what I'm doing here, I think that gives me credibility to get a position in Central Office one day. I want a position in Central Office. I mean I'll take – I won't say take just anything but I'll take something in Central Office and then eventually go on to be maybe assistant superintendent of something and then superintendent. But I think being here gives me that management piece. A lot of people have said that high schools are like mini-superintendencies. You've got to manage so many different aspects.

While Grant holds out for higher career aspirations, other participants have a hard time seeing beyond the job they are currently performing. Michael Tucker, in his first principalship, views his career prospects in this manner.

Right now I am thinking long term. I mean, I…when I applied for this job I applied to get it. When I came here, I'm planning on turning stuff around. I mean right now, I'm Spartan Middle School. That's it you know? I ain't thinking about nothing else down the road because there is some work to be done here and I think I can bring a lot to the table to help get them where they need to be. I'm young enough in the game that I can invest myself here and make a change and hopefully somebody will notice this good work. I really think that leading this school can be an advantage for my career. I'm all about the underdog and places like this are the underdog. When I was in the classroom I always got the kids that nobody else wanted to teach. Now I feel like I have a school full of them. But we can, I mean we will turn things around here. And I know that it's not going to be easy, but I'm going to try and prove that it can be done. I realize it's a small district but I hold out hope that if we can change things here, we can make change anywhere else. Especially places with more resources; maybe one day I'd like to try that. But that's way down the road. Right now, I'm all in with Spartan Middle School.

In a subsequent interview, Michael Tucker asked if he could reflect on this question from an earlier interview. Regarding his take on future career prospects, Tucker offered this further analysis.

I mentioned last time that I am all in on Spartan Middle and I still am. But I have thought a lot about several of the questions you asked me before. But I wanted to speak again about the career prospects question. I thought about it like this: Where would I like to be in five years? Five years from now, I would really like to be here (at SMS) with those numbers (school data) out of the box. Truthfully, I would like to have those numbers out of the box to the point where it's one of those recognition pieces for the school, like, "What did they do there" [to turn the school around] or "What can we learn from that school?" I'd really like to be like a model school with those low performing schools and [show] how you can whip that bad boy around. And then eventually I would like to try to do some coaching with some other principals and some districts and stuff like that. That would be cool. And I think that when we turn this around here, I may be able to accomplish those personal professional goals.

Robert Daye, the most veteran of the four participants in this study provided his

assessment on the impact leading a high priority school may have on his career prospects.

Now I have seen a lot in education. I've seen some good leaders and some not so good leaders. I've seen some things come and I have seen some go. But for me, I don't know if I have a "career" beyond Mae High School. I have been in education for 25 years and I only have 5 years left and I want to use that time to continue to move this school forward. We will get off of this list. But while I can't see this particular question applying directly to me, I can say what I see in education. I think they - the powers that be [those making hiring decisions] put African Americans in some of these schools and they know that they have virtually no chance of changing the school. You gotta have resources and support to change a school like this. So when you put a person in the leadership of a school like this and you don't provide those things you are setting them up for failure. The other thing I have noticed, and this is my opinion, and that is that African Americans don't get as long to prove themselves in the principalship. I feel like you may get two – maybe three years to show what you can do before another person is brought in to lead the school. If a person does well in a turnaround school most of the time they will move him to another school like that, you know you get a reputation of being able to lead a school like that and that's all you can do. I'm glad I only have 5 years left, not only will I be able to retire then, but I also won't have to worry about being given the opportunity to lead another school like this. Like I said earlier, leading a school like this takes a lot out of you.

Daye saw the nadir of his career as a positive in terms of leading a high priority school as he realizes the toll leading a high priority school has upon him and he admits to being tired. Tucker recognized the difficulty of leading a high priority school but still held out hope for his professional future as a School Improvement Coach. Grant desires to use his work at the high priority school to which he is assigned as a springboard to a Central Office position.

Darren Walker, the fourth participant, shared his career prospects by stating that he is where he wants to be (at his current school). However, the depth and passion of his comments spoke to much more than career prospects. When asked about his career prospects Walker shared the following sentiments.

Look I have never been the kind of guy who can go along to get along and those are the Brothers who move up the ladder and I know this about me. That's not me. I can't sit idly by and watch inequity and stuff like that and just be quiet about it. I gotta speak up about issues and I know that sometimes that may hurt my career. But you know I'm happy where I am and I'm at a school where I am needed. And to be honest, there are about only two or three more schools in the whole state that I would take and they all are like DuPree High School. And on top of that, I know that many of the other jobs out there, as a Black man, you're never even considered for…at all! I live by the mantra I told you earlier, go where you are needed. But I also live by this one: to thine own self be true. Meaning that I know me, I know who I am and what type of student I work well with, what type of school I work well with and I am here. I don't want to go to Central Office and you know what? They don't want me over there either! You don't want a nigger like me over there and I don't want to be there. I'm not gonna force people to accept me because I don't need you to affirm me. The difference between me and the people they let into Central Office is that I don't seek approval from White folks. I'm just not that kind of guy. I'm not a politician, I'm a principal. I tell you, I told my superintendent, I will tell anyone – I'm not looking for the "next job." So I'm probably not going to be the guy in the principal's meeting always got something intelligent to say for everybody to hear so that I can be seen. I'm on foot when I come to DuPree and I will be that way when I leave. I'm not campaigning to be an assistant superintendent and I don't operate as a principal in fear. I'm not that kinda guy. I don't aspire to be and I'm

never gonna be. It's just not in me. I'm happy with who I am. I can live with it. I know that this is my last stop and that's intentional.

The depth, the power, the frustration, and the rage with which Walker spoke led to an analysis of the final sub theme that fit within the theme of *My Career: Present Vision / Future Prospects*: the impact of race on these principals' acquisition of their current jobs or, as referred to earlier in this section, how race matters.

Race Matters

In this sub theme, the participants in this study weighed in with their opinions as to whether or not race played a factor in their being hired to lead the high priority school to which they are assigned. Michael Tucker, principal of a rural middle school in the eastern part of North Carolina, affirmed that notion that race was an important consideration in his hiring from the perspective of his students…but not for him professionally.

> That's an interesting question. I actually asked my superintendent, I'm like what gave me the [pause] – what kind of narrowed it down, and he said part of it was that he had the mindset that he feels for these kids to be successful, you know, sometimes it's ok for them [the students] to have a minority whatever, to look up to. Now I think that it [having a minority principal] helps a tad. I mean because the fact that them [the students] being able to see a minority or whatever in my Black community - some of my Hispanic students have made some comments about that I think that had kind of helps boost they, you know, morale up a little bit. It's one of those things where you know you read so much stuff how your race is sometimes detrimental to you and I think sometimes, right now, there's a need to have that diversity piece. But at the same time, I wouldn't say that I felt that I got this job because my you know my race or whatever. I don't want somebody to hire me just because they feel they have to because I'm a minority. And I'll be honest, I know race matters, but at the same time I'm glad I didn't grow up in a household and hearing that all the time [about race and racial issues].

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Stephen Grant also responded to the issue of race and its impact on his placement at Ithaca High School.

> I think in this particular sense none at all because I think they've had – I was told – I'm not sure, I've never done the research – they had one other Black principal here and he didn't last too long. I don't know if he left, resigned, or he was moved out. But you know the Klan is heavy in this district, I mean in this town. It has KKK rallies last year and KKK demonstrations downtown. I remember somebody texted me a picture and said "Be careful Grant" because of the KKK activity. It [the demonstration] happened right before I got named. Well, not immediately before but it happened before I got appointed. I don't think they put me over here because I was Black. I just think they put me over here because I could turn – they thought I could do a job and turn it around.

So while Grant realized that race exists in his environment, he did not think that it played a role in his being appointed as principal at his school. His opinion, while reflecting his experiences, differed from those of Tucker, Daye, and Walker. Robert Daye, leading a rural North Carolina high school, stated that race was a prominent factor in his hiring – for the betterment of his students.

> See, when people see me, especially in an area like this where you have Native Americans and all like that, they don't even know what race I am because when they look at me they're like, "I can't really figure this guy out" [what race or ethnicity he is]. See I'm what would be considered on the Census as Multi-racial. I've got some Black in me and some Native American, so that was the thing that when they looked at me, they didn't know. But here's how that works for me and I tell them, "okay, you can't play that race trump and that card with me saying that you don't like Native Americans, you don't like Black folks, you don't like white folks." My thing is like this – I'm everybody and then in my family it doesn't matter because it's like the United Nations – we've got a lot of different ethnicities represented in my family. So that allows me to relate to, in my opinion, many different types of students here at Mae High School.

Darren Walker also acknowledged the importance of race in his placement as a

principal of a high priority school. When asked if he thinks his race has anything to do

with him getting his job, Walker responded.

> Brother, my race is the only reason I got this job. There are certain jobs that only
> a guy like you and me can get and I know that.   Brother, let me tell you. When I
> tell you that there have been Brothers who have come through here [this district]
> who are very politically correct, who have gone to "their" [Predominately White
> Institutions] universities, who tried to hobnob with them and sh*t and they still
> don't get a sniff at other jobs. There are certain schools that only people that look
> like you and me can get and all of them are high priority schools. I contend that
> in this very district you have Black folks who've been with them [with White
> folks] all of their careers, who did everything right and never got a job offer.
> Access is so very important and White folks will only let you get so close unless it
> benefits them, then you might get a little closer. But they are not going to let you
> get but so close and you can believe that! You ask me does race matter, hell yeah
> race matters and I know it.

Summary

Four African American, male principals who currently lead high priority schools

were interviewed for this study. The results from an analysis of the data collected from

qualitative interviews describe these educators' perceptions concerning their placement at

a high priority school, their relationships with students, the support that they are afford in

order to help them grow as leaders, the impact leading a high priority school has upon

their health, relationships, and career were presented in this chapter. An examination of

major themes and subthemes were discussed. Chapter five presents the findings related

to the literature, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the presentation of the data related to this study was presented. The study was guided by research questions that emerged from the study's overarching question: *What are the experiences of African American male principals who lead high priority schools?* Chapter five of this study is divided into multiple sections. A review of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, a review of the methodology used in this study, and major findings are found in the summary of the study. Findings related to the literature and research questions are also included in this chapter. The conclusions section of this chapter includes a discussion of implications for future practice, recommendations for further study, and concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

The study summary presents an overview of the issues faced by African American male principals who lead high priority schools in North Carolina. The statement of the problem and the research questions detail why this particular study was conducted. A review of the methodology discusses how the researcher designed and collected data for this study. The results of the study are detailed in the discussion of the findings.

Overview of the Problem

African American principals have been found to be far more likely to lead schools serving large percentages of minority students, high concentrations of students affected by generational poverty, and schools that are plagued by constant and persistent patterns of low academic performance (Brown, 2005; McCray et al., 2007). In addition, research by authors Seashore-Louis, Wahlstrom, Leithwood, Anderson (2010) shows that "principals need to be in their schools for about five years in order to have a positive impact" (p. 168). Adding even more impact to this notion is the fact that, according to the Seashore-Louis, et al. (2010), when examining the tenure of principals of high priority schools, the average tenure of the leadership is less than three years (p. 171). More to the point, the leadership in place at high priority schools (generally African Americans) may not receive the requisite amount of time commonly recommended to implement positive, impactful change in their schools due to the intensity to turn schools around quickly. Accepting these ideas as true, the notion of supporting, guiding, and developing principals who lead high priority schools takes on tremendous importance as educators seek to turnaround schools. School improvement is a challenging effort alone; trying to improve schools without supporting the leaders that lead them only adds to the monumental task that is transforming a school.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The low academic position of high priority schools and the zeal to turnaround the schools quickly come together to combine to make a perfect storm: a school with exceptional deficiencies and urgency associated with improving the school. Turning

around schools is an admirable goal. However this study seeks to move beyond the fact

of improving the school to look at the experiences of those that lead the schools. Guided

by the question; "What are the experiences of African American male principals who

lead high priority schools?" this study examined the experiences of these professionals.

Emanating from this basic question, three sub questions further directed this study:

1. What factors lead to a principal's interest in and appointment to leadership in a turnaround school?

2. What support (type, quality, etc.) do turnaround principals experience?

3. What effect / impact does leading a high priority school on have on these principals?

 In addition, this study proposed to analyze the experiences of these leaders

through the lens of a Critical Race Theoretical framework. This study also sought to

challenge many of the assumptions, hiring practices, and positionality the participants in

this study may have experienced while also seeking to identify trends and

recommendations for improving the support, career prospects, and practice of African

American male principals who lead high priority schools. In the spirit of CRT's counter-

narrative theme, this study seeks to give voice to these leaders.

Review of the Methodology

This study used a qualitative research methodology. Elements of a

phenomenological research design and an ethnographic approach to research combined to

support the qualitative research methodology. An in-depth interview protocol was used

to interrogate the experiences of the participants in the study as a means of collecting

data. A semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol was employed with each of the four participants in this study. Each participant self-reported as being an African American male who leads a high priority school in North Carolina.   Of the four principals included in this study, one was employed in an urban setting, one in a suburban setting, and the other two in rural school settings in North Carolina. One of the principals leads a middle school (grades 6-8) and the other three principals lead traditional high schools (grades 9-12).

Data collected from the participants in this study represented their experiences as leaders of high priority schools. Each participant was interviewed at a sight of his choice. Each interview was audio taped using a micro recorder. After interviews were completed each interview was transcribed and data files were electronically uploaded into research analysis software program. Coding was then used to identify themes. The researcher crafted codes from the research analysis program and hand coded transcripts individually. The researcher generated codes based upon the responses given by each participant. The frequency with which individual codes emerged determined the priority of the code. The codes most frequently observed based upon participant responses are determined to be major codes or major themes.   These codes or themes form the basis of the findings of this research.

Major Themes

Data collected from interviews indicated that the participants in this study felt a desire (a calling if you will) to go to the schools to which they are currently assigned. Whether the impetus was a connection between their personal upbringings and that of

their students or just a desire to help out a staff, students, or school in dire need of support the participants in this study decided that they should go where they are needed and that reflects how they wound up at their current positions. Participants also felt a commitment to the schools and the students they served. Kofi Lomotey (1993) describes this notion as ethno-humanism. Ethno-humanism led these leaders to see themselves in their students. The link between principal and student that Lomotey (1993) refers to as ethno-humanism led these principals to heavily invest in their schools sometimes to the detriment of the leader himself. The data shared in this study also showed that professional support provided to these leaders (from sources that varied from internal district support to external support from the state department) ranged from inconsistent to non-existent. Familial support was cited as a position of strength. Participants also reported that leading a high priority school had a negative impact on some of their personal relationships and their health. Data in this study also revealed that participants faced a great deal of stress from leading their schools almost as if they were in a fishbowl or under a microscope. Finally, the reality of the school circumstances they face daily, combined with issues of race and politics, have an effect on their outlook as a professional and as a professional of color.

Discussion of the Findings

As a component of this study, an analysis of available literature referencing African American males who lead high priority schools was conducted. Scholars Mark Gooden (2005, 2012) and Linda Tillman (2004a) both note that little attention has been given to the experiences of African Americans in educational leadership. This study

extends that attention by focusing on the marginalized, overlooked subgroup consisting of African American male principals leading high priority schools.

The literature that undergirds this study reflects a review of the available research concerning three separate topics: African American, males, who lead high priority schools. By examining each topic in the aggregate this study attempts to craft a framework to operate within. In addition, narrowing the focus of this study attempts to examine an isolated, under covered area of educational leadership (African American males leading high priority schools) in an effort to extend the knowledge base of our profession; while at the same time give voice to those under covered. A discussion of the results of this study, guided by the research questions follows.

The data in this study suggests that African American, male, principals of high priority schools in North Carolina view leading their schools as a challenge yet they eagerly embrace the challenge due to the fact that they genuinely see a need for their services at their respective schools. These leaders also express an attraction to the schools they serve, but more so to the students they lead. This feeling emerged due to the fact that the leaders recognize a kindred relationship with many of the students, and these leaders empathize with their student's circumstances and environments. Participants reported many similar experiences to their students be it growing up in the same neighborhood (or similar neighborhoods or towns) or similar socioeconomic circumstances. In either case, the ability to relate and empathize was seen as a position of strength. The data in this study also shows the potentially detrimental effects that leading a high priority school has upon these leaders, be it physical, emotional, mental, or in the

area of their personal relationships. Participants detailed physical ailments that they attributed to leading a high priority school. They also reflected on their feelings of giving so much to their schools and their students that they did not feel that they had anything else to give to a significant other (spouse, girlfriend, children, etc.). The data included in this study also shows that intentional efforts to mentor and support the participants in this study are buoyed in small school districts by the accessibility to Central Office staff. However, the same data also shows that mentoring opportunities are inconsistently provided to these leaders of vulnerable educational environments. Finally, the data in this study reveals that the participants in this study do not feel that people understand what they see each day when they walk into their schools, that race still matters in education, and that they are in some ways limited by it, and that these perceived limits could potentially impact their careers.

This study opened by framing the notion that due to the precarious academic position that high priority or turnaround schools faced, due to potential sanctions from state or federal entities, the leadership of these schools needed more focused, intentional, and well-planned support structures. The necessity of the support structures not only benefits the leader but also provides the leader the opportunity to provide his students the quality education they so richly deserve. This study also posited a social justice position stating that providing the requisite amount of support for these principals was critical to the efforts of turning around a school as this support is essential in terms of enhancing the life and career prospects of the leaders of high priority schools. The data provided by this study further supports many of the premises this study sought to answer. In order to

provide a deeper, richer analysis of the data as it relates to the findings, each question that

guided this study will be restated followed by an exploration of the significance of the

study's findings.

Research Question 1 - What Factors Lead to a Principal's Interest in and Appointment to Leadership in a Turnaround School?

The results of this study indicate that of the four principals participating in this

study, one was administratively placed at the high priority school he serves and the other

three sought out, applied, and were hired to serve their schools. Participants in this study

regularly referred to the fact that they wanted to be at the school to which they are

assigned. They desired to go to each school to which they are assigned. They wanted to

go where they were needed.   They embraced the challenge that is turning around a high

priority school. They also spoke a great deal about using the common experiences they

shared with their majority African American student body to provide a model, an

example of the more positive type of life that was possible for their students.   Referred to

by Kofi Lomotey (1993) as ethno-humanism, the notion of investing in their students,

believing in them and what they can accomplish, displaying compassion and empathy for

them and the circumstances and environments in which they live provided a powerful

base of operation for these principals. More specifically Lomotey (1993) notes that

"these principals are not only concerned with the students' progress from grade to grade;

they are also concerned with the individual life chances of their students" (p. 396). These

leaders also felt that modeling the belief in their students served the purpose of not just

motivating the students but also to model for teachers that their expectations for their

student population must increase. Improving the individual life chances of students

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operates at the heart of the social justice notion that undergirds improving high priority schools and it served as a motivating factor as to why these leaders serve the schools they lead.

The findings in this study support the research conducted by authors McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007), who found that African American principals have an increased likelihood of being chosen to lead schools where the majority of the student body is African American. Each of the schools served a population in which African American students were the numerical majority. Each school experienced high levels of teacher turnover and suffered from low levels of academic performance. These findings which somewhat coincided with the findings shared by Brown in 2005, which stated, "the majority of African American leaders are employed in large, urban school districts that are underfunded, have scare resources, significant numbers of uncertified teachers and low student underachievement" (p. 587). While Brown's findings focused on urban schools (of which there was one in this study) those same findings were reflected in the rural and suburban schools involved in this study.

Research Question 2 - What Support (Type, Quality, etc.) do Turnaround Principals Experience?

When considering seeking employment at their individual school, no participant identified support as a motivating factor that drew them or enticed them to want to lead their current school. However, research shows that supporting principals is a vital cog in turning around a challenged school. As Duncan and Stock (2010) state, supporting principals is essential because "not all school principals possess the vast array of knowledge and expertise the principalship now requires and many school leaders feel

unprepared for the task" (Duncan & Stock, 2010, p. 296). Two of the least experienced participants in this study admitted to just those feelings. So not only were these two participants in charge of leading a high priority school they were either in at their first term at that academic level, (i.e. first year in middle school and first time principals wholly) or they were first time principals at their individual schools. In either case, the pressure to turnaround their school was only compounded by having to navigate the learning curve that is adjusting to a new school, new environment, or new grade span. Duncan and Stock (2010) also note, "beginning school leaders, placed in highly demanding and stressful situations are frequently left to learn on the job as best they can with many feeling isolated and overwhelmed" (p. 296). Unprepared, isolated, and overwhelmed - These feelings were also shared by a majority of the participants in this study. Seeking to understand the level, the amount, and the quality of support afforded to the leaders served as a major guiding principle of this work.

Participants in the smaller school districts stated that they benefited from greater accessibility to Central Office leadership due to the district's smaller size. The converse of this idea also existed as participants of this study who served in larger more urban districts expressed a concern over the lack of connection that they felt with their Central Office staff. But their comments went much deeper than a cursory focus on access. Participants also cited the conditional nature of Central Office support noting how fleeting it is, apt to be taken away at any time. Participants spoke about mentorship opportunities that were available to them.

Several authors have written about the importance of mentoring opportunities and making them available to principals of color.   Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey (1995) along with Valverde and Brown (1988) all stress the importance of mentors for principals of color in the profession. Whether for socialization into the profession or for providing academic or educational leadership support, or just providing a non-judgmental, supportive ear to listen and feedback to probe thinking, mentors can provide a valuable role for leaders of color. In addition, the lack of these mentorship opportunities can "stand in the way of promotion" (Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey, 1995, p. 411) and in the way of moving troubled schools to higher forms of academic success.

Participants in this study candidly shared that a majority of them did not have formal mentors, but instead had to turn to crafting informal support networks with family members in education or seek supportive relationships with people with whom they share common organizational affiliations. Only one participant stated that his district proactively sought out and assigned him a mentor to help with his growth and development. Mentorship and coaching opportunities must be strategic as some administrators of color may not feel comfortable opening up to mentors or coaches of the majority group. Some leaders of color may also feel that the ability of majority group mentors to relate to, empathize with, or understand their reality may be compromised or diminished by a lack of commonality in experiences. Understanding these issues and hearing them from the voices of the previously unheard adds a great deal to the value to the importance of mentoring opportunities for educators charged with leading high priority schools.

Participants in this study shared varying experiences with external support providers. Most commonly cited were erratic experiences with support from the Department of Public Instruction. Professional development offerings and support from DPI personnel was seen as inconsistent. One true constant with regards to receiving support, as evidenced by the participants in this study, came in the form of their family and faith-based structures.   Each leader in this study cited some value from the support they received from these entities. However, several participants cited the fact that this value was only received when they had the strength, desire, and ability to meet with members of their faith-based community, family members, and friends due to limitations imposed by leading high priority schools.

Research Question 3 - What Effect / Impact Does Leading a High Priority School Have?

The results of this study indicate that the participants of this study gave freely of themselves in an effort to improve their schools and the lives of the students they served within the school. The degree of giving had negative effects according to some participants. Participants noted experiencing health issues and some personal relationship issues with significant others, spouses, and children. Participants also communicated high levels of stress related to having to project themselves in a more outstanding manner due to their race. In short, these men stated that being an African American principal meant that they had to do better and be better than their counterparts. Participants shared the notion that having to live up to these pressures also contributed to the stress these participants faced. Additional pressures were shared as participants stated feeling as if they are living their professional careers in a fishbowl with everyone

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watching and with their every move critiqued and criticized, which added an additional layer of stress to that already occurring by virtue of leading a high priority school. In spite of these pressures the participants in this study expressed varying degrees of optimism for their future career prospects.

African American principals are more likely to be at the helm of a high priority school which is describes as a school with high amounts of teacher turnover (leading to staff inexperience), low levels of academic performance, and low socioeconomic standing (Brown 2005; McCray et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004a; Valverde & Brown, 1988). These factors individually would make transforming a challenged school difficult; a school confronting multiple combinations of these factors faces a more arduous task. Yet, these are the schools that African American principals are most likely assigned to lead.

Each of the participants in this study led schools affected with all three of the aforementioned factors. In spite of the difficulties these men faced in leading their schools, they viewed their career prospects as a mixed bag. Two of the participants stated that they would like to take the experiences they gained in leading a high priority school and turn them into positions in Central Office administration or serving as a leadership coach for other high priority school leaders. The other two participants harbored no desire to serve in either capacity, with one participant showing a form of disdain for Central Office staff members shaping his certainty in not pursuing any positions beyond the school level where he felt that he a degree of control. Without the benefit of a longitudinal study, it would be relatively difficult to determine the actual

career prospects of these leaders but through this research, an analysis of current literature and the data provided by these participants suggest that the likelihood of upward career mobility is not highly probable. Bookended by the findings of Brown (2005), McCray et al. (2007), Tillman (2004a), Valverde & Brown (1988) and those of Seashore-Louis, et. al (2010), which suggest that the average tenure of the leadership in high priority schools is less than three years the opportunity to turn around a troubled school is very short. Synthesizing the type of schools a African American is apt to lead and the amount of time provided (on average) to make change when layered with research on change which suggest that it may take up to six years (Fullan, 2001) to change schools of the type included in this study; the math does not add up to a promising prospect for these leaders. The intersection of these factors creates the foundation for a negative career path for the participants in this study.

Applying Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) served as the theoretical framework of this study. Using CRT as a foundational structure of this study allowed for the infusing of several key CRT tenets. The most basic is the CRT theme of counter-storytelling or counter-narratives. By capturing the thoughts, words, and emotions of the participants involved in this study, the real-life experiences of these leaders who feel marginalized by virtue of the schools they lead, the population they serve, and for the most part by their race, are brought to the surface. Milner (2007) asserts that "knowledge can and should be generated through the narratives and counter-narratives that emerge from and with people of color" (p. 391). It is the intention of this researcher that the experiences of these

leaders of color become a part of the discourse concerning school reform efforts and a pillar of educational leadership study. More so, as it relates to educational leadership, it is critically important to hear from those most intimately involved in leading high priority schools the principals themselves. As has been described earlier, African Americans are most likely to lead schools of this type consequently, capturing the words, feelings, thoughts, and impressions of this subgroup is critical to understanding how to better support these leaders in their quest to provide students with a fair and equitable education. This is the value of counter-narratives as employed in this study.

Another Critical Race Theory element that revealed itself over the course of this study is that of Whiteness as property. The notion of Whiteness as property for Critical Race Theorists means that there are benefits that are extended to members of the majority community simply due to their skin color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p.27). While the Critical Race Theory movement finds its birth in the legal field, due the fact that many of its principles can be applied to multiple disciplines it is often utilized in the field of education. Against this backdrop, reflecting the data provided by the participants in this study, the notion of Whiteness as property is interrogated.

In America, being white is a "gift" and with this gift comes certain benefits. This system of benefits or privileges, a central tenet of Critical Race Theory, is a "system of opportunities and benefits conferred upon people simply because they are White" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). In the area of education some participants in this study felt that Whiteness as property extended into hiring practices. To explain, one participant described it by saying that there are some jobs (administrative / principal) that

in his opinion, an African American would never be able to hold and conversely there would be some jobs that only an African American would be able to hold. An analysis of the school's history and its hiring practices might affirm or refute this bit of speculation, but recent history may point out the validity of this theory. Each of the participants in this study led schools that were majority minority. These were the type of jobs that the two most senior participants in this study felt that African American principals would be able to hold. The sentiments expressed by these two participants echoed those by McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007), which opined the types of schools African Americans were most likely to lead. Whiteness as property from an educational leadership perspective implies that certain schools were, are, and in this case continue to be "reserved" for Whites to lead and certain schools are reserved for African Americans to lead, again reflecting the sentiments of some of the participants in this study. Accepting this notion as an axiom of truth, withholding certain positions from certain people because of their race or holding certain positions as available for certain people because of their race is no more valid than allowing certain children to attend certain schools because of their race or excluding them from attending certain schools because of their race. This ideal, one at the core of the *Brown v. Board* decision (which ironically birthed the CRT movement), has been proven to hold no value since May 17, 1954, yet according to some of the participants in this study still exists today. Just like race, a socially constructed ideal to categorize and classify, Whiteness as property is real and affects the personal and professional progression of the participants of this study and of the schools they serve.

Whiteness as property extends to other areas, which may also affect hiring practices. Foundationally, the culture of being White allows for the accessing of some benefits that many principals of color may not have access to in life, for example the social capital of the majority culture (Echols, 2006; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Social capital emanates from common experiences and relationships. As such, principals of color may not have the opportunity to be invited (and feel comfortable and accepted) into the majority culture's churches, country clubs, or other social events where privilege and power are brokered and social capital is exchanged. These exchanges most often occur between district administrators and principals and prospective administrators and most often occur outside of traditional workplace environments. Actions such as the one described above are extensions of privilege and have the ability to influence the principal placement process. Accordingly, these same actions may also have a career derailing effect on principals of color if these same principals of color do not have the same equal access to these informal circles of influence and social capital as their white peers. Participants in this study rebelled against leveraging forms of social capital that Whiteness as property values. One participant recognized Whiteness as property as a real construct, but vehemently stated that he did not want anything to do with jobs that required him to as he described it "sell out", "Tom", "coon" or "cheese." The participant explained that he was not the type of guy to go along to get ahead; however, ignoring the impact of Whiteness as property does not lessen its power or impact.

Another aspect of Critical Race Theory that surfaced from participant responses is that of interest convergence. Interest convergence is defined as a process by which the

majority group supports efforts by the minority group to obtain equality when and only when the attainment of the goal of which the minority group seeks benefits the majority group as well (Bell, 1980; Gooden, 2010; Milner, 2007). Through this tenet the majority group benefits by helping or supporting the minority group. Multiple participants in this study shared the fact that they were at their school or received support for their school. In both cases they rationalized the results (the fact that they were hired at the school or that they received support) as a way of majority school districts or majority superintendents using both issues to keep them and their school quiet or keep us over here (indicating in a majority minority school). In the case of Darren Walker, a school leader speaking from the past and one of his contemporaries help to characterize his experiences and the intersection of interest convergence:

> "Speaking at a conference of administrators, Foster charged that whites elevated 'superblacks' to 'Head N****r in Charge' only when a situation had become hopeless. Alluding to the heart attack he had suffered while working 14-hour days at Gratz, he continued, 'We go through a coronary alley at all those tough high schools, and they tell us, "Here it is, baby; make it fly". Then, when you can't make it, they say, "I told you those n****rs can't do it"'.(Spencer, 2009, p. 298)

Juxtaposing Foster's thoughts in 1973 with those of Robert Daye in 2013 that stated the following allows a similar refrain to emerge.

> I think they - the powers that be [those making hiring decisions] put African Americans in some of these schools and they know that they have virtually no chance of changing the school. You gotta have resources and support to change a school like this. So when you put a person in the leadership of a school like this and you don't provide those things you are setting them up for failure.

Maybe one day the powers that be that Daye references will recognize that supporting principals in an appropriate manner is a necessary action in the quest to turnaround high priority schools. Maybe the powers that be will see that helping these leaders to turnaround high priority schools is actually beneficial to them as well as to the leaders. Then maybe interest convergence will emerge in a positive light in education. Noting that these two similar statements are made 40 years apart illuminates the distance that African American educational leaders have come while also illuminating the fact that the field of education (and our society in general) has so much farther to go. These two quotes serve to underscore the importance of this study and the future missions of social justice advocates in ensuring that participants like those in this study are allowed to fairly and equitably practice their professional craft.

However in the present, in the case of Walker, it is clear that he wants to be at his school (and having no desire to move up into Central Office) and one may reasonably postulate that his being there is "good" for the district as the district does not have to worry about finding someone to lead this high priority school. But with a leader in place at a school (especially a high priority school), such as Walker is, there is an obligation, buoyed by notions of social justice that say that the district is bound, I dare say obligated to support the leader of the troubled school; an ideal that Walker scoffs at.

Concerning the issue of race, three participants stated that race was a key factor (in their opinion) in their placement at their current school; one going so far as to definitively state "hell yeah race matters". Participants posited that the school and the school district benefited from having a minority principal at their respective schools.

Hence, participant placement at the school, while it clearly benefited participants financially (or from a positional standpoint – being labeled principal has a degree of status attached to it), it also clearly benefited the district as the district does not have to "find" someone to lead the tough, challenged schools that high priority schools tend to be.

The historical context of African American principals also is reflected in the analysis of interview and observation data. The four participants in this study described their experiences and feelings emanating from leading high priority schools in their district. They expressed a myriad of feelings that ranged from isolation to frustration to stress, to feeling like an outsider, to despair and trepidation regarding the prospect of what they considered conditional support from their Central Offices. The degree of the conditional nature of support expressed by the participants in this study reflects the "spectrum of tolerance" identified in chapter two.
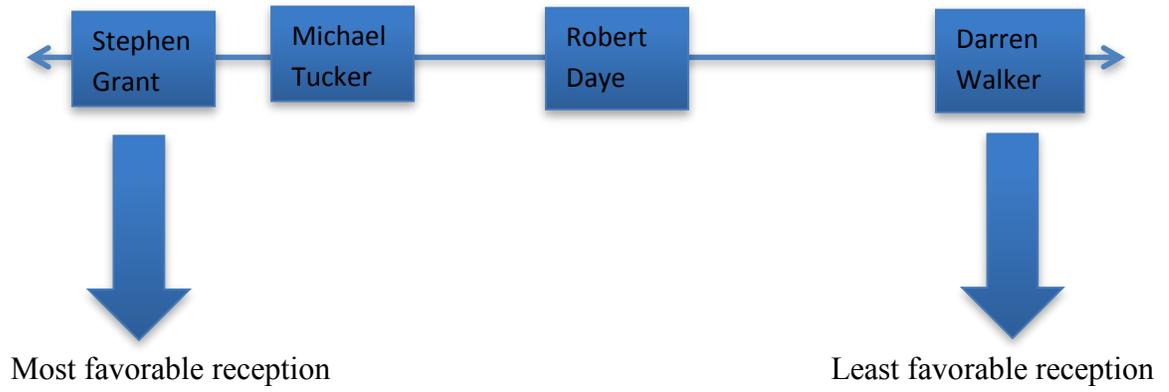
The "spectrum of tolerance" as defined by this study situates African American leaders along a continuum ranging from the degree of tolerance (or rejection) a leader experiences from Whites in power (in the context of education I will situate power in terms of those who have the ability to provide support to building level leaders) in Central Offices. African American leaders may experience degrees of tolerance as a result of his personality, leadership style, or philosophy. This spectrum when viewed through the dual lens of education and history draws parallels; parallels that contemporary educational leaders that may experience vestiges of that extend into current schools and hiring practices today. For the purposes of this study I frame the ends of the

spectrum as most favorable reception or least favorable reception. Over the course of history the ends of this spectrum have been labeled with a variety of terms: assimilation versus separatism or accommodation versus aggression. While the labels change over time, the hurdles that African American leaders have to overcome still remain grounded in many daily questions some of which may be "how will I be perceived today" and "how do I manage how I am perceived?"

African American leaders have sought civic equality and many have long viewed education as a vehicle to accomplish societal equity. As such, leaders operating in the sphere of education have traditionally been juxtaposed against one another. Juxtaposing leaders alongside one another allows Central Office staffers, superintendents, etc. to view, to theorize, and to think about which one of these candidates, principals, people I would most like to deal with, support, or even like. The degree of tolerance, when applied to African American educational leaders, forces these leaders to personally measure, just how much will I or do I push for the equity that I believe in. Wrestling with this issue clearly holds the potential to affect both the stress levels of these leaders and over time their effectiveness. Based upon participant responses and the analysis thereof, here is what my perception of the "Spectrum of Tolerance" would look like for this study.

Figure 1

"Spectrum of Tolerance"

| Stephen Grant | Michael Tucker | Robert Daye | Darren Walker |

Most favorable reception   Least favorable reception

"Spectrum of Tolerance"

In visualizing the "Spectrum of Tolerance," the left side of the continuum is situated as the most appealing side and the most desired side if the principal is seeking a collaborative, supportive, working relationship with Central Office support staff and the superintendent. The right side of the continuum is situated as the least desirable side of the spectrum **if** the principal is seeking a collaborative, supportive, working relationship with Central Office support staff and the superintendent. Again, based upon participant responses this is what an analysis of the data shows. Darren Walker has the most contentious relationship with his Central Office and other support providers. His personality, leadership style, and philosophy are most at odds with district leadership. On the other end of the spectrum are Stephen Grant and Michael Tucker. Grant and Tucker are most closely related on the spectrum. The fact that both of these principals are relatively young in the profession may contribute to the notion that they are least likely to ruffle any feathers by making any demands or criticizing district leadership directly. Their reluctance to confront issues may also be due to their inexperience. These are also two of the participants who most vocalized frustration with the politics within their district and they are also two of the participants who most openly stated the close access they had to Central Office staff and support.

The other two participants in this study are Robert Daye (for the purpose of this study positioned in the center of the spectrum) and Darren Walker. Robert Daye, the most senior participant of this study, is positioned in the center because as evidenced by his responses he picks and chooses his spots to approach Central Office staff about issues

of importance to his school. Walker, as evidenced by his responses in this study, is

confrontational and somewhat negatively aggressive. These emotions are especially

apparent when asked about issues of support, how he perceives those who are outside his

school views his school, and other issues of the ilk.

Earlier, in introducing the "Spectrum of Tolerance", it was stated that majority

group members, either consciously or subconsciously, make value judgments as to whom

or how or how much to support a principal based upon a leader's personality, leadership

style, or philosophy. This appears to be an issue that Walker contends with in his district.

Whether his personality is considered aggressive, abrasive, or rude by others he would

describe himself as principled and standing up for what he believes in. The difference in

how one sees or judges Walker may have an impact on the type, value, or amount of

support he receives. In the interviews for this study Walker has previously stated that he

receives little support from the district. The "Spectrum of Tolerance" as defined in this

study may be a factor in Walker's assertion.

However, the "Spectrum of Tolerance" that this study introduces affects each of

the participants in this study. It is not a new phenomenon instead it's an observation

made by this researcher supported by years of historical context. Throughout history,

White society has placed African American males along a spectrum of tolerance based

upon the degree of acceptance Whites attributed to the African American male. As

discussed earlier in chapter two, be it W.E.B DuBois versus Booker T. Washington in the

early 1900s or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X in the 1960s, to Marcus Foster

and Joe Clark in the 1970s and 1980s; it is not uncommon to place African American

male "leaders" along a continuum or a spectrum and often times that spectrum is framed around acceptability.

To explain, in the 1960s majority America had a choice as to which leader they wanted to negotiate with, listen to, work with, etc. As America began moving towards the mid-point and into the conclusion of the 1960s, it became apparent that the American status quo – predicated on segregation, Jim Crow laws, and other forms of oppressive, separatist doctrines was moving toward being eradicated. Over the course of the 1960s (taking into account neither leader saw the end of the 1960s and the fact that they both experienced major philosophical shifts over the course of their short lives) White America had a choice: which African American leader do I most want to work with: a man that wants a peaceful place at the table? One who preaches non-violence, regardless of what is done to him (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)? Or a leader (Malcolm X) that openly says that he advocates for change By ANY Means Necessary or who poses a question to listeners referring to the ballot or the bullet? I submit that while majority America was none too pleased to work with any African American leader during this time; they reluctantly chose to "negotiate" with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because he was the lesser of two evils to majority America (Carson, 2005; Cone, 1991; Oates, 1982).

Relating this historical journey back to the concept of educational leadership and the perspectives and experiences of African American males who lead high priority schools in North Carolina requires but a modest bit of attention. Just as society juxtaposed the aforementioned historical leaders, on opposite ends of a spectrum, one versus another, I content that the same process occurs with African American male

educational leaders. To illuminate this perspective, I will share two additional leaders

Joe Clark and Marcus Foster. Joe Clark rose to fame in the 1980s as a result of the movie

Lean On Me. In the movie, Clark, played by Morgan Freeman is brought in to

turnaround Eastside High School in Patterson, New Jersey. Clark, a tough talking, bat

wielding, bull-horn bellowing leader whose aggressive disciplinary practices drew praise

from conservative leaders as high as the White House and attention from multiple major

media outlets.   Clark's persona and his intense focus on discipline seemed to exclude

academics (except as it referred to a state assessment that would determine if the school

would subject to state takeover). The attention paid to Clark and his obsession with

discipline and order gave (Gooden 2012) credence to the notion that Clark's way was the

most appropriate method of cleaning up, reforming, transforming (read turning around)

troubled schools (read high priority schools). On the "Spectrum of Tolerance" Clark

would most likely take Walker's place on the continuum as the characteristics that

describe both are uncanny. Aggressive, sometimes abrasive, and unapologetically

committed to changing their school their way and to hell with the district – and an "I was

brought in to turn this place around and I'm gonna do it" attitude, persona, and

disposition.   Clark, a lot like Walker, did not look to or expect help from outside of his

building. They both advocated an ideal that states that if it is to be, it is up to me.

Implying that if their schools were going to be "great" again it would be in their hands.

The feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress that many principals (including those in

this study) admit to experiencing are surely to be exacerbated with practices such as those

advocated by Clark and most recently Darren Walker.

Juxtaposing the positionality of Joe Clark is that of Marcus Foster as depicted in chapter two. Marcus Foster in a stark contrast to Joe Clark sought to forge a collaborative educational environment that included family, school, the community, and the school district in the quest of educating students. Whereas Clark exuded a unitary, solitary approach to educational leadership, that mentality was the antitheses of Foster. John Spencer (2009) captures the essence of Marcus Foster, the educational leader citing his experiences in mobilizing the community to speak truth to power against school over-crowding and engaging the "total school community" in school revitalization efforts (p. 287-288). Speaking to the collaborative nature that Foster employed in turning around his school Spencer notes that Foster's practices recognized that "principals cannot transcend, by themselves, a social and economic context that may severely hamper their efforts to raise achievement" (p. 287). While Foster pushed a collaborative agenda, he did not fear speaking against the entities that he felt did were not bearing their weight in the effort to provide students with a solid education.

One of the many themes that Foster espoused in addition to that of collaboration was that of teacher responsibility. Foster believed that teachers needed to truly believe that the students they serve were capable of more. Several participants in this study echoed this same sentiment, including Stephen Grant. Grant specifically spoke of noticing when he assumed leadership of the school that teachers seemed afraid of the students and each participant spoke in some form of the need for teachers to raise their expectations for students. These are Foster-esque sentiments that speak to the depth and breadth of not only the experiences of these African American principals but also of the

deficits that the students they serve have to overcome. In referring back to the "Spectrum of Tolerance," Foster would most likely find a home in the area from the middle to the middle / left side of the spectrum. His place to the left of center would indicate that he would be more accepted by majority society than leaders such as Clark or Walker in this study. In either case these are just a few of the decisions (to push, how much to push, how will I be perceived, what effect will my actions have) that African American males have to make, not just in society at large, but also in their professional pursuits.   More importantly, these are conversations that are largely absent in educational leadership courses. So where are they covered in the development of principals like those involved in this survey? By mentors? Mentors are not widely used as evidenced by this study. By Central Office support? A portion of the participants in this study mentioned having access to Central Office support but they all alluded to the fact that support may not provide exactly what they need in terms of support. So where does that conversation occur? In the absence of that conversation, the growth and development of principals of color is left to chance. And studies like this one will continue to lament the perilous plight of African American male principals who lead high priority schools.

Implications for Practice

The plight for African American male educational leaders will continue to reflect the findings of Brown (2005) and McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) unless formal support structures are added to promote the growth and development of principals who lead high priority schools. These structures should most likely be internal mechanisms within school districts. Structures like formal mentoring programs would be a good first

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step. As has been stated earlier, exceptional care must be taken to assure that mentor /
mentee matches are compatible and beneficial to both parties. Other examples may be
carefully crafted Continuing Education Unit (crafted by state education departments or
Schools of Education or a collaboration of the two) courses that provide structure to
discuss issues of importance to leaders of high priority schools. These CEU classes
could be crafted based upon the survey feedback from principals who lead high priority
schools. In education, we sometimes operate from a "if we build it, they will come"
methodology. I am advocating asking the participants what they desire first and build
the courses around that. A strategy such as this recognizes and values the opinions of
leaders of high priority schools. The results of this study, framed by counter-narratives,
bears witness to the importance of listening to those on the ground and using this
information to make decisions. We in education could learn by employing this strategy.

But support does not only come in the form of post-activities, activities devised
once a leader is assigned to a school. Some support would be best served to be
implemented on the front side, on the side where a candidate is completing requirements
to serve as a principal. Schools of Education should reexamine preparation programs to
determine "what types of schools are we preparing leaders to lead". Differentiated
instructional strategies are currently one of the topics de jour in education today.
Accepting this premise as true, do schools of education provide differentiated
preparation that allows leaders to serve any type of school? The answer to this question
may be debatable, however data from this study reflects the difficulty, diversity, and

complexity of issues that these men face and it also speaks to the need for intentional structures to be crafted to better help them accomplish their goals.

Courses on diversity, cultural responsivity, and poverty are frequent professional development topics in schools and school districts as both entities struggle to adapt to the changing educational landscape. As more and more student of color enter American schools there is a movement among some to attempt to figure out how to provide academic success for these students. While I agree with the premise of trying to understand the diverse student populations that enter our schools, I contend that that same degree of understanding (and support) should be afforded to professionals. The notion of whiteness as property still holds tremendous value in contemporary education. Educators of color may not hold the same degree of social capital or organizational clout as some of their non-minority peers. Therefore, great care must be made to equitably serve and support leaders of color in ways that provide them opportunities to be successful. More to the point, African American school leaders enter leadership positions with a diversity of experiences that can only be understood through interaction, discussion, conversation, etc. that conveys a message of "how can I support you"? School districts would be wise to frame discussions around the notion of how can I better understand you to not only support you but to help you support the students in your school. Again, this is a conversation that the participants in this study state do not occur and consequently they continue to feel isolated, marginalized, and neglected. Addressing these feelings of inadequacy would be a major step in valuing the diversity that exists in the field of education. Anything less than full School of Education and

district level partnership and commitment to ensuring the success of the principals of high priority schools is a failure to ensure both entities next generation of students and a failure to invest in the growth and development of these leaders.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study consisted of four, African American, male principals who lead high priority schools in the state of North Carolina. Additional studies could include this same population grouping incorporating a greater number of participants thereby increasing the sample size of the study. This study could also be expanded by measuring the experiences captured in this study against the experiences of majority group leaders of high priority schools to determine if any differences in experiences exist.   Future iterations of this study could also focus on other states in the union.   This study focused on North Carolina, the experiences of its principals who led high priority schools - as determined by the state's Race to the Top application. Examining other states that also received Race to the Top funding for similar or disparate experiences might also be of interest.

This study chose to focus on middle and high school educational leaders. Future studies of this like may choose to focus on elementary schools in order to note any differences in responses from leaders of an earlier educational level. Of particular interest to this researcher, as a recommendation for future study, would be to conduct this same sort of study within a single school district. This would allow researchers to examine differences in service, experiences, or support that may exist within a district and question those differences (if any). Finally, IF one of these leaders ever left their

present school and moved to another school (especially another high priority school) or school district this would provide an opportunity to examine same participant experiences in a different school or school district. This research could be vital in determining any factors that could account for participant variability beyond change of school.

Conclusions

The current research study shares information on the experiences of African American male principals who lead high priority schools in North Carolina. An in depth-interview protocol was employed to elicit responses, responses that formed a counter-narrative in the tradition of Critical Race Theory. Undergirding this study was a framework built upon Critical Race Theory, which was additionally used to examine participant responses. The existing literature shows that African Americans are most likely to lead schools that serve high concentrations of students coming from low socioeconomic standings, schools that have high levels of teacher turnover, thereby leading to high levels of inexperienced teachers, and schools that suffer from low academic performance. Additionally, current literature reflects a disconnect between the amount of time necessary to turnaround a school and the amount of time generally allotted to turn a school around. Finally, contemporary research depicts a need to support all principals, as the job is characterized as solitary and isolated, but few districts excel in this area. This need is especially great for African American educational leaders who are tasked with not only turning a school around but also with managing cultural and historical deficits while navigating obstacles that the absence of social capital and access make all the more difficult to accomplish. The results of this study may provide

especially useful both to Schools of Education and individual school districts as they work to prepare and support leaders in an effort to improve high priority schools. The counter-narratives included in this study may also prove to be beneficial in helping to spark discussions concerning diversity, principal placement, and career development strategies as African American educational leaders (and the superintendents that employ them) are dispatched out into the world to do good work. This study rests upon the fact that providing all students an equitable education is a moral imperative; it also rests on the fact that it is a moral imperative to support, develop, and grow those trusted to ensure that students receive an equitable education. To that end, listening to the voices of those in the trenches, those in the field, the African American men who are actually leading high priority schools may be an excellent place to start. It is my hope that this study gives voice to the voiceless and gives hope to the hopeless in an effort to ensure that all students have the opportunities I have been blessed to receive. For this goal we must all "fight until hell freezes over; and then we must fight on the ice!" This is my prayer.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY
2718 Beverly Cooper Moore and Irene Mitchell Moore
Humanities and Research Administration Bldg.
PO Box 26170
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336.256.1482
Web site: integrity.uncg.edu
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

To: Reginald Wilkerson
Ed Ldrship and Cultural Found

From: UNCG IRB

Date: 4/05/2013

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption
Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation
Study #: 13-0090
Study Title: Examining the perceptions and experiences of African-American male principals in North Carolina's high priority schools

This submission has been reviewed by the above IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Study Description:

This research study proposes to capture and explore the experiences, perceptions, and thoughts of male African-American principals who lead turnaround / high priority schools in North Carolina. Through this study, I intend to explore participant experiences leading a turnaround school, preparation to lead a turnaround school, and the type and quality of support received from stakeholders in their educational communities. Concurrently, utilizing a Critical Race Theory conceptual framework, the study will examine participant's thoughts concerning the role race plays in being assigned to a high priority school and the role leading a turnaround school may play in their career progression.

Study Specific Details:

- Your study is approved and is in compliance with federal regulations and UNCG IRB Policies. Please note that you will also need to remain in compliance with the university Access To and Data Retention Policy which can be found at http://policy.uncg.edu/research_data/.

Investigator's Responsibilities

Please be aware that any changes to your protocol must be reviewed by the IRB prior to being implemented. The IRB will maintain records for this study for three years from the date of the original determination of exempt status.

CC:
Carl Lashley, Ed Ldrship and Cultural Found

page 1 of 1

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: The perceptions and experiences of African-American male principals of high priority schools in North Carolina

Project Director: Dr. Carl Lashley

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?
This is a qualitative research project. The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to examine the support, development, and career progression of African-American principals in high priority schools. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Specifically the project will focus on multiple African-American principals' experiences leading high priority schools and their own perceptions of their experience as a result of leading a high priority school, their perceptions of whether or not race played a factor in their appointment to their school, their perceptions of support provided, and their perceptions of their career prospects. Your participation is voluntary.

Why are you asking me?
You have been selected because you are a male, African-American principal who currently leads a high priority school.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?
You will be asked to participate in three open-ended interviews about your perceptions as an African-American principal in a high priority school, lasting approximately 60 – 90 minutes each. You are also requested to participate in shadowing sessions in which the researcher will follow you around for a portion of your day (duration and date of your choice).

Interview and observation data will be recorded and transcribed to construct written transcripts. The researcher will also keep a reflective journal to capture data sources.

Is there any audio/video recording?
Yes, your interview will be audio / digitally recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the dangers to me?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. You should not be harmed by this study. Also, as a participant in this study, you and all other participants are not required to answer any questions that you may not feel comfortable answering. In addition, no identifiers will be used in the study. If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Reginald Wilkerson at (919) 791-8812 (email: rwilkerson1906@gmail.com). If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or the benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855) – 251 – 2351.

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid 4/5/13 to 4/4/16

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, your participation **may** offer you the opportunity to process your experiences and contribute to a deeper understanding of male African-American leadership in a high priority school.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?
Through this research I hope to point out the experiences of African-American principals in turnaround schools and the support they may need. In addition, this study will explore the preparation needed to lead a high priority school as well as examine how leading a turnaround school may affect African-American male principals' career prospects. In addition, your participation in this study may benefit other African American male principals who lead high priority schools in the future.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?
All data will be stored in safe, locked file cabinet and transcriptions of interviews will be stored electronically and will be password-protected. All of your responses will remain anonymous and fictitious names will be assigned to facilitate the analysis of the data. Study participants will not be identified in any published or presented materials. Identifiable data will be destroyed soon after it is transcribed into deidentifiable form. At that time, the data will be shredded and/or destroyed. The researcher will be the only one with access to this data. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Regarding any Internet transmitted information: absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

<div align="right">
UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid 4/5/13 to 4/4/16
</div>

APPENDIX C

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

February 20, 2013

Dear _____

APPROVED IRB

APR 0 5 2013

Good _____

Hello, my name is Reginald Wilkerson; I am currently a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study examining the perceptions and experiences of male African American principals who lead high priority schools. There is a growing research base of information concerning principals and leading high priority schools; however little of the literature focuses primarily on the people (African Americans) most likely to lead these schools.

Furthermore, this study is of interest because as the country places more emphasis on reforming education, turning around schools, and increasing educator accountability, examining the impact of these areas of focus on those charged with leading these challenged schools takes on greater importance. This study seeks to capture to voice of those intimately involved in doing this type of work.

I am seeking 4 – 8 African American male principals who lead high priority schools to share their experiences during three (3) 60 to 90 minute interviews to be held at a place and time suitable for you. The researcher will also request to shadow participants in half day intervals at the dates and times of participants choosing. I plan to collect this data during the 2013 academic year. All data will be kept confidential and you will be assigned a fictitious name to protect your identity.

Lastly, while there are no financial rewards as a result of participating in this study; capturing and learning from your experiences in leading a high priority school may benefit others attempting to do the same in the future. If you are willing to participate in this study or would like more information concerning this study, I may be reached at the following address: rdwilker@uncg.edu or phone number (919) 791 -8812.

Yours in education,

Reginald Wilkerson

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APPENDIX D

ORAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

APPROVED IRB

APR 0 5 2013

Oral Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Reginald Wilkerson, I am currently a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study examining the perceptions and experiences of male African American principals who lead high priority schools. There is a growing research base of information concerning principals and leading high priority schools; however little of the literature focuses primarily on the people (African Americans) most likely to lead these schools. Furthermore, this study is of interest because as the country places more emphasis on reforming education, turning around schools, and increasing educator accountability examining the impact of these areas of focus on those charged with leading these challenged schools takes on greater importance. This study seeks to capture to voice of those intimately involved in doing this type of work. I am seeking 3 to 7 African American male principals who lead high priority schools to share their experiences with during three 60 to 90 minute interviews to be held at a place and time suitable for you. The researcher will also request to shadow participants in half day intervals at the dates and times of participants choosing. I plan to collect this data during the 2013 academic year. All data will be kept confidential and you will be assigned a fictitious name to protect your identity. Lastly, there are no financial rewards as a result of participating in this study. If you are willing to participate in this study or would like more information concerning this study, I may be reached at the following address: rdwilker@uncg.edu. Thank you, Reginald Wilkerson

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been an administrator? How long have you been an administrator of a high priority school? (GENERAL)
2. Could you please tell me a bit of the history of _____ school? (GENERAL)
3. What brought you to _____ school? (GENERAL)
4. How would you describe your job here at _____ school? What is an average day like here at _____ school? How do you think others (central office staff, Superintendent, parents, teachers, the community, etc.) would describe your job here at _____ school? (GENERAL)
5. What academic and professional experiences best prepared you to lead a high priority school? Describe your administrator preparation program – its strengths, weaknesses, etc. (PREPARATION)
6. Describe your district's principal induction program (or the program that you began as a new administrator with). (PREPARATION)
7. What is the motivation (personal) for your placement here at _____ school? What motivated you to want to become an administrator? (EXPERIENCES)
8. Who or what influenced your decision to become an administrator? (EXPERIENCES)
9. Identify any barriers you see in turning around a high priority school that you have personally faced? (EXPERIENCES)
10. Identify any personal barriers / disadvantages that you feel impede your ability to turnaround ____ school? (SOCIAL CAPITAL / CRT)
11. What supports have you found to most beneficial in helping you turnaround _____ school? (SUPPORT)
12. What role does race play (if any) in your attainment of this position? (RACE / CRT)
13. What role does race play as you carry out your day to day duties as the leader of _____ school? (RACE / CRT)
14. Where do you go for your own personal professional development? (SUPPORT)
15. Do you have or currently serve as a mentor? Who chose the mentor (who made the matches)? Based upon what criteria? (SUPPORT)
16. What is the most beneficial mentorship experience you have participated in thus far in your career? (SUPPORT)

17. What efforts have you made to bring constituents together to turnaround _____ school? How would you describe the success of those efforts? (Probe more depending on the degree of success indicated – SUPPORT)
18. Describe the involvement of the following entities in the advancing or retarding the turnaround efforts of _____ school: (SUPPORT)
    a. The school district (central office, Superintendent, human resources, etc.)
    b. The faculty and staff of _____ school
    c. The State Education department / Institutions of Higher Ed?
    d. The community (parents, business, civic leaders and orgs, etc.)
19. How accessible are each of the above listed stakeholders to you as you work to turnaround _____ school? (EXPERIENCES)
20. What voice do each of the stakeholders listed in question # 18 have in the process of turning around _____ school? What voice do YOU feel that you have in turning around _____ school? (EXPERIENCES)
21. What career advancement opportunities have come your way since you have assumed the leadership of _____ school? (CAREER)
22. Do you feel that leading _____ school plays an advantage or disadvantage career-wise to your professional pursuits? (CAREER)
23. What has been the impact (short-term or long-term) on you personally as a result of leading a high priority school (EXPERIENCES)
24. What one tangible item, which you do not currently have, (besides a different quality of students) do you think would be most beneficial in helping you turnaround _____ school? Why? (SUPPORT)
25. What is the most challenging aspect(s) of your job as the leader of _____ school? (EXPERIENCE)
26. How does the answer to question #18 differ from the experiences you observe your peers having at neighboring schools? (EXPERIENCES / PERCEPTIONS)
27. If you were to compare yourself, your leadership style to any educational leader to whom would you compare yourself and why? (PERCEPTION)
28. If you had a magic wand (or if you were dining with President Obama and Arne Duncan), what ONE radical solution to turning around a high priority school would you propose and why would you suggest that? (EXPERIENCE)
29. What once piece of advice or information do you wish you had of had before beginning your tenure at _____ school? (EXPERIENCE / PREPARATION)
30. What can be learned from your turnaround experiences at _____ school that you feel should be shared with others embarking on a school turnaround initiative? (EXPERIENCE)