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## Lessons from the Segregated Classroom: An Oral History of the Experiences and Practices of Three Retired African American Teachers

Sandra Melinda McKoy

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LESSONS FROM THE SEGREGATED CLASSROOM:  
AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES OF  
THREE RETIRED AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS

by

SAUNDRA MCKOY

(Under the direction of Sandra Murray Nettles)

ABSTRACT

From the very beginning of this nation's history, race has played a major role in the educational opportunities awarded to minorities. And although it has been fifty years since schools were mandated by the U.S Supreme Court to desegregate, discussions about race and culture in the classroom continue to generate controversy and discomfort for many African Americans. In fact, issues of segregation, racism and racial inequality in both schools and society are constantly being raised and voiced within the African American community.

Today, the nation is engaged in a great discussion about the differences in academic achievement between African American children and their white counterparts. Delpit suggests that "we look at the past through new eyes in order to determine what we might learn to help address the apparently difficult educational issue of providing an excellent education for all African American children" (as cited in Foster, 1997, p. ix). Therefore, lessons regarding the teaching of African American children can be learned from the cohort of African American educators who experienced segregation first hand. For this reason, this study explored the experiences, beliefs and practices of three retired

African American teachers who taught in segregated school environments in Georgia. Through such an exploration, this study investigated the underlying culturally relevant themes that helped and benefited the educational performance of African American students during the days of “separate but equal”.

This study used a culturally relevant lens to examine the overall school climate, the importance of parental and community involvement, and the teaching practices of the three retired African American teacher participants. Additionally, oral history was the qualitative method used to explore their “lived experiences”. Thus, this study sought to make the connection between what teachers from the segregated past and the teachers of today’s generation can do to promote academic achievement among African American students.

INDEX WORDS: Culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching, African American students, African American teachers, African American achievement, Oral history, Segregated schools, Desegregated schools

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## DEDICATION

To my husband, Dr. Paul McKoy, thank you for all of the support, encouragement and sacrifices that you made along this tedious journey in order to help me see my dream become a reality. I am blessed to share this moment with you.

To my daughter, Madison McKoy, you are a true blessing from God. Thank you for sharing your “mommy time” with Georgia Southern. It is because of you that I am dedicated to this research.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The role that teachers play in the school performance of African American children is central and critical to their overall achievement. Teachers' personal and cultural attributes as well as their attitudes and behaviors are important in the success of their students. Traditionally the black teacher has played many roles in schools. Among these have been teacher, parent, counselor, disciplinarian, and role model. These roles have been anchored in a collective black identity where these teachers perceive the success or failure of their pupils as gains or losses to the African American community (Walker, 1996, 2001).

Historically, African American teachers who taught in segregated schools were described as exemplary teachers. These African American teachers assumed the responsibility of interacting with students beyond the confined class periods. Walker (1996, 2000) discovered in her studies that these teachers formed personal relationships with the students, held extracurricular tutoring sessions, and visited homes and churches in the community. Therefore, Delpit suggests that "we look at the past through new eyes in order to determine what we might learn to help address the apparently difficult educational issue of providing an excellent education for all African American children" (as cited in Foster, 1997, p. ix).

In a case study in the contextual setting of a segregated school in Tennessee, Savage (2001) provided an opportunity for African American teachers to explain in their own words what they did and how they did it. For example, George Northern, a science teacher, shared his thoughts in a personal communication:

If we didn't have specimens in the lab, we went out to that creek down behind the school and caught frogs....Exposure....I think maybe what I did to supplement my youngsters....I took a major field trip every year. We'd go to Oak Ridge one year....The next year we'd go down to the wind tunnel at Tullahoma. (p. 193-194)

Savage described these teachers as ones who “spent long hours instilling in black children not only academic skills but also life lessons of resiliency, self-reliance, service, faith, and morality” (p. 187).

Today, due to the rapid growth of defacto segregated schools and with-in school segregation, many of the predominately African American school's across the country are now racial reflections of segregated schools from the past. The intent of this study is to explore the experiences, beliefs and practices of three retired African American teachers who taught in segregated school environments. Through such an exploration, this study can provide insight into how to educate African American students in today's racially segregated classrooms. It is expected that the study will contribute to the research on teaching strategies for teachers working with students in predominately African American schools.

Many researchers have explored the ways in which race, class, and gender often become key determinants of students' educational futures, and there is growing research and acknowledgement of the prejudicial and often devastating effects of such differentiation (Lewis, 2003; Weis & Fine, 1993; Irvine, 1990). However, according to Oakes (2005), a lapse in our search for the solution to the problem of educational inequality is that our focus is almost exclusively on the characteristics of the children themselves. “We look for sources of educational failure in their homes, their

neighborhoods, their languages, their cultures, even their genes. In all our searching we almost entirely overlook the possibility that what happens within schools might contribute to unequal educational opportunities and outcomes” (Oakes, 2005, p. xiv). As reviewed by Johnson (2002), research reveals that there is an absence of meaningful discussion on how to achieve equitable outcomes that do not unfairly penalize African American and other minority students.

Until the last two decades, little had been written about the internal functioning of segregated schools or the positive impact of their efforts from the perspective of the individuals they served or the teachers and administrators who had the primary responsibility of operating the schools (Morris & Morris, 2000). However, according to a review of the literature conducted by Walker (2005), she found that many of the factors that characterized the successful segregated schools for African American children during the days of “separate and unequal” now appear as recommendations in current educational literature for improving the educational outcomes for African American children today.

For example, Morris and Morris (2005) studied two successful predominately African American elementary schools in low-income urban areas and found that the schools had many of the same characteristics that segregated schools that existed before the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case exemplified. This study revealed that the presence of black teachers in the school as well as African American principals who served as cultural and academic leaders in the community ranked high among the characteristics that promoted academic success. Hence, this study concluded that there is

a positive correlation between successful schools of African American children and the presence of African American teachers and principals.

To provide a context for the present study, the remainder of this chapter will discuss the importance of conducting research about implementing a culturally relevant approach to teaching as a practice to enhance the educational opportunities and outcomes for African American students. First, this chapter will examine the problems that exist due to the disparities in the educational opportunities for African American students. Next, this chapter will introduce culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical framework for analyzing the teaching practices of retired African American teachers who have experienced working in segregated school environments. Finally, this chapter will conclude by providing the research questions, personal rationale, purpose and significance of the study, and a description of the difference between integration and desegregation.

#### Disparities in the Education of African American Students

The desegregation of American schools has been one of this country's most explosive social issues for more than a century (Patterson, 1997; Frankenburg & Orfield, 2007). Fifty years after schools were mandated by the U.S Supreme Court to desegregate, race, culture and related topics continue to generate controversy and discomfort for many African Americans. In fact, issues of segregation, racism and racial inequality in both schools and society are constantly being raised and voiced within the African American community. And although today's society represents a racially and ethnically mixed nation, the reality is that the United States and its schools remain

racially segregated and racial equality is more ideal than real (Verdun, 2005; Meyer & Nidiry, 2004).

In 1954 the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision sought to make public schools more equitable, however, according to Thompson (2004), inequality of educational opportunity has continued to be a problem for African Americans in public schools. Moreover, current research shows that the quality of education that most African American children receive today is still far below that of most white children in America (Meyer & Nidiry, 2004; Moore, 2002; Hale, 2001). For instance, a study conducted by Moore (2002) shows that African Americans and some other minorities are disproportionately the recipients of low teacher expectations, inequitable educational opportunities and school underachievement. In fact, Holcomb-McCoy (2007) concluded that one of the major problems facing the educational system in the United States is the widespread inequity in educational achievement and opportunity across ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Movements such as desegregation, special needs education and the use of mainstreaming attempted to make schools more accessible to more students by removing barriers to schooling in general and to particular programs within the schools. An analysis of statistics from the last thirty years reveals that from 1970 to 1980, reading and math achievement among African Americans did indeed climb substantially, and the gap in achievement between African American students and white students declined by more than 50% (Ipka, 2003). However, in 1988 the gap in achievement began to increase and by 1990 progress stopped and those gaps began to significantly widen again (Ipka, 2003). So despite modest gains in standardized test scores, the performance of African



Americans in public schools remain behind that of white students (Ipka, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Holcomb-McCoy (2007) found that on a variety of measures, such as high school completion and college participation rates, Advanced Placement course enrollment, and standardized achievement tests, ethnically diverse and low-income students have much lower levels of achievement. An analysis of the statistics conducted by Rovai, Gallien, and Stiff-Williams (2007) revealed that the achievement gap between black and white students has stubbornly resistant closing over the years and is among the most urgent contemporary problems in education and society. Many explanations of why the gaps in achievement between African American children and their white counterparts continues to exist point to the inadequacies in the child's culture and community and the socioeconomic levels of the family (Johnson, 2002; Thompson, 2004). However, even when parents' income and wealth is comparable, African-Americans still lag behind white students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

In spite of school reforms designed to close the achievement gap, Caldas and Bankston (2007) discovered that nationally there are too few African American students that can read or perform math at proficient levels. For example, according to Comer (2001), by the time African American students complete the fourth grade they are already 2 years behind their white counterparts in reading and mathematics achievement. And when these African American students begin eighth grade, they are at least 3 years behind; and by twelfth grade, they are four years behind (Comer, 2001). A further analysis of data indicates that the achievement gap between African American and white

students begins as early as elementary school and continues throughout high school (Ipka, 2003).

In an effort to explain how and why the achievement gap between African American and white students exists, Murrell (2002) concluded that there is a severe disconnect between the needs of African American children and the delivery system of public schooling in America.

They [African American students] gradually give up expecting school to make sense in the context of their lives. African American children, more than their European American counterparts, begin to experience schools as places that merely control, coerce and demand conformity, rather than as places that encourage learning, inspire creativity, and enable thinking. (Murrell, 2002, p. x)

According to Gay (2002), the best quality educational programs and practices can never be accomplished if some ethnic groups and their contributions to the development of U.S. history, life, and culture are ignored or demeaned. Therefore, it is my position as an educator of African American children that a change in the way we are teaching as well as with the curriculum itself needs to occur in order for these students to be more successful in the classroom.

#### Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Theoretical Framework

For almost 15 years, anthropologists have looked at ways to develop a closer fit between students' home culture and the school (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Villegas, 1991). A variety of labels "culturally appropriate", "culturally congruent", "culturally responsive", and "culturally compatible" have been used to describe these efforts (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 313). Ladson-Billings (1994) uses the term "culturally

relevant teaching" in *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* to define pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. Gay (2000) uses the term "culturally responsive pedagogy" to describe another cultural approach to teaching and learning. Gay (2000) describes her approach as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. And although called by different names, the ideas about why it is important to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students, and how this can be done, are virtually identical (Gay, 2000).

Culturally relevant pedagogy refers to instructional practices that build on the premise that the way students learn differs across cultures. It acknowledges that different children have different needs and addressing those different needs is the best way to deal with them equitably (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000). It also acknowledges the importance of culture in the overall learning experiences and opportunities for students. And in order to maximize and enhance these learning opportunities for students, teachers must gain knowledge about the cultures represented in the classrooms, and then translate this knowledge into instructional practices (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas, 1991). In reference to the interaction between culture and education, Wade Boykin (as cited in Gay, 2000) explains that formal education,

is about learning how to read, write, think...in certain prescribed ways consistent with certain beliefs, prescribed vantage points, value-laden conditions and value laden formats. These prescribed ways of educating, these certain vantage points, conditions, proper practices and inherent

values are the materials and texture of a profound cultural socialization process that forms the very fabric of the medium through which school is done. (p. 9)

Therefore, it can be concluded that culturally relevant pedagogy is a theoretical framework for education that attempts to integrate the culture of not only African American children but all children from different racial and ethnic groups into the overall curriculum. Gay (2000) defines it is a framework centered on the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant effective for them. In addition, Gay (2000), describes it is a framework anchored on four fundamental pillars of practice-teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies.

This study will use culturally relevant pedagogy as a framework to understand the personal recollections of practices of three retired African American teachers who have had the experience of teaching in schools before and after the desegregation of America's public schools. My goal is to determine the underlying culturally relevant themes that helped and benefited the educational performance of African American students during the days of "separate but equal". This study will use a culturally relevant lens to examine the overall school climate, the importance of parental and community involvement, and of course the teaching practices of the retired African American teacher participants.

This framework is appropriate for this study because the primary aim of a culturally relevant approach to teaching is to assist in the development of a "relevant

black personality” that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African American culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It also allows the teacher to integrate the cultural diversity of the students into the overall academic programs and curriculum of the school. This cultural approach to teaching is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

### Research Questions

The central research question for this study is:

1. What are the personal recollections of retired African American teachers about teaching and learning in public schools before and after *Brown v. Board of Education*?

Specific research questions are as follows:

1. What differences and similarities do retired African American teachers report about their teaching styles before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?
2. What differences and similarities do retired African American teachers report about the overall school climate, this includes other teachers in the building, and parent and community involvement before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?
3. What do retired African American teachers believe could be done to enhance the overall academic achievement of African American students in today’s public schools?

Investigating these research questions is important for determining what practices retired African American teachers feel are best used when teaching African American students. By using these research questions as a guide to explore the oral histories of the participants, I hope that their personal stories can give insight into how to best improve the educational experiences, opportunities and outcomes of African American students.

### Personal Rationale

My desire for conducting this study resides in my passion to enhance the educational opportunities of African American students in today's public school system. As an educator, mother and advocate of African American students, it is clear to me that something must be done regarding the education of African American students. For ten years, I have taught in a predominately African American, low socio-economic middle school in northeast Atlanta, Georgia. It has been my experience, that in this environment student achievement is low, teacher moral is low and the overall school climate is not conducive for learning. So this study is more of a personal inquiry about my own educational journey about what I can do to increase student achievement in the classroom.

This study started out as a personal reflection into my daily life as a middle school teacher in a predominately African American school. I remember so vividly the day that I felt "is it worth it to come in here everyday, teach until I am exhausted only to have my students continue to fail...continue to misbehave...continue to put forth very little effort to succeed academically..." However, regardless of how I felt or still feel to this day, I

always tell myself that my students need me and I continue to stay, and commit myself to improving their overall academic experiences.

Therefore, this study is about the commitment that I have for the middle school “at-risk” African American students that I teach everyday. It is about the personal bond that many of my students and I share, the lives that they live, their family situations, their goals and their dreams. It is about changing the way we as educators approach the teaching of African American children so that they can achieve their dreams. It is also about acknowledging, listening and learning lessons from the voices of past educators regarding the education of African American students. This study serves as a continuation of the commitment that I have to researching programs, practices and teaching strategies that would help my students achieve academically.

As a researcher, I am interested in taking a closer look at the historical context of educating African American children and how we can improve their experiences in today’s classroom. Historically, the relationship between race and education has been a major issue in the United States for centuries. And the chronicle of the civil rights movement in the United States illustrates the centrality of education to the fight of African Americans for equal opportunity and full citizenship (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Notable scholars such as Dr. Carter G. Woodson, Dr. W.E.B. Dubois, Marcus Garvey, Dr. Janice Hale, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a host of others have all asserted that an effective education is of fundamental importance in the progress of African Americans (Saddler, 2005).

I am passionate about this study because many communities and neighborhoods are segregated which in turn are leading to segregated schools. Segregated schools are

therefore leading to unequal educational opportunities for African American students. It was just fifty years ago when the races were operating under separate laws. And many of those who lived during segregation are still living and they have the rich history that can't be found in textbooks, but can be shared through their own personal narratives. And as the daughter of a retired teacher, I am blessed to have access to the stories of how it was for my mother growing up and teaching in the segregated south. And as I reflect on the past, I am reminded that there are things that we can learn by looking at segregated classrooms and teachers of the past. We can learn how these teachers were able to overcome inequities and still produce men and women who later became prominent figures in African American history.

Although African American schools were indeed commonly lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence suggests that the policies and community support helped African American children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards (Walker, 1996, 2000). And as an educator of minority students, I feel empowered to know that I can make a significant difference in their academic journeys. So for now, I will continue to teach until I am exhausted and hopefully one day I will see that my efforts in the classroom have paid off in the futures of my former students. Therefore, by conducting this study, I plan to add to the body of literature in reference to curriculum pedagogies and strategies that can be used to promote academic success among all African-American students.

#### Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the teaching experiences, beliefs and culturally specific practices of African American teachers who taught in



segregated and desegregated school environments. By doing so, this study seeks to identify practices that are best to use with African American students in today's predominately African American schools. In order to accomplish this task, this study will use culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical framework to examine the teaching practices and pedagogies of the retired African American participants. The methodology used for this study will be oral history, a form of qualitative research.

The significance of this study lies in the need for school improvement in the African American community. Statistics show that African American children nationwide lag behind European American students in test scores, high school completion and employment (Caldas & Bankston, 2007; Ipka, 2003; Murrell, 2002; Comer, 2001). Therefore, it is vastly important that African American children receive the kind of education that they need to successfully participate in the nation's economy and in our democratic society. And in order to ensure that African American children succeed academically, teachers must learn how to successfully teach them and nurture them in the classroom environment. Lessons regarding the teaching of African American children can be learned from the cohort of African American educators who experienced segregation first hand.

The social significance of this study is based on the notion that one reason for widespread concern over the gap in student achievement is that it involves substantial social and economic costs. Low educational achievement is associated with high unemployment, lower earnings, higher crime, and a greater dependency on welfare and other social services. Singham (as cited in Johnson, 2002) concluded that "An alternative explanation is that the primary problem lies not in the way black children view

education but in the way we teach all children, black, white, or other" (p. 6). Therefore, this study will seek to provide solutions for improving educational inequalities among African American children by exploring the characteristics of the teachers who are responsible for teaching them.

In addition, the significance of this study to the field of curriculum studies is rooted in its efforts to identify an array of pedagogies, strategies and curricula that can be used to promote academic success among all African-American students. This study seeks to build on the concept of curriculum studies as a racial and cultural text by identifying practices that will promote educational equity for African American students in the public school system. It also seeks to make the connection between what teachers from the segregated past and the teachers of today's generation can do to promote academic achievement among African American students.

#### Defining the Difference between Integration and Desegregation

As reported by Frankenberg and Orfield (2007), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. argued during the civil rights movement that desegregation is only the first step in eradicating segregation; and that desegregation must be followed with the transformative and inclusive goal of true integration. Godfrey Hodgson defines true integration as "an atmosphere of genuine acceptance and friendly respect across racial lines" (as cited in Street, 2005, p. 48). According to Dr. King (as cited in Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007),

desegregation is eliminative and negative, for it simply removes these legal and social prohibitions. Integration is creative, and is therefore more profound and far-reaching than desegregation. Integration is the positive

acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes in the total range of human activities. Integration is genuine intergroup, interpersonal doing. Desegregation then, rightly is only a short-range goal. Integration is the ultimate goal of our national community. (p. 25)

Therefore, for the purpose of this study it is necessary to first define the terms desegregation and integration. According to Powell (1973) the two words cannot or should not be used interchangeably for they describe two very separate practices. Powell (1973) defines desegregation as the elimination of laws, customs, or practices under which different races or groups are restricted to separate facilities, schools, organizations, or the like; it is the elimination of racial separation.

For example, based on their research, Stephan and Feagin (1980) concluded that what happened to children inside a particular desegregated school is a product of changing sociohistorical forces that brought that particular school to the “desegregated” state, a product of the status and power relations of minority to majority in the society and community, as well as a product of social and structural forces within the school. Thus, desegregation does not represent a single phenomenon to be understood and manipulated with a single explanatory theory and a series of studies. Powell (1973) further clarifies that when a facility has been desegregated, in that the physical separation of groups has been eliminated, it does not mean that harmonious incorporation of a group into the organization has occurred. Furthermore, Stephan and Feagin (1980) argue that putting minority children in such an utterly powerless position in a white-dominated organizational structure and a white-dominated informal friendship structure make the

production of equal status behavior or even academic improvement extraordinarily difficult.

Powell (1973) defines integration as the process of incorporating parts into a whole, the process of becoming part of the dominant culture, the process of combining separate groups into a harmonious organization. According to Gary Orfield “the deeper changes, in educational terms, involved going from the reality of desegregation-the fact the children of different racial and ethnic groups were now in the same school and faculties have been ordered to be desegregated-toward real integration, which required fair and equal treatment of each racial group” (as cited in Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, integration requires a change, or an infusion of all students regardless of their cultural or ethnic background to combine into an integral whole.

Over half a century after the Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of American education, schools are almost as segregated as they were during the 1960’s. And despite extensive civil rights efforts, true integration in American society has yet to be realized. Consequently American society remains stratified by both race and class (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Sanders, 2000). As Steinberg and Diggs-Brown noted (as cited in Street, 2005):

We like to think of racially balanced schools as integrated, but they are not. Race [remains]...the central organizing principle at these schools, often determining the social and educational lives of the student.

Youngsters of both races may pass each other and even talk a bit in the hall, but their contact in the lunchroom, the classroom, and the schoolyard is frequently defined by race. (p. 17)

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the term desegregation will be used to describe the process in which African American and white students attend the same physical institutions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

For the past decade, educational policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have addressed issues of cultural representation, race, class, and gender at all levels of the educational system (Lewis, 2003; Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1996). And although much educational research has looked at race in relation to gaps in achievement, differences in discipline patterns, and disparities in test scores, these numbers do not capture the reality of race as part of the process of schooling. These studies do not take into consideration nor do they reflect that cultural differences between African American students and their white counterparts exists within today's educational system and are reflective in their overall academic achievement.

Furthermore, these studies do not take into consideration the role that race and culture play in shaping classroom practices or how even the most-well meaning teachers can perpetuate inequities within the classroom. Because culture has not been considered in the educational process, the performance statistics for African American students in the public school system are alarming and disturbing to the African American community. Therefore, according to Hale (2001), the deficiency lies not in the student; rather it falls on a system of education that refuses to adapt itself to the differences among students.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview and synthesis of the research related to the academic experiences, opportunities and outcomes of African American students. The first section of this review will be an overview of the historical development of the early educational opportunities available for African

American students. The second section will explore the segregated and desegregated school experiences of African American students. The third section will examine the role of race and culture in the overall educational experiences of African American students. The fourth section will discuss the role of the African American teacher in the overall educational experiences of African American students. The fifth section will explore the literature pertaining to using culturally relevant pedagogy as an approach to improving the overall academic performance of African American students. Finally, the literature review will end with a conclusion that summarizes the findings in the research on some of the factors that have been identified throughout the review that affect the educational experiences of African American students.

#### Early Educational Opportunities for African American Students

*The first generation of southern black teachers was forged in the furnace of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. During this violent, disordered period of America's history, black teachers faced difficulties of staggering magnitude. (Fairclough, 2007, p. 27)*

#### *Before the Civil War of 1861*

From the beginning, literacy and the quest for freedom were struggles that were inextricably linked for African Americans in America (Anderson, 1998; Murrell, 2002). In the late 1700's and early 1800's, before the civil war, separate schools were established in many communities in the north for the education of free African Americans (Fairclough, 2007; Powell, 1973). However, according to Haskins (1998), during this time there were no public schools established for either whites or blacks. After gaining independence from England, ideas of a free public education gained

popularity in the North, and white public primary schools called common schools were established, but often these schools were not opened to African Americans, and certainly not to slaves (Anderson, 1988). In fact, educational opportunities for blacks during this time were few. Even in areas that stressed education, the prevailing attitude was that blacks were by nature inferior and unable to learn (Fairclough, 2007; Haskins, 1998; Anderson, 1988). However, slave schools existed, though mainly underground, throughout the South (Lusane, 1992).

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1888, Mamie Garvin Fields (1983) described in her memoir, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places*, how her great-great uncle went to Oxford, England as the caregiver for his master's sons when they went there to finish their education. She vividly described how "those young men who went to college loved him and saw that he got all the instruction they did" (p. 2). Garvin Fields writes about how "he learned right along with them" (p. 2). Later on, after her Uncle Thomas returned from England, Garvin Fields explains how "Uncle Thomas then taught his own sons. The brothers taught the sisters and they all taught other slaves" (p. 2). In her own words, this was a time in history when "some would steal away to teach, and some would steal away to learn" (p. 2)

Remarkably, many of the South's first black teachers had been taught to read by their owners. Henry B. Delaney, the first black instructor at St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina claimed that he owed his earliest education "to the Christian woman, whose property we were... My mistress herself taught my eldest sister to read and write, in order that she might carry on a school secretly in the upper rooms of the house for the benefit of the other children of my family" (as cited in Fairclough, 2007, p.



31). Described by Ladson-Billings (2005) in her text, *Beyond the big house: African American educators on teacher education*, Milla Granson, a slave in Kentucky, was taught to read by the children of her owner, even though it was illegal to educate slaves. She then organized a clandestine school, eventually educating hundreds of enslaved African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Garvin Fields (1983) reflects on one particular person that her family had taught:

Anna Berry. This Anna Berry learned faster than any. She in turned organized a school in her family's house on George Street, back in an alley, across the street from where the College of Charleston is today. Since the slaves were forbidden to go back there, or anywhere else, to learn, it had to be a clandestine school.

That Berry family carried right on with education...all this happened before my time. I'm talking about slaves. I'm not talking about abolitionists, the white people that came in, nor the Freedmen's Aid, who built schools after slavery, but about slaves that taught each other from the one that went to Oxford. (p.2)

Even after slavery was abolished in most northern states in the 1820's, the northern states offered few educational opportunities for African Americans (Haskins, 1998). However, most of the major cities did have some sort of formal education for African Americans, but these educational facilities were very uneven in quality. The few schools that did exist were usually associated with churches or religious groups. From earliest times, it was a religious group known as the Quakers that was in the forefront of efforts to educate African Americans (Fairclough, 2007; Haskins, 1998). It was not until the 1830's that most of the larger cities began to open public schools for African Americans. Among the earliest were the African Free Schools in New York City, which

operated from 1787 to 1860 and enrolled hundreds of students (Powell, 1973). By 1824, New York City had seven African Free Schools, which provided a free education to all African American children (Powell, 1973).

In the south, the movement toward free common schools had not yet taken hold. Education of white children was largely in the hands of private groups and education of blacks was almost non-existent. In some states any education of blacks was forbidden by law and opposition to the education of blacks was widespread (Powell, 1973). However, despite the odds against them, a few blacks in colonial America managed to become literate (Fairclough, 2007; Haskins, 1998).

#### *After the Civil War ended in 1865*

Education for blacks had a low status in all sections of the country before and immediately after the civil war. However, in 1866, shortly after the civil war, with the sole purpose of helping African Americans, the federal government extended the services of the Freedman's Bureau which was formed in 1865 as a federal agency to aid distressed refugees of the American Civil War (Anderson, 1988). Under the jurisdiction of this organization 4,000 schools for African Americans were established. To help with this effort, the American Missionary Association joined forces with the Freedman's Bureau to provide teachers, including African American teachers for the schools formed under the Bureau (Haskins, 1998; Anderson, 1988).

According to Haskins (1998), the American Missionary Association was a Protestant-based abolitionist group that was founded in 1846. The main purpose of this organization was to eliminate slavery, to educate African-Americans, to promote racial equality, and to promote Christian values. This was the largest of the aid societies,

supporting more than 5000 teachers in the south between 1861 and 1876 (Haskins, 1998). These two organizations worked cooperatively to provide educational facilities and educators for African American children throughout the South. During the brief existence of the Bureau, the educational opportunities for African Americans improved markedly. In fact, W. E. Dubois reported that by 1870, the Freedman's Bureau had created 4200 schools with nearly a quarter of a million pupils (Powell, 1973).

The early schools established through the Freedmen's Bureau for African Americans were segregated, grammar schools with rudimentary curriculums (Powell, 1973). There were no high schools being created for blacks and certainly no colleges (Haskins, 1998). The majority of colleges that did exist were for whites and they refused to admit blacks until a few began to do so in the mid 1820's (Powell, 1973). But, with the assistance from the Bureau, Northern societies founded and staffed the first African American colleges in the south including Berea, Fisk, Hampton, and Tougaloo, all initially designed to train African American teachers (Haskins, 1998). And though vastly inferior to the educational facilities for whites, schools and colleges for blacks multiplied and improved (Haskins, 1998; Powell, 1973). By the late 1860's, the total number of freedmen enrolled in these schools and in regular attendance had reached 114,522 (Bullock, 1967).

#### *During the Period of Reconstruction*

President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves went into effect on January 1, 1863. And during the first year of emancipation, hundreds of schools were opened for the former slaves (Lusane, 1992). In fact, after the war, congress took steps to ensure that slavery would never return and that the former slaves

would be guaranteed equal rights of citizenship by law. These steps took the form of three amendments to the US Constitution, the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth. All of which were ratified during the post-civil war period of rebuilding in the war-ravaged south that was called Reconstruction (Haskins, 1998).

The Thirteenth Amendment, formally abolished slavery in the United States and although it took the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 before the majority of African Americans in the South were registered to vote, the Fifteenth Amendment granted African American men the right to vote (Haskins, 1998). But probably known as the most important amendment made to the Constitution, the Fourteenth Amendment originated in the 39<sup>th</sup> congress which convened in December 1865 as the first post-civil war congress (Haskins, 1998). This amendment included the equal-protection clause which meant “no state shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, or deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (Powell, 1973).

This period of Reconstruction brought great hope for change among African Americans. For over ten years, from 1865 to 1877, gains in the status of African American were made, schools were created, teachers were trained, and black politicians were elected into office. By the 1870’s Reconstruction had made some progress to provide the former slaves with equal rights under the law, including the right to vote, and with education to achieve literacy (Haskins, 1998). However in 1876, President Rutherford B. Hayes declared an end to Reconstruction. According to the U.S. Department of State website:

Southern states gradually began electing members of the Democratic Party into office, ousting so-called carpetbagger governments and intimidating blacks from voting or attempting to hold public office. By 1876 the Republicans remained in power in only three Southern states. As part of the bargaining that resolved the disputed presidential elections that year in favor of Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republicans promised to end Radical Reconstruction, thereby leaving most of the South in the hands of the Democratic Party. In 1877 Hayes withdrew the remaining government troops, tacitly abandoning federal responsibility for enforcing blacks' civil rights. (para. 2)

According to Haskins (1998), Federal troops left the south, the Freedmen's Bureau ceased operations, and black southerners were left to fend for themselves.

After Reconstruction, a pattern of separation of the races began to develop in churches, hotels, restaurants, and trains (Fairclough, 2007; Haskins, 1998; Anderson, 1988). One by one, more and more states established segregated schools. In education, laws that echoed those existing in the time of slavery were instituted in many localities, forbidding white teachers from teaching black children (Haskins, 1998). Black teachers were rarely to be found, and it was difficult to procure a white teacher of African American children (Haskins, 1998). Most southern whites were opposed to any education for blacks and were relentless in their fight to oppose mixed schools even in the face of the equal protection provisions of the fourteenth amendment (Powell, 1973).

As reported by Bullock (1967), it was clear that the two races would constitute distinct castes, neither crossing over into the domain reserved for the other; that white

and black children would be trained in two different kinds of schools-indeed, in two distinct socio-cultural worlds; and that whites and blacks, though obligated to the same flag, would become two different kinds of people. In education, the public school systems that had begun in Reconstruction were cut back or dismantled; by the 1880's less than a third of the black children in the south received free schooling (Haskins, 1998; Anderson, 1988). Garvin Fields (1983) explained how her cousin managed to open a school for African American children in the 1880's:

Lala was educated to be a schoolteacher...so when the time came, Uncle Izzard brought some of the men who worked for him and built her a school at the back of their house: Miss Ann Eliza Izzard's School. He saw that everything was first-rate. He made benches and desks, divided the rooms, hung a blackboard-a "modern" thing to have in those days, since most schoolchildren only had slates. Lala kept maps and a globe, schoolbooks of all kinds, storybooks, songbooks, magazines...Naturally most of the cousins were taught by Lala, and many children from around the neighborhood came...After a while, Miss Izzard's was well known around Charleston and very successful. There was no other like it in Charleston. So many parents wanted their children to be taught by Miss Izzard that they had to enroll a year ahead of time. (p. 41)

By 1889-1890, only 32 percent of the school age blacks in the south were enrolled in public schools (Haskins, 1998). In 1894, at six, Garvin Fields (1983) left the comforts of her cousin's school and entered a public school in Charleston. She recalls that when she went to public school, "my school had only two black teachers, whom Charleston hired just to stay in the law-that the Negro school must have "some" negro teachers" (p.

42). Although still in a segregated school environment, Garvin Fields (1983) compares her experiences of learning from a black teacher at Miss Izzards' and then learning from white teachers at the public school for blacks in Charleston.

One thing they [white teachers] did drill into use was the Rebel tradition. They had a great many Rebel songs and poems. All had to learn...and recite once a week. This is what they wanted to instill in us. But you never heard these songs and poems at Claflin, a high school for blacks established by Northerners. And you never heard them a Lala's. Lala gave us things that you didn't get at public school, not from the Southerners or from the Northerners. It was from her that I learned about slavery as our relatives had experienced it and what it meant. She taught us how strong our ancestors back in slavery were and what fine people they were. I guess today people would say that she was teaching us "black history". Most of all, she taught us not only to read but to love to read and love to learn. (p, 45)

She describes one of her teachers at the public school as "very stern, never smiled, no warmth at all" (p. 43). To Garvin Fields it seemed as if another one "couldn't stand the little black children that she had to teach" (p. 43). However, she does acknowledge that she had some good teachers too, but she also recognized that "when I left for high school at Claflin and studied ancient history...I was lost. The children from Barnwell, S. C., who had teachers of our race, came better prepared" (p. 45).

### Segregated and Desegregated Schools

Shortly after the turn of the century, Jim Crow laws that segregated whites from former slaves and former freedmen were passed in all southern states, restricting African

Americans access to trains, restaurants, parks, buses, and other areas where the races might have occasion to mix (Walker, 1996). Jim Crow laws introduced segregation into every walk of life. From the late 1890s, this era of Jim Crow allowed southern states to legally begin to subordinate the position of African Americans in society.

### *Segregated Schools*

In education, once Jim Crow was firmly established in the public schools of the south, the inequities persisted and increased. According to Powell (1973), the ideal of equal education opportunity was a goal to be considered only after the needs of white children were met. Additionally, black teachers had to teach classes that were twice the size of those taught by white teachers, yet they were often paid only half as much as their white colleagues. Also, black schools often received the white students' old books, desks, and other equipment (Powell, 1973; Walker, 2000, 2001). Etta Joan Marks (as cited in Foster, 1997) recalled:

in 1961 or 1962, when our school burned down, we didn't have textbooks of any kind. We held classes in the church. The white schools sent us their used textbooks just before they were ready to put them in the trash. Pages were torn out; they were old, worn, and so marked up that there wasn't any space to write our names. (p.xxxii)

Bernadine Morris (as cited in Foster, 1997), one of the first black teachers to go into the desegregated schools in Hampton, Virginia recalled how for the first ten or eleven years that she taught in Hampton, black students never got new books:



Our school got the books that the white kids had had at least three years.

We never got the state adoption books until a few years after that book had been adopted, and then they had gone on to some new books. I remember an incident at Union, the second school where I taught. The books were so worn out that a first grade teacher spoke up at a faculty meeting. She complained to the principal. She told him, “These books are so old the state adoption period has passed. They’re so dirty I don’t even want to touch them myself.” The principal agreed with her...It was just not ideal at all. The books, facilities, and the equipment at both Greenbriar and Union were not comparable to those of the white schools at all. (p. 57)

The history of public schooling of African Americans during legalized segregation has focused almost exclusively on the inferior education that African American children received. Indeed, the meager materials, the inadequate facilities, the unequal funding of schools and teachers, the lack of bus transportation, and the failure of white school boards to respond to African American parents’ requests are so commonly named in most descriptions of segregated education that they have created a national memory that dominates most thinking about segregated schooling of African American children (Walker, 1996, 2000, 2001). Although many African American schools had inferior buildings and equipment, along with inadequate instructional resources, the initiative and ingenuity of principals, teachers, parents, and community residents enabled the schools to succeed in providing good programs for children in their communities (Morris & Morris, 2002; Walker, 1996, 2000).

Memoirs and oral histories depict segregated schools as places where order prevailed, teachers' commanded respect, and parents supported the teachers (Fairclough, 2007; Walker, 1996, 2000). Again and again in such recollections, former teachers and pupils described their school as an anchor of the black community and likened it to an extended family (Walker, 1996; Fairclough, 2007). Former teachers emphasized the community loyalty that their schools inspired. "Parents believed in the teachers and cooperated" said Fannie Phelps Adams, a member of the last generation of teachers who served segregated schools (as cited in Fairclough, 2007, p. 287).

Although research on segregated schools reveals that they were indeed commonly lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence suggests that the environment of the segregated school had affective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped African American children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards (Walker, 1996, 2000). In her study of a former segregated African American school community in North Carolina, Walker (1996) found that in spite of the legalized oppression, many teachers and principals created environments of teaching and learning that motivated students to excel. Walker concluded that "they countered the larger societal messages, which devalued African Americans, and reframed those messages to make African American children believe in their ability to achieve" (p. 219).

In a study conducted by Morris and Morris (2002), it was found that African American communities provided a good education for their children long before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954. Research conducted by Fairclough (2007) indicates that from 1950 to 1970, the educational attainment of black Americans increased dramatically. For example, in 1947, 13 percent of blacks 25 and older had

completed high school or college. In 1970, when the figures included the last cohort of students to pass through segregated schools, the figures stood at 33 percent (Fairclough, 2007).

The segregated school is most often compared to a family where teachers and principals, with parent-like authority, exercised almost complete autonomy in shaping student learning and insuring student discipline (Walker, 1996, 2000). Several accounts of this period assert that educators became part of students' extended families, as they resided, worshipped, and worked in the same communities as their students (Walker, 2000; Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999). These studies further maintain that because of their knowledge of and investment in the communities of their students, African American teachers were able to create home-like atmospheres in schools where students experienced a continuity of expectations and interactional patterns between their homes and schools, their parents and their teachers (Walker, 1996).

### *Desegregated Schools*

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision, *Brown v Board of Education*, set into motion a process of desegregation that eventually transformed American public schools. Stephan and Feagin (1980) reported that when the *Brown* decision was first handed down; its intent was to provide educational opportunities for black children equal to those provided for white children. With a unanimous decision, on May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Warren read these words:

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of

educational opportunities? We believe that it does....We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 1954*)

The Brown ruling recognized that minorities had a legitimate claim upon the educational resources of schools, and that discrimination in the allocation of these resources is unconstitutional. Based on their review of the case, Stephan and Feagin (1980) found that this action forced school systems to honor the "equal protection of the laws" clause of the Constitution and to abide by it not only for racial minorities but also for other special populations.

Desegregation proceeded rapidly in the years 1965-1969, but the forms it took were often antithetical to achieving equal nondiscriminatory educational systems. Black schools were usually the ones that were closed and black students were bused more often than whites (Fairclough, 2007; Stephan & Feagin, 1980). However, desegregation was a powerful movement, but by no means was it universally accepted by all blacks as a remedy to their educational problems. And although African Americans largely welcomed the *Brown* decision, they worried both about the degree to which it would be translated into action and about the costs it would impose on black teachers and students (Caldas & Bankston, 2007; Perlstein, 2004). In fact, an immediate impact of the *Brown* decision was the wholesale firing of African American teachers. A National Education

Association study reviewed by Jackson (2001) found that 30,000 African American teachers lost their jobs as an aftermath of the *Brown* decision.

Many of the white teachers, unaccustomed to teaching black students, and prejudiced against them, made school life even more difficult for the black students (Haskins, 1998; Fairclough, 2007). As Etta Joan Marks recalled, “In the desegregated school we had an abundance of materials to work with...But black kids have regressed instead of progressed because whites teach whites and blacks are left out” (as cited in Foster, 1997, p. 88). Black teachers faulted white colleagues for failing to adapt their teaching methods to black students, complaining that their approach was too didactic, that they tended to lecture too much (Fairclough, 2007). And almost every black teacher complained that students were more difficult to motivate, that parents had less involvement in schools, and that their own influence as mentors and community leaders had declined (Fairclough, 2007).

Generally during the early years of desegregation school performance of minority children did improve. However, by the late 1970's and early 1980's a number of negative trends were beginning to be noticed and documented (Morris & Morris, 2005; Saddler, 2005; Lusane, 1992). These negative trends included documentation that children of color and poor children received lower grades, passed fewer classes, and were suspended in significantly greater proportions to their enrollment numbers when compared to white learners (Morris & Morris, 2005; Saddler, 2005; Lewis, 2003). In addition, the number of black role models declined, and in their place was a teaching and administrative staff that was either foreign to or overly hostile to blacks (Irvine, 1990). James Hanely (1978, as cited in Irvine, 1990) commented about school desegregation:

With more and more black educators leaving the classroom because of demotion, reassignment, or firing, black student will more than likely receive most if not all of their instructions from teachers who are not familiar with their culture patterns as they should be; or as sympathetic in helping them obtain their educational objectives; or worse, who are actually prejudiced against their race. (p.36)

Black and white students and teachers shared the same physical facilities, but not the same cultural or psychological facilities. Black and white students occupied the same classrooms, but blacks were separate and considered unequal to whites. They were separated by invisible walls of resistance, dislike, and racism. The schools did not represent or pretend to represent the harmonious incorporation of black students into the total life of the school; rather there was a dissonance, alienation, and separation, far greater than that in any segregated black school (Powell, 1973). And by the 1990's Americans were rethinking the ways that had been used to achieve integration of schools.

According to bell hooks (1990), desegregation broke the relationship of love, caring, and support that black children had formerly experienced with their teachers. Significantly, hooks refers to desegregation as "one of the first great tragedies of growing up" (1990, p. 34). In her own words, bell hooks described her experience with desegregation;

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived,

behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle. When we entered racist, desegregated, white schools we left a world where teachers believed that to educate black children rightly would require a political commitment. Now we were mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes. For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom. Realizing this, I lost my love of school. (hooks, 1994, p. 3)

Based on the experiences of some black students attending newly desegregated schools, education became politically repressive because teaching for the white teachers they encountered was often not about a political or personal commitment to black children (Morris & Morris, 2005; Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999). In the eyes of these students, many of their white teachers conceptualized teaching only as the presentation of subject matter, without any critical reflection on whose interests such knowledge served (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999).

According to Haskins (1998), in theory integration made perfect economic sense, localities that had formerly practiced segregation would be able to spend their funds on one school system-one set of buildings, one faculty of teachers and principals, one inventory of books, sports equipment, one fleet of buses and other supplies. However, instead of creating schools in which educators and parents collaborated toward the goal of education for liberation, African Americans were compelled to endure schooling, and its attendant socialization, in white environments where racism was for the most part unacknowledged and barely mitigated by school personnel (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999).

From the perspective of the legendary black law professor and former civil rights desegregation litigator Derrick Bell (as cited in Street, 2005), a better more realistic *Brown* decision would have concerned itself with making America's public schools actually live up to the promise of "equal if segregated" schools. A truly useful decision, Bell argued, would have required schools to provide black children with educational resources equal to those received by white children (as cited in Street, 2005).

### *The Resurgence of Segregated Schools*

At the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, public school systems throughout the United States were moving toward racial resegregation (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). In reality, segregation is deepening in American schools as courts terminate desegregation plans, residential segregation spreads, the proportion of whites in the population falls, and successful efforts to use choice for desegregation, such as magnet schools, are replaced by choice plans with no civil rights requirements, including charter schools, which often increase segregation (Caldas & Bankston, 2007; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007). According to the Harvard University Civil Rights Project in 2003, one-sixth of the United States' black public school students attended virtually all nonwhite schools (Street, 2005).

Furthermore, though there is almost no legal segregation in America, most Americans live in segregated neighborhoods. And because of white flight, and governmental subsidies of new communities that either perpetuated or caused segregated living patterns, as well as private discrimination in housing, and the unwillingness of local and state educational officials to force school integration, our nation's public schools are today still largely segregated by race (Meyer & Nidiry, 2004). Unfortunately,



racially segregated minority schools are likely to be schools with high levels of concentrated poverty and tend to have fewer educational resources, both tangible and intangible (Hale, 2001; Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999; Kozol, 1991).

The year 2004, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown v Board of Education* case, in which the Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of American Schools. This important court decision articulated the fundamental idea that equality could be achieved through the schools and that all children were entitled to equality in educational experiences (Morris & Morris, 2005; Ansalone & Biafora, 2004). It was hoped, at the time that the desegregation of schools would facilitate the elimination of racial stigma, which would in turn improve the educational and professional outcomes of African American students and foster greater racial integration in society as a whole (Morris & Morris, 2005; Zirkel, 2004). However, whether in clandestine, church-supported schools that were illegal during slavery or in private schools constructed by freed blacks from Reconstruction onwards, African Americans have struggled to have control over the schools that would educate their children (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007).

While today, many of the traditional barriers to black advancement have been outlawed, Bonilla-Silva (2001) acknowledges that the situation is by no means one of equity. Research indicates that the segregated school environment, whether imposed through law or *de facto* because of choice or residential patterns, perpetuates racial caste and stereotype as the overriding and major focus of both education and life (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004; Meyer & Nidiry, 2004; Hale, 1994; 2001). And these segregated schools are still profoundly unequal. For example, Bonilla-Silva (2001) found that inner-city minority schools, in sharp contrast to white suburban schools, lack decent buildings, they

are overcrowded, have outdated equipment, do not have textbooks for all of their students, lack library resources, are technologically behind and pay their teachers and administrative staff less, which produces, despite exceptions, a low level of morale. These savage inequalities as Kozol (1991) calls them, have been directly related to lower reading and math achievement, limited computer skills and lower levels of learning in general.

The re-segregation and internal segregation of American schools is emerging rapidly across the country. There are high levels of de facto segregation, tracking, and differential assignment to special education due to race taking place within America's public school system (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004; Moore, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2001). In fact, recent statistics provided by Ansalone & Biafora (2004) show that about three-quarters of the school districts in the United States use ability grouping or some other form of tracking students into classes. Additional studies by Lewis (2003) show that invariably white students are placed in more advanced classes and black students in the less advanced. According to Street (2005), these studies also show that African American students are over-represented in more "vocationally" focused remedial "general track" classes where math equals common sense arithmetic and science is never concretely learned through experimental, hands-on procedures.

In 2001, educational researchers Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigodur (as cited in Street, 2005) found that separation inside schools accounted for a significant share of overall public school segregation in North Carolina. In this study, they discovered that "even in racially integrated public high schools, classes typically differed in racial composition. Black students were less likely to be assigned to advanced or honors classes and more

likely to be assigned to special education tracks for the mentally retarded than white students” (Street, 2005, p. 18). Lewis (2003) also concludes that a disproportionate number of black students were dropouts, or had failed to achieve national norms in reading and math.

Inequities based on race, gender, and language permeates U.S. society, especially in public education. Nowhere are these inequities more magnified than in special education (Moore, 2002; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). According to Moore (2002), racial, gender, cultural, and linguistic biases remain integral aspects of the special education referral process for African-American students. Data from the U. S. Department of Education and State Education Departments show clear patterns of overrepresentation of minority children in special education nationwide (Perkins-Gough, 2003). These patterns vary dramatically by state, disability, category, and race. Nationwide African Americans are twice as likely as whites to be enrolled in special education programs. In most states, African Americans are between one-and-one-half and four times as whites to be identified as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed (Perkins-Gough, 2003).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), the quest for a quality education remains an exclusive dream for the African American community because African Americans are burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal educational conditions, and regulations to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools. Thus, Ladson-Billings (1994) examines the holistic pedagogy to understand the essential values, beliefs and experiences of teachers and why they must parallel those of the students they teach.

## The Role of Race and Culture

Racism in the education system has been long standing in American history and other countries where racial differences exist (Perkins-Gough, 2003; Hidalgo, McDowell & Siddle, 1990). According to Yancey (1996), throughout this nation's history, race has always had a central role; it is part of the history and culture of America and it remains a pervasive element in North American society. Race and ethnicity are not natural categories even though both concepts are often represented as if they were. "Their boundaries are not fixed, nor is their membership uncontested" (Lewis, 2003, p.6). Tatum (1997) explains that race is about who we are, what we do and how we live, whom we interact with, and how we understand ourselves and others.

One hundred years ago race was thought to be biological and racial equality was justified because of race's scientific nature (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007). However, Lewis (2003) explains that racial categories are not merely sociological abstractions but are potent social categories around which people organize their identities, and behaviors that influence people's opportunities and outcomes. It is a way of understanding and interpreting "otherness" as a way of maintaining the categories of "us" and "them", and as a way of marginalizing and excluding certain societal groups from successfully engaging in specific context, such as education (Quisenberry & McIntyre, 1999, p. 113). Therefore race is now commonly thought of as a social construct, in that it is given meaning through social interactions (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007).

Biologically, race is no longer viewed as the color of one's skin, but by their social economic exposure and seized opportunities. According to the American Anthropological Association, the danger in attempting to tie race and biology is not that

individuals are never identical within any group, but that the physical traits used for such purposes may not even be biological in origin (American Anthropological Association, 1997, para. 14). They also stress that if biological information is not the objective, biological-sounding terms add nothing to the precision, rigor, or factual basis of information being collected to characterize the identities of the American population (American Anthropological Association, 1997, para. 15).

In schools, especially, race continues to be reified and shapes students' experiences and their outcomes. They are arguably one of the central institutions involved in the drawing and redrawing of racial lines. Schools are involved in framing ideas about race and in struggles around racial equity. According to Lewis (2003), they serve as a sorting mechanism, providing different students with different kinds of experiences, opportunities, and knowledge, which then shape their future opportunities. Though schools do not explicitly "teach racial identity", schools are settings where people acquire some version "of the rules of racial classification" and of their own racial identity (Lewis, 2003, p.4). As Lewis (2003) further explains, race is not merely a fixed characteristic of children that they bring to school and then take away intact but something they learn about through school lessons and through interactions with peers and teachers.

According to Delpit (1988), a key problem in education is the distinction made by educators, policy makers, and the general public between "our children" and "other people's children". She argues that given the persistent beliefs in the universality and superiority of white middle-class culture, many students are seen as different or "other" for being poor, of color, or from immigrant families. Delpit (1995) also concludes that

the education system is built upon a “culture of power” to which only some students have access. And not belonging to this “culture of power”, children are excluded from the social, political, and economic opportunities to which formal education provides access. Instead, they are pushed towards the margins of academic failure and continued social disenfranchisement (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999)

Ladson-Billings (1992) argues that issues of race are tied to more macro-social problems that the society has not and apparently will not address. As a result, we tend to remain silent about issues of racism and ethnocentrism both in the United States as a whole and within the educational profession in particular, engaging in what has been described as a “conspiracy of silence that promotes the ill effects of racism and reduces the opportunities for change and progress” (Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998, p.4). Ladson-Billings (1992) suggests that one way educators can address the need to bring race to the foreground is by make race problematic and open to critique.

In reference to culturally relevant pedagogy, culture refers to a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). It determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these in turn, affect how we teach and learn. George and Louise Spindler (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1994) explain how culture affects the educational process:

Teachers carry into the classroom their personal cultural background. They perceive students, all of whom are cultural agents, with inevitable prejudice and preconception. Students likewise come to school with personal cultural backgrounds that influence their perceptions of teachers, other students, and the

school itself, Together students and teachers construct, mostly without being conscious of doing it, an environment of meanings enacted in individual and group behaviors, of conflict and accommodation, rejection and acceptance, alienation and withdrawal. (p. 9)

Additionally, culture is a variable that is often overlooked as a function of student success. Teachers are often among that group most reluctant to acknowledge the extent to which white-supremacist thinking informs every aspect of our culture including the way we learn, the content of what we learn, and the manner in which we are taught (bell hooks, 2003). In many cases, teachers have more positive expectations for white students than for black students. Irvine (1990) found that the student's race, culture or class cues teachers to apply generalized expectation, which makes it difficult for teachers to develop specific expectations for individual black students. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), "culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment (p. 8).

#### The Role of the African American Teacher

When we study ways of closing the achievement gap between African American and white children, we must focus on devising curriculum and instructional strategies that will produce equal educational outcomes for all children (Hale, 1994) and to do this we must focus on the characteristics of the classroom teacher. In her study of successful elementary school teachers of African American children, Ladson-Billings (1994), found that teachers who were family oriented, cultivated relationships beyond the classroom, encouraged collaborative learning through building a community of learners and created an atmosphere of trust and support were successful with African American students. In

fact, the entire class was expected to rise or fall together, and it was in the best interest of everyone to ensure that each individual member of the group was successful (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Schools play a role in offsetting maladaptive behavior, and in promoting engagements and academic success among students (Sanders, 2000). Most students are profoundly influenced by their school experiences, not only in terms of formal academic learning but also in the development of a sense of self. Research conducted by Sanders (2000), suggests that one way in which schools influence students is by fostering supportive relationships between and among students, teachers and other caring adults. Studies further maintain that because of their knowledge of and investment in the communities of their students, black teachers were able to create home-like atmospheres in schools where students experienced a continuity of expectations and interactional patterns between their homes and schools, their parents and their teachers (Walker, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

There is considerable research suggesting that the relationship between teachers and their students can affect student achievement and overall educational success (Morris & Morris, 2000; Sanders, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). At the very least, students need to know that adults in their lives truly care about them. From this foundation, trusting relationships develop and serve as essential context for learning (Sanacore, 2004). While this bridge from caring to learning is necessary for a successful career, according to Sanacore (2004), it is vitally important for African American children who tend to experience more challenges in their personal and academic lives.



White educators may treat students differently out of prejudice, conscious or unconscious, or from a perspective that African Americans have different needs and abilities (Casteel, 1998). Regardless of the cause of racial prejudice, teacher interaction and treatment of students in integrated classrooms is not equal. Unfortunately, many teachers, white and black alike feel ill-prepared for or incapable of meeting the educational needs of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). And based on current research, it is critical to have teachers who are sensitive to cultural and social issues and circumstances of African American children (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Gay, 2000). According to Lusane (1992), these teachers must be aware of the communities in which they work and they must transmit a sense of high expectations of the students. In addition, understanding the circumstances out of which the children come would help teachers better understand how to relate to the children and, thus how to teach them (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Walker, 1996). According to Lorraine Lawrence (as cited in Foster, 1997, p. 98), a veteran teacher from Florida,

In order to teach well, I think you have to think about students as if they belonged to you. If teachers showed the same concern, interacted with their students and treated them as if they were their own children, schools would have more success with greater number of students...The very best teachers can get all students to achieve.

#### A Culturally Relevant Approach to Teaching

Today's classrooms are becoming more reflective of America's multiracial and multiethnic society. Demographic shifts in the population clearly indicate that educators must pay attention to cultural and racial diversity as they begin to develop new

approaches to teaching, curriculum, and other school practices (Howard, 1999). The U.S. Census Bureau (2000, in Ladson-Billings, 2005) estimated that people of color made up 28% of the nation's population in 2000 and predicted that they would make up 38% in 2025 and 50% in 2050. Forty percent of the students enrolled in the nation's schools in 2001 were students of color. However, these disadvantaged groups now compose less than 15% of the teaching force, and less than 12% of school administration (Status of the American School Teacher, 1992 in Gay, 2000).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a broad approach to successful and democratic teaching and learning practices with students and is grounded in the ideological foundations of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 1995). Therefore changes in demographics are having a profound effect on education (Jones, 2004), and racial inequality in schools is talked about today most often in the context of multicultural education.

Traditionally directed at improving the school experience of students of color, multiculturalism has typically focused on either teaching the culturally different in order to assimilate them into the mainstream population or increasing the sensitivity of dominant group children in order to help all children get along (Gay, 2000; Casteel, 1998). Multicultural education provides a framework for examining some of the contradictions in schools today (Marable, 1996). It is designed to bring about educational equity for all students, including those from different races, ethnic groups, social classes, and exceptionality (Jones, 2004).

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been described by a number of researchers as an effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students

(Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). And although called by many different names, including culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, reflective, mediated, contextualized, synchronized, and responsive, the ideas about why it is important to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students remains the primary goal (Gay, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1992) explained that culturally relevant teaching serves to empower students to the point where they are able to critically examine educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as “an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). It extends mainly from the scholarship on the work and lives of African American teachers. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a theoretical framework designed solely from looking at the practices of teachers who were successful with African American children. It is commonly used in qualitative research because it specifically addresses the characteristics, beliefs, life experiences, and pedagogical practices of African American teachers as well as highlights the role they play in enhancing the schooling experiences of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

Most notably, Ladson-Billings (1994) is credited with the concept of “culturally relevant pedagogy,” which is explored in great depth in her book, *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*, where she asked the African American community in her study to identify good teachers regardless of their race and develop profiles of those teachers. In her theoretical work, Ladson-Billings (1995) identifies three

criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy; the pedagogy must be aimed at academic achievement, must demonstrate respect for and encouragement of students ability to operate within the context of their own culture, and must develop the students ability to critique social inequalities.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to produce students who achieve academically, who demonstrate cultural competence, and who can both understand and critique the existing social order (Lane, 2006). In this instance, the notion of “cultural relevance” moves beyond languages to include other aspects of student and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Thus, Ladson-Billing’s (1994) culturally relevant approach to teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. It teaches students to think critically by having them make connections between school knowledge and the community (Lane, 2006).

In her work, Ladson Billings (1994) also delineated three broad characteristics that represent a range of teaching behaviors that serve to theoretically underpin culturally relevant pedagogy: the conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers, the manner in which social relations are structured by culturally relevant teachers, and the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers. This literature also maintains that successful teachers of children of color are aware of the cultural distinctiveness and strengths of these students. As a result, culturally relevant teaching is a successful pedagogy because it is "relevant" to, or mindful of, the cultures embodied by students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

In particular, culturally relevant educators are conscious of the presence of racism which surrounds students with distorted and overwhelmingly negative images of the

cultures, histories, and possibilities of people of color. Culturally relevant teachers feel personally, and not simply professionally, invested in educating children of color. Often this commitment derives from the fact they share and understand the culture of their students. Thus, these educators are able to avoid the problem of "cultural mismatch" that has often been cited as a major problem between white teachers and students of color (Irvine, 1990). Rather, they successfully encourage their students to be competent and comfortable in both their home culture and the larger society. Because culturally relevant educators view education for children of color as an additive rather than subtractive process, they resist the common assessment of African American students: that their culture is an obstacle to their learning, and that academic success for these children necessitates their becoming disconnected from their culture or "raceless" (Gay, 2000; Villegas, 1991; Fordham, 1988).

Culturally relevant teachers feel personally, and not simply professionally, invested in their educating practices. These teachers are aware not only of the cultural norms, values, and practices of their students, but more important, of their political realities and aspirations. As a result, their pedagogy is relevant to the political experiences of inequity and disenfranchisement of their students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Gay (2000) defines the term culturally responsive as the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, cultural frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive pedagogy has the following characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritage.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

A persistent theme in the literature on culturally relevant teaching is the quality of the relationships that teachers establish with their students. Therefore, according to Ladson-Billings (1994), the role teachers' play in the lives of these students is critical to their overall academic success. Looking at the curriculum through a cultural lens, Ladson-Billings (1994) discovered that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning by "using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 382).

In addition to improving academic achievement, culturally responsive approaches to teaching are committed to helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire an ethic of success (Gay, 2000). However, culturally responsive teaching alone cannot solve all the problems of improving the education of marginalized students of color. Other aspects of the educational enterprise

such as funding, administration, and policy making, must also be reformed, and major changes must be made to eliminate the social, political and economic inequities rampant in society at large (Gay, 2000).

### Summary

The field of education is both a rewarding and yet challenging profession. It is a profession in which those committed to the field leave lasting impressions on the lives of the children they teach. Everyday across the country teachers directly influence the moral and intellectual growth, development and achievement of the students within their classrooms. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), in today's society the quest for a quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community because African Americans are burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, a separate and unequal education, and a relegation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools.

It is evident that a strong relationship between the teacher and the student is an important aspect of the academic achievement of African-American students. It is also equally evident that the power of the dominant group still exists within America's public school system. This power is what determines who will and will not achieve academically. As an educator of minority students, I feel empowered to know that I can make a significant difference in their academic journeys. Conducting this research will allow me to uncover the successful curriculum pedagogies and strategies from the segregated classrooms of the past that I can use to work with the African-American students that I teach each day.

Using culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical lens for this study enables me to bring to the forefront the importance of adapting teaching strategies to fit the needs of African American students so that they can perform well academically in the classroom. Therefore, this study serves to promote that an understanding of the circumstances out of which the children you teach have come is vital to their overall success. Hopefully, through continued research, one day African Americans will have the same educational opportunities regardless of their skin color or neighborhood, but in the meantime we must provide them with the best teaching approaches that are available. In the words of our former U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige, “Equality of opportunity must be more than just a statement of law; it must be a matter of fact. And factually speaking, this country does not yet promote equal opportunity for millions of children” (Meyer & Nidiry, 2004, p. 16).



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Oral History

Qualitative research is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience, chiefly because teachers, like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Oral history is a qualitative research method that seeks and records answers to questions in an effort to understand the experiences of others (Chiang, 1997). For this reason, oral history was the qualitative method used to explore the “lived experiences” of the retired African American participants who participated in this study. I selected oral history methods because they allowed me to gather and represent the stories that the participants told about their experiences of teaching before and after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Therefore, by using oral history methods, this study provided insight into the career histories of the participants.

Using a culturally relevant lens to view the data, this study used oral history to describe the individual teaching practices of the three retired African American teacher participants. Through oral histories, the participants were able to recollect their experiences and construct the outlines of their own personal narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). The culturally relevant framework allowed me to examine the experiences of the participants and then descriptively outline these experiences as they described their philosophies, beliefs and practices about teaching African American children in both a segregated and desegregated classroom environment.

### *An Oral History Approach*

The development of oral history as a unique method of qualitative research has been credited to the works of Allan Nevins' Oral History Project (Dunaway & Baum, 1996). Nevins' work began at Columbia University in 1948 and resulted in the appearance of Columbia University's Oral History Collection (1960). Today, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identify oral history as one of three closely related lines of inquiry that focuses specifically on story. It is regularly defined as some variation of "the recorded reminiscences of a person who has first hand knowledge of any number of experiences" (Janesick, 2007, p. 111). Furthermore, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. As a result, oral history can be defined as an approach in which the researcher gathers personal recollections of events, their causes, and their effects from an individual or several individuals (Creswell, 1998).

For the purpose of this study, I used the oral histories of my participants to uncover themes about the appropriate cultural pedagogies that were used with African American students in the segregated and desegregated classroom environment. Additionally, the oral histories were also used to explore the overall school climate in both of these school environments. The goal of using this approach was to use the experiences of the participants to construct a blueprint of successful teaching strategies for African American children.

### *Participant Selection*

In order to provide information-rich cases, qualitative research calls for purposeful sampling. The goal of purposeful sampling in this study was to find three

teachers who could provide detailed information about their teaching practices in both a segregated and desegregated school environment. Although there are many types of purposeful sampling procedures, the researcher used criterion based sampling for this study. The three participants selected for this study met the following criteria for selection: each participant had a personal relationship with the researcher, had retired from the same public school system in Georgia; had taught for over twenty years and had taught in a segregated and desegregated public school in Georgia.

Prior to starting this research project, the researcher made initial contact with the selected participants to explain the purpose of the study and to solicit their help. Because the participants knew of the researcher prior to the study, rapport was easily established. And for the purpose of this oral history project, the three participants each agreed that the use of their real identities was permissible.

The three participants in this study will be Ms. Sarah Townsend who began teaching in 1966; Ms. Vallie VanBuren who started teaching in the early 1950's and Ms. Louise Radden who began her teaching career in the early 1940's.

#### Data Collection Methods

##### *Oral History Interviews*

Oral history as a form of qualitative inquiry has allowed researchers to access and to document information that has previously been unavailable (Askew, 2004). Therefore, the primary data gathering techniques for this study were oral history interviews that were conducted with each participant. I selected to use oral history interviews because they are autobiographical in nature and elicit stories about one's personal experiences. According to Creswell (1998), the cornerstone for writing an oral history is the open-

ended interview. However, there are various strategies for obtaining an oral history ranging from using a structured set of guiding questions in which the researchers' intentions are uppermost to asking participants to tell their own stories in their own way, in which case the participants' intentions are uppermost (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

In designing this study, the researcher recognized the significance of oral history research in producing historical text about minorities in the field of education. Thus, for the purpose of this study, oral history interviews were conducted to gather first-person accounts from the three participants in reference to their own individual experiences and practices in both a segregated and desegregated school environment. The scholarly oral history research model found in Sitton, Mehaffy, and Davis' (1983) *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers and Others* was used to guide the interview process for this study. According to Askew (2004, p. 59), the stages of scholarly oral history research identified by Sitton et al. include:

1. Pre-interview Research—Pre-interview research must be well informed. First the topic must be selected and participants identified. The researcher should consult many primary and secondary sources to validate and ascertain. Following this process, a pre-interview guide should be developed. This guide is a roadmap that should direct the initial interview. The interview guide is not a script, but a set of guiding questions to use with each participant.
2. Initial Interview—This interview is based on background information gained during the pre-interview research. This interview sets the tone for the series of interviews. The initial interview should begin with basic identifiers i.e. who, what, when, and where. The interview should then move into substantive

themes. All non-verbal oral author explanations should be translated into explicit verbal accounts. The interview must be conducted in a comfortable noise free environment. The proper spellings of people, place, object and event names must be clarified before the close of the interview. Throughout the interview session, the researcher should function as the consummate listener.

3. Tape Analysis—This procedure allows the researcher to conduct more precise interview sessions as the interview process continues. Interview tapes should be analyzed for content and breaks in interviewer technique. The researcher should conduct the tape analysis.
4. Re-interviews—These sessions help to thicken data, as respondents can be asked to rediscuss certain items or produce additional details, clarification, or remembrances. Further, respondents can be asked to particularize general answers or explain special terminology.

Individual interviews were conducted with each participant. Pre-interview information was gathered during the literature review process and a list of guiding questions were prepared in advance to guide participants to speak about their experiences as educators of African American children (Appendix A). Following this model, the three teachers were asked to participate in two interviews. The first interview was approximately 2 hours in length. This interview sought to detail the factual account of the participants' teaching career, to recall practices and procedures used in the classroom, and ascertain the personal reflections of the school setting and the people in the schools. The second interview was shorter, approximately half an hour and was held to simply

confirm the data received at the first interview and to seek points of clarification where needed. The goals of the interviews were to capture the deep meaning of each participant's experiences in his or her own words (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

All interviews were conducted at the home of the participants and scheduled at the participants' convenience. I started each interview by asking initial questions that had been pre-written, but throughout the interview I engaged the participants into ongoing conversations by expanding the questions based on their responses. This technique of expanding questions is referred to as probing (Patton, 2002). Probing is defined as "asking follow-up question to go deeper into the interviewee's responses. As such, probes should be conversational, they should be offered in a natural style and voice, and used to follow up initial responses" (Patton, 2002, p. 372). Interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The participants received a copy of the transcription to check for accuracy of their comments during the second interview. A third, informal, unstructured meeting in which the researcher's mother accompanied her to the homes of the other two participants was held in order to discuss the research findings and to "member check" the information collected. Phone-interviews were also conducted to clarify information. Transcriptions were then edited and coded for analysis.

### Data Analysis

A three-step process (Mertens, 1998) was used to code and analyze the data. The first step in the process was open coding. This step involved naming and categorizing phenomena as I read the transcripts line by line. I utilized this process of coding as I looked for patterns and themes in the responses from each participant. Multiple readings of the transcriptions allowed me to begin highlighting common themes. The second step

in the analysis process was axial coding. During this phase I made connections within the data that was previously coded in order to determine relationships between the practices used in both the segregated and desegregated school environment. The final step in this process was selective coding, which involved conceptualizing the data into main themes. The transcripts were coded manually; with acute awareness to similarities and differences in the teaching practices of the participants before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The data was presented as a narrative about the experiences of the three African American teacher participants.

### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is linked to the researcher's ability to create within the research community a basis for consideration of the researcher's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify three domains through which the trustworthiness of a qualitative study may be established- validity, reliability and generalizability.

### *Validity and Reliability*

Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. Therefore, the validity of an oral history research project is dependent on the degree of conformity between what the participants' report concerning past events and the events themselves, as reported by other primary sources. However, the dual aims of oral history have not precluded the need of researchers to seek accuracy in the reports of participants (Dunaway & Baum, 1996; Ritchie, 1995). However, for the purpose of establishing validity, pre-interview

information pertaining to when and how schools in this Georgia community integrated was used by the researcher to validate the reports of the participants.

Reliability is a term that defines the consistency of a study's findings. In terms of oral history research, reliability is depended on the ability of the researcher to prompt participants to consistently report the same story, about the same events, over time (Dunaway & Baum, 1996; Ritchie, 1995). Therefore, for the purpose of establishing reliability, the researcher probed the participants concerning details of the same career events that occurred over time. In addition, because two of the three participants worked in the same school at the same time at some point in their careers, the researcher was able to cross-check information between participants.

Thus, it is important to establish validity and reliability in which there is correspondence between the way the participants actually perceive their teaching practices and the way that the researcher portrayed their viewpoints. In the present study, the researcher used the following measures to establish validity and reliability (Askew, 2004):

1. The audio-taped interviews were analyzed for lapses in content and contradictions in responses. Follow-up interviews were conducted to fill in lapses in content.
2. Interviews were compared against pre-interview information gathered during the literature review and other existing primary sources to check for validity. The dates and events shared by the participants correlated with the integration plan that was implemented in the community in which the study took place.
3. Participants' clarifications and expanded explications formed the base from which interview transcripts were edited for accuracy. .



This process helped to thicken the data, to reveal contradictions, and it allowed the researcher to seek clarity in the participants' remembrances.

### *Generalizability*

According to Ritchie (1995), oral history research is used to study the heritages of populations whose histories have not been well researched or recorded. Additionally, oral history research has been used in the exploration of the histories of ethnic minority and other non-majority culture groups (Askew, 2004). This study was designed to focus on the experiences, beliefs and practices of retired African American teachers who taught in public schools in Georgia before and after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Thus, the results are not intended to predict that every retired African American teacher would have the same experiences, beliefs and practices as the participants.

### Ethical Considerations

Traditionally ethical concerns in a qualitative study have revolved around the topics of receiving consent by the subject after having carefully and truthfully informed him or her about the research, protecting the identity of the subject, and protecting the subject from physical, emotional, or any other kind of harm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). For the purpose of this study, after thoroughly understanding the research project, each participant gave the researcher oral consent to participate in this study. In addition, each participant also granted the researcher permission to use her real name and other identifying information such as towns and school names within the study. Finally, the ethical guidelines of the Oral History Association were followed for this study (Oral History Association, 2000).

In addition, for the present study, initial interview sessions were set up and conducted only after permission was granted by the dissertation chair and IRB approval was granted.

### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a detailed description of the design and procedures that were used to conduct this study. This study is an oral history project that was guided by a culturally relevant framework. By exploring the researcher's role, this chapter provided detailed information on the researcher's approach to the study to gain accurate data from the participants while accounting for trustworthiness. By exploring oral history theory, the researcher provided background for the rationale behind the oral history research method. This methodology recognized the importance of the African American teacher as a valuable informant in researching classroom teaching practices. Chapter 4 will present the oral histories of the three African American participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### ORAL HISTORY: TEACHING AND LEARNING IN GEORGIA COMMUNITIES BEFORE AND AFTER BROWN V. BOARD

The purpose of this study was to uncover teaching practices of African American teachers before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* case and to ascertain what practices could possibly be used to improve the education of African American students in today's racially segregated school environments. Ms. Sarah Townsend, Ms. Vallie Van Buren and Ms. Louise Radden, were the three teacher participants in this study. The three teachers selected for this study were specifically asked to share their oral histories about their teaching experiences in relation to the students, parents and overall school climates. They were asked to reflect on the different pedagogies used as well as any other school practices that affected the overall achievement of their African American students.

A common strand between the participants in this study was that each participant worked in the same school system before, during and after schools in Georgia observed the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. This chapter presents the oral history of teaching and learning in Georgia communities through the eyes of these participants.

#### Learning in Segregated Schools

Historically, due to the inequality of facilities, lack of transportation, shorter school terms, teacher-pupil conflicts, overcrowding, poor teaching, and poor student attendance segregated African American schools have been depicted as inferior educational institutions (Walker, 2000). However, oral history accounts from those that attended segregated schools reveal that the initiative and ingenuity of principals, teachers,

parents, and community residents enabled the schools to succeed in providing good programs for children in their communities (Morris and Morris, 2002). This oral history study begins with the personal accounts of the three participants as they describe their own educational experiences being educated in a segregated school system.

*Mrs. Sarah Townsend*

The first participant in this study is Ms. Sarah Townsend. Ms. Townsend was born in 1945 in Prosperity, South Carolina, a small town located in southern Newberry County. Her parents were both educators and they stressed education as a means to a better life for their five children. As she reflected on her early educational experiences, she recalled growing up in a community surrounded by family. “My grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins all lived, worked and went to school in the same community”. She recalled,

I attended an elementary school in Prosperity and to be honest I don’t remember if the school had a name or not, but it was a two room school with two teachers. My father was the principal as well as the high school teacher and the other teacher was my teacher, Mrs. Mary Alice Gamble. She taught from first grade up to the fifth grade.

At the age of eight, Ms. Townsend’s father relocated the family to Columbia, South Carolina because he felt “the schools in the city offered a better education than the schools in the country”. Upon arriving in Columbia, she attended a small segregated, neighborhood elementary school and then later went on to attend Booker T. Washington High School, a segregated high school in Columbia. At the time, Booker, as she fondly referred to it, was one of three schools for blacks in Columbia. Booker opened in 1916 as

the second elementary school for blacks in the city of Columbia and in 1918 became the only high school for blacks (Edwards, 1998). It was a relatively large high school and students from other surrounding towns attended Booker. According to Ms. Townsend, there were 212 students in her graduating class of 1966 and over 900 students in all.

Booker offered traditional courses such as, English, math, history and science for grades nine through twelve. The school also offered classes for students that were interested in auto mechanics, home economics, and cosmetology. In addition, the students at Booker could participate in extracurricular activities and clubs such as sports, band, dance, and chorus.

Although she graduated from high school eight years after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision to integrate America's public schools, Ms. Townsend recalled that the schools in Columbia were "very much segregated". She went on to explain that "during that time, schools were operating under the separate but equal laws" and because she was so young she really didn't know much about the *Brown* ruling. However, as she remembered her own schooling experiences, she recalled that the schools were "very much unequal". She remembered, "having books from the white children's school. They passed them on down to us; even the old raggedy magazines. In fact, that was all that we had in our library there in the school in Prosperity". In spite of the outdated resources and books, "we were told that we were being offered the same curriculum as the white students at the all-white high school" Ms. Townsend said. And although unequal, Ms. Townsend described the segregated school environment in which she grew up as a loving and caring place to learn.

It was a place where students could see African American adults dress and

conduct themselves in a professional manner. The female teachers always wore dresses and pantyhose and the male teachers always wore ties. The teachers there really cared about the children. The counselors cared about the children and they tried to make sure that we got a very good education, and they tried to make sure that each child furthered their education, and they taught us the importance of getting a very good education, and not dropping out of school. So they encouraged us to go on to college and get a higher education.

Booker T. Washington High School operated within South Carolina's dual educational system of "separate but unequal" until 1970 and finally it closed its doors in 1974, after fifty-four years of educating African American children. In 1975, the school board sold the land in which Booker was built to the University of South Carolina. As Ms. Townsend remembered it, "Booker was in good condition, it had just opened a new auditorium, but there was a financial issue in which the school board opted to let the University system purchase the land." She continued to explain how "there was great opposition to the closing of Booker and the community was devastated by the board's decision".

After graduating from high school, Ms. Townsend attended Allen University, one of the oldest historically black universities in America, located in Columbia South Carolina. Allen University, a Christian liberal arts college opened its doors in 1870 in order to provide educational opportunities for newly freed slaves. Both of Mrs. Townsend's parents received their teaching certificates from Allen.

My mother and father both finished Allen University and later became teachers.

My mother earned a degree in teaching, but my father finished Allen University in

the eighth grade and at that time they could go back and get a license to teach their children. After my father finished Allen he went back to Prosperity and he taught in a one room church school. Back at that time, the churches had to build their own schools. The churches would find a piece of land and then would come together as a community to build their own school. And the state did pay them a salary, but the state did not pay them the same thing that they paid the white teachers because they [black teachers] did not teach long, the only time that they could teach was the time that the children were not working the farm land.

When asked why she wanted to be a teacher, she explained that “teaching was one of the only things that African-Americans could do when I came along. You could either be a preacher, a teacher or a nurse and I think it was really a nurse's aide. So at that time your choices were really limited”. While attending the church-affiliated, historically black university in her hometown, she majored in elementary education and in 1966 she went on to receive her bachelor’s degree in education.

*Mrs. Louise Radden*

The second participant in this study is Ms. Louise Radden, who is affectionately known by her friends and family as Ms. Lou. Ms. Lou was born in 1919 in Hancock County, Georgia, a small town located outside of Sparta. She was the only girl of three children. While growing up in Hancock, she attended a small segregated elementary school. She didn’t remember much about her first elementary school, including the name because at the age of seven, her father, a Methodist minister, moved the family to Allendale, SC where he served as pastor of a small church. While living in Allendale, Ms. Lou attended Leesville-Batesville Elementary, a first through eighth grade

segregated school for blacks. It was the only school in the county that was open for blacks. And although many blacks did not attend high school, after completing elementary school, Ms. Lou opted to continue her education by enrolling at Walterboro High School. It was the only high school for students in the county and students could take classes in English, Arithmetic, Geography and Writing. “Attending high school was a privilege when I was growing up. Most children finished after 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then worked picking cotton in one of the many cotton fields that existed in Walterboro” she said.

According to Ms. Lou, neither of the two schools exists today, “they have been gone for a long time”, but she has fond memories of her elementary and high school years. At 89 years of age, Ms. Lou still recalled that her “favorite class every year in elementary school was music.” She also recalled that “the black schools functioned as extended families. They were places where the teachers genuinely cared about the well-being and futures of the African American children in which they were given the charge of educated and training to function in a segregated world”.

She explained how educational opportunities were limited for African Americans during the 1930’s and 1940’s, but she was “blessed to have an educated mother and father who stressed education. They had both attended college and as a child, I knew that not going to college was not an option in our household”. After graduating from high school in 1934, she went on to attend Benedict College, a historically black college in Columbia, South Carolina. In fact, it is directly across the street from Ms. Townsend’s alma mater, Allen University. When asked what inspired her to go so far from home to attend College, Ms. Lou explained that she was simply following in her mother’s as well



as her elder brother's footsteps by attending Benedict. At Benedict, Ms. Lou decided to major in elementary education, because that was the only option for black women at that time-to be a teacher. In 1938 she received her teaching certificate in elementary education. Ms. Lou later went back and took method courses in teaching and learning during the summer months so that she could maintain her certification. She received her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Benedict College in 1944.

*Ms. Vallie Van Buren*

The final participant in this study is Ms. Van Buren, who is fondly referred to as Ms. Van by those who know her. Ms. Van was born in 1929 in Fulton, Missouri where she attended George Washington Carver Elementary School. She described her early educational experiences;

My elementary school went through the eighth grade. It was a school where the teachers cared about us and inspired us to continue our educations. Upon completing the eighth grade, blacks had a choice of working or continuing there education. So the teachers really tried to instill in us the importance of getting a higher education. In my hometown, there were no high schools for blacks during this time and students had to travel twenty-four miles to Jefferson City in order to attend the only high school that did allow blacks to attend. It was a small high school called Lincoln University Laboratory High School. It was located on the same campus as Lincoln University, a historically black university that was founded in 1866 for the special benefit of freed African Americans.

When asked why she wanted to become a teacher, Mrs. Van explained that "when I came up there was not much that you could do. Blacks had maid and babysitting

jobs, but I had always wanted to be a teacher”. According to Ms. Van, she started out with the little children in the neighborhood, “they would come up and I would help them with their homework and things like that. It was just embedded in me that that is what I wanted to do”. So after graduating from high school in the mid 1940’s, Mrs. Van attended the college that was located on her high school campus. She recalled that, “I was fortunate enough to attend Lincoln in Jefferson City, Missouri where I studied to become a teacher”. In 1950, Ms. Van graduated from Lincoln with a degree in elementary education.

### Teaching in a Segregated School

Although the *Brown v. Board of Education* holding called for an end to school segregation in 1954, schools in Georgia were still racially segregated institutions of learning during the 1960’s and early 1970’s . In fact, when *Brown v. Board of Education* was passed, the Georgia School Board required public school teachers to sign a pledge that they would not teach in integrated schools or they would lose their teaching license (Cashin, 1985). The Georgia State Board decided that “any teacher who dared to enter racially mixed classes would be barred from the classroom for life” (Cashin, 1985, p. 102). This was the first attempt to slow the process of desegregation, and it worked for a while because the teachers were afraid to lose their teaching jobs. Thus, the schools in Georgia remained segregated for more than ten years after the landmark *Brown* decision.

Ms. Townsend began her teaching career in 1966 when she was recruited during a job fair to relocate to the small city of Sparta, Georgia. Ms. Townsend’s first teaching position was a third grade class of 32 students at Hancock Central High School in a very rural part of town. She recalled that, “Hancock Central High School was actually an

elementary and high school combined from first through twelfth grade and that it was the only school designated for black children in Sparta”. Therefore, all of the black children in the town attended the same school for their entire grade school and high school education.

As Ms. Townsend reflected on her first year of teaching, she described how far behind academically many of the students were when it came to their reading and math skills. “I remember thinking that the students that year were extremely slow, because I was expecting the children to be able to read and these children were not able to read”. However in any case, she attributed this to the fact that during the fall of the year the children hardly came to school because they had to stay out to pick the cotton and harvest the crops. So she really didn’t know if their inability to read and do math was because they were from a very rural area or if they had just not been taught to read at that point.

Despite the fact that some of the students could not read, Ms. Townsend was determined to teach her students to read and to excel academically. She recalled that “overall the entire school was committed to increasing the academic achievement of all of the students”. In fact, she truly believed that “there was a true sense of caring throughout the school”. Everyone stressed academic excellence because “we knew that getting a good education was the only way for our children to compete in the segregated society and to make things better economically” she said. The principal made regular visits to the individual classrooms to talk to students about the importance of getting a good education. According to Ms. Townsend, “he would reward students with special treats for making all A’s and B’s”.

In the classroom, Ms. Townsend explained how she used a variety of instructional

strategies to help her students learn the academic concepts being taught. She described a classroom environment in which the students were actively involved and engaged in the learning process.

We did a lot of role-playing in the classroom, because there was no such thing as taking your children on a field trip or searching different places on the internet. So we would take imaginary field trips by role playing. The students would draw, sing songs, and act out simulations of what they were learning in the classroom. We also used a lot of hands on activities to keep the children involved in the learning process. For example, I remember teaching math skills by starting a school store right in the classroom where students talked about selling items that their parents sharecropped. In fact, I taught my students about the harvest because they were familiar with harvesting crops and we talked about consumers and producers. So they learned a great deal by participating in hands-on activities.

In addition, during her first year of teaching, Ms. Townsend explained that parental involvement was a major component of the learning process for students in the segregated school. Therefore, she stressed the importance of a good teacher-parent relationship.

I tried to work along with the parents, because I have always believed that it was extremely important to have a good parent-teacher relationship for the child to succeed. And during that year, I became very close with the majority of my parents. And I tried to teach the parents the importance of helping their children at home with their studies and homework.

Ms. Townsend remarked, “The parents were very trusting of teachers and they just expected you to take care of their children and do for them and give them the best education possible.” The parents were also described as very involved and caring. Due to this positive parent-teacher relationship there was very little misbehavior at school. Ms. Townsend remembered that during the time of segregation, the students were very obedient. “There were very few behavior problems in the classroom, because the students knew that we would have paddled them at the school and then walk to their homes after school to inform their parents and they would get spanked again at home” she said.

After completing her first year of teaching at Hancock Central High School, Ms. Townsend did acknowledge that “some of the students mastered the required curriculum for the year and some of them did not.” She also acknowledged that she “never gave up the hope that every child could learn. And although every child did not master the required material they all made great progress from where they had started at the beginning of the year”.

In 1966, while teaching in Sparta, Georgia, Ms. Townsend met and became friends with Ms. Lou, a fellow elementary school teacher at Hancock Central High School. At this time, Ms. Lou had been teaching at Central for eighteen years and was currently teaching the third grade. One of Ms. Lou’s remembrances of her first year at Central in 1948 was that her classes changed in size depending on the time of the year.

Classes would range from 20 to 40 students. And although I officially started working in August, they would have to close school for harvest. So I would work some of August and then September, but school would let out whenever the crops

were ready for picking or chopping or whatever needed to be done. At that time I would drive back to Columbia. When school reopened, I would drive back to Sparta. The students and parents showed their appreciation for the teachers by bringing fresh vegetables to them when school was open.

Ms. Lou taught at Central High School for 23 years where she taught grades third, fourth, fifth and sixth. During her tenure there, she was passionate about teaching her students reading and writing. And just as Mrs. Townsend had, she too acknowledged that the students were slow learners but she also explained that “motivating a child by encouraging him or her is the greatest thing a teacher can do. I would praise my students for what some would consider small steps. I would brag on my students all the time and you should see what some of them did for a little praise or positive attention”. She also recalled that,

In order to get the children motivated in reading and writing I would use a lot of pictures and objects to get them excited about reading to find out about the item. I would also use pictures that the students brought in of their families, or things that were special to them and I would have them write stories about them. It was very important to make the assignments have meaning and to relate to the students. We also used homework that reinforced basic skills and hands-on-activities in class to help students see and understand how getting an education would help them and their families out economically. We used the resources that we had available to help the children learn, but I must add that spanking also helped the children learn.

The kids at Central High School were described by both Ms. Townsend and Ms.

Lou as hardworking, and very lovable; they always wanted to hug and kiss on the teacher. So Ms. Lou expressed that “I had to be very affectionate...I wanted my students to know that the love they had for me was reciprocated”. The parents were also described as very involved and caring. According to Ms. Lou, “they [the parents] would visit the schools, invite you into their homes, cook meals for you and invite you to their churches”.

After Ms. Townsend’s first year at Hancock Central High School, she decided to leave Sparta and relocate to the nearby city of Augusta where she accepted a job at Weed Elementary, a segregated elementary school in the downtown area. Although the school no longer exists today, Ms. Townsend fondly talked about the students, parents and teachers that were part of the Weed Elementary School family. She even shared her year books from the late 1960’s to show what the school building and classrooms looked like during that time. The school was an old building, but it was well-maintained. The classrooms appeared neat and orderly with wooden desk in rows and a chalk board at the front of each classroom. Going through the pages of the yearbook, I noticed that the students were neatly dressed and groomed in each of the pictures and all of the female teachers were dressed in dresses and the male teachers had on suits and ties.

In 1967 Ms. Townsend started her first year at Weed, where she was introduced to her mentor; a veteran teacher known as Mrs. Van. Ms. Van started her teaching career in Fulton, Missouri in the late 1940’s. “I was working down in Southeast Missouri where they had the cotton picking going on. So we were out of school when the children had to go and pick cotton. We would be out of school for six weeks at a time, because they had to pick cotton during the summer time.” Ms. Van taught elementary school in Fulton,

Missouri for six years and then her husband, who was in the military, was transferred to Fort Gordon, Georgia, which is right outside of Augusta.

I remember my first year teaching in Missouri, the parents loved to come to the school and help out. They were visible and actively involved in the overall academic experience of their children. They would call about their children and inquire if they were doing their work or not. During that time, we had to go and visit the children's homes and talk to the parents. The children, parents and teachers were just closer, but now it's just not like that.

After moving to Georgia in the early 1950's, Ms. Van started teaching third grade and then later moved to the fourth grade. Throughout her career, she taught from second grade on up to eighth grade. When asked to reflect on her experiences in the segregated school environment, Ms. Van recalled that "we didn't even know about the segregated schools, we knew we were racially segregated, but it was not until later years that we knew about the fact that we were getting all of the hand-me-downs and things like that. During that time it was just the way of life."

For the first two decades of Ms. Van's career she taught in a segregated school environment. According to her, the school atmosphere was nicer in the segregated schools; the teachers worked well together and they shared their thoughts, ideas and resources. She further explained that "the competitive edge that was sometimes found in the integrated school was absent from the segregated school". In the segregated environment, the principal was supportive and the teachers collaboratively planned lessons together and when they had to purchase resources for the students, the teachers



would also share in expenses. Therefore, based on her experiences, she believes that the “teacher camaraderie was definitely a positive characteristic of the segregated school”.

In reference to the students, Ms. Van acknowledged that some of the students were slow learners, but that by using different teaching methods and strategies the students were able to make appropriate progress each year. Behaviorally, she recalled that the children in the segregated school were very well behaved and that there were rarely any behavior problems. This she believes was due to the fact that the teachers functioned as what she calls “extended family members” in which they would discipline the students when they got out of line; even if it meant giving the student a spanking. The teachers had positive relationships with the parents as well as the students. According to Ms. Van, “the parents trusted the teacher’s judgment when it came to what he or she thought was best for the student”.

Ms. Townsend and Ms. Van worked very closely with one another during their tenure at Weed. Ms. Townsend acknowledged that she learned a great deal from Ms. Van during her first few years about teaching, communicating with parents and keeping discipline in the classroom. The main instructional strategy that Ms. Townsend remembered learning from Ms. Van was how to correlate the math and reading lessons. She recalled, “We would make-up story problems in reading and create math problems for the students to solve. Ms. Van taught me how to relate the word problems to what was happening in the students’ day-to-day lives”.

#### Teaching in a Desegregated School

Although schools in Augusta had first attempted to integrate in the fall of 1964, the newly designed integration zones were not racially mixed, and in the fall of 1967, the

United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare declared the Richmond County plan unacceptable (Cashin, 1985). Hence, in 1969, the board devised a school integration plan in which the students were paired and bussed with an alternate school to achieve desegregation, but according to the participants, this plan was met with great opposition from parents and community members.

From 1967 to 1970, Ms. Townsend worked with the children at Weed Elementary School. However, in 1970, when she was expecting her first child she was forced to resign from her teaching position at Weed. This was due to the school rule that “as soon as a pregnant teacher started showing she could not stay in the classroom”. In January of 1971, she went out on maternity leave and this just happened to be the same year that the school board was in the process of implementing phase I of its new school desegregation plan. Finally, on February 15, 1972, eighteen years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, seven schools were paired in which the students were bussed to attend previously racially segregated schools (Cashin, 1985).

Due to the new plan, when Mrs. Townsend went back to reapply for her previous position she was told that she would have to go to the newly integrated Glenn Hills Elementary School. Glenn Hills was a fairly new elementary school that consisted of grades first through eighth. Under the new integration plan, Glenn Hills transferred three African American teachers in during that first year. So unfortunately, she was forced to leave the comforts of Weed Elementary where she had positive, nurturing and caring relationships with her students, parents and colleagues. However, if she wanted to re-enter the teaching profession, she had no choice but to become one of only three black teachers that would be integrating Glenn Hills. During that first year, 4 out the 28

students that Ms. Townsend had in her class were black and the rest were white. She described her experience with school integration,

The teachers were different and the students were different. The white teachers wanted nothing to do with the black teachers and the black teachers really didn't want to have anything to do with the white teachers either. It really felt like two worlds being collided together without any preparations what so ever. I remember that they set on their side of the room and we set on our side of the room. There was very little communication across racial lines.

At Glenn Hills, Ms. Townsend also taught second grade. She recalled that "my students were very small at the time [second graders] and they were very receptive to me as an African American woman". She continued to explain that "in the beginning the children really didn't know that there was a difference, but very early in the year, the parents taught them that there was a difference and some of the parents did not want their children in my class because I was black".

Where the teachers had once established a cooperative and communal classroom environment in the before *Brown* era, "it was now replaced with independent learning assignments in the segregated classroom setting" Mrs. Townsend said. The family-like classrooms described by the participants did not transfer to the desegregated classroom. According to Ms. Townsend, "this change in the classroom structure has negatively impacted the overall achievement of African American students".

Regardless of the struggle to integrate, Ms. Townsend continued to use teaching strategies and pedagogies that best fit the educational needs of her students. She continued to teach at Glenn Hills for seven years and during that time the racial

composition of the school changed drastically. Cashin (1985) explained that “the immediate result of the court plan to integrate schools in Richmond County was a “white flight” as private schools sprouted up all over the city (p. 122). Therefore, due to white flight and the busing of black students into the school, the black student population increased.

In 1968, Ms Lou left Sparta and relocated to the larger, urban city of Augusta. “I worked at Levi White Elementary, a small segregated school and two years after I got there [to Augusta] they passed the law-that all schools had to be integrated”. While at Levi White, Ms. Lou acknowledged that the school was very similar to Hancock Central High and that she thoroughly enjoyed working with the staff, administration, students and parents there. However, in 1971 when Richmond County integrated all of their schools, Ms. Lou was forced to leave her all-black haven and become part of the integration movement. Ms. Lou recalls that,

They transferred me to Wilkerson Gardens Elementary, where I worked with the upper-class, and what I considered rich white crowd. The students were nice and the parents were somewhat accepting of a black teacher so I had no major problems. However, I did experience a few situations that first year in which the parents were concerned about their children being taught by a black teacher. So I had parents that would come and visit and stay in my class to see if I knew what I was doing, if I knew how to teach.

During this same time, Ms. Van was transferred to a different elementary school and Weed Elementary School was permanently closed down a few years later. She recalled the day that she found out that she was being transferred,

The school superintendent came to the school to meet with the teachers. During this meeting he explained that Weed was being paired and bussed with another elementary school and that teachers in grades third through fifth would be switching teaching positions with the teachers at the other school. Since I was teaching third grade, I was informed that I would be moving to A. Brian Mary Elementary School, a former all-white elementary school on the other side of town.

Ms. Van continued to work in Augusta, where she taught at two integrated elementary schools. According to Ms. Van, in the segregated school, the relationships between teachers, student and parent were ones of positive mutual support. However, the lack of trust, fear of the unknown, and racism prevented positive relationships from being established during the early days of desegregation. Over the years, the relationships did become more positive. She described the “relationships at the segregated school were warm and personal, but the relationships at the desegregated schools were professional”.

In the segregated school, teachers were accustomed to working with a close-knit group of teachers on a regular basis. Ms. Van recalled that “the teachers worked well together and they shared their thoughts, ideas and resources”. At school and in their homes, the teachers in this study met with their colleagues to plan lessons and to coordinate the use of resources. In fact, the relationship between Ms. Townsend, Ms. Van and Ms. Lou represents the notion that long friendships with other African American teachers evolved from the segregated school environment.

## Retirement

In 1981, Ms. Townsend moved to Terrace Manner Elementary, a predominately black school in South Augusta, where she stayed for over twenty years. During her tenure at Terrace Manner, she worked very hard to expose her children to places that otherwise they may have never been able to visit. In 2003, Ms. Townsend reached one of her life-long goals, which was to earn her Masters Degree in Education. And finally in 2005, after 37 years of teaching she retired from the Richmond County School System. However, the following year, she returned to the school system as a part-time reading specialist in one of the county's at-risk, predominately African American elementary schools. She worked with the children there for two years. In 2007 she resigned from her position with the school system and decided to take a job as a recruiter for her college alma mater. Although she is now retired, she continues to work with children as a substitute teacher, through her church and social organizations. She also continues to share her experiences and give her insight to the next generation of educators of African American students.

In 1984 Ms. Van retired after 33 years of service. During the mid 1980's she would periodically substitute teach, but she later joined a senior citizen's group and now enjoys her days and nights traveling and enjoying her retirement. And although Ms. Van taught in two very different school districts in two very different states, her desire and passion for teaching remained consistent. Whether in the rural segregated schools in which she started her career or in the predominately white school in which she ended her career, she was always committed to ensuring that her students were successful.

Ms. Lou remained at Wilkerson Garden for the last nine years of her career and retired in 1977. According to her the students in both environments-segregated and desegregated all learned the same. She acknowledged that there were some “slow white children as well as some slow black children”. However Ms. Lou remembered that one thing did change during the time of desegregation, “in the segregated school, we had to teach and instill in our black students that they had to be twice as good as white children in order to succeed”, but in the desegregated classroom, we had to teach them to be “more than twice as good”. Today, that sense of working hard to be “more than twice as good” as their white counterparts has dissipated and students have become accustomed to being labeled as failures, special education students, or students that “simply can’t learn”.

It has been over thirty years since Ms. Lou was a classroom teacher, but she stays current with the status of today’s educational system by reading and watching television. Ms. Lou acknowledges that there is a crisis in the African American community and its predominately African American schools. However, she does not put the entire blame for failing African American schools on the teachers and the school system. She also finds fault with how parents in today’s society are raising their children. According to her beliefs, “the students of the past weren’t as wild as the students are today with all the new modern inventions, technology and things of that nature. Today, parents let the children get away with too much”. When asked what she thought the new president could do when he took office in 2008 to improve the conditions of today’s education in the African American community, Ms. Lou fondly smiled and replied “now that’s the million dollar question and if I had the answer I would be a millionaire”.

## Summary

This chapter presented the oral history of teaching and learning in Georgia communities through the eyes of the three retired African American teachers who participated in this study. It presented a detailed analysis of their experiences, beliefs and practices in the segregated and desegregated school environment. Their oral history accounts revealed that teachers in the segregated school did indeed exhibit mother-like behaviors, have high expectations, motivate their students to excel, and provide resources to address the perceived needs of their students. As evidenced by these oral histories, it is clear that the segregated school supported and reinforced the aspirations that students could grow up to “be somebody” (Walker, 2000, p. 267).

Chapter 5 will provide a discussion about the themes that emerged from the oral histories presented in this chapter. It will present a detailed analysis and conclusions about the lessons that can be learned from looking back at the segregated classroom.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was meant to settle, once and for all, differences in access to educational opportunity. This decision was hailed as a great victory by many African Americans who believed that it would pave the way to improved education for African American children. However, fifty years after the decision to integrate America's public schools, the nation is engaged in a great discussion, which is also referred to as the achievement gap, about the differences in academic achievement between African American children and their white counterparts. This national discussion not only focuses on the unequal educational opportunity provided by schools, but it also centers on the unequal performances of African American children and their failure to perform academically.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences, beliefs and practices of three retired African American teachers who taught in school environments in Georgia before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. By doing so, this study was conducted to provide insight into how to educate African American students in today's racially resegated public schools and to contribute to the research on successful teaching strategies and practices for African American students. This inquiry used culturally relevant pedagogy as a framework for examining the teaching beliefs and practices of the participants as they reflected upon their experiences in both the segregated and desegregated school environments. The study was conducted as an oral history which gathered the personal recollections of participants' experiences through in-depth interviews.

This study addressed three specific research questions:

1. What differences and similarities do retired African American teachers report about their teaching styles before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?
2. What differences and similarities do retired African American teachers report about the overall school climate, this includes other teachers in the building, and parent and community involvement before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?
3. What do retired African American teachers believe could be done to enhance the overall academic achievement of African American students in today's public schools?

In this chapter these questions and how they were informed by the oral history are discussed in the following three sections: Teaching and learning before *Brown v. Board of Education*, teaching and learning after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the lessons learned from looking back at the segregated classroom. The remainder of the chapter presents the limitations of the study and avenues for further study in the area of the education African American students.

#### Teaching and Learning before *Brown v. Board of Education*

Research suggests that there are specific instructional strategies and practices that contribute to the overall success of African American students. Therefore, a culturally relevant teaching approach filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through the students' cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master. According to Irvine (2002), these strategies include cooperative

learning, values and character education, performance-high involvement and active learning, use of community language and dialect and discipline. The present study confirmed the use of such strategies prior to *Brown v. Board*. Three themes emerged from participants' recollections about their teaching styles. The teachers in this study (a) varied their instructional strategies (b) made the lessons relevant to the lives of their students and (c) exhibited strong classroom management and discipline.

Three additional themes emerged regarding participants' relationships with fellow teachers, parents of the students, and students themselves. The participants also revealed that teachers in the segregated school environment (a) worked collaboratively together to ensure the academic success of their students, (b) had positive relationships with parents and (c) cultivated caring relationships with their students.

#### *Varied Instructional Practices*

Hale's (2001) culturally relevant model for improving the academic performance of poor and working-class African American children focuses on the classroom and the interactions between the teacher and the student. She emphasizes "artistic teaching" that utilizes culturally relevant material, encourages collaboration, and provides children with choices and alternative strategies for achieving specific educational outcomes. In fact, according to Ladson-Billings (1994), teachers who practice culturally relevant methods see their teaching as an art rather than as a technical skill. The participants in this study described how they had to be creative and create their own teaching and instructional games and resources.

Acknowledging that all students do not learn at the same pace, the teachers in this study described how they used a variety of instructional models and strategies to help

their students learn and retain the knowledge that was being taught in the classroom. They identified five effective techniques that they recalled using in the segregated classroom: (1) hands-on activities, (2) cooperative learning groups, (3) one-on-one instruction, (4) peer coaching, and (5) direct teaching. This corresponds directly with Hale's (2001) model which advocates for small group instruction, reading out loud, and using activities that encourage physical movement.

The participants in this study described how they used many hands on activities, role-playing activities, projects and group work to keep the children involved in the learning process. These strategies were implemented due to their belief that children learn better when they are directly involved, in their view, active involvement of students as an instructional strategy was essential to the learning process in the segregated classroom. This was due in part to the lack of materials and resources that were available to the teachers in the segregated schools. Hence, they engaged their students in activities such as, growing plants and vegetables in science class, selling and purchasing products in the classroom store to teach math skills, and finally the teachers in this study recalled using role playing as a method for their students to interact and experience the learning for themselves.

Cooperative learning groups were also described by the participants as an essential component for the teaching and learning of African American students in the segregated environment. During segregation, African Americans commonly worked together in the community for the common good of all African Americans. Therefore, working cooperatively was essential for the overall gains of the African American community. The teachers in this study discussed the importance of teaching students to

work together in the classroom to solve problems. For example, the students worked together on instructional games and other group activities in which they would have to create stories, solve math word problems, or create projects. Research shows that cooperative learning builds upon a cultural value of black people and other students of color, who often prefer cooperation instead of competition as a modality of learning (Irvine, 2002). Thus, cooperative learning builds positive relationships among students, particularly in multicultural and economically diverse classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Therefore, the teachers in this study advocate the use of cooperative learning groups as an instructional strategy in the predominately African American classroom.

In addition, the participants also discussed using one-on-one instruction, peer coaching and direct teaching with students when they were having academic difficulty. They described moments when they would work with students before and after school, as well as moments when they would pair students with peer partners to review concepts. This one-on-one approach was used to personally help failing students get a better understanding of the concepts being taught in the classroom. Direct teaching methods were also used as a teaching strategy to reinforce basic reading, writing and math skills.

Current research supports the use of varied instructional strategies in the African American classroom. Young, Wright and Laster (2005) found that to assist African American children in their achievement, teachers should create movement, provide opportunities for personal oral expression, and create learning activities that are energetic and lively. In addition, Hale (2001) acknowledged that Xeroxed worksheets, workbooks, textbooks, and a skill-and-drill orientation should be diminished and emphasis should be placed instead on hands-on activities, projects, interrelated learning experiences, field

trips speakers, and classroom visitors.

### *Culturally Relevant Lessons*

According to Howard (2001), this is of great importance because the idea of a culturally sensitive pedagogy is tied to the belief that if learning structures and stimuli are grounded in a cultural context familiar to students, the potential for cognitive expansion is enhanced. Thus, culturally relevant instructional strategies transform information about the home and community into effective multicultural classroom practices. Research regarding effective teachers of diverse children has pointed to the importance of fostering curriculum and pedagogy that is culturally responsive (Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000). Therefore, Ladson-Billings (1994) proposed the use of culturally relevant instruction as a method of teaching African American students and improving their overall school success.

The teachers in this study reported that they constantly used a variety of culturally relevant teaching methods to ensure that their students were actively engaged in the learning process. They also recalled using culturally relevant activities, resources, and strategies to organize and implement instruction. For example, the segregated communities where the participants taught were very rural areas and the majority of the students were from sharecropping families. Therefore, the participants would use the idea of sharecropping to teach science, math, writing and reading skills. The teachers would create thematic units that included activities such as having the students write stories about their own experiences as sharecroppers; students would also create timelines and growth charts that monitored the growth of the crops. The teachers also gave examples of using community and civil rights issues to teach lessons about famous

African Americans that were achieving and doing great things outside of the community. This included writing stories about and role-playing the lives of African American pioneers.

### *Strong Classroom Management and Discipline*

The use of strong classroom management and discipline also emerged as a practice shared by all three teachers. In the classroom each teacher had established routines that were followed each day in class. The teacher's expectations were that students came prepared for class and that students began to work when they arrived. The students understood that school was a place of learning and the teachers stressed to them that every student could learn. In her study on segregated schools, Walker (2000) found that teachers in the segregated school were consistently remembered for their high expectations for student success, for their dedication, and for their demanding teaching style. The teachers in this study each acknowledged that establishing routines in the classroom helped facilitate the learning.

Ware (2006) found that culturally responsive African American teachers teach with authority, and Irvine (2002) found that maintaining discipline was an important part of the instructional tactics of black teachers. The established routines that the participants recalled gave order and stability to their classrooms, and their reported use of various instructional strategies kept the students engaged in the learning. Therefore, according to the participants, effective classroom management could only take place with strong and effective discipline. Due to the closeness of the parents and the community as a whole with the school, the participants explained that in the segregated classroom teachers typically had very few behavior issues.

### *Collaboration among Teachers*

The present study revealed that in the segregated school, teachers were accustomed to working with a close-knit group of teachers on a regular basis. It was an overall school climate in which the teachers shared a common background. Therefore, they were comfortable working closely with one another. They would plan together and share their thoughts and ideas about what worked and what did not work in the classroom. They would also help each other create instructional resources and bulletin boards. According to the participants, working collaboratively with other teachers and having a good working relationship with the principal was a significant part of their experience teaching in a segregated school. Each participant expressed the importance of sharing lesson plans, materials and resources, and teaching techniques and strategies. In fact, the mutual support of the African American teachers for one another served as one of the foundational tenets for the three exceptional teachers in this study. Findings of the present study are consistent with ones reported by McClure (2008), who found that a small but growing body of evidence suggests a positive relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement.

### *Positive Parental Relationships*

Research shows a strong correlation between the positive relationships between minority-parent school involvement and minority-student achievement. For example, Jeynes (2005) in his meta-analysis provides evidence that when parents are involved in the overall school process, there are benefits in increased student attendance, positive parent-child communication, improved students attitudes, and more parent-community support of the school. The teachers in the present study expressed the desire for teachers



in the segregated school environment to build strong, positive relationships with their parents and students. They also revealed that parents were visible in the segregated schools and they were actively involved with the overall education of the student.

During segregation, African American parents were committed to ensuring that their children were going to be educated. Hence, they took an active role in the school and cultivated relationships with the teachers. According to the participants, there was an admiration for the teachers and the overall educational process, so the respect level and participation among parents was high in the segregated classroom. The parents valued and trusted the opinion of the teachers and therefore, they were constantly interacting with the school.

#### *Caring Relationships among Students and Teachers*

One of the characteristics of highly effective teachers identified as very critical by Morris and Morris (2005) in their study on valued segregated African American schools was the ethic of caring. In the segregated school environment, the teachers had positive, caring relationships with both the parents and the students. They used class time, before or after school sessions, and attendance at extracurricular events to foster these relationships. In the classroom, there were many opportunities to get to know the students better. Outside the classroom, the teachers would attend events in which their students were participating. Attending church services, shopping at the same local markets and participating in the same community programs were opportunities for the teachers to visit with students and parents outside of the school.

Successfully educating African American students is a complex process that involves specific instructional strategies. However, at the very least students need to

know that adults in their lives truly care about them. From this foundation, trusting relationships develop and serve as essential context for learning (Sanacore, 2004). Thus, the teachers in the present study stressed the importance of developing caring relationship with students. The overall belief is that African American student's benefit from the type of support that nurtures emotional growth and simultaneously provides optimal conditions for effective learning.

Demonstration of care was identified as a major component of the practices of African American teachers by the teachers that participated in this study. This is consistent with Walker's (1996) study of segregated schools as well as Ladson-Billings' (1994) work in integrated schools. These investigators found that caring was a strong attribute of culturally responsive teachers and that caring contributed greatly to the academic success of ethnic minority students. According to Gay (2000) caring teachers are distinguished by their high performance expectations, advocacy, and empowerment of students as well as by their use of pedagogical practices that facilitate success. She also emphasizes that "just as caring is a foundational pillar of effective teaching and learning, the lack of it produces inequities in educational opportunities and achievement outcomes for ethnically different children". (Gay, 2000, p. 62)

The three teachers in this study each stated how much they loved and cared about their students. Each participant recalled experiences where they had to nurture and care for the children in their classrooms. They described instances in which they had to wash faces, comb hair, and washout clothes before, during and sometimes after the school day ended. They called their actions "the mother instinct." The teacher in the segregated school environment showed caring in indirect and sometimes in very tangible ways. The

teachers made personal sacrifices of time and money in order to provide the best education possible to their students at the segregated schools in which they taught.

#### Teaching and Learning after *Brown v. Board of Education*

The literature on African American communities prior to and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Anderson, 1988; Siddle Walker, 1996; Ware, 2006) identifies African American communities that were caring and nurturing to children and committed to the successful education of African American children. Furthermore, the parents, teachers, and students in these communities saw education as an important means for collective advancement in a racially biased country.

The teachers in the present study revealed that their practices of varying instructional strategies were slightly modified as they moved into the desegregated school environment. This was because they no longer had the freedom to create their own materials; they were now using a pre-created, scripted curriculum in which they used textbooks, workbooks and worksheets to teach the lessons. In today's classroom, teachers still lack the opportunity to create their own instructional materials.

Moreover, in the desegregated school environment, the African American teachers decreased their use of cooperative learning groups and hands-on activities. Thus, where the teachers had once established a cooperative and communal classroom environment in the before *Brown* era, such a context was now replaced with independent learning assignments in the segregated classroom. According to the participants, the family-like classrooms described by the participants did not transfer to the desegregated classroom. They attributed this to the fact that when schools desegregated, the teachers and students were not adequately prepared for interactions with white students and

teachers. Therefore, black and white students were not prepared to cooperatively work together in the desegregated classroom.

Another change in instructional strategies that occurred after the *Brown v. Board of Education* case included the need for the teacher to understand who the audience was and to adjust the lesson to fit the interests of all students. Previously, by sharing similar cultural backgrounds as their students, the teachers in this study had the ability to connect with the students, to use commonly shared customs in the real-world application of the lesson, and to use a common language phrase and idioms when talking with parents and students. In the desegregated schools, teachers could no longer discuss the civil rights movement, music, or the harvesting of crops. Because the life experiences of the students varied so greatly in the desegregated school environment, the teachers had to use a plethora of strategies to make the learning relevant and meaningful to all students. According to the participants, by making these changes, teachers were no longer making the lesson relevant to the African American students.

A theme throughout the oral histories of the participants was that teachers in the segregated school encouraged students to succeed academically and to further their educations. However, after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case, the teachers no longer reminded students of their responsibility to get an education and to succeed in life. The teachers moved away from focusing on the achievement of African American children and started focusing on surviving in a new desegregated school environment. In reference to the teachers, this study showed that there was more professional isolation and competition among them. Due to the racial relationships among white and black teachers, there was very little communication across racial lines. In the desegregated

classroom, there was a level of competition for one teacher's class to out perform and outscore another teacher's class on standardized test. Although, teachers today collaboratively plan lessons and work together, this level of competition is still prevalent in the overall school environment.

Other areas of change that the participants discussed were the decline of both parental involvement and the sense of care in the desegregated classroom. Before *Brown*, parents were visible and involved in the school, but after *Brown*, parents were no longer actively involved in the learning of their children. According to the participants, this was due to the fact that parents became apprehensive about communicating with white teachers in the desegregated school environment. It is what they described as the "fear of the unknown" that caused parents to stay away from the desegregated classroom. In reference to African American parental involvement in today's school, Hale (2001) describes African American parents as uninvolved in the schools and nearly nonexistent.

In cultivating caring relationships with students in the desegregated classroom, African American teachers still cared deeply about all of their students, but the way in which they exhibited their care for the students changed. According to the participants, teachers were hesitant to openly display signs of affection in the desegregated schools. They each acknowledged that the times, students and the world in which we live in is different from when they first started teaching in the before *Brown* era. However, each agreed that something needs to be done about the status of education in the African American community.

The teachers in this study believe that many teachers in today's predominately African American classrooms need to hold higher expectations for African American

students. As the participants shared their experiences, it became clear that they believed that teachers in the segregated schools were indeed successful with teaching the students in their predominately African American classrooms. The participants believe that caring and committed teachers should be hired to teach in predominately African American schools. They also believe that these teachers must be trained to work with African American students. According to this study, teachers must be aware of the situations in which their students come from and then they should use those situations as learning opportunities in the classroom.

#### Lessons Learned from the Segregated Classroom

As a teacher in a predominately African American school, I am very concerned with the overall educational experiences of African American students in today's public schools. Therefore, I decided on this avenue of research because of the low academic achievement, low motivation and the overall low perception of education that my African American students portray each day in the classroom. By looking back at the segregated classroom, I have learned that we must change the students' perception of education. Learning must become something that African American students want to do for themselves. Before *Brown*, African American students were motivated to learn; they understood that by obtaining an education they could improve their socio-economic status in society. However, after *Brown* the perception of an education being a privilege in the black community rather than a right devalued the sense of an education.

Thus, the findings of this study have implications to both practice and research. The issues of providing a quality education for all students and closing the achievement gap between African American students and their white counterparts remains at the

forefront of educational discourse across the country. This study suggests that classroom teachers need specific strategies in order to successfully promote learning among African American students in today's predominately African American school environments. Additionally, researchers have repeatedly confirmed that all teachers need to know more about the world of the children with whom they work in order to better offer opportunities for learning success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000).

The data in this study revealed that these three teachers used what is now known as a culturally relevant approach to teaching and believed that it had been successful in meeting the needs of African American students. To effectively implement a culturally relevant teaching framework, teachers need to consider use of the following three dimensions of culturally relevant teaching defined by Gay (2000): (a) academic achievement—make learning rigorous, exciting, challenging, and equitable with high standards; (b) cultural competence—know and facilitate in the learning process the various range of students' cultural and linguistic groups; and (c) sociopolitical consciousness—recognize and assist students in the understanding that education and schooling do not occur in a vacuum. Through these dimensions, educators not only learn to be sensitive to the needs, interests and abilities of students, parents and communities, but also to validate the whole person.

Changes in the demographic composition of student populations are having a profound effect on education (Jones, 2004), and racial inequality in schools is talked about today most often in the context of multicultural education. Traditionally directed at improving the school experience of students of color, multiculturalism has typically focused on either teaching the culturally different in order to assimilate them into the

mainstream population or increasing the sensitivity of dominant group children in order to help all children get along (Casteel, 1998). Multicultural education is designed to bring about educational equity for all students, including those from different races, ethnic groups, social classes, and exceptionality (Jones, 2004). The goal is to help minority students develop competence in the public culture of the dominant group; and at the same time help them develop a positive group identity which builds on their home cultures (Hidalgo, McDowel, & Siddle, 1990). Therefore, educational leaders must provide opportunities for teacher to gain the knowledge and skills needed to become culturally relevant classroom teachers. This study offers insight to school administrators and teachers who are seeking ways to effectively educate students, especially African American students.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study is limited because it is solely based on the perspectives of the individual participants. And although the oral histories collected from the participants may provide valuable information regarding the successful teaching of African American children, the results of this study are based on what they can remember from teaching from at least thirty years ago in the segregated school environment. In spite of the fact that this limitation can be offset by the use of secondary sources, this study used what the participants recall about their personal teaching practices in the segregated classroom. Additionally, another limitation of this study is that the experiences of the participants are restricted to public schools in the state of Georgia only. No other perspectives from other schools in the south were included in this study.



## Avenues of Further Study

The findings of this study lead to several areas of future research. First, a comprehensive study of the cultural aspect of the students before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision might be completed to ascertain how the differences in the media, technology and other areas of pop culture have affected the overall education of African American students. It is equally important to recognize that the knowledge that is institutionalized by the mass media and other forces that shape popular culture has a strong influence on the values, perceptions, and behaviors of children (Reglin, 1995).

Secondly, this study focused on African American female teachers. Studies on African American males who taught in segregated and desegregated schools would provide additional insight into the role that gender plays on the education of African American children. And finally, a study of successful predominately low-income, disadvantaged African American schools in today's society can also add to the literature on successful teaching strategies of African American students.

## Conclusion

“By failing to tell our stories, we in the black community have abetted white scholars who, in much the same way that they have promoted the myth of the culturally disadvantaged black child, have by omission, distortion, and misinterpretation created the myth of the inadequate black teacher (Moore, 2002, p. 633). As educators we cannot help our children overcome the negative repercussions of past and present racial dominance if we have not unraveled the remnants of dominance that still lingers in our own minds, hearts and habits. As Malcolm X reminded us years ago, “we can't teach what we don't know and we can't lead where we won't go (Howard, 1990, p.4). In

today's changing society, educators must prepare themselves to teach children from a variety of different and diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The intention of this study was to add to the discussion on the successful teaching practices of African American children. Further, the intention was to raise the question of what are the successful teaching practices that can be used with students in today's predominately African American schools and to consider the use of those practices as an avenue for raising the achievement level of African American students.

As I close, I am reminded of an article that I read this summer in my local community newspaper entitled, *Black Education* by Walter Williams (2008). It was an article about the HBO documentary that aired last June, "Hard Times at Douglass High". Williams captures the decline in the once-proud heritage of Douglass High as follows:

Frederick Douglass was founded in 1883 as the Colored High and Training School before it was renamed. It is one of the nation's oldest historically black high schools. Success stories among its alumni include Thurgood Marshall, Cab Calloway, congressmen and civil rights leaders. I guarantee you that if Douglass High students test scores of that earlier era was available, they wouldn't show today's achievement gap. Today, Douglass students are four to five years below grade level. Most of its ninth-graders read at the third, fourth, or fifth grade levels. Sixty percent of the teachers are uncertified and on any given day teaching becomes secondary, and discipline is the main thing that goes on. School day behavior demonstrated little student interest and teachers are pressured into passing failing students. At Frederick Douglass' founding, it didn't have the resources available today. If blacks can achieve at a time when there was far greater poverty, gross discrimination and fewer opportunities, what says that blacks cannot achieve today?

This article, as well as every other article, journal or text that depicts the failing education of today's African American student serves as the inspiration for this research. It has been over fifty years since the landmark decision *Brown v. Education* and the education of African American students is still in a critical, unresolved state. By looking at the experiences, beliefs and practices of the teachers that taught in the segregated classroom,

we can develop a plan to help improve the educational conditions of the next generation of African American students. I believe that Reglin (1995) best summarizes the status of the educational crisis in the African American community, when he says; “schools are not succeeding with our current generation of African American students. In far too many minority communities, schools simply fail to provide the quality education needed to sustain the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of young African American children” (p. xiii).

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## APPENDIX A

### ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW: GUIDING QUESTIONS

#### *Background Questions:*

Tell me about your own personal educational experience. What do you remember about your elementary or high school?

Where did you receive your teacher training?

What made you want to become a teacher?

Give me an overview of your teaching career? Where did you teach? When and what did you teach?

#### *During the oral history interview, participants will be asked to reflect upon the following:*

What was it like teaching in a segregated school environment?

What did you do to ensure that your students in the segregated school setting would achieve academically?

What were some of the “successful” teaching practices you remember using or implementing when you taught in the segregated school environment? What do you remember doing to motivate or encourage academic success among your students?

What was the overall school climate like in the segregated school environment? This includes relationships with other teachers in the building as well as with parents.

Overall, do you feel that your students in the segregated school mastered the material that you wanted them to learn? If not, why?

What was your experience like when the schools integrated?

How did the overall school climate change when the schools integrated? This includes relationships with other teachers in the building as well as with parents.

#### *Post-interview follow-up questions:*

What differences and similarities do you think are apparent in the way you taught in the segregated classroom in comparison to the integrated classroom?

What do you believe should be done to enhance the overall academic achievement of African American students in today's classroom?