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The Influence of Middle School Teacher-Student Relationships on Future Academic Decisions of African American Males

Andrea R. Williams-Baugh

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THE INFLUENCE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER-STUDENT
RELATIONSHIPS ON FUTURE ACADEMIC DECISIONS
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

by

ANDREA REGINA WILLIAMS-BAUGH

(Under the Direction of Yasar Bodur)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible effects of middle school teacher-student relationships on students' future academic decisions after dropping out of high school. With a national dropout rate of 30% and in some urban areas of 50%, among poor black minority youths, it is crucial that educators strongly consider the possibility that teacher-student relationships may play a vital role in the future decision-making or planning of middle school students (Kafele, 2012). Middle school research suggests that indicators of student disengagement can be traced back as early as elementary school when student reading and math scores begin to decline and disruptive classroom behavior begins to rise (Kafele, 2012; Kunjufu, 2005). The primary focus of this paper was student disengagement and dropout at the middle school level. Do positive teacher-student relationships, at the middle school level, have any impact on students' future decisions to graduate from high school or return to school, such as a technical college after dropping out of high school. Five African American males between the ages of 23 and 46 were asked to share their personal experiences with their teachers in middle school, whether positive or negative. The participants were asked to give their own

personal definitions of characteristics of positive and negative teacher-student relationships, and to disclose whether or not those relationships had any influence on their decisions to enroll into the local technical college. None of these males was influenced to enroll in school by a relationship with a teacher, but they shared information that is invaluable to all educators today as it relates to improving student engagement and increasing the graduation rates – Rules without relationships equal rebellion.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher-Student Relationships, drop-outs, middle school, African American males, teacher behaviors and attitudes, at-risk students

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late grandparents – Thomas and Laura Kelly, Sr. and Lucious and Vinee Williams. Although neither received a formal education beyond junior high school, they set examples of self-sufficiency, hard work, dedication, entrepreneurship, Christian principles, perseverance, a love for learning, and a desire for consistent self-improvement and greatness in all areas of life.

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I am thankful for my close friends – Tee, Roz, and Niece who were my personal cheerleaders, proofreaders, grammar teachers, and writing coaches. I am thankful for my son Andre' for teaching me patience, endurance, the ability to manage my time and balance my life more effectively, for unconditional love, and for provoking me to become more cognizant of the needs of others at multiple levels.

The doctoral degree program at Georgia Southern has been one of the best programs I have ever attended. I have learned to appreciate research on a greater scale. My passion for working with at-risk learners has been re-fueled; I find myself always engaged in literature or some piece of work to develop more ideas for helping our students strive for greatness. For that, I would like to acknowledge my professors, particularly my committee members.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	3
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES.....	8
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	9
Background of the Study.....	13
Graduation and Dropout Rate and Calculation in Georgia.....	17
Reasons for the Dropout Problem.....	18
Consequences of Student Dropout.....	20
African American Males and the Dropout Crisis.....	24
Middle School Dropout Data.....	25
Teacher-Student Relationships Including Perception Studies.....	26
Teacher-Student Relationships as Dropout Prevention.....	30
Using Students' Recollections and Perceptions.....	35
Conceptual Framework.....	37
Problem Statement.....	42
Research Questions.....	43
Significance of the Study.....	44
Methodology.....	45
Limitations and Delimitations.....	51
Definition of Terms.....	51

Summary.....	54
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	55
Accountability: A Nation Still at Risk.....	55
Accountability: Dropouts in Georgia.....	56
Dropouts: African-American Males.....	61
Teacher-Student Relationships Including Perception Studies.....	63
Teacher-Student Relationships as Prevention/Intervention.....	68
Summary.....	82
3 METHODOLOGY.....	84
Introduction.....	84
Research Questions.....	85
Research Design.....	86
Sample.....	88
Instrument.....	89
Data Collection.....	91
Data Analysis.....	92
Summary.....	93
4 REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS.....	95
Introduction.....	95
Participant Number One (Marcus Thomas).....	97
Participant Number Two (Anthony Johnson).....	100
Participant Number Three (John Davis).....	105
Participant Number Four (Deonte' Roberson).....	108

Participant Number Five (Levi Winston).....	111
Patterns in the Data.....	113
Teacher Behaviors and Attitudes Perceived as Positive or Negative.....	114
5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	118
Introduction.....	118
Analysis of the Results.....	119
Implications for Practice.....	127
Recommendations for Future Research and Practice.....	132
Conclusions.....	135
REFERENCES.....	136
APPENDICES	
A Certification of Completion.....	145
B Letter of Approval from Local Technical College.....	146
C Table 4: Studies Related to Teacher-Student Relationships Including Perception Studies.....	147
D Table 5: Studies Related to Teacher-Student Relationships as Dropout Prevention/Intervention.....	149
E Table 8: Pre-screening Survey Data of the Top Five Chosen Candidates.....	152
F Pre-screening Survey for Research Participants.....	156
G Informed Consent.....	157
H Table 8: Created Codes for Social and Emotional Construct.....	160
I Semi-Structured Interview Questions.....	163

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Georgia Graduation Rates.....	58
Table 2: Georgia Dropout Rates (7-12).....	58
Table 3: Georgia Dropout Rates (9-12).....	59
Table 4: Kelvyn High School, Chicago, IL.....	77
Table 5: List Researcher's Pre-Created Codes.....	147
Table 6: Qualitative Item Analysis.....	149
Table 7: Pre-screening Survey Data of Top Five Candidates.....	152
Table 8: Researcher's Pre-Created Codes.....	160

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Georgia Ranks 4 th	15
Figure 2: Dropout Rates Among.....	16
Figure 3: French and Raven's Social Powers.....	40
Figure 4: Winfield's Teacher Behavior Patterns.....	40
Figure 5: Combination of French and Raven's Social Powers and Winfield's Teacher Behavior Patterns.....	41

Chapter I

Introduction

The goal of every school district in America is to unlock the door of ignorance by providing all students with a quality education, teach them to be lifelong learners, and become leaders within their communities. However, America has a serious problem that has not gone unnoticed, but has gone unsolved. High school students between the ages of 15 and 24 are dropping out of school without attaining a high school diploma (Kaufman, 2004). Although it is unclear how many students are actually dropping out, No Child Left Behind legislation indicates that one student is too many to lose (PL107-110, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001).

There are discrepancies in the dropout reports and they vary among schools, school districts, and states. Kaufman (2004) report stated an average of about 5 percent of students between the ages of 15 and 24 are leaving high school without successfully obtaining a high school diploma. In a 2006 report published by the Bill Gates Foundation, the dropout rate was cited to be between 29 and 32 percent (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). In yet another report, the dropout rate was reported at 9.3 percent in America (Laird, Cataldi, Ramani, & Chapman, 2008). Research suggests that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was largely to blame for these discrepancies (Darling-Hammond, (2004). By 2013, there was a decline in the dropout rates from 12 to 7. The rate was lower for whites than blacks and lower for whites and blacks as compared to Hispanics (The Condition of Education 2015 (NCES 2015-144).

With the introduction of NCLB, states and school districts have been accused of playing the numbers games to avoid punishment for not making adequate yearly progress

(AYP). Since state-standardized tests are the measuring devices that are used to determine a school's success, district and school administrators are under pressure to keep students out, hold them back, or push them out if they do not perform well on state-mandated tests. As these low-scoring educationally vulnerable students disappear from the system, average test scores increase giving the false representation that schools have made gains in achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Disregarding the discrepancies in the numbers, America's children are being left behind. These startling statistics have been fairly consistent over the past three decades despite school leaders' mission statements and ineffective efforts to meet state standards and raise student achievement (Kaufman, 2004). For example, the southeastern region of the United States occupies the first, second, and fourth positions for having the most dropout factories in the Country. Georgia has the fourth highest percentage of dropout factories in the United States. Of Georgia's 319 public high schools, 124 (38.8%) have been labeled as dropout factories. Dropout factory is a label placed on high schools that graduate less than 60 percent of their students on time due to a perpetual cycle of underachievement (georgiataxcreditscholarship.org, 2012). Simply put, the number of seniors is approximately 60% or fewer than the number of freshmen enrolled in the school three years earlier. In summary, between the freshman and senior years of one cohort of students, nearly 40% of the students vanished (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

For the class of 2006, the state of Georgia reported a graduation rate of 56% compared to the national graduation rate of 69%. The graduation rates varied for different ethnic groups. The graduation rates were: 65% for Caucasian students, 46% for

African American students, 41% for Hispanic students, 80% for Asian American students, and 38% for Native American students. The national graduation rates for the aforementioned ethnic groups were 76%, 51%, 55%, 79%, and 50% respectively (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). On both the state and national levels African American students fell behind their counterparts holding the 3rd position in the state and the 4th position in the nation for the class of 2006 (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2009; Layton, 2012; 5millionkids.org).

Persistent dropout rates throughout the United States are symptomatic of a multi-generational problem, disengagement from school (Marquez-Zukac, Hammon, van Lier, & Marquez-Zenkov, 2007). This disengagement from school may be the result of a void in the curricula or perceived irrelevance to students' future lives (Marquez-Zukav, et. al., 2007). Through surveys conducted by the Bill Gates Foundation, educational leaders have insight to eradicate the problem of disengagement that eventually leads to dropout. In an effort to explore the dropout problem from the students' perspective, young people aged 16-25 were identified in 25 different locations which included large cities, suburbs, and small towns. Survey responses from the 16 to 25 year olds included boring classes, lack of motivation, caring for family members, significant academic challenges, and having to work to support the family as reasons for student drop-out. Conversely, student respondents also exposed strategies that might help them stay in school: improved teaching, improved curricula and instruction and adequate support for struggling students (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006).

It is believed that the drop-out problem starts in middle school because the greatest numbers of dropout events occur between the beginning of seventh grade and the

end of the ninth grade year (NCES, 1998; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). During this time, in addition to pubertal changes, students encounter larger social networks, social cliques, academic pressure and other sexual and social issues. For students who were already struggling academically and socially, the disruption of relationships with peers and teachers during the transition from middle to high school can easily translate into frustration and anxiety. African American students, particularly African American males, struggle the most with academic achievement and school retention (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). African American males have the lowest reading scores; comprise the highest prison rate, the highest crime rate, including gang activity, and the highest dropout rate in most urban, rural, and suburban cities (Campbell, 2006; Venkatesh, 2009).

Since the research points to the seventh grade year as the beginning of the dropout crisis, this study focused on African American male students who dropped out of school between seventh and twelfth grade, but later reassessed that choice and decided to return to school to pursue a General Education Diploma (GED). The researcher is interested in knowing if a prior middle school teacher-student relationship may have been at least partly responsible for the students' decision to pursue a General Education Diploma (GED). Although some would argue that a GED is not an alternative to a high school diploma because it does not allow for gainful employment, the researcher is interested in interviewing students who have chosen this opportunity as opposed to not returning to school at all (Baroglu, 2009). This study delved into student perceptions of middle school teacher-student relationships and the influence of those relationships on their decision to drop out of school and/or pursue a GED. Positive teacher-student

relationships are the foundation for successful completion of a high school diploma or GED for “at-risk” students (Johnson, 2009).

This research may add to professional practice by emphasizing the need to strategically place the right teachers at middle schools that serve at-risk African American male students. Acknowledging and responding to students’ personal and social needs are keys to student success (Gewertz, 2009).

Background of the Study

Dropouts: An Accountability Issue

The national dropout epidemic is claiming the lives of the nation’s youth between the ages of 15 and 24 according to some reports or 16 to 24 according to other reports. Regardless of the inconsistency in ages reported, these young people are in danger of becoming menaces to society due to inadequate education, insufficient income to support themselves and their families, deficiency in job or career skills, and lack of interest in or ability and willingness to contribute to society (Venkatesh, 2008). School systems around the United States appear to be unable to educate these potential leaders of tomorrow; they are failing to meet the needs of these struggling diverse learners. The statistics reported by the Georgia Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, and other reporting agencies indicate that seventh grade is the year when students begin to exit school to never return, but the largest numbers of dropout events occur in the ninth grade year. Thus, massive numbers of high school students are dropping out of school without successfully completing a high school program and obtaining a high school diploma or a General Education Development diploma (GED). This fierce contagion has demanded the attention of educators, business executives,

lawmakers, and communities at the federal, state, and local levels (Bridgeland et.al. 2006; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Druian and Butler (2001) accused the United States of fostering a “push out” syndrome in its schools wherein students are passively allowed to fail or drop out without aggressive intervention. United States Secretary of Education and former chief executive officer of Chicago public schools, Arnie Duncan, reports that about 5,000 of America’s high schools are underperforming and about 2,000 of those schools are dropout factories (chronically underperforming high schools that lose 40 percent of students between 9th and 12th grades). In translation, two out of five of their enrolled ninth graders will not be enrolled in school at the start of their senior year (Duncan, 2009). “If we don’t take aggressive action to fix the problems of these schools, we are putting the children in them on track for failure” (Duncan, 2009, p.36).

In the state of Georgia, 124 out of 319 public high schools have been labeled dropout factories (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Surprisingly, all of the 124 schools are not located in urban areas. There are an equal number of dropout factories in the suburban as well as rural areas of Georgia (Bonds-Staples & Dodd, 2009). In Georgia’s neighboring state, South Carolina, 96 of the 185 public high schools are dropout factories (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). In fact, South Carolina tops all other states in the Nation for having the greatest number dropout factories and the greatest number of rural dropout factories (Zehr, 2010). Figure 1 presents the top five states in the Nation with the greatest number of dropout factories according to the Alliance for Excellent Education. The states are listed in order from greatest to least with South Carolina leading the list followed by Florida, Nevada, Georgia, and New Mexico,

respectively.

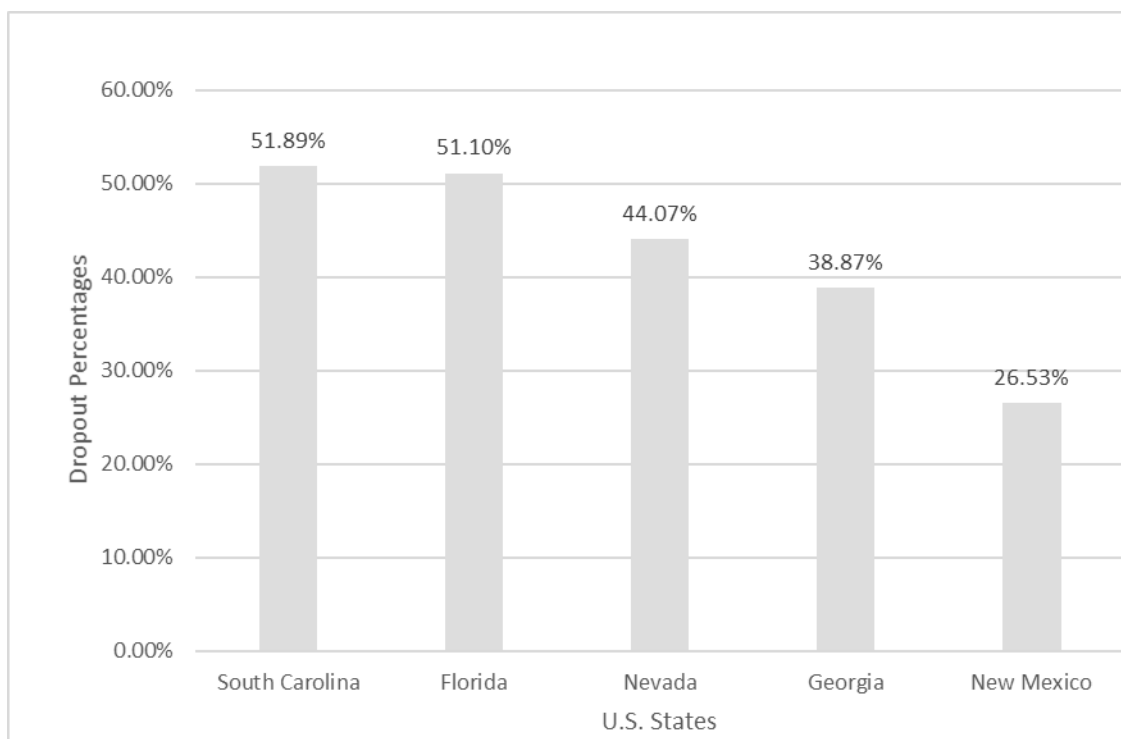


Figure 1. Georgia Ranks 4th in the Nation for Percentage of Dropout Factories. Adapted from www.gadoe.org.

Across the nation, approximately 30 percent of students enrolled in high school in October 2000 left school before October 2001 without obtaining a high school diploma. From 1990 to 2001, between 347,000 and 544,000, students in grades 10 through 12 left school each year without successfully completing a high school program (Kaufman, 2004). In New York and California, the dropout is 35 percent. In inner cities and rural communities (often overlooked) where large numbers of African Americans live, the dropout rate is 50 percent (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Zehr, 2010).

The dropout rates of Whites remained lower than that of Blacks in 2006, the

difference between the rates of Blacks and Whites has narrowed over the past 30 years. The dropout rate of Asian/Pacific Islanders is extensively lower than that of their counterparts. The dropout rate of the Asian/Pacific Islanders was 3.6 percent compared to 27 percent for Hispanics, 10.9 percent for African Americans, and 7.3 percent for Whites (EPE Research Center, 2009; Kaufman, 2004). The EPE (2009) projected failure rates of 1.3 million for the United States and 64,052 for the state of Georgia.

Figure 2 is a display of dropout rates by ethnic groups. Hispanics rank first, and the second highest rate is among African Americans.

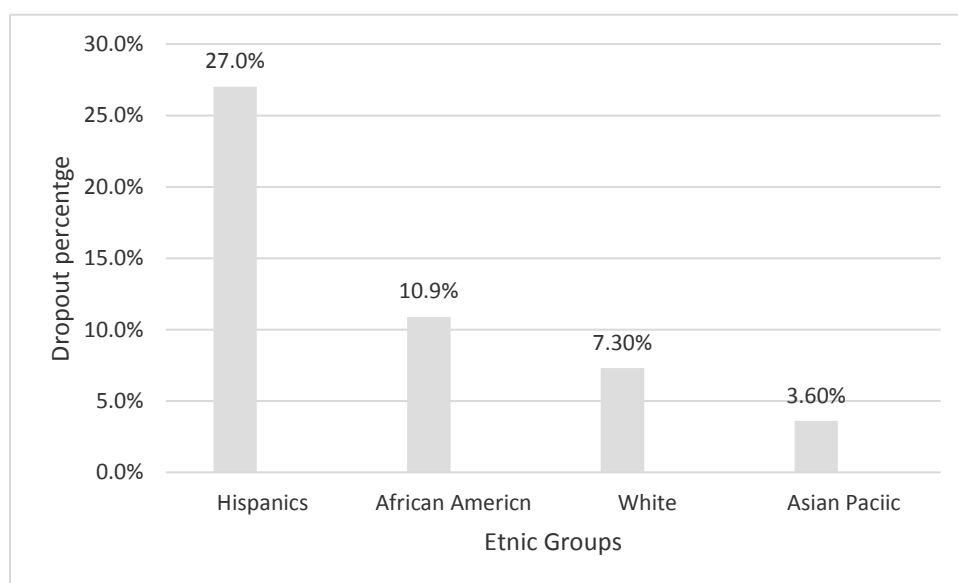


Figure 2. Dropout Rates Among Ethnic Groups. Adapted from Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center. Retrieved from www.edweek.org (June 2010).

Over the past 30 years the dropout rate has fluctuated between 4.0 and 6.7 percent. Since 1972, event dropout rates have trended downward from 6.1 percent to 5.0 percent in 2001. This decline in the dropout rates occurred primarily between 1972 and 1987. Nevertheless, from 1988 to 2001, there was not a consistent upward or downward

trend in dropout rates. Dropout rates among 15 to 24 year-olds have remained quite consistent (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Kaufman, 2004).

According to the NCES, high school students in low-income families were six times as likely as their peers from high-income families to drop out of high school (Laird, Cataldi, & Ramani, 2008). In 2006, the difference between low-income families and high-income families was 0.76 percent (Laird, Cataldi, & Ramani, 2008). Older high school students were more likely to drop out of high school than younger high school students. Not only were older high school students more likely to drop out, they also represented a disproportionate number of dropouts in 2001. Students aged 19 to 24 accounted for 9.7 percent of students in the 15 to 24-age range. Kaufman (2004) did not report a significant difference in dropout rates between males and females for the past 30 years. However, it was noted that the rate for females was lower than that of males between 2000 and 2001 (Kaufman, 2004). As of October 2006, the dropout rate of females was 0.03 percent lower than that of males (Laird, Cataldi, & Ramani, 2008).

Graduation and Dropout Rate Calculations in Georgia

At this point, it is necessary to discuss how dropout rates and graduation rates are calculated. The National Center for Educational Statistics requires that every state submit a report of 7-12 grade dropouts and 9-12 grade dropouts. Students are considered dropouts if they exit school for any of the following reasons: marriage, expulsion, financial hardships, pregnancy, family issues, serious illness, accidents, truancy, and incarceration in juvenile detention center or any other reason.

The dropout rate is calculated by finding the total number of students assigned a withdrawal code corresponding to a dropout situation divided by the number of students

that attended school excluding “no shows.” The graduation rate is found by dividing the number of students who received regular diplomas by the four-year total of students who dropped out of school plus the sum of students who received special education diplomas plus the sum of students who received certificates of attendance plus the number of students who received regular diplomas.

Reasons for the Dropout Problem

Researchers have begun to seek answers from students as to why they drop out of school. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation conducted a survey of high school dropouts to determine the reasons for dropout. The researchers discovered several reasons why students leave school without earning a high school diploma. Forty-seven percent of the respondents believed they were disengaged because the classes were boring. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents said they were not motivated to work hard even though they felt they were capable of passing and graduating. Several students reported that they quit school for personal reasons. Thirty-two percent had to get a job to support the family, 22 percent had to take care of a sick family member, and 26 percent of the students became parents. The results of the survey also revealed significant academic challenges as the reason why students drop out of high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Student responses showed an alarming three out of ten that said they could not keep up with the schoolwork. Forty-five percent were frequently absent and could not catch up in their work. Thirty-two percent of the students were required to repeat at least one grade before dropping out and felt that it would have been impossible to meet their high school’s graduation requirements regardless of their efforts (Bridgeland, DiIulio, &

Morison, 2006). Forty-five percent of the students said they started high school poorly prepared due to failure to achieve at the elementary and middle school levels. These students thought they could have been successful with the appropriate supports in place and the right teachers or adults encouraging them to persevere (Bridgeland et.al, 2006). Being retained once increases the dropout rate by 40-50%. Being retained twice increases the dropout rate by 90%.

One factor often underestimated and overlooked in regards to student retention is the impact of faculty interactions with students. In his research on faculty-student interactions and college retention rates, Gregory (2009) concluded that freshman students, especially minority students, were more likely to remain in schools where the faculty interacted with the students inside and outside of the classroom. In 1989, Wells wrote a similar statement about the interactions between students and teachers at the middle school level. Middle schools must address positive teacher/student relationships as well as high academic achievement. Payne (2006) reports that while the main focus of schools has been effective teaching strategies and student achievement, the most important element in a student's success is relationships. After questioning students who made it from poverty to middle class socioeconomic status (SES), nine out of ten attributed their success to a relationship with a teacher, counselor, or coach (Payne, 2006; Wells, 1989).

In 2014, Rimm-Kaufman, Barody, Larsen, Curby, and Aubry reported kindergarteners and fifth graders showed higher academic performance in math classes when they experienced higher emotional support from their teachers. They were more engaged in the work and enjoyed working through difficult tasks that required analytical

skills. Conversely, students who were in constant conflict with teachers were more dependent in kindergarten and showed lower academic achievement. They developed poor work habits, turned in messy work, and gradually became more severe behavioral problems through the eighth grade. In classrooms where the teacher-student relationship was positive and supportive, students displayed higher reading and math engagement and achievement. These students were also more socially developed throughout their elementary and middle school years.

The research of Cohen and Smerdon (2009) suggests lack of structure as a problem when students transition from the middle school to the high school. The most significant loss of high school students occurs during and immediately following the first year of high school. The loss of the more structured and supportive home and middle school environments coupled with the stress of adolescence makes the transition from middle to high school difficult for some and extremely difficult for others, particularly if they were struggling middle school students (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

The shift in human development such as pubertal changes, emergence of individuality, social cliques, sexual maturity, larger social networks, and other stresses place unbearable strain on some young adolescents. During this time period, students experience low self-esteem and fears about the social and emotional changes that are occurring in their lives. Coping with these issues and new academic challenges of a more impersonal and rigid high school environment and curricula can lead to anxiety and frustration that cause disruptive and negative behaviors (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Consequences of Student Dropout

Society will have to bear the numerous and severe consequences of students who

drop out of school without successfully completing a high school program and attaining a high school diploma. On average, high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed and earn less money than high school completers. In 2008, slightly less than 46% of young high school dropouts were employed (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). Annual earnings of the nation's young dropouts in 2007 were only \$8,358, well below the average earnings of \$15,149 for all young adults. High school graduates earned an average of \$14,600 while youth with a bachelor's degree earned \$24,800, three times as high as high school dropouts. In 2008, the unemployment rate for these youth was 54 percent. This rate was 22 percent less than that of high school graduates, 33 percent less than that of young adults who had completed 1 to 3 years of post-secondary schooling, and 41 percentage points below their peers who held a four-year degree (Sum, et al., 2009).

High school dropouts are more likely to receive public assistance than high school completers because they are unable to support themselves, let alone their families. The mean cumulative earnings of male high school dropouts declined considerably, reducing their marriage rates, home ownership rates, and their fiscal contributions to federal, state, and local governments (Sum et al., 2009). High school dropouts are also more likely to be in poor health needing more medical treatment and medications and less likely to hold jobs for long periods of time; consequently, raising the costs of medical treatment, medicines, and training costs for employers (Gewertz, 2009; Kaufman, 2004).

Add Health conducted a national study of adolescent health in 2008 and unveiled startling statistics about the health of America's youth (Add Health, 2008). The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) is the first national study of

adolescent health designed to measure the way in which adolescents connect to the world around them and the influence of their social settings (n.d.). Since 1990, teenagers have continued to engage in risky behaviors at a faster and higher rate. Cigarette smoking and marijuana use have increased for students in grades 8, 10, and 12. More teens are living in poverty than previously noted, and teen violence, suicide, homicide, and pregnancy have spiked at an all-time high. Coincidentally, the youths who fall victim to homicides, suicides, and accidental deaths are the same age as the youths who make up the 30% dropout rate in America (Add Health, 2008; Venkatesh, 2008). These students are at risk socially, emotionally, physically, and academically.

In addition, young women who drop out are more likely to have children at younger ages and more likely to be single parents making them more reliant on public assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, public housing, and medical assistance. Seventeen percent of 7th and 8th grade students reported having sexual intercourse. The numbers for high school were about three times as high (49 percent). Of girls, 11.8 percent of younger teens and 19.4 percent of older teens reported having been pregnant. Higher rates of sexual intercourse were found in rural parts of the South. Approximately 18 percent of older teens who experienced high levels of emotional stress engaged in substance abuse and earlier ages of experimentation with sexual intercourse (Add Health, 2008; Bergeson, 2006).

Students, who perceived themselves as looking older than their peers, engaged in early sexual intercourse, use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana and were at greater risk for suicide attempts than those who perceived themselves as looking age appropriate (Add Health, 2003). The 2006 and 2007 American Community Surveys found that 13.5

percent of the 18.6 million young women surveyed, aged 16-24, had already given birth to one or more children at the time of the survey. Approximately 38 percent of these women lacked a high school diploma.

High school dropouts make up the majority of the nation's prison and death row inmates, which results in higher governmental costs to provide the facilities, maintenance costs for the facilities and care for the inmates (Kaufman, 2004). In 2004, approximately 1.3 million students who failed to graduate cost the nation about \$325 billion in lost wages and taxes since most high school dropouts are on public assistance, in prison, or enrolled in adult education classes, which taps into monies earmarked for domestic programs. The social and economic costs associated with this problem are tremendous (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

During the 2006-2007 time period, 1.4 percent of the Nation's 16-24 year-olds were institutionalized of whom nearly 93 percent were residing in jails, prisons, and juvenile detention centers. The incidence of institutionalism was 63 times higher than that of young adults with a four-year degree. In 2008, about one in every one hundred young adults was housed in a correctional facility. Approximately 90 percent of inmates were males. One out of 10 of the males were high school dropouts, and the highest incarceration rate was among the African American males (Kearney, Harris, Jacome, & Parker, 2014; Sum et al., 2009). The Brookings Institutes' Hamilton Project revealed black male dropouts have a 70 percent chance of ending up in prison which is 3 times higher than that of white males. About fifty percent of the fathers of black males, who did not attain high school diplomas, are incarcerated by the time their children are fourteen years old, and this alarming statistic is often perpetuated throughout the future

generations of the families (McCormack, 2014).

There are political consequences associated with the high school dropout problem, and this problem has not gone unnoticed by politicians, as they have joined other stakeholders in the campaign to combat this problem. High school dropouts are less likely to register to vote and participate in the government than their counterparts who successfully complete high school. High school dropouts are also more likely to appear in court for trials as they are imprisoned for committing public offenses and crimes, such as drug trafficking, illegal possession, illegally carrying handguns or participating in street or gang violence (Venkatesh, 2008).

African American Males and the Dropout Crisis

African American males are more likely than Hispanics and American Indians to graduate from high school, but less likely to graduate than Whites and Asians. Less than 45% of White, African American and Hispanic male high school graduates between the ages of 16 and 24 are enrolled in college compared to Asian American high school graduates. The unemployment rate for young African American males is twice the rate of young White males. Over 20% of young African American males between the ages of 16 and 29 live in poverty compared to 18% Hispanic, 10% White, and 12% Asian (Kaiser Foundation, 2006).

The United States has the highest prison population in the world (Hogg, Druyts, Burris, Drucker, & Strathdee, 2008), and 75% of the prison inmates are illiterate (Kunjufu, 2005). Eighty-five percent of juveniles who appear in court are functionally illiterate (Kunjufu, 2005). African American males are the highest risk group for this functional illiteracy. On average African American males can expect to spend 61.8 years

longer in prison than Caucasian females whose prison rate is only about 0.05 to 0.09 (the lowest prison expectancy group). African American females can expect to spend an average of 0.23 years in prison as compared to African American males with an average of 3.09 years expectancy (Hogg & et al., 2008).

Young men of all races are more likely to be uninsured. Nearly 4 out of 10 African American males lack health insurance. Young African American men die at a rate of at 1.5 times the rates of Hispanic and White young men and three times the rate of Asian young men. While the death rate drops for some young men, it continues to rise for African American males. The leading cause of death for all males between the ages of 15 and 29 are unintentional injury, homicide, and suicide. The leading cause of death among young African American men is homicide. Homicide rates for African American men are three times those of Hispanic and American Indian men (Kaiser Foundation, 2006).

On top of the economic and social woes of African American males, school failure among African American males is also a chronic problem, and it exists in every school system in America. Reading deficiencies among African American males has become an epidemic. By the time African American males reach adolescence, they are painfully aware of the differences between their counterparts and themselves. The academic success of African American males is greatly influenced by the school and the value they attach to it (Tatum, 2005).

Middle School Dropout Data

There are very few studies on middle school dropout data, but the few studies found revealed an increase in the number of students dropping out before they reach high

school (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010). Seventh and Eighth grade students are dropping out of school at alarming rates. In Massachusetts, during the 1997-1998 and 1999-2000 school years, there was a 300 percent increase of middle school dropouts with greater proportions of them African American and Latino. In Georgia, during the 2007-2008 school year, 2,022 students in grades seven and eight dropped out of school. This equates to 11 middle school students leaving the classroom on a daily basis (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010).

According to Wells (1989), if middle schools do not address positive teacher/student relationships as well as high academic achievement, students will not be successful, and if the students are retained academic resiliency can be lost. If a student is retained one time, the chance of that student dropping out of school is 40-50%. If a student is retained two times, the chance of that student dropping out of school is 90%. Instead of the middle school improving learning of its students and increasing student achievement, retention at the middle school signifies the failure of the school to meet the needs of the adolescent learners.

Teacher Student Relationships Including Perception Studies

Educators should not try to identify or predict which students will drop out of school based on risk factors because many who drop out do not fit the profile and many who do exhibit risk factors end up graduating on time (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003). However, the fact remains that as students begin to make the transition from middle to high school, there is a gradual process of disengagement that is obvious to 9th grade teachers as well as the previous 8th grade teachers, especially when students are already older than their peers on the same grade level (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003). There are

distinct factors that exist in students from grades five to eight that signify disengagement from school, yet there is a limited number of quantitative studies and practically no qualitative studies that have begun to capture attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of the middle school student as it relates to relationships with the teacher.

Over the past twenty years there has been an increased interest in strategizing to improve the academic performance of African American students culturally, ethnically, racially, and linguistically. Mohatt and Erickson (1981, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2009) studied the differences in interactions between Native American students and their White and Native American teachers. The study revealed that teachers were effective in communicating with the students when they altered their speech patterns, communication styles, and participation structures to resemble more closely those of the students they taught. In particular, this style of teaching (culturally relevant teaching) is a pedagogy that empowers students socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

According to Ladson-Billings, cultural relevant teachers have high self-esteem and high regard for others. They see themselves as part of the community. They give back to society and teach their students to do the same. According to Wells (1989), students who did not drop out of school referenced the teacher as the most important influence. Students said the teachers were flexible, creative, personable, and positive rather than rule oriented. Teachers viewed teaching as an art and themselves as artists. The positive culturally relevant teachers believe that all students can learn and all students can achieve because it is up to teachers to tap into the knowledge and gifts that students possess (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Teacher attitudes and beliefs can also impede or perpetuate student achievement. Winfield (1986) suggested that a teacher's beliefs could yield four behavior patterns. The teacher can be classified as a *tutor, a contractor, a custodian, or a referral agent*. *Tutors* believe that students can improve and that it is the teacher's responsibility to help the students improve. *General Contractors* believe that it is possible for the student to improve, but do not feel that it is their responsibility. *Custodians* believe that not much can be done, but do not look for others to help maintain the students at the lower levels. *Referral Agents* do not believe much can be done to help the students, but they shift the responsibility to maintain the students at the low levels to ancillary personnel, such as the school psychologist or guidance counselor. Since part of the teacher's job is to help students find the place where they fit in society, one can assume that low teacher expectations may leave a child wondering if his only place in society is the lowest rung on society's ladder (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Effective teacher-student relationships consist of positive emotional deposits. Payne (1996), describes effective emotional deposits as: appreciation for student humor; acceptance of what the individual cannot say about a person or situation; respect for priorities of relationships; understanding the importance of personal freedom, speech, and individual personality; and identifying options related to available resources. Conversely, emotional withdrawals that should be avoided are: put-downs or sarcasm; demands for full explanations about a person or situation; making judgments on value of available resources; and insistence on middle class view. Payne declares that an exchange of the right deposits and withdrawals is the key to the creation of long-lasting relationships that impact sustained change in attitudes, behavior, and academic success.

Through classroom experience, classroom observations, and interviews, Payne (1996) concluded that nine out of ten students, who are able to transition from low socioeconomic status to middle class status, attribute their success to a teacher, counselor, or coach who took interest in them as individuals or who made a suggestion. The first step in all relationships with students is the relationship between the teacher and the student, then between the student and each administrator. Successful and effective relationships that impact student learning occur when emotional withdrawals are avoided, emotional deposits are made to the student, and students are respected and honored (Payne, 1996).

Thomas-El (2003), a teacher in Vaux inner city schools in New York, facilitates student accomplishment and raises student self-images of low-achieving 6th, 7th, and 8th grade African American male students who have been identified by school officials as potential dropouts. He invites these low-performing, behaviorally maladjusted, at-risk students into his home to teach and tutor them each Saturday morning. His strategy is to motivate the students and improve their learning through his unique relationships with them inside and outside of the classroom. As a result of raising his level of expectations of the students and taking a personal interest in their success, student self-esteem soars to higher heights as the students strive to work harder to please the teacher. This contradicts the report published by the America's Promise Alliance and the AT&T Foundation in 2009. This report stated that 75% of teachers and 66% of principals said they did not believe students would work any harder if teacher expectations of the students were raised (Foundation Center, 2010). However, Kuykendall (1991) supports Thomas-El with her belief that the beginning of an improved academic self-image starts in the

classroom and is perpetuated through a teacher-student relationship of consistent encouragement and praise.

Meehan, Hughes, and Cavell (2003) studied teacher-student relationships in behaviorally aggressive children with negative parenting and supportive parenting. They also endeavored to explore significant differences in teacher-student relationships with African American and Hispanic children. Teachers at 15 elementary schools in the Southwest were asked to select two to three students each. The participants for this study were 140 elementary students of different backgrounds, including African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic. The following types of students were included in the study: children who refused to befriend other children if they could not have their way; students who refused to cooperate in groups with their peers; children who talked about their classmates behind their backs; and students who called others' names started fights, and hit or pushed other students (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavelle, 2003). The results yielded no significant difference between the group of students who had supportive parents and the group of students who had negative parents and experienced harsh discipline at home. However, there was a correlation between the supportive teacher-student relationships and a lower level of aggression of students, particularly African American and Hispanic children in the treatment group. Students who exhibited behavior problems in grades kindergarten through eighth grade were less aggressive and incurred fewer in-school or out-of-school suspensions when supported with cohesive teacher-student relationships (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavelle, 2003)

Teacher Student Relationships as Dropout Prevention/Intervention

Some school systems and stakeholders across the United States have begun

implementing prevention programs and interventions to increase student retention.

Calabrese, Hummel, and San Martin (2007) concluded from their case study that teachers and principals who emphasized the assets of at-risk students rather than the deficiencies of those students were more likely to produce students who were not only resilient, but would remain engaged in school. When interviewed by the researchers, the principals and teachers said they needed more technology to motivate learners. The educational leaders placed blame on students' lack of motivation, poor home environments, and lack of resources. The teachers blamed parents for lack of interest and refusal to become involved with the school. The researchers of this case study concluded that the key to educating at-risk students is not blaming students, their parents, their home environment or gathering more resources. Rather, the key is establishing positive relationships and appreciating the talents and assets at-risk learners bring to the school/student relationship (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007).

Education and assessment systems continue to marginalize inner city, poor, and rural students and fail to address the achievement gap between poverty stricken at-risk students and their white counterparts. In 2007, "Through Students Eyes," was a project which studied 31 high school students in a Midwestern high school. The researchers used writings, pictures, and photographs created by the students to uncover suggestions about teacher knowledge, roles, and practices that students believed were effective in helping them to be successful in school and prevent them from dropping out.

Interestingly the concept of teacher-student relationships was addressed. The researchers extrapolated the following three themes: recognizing urban youths' realities, engaging in caring networks, and utilizing students' social networks (Marquez-Zenkov,

Harmon, vanLier, and Marquez-Zenkov, 2007). It is important to note that the researchers made an interesting observation during their study. Although the participants would receive an honorarium for participating in the study, the researchers believed the students were committed to the study because the researchers were committed to establishing and cultivating relationships with the participants.

Additionally, the students were compliant and the data extracted from the interactions were more reliable and valid (Marquez-Zenkov, et al., 2007). The authors concluded that teachers of at-risk students could not battle endemic academic engagement with savior attitudes and “lesson of the year” routines (p.414). Teachers should endeavor to understand the conditions of students’ lives, youths’ attitudes toward formal education, which in some cases are handed down through generations, and students’ perspectives on school, its purposes, and teachers’ efforts. Teachers can give at-risk students a better chance to achieve by incorporating their perspectives, on the purposes, supports, and impediments to success in school (Marquez-Zenkov, et al., 2007).

School personnel have great difficulty addressing students who are at-risk for behavior problems because the reaction of school personnel is often punishment. This limited strategy only leads to more aggressive misbehavior for students who are already in danger of failing due to poor grades, test performance and disruptive behavior. Slate and Jones (2003) identified a group of “tough kids” characterized by weaknesses in academic and social skills. The researchers asked principals to select 30 sixth grade boys in a Southwest Georgia school who were at risk for violent behavior and drug abuse. These students had been retained in a grade twice or were two years older than other sixth

grade boys. They had been referred for serious disciplinary action while in fifth grade, suspended from school, detained in a juvenile facility, or placed on probation by juvenile court. The control group of 30 boys would be tutored while the experimental group engaged in basketball training (Slate & Jones, 2003). Students were allowed to practice basketball skills if grades and behavior were improved during school. The results of the No Bad Actions (N.B.A.) program revealed a significant decrease in the number of infractions by the experimental as compared to the control group. Likewise, when comparing the grades of the experimental group and the control group, the means for reading, English, math, social studies, and science were significantly higher for the experimental group than the control group. Slate and Jones (2003) concluded that significant improvement can be made in the behavior, academic achievement, and personal characteristics of these “tough kids” through a program that involves intense efforts to teach and model appropriate behavior (Slate & Jones, 2003).

It has been suggested that at-risk students who engage in self-monitoring techniques can actively change their own inappropriate behavior. Wood, Murdock, and Cronin (2002) selected four students who were 15 years of age, had a reading level of third grade or higher, and a grade point average of 2.0 or below. Target behaviors and baseline criteria were established. When a student met the baseline criteria, the student was taught to self-monitor. Students were responsible for recording their own academic performance. There was an immediate increase in academic performance of students who self-monitored their own performance. The amount of increased achievement varied from student to student based on baseline data of the individual students. Although researchers contended that this strategy was appropriate for elementary and middle

school students, critics might argue that the sample size of the study was too small to validate the results and draw conclusions (Wood, Murdock, & Cronin, 2002).

The majority of previous research on the dropout rate of middle and high school students has been one-sided in type and approach. These studies were predominantly quantitative utilizing surveys as the primary data collection method. Conversely, the limited number of qualitative studies on school retention focused on the high school experience. Unlike the previous research, this study is distinctive. Student perceptions were used to analyze the influence of middle school teacher-student relationships on students' decisions to drop out of high school and pursue a GED after dropping out of high school.

Some attention may need to be given to incorporating professional learning that not only emphasizes curriculum, instruction, and assessment, but also addresses the importance of cultivating relationships with at-risk students. The researcher believes that student perceptions of these relationships, at the middle school level, may support school leaders in strategically selecting teachers and principals for at-risk middle schools. Student perceptions of the middle school experience, as recalled by GED students, were unique to this study. Therefore, it was paramount that some attention be given to students' recollections of past school experiences and the use of student perceptions in education research.

The researcher was aware of the elapse of time between students graduating from middle school, dropping out of high school, and returning to a GED program. The researcher was aware that middle school relationships may not have any impact on some students. However, the researcher was also aware of the research on student recollections,

perceptions, and memorization. The following research studies suggest not only can students recall positive and negative relationships over an extended period of time in their adult lives, but also that positive and negative teacher-student relationships could possibly have a long-term effect on students' future academic decisions.

Using Students' Recollections and Perceptions

Crozier and Skliopidou (2002), of Cardiff University, conducted a study to determine the ability of adults to recall experiences from their childhood regarding name calling and/or the use of nicknames. Two hundred twenty adults were asked to participate. The sample consisted of post-graduate and undergraduate men and women between the ages of 18 and 70 with a modal age of 25. All of the participants were able to recall positive and/or negative school experiences from their elementary, middle, and high school years. The researchers noted that although the short-term effects of the negative experiences affected academic performance and involvement in extracurricular activities, over time the hurt lessened and did not alter personalities or attitudes about school.

In another study, Peterson, Wang, and Hou (2009), studied 225 eight-year-old students in Western Europe and Canada and 133 Chinese children from Beijing and Zhejiang in elementary and junior high school ages 8, 11, and 14. The children were asked to recall experiences from their early childhood. It was found that as the age of the children increased they were able to access a greater degree of memory. The 11 and 14 year olds were able to recall more than the 8 year olds. Parents were interviewed to verify the accuracy of the recollections and 79.5% of the parents could attest to the data gathered from their children.

There is more research emerging that involves the influence of students' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about themselves and others around them. These student perceptions signify that students are not passive learners as formally believed by early educational theorists. Rather, students participate in their learning by setting their own achievement goals, selectively attending events within and without the classroom to enhance their learning (Schunk, 1992), and determining how they learn best to maximize their learning experience in the classroom (Jamison, 1996). Student perceptions represent critical thinking (Jamison, 1996) and complex and diverse effects on classroom environments and relationships with peers and teachers (Schunk, 1992).

In one perception study, Jamison (1996) interviewed 38 high school dropouts of the Atlanta Public School system, some of whom were enrolled in a GED program, to determine their reasons for dropping out. Many of the students cited their relationships or lack of relationships with their teachers as the central reason for leaving school. Students perceived the negative teachers as those who: did not exhibit patience when the students needed assistance; did not show concern for them as individuals; did not take the time to explain the lesson when the student needed additional learning strategies; and did not talk to students when noticeable changes in their behavior were observed. Conversely, students regarded their relationships with their teachers as positive when the teachers took on the role of mother or father; took an interest in them inside and outside of the classroom; explained difficult assignments step-by-step; did not gossip about their problems or repeat them to other teachers; spoke encouraging words to them (Jamison, 1996); and spoke in a language they understood (Payne, 1996).

Newby, Rickards, and Fisher (2001) administered three versions of the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) to teachers and students in Tasmania and Western Australia and found that teachers perceived their interaction with students more favorably than the students did. The sample for this study consisted of 1,659 students in grades 8, 9, and 10 and 72 teachers in 16 different schools. The QTI revealed that positive student interactions were characterized by the following teacher behaviors: helpful, friendly, understanding, and possessing leadership qualities. The following negative teacher behaviors were identified: uncertain, dissatisfied, and strict. Perception studies have been used to provide a framework for distinguishing between positive and negative teacher behaviors that influence student outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

French and Raven (1959), identified five specific bases of social power that they believe are apparent in all human contact, including the classroom. Educators can use these bases of power to influence students. The five bases of power are *coercive*, *reward*, *referent*, *legitimate* and *expert*. French and Raven stated that all five of the bases of power are in operation simultaneously in a classroom and depending on the beliefs of the teacher, some power bases can be used more often than others. Thus, one teacher's power wheel can look different from his or her colleague's power wheel (Tauber, 1995).

Coercive power is the ability to inflict negative consequences, such as punishment or threats, on others. This power base can only be effective if teachers are fully aware of the pros and cons. *Reward* power consists of the students allowing the teacher to exert power over them because he or she can release or withhold rewards. *Legitimate* power means that the students recognize and respect the teacher's position because people

accept the hierarchy of power of an institution. *Referent* power is the most powerful and is executed when students respect and are attracted to the teacher's personality. *Expert* power is the least utilized power because too often students overlook the teacher's expert knowledge and neglect to respect the teacher professionally (Tauber, 1995; Tauber & Knouse, 1983).

Reward, coercive, and legitimate powers are viewed as positional powers because they are based on the position that the person holds in the organization. *Referent* and *expert* powers are viewed as personal powers deriving from the personal characteristics of the person. These powers are thought to be particularly effective because they rely on the internalized values of others while *reward* and *coercive* powers are less effective because they depend upon the continual presence of the person for the dispensing of rewards and punishments (Tauber & Knouse, 1983).

Additionally, influenced by concern for teacher behavior towards at-risk students in urban settings, Winfield, (1986) felt that teachers' beliefs yielded four classifications. The *tutor* believes that the teacher is responsible for making sure that students improve. Although *General Contractors* do believe students can improve, they do not think it is their responsibility to make sure students improve. *Custodians* do not believe much can be done for the students, but they will try to maintain the students at the low levels of expectations and success. *Referral Agents* do not believe much can be done to help the students. Thus, they shift the responsibility to maintain the students at the low levels to ancillary personnel, such as the school psychologist, special education teacher or guidance counselor (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Winfield, 1986).

The conceptual framework, unique to this study only, is a combination of *French*

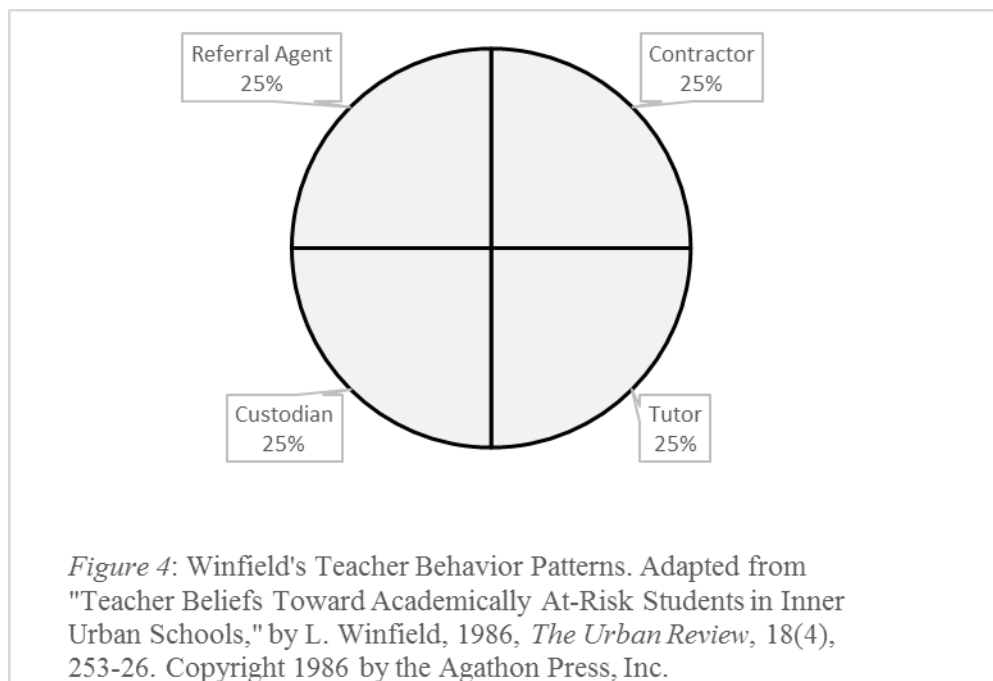
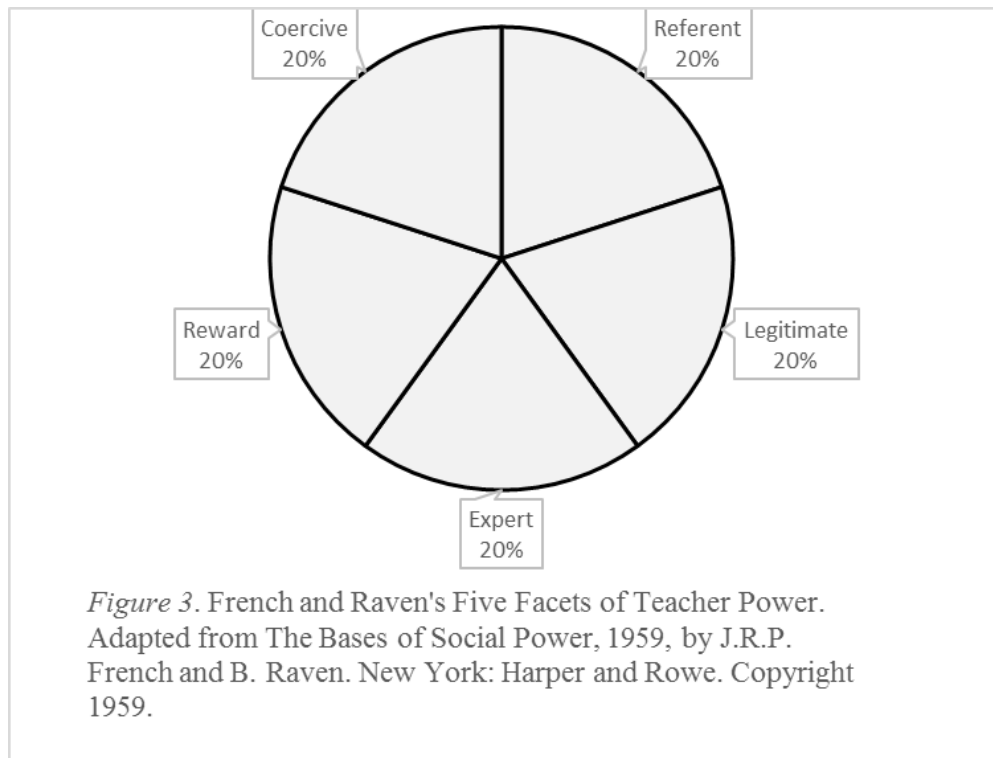
and Raven's Social Power Framework and Winfield's Teacher Behavior Patterns

Framework infused with the definition of positive teacher behavior and positive teacher-student relationships (French & Raven, 1959; Winfield, 1986). I believe the successful teacher is one who can effectively form positive teacher-student relationships that impact not only the academic achievement of the student, but also builds the kind of rapport that will leave life-long impressions on students. When the right kind of positive relationships are formed, students believe that they can be triumphant because teachers believe they can be triumphant. As stated earlier, students in poverty-stricken environments who decided to make a change in their lives for the better ascribed their accomplishment to a teacher or a coach (Payne, 1996).

Hence, there are combinations of social powers and teacher behavior patterns that can positively or negatively influence teacher-student relationships. These influences can result in promoting student achievement or school failure. Ideally, combinations of characteristics that will produce positive teacher-student relationships are *expert* and *referent social powers* and the *tutor teacher behavior pattern*. On the other hand, the *coercive* and *reward* social powers and *general contractor, referral agent and custodian* teacher behavior patterns can produce teacher-student relationships that negatively impact student achievement and retention.

A combination of the French and Raven and Winfield (figure 6) frameworks was used to guide this research and analyze the research findings. A preliminary list of major codes was included for the data analysis based on this framework (see Appendix H). After the data were coded, the data clumps were linked to the framework to interpret and draw conclusions concerning relationships between teachers and students and the impact

of these relationships on academic, career, and life decisions of at-risk African American males after middle school.



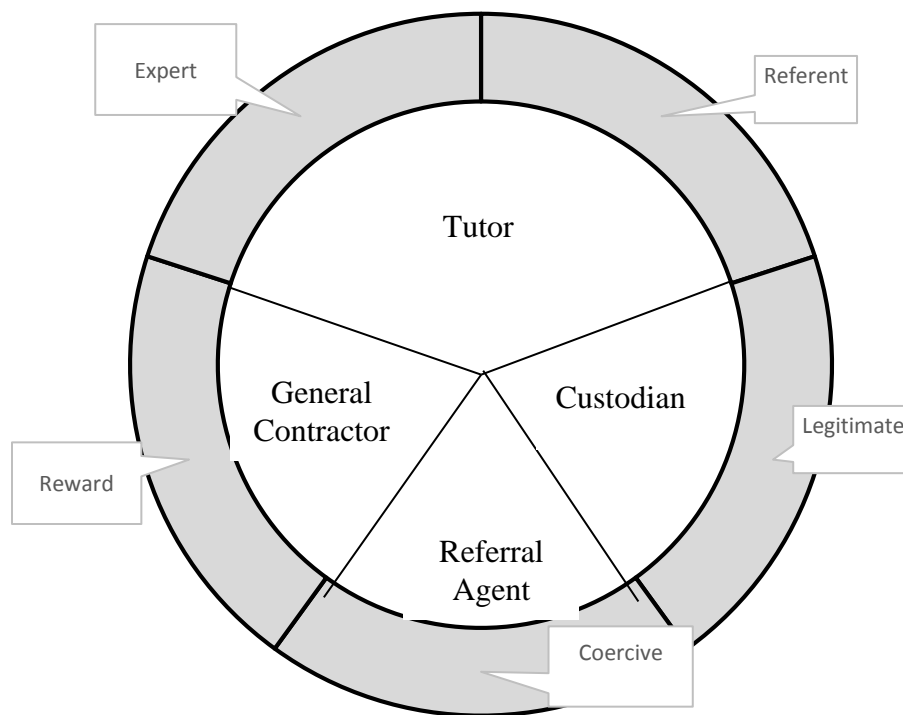


Figure 5. This is a combination of French and Raven's Social Powers and Winfield's Teacher Behavior Patterns.

Problem Statement

Student retention is a chronic problem in the United States today as students continually disengage from school. Just like NCLB, The College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) is holding principals accountable for failing to graduate students on time who are prepared to complete in a global society. Principals are holding teachers accountable for failing to teach the students. Teachers are holding students accountable for failing to learn and motivate themselves and everyone blames the parent. There are early warning signs that alert teachers and principals when students are becoming disinterested in school. By proactively engaging the student through trusting caring relationships, educators can help curtail the problem before it escalates into an uncontrollable and embarrassing situation. It is evident through previous research, some of which is presented in the background of this study, that the need to acknowledge and address early indicators of dropout at the middle school level may be essential to resolving the nation's dropout problem.

The researcher, having middle school experience, has taught several students who lacked motivation, and scored consistently low on standardized tests. These students also disrupted classroom processes with chronic misbehavior or engaged in inappropriate behaviors that hindered the learning of their classmates. Many of those students dropped out of ninth grade after repeatedly expressing a desire to drop out during middle school, failing to report to school or consistently reporting late, and refusing to work once in school. These students often displayed patterns of failure and absenteeism in the upper elementary grades as well as 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. The research and data presented in this study are indicative of the fact that teacher-student relationships can positively or

negatively impact student learning. However, additional research from the student's perception is needed to further examine this point.

Students' perceptions of their relationships with their middle school teachers needed to be analyzed. This research filled the gap in professional literature by investigating students' perceptions of their middle school relationship experiences, with teachers, and the lasting effect of those relationships on the academic decisions of students beyond middle school. Teachers need to know how students perceive their relationships or lack of relationships with their teachers and how those relationships impact student learning and retention. Further, the extent to which students perceive those relationships as having influenced their decision to drop out of school is crucial to dissecting the reasons for dropout and resolving the problem (Jamison, 1996).

Research Questions

The over-arching research question that drove this investigation was:

What is the influence of middle school teacher-student relationships on the future academic decisions of African American males who dropped out of high school?

The sub-questions that supported the over-arching question were:

1. What affect did negative middle school teacher-student relationships have on the decisions of African American males to pursue a GED?
2. What negative behaviors and attitudes did teachers exhibit who were perceived by their students as negative?
3. What affect did positive middle school teacher-student relationships have on the decisions of African American males to pursue a GED?
4. What positive behaviors and attitudes did teachers exhibit who were perceived

by their students as positive?

Significance of the Study

President George H. Bush felt this nation needed world-class national standards in core subject areas. Thus, his administration called for voluntary testing in grades 4, 8 and 12. In 1989, at a national conference the nation's governors agreed to six national goals for education. These goals became known as the National Goals 2000 Campaign and included the following: 1) all children start school ready to learn, 2) the high school graduation rate will increase to 90 percent, 3) all students in grades 4,8, and 12 will demonstrate proficiency in reading and math, 4) U.S. students will be first in the world in math and science achievement 5) every adult will be literate, and 6) every school will be free of violence and drugs (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2004).

As a part of the new educational accountability system, College and Career Readiness Performance Index, teachers receive rewards or sanctions based on the level of performance of their student's collective performance on state mandated standardized tests Georgia Milestones Assessments. Sanctions associated with low student performance include but are not limited to: termination of teachers and administrations; transfer of teachers or administrators; published report cards with rankings and comparisons to other schools and districts, mandated professional development for the staff and administrator, state monitoring guided by a contract between the school district/school and the state department of education, withholding of funding, complete takeover of the school and districts, or closing of schools and districts. Therefore, this study highlighted educational practice in a way that can, if implemented with sincerity, stop or at least slow down the process of closing schools due to student disengagement

and subsequent school failure (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

This study can inform current and future professional practice by providing insight that will prompt educators across Georgia and the United States to become more proactive in addressing student disengagement of African American males. The researcher anticipates that district and school level leaders will address, in the very near future, the need to establish social and emotional constructs that meet the needs of middle school learners. Leaders need to model for teachers how to establish and maintain positive relationships with students. The researcher also believes that principals and superintendents will begin strategically assigning teachers and administrators to schools where they fit not just where there is a vacancy. By focusing on relationships, teachers and administrators may become more insightful and assertive in identifying and addressing student apathy in the middle school before it becomes a crisis in the high school.

Methodology

Research Design

This investigation employed a qualitative, phenomenological design. Specifically, the researcher examined GED students' perceptions of their past middle school teacher-student relationships and the impact of these relationships on academic resiliency. The researcher used surveys as selection criteria. Ten males were randomly selected by the G.E.D. director. Once selected, participants were asked to complete a survey and return it to the researcher. The surveys were reviewed by the G.E.D. director and me. We agreed on those who might have the most to contribute to the study. She and I agreed on a date and time, and the students were interviewed.

After the data were collected on a voice recorder, the researcher had the interviews transcribed into line numbered text. The data were coded. Like data were clumped together into a chart (based on the conceptual frameworks by French and Raven and Winfield) and analyzed by the researcher to draw conclusions related to teacher-student relationships as an intervention strategy to increase student engagement and consequently, the graduation rate (See Appendix D). Ingrained in social constructivist view, this study employed the phenomenological approach to inquiry as the researcher attempted to capture the middle school experience of the high school dropouts who have made a conscious decision to return to school to pursue a GED.

Social constructivists believe that individuals seek to understand the world around them. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their personal experiences, which are simple or complex and multiple in meaning (Creswell, 2009). This led the researcher to look for the complexity of the meanings instead of the simplistic. The goal of the investigation was to rely on the participants' views of the phenomenon being studied. Phenomenology is a strategy of inquiry in qualitative research that describes the subjective experience of the participants. Through extensive and prolonged engagement, the researcher develops patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2009).

Sample

The researcher interviewed GED students who were enrolled at a technical college in Georgia. The sampling method for this study was purposeful and convenience. The General Education Diploma Program Director granted access to the school from which the sample for this study was chosen. The sample consisted of five African American male GED students. A prescreening questionnaire was used to find those

students who most closely fit the selection criteria of students who were influenced by middle school teacher-student relationships to re-enter school after dropping out of high school.

Instrument

The researcher was the instrument for this study because the data were collected through semi-structured interviews. A letter/form describing the researcher, the purpose of the study, possible participants, and the benefits to school districts in Georgia, was sent to the Director of the GED program at a technical college in Georgia, which serves the entire Central Savannah River Area (CSRA), a 13-county region. This region includes five counties in South Carolina and eight counties in Georgia.

Once the Director of the GED program located all of the African American males who expressed an interest in participating in the study, the researcher used a prescreening questionnaire (Appendix A) to determine the participants for the study. Once the five participants were chosen, they were asked to participate in an intense 45-60-minute session or as long as needed until no new information emerged. They were asked to make a recording of their consent to be audio taped to participate in the study acknowledging that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity and materials would be kept under lock and key for their protection.

Face-to-face, one-on-one, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were used as the primary data collection method for this investigation. In order to avoid compromising the trust and validity of the data, the researcher acknowledged and address certain subjectivities prior to the interviews (Peshkin, 1998) since the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research (Glesne, 2006; Richards & Swartz, 2002). The

interview questions will be developed from a framework created by the researcher. This unique framework (unique to this study) was derived from a combination of the frameworks of French and Raven and Winfield. The researcher anticipated and hoped other interview questions emerge out of participants' responses since the interviews were semi-structured. The researcher chose this approach because the researcher developed a framework (a combination of French and Raven and Winfield frameworks), which was unique to this study.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data from high school dropouts who were enrolled in the GED program at a technical college in Georgia. The researcher adhered to guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board of Georgia Southern University and the Director of the GED program at a technical college in Georgia. Once identified, audio taped consent was collected from the participants.

The participants were interviewed one-on-one, face-to face in a semi-structured format. The researcher attempted to secure interviewees who were influenced by middle school teacher-student relationships. This information was obtained through a prescreening questionnaire, administered by the researcher for selection of the participants (See Appendix A).

Once the questionnaires were collected and reviewed, the participants were notified by the G.E.D. Director. They were given a date, time, and room number where the interview would take place. The interview protocol was read to the participants for the initial interview and audio recorded along with their verbal agreement to participate in the study. In order to document the interviews properly, the interview protocol read by

the researcher and audio taped on a voice recorder. Facial expressions, body language, and other observations (field notes) were made by the researcher and recorded in a notebook by the researcher. The interviewer used open-ended interview questions using the framework developed by the researcher, but will allow the responses of the interviewees to guide the interviews or dictate consequent questions. The interviewer did not limit the number of interviews for each participant, but allowed interviews to take place until no new information was revealed.

A voice recorder was used to record the interviews. After the interviews were recorded, interviews were transcribed to a personal computer into a line numbered format. The interviews took place at Augusta Technical College in a room designated by the GED program director. Approval to interview the five students was requested from the GED director and the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board prior to beginning the interviews.

Prior to conducting the interviews, ten participants were randomly selected by the G.E.D. director. The ten males met with the researcher in a lecture hall to receive and introduction to the researcher and receive additional information about the study. The researcher explained the purpose for the study and the need for the interviews. The researcher distributed the surveys to all potential participants. Upon completion of the surveys, they were to leave them with the researcher and return to class. They were thanked by the researcher and informed that they would be notified if chosen for the study.

After collection of all surveys, the researcher went back to the director's office. Together the surveys were reviewed and five out of the ten were chosen. The surveys

were ranked by who appeared to have been most influenced or had more to say. The remaining surveys were also ranked as alternates based on the volume of their answers. We decided, the more explicit the answers, the more willing the men might be to open up and share.

Data Analysis

The researcher hired a transcriber to transcribe all of the interviews into line-numbered text. The transcribed data was then placed into the pre-created major codes/themes chart in (Appendix D). Thematic analysis is the most widely used means of data analysis within the sociological tradition; it involves coding and segregating the data into data clumps. This is done to make sense out of what the researcher has seen, heard, and read. The researcher categorizes, synthesizes, and interprets the data to search for patterns and common themes. Then, the organized framework will be displayed in the form of matrices, flowcharts, graphs and other forms of visual display to assist in making meaning of the data and exposing the gaps or areas where further data is needed (Glesne, 2006).

The researcher analyzed the data in this research through the lens of the Heuristic approach developed by Clark Moustakas (Kleining & Witt, 2000). In this analysis, the emphasis is not shared constructions, but rather, idiosyncratic meaning of individuals (Ratliff, n.d.). In addition, the lenses of French and Raven's Bases of Social Power Framework and Winfield's Teacher Behavior Patterns Framework were used in the analysis to help establish the validity and necessity of positive teacher-student relationships.

Limitations and Delimitations

The researcher anticipated a few limitations to possibly hinder the study and compromise the results. The researcher was not able to select the subjects. Instead, subjects were preselected by the Director of the GED program. Lack of informed consent, lack of cooperation from GED program director, failure of students to give honest answers, inconsistency with student answers due to lack of maturity, students' abilities to recall significant details from their middle school experience, and coordination of schedules to conduct interviews were considered as possible hindrances to the research and to the timely completion of this study. However, of those limitations named, the only limitation that manifested was false information submitted on the pre-survey questionnaires. Two of the young men submitted false names and phone numbers and could not be located by the G.E.D. Director.

Due to the scope of the research, the researcher established delimitations for this investigation. This study included African American male high school dropouts who are enrolled in the GED program at a technical college in Georgia.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – is one of the cornerstones of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The State of Georgia, each local school district, and each individual school will be held accountable for the academic success of students. The federal law requires that each State set high academic standards and implement an extensive annual student testing program which is aligned with standards and which measures students' achievement based on the standards. AYP requires schools to meet standards in three areas: Test Participation (for both Mathematics and Reading/English

Language Arts), Academic Performance (for both Mathematics and Reading/English Language Arts), and a Second Indicator. For the state of Georgia, the second indicator is attendance. AYP holds each local school district and each individual school accountable for the academic success of students (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).

Alternative School – Children who are expelled from their assigned public school must be offered alternative education. This is sometimes done through alternative programs within a school. Other times, school districts place children in a different setting, such as a separate alternative school (Pyramid Parent Center, n.d.).

Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) – AMO is the prescribed level of achievement that every public school in Georgia is expected to meet in reading, language arts, and math on annual standardized tests. This level increases every three years. The goal for Georgia is that every public school will reach a level of 100% in reading and math by the year 2014 (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).

At-Risk Student – Unique to this study, a student who has demonstrated one or more of these characteristics: three or more office referrals for deviant behaviors that resulted in In-School or Out-of-School Suspension; consistent poor performance on standardized tests, particularly in the areas of math and reading; recommendation to or prior attendance at an alternative school; assignment to a probation officer; confinement to a youth development or detention center and chronic absenteeism (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

Dropout Factories – dropout factories are high schools that lose approximately 40 percent of their students between 9th and 12th grades (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2009).

In-School Suspension (ISS) – ISS is the temporary removal of a student from the normal school classes and the placement of a student in an approved “time-out” program, usually at the same school (Pyramid Parent Center, n.d.).

Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) – OSS is the temporary removal of a student from school. Suspensions are limited in time and the student should be able to return to school after the term of suspension is completed. During the suspension period, students are not permitted to visit their school campus (Pyramid Parent Center, n.d.)

Pedagogy – pedagogy refers to the process through which knowledge is produced (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Teacher-Student Relationships – Unique to this study, teacher-student relationships are those in which positive emotional deposits are made, emotional withdrawals are avoided, and students and teachers respect each other. Positive teacher-student relationships also occur outside of the classroom as well as inside of the classroom because of the trust that has been established (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Payne, 1996).

Youth Development or Detention Center (YDC) – YDC is a maximum security facility or prison designed to house youth who are in need of a restrictive environment and who are alleged delinquent or have been adjudicated delinquent. Some offenses include: possession of a firearm, rape of a child, prostitution, assault of school personnel, incest, cruelty to animals, drive-by shooting, motor vehicle theft, arson, and bomb threats. Programs can include tutorial, crisis intervention, reading and math, religious, and recreational. After the term is served, students may be released and may return to school (Franklin County Court of Appeals, n.d.; King County Government, n.d.).

Summary

The dropout crisis has plagued America as thousands of youth leave high school without successfully completing an academic program. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to draw attention to the impact of middle school teacher-student relationships on students' decisions to enroll in a GED program after dropping out of school. This was accomplished through in-depth, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with five African American males who have enrolled in a GED program. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes and sub-themes centered on the impact of middle school teacher-student relationships.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Accountability: A Nation Still at Risk.

All children are entitled to a fair chance at education and the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This will afford them the opportunity for gainful employment and the ability to manage themselves; thereby, serving their personal interests as well as society. According to the *Nation At Risk* report, we have failed to hold up our end of the bargain as a nation because we have allowed mediocrity to spread through our schools and as a result other nations are surpassing us in academic achievement, industry, skills, and the job market. Our students are not in position to compete globally (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). There is a need to renew our commitment to education by examining the influence of teacher-student relationships on the resiliency of at-risk students.

Research studies presented in chapter one seemed to indicate that teacher-student relationships play a major role in the academic resiliency of at-risk students. The at-risk students referenced unique to this research study are those who exited high school before completion of their fourth year or who failed to graduate with a traditional diploma on or before their 19th birthday, (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). In one study, students alleged lack of caring teachers encouraging students to persevere could have contributed to student disengagement, (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In another study, student perceptions of their interactions with faculty were positively correlated with stable enrollment throughout the freshman year of college. This was particularly noted among minority students (Gregory, 2009). In Ruby Paynes's research, students interviewed

revealed that relationships with their teachers motivated them to be diligent in finishing school (Payne, 2006).

In chapter two, the researcher examined more closely and critically studies relating to at-risk learners, Georgia's high school graduation rates and dropout crisis, teacher expectations and student achievement, and the influence of teacher-student relationships on students' decisions to enroll in a GED program.

Accountability: Dropouts in Georgia

In order to earn a decent living in America, one must possess a postsecondary education. In fact, almost 90% of the highest-paying fastest-growing jobs in this country require a high school diploma. However, nationally, there are approximately 1.3 million students leaving high school without a diploma, with the highest incidents occurring among poor and minority students; there is a problem with these statistics (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Due to inaccurate data and calculations, and inadequate state and federal accountability systems, the number of dropouts may far exceed the number reported to agencies (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

In the State of State Standards report released by the Fordham Institute in 2006, Georgia's new curriculum, Georgia Performance Standards, was recognized as one of five best state curricula in the nation. According to the state superintendent of schools in Georgia, the graduation rate began to rise with the implementation of the new curriculum. In 2008, 83,000 students graduated on time, which is 27,000 more than reported in 2003. The governor of Georgia stated that Georgia has made progress rising from 60 percent in 2002 to 75.4 percent in 2008. All ethnic groups showed an increase in their graduation rates in 2008 (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

African Americans had a graduation rate of 62 (four point increase from 2007) percent and Hispanic students had a graduation rate of 65.5 (five point increase since 2007). Georgia's economically disadvantaged students raised their graduation rate by four points to 67 percent (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). In 2009, the graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students rose even higher to 72.6 and 69 percents respectively. However, there are slight differences depending on the reporting agency. Despite the increases, the graduation rates of African American and Hispanic students are still significantly lower than the graduation rate of their white counterparts (82.1 percent), and Georgia is one of five states with the worst graduation rate in the entire United States (Staples & Dodd, 2009). However, when compared to large urban cities like Detroit, New York City, and Miami, Georgia appears to be a hero for graduating non-white students on time (Kafele, 2012).

In contrast to the aforementioned report from the Georgia Department of Education (2008), the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (2010) indicated that only 64% of Georgia's students graduate from high school with a diploma. That means that 36% of Georgia's students are leaving high school without a diploma. There is a vast difference between 75% and 64%. In addition to these numbers, the United States Department of Education reported Georgia's graduation rate at 62%. There are hundreds of students who have dropped out and have not been reported by any agency because of inconsistency in calculations, reporting procedures, and manipulation of data (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009, Darling-Hammond, 2004; Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Tables 1 presents the graduation rates for grades K-12 in the state of Georgia. Tables 2 and 3 present the dropout rates for grades 7-12 and 9-12 respectively

in Georgia's public schools.

Table 1

Georgia Graduation from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement

	2009-2010 Percentage	2008-2009 Number	2007-2008 Percentage	2007-2008 Number	2006-2007 Percentage	2006-2007 Number
All students	78.9	115,570	75.4	110,765	72.3	104,123
Asian	91	3,406	88.7	5,233	86.2	3,100
Black	74	43,088	69.2	41,915	65.5	39,153
Hispanics	71	7,113	65.5	6,581	60.3	5,624
Native Americans	80.9	173	77.1	188	65.5	142
White	82.7	55,559	80.2	56,989	77.5	54,483
Multiracial	82.5	2,231	79.2	1,859	76.3	1,621

Table 2

Georgia Dropout Rates for Grades 7-12 from the Governor's Office of Student

	2009-2010 Percentage	2008-2009 Number	2007-2008 Percentage	2007-2008 Number	2006-2007 Percentage	2006-2007 Number
All students	2.8	794,259	2.6	797,446	2.9	795,138
Asian	1.2	24,598	0.9	23,785	1.1	22,251
Black	3.5	323,317	3.0	327,385	3.2	326,132
Hispanics	2.9	65,632	2.8	624,416	3.4	58,587
Native Americans	1.3	1,299	2.0	1,336	3.0	1,174
White	2.2	359,065	2.4	364,843	2.8	370,463
Multiracial	2.6	20,348	2.2	18,359	2.4	16,531

Table 3

Georgia Dropout Rates for Grades 9-12 from the Governor's Office of Student

	2009-2010 Percentage	2008-2009 Number	2007-2008 Percentage	2007-2008 Number	2006-2007 Percentage	2006-2007 Number
All students	3.8	519,190	3.6	519,784	4.1	512,828
Asian	1.6	16,231	1.2	15,123	1.5	146,777
Black	4.7	213,224	4.0	213,369	4.3	208,495
Hispanics	4.2	39,875	4.2	37,721	5.0	34,707
Native Americans	2.0	888	2.8	866	4.5	753
White	3.2	236,650	3.4	241,800	4.0	244,527
Multiracial	3.9	12,342	3.3	10,905	3.6	9,669

Achievement. Retrieved from www.gosa.georgia.gov/indicators, 2009.

The 2004 Dropout Prevention Act identified several common patterns and behaviors commonly found in students who drop out of school. These behaviors include poor attendance, low grade-point average, low standardized test scores, low reading scores, low math scores, special program placement, grade retention, discipline referrals, multiple and/or long-term suspensions, low socioeconomic status, teen parenting, frequent school transfers, and single parent families. Some of the antisocial behavior that is manifested in school has been linked to students who are victims of poverty, alcohol and drug abuse in the home, single-parent or surrogate families, and violence (Converse & Kraft, 2009). Interestingly, teacher expectations were excluded from this list, but low teacher expectations are a leading influence of student disengagement from school (McNeil, 2016).

In recent research conducted by Sparks, Johnson, and Akos (2010), it was found that combinations of these at-risk factors are more likely to produce school

disengagement that leads to dropout than the presence of one or none of these factors in 9th graders (Sparks, et. al, 2010). The purpose of this research was to produce data that would help school counselors, administrators, and teachers find and serve students who were at highest risk of dropping out. In a Southeastern school district in the United States, six percent of 17,735 ninth graders dropped out of school. The 9th grade population was of particular interest to the researchers because the 9th grade year is considered a year of transition. Data for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years were examined to identify risk factors that would best indicate dropout. Initially there were nine risk factors identified that were highly correlated with each other. For example, failure of English 1 and the 8th grade standardized math test were highly correlated with retention in the 9th grade (Sparks, et al., 2010).

To simplify the analyses, the researchers extracted three factors that were more significantly associated with 9th grade dropout and labeled these three factors as the “Big 3.” These three indicators were: being retained in any grade (k-9), scoring below grade level on end-of-course tests in 8th grade math or failing Algebra I, and receiving a long-term suspension. It was found that 60.9 percent of 9th grade dropouts had been retained at least once prior to 9th grade as compared to 8.2 percent of students who did not dropout. Of the retained students who dropped out, 42.3 percent had failed the English I standardized test. About 33.7 percent of 9th grade dropouts score below grade level on the 8th grade standardized math test as compared to 15.4 percent of non-dropouts. Another 26 percent of 9th grade failed Algebra I compared with less than 12 percent of the non-dropouts. More than 35.2 percent of 9th grade dropouts had received a long-term suspension of 10 days or more in either 8th or 9th grade students, compared with only 2.4

percent of students who did not dropout; 74.3 percent of the suspended students who dropped out had also served short-term suspensions (Sparks, et. al., 2010).

Dropouts: African American Males

African American males have the lowest reading scores; comprise the highest prison rate (22% daily for dropouts), the highest crime rate, including gang activity, and the highest dropout rate in most urban, rural, and suburban cities (Campbell, 2006; Sum, et.al., 2009; Venkatesh, 2009). A noticeable decline in reading standardized scores becomes blatant in the fourth grade. Ironically, new constructions for prison projects are based on fourth grade reading levels of male students. Research by Kunjufu (2005) and Kafele (2012) revealed that only 27% of African American male students in special education graduate from high school and only about 46% of African American students in the general education population graduate from high school (Kunjufu, 2005). Factors that further contribute to this overwhelming issue are low teacher expectations (also known as the “expectations gap”), stereotyping of these male students, the cultural diversity of the students, outdated teaching practices (lecture/rote learning), and unwillingness or inability to form connections with the students (America’s Promise Alliance and the AT&T Foundation, 2010; White-Hood, 1991; Kafele, 2012).

Since the focus of this investigation is African American males, it is important to acknowledge gender-learning differences in male and female students. Males in general, are active in an anarchistic or non-traditional way. They have a low degree of preparation. They broaden subjects and include new angles and points of view in discussions or tasks. Males see lesson as an individual matter. They constantly interrupt each other and compete with each other in getting the teacher’s attention. In order to

effectively teach males, teachers must understand and be willing to make adjustments to accommodate differences in learning styles (Kunjufu, 2005).

More specifically, because of the nature of African American cultures, there are differing philosophies between school and African American male culture, which contribute to the tensions with which African American students face daily in school and out of school. In school, the culture is *I, individualism, competition, academics, and reporting of infractions to authority figures*. In African American male culture, it is *we, collectivity, cooperation, sports, rap music, and self-defense*. These two cultures are in direct conflict with each other as the greatest challenge for African Americans is not always biology, reading, and algebra, but survival (Kunjufu, 2005).

African American and Hispanic students are often disruptive in school in response to their perception of the teacher's belief in their inferiority. In these cases, students are likely to act out which puts them in control of the classroom setting. Their disruption is a hypersensitive defense mechanism to protect them from rejection by the teacher. There are four objectives of misbehavior exhibited by African American males: to get attention, to achieve power, to seek revenge, or to assume an attitude of inadequacy. African American males need a sense of belonging; they want to feel connected to others; they compensate for hurt feelings by deprivation of importance; they react to perceived loss of importance by giving up (Kunjufu, 2005).

Unfortunately, many teachers begin to label the minority students as hostile, disruptive, and hopeless. When the child becomes hopeless, he becomes a true problem at school. No learning takes place and disengagement from the school is fully manifested through chronic absenteeism which eventually leads to dropout. When schools begin to

convey that a student's academic and lifelong success is the number one priority of the school, students will become more motivated and engaged in the learning process (Kuykendall, 1991). Anderson (2016) describes this as a pro-social environment. Students need a risk-free environment that permits them to be emotionally vulnerable, and only when students perceive the teacher as trustworthy will they allow themselves to become emotionally vulnerable. Students will engage in challenging work and persevere if they feel the teacher will treat them with respect, kindness, empathy, and support. If they expect scorn, criticism, or derision from the teacher or peers, they will not take risks and eventually disengage from the learning process. Thus, the teacher's number one objective should be creating positive relationships with their students and creating a nurturing environment that fosters authentic learning (Anderson, 2016).

Teacher-Student Relationships Including Perception Studies

There is very little research available on middle school dropouts; however, there is a plethora of research on the need to establish positive teacher/student relationships at the middle school level as an important link to preventing dropout in high school (Wells, 1989). In the 1983 report, *A Nation At Risk*, the author clearly and loudly called for America to regain focus of the purpose of education in this nation. It was stated that our society has lost sight of the basic purposes of schools and have compromised the commitment to education because of conflicting demands that are placed on schools and colleges. "They are called on to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve. We must understand that these demands on our schools and colleges often exact an educational cost as well as a financial one, (p. 1)." However, in 2010, we are still failing to graduate

100 percent of our students because we have not realized the importance of addressing the personal, social, and political problems that are facing our children. If the cost of ignoring the social needs of adolescent learners is weighed against the benefits of addressing these needs, the benefits will outweigh the costs.

Teaching means more than the transference of knowledge from teacher to pupil; it involves interaction and the cultivation of personal one-on-one relationships. Sperry (1968, as cited in Brophy & Good, 1974) noted school failure as the result of social class, personality traits and problems of the students rather than failure of school officials to focus on individual student needs, strengths, weaknesses, and interests in order to prescribe educational opportunities to help students succeed. Brophy and Good (1974), agreed that students are different; some thrive and are self-motivated while others are apathetic and uninterested. However, teacher attitudes, perceptions, and expectations not only influence teacher-student relationships, but they also influence student self-expectations, attitudes, (Brophy & Good, 1974; Chen & Thompson, 2003) and classroom performance (Newby, Rickards, and Fisher, 2001). Then, the student attitudes shape the teacher behaviors, which ultimately influence student outcomes whether positive or negative (Newby et. al, 2001). In summary, teacher attitudes, perceptions, and expectations contribute to the widening performance gap between high achieving and low achieving students (Brophy & Good, 1974).

While Charlton and David (as cited in Baroglu, 2009) acknowledged the impact of school policy and organizational factors such as content and delivery of curriculum on student engagement and misbehavior in the classroom, they emphatically highlighted the necessity to reevaluate the impact of teacher behavior. They challenge schools to

examine what they are offering, how it is being offered and whether or not it meets the needs of the students. In Taiwan, studies of elementary teacher-student relationships were conducted, with students in grades three through six, to uncover student perceptions of four types of teachers' oral feedback: positive academic, negative academic, positive nonacademic, and negative nonacademic. Small group discussions and surveys revealed that students in the low expectancy group perceived more negative oral feedback and less positive feedback while students in the high expectancy groups perceived less negative oral feedback and more positive oral feedback (Chen & Thompson, 2003).

Teacher expectations are based on inferences that teachers make about the present and future academic achievement of their students (Brophy & Good, 1974). Chen and Thompson (2003) further define this mindset as the teacher's judgment based on the student's academic and non-academic classroom behavior. Ordinarily, these expectations are based on intelligence and achievement data, past grades, comments from previous teachers, and knowledge about the student's family. When the teacher takes these data into account, he or she begins to form an expectation that may or may not be a "true" picture of the student. When the teacher meets the student, expectations are changed or reshaped based on interactions with the student. If teacher expectations are inaccurate or inflexible, the relationship between the teacher and student is malformed and places the student at risk (Brophy & Good, 1974).

The Pygmalion Effect is a theory that links higher expectations to higher student performance. In this study, it was found that students who had teachers who displayed high expectations for their students were three times more likely to graduate from college than students who had teachers who displayed low expectations (Moeny, 2014). Teacher

expectations outweighed student motivation or effort whether positive or negative. Teacher predictions about student outcomes outweighed parent predictions whether positive or negative. It was also noted, teachers consistently held lower expectations for children of color, particularly if the children were male and from high poverty backgrounds. Expectations for black males from poverty backgrounds were consistently low if the teachers were white versus black (McNeil, 2016). Teachers, in general, believed poor students were 53% less likely to graduate from high school than wealthy students, and Black and Hispanic students were 47% and 42% less likely to graduate from high school than white students (Moeny, 2014).

A teacher's attitude and values can provoke negative behavior in students (Baroglu, 2009; McNeil, 2016; Money, 2014). When a teacher's expectation functions as an antecedent or cause of student behavior rather than a result of observed student behavior, it is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy. This prophecy or expectation is usually false, but it inspires a chain of events that causes the original statement to become true. A teacher is guilty of the self-fulfilling prophecy when her treatment of the student is contrary to who he really is. Additionally, when a teacher's expectations are inaccurate and she is unwilling to make a change, these expectations are damaging (Brophy & Good, 1974). To follow this further, if a teacher harbors an expectation that a student is not capable of doing work in a particular subject area or classroom, the teacher is very likely to give up on the student psychologically. In other words, the teacher is simply going through the motions of teaching the student because there is no determination that the student can learn. The series of reinforcing events could include: teaching the student with less enthusiasm than the rest of the class, calling on the student less frequently, and

making half-hearted efforts to elicit responses to questions (Anderson, 2016; Brophy & Good, 1974).

Teachers are more likely to notice the student's failure, but less likely to intervene or celebrate successes. Naturally, this type of selective perception will negatively impact the teacher-student relationship, as it will only perpetuate the low teacher expectations. In light of the fact that low teacher expectations significantly impact teacher behavior towards a certain subset of students (low achievers), it is easy to see as teacher behavior diminishes, student behavior declines and student withdrawal increases because the student begins to notice that he is being taught with less rigor and enthusiasm. The quantity of the material lessens and the quality of the teaching diminishes (determination, patience, and support). The longer this situation continues, the worse it gets. The student falls further behind, and student motivation deteriorates (Brophy & Good, 1974).

In essence, teachers need to check their own attitudes and motivations because many still engage in behavior, which suggests they are aloof, impersonal, and uncomfortable with diverse student populations (Kuykendall, 1991). The student is astute enough to discern the teacher's treatment of him. He reaches the conclusion that the teacher does not think he is very bright or likely to succeed. Thus, the student becomes frustrated, apathetic, disengaged, rebellious, and disruptive. He begins to withdraw from the learning process feeling defeated and unwilling to attempt difficult tasks (Brophy & Good, 1974). The America's Promise Alliance and the AT&T Foundation (2009) conducted a research project in which they defined this very attitude as the "expectations gap." The assumption is that teachers and administrators or schools, in general, contribute to student disengagement and the dropout epidemic when

expectations of student performance are low (Foundation Center, 2009). Table 4 presents a summary of the primary sources of literature related to the negative effects of teacher-student relationships on student retention and achievement.

Teacher-Student Relationships as Prevention/Intervention

Yates and Holt (2009) explicitly state that there is a definite need to reevaluate how we do business in middle school. In Australia, the problem of student disengagement in the ninth grade year of high school is just as prevalent as it is in the United States. As a result, a high school developed a program that would promote a pedagogy of caring by establishing teacher-student relationships. The researchers spent time in a public high school in Australia at least once a month over a period of a year and observed staff meetings and classrooms. They talked to principals, students, and teachers, conducted interviews and casual conversations and collected documents related to the program.

The teachers of this school who saw a need for a personal curriculum initiated this reform. They were concerned about the number of students who were disengaged, the poor attendance rates, and the astronomical number of dropouts. The data revealed the ninth grade year as the worst for attendance and disengagement. The main features of the reform, entitled ARCH (*Active* in their learning, *Resilient* in meeting new challenges, *Connected* to their learning, peers, and community, *Happy* about being in school) were: separate location from the rest of the school, each class would be located in one room with two teachers who would teach all core subjects, teachers would have to apply for the program, off-campus activities were used, and reflection tools like diary writing were included in the reform (Yates & Holt, 2009).

Interviews, surveys, and observations revealed that students and teachers did get to know each other better and as a result, students became more engaged in learning. Parents wrote testimonials of how excited their children were about going to school. They also believed that the individual needs of their children were being met by teachers who knew their children because of the extensive amount of time spent with the students. Students revealed excitement about the amount of responsibility placed on them and how they were allowed on excursions without a teacher presence because of the newfound relationships of trust. Students started coming to school because teachers took a personal interest in them and began to engage students for learning. Teacher-student relationships were defined as personal and interpersonal rather than positional (institutional). Students began sharing personal information with teachers and teachers reciprocated (Yates & Holt, 2009).

The researchers concluded that a shift to personal and interpersonal schooling in secondary schools is superior to a competitive academic school culture. This is especially needed when students are transitioning from middle school to secondary school. The characteristics that education departments use to define successful schools (high test scores, positive public appearances and reputations, high discipline standards, and state-of-the-art facilities) are the very things that promote student disengagement, dropout, and chronic absenteeism. Human connections along with cultures and structures of academic rigor are needed to ensure academic success and student retention (Yates & Holt, 2009).

Another mixed methods study by Johnson (2009) examined the relationship of student belongingness and teacher support on student learning. This research was inspired

by the work of Bronfenbrenner in 1974. He declared that high schools were breeding grounds for student disengagement and boredom. Johnson set out to prove that schools that place greater emphasis on the developmental needs of adolescent students are more likely to foster a sense of belongingness and have important effects on student and teacher outcomes. This study is in direct contrast to the statement made earlier in regards to the financial and educational costs of addressing social needs in public schools highlighted in the *A Nation At Risk* report.

Data were collected from two different public high schools in the Northwestern United States. One traditional high school (Lincoln) and one non-traditional high school (Starlight) were compared to each other in term of teacher-student relationships. The two schools were similar in relation to city demographics (median household income), community history (located in predominantly African American neighborhoods), school admission procedures, and student demographics (gender, grade level, and standardized test scores).

Students at both schools were asked to fill out questionnaires, which included questions about the level of teacher support they experienced at school. These variables assessed students' perceptions of how many teachers at their school were caring and concerned about their academic pursuits. Students answered questions such as, how many teachers at your school show interest in you, listen to your problems, ask about your future plans, discuss your personal life with you, care about you, motivate you to do your best, etc. (Johnson, 2009).

The quantitative findings were followed up with interviews of ten students and five teachers and classroom observations. Analyses indicated that teachers at the non-

traditional high school (Starlight) were more supportive than teachers at the traditional high school (Lincoln), and this difference impacted student engagement. At Starlight, students reported that at least two to three teachers showed interest in them as individuals, while one or none showed a personal interest in students at Lincoln. The students at Starlight felt supported, respected, included, and accepted by other members of the school community. They felt like they had a voice, and that teachers cared about them as individuals.

Furthered, students also reported that sharing their interests and developing relationships with their teachers through conversations about learning inspired them to excel in school and life in general. Students felt comfortable with learning when they could communicate with teachers on a personal level about their learning and their lives. Johnson (2009) concluded that adolescents' sense of belonging, in the school, environment and teacher support are directly related to academic engagement and motivation. Pedagogies of care not only enhance the learning environment, but also are a necessary and often overlooked part of the learning environment.

In the same way, it was found that students who are more attached to teachers, more committed to school, and have stronger beliefs in school norms and expectations, are less likely to engage in deviant or violent behavior and display higher academic achievement. Limbos and Casteel (2009) drew the following conclusions from their examination of school environmental factors that influence student crime. Schools with lower teacher student ratios that employ more certified teachers trained in student relations raise student achievement and deter delinquency. They believe informal social controls in schools regulate the behavior of its students.

Relationships between professors and students were investigated among 640 undergraduate students at a large northwestern university. These students were asked if they could recall a turning point event in detail that changed the context of their relationship with their professor and impacted their learning and motivation. The age range of the participants was 18 to 49. They were asked to complete an online survey, which lasted 10-20 minutes.

Devito (1986, as cited in Docan-Morgan, 2009) conceptualized the professor-student relationship along a continuum of relational development which asserts: (1) teaching can be described as a relational process from initial closeness and dissolution; (2) teacher-student interaction that assists teaching and learning depends on the development of an interpersonal relationship; (3) the development of a teacher-student relationship will lead to greater and more effective learning; and (4) failure in teaching can be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the relational development process.

According to the research of Devito (as cited in Docan-Morgan, 2009) teacher-student relationships develop through distinct stages, including relational elements such as control, trust, and affection. However, the most salient feature of the relationship between teachers and students is a relational turning point. A relational turning point is defined by Docan-Morgan (2009) as a single event that shaped the students' perception of their relationships with their teachers.

In his analysis, Docan-Morgan (2009) identified the following themes: instructional (communication, perceived confidence and character, perception of instructor's management style, learning climate, rhetorical sensitivity, feedback, and course administration style), instrumental (discussion of grade, course content, course

assignment, college, major, independent study, and course policy), personal (discussion of coursework, personal information, common interest, compliment, invitation, name used), rhetorical (lecture topic, teaching style), and ridicule/discipline (professors speaking condescendingly to students, yelling or making derogatory comments).

Positive relational turning points occurred when teachers and students interacted in one-on-one conversations sharing personal and private information, showing respect for each other, valuing each other's contribution to the relationship. Students illuminated the importance of teachers portraying characteristics of understanding, helpful, receptive, personal, and friendly and how these interactions made a difference in their college careers. Docan-Morgan (2009) concluded that teachers/professors have the capacity to impact student learning and motivation by engaging in simple behaviors whether they are positive such as calling a student by name or negative such as ridiculing a student. Whether positive or negative these behaviors have strong implications for instructional outcomes including cognitive and affective learning and student motivation.

At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 established the Dropout Prevention Program (Title I, Part H), which provides three-year grants to states and school districts to assist with prevention of dropout and intervention strategies that will perpetuate re-entry actions from students who have already dropped out. States and school districts will receive these funds as long as they can prove the success of their programs. Chicago's public schools have implemented intervention and prevention strategies (EPE Research Center, 2004).

Mentoring at-risk youth first emerged as a community-based program of intervention for children who were considered disadvantaged. This intervention has now

emerged nationally as a school-wide program for at-risk youth in which the mentors are usually community volunteers. The objectives of mentoring are preventing dropout, improving grades and test scores, improving behavior, and developing better student attitudes. Converse and Kraft (2009) noted, prior to launching their mentoring project, that some research reports significant improvements on student attitudes, school engagement, school-related behavior problems, and attendance, but show little impact on dropout rates, grades, and self-esteem. On the contrary, their 18-week study unveiled a few differences.

The three measures used to evaluate the effects of the school-based mentoring program were office referrals, persistent unexcused absences, and a student survey on school attitude. These criteria are incredibly similar to the “Big 3” defined by Sparks et.al. (2010). Converse and Kraft (2009) found that there was no significant difference in the number of days missed by the group of students who were mentored and those who were not mentored. However, there was a significant decrease in the number of office referrals of the mentored group. In addition, the research yielded progress in the quality of student attitudes toward school as measured by the school connectedness survey. Included in the school connectedness survey were questions about how students viewed themselves, how they viewed current and past teachers, and how they viewed support staff and administrators. Summarily, teacher mentoring did promote advances in student behavior, school engagement, and attitude.

In opposition, to dispute the fact that mentoring does not positively impact the dropout rate, self-esteem, and grades, an intervention currently in use in Chicago public schools is making headlines. In a case study of Chicago public schools, aggressive action

is being taken to minimize the gross number of ninth grade students who leave high school without graduating. The Central Office administrative team provides each school with detailed data about each incoming freshman including math and English grades, attendance records, scores on the ACT's Explore test, whether or not the student attended summer school to make up failed eighth grade work. Students who earned D's or lower in math or English are flagged and color coded orange for academic intervention. Nine unexcused absences trigger attendance intervention and are coded dark orange. Students with poor academic and attendance records are coded yellow (Gewertz, 2009).

A "success report" is generated every five weeks. Students with poor grades of D or less or too many unexcused absences are a red flag and teachers are placed on the alert. Teachers at Kelvyn High School monitored students and met with them to discuss their observations in weekly team meetings. Contracts for improvement are created and signed by all team members as students are prompted to discuss and assess their own progress, contracts include lunchtime tutoring and weekly counseling sessions. This intense progress-monitoring plan offered more tailored attention toward struggling learners in class. Students who continually show no improvement are pulled out of regular classes and placed in "academic boot camp." Although there are other levels of interventions in place at the teacher level, a school-wide plan, which includes mentoring by the classroom teachers, has been implemented to ensure success for all (Gewertz, 2009). To develop this point further, mentor logs, from the research of Converse and Kraft (2009), confirmed the effectiveness of positive mentoring. The mentors recorded things like: students were beginning to open-up; they were talking more and initiating conversation; students were more comfortable and willing to meet with mentors; they

were laughing and making jokes, and they were positively changing in terms of attitude. The article about the mentoring program at Kelvyn High School in Chicago public schools, there is a picture of Alvin interacting with his mentor (teacher) at lunch. Alvin's face is brightly lit as he opens his mouth widely clearly laughing with his mentor (Gewertz, 2009).

The Chicago school district defines an "on-track" freshman as one who earns five credit hours by the end of ninth grade and has not failed more than one semester of math, English, science, or social studies. The principal says that ninth grade data not only serve as a good initial outline of student needs, but also serves as a way to fine-tune accountability for teachers. The ninth grade class is divided into three learning communities or pods. As students are monitored, classes and schedules are adjusted to meet the needs of all students, those who are struggling and those who are not. Kelvyn High School has seen an improvement in the number of students who successfully move through ninth grade and remain on track. Furthermore, a three-year trend analysis revealed an increase in both Kelvyn and the entire school district (Gewertz, 2009). Table 5 presents a three-year trend analysis of the graduation rates for Kelvyn High School and the Chicago school district. The table displays a positive correlation between the implementation of the progress monitoring program and the graduation rates.

Table 4

Three-year Growth Trend of Kelvin High School and Chicago, IL.

Three-Year Trend Analysis	Chicago, IL	Kelvyn High School
2007	73.60%	75.80%
2008	77.20%	77.80%
2009	84.50%	78.40%

Adapted from “9th grade by the Numbers,” by C. Gewertz, 2009, *Education Week*, 28(24). Copyright 2009 by the Editorial Projects in Education.

Previous studies conducted by Ladson-Billings (2009) and Payne (1996) suggest that African American students learn best in environments that are relational and personal, like an extended family. Payne (1996) believes that in actuality, the effective teacher of African American children, regardless of race, is one who takes a personal interest in the student by cultivating relationships. Ladson-Billings (2009) reiterated this point by stressing the fact that teachers who are culturally relevant see the teacher’s job as an opportunity to help students find out who they are and how they fit into society by developing relationships with and getting to know students.

Ladson-Billings (2009) conducted an ethnographic study to document the teaching practices of highly effective teachers of African American children. The “dreamkeepers” are those teachers who continue to teach African American students to high levels of achievement in the midst of a “teach to the test” paradigm. These teachers focus on student learning, cultural relevance, and sociopolitical conscious in their work with African American and Latino students. They use their work to perfect their practices

in the classroom and beyond.

Ladson-Billings (2009) attempted to build a profile of effective teaching that could be used in teacher preparation programs and professional learning. Data collection consisted of interviews, videotaping, classroom observations, and collective analysis and interpretations of the videos by all participants. Audiotapes and field notes were also collected, and the researcher served as participant-observer to minimize the distraction of her presence. The data collected coupled with her own experience allowed Ladson-Billings to draw several conclusions regarding teacher-student relationships.

Emphasizing the importance of creating classrooms of social relations to promote student engagement and increase student achievement was a goal of Ladson-Billing's (2009) research. The teacher-student relationship is just as fluid as it is humanely equitable because students respond to the teacher based on the teacher's behavior and personality. In other words, the teacher-student relationship is a reciprocal one. If the teacher is warm and concerned, the student will be warm and concerned. If the teacher is cold and hostile, the student will be cold and hostile (Brophy & Good, 1974; Ladson-Billings, 2009). No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship between the teacher and the student (Kunjufu, 2005).

In the Kelvyn (2009) study, one student in particular was flagged as at-risk of not graduating on time due to poor grades and a history of failure prior to 9th grade. A program was designed with his input and used to track his success throughout his freshman year. His teachers observed him both up close and at a distance. His team of teachers kept track of his grades, classroom performance, behavior and interactions with other students throughout the school day. Through close relationships established

between his teachers and with him, Alvin was able to turn his failing grades into Bs and Cs and stay on track for completion of his 9th grade year, his most successful year due to the personal attention of his teachers and other school personnel involved in his school career (Gewertz, 2009).

When the teacher's attitude is one of position and power, the relationship is hierarchical in nature instead of equitable. In this type of relationship, the teacher talks, the student listens (Ladson-Billings, 2009) or the teacher asks the questions, the student responds according to the teacher's expectations (Kunjufu, 2005). This rigid atmosphere does not allow for the construction of personal interaction between the students and teacher because there is a clear line of division between the teacher and the student (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In summation, Kunjufu (2005) states, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

The teacher-student relationship should be one wherein the teacher demonstrates a connectedness to all students and that connectedness emerges into interactions that extend beyond the classroom. Very few teachers live within the neighborhoods in which they teach. Many students, especially those who live in poverty conditions, have not been outside of their neighborhoods. Ladson-Billings (2009) interviewed teachers (4th grade and up) who revealed taking students out to lunch on Saturdays, taking students to church, and spending time exposing students to places and events that might cause them to dream. These teachers rose above and beyond the call of duty in order to get to know their students better.

Effective teacher-student relationships consist of encouraging a community of

learners to work together and take responsibility for each other instead of competing with each other. One group of teachers studied by Ladson-Billings (2009) argued for student cooperation and mutual responsibility in the classroom when other teachers interviewed talked against it. Those who were against it stated that it was difficult to evaluate student work if they constantly worked in groups and helped each other. Those teachers who were in favor of student cooperation argued that students, particularly those who were victims of or lived in neighborhoods that perpetuated violence, drugs, unemployment, underemployment, high drop-out rates, and crime need to see community-building as a lifelong practice that takes place within the classroom and beyond.

Successful teachers who create a community of learners much like an extended family perceive teaching as more than a career; they perceive it as a calling. Love and Kruger (2005), motivated by the work of Ladson-Billings' original study (1994) on cultural relevant teaching, examined this phenomenon in two studies with the same participants. They were interested in a measurement tool that would assess teachers' "culturally relevant" beliefs. Thus, Love and Kruger (2005) developed a survey instrument for teachers in 6 urban schools serving predominantly African American children. The surveys contained 48 statements emphasizing high regard for students, cooperation and interaction among students, and community connectedness to urban education, students' race, ethnicity, relevant teaching, and classification that would reflect the teacher's teaching style without regard to particular cultural characteristics of the student. The researchers organized the statements into six dimensions: (a) knowledge, (b) student's race, ethnicity, and culture, (c) teaching as a profession, (d) teaching practice, (e) students' needs and strengths, and (f) social relations in and beyond

the classroom. The results of study 1 indicated: (a) teachers learning from students was just as important as teaching them; (b) teachers did not see children of color, just children; (c) teachers could not reach consensus about how to make students accountable for their learning; (d) teachers were ambivalent about parental involvement; (e) although some participants expressed burnout in their urban schools, the majority were positive about teaching in urban schools because they saw it as an opportunity to give back to the community; (f) there was no overwhelming response one way or the other in regards to the use of repetition, drill, or practice; (g) teachers showed indecisiveness when asked if the standard of excellence is independent of individual differences.

In the second study conducted by Love and Kruger (2005), the researchers selected two of the six schools studied in the first study. In these two schools 95% of the student body received free and reduced lunch, were predominantly African American, and ranked in the lowest 20 percent for standardized test scores in the state. Results of study 1 were correlated with test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a commonly used standardized test in reading, math, and language arts. Results showed a strong connection between cultural relevant beliefs and increased reading, language arts, and math achievement as measured by the ITBS. The outcome yielded a strong correlation between the role of the teacher as disseminator of knowledge and enhanced achievement in language arts and reading. There was a positive correlation between teachers who viewed the school as a community of learners and augmented reading scores. There was a positive correlation between teachers who saw teaching in an urban school as a way to give back to the community and reading achievement. Teachers playing the role of student and allowing students to teach the class was positively related

to enlarged math achievement. Planning for individual student needs was positively correlated to improved math achievement (Love & Kruger, 2005).

Appendix F is a summary of research studies related to the effects of positive teacher-student relationships and their impact on student retention and achievement.

Summary

This Nation is still at risk because we have failed to graduate 100% of senior high school students in public schools throughout the urban, suburban, and rural districts in the United States. This Nation is still at risk because the achievement gap is no closer to being closed today than it was 30 years ago. There continues to be a tremendous difference in graduation rates among different ethnic groups and between boys and girls. White students are more likely to graduate on time than African American or Hispanic children, and girls are more likely to graduate on time than boys. There have been numerous efforts to resolve this issue; however, in most cases, the dropout rate continues to hover at approximately 30% in most states in America.

Students are considered at-risk for school failure when they demonstrate low reading and math scores on standardized tests, chronic absenteeism, grade retention, multiple discipline referrals and suspensions, teen parenting, and frequent school moves. Students who exhibit antisocial behavior associated with poverty, drugs and alcohol, home abuse, and surrogate families may also be at-risk of school failure. African American and Hispanic children are especially at-risk because they remain significantly farther behind their counterparts. African American males in particular have the second highest dropout rates in some areas and the highest in other states. African American males have the lowest reading scores, the highest crime rates, the highest incarceration

rates, and the highest unemployment rates. Critics believe that the answers are a more rigorous national curriculum, more highly qualified teachers, more dropout prevention programs, and ending social promotion. The goal of this study is to find out if positive middle school teacher-student relationships were influential in students' decisions to pursue a GED after dropping out of high school.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of middle school teacher-student relationships on students' decisions to return to school to pursue a GED after dropping out of high school. With a national dropout rate of 30% and in some urban areas of 50%, among poor minority youths, it is imperative that proactive measures are implemented with a sense of urgency. Research suggests that indicators of student disengagement can be tracked as early as elementary school when student reading and math scores begin to decline and disruptive classroom behavior begins to increase. While a ninth grade intervention plan is very necessary, a middle school intervention plan is critical.

This study may inform teacher and principals about the importance of building the right kind of relationships between staff and students. A rigorous national curriculum is important, but without the social systems and pedagogies of care there is an imbalance within classrooms and ultimately school systems. Educators, especially teachers must embrace the cultivation of relationships with students as an integral part of a child's education. Students want and need to be valued and empowered.

Additionally, college preparatory programs could benefit from this study. Potential educators need to be prepared to handle the pressures of teaching at-risk students and be able to reach them on all levels. As teacher evaluation systems are modified and test scores become a major tool of measurement for teacher success in the classroom, teachers need to be equipped to handle at-risk students. Funding sources are

diminishing, class sizes are increasing, but the AMO for reading and math is increasing as we advance towards 100% mastery in reading and math by the year 2014 in the state of Georgia. In other words, teachers will be expected to continue to raise levels of student achievement with greater numbers of students in the classroom and less resources with which to work.

This chapter focuses on the method and procedures used to collect, analyze, and interpret the data for this examination. This chapter includes the research design, population and sample, data collection and procedure, and data analysis methods. This study is expected to answer the following overarching question and sub-questions.

Research Questions

The following over-arching research question and sub questions guided this investigation:

What is the influence of middle school teacher-student relationships on the future academic decisions of African American males who dropped out of high school?

1. What affect did negative middle school teacher-student relationships have on the decisions of African American males to pursue a GED?
2. What behaviors and attitudes did teachers exhibit who were perceived by their students as negative?
3. What affect did positive middle school teacher-student relationships have on the decisions of African American males to pursue a GED?
4. What behaviors and attitudes did teachers exhibit who were perceived by their students as positive?

Research Design

Rooted in social constructivist view, this researcher employed a phenomenological approach to inquiry as the researcher attempted to capture the middle school teacher-student experiences that may have helped or hindered the student from maximizing his potential during middle and/or high school. Phenomenology is an approach used in qualitative research that describes the subjective experience of the participant. Qualitative design was chosen to allow the researcher to examine the underlying causes of the phenomenon or process as facial expressions and body gestures can be observed in a field experience (Creswell, 2009).

After a careful review of the literature, especially the research of Payne (1996), Ladson-Billings (2009), Brophy and Good (1974), and Venkatesh (2008), the researcher became more driven and passionate about uncovering strategies to help improve the achievement of young African American male students. I was interested in an intense study of teacher-student relationships at the middle school level. The research strongly suggested that positive teacher-student relationships can have a significant effect on the achievement of adolescent students, particularly African American males. I had hoped to capture positive and negative experiences that perpetuated the continual success of the student despite at-risk behavior that he displayed during his middle school years.

Social constructivists believe that individuals seek to understand the world around them by developing meanings of their personal experiences. The researcher's goal is to rely on the participant's views of the phenomenon being studied. Through extensive and prolonged engagement, the researcher develops patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakes (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2009)). The researcher keeps the focus on the meaning that the participants bring to the issue not the meaning that the researchers bring

to the research. The researcher has the opportunity to record field notes of behavior and actions observed during the interviews. This is a major characteristic and advantage of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). It is important to note that qualitative research is emergent. It is not always easy to prescribe the plan for data collection. There is always the possibility that the process may change after the researcher enters the field. For instance, the questions may change, the individuals may have to be modified, or the site selected may have to be modified (Creswell, 2009).

An interview protocol, established by the researcher, was presented to the Director of G.E.D. programs at a local technical college. She received a letter from the researcher, on Georgia Southern University letterhead, introducing the researcher and explaining the purpose and the benefit of the study. The letter was accompanied with a copy of the questionnaire, the interview protocol, and the list of survey questions. Interview sessions would last 45-60 minutes each or until no new information was uncovered. To protect the privacy of all individuals involved, pseudonyms would be used in chapter four when the findings were reported.

Interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder. Each interview was recorded into a separate folder to keep the data organized. The transcriber met at the re-searcher's house to transcribe the interviews into line numbered documents on a personal computer. The data were reviewed, analyzed, and interpreted by the researcher to draw conclusions for reporting in chapter five. The data was organized into themes and sub-themes, based on the frameworks of French and Raven and Winfield, that could be used to inform teachers and principals of the impact of middle school relationships between teachers and students on student retention and achievement.

Sample

The sample for this study was purposeful and convenient. The goal behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will best help the researcher understand the research question. The researcher needed participants who were interested in participating in the study, who would not have hindrances such as transportation issues or time factors like caring for a child after school. Additionally, participants would need to be able to give high quality information. Participants' willingness and ability to elaborate when asked questions instead of giving very brief answers would be crucial to this study.

The Director of the G.E.D. program was presented with the letter of approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Georgia Southern University. The G.E.D. director approved for the research to be conducted. She randomly selected ten potential participants to meet the researcher in one of the lecture rooms to complete the survey questionnaire. Then, she arranged a time and date for the interviews to be conducted. The researcher followed the guidelines outlined by the G.E.D director and Georgia Southern University.

The African American male students selected for sampling were those who had dropped out of high school and indicated on the survey that they had been influenced by at least one middle school teacher whether the influence was positive or negative. The goal of the researcher was to accomplish in-depth interviews with a few participants rather than speak to many participants. In light of this fact, establishing an atmosphere of comfort and trust proved to be essential to motivating participants to open up eagerly with candid dialogue that would help uncover in-depth answers to the research questions.

Therefore, only five African American male students were interviewed.

A survey was used for the initial screening to indicate whether or not there was at least one middle school relationship that made an impact on the participant (positive or negative) and whether or not the participant would be able to participate in more than one interview if needed. After the initial screening of potential participants, the researcher and the G.E.D. director selected five who would make good interviewees based on their answers to the questions about teacher-student relationships in middle school. The researcher kept a list of alternates who could possibly fill in if a participant was lost from the study.

As the G.E.D. Director attempted to contact the top five men that were chosen to participate, she discovered that one of the young men had just received a diagnosis of cancer and would not be able to participate. I was disappointed since he had expressed a sincere and heartfelt desire to not only participate in the study, but to also reach out to younger generations of men so they could learn from his life. The G.E.D. director tried to contact two other young men, but was unable to verify their information. Thus, the researcher proceeded to interview three out of the top five chosen. The process had to be repeated to select two additional males. The director and the researcher met again to decide on another day and time to issue the surveys to select two more participants. Out of three randomly selected, two agreed to be interviewed.

Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument in the data collection process (Glesne, 2006; Richards & Swartz, 2002). For this project, the role of the researcher was to interview the participants, observe facial expressions and body

language during the interview, audiotape the interviews, and record field notes. It is important that the researcher acknowledges the fact that it will be difficult to remain objective throughout the interview process; however, certain subjectivities should be made known (Creswell, 2009; Peshkin, 1998).

As an African American female, the researcher is deeply concerned about the plight of African American children, especially African American males, in relation to high school completion and the capacity to become self-sufficient and economically stable. Therefore, the researcher must resist the temptation to interject personal opinions and allow the participant to speak freely. As a veteran teacher, the researcher tried to remain stoical when receiving less than pleasant accounts of teacher-student interactions from the interviewees. Through the lens of the parent, the researcher anticipated experiencing a degree of frustration as students recalled incidents or conversation in direct conflict with the re-searcher's own values and beliefs because the researcher has to be mindful of these subjectivities at all times (Peshkin, 1998). However, the stories were more intriguing and insightful than mournful.

To ensure the credibility of the research study, the researcher employed qualitative validity and reliability strategies with the help of experts in the field of English Language Arts Education, editors, and Public Relations. The transcripts as well as all text were reviewed and read by these individuals to control for the interjection of subjectivities by the researcher. Data were frequently compared with the codes to keep the code definitions clear. Ideally, the researcher would have engaged the participants in member checking with pieces of the polished product (instead of raw data) to make sure the stories properly captured the essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). However,

due to the time lapse between the interviews and the completion of this study, some of the participants are no longer enrolled in the school. Therefore, member-checks were not completed as originally planned.

The researcher created interview and research questions using the frameworks of French and Raven and Winfield. The researcher developed a framework unique to this study, which combines the frameworks of French and Raven and Winfield and denotes an ideal combination of social power and teacher behavior. This ideal framework, which will be referred to as combination framework for this study, is needed for the purpose of building meaningful relationships with middle school students to ensure success and possibly impact future academic decisions of at-risk males. The questions were centered on the characteristics of a positive teacher-student relationship and the characteristics of a negative teacher-student relationship from students' perspectives. The questions were open-ended allowing students the opportunity to elaborate and share their experiences and honest opinions about how these relationships may have shaped their adult decisions after dropping out of high school.

Data Collection

The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants and/or sites for the proposed study. This is contrary to large numbers of participants or sites typically found in quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the data collection method was face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and observations. The researcher chose interviews as the data collection method to be able to directly observe the interviewees, to control the line of questioning, and to gather historical information from the interviewees (Creswell, 2009). The

interviews were audio recorded while the researcher collected field notes highlighting changes in facial expressions, tone, mood, and body language during the interview. Participants were observed in a designated setting based on the Director of G.E.D. studies. The researcher hoped for the most comfortable and risk-free environment so participants would feel relaxed enough to disclose pleasant and unpleasant school experiences.

During this process, the researcher considered the following interview limitations. Information is filtered through the eyes of the interviewees. Information may not be provided in the most natural setting. The researcher's presence may bias the participants' responses. Not all people are equally articulate and perceptive, which may affect the collection of certain information (Creswell, 2009).

Data Analysis

The data analysis and interpretation followed several steps. Step one consisted of transcribing the interviews and inserting the field notes described in the previous section. Step two involved reading through all of the data to gain a general sense of the data and its overall meaning. Step three encompassed coding of the data (Creswell, 2009). Coding is the process of sorting and defining scraps of collected data that are applicable to the research purpose. As pieces of like-minded data are put together, an organizational framework is created. Major code clumps of data are formed initially. Then, sub-codes of the clumps of data are formed out of the major code clumps. Eventually, the various clumps are placed into meaningful sequences (Glesne, 2006). A table of possible codes, based on the conceptual framework for this research study, were pre-created (See Appendix G). The major codes are in capital letters and are in bold type. The last two

columns are the sub-codes, which are also in capital letters, but not bold type. As previously stated, these sub-codes were created out of the major codes.

In step four, each participant's story was recorded, transcribed, and presented individually. The researcher looked for common themes within and among the interviews which are presented in chapter five. Finally, the research questions were answered in each individual presentation of the interviewees. Results were addressed, interpreted, and presented in chapter five based on common themes found in the collected data, the combination of Winfield and French and Raven's conceptual frameworks presented in Chapter one and the literature presented in Chapter two.

Summary

The research questions for this study explored the effects of middle school teacher-student relationships on the future academic decisions of five African American male students to enroll in a GED program. The sample was convenient and purposeful, and the instrument was the researcher who conducted face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions.

The data analysis involved transcribing the interviews from a digital voice recorder into line numbered text. First, each part of the transcribed text was coded based on pre-determined codes (created from the conceptual frameworks of French and Raven and Winfield and researched literature). Codes were not limited to the pre-determined codes. As the interviews were thoroughly reviewed and studied other codes emerged. Next, data were interpreted using the conceptual frameworks and literature unique to this research. Finally, the data were presented in tabular format, as required by the Handbook for Doctoral Studies in Educational Administration. The purpose of this table was to tie

the research questions to key research presented in chapter two of this study. This was most helpful in the analysis of the findings. The table (table 8) can be found in chapter five.

Chapter IV

Report of Data and Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible effects of middle school teacher-student relationships on students' future academic decisions after dropping out of high school. With a national dropout rate of 30% and in some urban areas of 50%, among poor minority youths (Kafele, 2012), it is crucial that educators strongly consider the possibility that teacher-student relationships may play a vital role in the future decision-making or planning of middle school students. Middle school research suggests that indicators of student disengagement can be traced back as early as elementary school when student reading and math scores begin to decline and disruptive classroom behavior begins to rise. While most research may suggest a high school intervention plan, according to statistics reported in chapters one and two of this paper, a middle school intervention plan is also very critical to the future of education in America (Kafele, 2012; Kunjufu, 2005).

This particular study may inform teachers, principals, and other key school personnel about the importance of building relationships between staff and students. Although most would agree that critical thinking and rigorous standards are the way of the future in education, strong teacher-student relationships may be just as important if not more important than standards. Administrators and teachers should embrace the cultivation of relationships with students as an integral part of a child's education.

In this study, five African American males were interviewed to determine if they were positively or negatively impacted by their middle school relationships with teachers regarding their decision to return to school to pursue a GED. Middle school is the focus

of this study. The information was gathered from the participants on their school campus at a time convenient to them. They were all enrolled in the GED program at a local technical college at the time of the interviews and ranged in age from 23 to 48.

There were distinct differences among the participants, such as where they were from to which schools they attended during middle school to goals or purposes for which they decided to pursue a G.E.D. However, there were a few common threads among them that were resounded throughout the individual interviews. 1) Teachers should care about students beyond the textbooks and the confines of the classroom. Teachers should go the extra mile to get to know the students on a personal level to eliminate prejudices. 2) Teachers should be able and willing to teach engaging lessons and deliver those lessons at varying levels to accommodate student learning styles, interests, and preferences. 3) Teachers should take time to discover which students are struggling and provide the help they need or locate the necessary resources for the struggling students. 4) Teachers should be persistent in getting to know the child and engage the total child in the learning process.

Conversely, the participants pointed out some things teachers should not do.

1) Teachers should not pre-judge their students based on how they dress, where they come from, or how they act. 2) Teachers should not assume their futures are hopeless because of their current academic performance level. 3) Teachers should not assume students do not want to learn because they misbehave in school. 4) Teachers should not assume students do not want attention and concern just because they appear unresponsive.

Out of the five males who were interviewed, none of them was influenced by a

teacher or coach to pursue a G.E.D. or a particular career. It was due to influence from family or life experiences and the desire to acquire a quality life, competitive wage or salary, and/or fulfill dreams. Further, they all had advice to give teachers for future generations of students when asked what could have been done differently for a more positive middle school experience now that they have had time to reflect upon their post-secondary school experiences.

I have presented a summary of the data which includes field notes (interviewer's observations of the participants during the dialogue), interview content, demographic information on each participant in narrative form, and answers to the research questions. The answers are not in order, but are implicitly or explicitly stated through the interviewees' stories. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants.

Participant Number One (Marcus Thomas)

Marcus Thomas is a 23 year-old single African American male with no children. He was raised by his mom and grandma. He did not have any positive male role models in his life. He dropped out of high school during his junior year. He attended middle and high school in the same city where he is currently enrolled in technical school pursuing his G.E.D. He described tumultuous middle school and high school periods. He was influenced by one of his middle teachers of whom he spoke very fondly. He quoted, with a wide smile on his face and a gleam in his eye, "He made me want more out of life. He made me change how I looked at life. He opened my eyes. He showed me how to be a man-- how to stand up to my problems." As his luck would have it, Marcus had the benefit of this positive influence from his 8th grade year until he dropped out of school in his junior year. Mr. Brown transferred to the local high school and continued to be a

stabilizing force in Marcus's life.

Marcus described Mr. Brown as tough, but encouraging, consistent, personable, and trustworthy. He showed interest in his students as individuals. Marcus said Mr. Brown shared his own personal stories which demonstrated his interest in his students' lives. "When he was young, he was doing basically the same thing I was. So, I could relate. He could relate to me." Mr. Brown's ability to be transparent helped him gain the trust of his students. "You could talk to him about anything," Marcus recalls. Mr. Brown stayed on him about doing his work. Although he would go to school high, Mr. Brown did not let him off the hook. Marcus could hear Mr. Brown's voice echoing in his ear whenever he thought about engaging in mischief. Mr. Brown is still the only positive male role model in his life today.

Marcus gives an account of his interaction with Mr. Brown and the other students. He sauntered into the class one day late and high. He sits in his desk talking, laughing, and neglecting his work along with his buddies. Mr. Brown walks over and thumps him on the forehead with the rest of his buddies and tells them to get it right. Marcus did not take offense to this because he knew Mr. Brown cared about him. "I look him dead in his eye and I could tell he cared. He sounded like he cared. I trusted him, and I don't know why. I just did." He said Mr. Brown "kept it real." Mr. Brown always told the truth. There were a couple of other middle school teachers who exhibited similar characteristics to those seen by Mr. Brown. They would be encouraging despite Marcus's occasional misbehavior.

Conversely, most of the other middle school teachers that Marcus referenced during our interview were female teachers with whom he experienced negative behaviors.

These teachers were not as understanding and tolerant as he described earlier. As Marcus reflected over the triggers of his bad behavior, he remembered that throughout middle school, he fought frequently in addition to arriving late for class, getting high, and disrupting instruction. He began to be very transparent admitting that reading is an area of weakness for him and always had been. When he had to read in class, Marcus became very frustrated when he could not pronounce a word. He would respond by walking out of class. He was angry at himself because of his deficiency in reading. He would give up trying. He had already been retained in the sixth grade. He felt dumb, and he felt low. So, instead of sharing this information with his teachers, Marcus kept it inside and just acted out.

The response of teachers who did not know this or who appeared to be uninterested in it began to fight back. Ms. Logan, for example, would target him daily when he stepped into her class. “She would always target me cause she know I’m a flip.” She would toss or slam his worksheets or books on my desk; she threw his work in the trash in my face; she did not try to get to know him as a person. She would yell at him and talk to him any kind of way “showed no respect, just didn’t dare.” Marcus started talking to her in the same way. She told him he wouldn’t make it. Thus, Ms. Logan was the antithesis of Mr. Brown. Marcus began to feel as if the negative teachers outnumbered the positive teachers and decided he was wasting his time with school. “I really felt like the teachers didn’t care so why am I here? I’m wasting my time.

Although Mr. Brown did not influence Marcus to pursue his G.E.D. His influence encouraged Marcus to sign up for the Youth Challenge to complete his G.E.D. He agreed to be his mentor throughout the program. He gave his cell number to Marcus to call him

any time while in the Youth Challenge program. When I asked if the relationship with Mr. Brown was still intact, he said, “I haven’t talked to him in a good little minute, but I know if I call him and let him know what I’m doing he will be very proud of me. I’m pretty sure he’ll help me. I ran into him at my job one day. I told him I was in school and he told me to keep up the good work!” Every time he spoke of his best teacher, Mr. Brown, it was with warmth in his voice and a smile on his face. Conversely, while he described his negative teachers and their attitudes and behaviors, he frowned and the warmth in his voice would dissipate, and he would look away. Before he left the interview, he looked at me with a frown on his face and said, “You know what really gets us? It’s when teachers say I got mine. You gotta get yours. That really do something to us.” Marcus perceived this as discouraging and condescending.

Participant Number Two (Anthony Johnson)

Anthony Johnson was the second person I interviewed for this study. He was selected due to a traumatic school experience and because he attended middle school in a different school district. He received all of his formal education in Decatur and Dekalb in Atlanta, Georgia. He is currently enrolled in the local technical college, has one son who is a toddler, and a lady friend with whom he wishes to spend the rest of his life. He said it is difficult working all night and attending classes during the day, but he is motivated by his son and his own desire to make a better life for his son, particularly his home and school experiences.

As the participants were filling out their pre-screening surveys, I noticed those who were writing a lot of information and who appeared to really take the survey seriously. I walked around the room during the initial meeting, I noticed that Anthony

seemed to be writing extensively and intently, but after gathering the surveys, I noticed that he had traced every letter of the first two responses which were quite extensive. Those questions were about positive relationships and recalling memories about school. This grabbed my attention, immediately.

It was somewhat difficult to interview Anthony without crying or showing some kind of emotion to say the least. Although I did not cry, I sat stiffly and tensely as I listened to his words and observed his behavior. There were a few times I thought he was going to cry, but instead, he paused and continued with his story. He was so caught up in his story; I don't think he noticed my tension because he looked away or at the floor from the initial collection of the consent to the end of the interview. During the entire interview he squirmed in his seat. His face turned red. He stuttered and stammered over his words. He coughed nervously. His voice quivered, his eyes were teary off and on, and he looked off into space as if watching his childhood video. It seemed he was reliving the painful experience with every word he spoke.

He made reference to having a nervous breakdown during his early educational years due to some family trauma that had taken place. His eyes turned redder and waterier. He paused as he squirmed in his seat and coughed. I tried to query to find out what the trauma was, but he would not elaborate, and I did not press the issue because he was visibly on the verge of crying. I was fearful of what type of response any further prodding might elicit from him. So, I allowed him to dictate the direction of the interview since I was using a semi-structured format. As he talked, he repeated a lot of statements which reminded me of the way he had traced over the letters on his paper. I wasn't sure if he was trying to make sure I heard and understood what he was saying or if

it was just a picturesque view of his nerves or tension I was privy to since he seemed to be oblivious of his surroundings. His statements were very profound, and I hung on to every word as he spoke. At the end of his interview, I was compelled to complete a self-check to determine if I was guilty of committing the offense that he accused his teachers of committing several years earlier in his life.

Anthony believed that he spent the majority of his school years inside of a bubble. “So in that bubble everything just was like you bump into a wall. I bump, bump, bump, nothing really stuck.” He labeled himself as an outcast which he defined as someone that no one likes, wants to be around or interact with, including your middle school teachers. He said that since his home life was unhealthy, he came to school looking for solace. However, he was met with a cold insensitivity that he blamed on all educators “because they look at you as strange, as weird.”

He insisted teachers did not reach out to him like they should have. When children are unresponsive to the attempts to engage them, educators should not take it personally, but continue to reach out. Most students behave that way because they have been hurt and do not have the necessary skills to understand that the adult is trying to reach them or trying to figure out what’s going on in their lives. As he frequently did during this interview as he disclosed the details of his middle school experience, he started twitching, stammering, and repeating his words. He sounded like this. “So, most times...you...you had a ner...nervous breakdown and when you have a nervous breakdown, you as a child, you don’t know what are you exactly doing to cause people not to like you, not to want to be around you. So because I felt like they wasn’t reaching out hard as I thought they could, I got more and more distant away from the school world

so that put me in that corner.”

He vividly recalled his 7th grade class. He remembered how he would enter the classroom and sit all the way over to the wall and in the back in the corner where he could be inconspicuous. Since he didn't say anything to anyone or cause any disruptions, his teacher did not say anything to him. Ms. Miller would interact with the other students; they would interact with each other, and everyone would proceed with business as usual while he sat in his desk covered up with his coat and sometimes his hood while Ms. Miller and the other students had class around him. This would occur day in and day out with all teachers in all of his classes including gym classes.

Anthony spoke with indignation in his voice when he said students come to school looking for safety and relationships regardless of how they act. More often than not students, who have been traumatized, are not aware of the impact of their trauma on their social skills—their ability to interact appropriately with others. Thus, school personnel should persist in trying to reach a child no matter how weird they think a kid is. “They cannot give up. The school should “try to go to the house or anything or try to see what’s going on in the house. Because if you really want to know what’s going on with a child, that’s the best way I can think.” In his case, this never happened. He continued to feel insignificant as if he did not exist.

He recalled a Big Brothers group that helped students outside of school, but he expressed a critical need for this level of care too inside of the school. The more teachers and fellow classmates did not attempt to reach inside that bubble to pull him out, the angrier and more frustrated he became. “...so many kids I feel that have so much going on and keep it bottled up, but if you got someone there to show you and stay persistent

and drill it in you and just determined to show you whatever that you going through that you don't have to anymore." He clapped his hands loudly at the conclusion of this statement. Then, Anthony proceeded to say that the anger and frustration of not receiving the right kind of attention from teachers leads students to act out just to be seen.

In addition to causing him to retreat to his bubble due to inattention from teachers, Anthony, believing he was shunned because he was weird also felt he was left out of activities and overlooked because he dressed differently and was not at the top rung of the social ladder in school.

After year in and year out of the same thing, he withdrew into a corner and sat with nothing to say—no interaction with anyone. As long as he sat quietly and did not disturb the class, teachers allowed him to remain in his bubble and did not attempt to engage him further. He felt ostracized and let down by his peers and most especially, his teachers, the adults who were supposed to care about him, teach him, mentor him, and protect him. Instead, they continued to perpetuate his feelings of isolation and betrayal. He continued to pretend he was invisible until he eventually dropped out in the 11th grade when he joined a street gang who accepted him and started treating him like family, meeting all the needs that were not met at home and school. They too were dropouts with no dreams and no future plans.

Anthony did not describe or recall any positive memories. His entire interview was a recall of negative and painful experiences. The only influence his teachers had on his future academic decisions was to make sure he worked hard which included finishing the G.E.D. program so that his son could have a better life. He does not want his son to suffer the way he did at school or home.

Participant Number Three (John Davis)

John is twenty-seven years (27) old. He and his wife are the proud parents of one son. He describes himself as a family man and happily married man. I noticed he needed extra time on his pre-interview survey. As I observed him, he wrote lengthy answers and answered every question thoroughly. He stood out to me because he took his time, checked his work, and asked a question for clarity so he could provide a quality answer. It seemed he had a lot to say as if writing his answers on paper was somehow therapeutic. He had an interesting take on teachers and the impact of teacher-student relationships and teacher behaviors toward students.

John attended two middle schools in the area where he grew up. During the interview, he constantly compared the two schools. If he were to create a Venn diagram, the middle oval of that diagram would be empty. As far as he was concerned, there were no apparent similarities between the two schools, just contrasts. At ABC Middle School, teachers never saw him as an individual. "It was like I wasn't getting the attention I needed...it's like they didn't even care. They was not there for me." As he was speaking, the smile on his face and the cheeriness in his voice began to fade away. "They was at the board. They gon' tell you what they want you to do and basically sit down. They never really got one-on-one wit' any of the students. So I felt like they were there to get a paycheck." The more I probed, the tauter his face became, and the more his voice seemed to evolve from frustration to anger. It was almost as if he were not only re-telling the story, but re-living the story.

Conversely, on the other side of town, the teachers at XYZ middle school showed concern for his academic performance or lack thereof. He felt more at ease with these

teachers because they seemed to support students by showing they cared. If teachers noticed a change in the academic performance of the students, they would take time to call home to establish a relationship with home and to see if circumstances at home could be attributed to the negative behavior or poor performance of the students at school. He described the positive behaviors of the teachers at this school as being passionate about their jobs and presenting themselves in a 'motherly way'.

At ABC middle, "Teachers felt like they didn't need to call your parents cause they try to say that you're grown by then, but you're not grown. You still a child..." John tells the story of Mrs. Greene, at XYZ middle school, who never gave up on him. Every time he would misbehave, Mrs. Greene would call him to the side to tell him that he knew better and he needed to do better. She never said, 'Aw, just get out of my class'." He snickers as he recounts how she kept in close contact with his parents and stayed on him every chance she would get. She constantly reminded him that he could do better. He said, "You need to know that somebody care."

John mentioned being labeled unfairly because of his dress and hair style. He wore long locks in his hair, but he never wore sagging pants. However, he felt that he and other students who looked like him were mislabeled as thugs. He wished his teachers would have made a concerted effort to get to know him as an individual. I continued to probe for specific examples and experiences. He recalled one of his 8th grade days. In the midst of misbehaving, Mrs. Smith told him that he was going to be locked up or dead by seventeen. As John continued to recollect, "...hearing that from an educator kinda threw me off. To tell a fourteen-year-old kid that wasn't the right thing to do. Cause you got your parents or your older sibling or something saying it. These are people you look up

to. So if they thinkin' 'bout you like this you eventually gon' start to think well this is what I am, and it's sad cause most kids if they going through this at home they goin' to school looking for a different approach from an adult." He makes reference to this at least three times during our interview. Every time he makes this reference, the more disappointment I hear in his voice.

However, he recalled that Mrs. Greene would say something similar to that and he called it motivational. When I asked him to differentiate, he said "Mrs. Greene used the words *dead end*. A dead end could mean anything, but dead or in jail means...you already put a nail in my coffin; I only have two options – jail or dead. It's *how* you say thangs." John described this teacher as one who cared because he could feel it. He described Mrs. Greene as a positive teacher—one of those who care. "...it's like a motherly feel. You know if they really care; you'll feel it."

John was not influenced by a teacher to pursue a GED. His wife kept reminding him that he could do anything he puts his mind to. However, his greatest motivation was his seven-year-old son. As part of their quality father/son time in the afternoons, he helps his son with his homework. According to John, his son enjoys doing math with his dad, and John enjoys being there for his son. One night while preparing his son for bed, John was re-iterating the importance of staying in school, behaving in school, and getting a high school diploma. As he was brushing his teeth, his son looked up at him and asked, "Daddy what school did you graduate from?" John's response was so moving, I almost stopped the interview. His eyes turned red and filled with tears. His voice started trembling, and I could hear the tenderness from the humiliation and guilt. He said, "I couldn't say nothing so I walked out because it hurted me because I couldn't tell my son

where I graduated from. So, the next day I came and signed up.”

His advice for middle school students is to stay focused and put God first. Students must define themselves and not allow others, including teachers and other school officials to define them. He advised that teachers should not take the job if they don't want it. Teachers who lack passion for teaching are paycheck teachers. Teachers should get to know students and not impose their opinions of students' futures. In other words, teachers should get to know their students instead of passing judgment on them. He told me something I had never heard. “You can hide many cries behind one smile.” Teachers should always reach for their students and try to make a connection with the students. Their interest in the successful completion of his work, the fact that they took the time to remain in constant contact with his parents, and the fact that they did not judge him or his brother by the locks in their hair and their baggy jeans were proof that the teachers at XYZ middle school cared about him as an individual.

Participant Number Four (Deonte' Roberson)

Deonte' is a twenty-three-year-old up and coming hair stylist who is originally from Indiana. He has studied hair extensions in Europe and has dreams of becoming a famous hair stylist who styles Oprah's hair as well as her contemporaries. He began middle school in Indiana. Then, he moved to Georgia where he finished middle school, attended high school and enrolled in the G.E.D. program. Deonte' spoke about teacher student relationships and the pedagogy of care in terms of the level of instruction or lack thereof that he and his peers received in class. Deonte's future was the influence that led him to enroll in a G.E.D. program.

He began his interview by pointing out the distinct difference between his

elementary teachers and his middle and high school teachers. There was no doubt that his elementary teachers loved their students. They were impressionable, memorable, and hands-on. Although he remembers all of his teachers, none of his middle school teachers were nearly as influential inside or outside of school as his elementary teachers. No one impacted his future decisions about school. “No teacher left any impression on me. Some of the teachers were just simply unimpressionable. So when you leave school you don’t remember what they’ve said or what they taught.” He said this shaking his head from side to side with his nose turned up and a perturbed look on his face.

He described a typical middle school day as walking into the classroom, reading an assignment on the board, and hearing the teacher tell everyone what the assignment was and when it was due. He said the classroom was more “like a social setting versus an actual class.” Students talked, laughed, and copied each other’s work. Instead of probing to find out what students knew. They would be grading group assignments because everyone in the class shared the same answers to the problems. Teachers did not provide any guidance and appeared to be uninterested in the students and the teaching and learning as they sat behind desks and allowed the class to run itself.

Deonte’ did not feel that the environment of the classes and the school as a whole was risk-free. He often felt uncomfortable around the other students. He stated three times within two minutes that he did not care to be around the other students. This is the only time during the interview that I noticed a change in his speech pattern, tone and mood. He would look downward with a melancholy expression. He would say “umm,” and his voice would trail off. It seemed he had transported himself back to that time period, and it seemed like he wanted to say more, but he would not. His discomfort led to

isolation. “I was a loner in high school and middle school.” I was curious and needed to know if anyone noticed him isolating himself and sought to make difference in correcting the culture or climate of the classrooms and/or school. So, I probed further.

Deonte’ recalled that when teachers did address him with phrases like, “Hey man you need to straighten up or if you don’t get this done, you’re not going to...” those comments came from more of the African American teachers than their Caucasian colleagues. It appeared that as a whole, teachers were more focused on discipline than building relationships and teaching. There were multiple threats throughout the week of writing students up, sending them to the office, or putting them out of class. “It was a lot of discipline. It was a lot of ‘get out or I’m writing you up’ or ‘go to the office’. It was tons of that. You can blame the students, but then you kinda blame the teacher for kinda setting the tone.”

Deonte’ stated that the routines were always the same, nothing new. An assignment would be listed on the board with the due date. Students were expected to sit down, get the work done, and turn in the assignment on time. He suggested that teachers should plan lessons that consider the learning styles and preferences of their students. “When the energy of the teacher is poor, the energy in the classroom is poor and that leaves room for students to misbehave, socialize, and cheat to make good grades although they have learned nothing,” he stated very emphatically.

Further, Deonte’ suggested that instead of a teacher-centered classroom, a lively classroom with well-planned lessons appeals to the senses of students, provokes curiosity, and allows students to engage in two-way communication (teacher-to-student and student-to-student). When students are allowed to speak and to interact with the

teacher, peers, and the lesson, teachers can more effectively discern and analyze student strengths and determine student deficits. In other words, teachers need to be more intimate and students need to be more vocal. “There may be fifty or sixty students and twenty of them are on different pages of how we comprehend and how we receive some of the information the teacher gives.” Students need interaction and intimacy.

Deonte’ believes that it is the teacher’s job to reach out to his or her students and teach quality lessons. When teachers show they care, students will go out of their way to respect, protect, and conform to the teachers’ expectations both academic and behavioral. He said even the worse behaving students will leave their bad behaviors outside of the classroom when they can feel a teacher’s concern for them and the future success. Ms. Daphne had a classroom full of gang bangers. However, when they entered her classroom, she was greeted with “How you doing, Ms. Daphne?” The sagging pants and gangster attitudes would vanish. She cared, and they cared about her expectations. At this point in our interview, he references the movie Coach Carter. When Coach Carter demonstrated that he was not just about winning games, but that their lives beyond basketball were his major concern, everyone could see a “turnaround in their performance” on and off the basketball court. It’s all about the teacher. Although the student has a responsibility, the teacher has to come at least fifty percent (50%) by setting the tone and showing that students’ lives matter.

Participant Number Five (Levi Winston)

Levi was not influenced to enroll in the technical school or pursue any other endeavors by any of his teachers; he was influenced and encouraged to pursue his G. E.D. by his son and the inability to attain gainful employment. His last good paying job did not

require a degree when he started work, but when he left and relocated to Georgia, for personal reasons, he found it difficult to find a job paying a sufficient wage or salary to support his family and his standard of living. When his son enrolled in the G.E.D. program, he gained the momentum to enroll as well. Levi attended school in Harlem which he describes as Uptown Manhattan, New York or the ghetto of Manhattan. He is 48 years old and currently enrolled in the local technical school.

Levi was eager to share his story and wanted to participate in this study when others were trying to avoid me or appeared to be running away by falsifying their contact information or leaving the room with the promise to return. He waited patiently for me to finish my interview of participant number four. He began his interview by pointing out the distinct differences in the public schools of New York and the public school system of Georgia schools. He described the prevalence of gangs on or near school campuses, the pandemic of bullying in his community and school, and the prejudices of teachers in at-risk schools in Harlem. He specifically spoke to teacher behaviors and attitudes towards students of varying genders, religions, and appearances. This was stated on his pre-screening survey as well as twice during the interview process. He feels that is very disrespectful to discriminate against students in this way because it is unfair to judge a book by its cover. Students cannot help where they come from or the family issues that they bring to school with them. Levi decided to let the negative attitudes and behaviors of the teachers motivate him to assume the position of positive influence and comic relief for the class.

When asked, "Did you develop any positive relationships with your middle school teachers or coaches that influenced any of your future academic career or life decisions,

the majority of the responses were “no.” Levi recalled his entire school career in middle school as positive and negative. He said he was the teacher’s pet in most of his classes. He bridged the gap between the teachers and students by helping other students understand their lessons and encouraging them to push themselves to do their work and complete their studies because so many of the teachers were apathetic towards students, especially if the students were less fortunate than others or perceived by the faculty as trouble makers.

Patterns in the Data

There were several patterns to emerge from the data during the analysis.

- Memorable positive teacher-student relationships were far and few between. The foundation of the middle school concept involves teaching teams. To only name one or two teachers out of a possible total of nine teachers from 6th to 8th grade is a sad commentary. There is an obvious absence of positive teacher-student relationships that made a lasting impression on students or their future academic decisions.
- Only two males were mentioned among the interviews. The males that were mentioned were positive and regarded as father figures.
- The hostile attitudes came mostly from female teachers.
- No father or surrogate father figures appeared to be present in the lives or homes of the participants. Only one participant spoke of a father, but his father’s influence was limited due to early death.
- The painful memories of past negative teacher-student relationships still have the power to provoke negative emotions, body language, and facial expressions in the

lives of the young men i.e., twitching, watery eyes, facial tension, and other noticeable physiological responses.

- Although there was recall of positive teacher-student interactions, the negative memories dominated the discussions and interviews. The participants seemed to recall more clearly the negative experiences with teachers than the positive.
- The negative teacher-student interactions appeared to happen more frequently than the positive ones.
- All of these young men lost hope and dropped out of school during their junior year. They were fed up with the school system and were too far behind to catch up due to missed instruction for suspensions or failure of teachers to engage students and meet their academic, social, or emotional needs.

Teacher Behaviors and Attitudes Perceived as Positive or Negative

Research questions one and three asked what affect did the negative and positive middle school teacher-student relationships have on the decisions of African American males, who dropped out of high school, to pursue a G.E.D. Interestingly, the stories of all of the young men were very similar. They expressed some of the same negative and/or positive teacher attitudes or behaviors. However, relationships with teachers, whether negative or positive, were not a driving force to pursue a G.E.D., for these gentlemen. Instead, the pursuit of a G.E.D. was influenced by their varied negative and positive post high school life experiences. I will also note, the memories of how they felt they were treated by teachers and the mistake of leaving high school without a diploma were powerful enough for them to want better for their own children. Anthony wants to be a

better father and protect his son from the feelings of isolation that he felt in school and John's wish is for his son to finish high school with a regular diploma.

Research questions two and four asked what behaviors and attitudes did teachers exhibit that evoked negative and/or positive perceptions. There were many similarities between and among the participants when relaying their opinion about which teacher behaviors were perceived as positive and which teacher behaviors were perceived as negative. This section describes those characteristics in detail, by participant, whether they were experienced or just desired. Marcus appreciated teachers who were transparent. They were not afraid to share personal stories or show a personal interest in students beyond the classroom. He felt like he could relate to Mr. Brown because he shared his school experiences with the class. That simple personal connection made Marcus feel like someone understand him and took an interest in him as an individual. He was called by his name, and he believed in Mr. Brown's sincerity because he allowed his students to look him in his eyes. Conversely, the teachers he perceived as negative spoke harshly to him for no apparent reason. Materials were tossed on desks. His work was thrown in the trash without being reviewed or graded. These teachers spoke in a condescending way, and there seemed to be no interest or attempt to make personal connections with students.

From Anthony's point of view, positive teachers engage all students not just those who are popular, well-dressed, or are the most interactive in the classroom. Positive teachers make it a point to get to know all students personally by making connections in the classroom and establishing communication with the home. Positive teachers are observant and not only notice when students have changed or are not engaged in the learning, they take active steps to get involved with the students even when they are

rejected by the students. Anthony's personal experience was the antithesis of his desired responses to his seclusion. His teachers did not attempt to engage him because he sat quietly and did not bother anyone. He did not cause any problems so it appeared teachers did not care if he was learning or not. To his teachers, he seemed invisible. So he continued to sit in the corner unnoticed year after year.

John's idea of positive teachers was those who cared enough about students to create a web of communication with home, other school personnel, and students to make sure students received needed help in a timely manner. It appeared that teachers were more interested in labeling him as a troublemaker and suspending him instead of educating him. As he compared one middle school to the other, one school was more interactive with his mother and were concerned with giving him all possible opportunities to successfully meet promotion requirements. Teachers who left a negative impression on him were those who judged his dress code, hair style, and behavior without getting to know him as a person. Too much emphasis was placed on discipline instead of student success.

Deonte' was another student who characterized teachers by their ability to teach students. Lesson plans should be created based on the students varied learning styles. Students should be engaged with interesting and relevant material which allows students to interact with the material, the teacher, and their peers. Also, positive teachers do not ignore students just because they do not sit in the front of the class or are not very vocal or popular. Positive teachers engage all students and recognize the value in each student.

Negative teachers allow students to be isolated who are different from the others. They do not know how or do not seem to realize the importance of creating a risk-free

environment which invites students to maximize their potential because they will not be picked on or ridiculed by peers. Deonte' felt he could have gone a lot further had he been embraced as an individual. Instead he spent all of his middle and high school years feeling isolated and shunned by the adult and students in his schools.

Levi's story was quite different because he was treated like the teacher's pet while he watched his classmates become the recipients of maltreatment. He witnessed this more often than not. The positive teachers made everyone feel welcome whether they were misbehaving students or not. The positive teachers addressed students by name and cared enough about the students to make positive phone calls home. Positive teachers had conversations with the students and were aware of significant events in the students' lives, such as his father's death.

The negative teachers pushed all the misbehaving students to the rear of the classroom while they tried to teach those who gave the appearance of wanting to learn not realizing some students misbehave to get attention. Negative teachers did not try to help the struggling students so Levi used his talent as a class clown to encourage the struggling students to do their work as he also assumed the role of tutor. He continually used his position as the teacher's pet to bridge the gap between the teachers and the students who were made to feel inadequate and disliked by teachers.

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of middle school teacher-student relationships on the future academic decisions of African American males who dropped out of high school. This study was of particular interest to the researcher because of the consistent low graduation rates in Georgia and across the Nation and growing dropout rates of African American students, particularly the African American males in Georgia's public schools and across this Nation at large.

The research suggests that student disengagement does not start at the high school level; it begins in the upper elementary classrooms where students begin to notice a difference in their reading levels versus the reading levels of their classmates (Kunjufu, 2005). In many cases, those classmates are not only Caucasian, but African American girls as well. There is a significant gap between the graduation rates of African American males and African American females, Caucasians, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders (N.C.E.S., 2014). African American males have the lowest graduation rates and the highest dropout rates throughout the Nation.

If African American males are going to have a fighting chance of competing with their Caucasian counterparts in school and this ever changing global society, school systems will need to make adjustments. One strategy for closing the achievement gap is examining the context of teacher-student relationships within the classrooms/buildings at the middle school. Establishing positive teacher-student relationships in school has to be superior to academics, especially at the middle school. To insist on high test scores and

advanced curricula while ignoring the social and emotional needs of children is to win at perpetuating ignorance instead of curbing it (Yates & Holt, 2009).

Analysis of the Results

At the conclusion of the transcriptions of the interviews, the data were clumped into a chart created by the researcher to organize the findings and make connections to the literature and the frameworks, particularly the created framework (combination of French and Raven and Winfield). Codes were pre-created based on the literature and the conceptual frameworks. After the data were collected, the chart title of codes was changed and some of the coders were modified to better fit the results data. As a result of the coding, patterns in teacher behaviors and social powers began to unfold and are listed under the heading *Patterns in the Data* in chapter four.

Marcus Thomas and Levi Winston were the only participants who were able to expound on specific positive teacher-student relationships in middle school wherein the teachers or in Winston's case, the principal, interacted with them one-on-one on a personal and frequent basis. These educators were not only culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 2009) but they also recognized the importance of school personnel making positive emotional deposits (Payne, 1996). They called the students by name and checked on them daily or at least weekly to make sure they were making adequate progress towards successful completion of their studies. Marcus's teacher shared his own personal stories and gave Marcus his cell number so he could have access to him at any time. Marcus called him when he needed whether it was at school or outside of school.

Levi felt a close bond with this principal who became his surrogate father in the absence of his dad. His principal constantly reminded him to do the right thing no matter

what temptation he encountered. Although Levi dropped out of school during his eleventh grade year in high school, his principal went out of his way to talk with his teachers frequently to make sure he was present in classes and passing his courses. Levi had a teacher who bonded with his mother, called his home, and visited his home. This teacher made connections with Levi outside of school. According to researchers Marquez et. al., (2007), creating and maintaining caring networks is the most powerful dropout prevention or anti-student disengagement strategy for students at all levels.

The observed physiological were obvious proof that the personal attention received by these young men was extremely essential in making them feel empowered. They smiled and grinned, while looking off as though they were reliving a special moment of their past. Kafele, (2010) describes this as the *Relationship Gap*. His belief is that more often than not African American males do not have a personal connection with a school employee. It is not enough to be superficially known by many. Each student should have a relationship with at least one individual beyond the surface. Each student should have a positive trusting relationship with someone he can seek out in time of need. This is particularly true for African American males. According to Tatum (2005), the school's influence is based on the value students place on it. In other words, the more powerful the relationships between teachers or school personnel and students, the more value students place on the organization. Although these caring networks were formed for Marcus and Levi, they were not the norm or existent throughout the school.

Ideally, educators possess expert knowledge in their subject areas; they are competent to teach and are experts in the pedagogy of the subject(s) to teach which assures they can proficiently deliver quality instruction. Thus, they are certified and

highly qualified based on the issuing State of their clearly renewable certificate. Students are attracted their teachers' personalities. The teachers are personable with and accessible to students. These educators believe it is their responsibility to make sure students make improvements under their tutelage. These are characteristics of the *Expert Referent Tutor* in the combination of Winfield and French and Raven's conceptual frameworks.

However, it is important to note there is no indication that Levi's principal and teacher or Marcus' teacher possessed expert knowledge, but it is clear they were respected by these students and were obviously concerned about the welfare of the students which seemed to weigh more for the students than anything else. These educators used personal power rather than positional power. Four out of the five participants interviewed appeared to be less concerned about the quality of instruction received or if the teachers could teach at all and more concerned about the way in which they were treated while in the presence of these educators. They described the personality traits and how the educators related to them.

Conversely, all of the participants recalled instances where in they experienced educators who could be described by *Baugh's Social and Emotional Construct as Coercive Referral Agents and/or General Contractors*. Coercive Power entails using threats or punishment to control students or control situations (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These educators, as described by the participants, used threats, such as telling students they would end up in jail or dead. They would threaten to put students out of class and write them up or refer them to the principal's office. Marcus described materials being tossed to him or seeing his work balled up and thrown in the trash. These actions were perceived by the students as hostile. Ruby Payne described these actions as the antithesis

of *emotional deposits* (Payne, 1996).

Any time an educator or anyone says or does something to cause pain for these *educationally vulnerable* youth (Darling-Hammond, 2004), it is equivalent to making *emotional withdrawals* (Payne, 1996). If the withdrawals outnumber and/or outweigh the deposits, the student ends up feeling worthless and empty which increases the likelihood of dropping out. The participants felt judged because teachers did not get to know them as individuals, but appeared to label them unfairly based on their attire or behavior. As perceived by the participants of this study, students who were performing on grade level, popular among peers and faculty, and who dressed a certain way received preferential treatment. Marcus and John said teachers were authoritative. All of the participants said teachers did not show interest in them as individuals, and all of the participants, except Levi felt teachers shunned them. Levi believed he received preferential treatment, but saw others ostracized by teachers.

It is important to note African American males are in crises centered on self-esteem, self-image, self-discipline, self-image, and self-respect. Improvement can only come when schools begin addressing the affective domain as top priority (Kafele, 2011). Kafele expounded further by emphasizing several social and emotional gaps that need to be whole-heartedly addressed by every public school. These are critical in every child's life, particularly in the lives of African American males. 1) The Learning Gap - Why are students not learning? 2) The Attitude Gap – Do the students believe they can learn? 3) The Relationship Gap – Is there a one solid relationship between each student and at least one educator? 4) The Opportunity Gap – Does the student have access to a great public school? Great is defined as having everything necessary to ensure every student receives

a quality education. 5) The Relevance Gap – Are the school’s vision and mission applicable to the daily lives of the students?

Marcus, John, Deonte’, and Levi recalled teachers’ classes as dictatorial. They put the work on the board, directed students to remain in the desks (in neat rows), be quiet, and complete the assignments. In some classes, there was no interaction among students or between students and the teacher. When students were allowed to interact, the conversations were strictly for socialization among themselves as they shared each other’s work and any and everything else but the lesson. Deonte’ made particular mention of the fact that teacher interaction with the students would allow teachers to observe student weaknesses and strengths so instruction could be tailored to the needs of the students. However, teachers did not teach at all. Instead, they were collecting checks without performing their duties. Thus, teachers were nicknamed *Paycheck Teachers* by two of the participants. John and Marcus shared these same sentiments. These are the negative actions of the *Legitimate General Contractor* and/or *Legitimate Referral Agent* in *Baugh’s Social and Emotional Construct*.

Although the *Custodian* behavior pattern is paired with the *Reward Social Power*, interestingly none of the participants mentioned the use of rewards to control classes or individual students. All of the negative behaviors could fall under the *Custodian*, *General Contractor*, or *Referral Agent* although neither of the participants described being referred to someone else. These behaviors are connected because they are direct responses to or outward demonstrations of teacher attitudes and perceptions of the students according to (Brophy & Good, 1977).

Teachers create the atmosphere of their classrooms/buildings by prematurely

setting expectations of students based on their own false ideas, beliefs, and ideals. Students automatically respond to their perceptions of teacher attitudes and behaviors toward them (Brophy & Good, 1977). Participants, Marcus and John, emphatically stated students can tell if a teacher cares. It can be seen in their eyes of body language and behaviors. The students' perceptions of the teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward them influence the *Attitude Gap*—student's belief of whether or not he can learn (Kafele, 2010). The *Referral Agent* and the *Custodian* do not believe the student can learn. The *General Contractor* believes he can learn, but it is not his/her responsibility to help him learn.

The *Referral Agent*, and *General Contractor* desire to maintain the students at low levels of expectations. The negative behaviors perceived by the participants led to feelings of isolation and eventual dejection. These negative feelings compounded the frustration of being abhorrently behind their classmates in reading and math. Despite the fact, these young men matriculated to the eleventh grade, they believed they did not matter enough for their schools to sincerely invest in their success. They were too far behind to earn the credits to graduate on time or near time. Their school failure and despair influenced their decision to give up and drop out of school. Although none of the participants was influenced to pursue a G.E.D. by a middle school teacher-student relationship, they were certainly influenced by the relationships or lack of relationships with their teachers. As proven by the research conducted, they remembered the positive teacher-student relationships or experiences as well as the negative teacher-student relationships or experiences. Unfortunately, the memories of those negative relationships seemed to outweigh the memories of positive relationships because the memories of the

negative relationships dominated the interviews.

Ruby Payne used the analogy of a bank to paint a mental picture of educators making emotional deposits into and emotional withdrawals out of a child's life. When the number of emotional withdrawals exceeds the number of emotional deposits, emotional trauma is the result (Payne, 1996). One might assume that too many emotional withdrawals were made in the life of one of my participants, Anthony. The physiological changes I observed as he depicted his middle school years were indicative of the lack of positive relationships in his life. He said because his family was so dysfunctional, he came to school looking for positive adults who would show their concern for him emotionally and socially. Instead he was met with more dysfunction as he was allowed to get trapped in a "bubble."

Teachers failed to make emotional deposits into Anthony. Conversely, they made emotional withdrawals every time they passed by "the bubble" ignoring him instead of reaching for him. Emotional withdrawals were made every time Anthony was allowed to go unnoticed hiding in a corner with his head down or covered behaving in the manner in which he believed his teachers perceived him—invisible. He expected a teacher to come help him out of the bubble. No one appeared to want to get him out, and he could not seem to get out on his own. So he stayed inside the bubble until his junior year of high school. Gang members provided the social and emotional support he wanted from his teachers. They made the emotional deposits that helped him from his bubble into the streets. Failure to educate these vulnerable youths who suffer from low self-esteem, poor self-image and awareness, and self-respect leads to further accumulation of menaces to society (Venkatesh, 2009).

As I recollect, Anthony still appears to suffer from the painful middle school experiences he illustrated to me. I observed watery eyes, extreme notable changes in speech patterns like uncontrollable coughing and stuttering, and tense facial expressions when probed for further details. However, his interview as well as the others was enlightening and thought provoking. As a result of their experiences, all of the participants made the same observations and recommendations for educators.

Students come from different situations and should not be treated the same. Therefore, teachers should do whatever it takes to get to know their students as individuals so they can meet them where they are. Sometimes this means breaking down the walls African American males use as protection from past and anticipated future hurts from school personnel (Kafele, 2010). Failure to meet students where they are and embrace them by fostering a pedagogy of care not only confirms but also perpetuates the phenomenon of the “push out” syndrome described by Druian and Butler (2001).

The young men who participated in this study were hurt, disappointed, and angry because teachers and school personnel did not get to know them or show concern for them as individuals. The fact that the participants could only speak of one or maybe two educators as being personable is a gauge that signifies how well schools are doing to reach the educationally vulnerable students. Creating positive trusting relationships with young at-risk African American males appears to be the exception and not the rule. I particularly remember John saying teachers always threatened to suspend him and followed through with the suspension without the courtesy of a phone call to his mother. When I asked what did he think the school should have done, his response was, “Hell, at least call my mama!”

Additionally, Arne Duncan dogmatically stated until educators realize the need to develop aggressive strategies to get and keep students on track, America will continue to see students spiral rapidly downward towards failure, thus, increasing dropout rates and extending achievement gaps between African American males and Caucasian males. At the time of his publication (2009), two to five ninth graders in schools across this Nation were nowhere to be found by the time their cohort reached their twelfth grade year. Ironically, each of the participants, in this study, authenticated Duncan's statement. They dropped out of school during their junior year.

Implications for Practice

This research yielded three major implications for practice. The first implication was the need to teach teachers and other school personnel how to communicate high expectations to at-risk students. Students cannot rise to low expectations. This concept is described as the expectations gap (America's Promise Alliance and the AT&T Foundation, 2010; White-Hood, 1991). Low teacher expectations and the inability and/or unwillingness to form bonds with students, particularly those who appear to be difficult, cause students to become at-risk. Female teachers were particularly noted by the participants as ignoring students and appearing angry by speaking harshly or distributing materials with attitude. In the research conducted by Kunjufu in 2005, male students see teaching and learning as an individual matter. They compete with each other for the teacher's attention. They also want their individual learning needs and styles met by the teacher. When African American males do not receive the individual attention they seek, they become behavior problems; they become labeled as hostile, disruptive, and hopeless (Kuykendall, 1991). The participants' bodies would become tense and the smiles would

disappear when they recalled painful teacher behaviors and attitudes. They would smile and their eyes would sparkle as they reminisced about the positive behaviors and attitudes. Teachers of middle school students should receive intense professional learning on how to express high expectations to at-risk African American male students.

Student misbehavior is a direct response of students' perceptions of teacher expectations of them. African American males need and want to feel connected to their classmates and teachers. The perceived lack of importance causes hurt feelings. Thus, the misbehavior is a defense mechanism (Kunjufu, 2005). Marcus specifically said, since the teachers did not seem to care about him. He did not care about school. He stopped trying. He did not care if he was late to class or showed up for class at all. He became even more cynical when he was accepted for Youth Challenge. Ignoring the social and emotional needs of students is equivalent to the absence of quality instruction. Both the social and emotional aspects of adolescents along with a quality curriculum must be present to improve graduation rates and stifle dropout events. Positive teacher-student relationships are key to preventing dropout (Wells, 1989).

Educating students has to extend beyond teaching and learning (Brophy & Good, 1974). The old adage "Students don't care what you know, until they know you care," is often quoted in many educational settings. It sounds good, but often looks to be just that - an old adage. The young men who were interviewed struggled to recall positive teacher-student relationships wherein teachers actually showed they cared. Schools, more often than not, fail to concentrate on or even fail to consider the individual student strengths, weaknesses, and interests which is a travesty (Chen & Thompson, 2003) because teacher attitudes, perceptions, and expectations shape the foundation of the types

of teacher-student relationships that are formed, and these relationships influence student attitudes and academic performance and consequently, the achievement gap between high and low achieving African American males (Baroglu, 2009).

Teachers create their own negative classroom environment, and the same holds true for school leaders. Since the leader is charged with setting the tone in the school, he or she is responsible for creating an environment that says all students are important and all students can succeed. There is often too much negative conversation taking place about students, especially when they leave one grade level to go another. Teachers may not be cognizant of facial expressions and body language when interacting with students or the fact that they could be overheard by students when in conversations with other adults. The participants spoke of their ability to read teacher behavior. Marcus spoke of his ability to discern if his teacher was sincerely concerned about him or pretending to care. John said it was not just the look in the teacher's eyes but a combination of things because looks could be deceiving. He said the best way to tell if a teacher cared is if he or she exuded a motherly or fatherly feeling. All participants except Levi, agreed on one thing without a doubt. Their teachers were guilty of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers perceptions of them were not accurate, but could have been had they taken the time to get to know them as individuals. Middle school teachers need to receive professional learning on the soft skills of communication. Students' perceptions of non-verbal cues via eyes and body language can have a positive or negative impact on teacher-student relationships and student achievement.

The second implication highlighted by the study is the need to increase parental engagement in schools. Schools spend too much time reacting to misbehavior and need to

spend more time on intervening and celebrating the successes of students no matter how minute. Chronic misbehaving students need to know the school's main agenda is to help them; casting them aside or expelling them cannot be the first or only option. John believed the school's main objective was to put him out of school. By the time his mother would receive a phone call from the school, he was being suspended without the opportunity for his mother to intervene or work with the school officials. The negative phone calls far outweighed the positive phone calls at his first middle school.

All participants, with the exception of Levi, believed the school gave up on them too soon. They believed the school judged them instead of consistently reaching out to them and their families. Anthony said the school left him sitting in a bubble without reaching out to him or his home to find out what was keeping him in a state of withdrawal. He stated that he, like most students, come to school looking for safe haven in the school, especially when home is chaotic and fails to provide love and safety. He noted that no one in the school seemed to genuinely care about him as an individual or even notice him and the pain he was in. What if school personnel begin to place greater emphasis on making connections to parents. Parental involvement could become the number one alternative to out-of-school suspension and school failure which leads too dropout.

Teachers and school leaders are partly responsible for creating achievement gaps among minority students and between minority students and their Caucasian counterparts. The attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers concerning their students and their families contribute to student apathy low self-esteem, and poor academic performance without a doubt. Teachers and school leaders are partly responsible for higher tax brackets,

high unemployment rates, the gang activity that plagues America's neighborhoods, increased health care costs, teenage pregnancy, and high crime rates because educators fail to make connections to the homes of African American males and establish positive relationships with the students and their parents.

The third implication that emerged from this study was the need to increase and value feedback from our students. We should include student input by allowing students to share their past school experiences and their perceptions about how they are taught and treated by their teachers. We should allow students to educate us on how they learn best and we can better serve them through the use of perceptual surveys. We need to know how to help our students succeed, and who is better qualified to tell us than they are. We learn this by interacting with them and permitting them to interact with each other and their lesson.

As educators, we must perceive student input as an invaluable and integral part of the education process. Some students have very good ideas about how they learn best and how they prefer to learn, but appear to be overlooked or devalued as part of the learning environment. One of the major changes in the Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) this year was the removal of the student surveys that were included previously to inform teacher performance ratings. Students were asked to rate teachers' use of varied instructional strategies, use of differentiation strategies that meet the needs of individual learners, ability to provide a well-managed and orderly classroom, and the ability to challenge the learning of the individual students in their classes. These surveys occurred twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. This year, the student surveys were deleted from the TKES process. Was this a good move?

Deonte', participant four, talked about how boring the classes were for him. Students were not engaged by the teacher. They were to come in, sit in their seats, and read the board. The work was on the board with the corresponding page number(s) from the book...end of discussion. The majority of the class worked in groups to copy each other's papers and received the same grade for the same effort. Deonte specifically mentioned that learning styles were never addressed. So how could the teacher know if the students understood the work they were given? How could the teacher know what each student needed if he/she never asked questions or facilitated any sort of academic discourse among the students. If students never talked about the work, and everyone copied each other's papers, how would the teacher ever know how to help the students.

Anthony, participant two, talked about how he was never engaged in the work. The teacher taught all around him as if he were invisible. There was little attempt to interact with him and tailor instruction to meet his learning needs. It appeared to him as if his learning style or needs were insignificant because his social and emotional needs were never addressed. No one seemed to notice his behavior was his way of crying out for help. Now his feedback has come many years after his middle school experience, but is still very essential to improving our practice. If we do not include all students, engage all students in the process, we... We need to know how students perceive us, and we need to consider their input as a priority to improving education for all students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study did not uncover any African American males who were influenced to re-engage with school and pursue a G.E.D. Instead, these participants were influenced by difficulty finding substantial employment, the desire to pursue dreams, family, and life

experiences. Considering the fact that this study was convenient and purposeful, the first recommendation would be for recent high school dropouts or students currently enrolled in middle school to speak about their middle school teacher-student relationships. Their ability to recall more specific details would allow for school leadership faculty to be more proactive in diagnosing dropout causes and implement significant changes to prevent the loss of additional students to the dropout epidemic. The data may indicate a need to make changes in personnel or implement professional learning that would facilitate a paradigm shift in the school culture and climate.

The second recommendation would be to study teacher-student relationships of non-drop out African American males. I would be interested in knowing if their future academic decisions were influenced by their relationships with their teachers. If these students were influenced to finish school, what went wrong with the students who saw dropping out of school as the best alternative. The similarities and/or differences could be indicative of the need to examine how schools approach school improvement opportunities for all students, how school improvement programs are implemented, whether or not teachers' expectations are appropriate for all students or a select few, or a combination of two or more of the aforementioned.

The research also revealed that the two young men who did not have any children (Marcus and Deonte') were motivated to go back to school by their desire to better themselves. Marcus realized he needed the foundation of a high school diploma or equivalent to gain access substantial employment. Deonte's dream of getting a license to do hair legitimately drove his decision to go back to school. The other three young men in this study, were motivated by their desire to be better men to themselves or their wives

or significant others and better fathers and role models to their children. Thus, a third recommendation is to investigate the influence of family factors that drive future academic decisions made by at-risk African American high school males.

The teacher evaluation system formerly collected student survey data. The data were limited to ratings on a continuum from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* on specific standards (effective instructional standards, differentiation, positive classroom environment, and academically challenging classroom). To resume collecting this data would empower middle school young men of color by giving them voice and the opportunity to elaborate on questions or formulate questions of their own. The leadership team should use the collected data for the purpose of targeting specific issues or aspects of teachers' classroom practices students perceive as problematic. The information should only be used by the leadership personnel of the school for the purpose of improving teacher practices and consequently, school culture and the dropout rate. Actively listening to students and acting on what they say is being *culturally relevant and responsive*. This validates the students which empowers them (Payne, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Training school leaders and teachers on the importance of collecting perceptual data from students and learning how to analyze and interpret the data to improve learning and achievement is a necessity as indicated by the participants of this study. It was mentioned by Anthony and John that their school careers could have been much better if their teachers had taken the time to care and get to know them and value them as individuals.

Conclusions

School leadership and teachers must be cognizant of the need to reevaluate their attitudes, behaviors, and gestures that may signify the true feelings towards their students. They must understand that their mindsets show up in the way they interact with students. When in error, school officials must be willing to make the necessary adjustments. This is a requirement if schools expect to be successful (Baroglu, 2009). Students, just like adults, want to be validated and celebrated. Deonte' spoke of too much emphasis on discipline and not enough emphasis on celebrating student academic and behavioral progress. The recommendation is to give students the recognition they deserve and desire.

Empower teachers and other school faculty and staff by giving them the leeway to assess individual needs of students and create and monitor programs that address these needs. The ARCH (social and emotional support) program was developed because teachers were concerned about the growing absenteeism, increased number of dropouts, and those students who were disengaged. Positive teacher-student relationships emerged. Student apathy decreased along with dropout rates and absenteeism (Yates & Holt, 2009).

Effective teaching and teacher-student relationships cannot be treated as separate entities or separate events because no real education takes place without the establishment of meaningful relationships between teachers and students. A former professor once made a very profound statement, in one of my graduate classes, that will forever resonate loudly in my ears, "Rules without relationships equal rebellion." The young men in this study emphatically stated their desire was to be treated and recognized as an individual. They wanted to know that the teachers and other school personnel cared about them academically, socially, and emotionally.

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Appendix A**Certificate of Completion**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Andrea Williams-Baugh** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 11/23/2012

Certification Number: 1053706

Appendix B



January 24, 2014

Human Subjects - Institutional Review Board
Georgia Southern University
P.O. Box 8005
Statesboro, GA 30461

To Whom It May Concern:

Andrea Baugh has requested permission to collect research data from five African American male students at Augusta Technical College in Augusta, Georgia through a project entitled *The Influence of Middle School Teacher-Student Relationships on Student Future Decisions*. I have been informed of the purposes of the study and the nature of the research procedures. I have also been given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher.

The data requested including (student test scores/individual education plans/disability status data/disciplinary plan) can be provided to the researcher without parental permission under our school Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) policy. The data will be collected by the researcher without student names, ID numbers or other identifiers.

As a representative of Augusta Technical College, I am authorized to grant permission to have the researcher recruit research participants from our school. Andrea R. Baugh is also permitted to collect research data [during school hours at our school. The researcher has agreed to the following restrictions: to adhere to the guidelines outlined by Augusta Technical College, to keep all collected data confidential by using false names, and to provide a copy of published conclusions or results, if desired by ATC.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (706-771-4131).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stefanie Bowie".

Stefanie Bowie
Executive Director, Adult Education

Appendix C

Table 5: Studies Related to Teacher-Student Relationships Including Perception Studies				
STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Brophy and Good (1974)	Examine the effects of positive and negative teacher-student relationships	Classroom teachers and students	Mixed methods/ surveys, classroom observations, and field notes	Teacher attitudes, perceptions, and expectations can impact student achievement positively or negatively
Chen and Thompson (2003)	Examine effects of teacher-student relationships at the elementary level	Teachers of students in grades 3-6 in Taiwan	Mixed Methods/ small group discussions and surveys	Students in the low expectancy group were more apt to perceive teachers negatively while students in the high expectancy group perceived teacher feedback positively.
Baroglu (2009)	Explore impact of negative teacher behavior on student achievement	137 male and 138 female Turkish high school students	Qualitative/ observations and field notes	Negative behaviors pointed out by students included behaving aggressively, speaking fast, threatening

				with low grades, discriminatory actions and remarks, insults, lack of interest, physical punishment, use of slang, favoring female students
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Appendix D

Table 6: Studies Related to Teacher-Student Relationships as Dropout Prevention/ Intervention				
STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Yates and Holt (2009)	Examine the effects of positive and negative teacher-student relationships	Australian 9th graders and their teachers in one high school	Mixed Methods/ surveys, interviews, collection of documents, and observations	As teachers demonstrated care and cultivated teacher-student relationships, student absences decreased and learning increased.
Johnson (2009)	Compare the impact of teachers who displayed care vs. teachers who did not on academic engagement	High school students in two different high schools, one with care and one without	Mixed Methods/ questionnaires, interviews, and observations	Students perform better and are academically engaged when teachers employ pedagogies of care.
Limbos and Castelle (2009)	Examine effects of school organizational and educational environment on crime rates	Students in 95 middle and high schools in the Los Angeles unified school district	Qualitative/ observations and collection of documents	The more students became attached to teachers, the less likely they were to engage in deviant behaviors and the more likely they were to feel connected to school and excel academically.

Docan-Morgan (2009)	Determine relational turning points between undergraduate students and college professors	640 undergraduates, between the ages of 18 and 49, at a Northwestern University	Quantitative/online surveys	Positive relational turning points occurred when professors and students engaged in one-on-one conversations, shared personal information, and valued each other's contributions to the relationship.
Converse and Kraft (2009)	Examine the effects of a mentoring program on student achievement, student engagement, student behavior, and absenteeism	45 at-risk 13-15 year olds with chronic absenteeism and multiple disciplinary referrals	Quantitative/surveys	Student attitudes towards school improved and discipline referrals decreased, but there was no significant difference in number of days missed.
Payne (1996)	Examine the impact of teacher student relationships on student achievement of African American students	teachers and students throughout the United States	Mixed methods/observations and interviews	The proper emotional deposits made by teachers increase student engagement and achievement of African American students

Ladson-Billings (2009)	Examine the impact of culturally relevant teaching on achievement of African American students	teachers and students across the United States	Mixed methods/ observations and interviews and field notes	Culturally relevant teachers increase student achievement of African American students.
Kunjufu (2005)	Examine the tremendous number of African American males in Special Education	African American male students in multiple school districts throughout the U.S.	Mixed methods/ observations and interviews	Referrals of African American males to Special Education programs have decreased in Alabama and Maryland as a result of increased training for intervention services and change of codes and protocols for referral to special education.
Gewertz (2009)	Examine effects of ninth grade intervention program on students at-risk of dropping out	1 African American 9 th grade male at-risk student	Case Study	Students can succeed and meet graduation requirements with close monitoring and mentoring by teachers.

Appendix E

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
#6	I had positive relationships with my teachers, but I'm not sure if they influenced me.	Yes. My teacher, Ms. C, and I got into an argument and she told me that she wasn't going to push me up to the 9 th grade it made me care a lil less about school.	No, didn't stay in high school to long still had a middle school mind frame and was kicked out.	No memories	Related to my life, punish me when it hurts, made school more fun.	Tattoos, bartender, car wash, my own lounge	Wasn't influenced by no one. The way life is set up – in a way it forces you to get knowledge or be lost.
#7	To be honest, I never developed any positive relationships with teachers while at M. It was more of what I liken to call pay check teachers meaning they were at work to get a check, they never	I have had a teacher tell me I was gone be locked up or dead by 17. And hearing that from an educator kind of threw me off. To tell a 14 year old kid that wasn't the right thing to do.	There was this one teacher named Mrs. H who never gave up on me and motivated be daily. If I would get out of line she would pull me to the side and tell me I'm headed to a dead end.	I was stereotyped a lot by my high school teachers, coaches, etc. for the way I dressed, but I never sagged my pants. And I was told I would never amount to nothing. They basically gave up on me.	Tutor me in the ____ I had problems or sign me up for the after school program, hell call my mom before suspending me out of school.	Continue with school, want to get my barber license, and also take up welding, and graphic design	I did it for me, but the person that influenced me the most was my wife. She told me I could do anything I put my mind to. But what took the cake was I was talking to my 6 year old son about how important education was when

	really had the passion. But when I switched to S they had after school programs where if your teachers felt you struggle they would sign you up.						he ask me what school I graduated from and I had nothing to tell him. The very next day I signed up.
#8	No	Yes. I was looked down on as well as many others because we were poor and farmers missed school a lot. Teachers act as if their interest was only for the smarter children whose parents could help their children.	Yes. I made up my mind that I would make it with or without the school system.	I was one of 3 blacks in Pepperell High. We were looked at as if "We got our number of blacks and we hope they are good at sports."	Show that they really cared by mentoring us in special areas in our school and personal lives. And not cause us to lie about our home life what we have and who our parents were.	Enroll in spiritual classes.	Me wanting to replace my GED. I would love to help others to change the slave way of thinking.

#9	No. There were family issues that detoured me to interact with people on a social level. At a young age, I had a mental breakdown that caused me to be an outcast.	They couldn't relate to my problems that I was going through. They felt that their job title wasn't for counseling but just teaching. I got more and more into that corner where no one could see me as a problem.	No. My being able to get with other kids as well as teachers. It didn't work because my anger always got in the way of me trying to make friends.	Yes. I went to a high school where you had to dress a certain way.		Go into the Army	My son
#10	Mr. H, at USA middle school made me want more in my life. He was also my high school teacher and mentor for the Youth Challenge program.	I would fight almost every day. Then, the teacher would tell me that I wouldn't make it.	Yes. He made me want to do better in life. Mr. H opened my eyes to the real world.	Not listening and not going to class because the teachers didn't want me there. They threw my work away, put me out of the class, and threw books at me.	Sit down with me and talk to me on a personal note	Stay in school to get a higher education.	Me. I want more for me and my family.
#4	No	My teacher used to	No	No	Took more time out with	Go to school for business	My girlfriend.

		make me feel like I didn't belong in school. He used to tell me that I wasn't going to amount to anything.			me and not down me		
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Appendix F

ANDREA R. WILLIAMS-BAUGHandiebaugh1@gmail.com**PRE-SCREENING SURVEY FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS****School:** *Georgia Southern University***Program:** Educational Administration P-12**Researcher and Interviewer:** *Andrea R. Baugh***Title:** *The Influence of Middle School Teacher-Student Relationships On Future Academic Decisions of African American Males***Purpose of the Study:** To help principals and other school leaders understand the need to establish and develop teacher-student relationships that produce long-lasting effects.**Purpose of this Survey:** To choose a group of students who are willing to participate in this study.**Survey Participant:****Address:****Phone number(s):****Age:****Current Program of Study at Augusta Technical College:****Name of middle school(s) attended:****Name of county where the middle school(s) is/was located:****Name of high school(s) attended:****Name of county where the high school(s) is/was located:**

1. Did you develop any positive relationships with your middle school teachers/coaches

that influenced any of your future academic, career, or life decisions? Please explain.

2. Do you recall any negative memories of your relationships with middle school teachers/coaches? Please explain.

3. Did you develop any positive relationships with your high school teachers/coaches that influenced any of your future academic, career, or life decisions beyond high school? Please explain.

4. Do you recall any negative memories of your high school teachers? Please explain.

5. What more could your middle or high school teacher/coach have done to better prepare you? Please explain.

6. What are your future plans upon completion of your G.E.D.? Please explain.

7. Who or what influenced you to enroll in this G.E.D. program? Please explain.

The answers you provided to the above questions may help educators improve the middle school program in Richmond County Schools. The researcher and select team members are the only ones who will have access to your information. If you are chosen to participate in this study, please note, you will be asked to participate in face-to-face interviews containing similar questions. If you are not chosen, your information is still valuable and will still be kept confidential as it may be used at a later time during the study. Your time and participation are greatly appreciated. At your request you may receive a copy of your survey responses

Appendix G

Informed Consent.

In order to document the interviews properly, the following was audio taped and facial expressions, body language, tone, mood, and any other physiological changes or behaviors (field notes) were recorded by the researcher.

My name is Andrea R. Williams-Baugh, I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University and the primary researcher for this study, in which you have agreed to participate. As stated in the letter you previously received, the purpose of this research is to examine the impact of middle school teacher-student relationships on student academic decisions after dropping out of school. As part of this interview, I must include a brief consent statement before we continue. The contents of these interviews will be analyzed in my research course at Georgia Southern University. All information on your identity and the identity of other students or teachers will be kept confidential unless otherwise required by law. If information about this interview is published, it will use pseudonyms or fake names. This project is for research and educational purposes only.

This research is not expected to cause any discomfort or stress. However, some people may feel uncomfortable talking about this subject. If you feel uncomfortable during the interviews, you may decline to answer or stop participating at any time without penalty. No risks are expected. Do you have any questions? Do I have your consent to continue with this interview? If so, please state your name and say, "Yes, you have my consent to audio tape this interview."

You have been chosen to participate in this study because you indicated on the questionnaire that you were influenced by a relationship with a middle school teacher,

whether positive or negative. Therefore, I need for you to feel relaxed and share openly and honestly any information about your middle school teacher-student relationships and how those relationships have impacted your life.

Appendix H

The table below contains codes derived from the framework created by the researcher, using the frameworks of French and Raven and Wingfield) to identify positive and negative relationships as perceived by the participants. As the participants reflected on their memories, the transcripts were coded, and the data were clumped together, assigned a code, and added to the table.

Table 8: Created Codes for Social and Emotional Construct				
Code #	Research Data Codes	Interviewee #	PTSR	
1.0	Positive Teacher-Student Relationships - (Perfect combination of power and teacher behavior is the Expert Referent Tutor)			
1.1	<i>Expert Tutor</i> - Expert (Knowledge)		<i>ET</i>	
1.2	Teacher prepares for Class			TPC
1.3	Teacher incorporates meaningful activities			TMA
1.4	Teacher's class is risk free	1, 5		TRF
1.5	<i>Referent Tutor</i> - (Student's Improvement is teacher's responsibility)		<i>RT</i>	
1.6	Teacher shares personal stories	1		TSS

1.7	Teacher listens to problems	1, 5		TLP
1.8	Teacher spends time outside of class or shows interest in the whole student	1, 5		TTO
2.0	Negative Teacher-Student Relationships			NTSR
2.1	<i>Reward Custodian</i>			<i>RC</i>
2.2	Teacher gives rewards to class			TGR
2.3	Teacher withdraws rewards to punish class			TWR
2.4	Teacher uses rewards to punish class			TRP
2.5	<i>Coercive Referral Agent</i>			<i>CRA</i>
2.6	Teacher threatens with grades	1, 2, 3		TTG
2.7	Teacher shows no interest in student	1, 2, 3, 4, 5		TNI
2.8	Teacher discriminates or shows preferences	1, 2, 3, 5		TDP
2.9	<i>Legitimate General Contractor</i>			<i>LGC</i>
2.10	Teacher is authoritative & dictatorial	1, 3		TAD

2.11	Teacher's class is teacher-centered	1, 3, 4		TTC
2.12	Teacher yells at student or openly disrespects student	1, 3		TYS
2.13	Teacher calls students' names	1, 3		TCN
2.14	Teacher devalues student work	1		TDW

Appendix I

Semi-Structured Interview Questions.

In order to document the interviews properly, the following was audio taped and facial expressions, body language, tone, mood, and any other physiological changes or behaviors (field notes) were recorded by the researcher.

My name is Andrea R. Williams-Baugh, I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University and the primary researcher for this study, in which you have agreed to participate. As stated in the letter you previously received, the purpose of this research is to examine the impact of middle school teacher-student relationships on student academic decisions after dropping out of school. As part of this interview, I must include a brief consent statement before we continue. The contents of these interviews will be analyzed in my research course at Georgia Southern University. All information on your identity and the identity of other students or teachers will be kept confidential unless otherwise required by law. If information about this interview is published, it will use pseudonyms or fake names. This project is for research and educational purposes only.

This research is not expected to cause any discomfort or stress. However, some people may feel uncomfortable talking about this subject. If you feel uncomfortable during the interviews, you may decline to answer or stop participating at any time without penalty. No risks are expected. Do you have any questions? Do I have your consent to continue with this interview? If so, please state your name and say, "Yes, you have my consent to audio tape this interview."

You have been chosen to participate in this study because you indicated on the questionnaire that you were influenced by a relationship with a middle school teacher,

whether positive or negative. Therefore, I need for you to feel relaxed and share openly and honestly any information about your middle school teacher-student relationships and how those relationships have impacted your life.