

THE IMPACT OF A CULTURAL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE IN BUILDING CULTURAL  
COMPETENCE OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS IN URBAN SCHOOLS

By

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To my mother, Izabella, who has always been my hero

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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This study examines the reflections of preservice teachers in relation to their experiential knowledge gained through active learning of African American culture and their perceptions and beliefs concerning the home life of these students and their lives in the community. This action research study presents the results of a qualitative analysis of the on-line journal postings and class discussions of sixteen preservice teachers after a cultural experience designed to increase their knowledge of the attributes of African American culture. The research is designed to address the following question: How will participation in this community experience (visiting a community church) impact preservice teachers' knowledge of African American culture and their ideas about how to build on children's culture in the classroom?

Findings reveal six lessons learned and four implications for culturally responsive teaching. This study shows how the experience enhanced their conceptual and practical knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. Implications for teacher educators are addressed.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the results of an action research project in which cultural experiences (interventions) are provided to students in a graduate level internship seminar to build cultural competence to impact their level of effectiveness in teaching students in high poverty, mostly minority (African American), urban schools. As a principal in one these schools, I recognized a need to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers to work in these schools- teachers who could provide a culturally responsive classroom learning environment. In addition, pre-service teachers entering the local college of education and interning in these schools were predominantly white, females who lacked prior knowledge/experiences to connect and to make sense of the multicultural issues discussed in their course. There was a need to provide authentic cultural experiences for these interns to help them connect theory and practice.

The constructivist-learning model serves as the theoretical/conceptual framework for the course in which the cultural experiences were provided. Constructivism is a learning or meaning-making theory that proposes that people create their own meaning and understanding combining what they already know and believe to be true with new experiences and information (Richardson, 1997). The theory views knowledge as temporary, developmental, social, and cultural (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Constructivism is described as the primary basis for learning in which individuals use their past experiences and beliefs along with their cultural identities in the process of learning (Lambert, et al., 1995). These elements determine how people perceive and respond during encounters with new ideas and experiences. Individuals acquire knowledge by

constructing it from the inside, while interacting with the environment and circumstances (Kamii, Manning, & Manning, 1991).

Hoban (2002) credits the constructivist perspective for providing a strong research platform to explain learning, especially the influence of prior knowledge in making meaning from experiences. The constructivist learning model has transitioned from a Piagetian individually developed model (Piaget, 1976) to a cognitively developed model in social settings. The shift to this social-cultural paradigm is a process of synthesis where understanding is personally constructed but is influenced by the social context that the learning takes place (von Glaserfeld, 1992). The social setting in which learning takes place influences the individual cognitive process which in turn affects the meaning making-making end product.

Based on the constructivist view, the professor (white female) teamed up with me (an African American female) because we were committed to providing the predominately white-female-middle class interns with a cultural experience that would help them connect the theories and assignments presented in the course with actual classroom practice. The goal was to help build their cultural competence in working with African American students by helping them to construct or deconstruct perceptions and knowledge while impacting practice.

The theme of the graduate level course in elementary curriculum is Engaging All Students in Learning. The class focuses on classroom structure, classroom climate, curriculum, and instructional strategies that enable all students to develop and participate in a learning community and successfully engage in activities that result in

learning. Because effective classroom management provides the foundation for effective instruction, the course begins with a focus on classroom management.

The content and the implementation of this graduate level course support a constructivist method of learning. Throughout the course, students have the opportunity to learn and implement various strategies for classroom organization and management. Implications of the strategies are discussed in class, in seminar, as well as in the online discussion forums. This course also includes a review of prior learning about working with students with different cultural backgrounds. This constructivist course, by providing the students with experiences and connecting to their prior knowledge, enables the interns to construct/deconstruct their vision of students of different cultures as well as of themselves as future teachers of these students. The main assumption of the course is that student learning enhanced by using readings and assignments that provide students with first-hand multicultural experiences and reflecting and discussing those issues at the theoretical and practical level.

The course is designed to provide support and allow for reflection during the preservice teachers' work in classrooms in culturally diverse classrooms. The readings, activities and assignments are designed to provide pertinent information about the beliefs and pedagogies of effective teachers in diverse schools and to generate meaningful self critique of classroom practice. The course revolves around the premise that "good teachers" structure classroom environments that are aligned with students' backgrounds, interests, and background experiences. To further provide meaningful, authentic, and first hand experiences, I worked collaboratively with the professor for the course and the graduate student supervisor for the seminar to provide an event that

immersed them in a cultural experience to build their knowledge of the majority culture of the students in their schools. Following the experience, students reflected in online journals and then debriefed in class.

During this action research, my position will be that of an insider (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Other stakeholders will be the interns, the College of Education, students, families and the school and community. At the time of the study, I was a sitting principal at one of the elementary schools where three of the interns were working. I did not directly supervise any of the interns or grade them in any way.

### **Background of the Problem**

In order to increase student achievement for African American students, the educational experiences of these students must be improved. Ladson-Billing (1998) contends that teachers need to engage in critical reflection about race and culture to address the need for culturally relevant pedagogy. Establishing culturally relevant pedagogy is a must to foster academic achievement and economic success of African American students. It is imperative that teacher education programs continue to consider how white teachers can become more culturally competent to teach for culture and diversity (Johnson, 2002). With 40% of the students in today's schools being African American, and the majority of the teachers being white, the literature suggests that there is a growing concern that novice teachers may not be adequately prepared to effectively teach African American students to meet the high expectations for their academic performance and success.

### **Research Questions**

This action research study will address the following: How will participation in a community experience with African American adults and children impact preservice

teachers' knowledge of culture and ideas about how to build on children's culture in the classroom? Specifically, it will examine:

- 1) What do preservice teachers perceive and report learning about African American culture from this community experience?
- 2) What implications for teaching do preservice teachers draw from this experience?

This action research is being conducted to improve future preparation and support for preservice and novice teachers working in high poverty, mostly minority, urban schools. The focus will be on my professional actions as principal in one of these schools as well in my role as collaborating principal with the local College of Education.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature traces the ascent of the necessity of looking at the issue of culture as it relates to meeting the educational needs of students. To illustrate the evolution of educational change from a systemic, universal issue to an individual learner issue I reviewed literature showing how we got to this point. Addressing the question of how to meet the needs of struggling learners started with school reform in general, including the research on the characteristics of a good teacher. The research then moved into looking at effective schools and the common traits of those schools deemed “good schools”. The educational change movement then progressed from what effective schools look like to the point of looking at how students are positively affected. Because of the high number of African American children that were not succeeding, it was important to show how we looked at school reform moving from an institutional focus to looking at students both culturally and individually. The chain of relevant literature progressed as needs were identified. Figure 2-1 illustrates the progression of the literature.

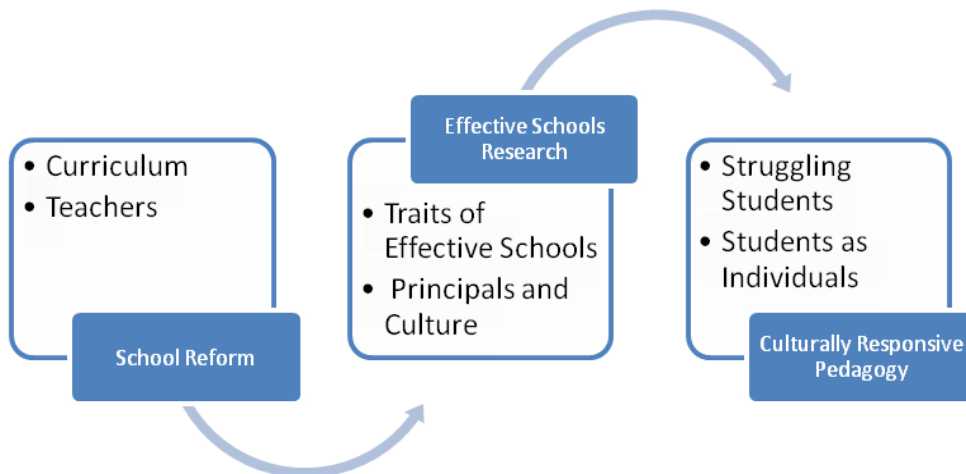


Figure 2-1: Literature Review Organizational Flow

## **School Reform**

The pressure on teachers, principals, and others to improve the quality of instruction has never been greater. Research over the past twenty five years has consistently shown that not only are some schools in need of improvement but that many children in these schools continually score below their counterparts on standardized achievement tests (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). These children, for the most part, are minority children from low-income families. This review of the literature will show that to close the gap in student achievement and to improve student learning in general, education reform policies have stressed the development of more rigorous content standards and assessments of those standards. In addition, school reform policies have focused on the characteristics of schools deemed as effective and development of strategies to impose those features on schools that are deemed ineffective. Only recently has there been a focus on improving affective features of the classroom environment and the quality of children's life in school and classrooms apart from the standards and assessments. This review of the literature shows that even though the school reform movements have been undeniably critical to the improvement of schools and student learning, to focus on these dimensions without considering students' social experience in classroom is to miss a major factor explaining why some learning environments are more effective than others. Current research shows that the affective climate of the classroom also appears to have a critical, long lasting impact on student and in turn is a key to students' academic success (Cohen, 2001).

For the past twenty years, school reform has been directly addressed as a part of educational policy and rhetoric. Policymakers have relentlessly set out to change what schooling looks like for students. From the Coleman Report (Coleman, Campbell,



Hobson, McFarland, Mood, Weinfield & York, 1966) in the 1960's through A Nation at Risk (1983) to No Child Left Behind (2002), policymakers have sought to enhance public education for democracy's sake. As Americans became more aware of how the economy and children were falling behind other nations, pressure built to use the educational system to help Americans become more competitive again (Bliss, 1991). Research shows that this sea of school reform has happened in three waves (Cooper, 2003).

The first wave of school reform seemed simply to ask schools to "raise the standards". Reacting to the work of Jenks (1972) that discounted the impact of schooling in student achievement and fundamentally stated that school quality did not make a difference, schools were asked to do more of the same thing, but just do it better. This standards movement failed to take into account the systemic makeup of the educational system. There were more questions than answers. What is to be taught? Who determines the standards? How will they be measured? Though schools and educators were expected to make significant changes, this first wave of educational reform had little impact on teaching and learning (Cuban, 1990).

The second wave of reform dealt with the distribution of power within the school's hierarchy. Reformers sought to decrease control of curriculum, budgets and staff by those removed from the day to day operation of schools and increase control by principals, teachers and parents. Whereas this change appeared to take into account the differences of the contexts of schools and the need to empower and tap into the people who were directly involved in day to day schooling, the number of schools that experienced sustained fundamental change was not extensive (Murphy, 1992).

The third wave, currently in process, focuses on the development of human resources (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). This latest wave of school reform is focused explicitly on policies and practices aimed at improving educational quality at failing schools. With the signing of the No Child Left Behind law, (NCLB) in 2002, the national policymakers insisted that schools demonstrate that they are meeting the needs of all of their students. Above all, the legislation focuses on students who have been traditionally underserved in public schools (mostly poor, minority students). To assure that those students receive an equitable and quality education, various research-based initiatives and program have been put in place by local and national agencies. These comprehensive school reform programs (CSR) have been prevalent in these schools since the late 1990's (Durden, 2008). This initiative is viewed as a primary component of the NCLB, as made evident by the \$308 million dollars Congress appropriated to this process under the Title I, Part F component of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. CSR is one of the few mandates stemming from the NCLB legislation that had funds allocated to the states for implementation. These funds provided grants to schools with comprehensive school reform models (Datnow, Borman, & Springfield, 2000). Yet, questions remain on how effective these comprehensive school reform and other initiatives sponsored by NCLB are in raising achievement for the students in these schools.

The primary goal of the comprehensive school reform movement is to affect deep changes in the structure/organization, curriculum and teaching practices, and professional development agenda of schools, as well as the norms that guide policy and practice. In a review of research and literature that documents comprehensive school

reform, Desimone (2002) finds that five policy attributes provide a useful perspective to examine school change efforts based on CSR and its ability to help the nation shift toward a better understanding of how to foster successful school reform. School reform efforts must be specific, consistent, authoritative, powerful and stable. Researchers are consistent in their belief that piecemeal reform seldom works (Kilgore, 2005). Because schools are made up of intersecting and overlapping parts and variables and there are different dynamics that prevail in these schools, scholars are not convinced that comprehensive school reform can achieve the ambitious goals set forth by NCLB and its antecedents. Additionally, these school reform efforts do not compensate for the continued inequities in educational outcomes for certain students. Also evident is the fact that the education of culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse students must go beyond curriculum and pedagogy.

True school reform must accommodate the difficulties that students face. School reform efforts should be contextualized in the culture and experiences of students' homes and communities (Tharp, 1997). There is a need to examine beliefs and social constructions of ability, race and culture in order to provide improved educational opportunities for all students. Equity and multiculturalism must be included in school reform efforts (Datnow, Borman, Stringfield, Overman, & Castellano, 2003).

### **Descriptors of Good Teachers**

Interwoven in the school reform movement were questions regarding the traits of good teachers. There are as many kinds of good teachers described in the literature as there is literature. The variations are as diverse as there are learners and situations in education. One researcher sums it up by comparing the sundry of attributes of "good teachers" to that of the assortment of apples in your local grocery store (Cruickshank &

Haefle, 2001). Schools, school districts, and colleges have used a plethora of instruments and rating scales that have assessed such traits as professional attitude, understanding of students, creativity, classroom management, planning, differentiated instruction and student engagement. Example such as the Teaching Evaluation Record attempt to provide comprehensive lists of ideal attributes that include buoyancy, emotional stability, ethical behavior, expressiveness, forcefulness, and personal magnetism to name a few. One has to wonder what brought about these exhaustive attempts to capture the essence of the “good teacher”.

Most would attribute the scrutiny of teachers to the influential Coleman Report published in 1966. This report asserted that students’ socioeconomic backgrounds held a greater influence on student learning than their teachers. Educational researchers set out to show that teachers made a decisive difference in student achievement. First, researchers identified teachers whose students scored higher on tests than comparable students taught by others. Next, they examined these high quality teachers to determine exactly what they were like and what they did so that other teachers might have a model to emulate. The findings of many of these studies found that effective teachers carefully plan and oversee student learning activities. They are clear in their objectives and expectations. These teachers are caring and supportive, while treating all students equitably. They are persistent in challenging and engaging students (Cruickshank & Haefle, 2001).

Researchers have begun to conduct more qualitative studies of teachers in the ongoing quest to provide a replica of the good teacher. A sociocultural point of view was used to illustrate how beginning teachers’ conceptions of classroom management

affected their developing teaching practices (Martin, 2004). This emphasis on classroom management attests to the notion that how teachers are able to direct the learning environment is a key component to effective teaching. Yet, despite educators' concerns with the nature of classroom learning environments and good teachers, few recent studies have comprehensively investigated either teachers' knowledge or practices of classroom management in positive learning environments. There is not a widespread understanding of how teachers successfully establish and manage classroom environments that support both engaged learning and positive social interaction in the classroom setting (often overcrowded) with diverse, active children. The findings of the studies that have been conducted, assert that good teachers begin with initial conceptions and understandings of classroom management that enable them to establish positive learning environments. Two implications for teacher education emerge: 1) the critical need to include extensive coursework on management in teacher education programs and 2) the relevancy and authenticity of that coursework. Since good teachers create classrooms as social communities that are positive learning environments, this becomes a vital component in teacher preparation.

Effective teachers are able to figure out what they want to teach and provide instruction in a way that students can understand and apply the new information and skills. Good teachers know what is relevant and pertinent, and they choose tasks that are productive while organizing these tasks in a way that builds understanding (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In addition, they monitor students' growth and progress so they can provide differentiated instruction so that learning remains fruitful and

beneficial so that students will be equipped to live productively and be an asset and not a casualty in society.

### **Effective Schools Research**

The notion of effective schools emerged as much a movement as a body of research. Effective schools' scholars were committed to the belief that students from diverse backgrounds could succeed in school and that the school itself was more likely to impact that success than any large scale reform or comprehensive school reform program. While the overall school reform movement focused on making schools better to produce better students who would then be better workers, the effective schools research was circulated as a means to promote race and class equity in spite of earlier literature that had linked achievement with social class (Firestone, 1991).

Effective schools research, in its inception, derived lists of school factors that are associated with higher achieving schools. The common thread and the major theme that emerged from this initial work was that the set of factors when implemented together can improve student achievement. The first list was compiled by Ronald Edmonds in synthesizing the early work on school effectiveness. He highlighted strong administrative leadership, high expectations for student learning, discipline and school order, basic skill acquisition, and monitoring of student progress through measured benchmarks of standards as the key factors in effective schools (Witte & Walsh, 1990).

A review of the literature by Sizemore (1985) attempted to define "effective" as used in the term "effective schools. Researchers sought to discover what constituted a school where Black and poor children learned and performed well. Research showed that effective schools were schools that shared a climate where all teachers in the school delivered effective instruction to all students. Schools where students were

being successful had certain things in common. Most notably, these factors were evident in the areas of 1) administrative behavior policies and practices in the school; 2) management, instructional routines and solid operating procedures; 3) teachers' attitudes toward the students' ability to learn; 4) teacher expectations for student performance; 5) amount of time spent in instructional activities; and 6) quality of assistance given by the principal to the teachers. The research on effective schools showed that Black poor students could demonstrate high achievement.

Much of the research on effective schools is based on case studies of effective school practice. Researchers identified places of schooling where intended outcomes were obtained and then studied these environments to determine what happened in these schools that was different from schools that were not having the intended outcomes. In developing a conceptual and operational definition of effective practice in these schools, several premises have been developed to clarify the understanding of what factors are present in these effective schools (Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985). These premises revolved around the school as a place for teaching and learning with the success measured by student outcomes. Furthermore, effective schools demonstrated quality and equity through programs designed to maximize student achievement for all students. Even in this early work in effective schools, it was foretold that how districts chose to determine student outcomes was what was deemed important.

A second generation of traits that parallel these and build on the seminal work of others in the field emerged (Lezotte, 1999). Most notably this work included Edmonds (1979) who used teacher satisfaction with jobs, principal as instructional leader and a culture conducive to learning along with high expectations as variables for effective

schools. Block (1983) was one of the first to include active monitoring of student progress as a vital component of effective schools. Purkey and Smith (1983) included teacher collegiality, sense of community and clear goals, order and discipline and school autonomy as defining factors. Downer (1991) emphasized effective teachers and instructional strategies, teacher decision making, and collaboration as correlates to effective schools. Lezotte (1999) used this research as well as current research and findings plus a challenge to continue to focus on the learning of all students for the impetus for these second generation correlates for effective schools. He also stressed in these second generation correlates that more emphasis should be placed on the desired student behavior where students help one another. Along those lines, he stressed that schools should be places where professionals create more collaboration in their working relationships. He also calls for the respect of diversity and democratic values and a commitment to multicultural education. He insists that schools must go beyond the focus on instruction to expected learning outcomes for students. Knowing that teachers are at the core of the instructional program, he realizes that principals cannot be the only leader if schools are to be effective. To continuously impart the mission of the schools, there must be a mechanism for community shared vision. To this end, principals empower teachers to be leaders and allow them to share their expertise. Higher level learning in addition to the need for basic skill learning must be effectively balanced. Teachers will need professional development to design and deliver curriculum that responds to the need for more teaching with outcomes in mind. Being asked to do more, teachers will have to become more skillful in integrating the curriculum. The monitoring of student progress will include more authentic



assessments and using ongoing, frequent assessments to drive instruction and differentiate instruction.

Later work in effective schools began to look at high poverty, high performing schools (HP2). Bell asserts that the “essence of high-poverty schools may hold the key to our understanding of successful school reform” (2001, p.8). She characterizes these schools as having extraordinary acts of heroism as well as an extensive group of adults in the school who effectively implement a quality curriculum. She emphasizes the school’s culture as having a powerful impact on school effectiveness. HP2 schools afford all students the same opportunities to learn in an intellectually changing way and go above and beyond what is required by the state’s accountability system. These schools operate under a culture that demands success and excellence. The adults in the school support one another, the families and the students toward a common goal of success. A symposium sponsored by the Statewide System of School Support (S4) – School Support and Improvement Centers in California in collaboration with other educational agencies, added to the body of knowledge on school effectiveness in schools with students from diverse backgrounds by identifying 14 common themes and three categories that epitomized practices in these schools (Bell, 2001).

Foremost, rigorous standards for all students as the school’s main goal and setting high expectations along with emphasis on hard work keeps student learning as the primary focus. The school setting must be conducive to learning and the culture must center on caring relationships with students and families that encourage parent involvement. All stakeholders must be committed to the success of the school. Collaboration and empowerment fuels the success of the school. Teacher learning is

ongoing as they monitor student learning of academic goals. Teachers work in a collegial environment to plan and implement academic programs across grade levels.

These effective schools were characterized by the strength of leadership at the school as well as the district levels. Within the school, faculty operated as a professional learning community and faculty implemented best practices based on research-based principles as to how children learn.

The effective schools research is revisited in the midst of the NCLB era and the research continues to stress that for true effectiveness, schools must develop a model for working with diverse student populations and that schools are no longer islands that can ignore the issues of racism, classism, and sexism (Alston, 2004). Alston reviews the literature on effective schools and applies the concepts of border crossing as she focuses on issues of racism, classicism, and sexism. She recommends that schools can develop an effective model for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students if they are willing to go beyond the border of these issues. She admonishes schools to become better prepared for cultural diversity. Effective schools will embrace diversity as a main component of school improvement and not just as an appendage. This precept led the research into how to best provide the best learning environment for African American students.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Effectively teaching African American students continues to be one of the most pressing issues facing educators. There is still a great divide in student achievement between African American students and their white counterparts. Since the majority of teachers in schools today are white females, it could reasonably be inferred that they

are not effectively meeting the instructional needs of these students of color (Howard, 2001). Recent data states that teachers of color represent 9% of K-12 public school teachers, whereas students of color represent 40% of the student population (Ware, 2006). As a result, 44% of U.S. schools have no teachers of color on staff, and many students will go through their K-12 years without having a single teacher of color.

Current statistics indicate that standardized test scores and graduation rates of students of color continue to fall far below those of white students (Hyland, 2005). Even though we cannot fairly assert that teachers are fully responsible for such racial inequality in education or that they are solely responsible for correcting it, we do know that levels and quality of schooling factor into the inequality that is still inherent in today's society. Teachers can factor heavily into the perpetuation of inequality for students of color depending on what happens in their classrooms. In order to bridge the achievement gap that exists between students of color and whites, teachers must find a way to enhance the learning opportunities by embracing pedagogical practices that foster high student engagement (Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2008). Clearly, the persistence of the achievement gap suggests that most teachers are less effective at engaging African American students and it does warrant further study and action.

With these current trends in public school enrollment and the demographics of those entering the teaching profession, researchers have begun to investigate the strategies that teachers use to effectively teach African American students (Cooper, 2003). Because all students deserve to leave K-12 schools equipped with the knowledge, skills, awareness, understanding, and dispositions necessary to combat

social problems and the opportunity to lead productive lives, this is certainly a priority (Milner, 2005). Because racial inequality can be exacerbated in classrooms in America, there has been a focus on what an effective teacher of students of color is.

First and foremost, successful teachers of students of colors acknowledge that schooling is a long time product of the majority culture and is therefore inherently racist. They see themselves as agents of change within the total political struggle for racial justice (Hyland, 2005; Ladson-Billing, 1995). Culturally relevant teachers do not differentiate their connection to the community and their identities as teachers. How they identify themselves as teachers can perpetuate or dispel the institutional and societal racism that lives in the practice of U.S. schools. Ladson-Billings (1995) and Hyland (2005) both stress that good teachers of students of color are activists. They are willing and able to advocate for students. These teachers see themselves as members of the community and their teaching as a way to give back to the community. Culturally responsive practice must develop students academically while at the same time work to preserve the students' values of their culture. Culturally responsive pedagogy should help students develop a sense of sociopolitical or critical consciousness. It should allow students to find ways to contribute as well as benefit from the world they live in.

Hyland (2005) also identifies being a helper as an essential quality of good teachers of African American students. They are there to help students and their families. Good teachers of students of color are able to communicate with students and their families in ways familiar to them in their cultural context. They place emphasis on culture and their understanding of it. These teachers are able to adopt a world view similar to that of their black students. Although they are careful not to fall into "trying to

act black,” they are cognizant and sensitive to customs and beliefs of the culture. Additionally, teachers must face the challenges of classroom organization and management through culturally diverse lenses (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson, 2003).

There are many school factors that affect the success of culturally diverse students. Noted repeatedly in the literature is the importance of the personal and academic relationships between teachers and their students (Burnett, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ross, et al, 2008). Teachers identified as effective teachers of culturally diverse students appreciate and accommodate the similarities and differences among the students’ cultures. They acknowledge both individual and cultural differences enthusiastically and identify these differences in a positive manner. This positive identification creates a basis for the development of effective communication and instructional strategies. Social skills such as respect and cross-cultural understanding can be modeled, taught, prompted and reinforced by the teacher. They build relationships with their students and focus on ways of helping students to identify their task orientations. Effective teachers of African American students teach students to match their behaviors to the setting. Instructional strategies and learning activities are varied while considering students’ cultures and language skills when developing learning objectives and instructional activities. They incorporate objectives for affective and personal development. They focus on the whole child. They are able to form positive relationships with students and their families and increase their willingness to participate in schooling. You may often see them in the community, visiting homes, attending churches, or frequenting neighborhood businesses. Their teaching practices are empowering for their students. Their goal is to build students up,

not tear them down. School environments that are culturally responsive help to create a positive school culture and connect school to students' lives and cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2000). Culturally relevant teachers encourage a community of learners rather than competitive, individual achievement. These teachers demand a higher level of academic success for the entire class.

Since the majority of teachers are white, middle-class, young women that may only identify with their culture and backgrounds, they may tend to believe and accept tracking and forms of traditional instruction that appeal to a narrow range of learning styles (Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001). They are likely to bypass contributions of minority groups in favor of those they know as a part of the majority culture. Although they may enter teaching believing minority students are capable of learning high-level concepts and achieving excellence, they are ill-equipped to achieve this lofty aim. Many fail to consider the cultural content of activities planned for the classroom and may implicitly extend preferential treatment to students whose cultural backgrounds are most like the school norm.

Culturally responsive teachers believe that it is their job to make sure that all students succeed and give students no other choice but success (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2005). Cultural responsiveness begins with seeing past the demographics, meeting students where they are, building on the assets that they are bringing to the classroom (Sheets, 1995). This requires an awareness of students' culture, knowledge of their likes and interests, and creating a nurturing family like atmosphere (Ladson-Billing, 1994). In this way, successful teachers of African American students communicate their belief that all their students are able to achieve at high levels

(Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) describes the attributes of effective culturally responsive teachers. They view their pedagogy as an art as well as a science. They are aware that they must be adaptable, creative, and willing to take risks. They see their students as a blank canvas and are willing to use whatever tools necessary to make them a masterpiece. They are committed to classroom practices that permit these students to showcase their knowledge in meaningful ways. These teachers are unwavering in their beliefs and approaches and are not easily swayed by shifts in policy and public opinion. Students in these classes are encouraged to learn collaboratively and to be responsible for the academic success of others.

Effective teachers of African American students communicate expectations for academic performance and for behavior in ways that encourage and support effort and therefore enhance achievement. Research had begun to focus on this role of the teacher in insisting on high performance. This research focuses on the role of the teacher as a *warm demander* (Ware, 2006).

The term warm demander has been used to identify teachers who were successful with students of color because the students believed that these teachers did not lower their standards and were willing to help them. The term has been expanded to describe teachers who provide a tough-minded, no nonsense, structured and disciplined classroom environment. The role played by these warm, demanding teachers has also been described as “other-mothering” (Ware, 2006). Warm demander teachers act as surrogate mothers. They see themselves as a part of the students’ extended families. They use this position to motivate students to work to high expectations. The review of existing literature indicates that these teachers clearly believe and expect that their

students can and will learn (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2005; Ross, et al., 2008; Ware, 2006). These teachers assume responsibility for implementing strategies that enhance student learning. They leave nothing to chance by providing purposeful, deliberate ways to tap into their students. They believe that circumstances are not an excuse for lack of achievement. As practitioners, these effective teachers demonstrate culturally specific practices. These practices incorporate elements of the students' culture in their teaching, adapting instruction to meet the students' learning styles. You may also see music, dance, poetry, etc. infused into the classroom. High standards and expectations are parts of the norms for the classroom.

Warm demander descriptions have been traditionally given to teachers of color (Milner, 2005). Yet, most of our teachers are white. Many new teachers will need to take positions in predominantly black, urban schools without having the opportunity to work with effective teachers of African American students prior to taking these positions due to the decrease in the number of African American teachers (Adkins, 2006). More distressing is the fact that if we are to minimize or alleviate the black/white achievement gap, the teachers that remain in American schools must find a way to reach African American students through our instruction using higher levels of engagement (Ross, et al., 2008). Ross, et al. (2008) conducted researcher with three novice teachers and found that teachers of varied cultural backgrounds can communicate high expectations for African American learners by finding ways to increase student engagement and decrease task avoidance. The authors report that this is done by creating positive psychological environments comprised of respectful interactions, a calm tone, minimal student resistance, and clear academic focus. They introduce the use of insistence to



create a safe, loving but resolute approach to teaching that scaffolds students while creating a setting where authentic engagement leads to higher achievement. They make the assertion that through insistence the teachers set high standards and say what they mean and mean what they say. They never waver. Inconsistency leads to lack of trust and respect and nullifies support achievement motivation. The use of insistence is a vital concept especially since our classrooms teachers will most likely be young, white female teachers who have been brought up to speak softly, meekly and to be non-assertive. They will be viewed as “weak” by African American youth. Further research in this area is needed in using insistence within a framework of culturally responsive practices. Teachers must learn to be warm demanders. Amidst the widespread academic failures of African American students, further characterization of all these components of effective teaching of these students must be further investigated and taught in teacher preparation programs.

Multicultural education is a necessity for academic and social success among students of color. Students of color need to encounter and experience lessons that highlight, showcase, and speak from the point of view of the life experiences and contributions of people of color not just those of the White mainstream (Milner, 2005). Teachers can maximize student learning by incorporating the culture and everyday experiences of their students into their lessons. Ensuring that a wide range of cultural, racial, ethnic, gendered, and linguistic groups of people and their experiences are represented in the curriculum is a vital element in providing access, empowerment, and awareness for students of color. Plus, the quality of content of the curriculum and how it

is incorporated into the classroom instruction are also critical. It must extend beyond the days or months traditionally set aside to highlight various cultures.

Research has shown that the structure and culture of U.S. public schools might contribute to students' disengagement (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). The traditional school set up, calendar and scheduling all need to be examined when seeking to support higher quality, relevant learning environments. Working with students from diverse backgrounds requires an understanding of their worlds and the conditions and practices of that world. Again, urban schools throughout the United States are becoming more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse and the educators remain predominately white. It is important that time honored traditions entrenched in these schools that contradict with many students' home culture be examined and juxtaposed with a more familial culture, widely accepted by students of color. Teachers must be prepared to facilitate this metamorphosis.

To this end, teachers should become knowledgeable about the cultures and communities in which their students live (van Tartwijk, den Brok, Veldman, & Wubbles, 2009). They should be able to teach their students mainstream ways to interact in social situations in order to succeed in the existing social stratus. At the same time, teachers should not devalue students' cultural practices which are not like the dominant culture's way of life. Culturally relevant teaching and the theory of cultural synchronization provide a broad spectrum for ascertaining qualities of effective teachers of black children (Cooper, 2003).

Effectively teaching African American students continues to be one of the most pressing issues facing educators. Faced with the reality that diverse classrooms are

being taught by mostly white, young, females it is imperative that this issue continue to stay in the forefront of thought, research, and teacher preparation (Milner, 2006). The future of a whole group of young African Americans depends on it. With the stakes being so high, it was with these postulates that this action research developed. In my position as principal and partner with the local college of education it was possible to provide interventions and cultural experiences to interns in four schools to determine if their perspectives and practices could be impacted to bring about stronger cultural competence to better align their practice to the needs of the students they were serving. The results of this study could greatly affect the ability to recruit and retain teachers for these schools. More importantly, due to the high turnover in schools that traditionally serve students with the greatest needs, teachers who commonly get assigned to these schools are novice teachers. Typically, they are young, white females coming from colleges of education. Efforts to better prepare teachers to work in these diverse urban settings call for unique training opportunities for these teachers. Calls for better teacher education preparation include the need to extend and broaden the quality of experiences provided to preservice teachers to bridge theory and practice (Holmes Group, 1990). Partnerships between universities, public schools, and the community can help to stimulate and sustain systemic change in building the capacity of these young teachers to work in urban schools. An immersion model is a critical aspect of teacher education (Goodland, 1990). Since the priorities and expectations of predominantly White, middle class teachers conflict with the priorities, experiences, education, and expectations of lower socioeconomic, urban families and community members, teachers must change the way that they interact with the children and

communities they serve (Wald, 1996). This study documents an immersion into the culture through a church experience to illustrate a forum to effectively train these teachers to work in high poverty, high minority, urban schools.

### **Action Research**

Action research paved the way for the type inquiry utilized in this study. A review of the literature yielded justification for the use of action research. The purpose of action research is to provide educational practitioners with new knowledge and understanding so that they are empowered to positively impact their educational practices or find solutions to problems that exist in classrooms and schools (Stringer, 2007). Action research is beneficial in addressing classroom and school problems and to empower teachers and administrators to improve school settings. Action research is systematic inquiry to gather information about and improve teaching and learning (Creswell, 2002).

The foundation of action research is its cyclical, synergistic, and collaborative approach to inquiry. Kurt Lewin (1948) introduced this research approach. The approach can be characterized by the systematic gathering of data in order to facilitate social change. Over the decades since then, the scope of action research has been expanded to encompass a broader vision that delineates it as a part of the democratic process through the participation of the people in the process to bring about meaningful changes in real world issues (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Most recently, action research has been embraced by educational scholars in the era of accountability and high stakes testing. The ability to work as an insider, diagnose and plan action, take action and evaluate has heightened the level of job embedded professional learning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001). The focus has become learning in action and the implications for real time change have intensified. Teachers as

researchers in the classroom have been chronicled by Mertler (2006). The focus has shifted from the more traditional theoretical methods of research to practical facets of inquiry based research that can be applied in the classroom. Mertler (2006) takes examples from published action research studies for the purpose of demonstrating the vital need for educators to design and conduct school based research in order to make effective decisions that directly impact what happens in schools everyday. Action research provides a relevant and rigorous means of gathering and analyzing data. Action research fosters reflective outcomes that benefit those that do the research.

Action research, for those of us who are practitioners as well as researchers, serves as a vehicle to help transpose institutions from the more conventional ways of conducting research (theory) to a more pragmatic approach (practice). Action research, as well, attempts to bridge the gap between researchers and the broader constituencies that they are designed to serve (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Action research integrates theory and practice.

This action research study aims to solve a pertinent problem in the existing context of an internship experience and the schools and community in which the interns are working. Through this inquiry process (Greenwood & Levin, 2000), the African American researcher collaborates with local stakeholders (a White university professor and sixteen interns) to seek and enact solutions to the process of adequately preparing teachers to work in high poverty, mostly minority, urban school settings.

The study addresses the question of whether the church experience will provide preservice teachers with insight into students' culture and whether this insight will impact teaching practices of these interns. Specifically, this action research will allow

participants and researchers to generate knowledge through a communicative process where all participants' contributions are accepted equally. Through a process of providing an immersion experience, the researcher will take the opportunity to solve a real-life problem in context. Meanings constructed in this inquiry process will lead to action that will contribute to a change in the theory and the practice of the university in preparing teachers for work in these schools. In addition, it will serve as a springboard for a litany of activities for principals that they can continue or provide to novice teachers to help build their cultural competence.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The goal of qualitative research is to examine and understand the work of real people in real settings (Hatch, 2002). This qualitative study used an action research framework. Action research incorporates forms of ethnography with case study techniques to inquire, reflect and bring about changes in real life settings to make the research meaningful and pertinent (Freebody, 2003). Action research is “learning by doing”. Moreover, action research contributes to the practical issues of people in bona fide problematic situations in existing institutions as well as contributes to the body of research regarding that issue. This research method is highly reflective, experiential, and participatory (Berg, 2004). There is a dual goal in action research to investigate a system and simultaneously collaborate with members involved in that system to impact it in ways that lead to desired change. Action research allows for the integration of practical outcomes related to the actual work of the participants involved (O’Brien, 2001).

Reason and Bradbury (2008) define action research as, “A participatory process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice” (p.4). Action research is inquiry that is done by or with stakeholders in an organization. It is a reflective process that is deliberately and systematically undertaken and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions. The debate is still raging as to what constitutes evidence (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

What distinguishes action research from general practitioner work is the emphasis on scientific study. The researcher spends considerable time refining methods as

situations unfold, collecting, analyzing, and reporting data on an ongoing, cyclical basis. A certain degree of latitude in terms of the evolution of the methodology is inherent in the action research process. While some of the steps may remain the same-iterative cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect- these are broad categories that will be rendered as actions during the scope of the inquiry (Lewin, 1948). In action research, this continual cycle revolves around reflection and action. Each spiral allows for the collection of data and ongoing analysis that clarifies the situation, which may result in new definitions or issues that need to be addressed (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). This determines the next steps in the cycle.

Susman (1983) provides a more explicit description of action research. He distinguishes five phases within the action research cycle. Initially a problem is identified and data is collected for a more detailed analysis. This is followed by the description of a set of assumptions from which a single plan of action emerges and is implemented. Data on the results of the intervention are collected and analyzed and the findings are interpreted in light of how successful the action has been. The problem is reassessed and the process begins another cycle. The cycle continues until the problem is solved or until viable solutions emerge.

It is for these reasons I have chosen action research. This process will enable me to gain knowledge about how to facilitate learning about culture and culturally responsive pedagogy that will benefit me in my work with novice teachers and in my partnership experiences preparing preservice teachers.

Several elements distinguish action research from other types of research. Since the research takes place in authentic settings and in real time, it can result in real



solutions to problems. Just as significant is that action research has a social dimension. The final element allows for the primary researcher to acknowledge biases to the other participants. Unlike in other disciplines, researchers do not have to attempt to remain objective (O'Brien, 2001). As an African American, a principal and a parent, I am directly invested in preparing teachers to effectively work with African American students. As an African American, I have been mortified by the level of academic achievement in African American students. In addition, as principal, I have experienced the burden of trying to recruit and retain teachers in my school. More importantly, as a parent, I have lived the frustrations of parents and students who feel as though the needs of African American students are not being adequately addressed due to lack of cultural understanding. This action research allowed me to immediately and directly impact progress in this area.

Subsequently, an assumption in action research is that an action researcher must connect organically to the practice being studied (Levin & Martin, 2007). As practitioner and researcher it was important for me to engage in "experiential knowing". This process is active, intentional, and highly engaging due to the connection to the issue being studied and benefactor of what is learned in the process. As a sitting principal in a school that serves students who are predominately African American and economically disadvantaged, it is imperative that I recruit and retain qualified teachers who have a level of cultural competence that allows them to effectively meet the needs of these students. The opportunity to do action research to attempt to provide meaningful opportunities to help build cultural competence in teachers prior to entering the schools as novice teachers provides an opportunity to assist other principals as well

as equip teachers to be more successful in hopes that they will want to work and remain in these schools.

### **Research Questions**

This action research study addressed the following question: How will participation in community experiences with African American adults and children impact preservice teachers' knowledge of culture and ideas about how to build on children's culture in the classroom. Specifically it examined: 1) What do preservice teachers perceive and report learning about African American culture from community experiences and 2) What implications for teaching do preservice teachers draw from this experience?

This action research study attempted two main goals: 1) to uncover or produce information and knowledge that will be directly useful to the researcher in working with novice and preservice teacher and 2) to empower the participants and researcher to use the information to impact their practices in their urban school settings. The research process was a spiral activity of plan, act, observe, and reflect. In other words, features of action research provided me the opportunity to try out ideas in practice as a way to add to the knowledge about the use of cultural informants and culture experience on the impact of teaching practices in urban schools.

### **Study Design**

#### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. Purposeful sampling allowed me to intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand an aspect of that setting (Creswell, 2002). Sixteen preservice teachers completing their internships in high poverty, high minority schools and enrolled in one internship seminar

course were invited to participate. All sixteen interns agreed to participate in this study. These interns were in three urban schools. All three schools were Title I schools with 90% of the students on free/reduced lunch. Ninety percent of the students in the schools were African American. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained on August 25, 2009 and informed consent letters were signed and collected at the start of the term. The IRB and sample informed consent letter are included in Appendix A.

Prior to the first day of school for the interns, they were asked to give an introduction of themselves online and to describe the talent they hope to bring to the classroom. The following table provides an overview of the journal entries for this initial assignment. The synopses are drawn from their descriptions of themselves.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the preservice teachers.

All of these students came into their internship believing that even students who face overwhelming challenges in their lives and their learning deserve good teachers. These students came in committed to learning to become better teachers by looking at their own perceptions and practices and committed to doing “whatever it takes” knowing that next to parents, teachers have the greatest impact in shaping the lives and futures of children. Through their class, seminar and classroom internship, they committed to learning about the beliefs and practices that will help motivate their students and propel them towards academic success. They believed that success in the classroom began with relationships between the teacher and the students. One important factor that played into the reality of these ideals was that all but one of the interns was young, white and female. Only one of the students was an African American. This created a

challenge for the preservice teachers because they were interning in urban schools that had an African American population of over ninety percent.

Table 3-1: Participant list and forum introductions

Name	Grade	Description
Alice	4	I look forward to working with at-risk students, and plan to do everything possible to make a positive contribution to their lives. The talent I hope to bring to my classroom is my passion for literacy. I hope that my genuine love of books and reading will inspire my kindergartners to discover the joy literacy can bring.
Debra	3	I think my artistic and adventurous side is my greatest asset. Learning cannot be important to students if we do not take their own world into account.
Molly	1	I would say my special attribute I have and can bring to my classroom is my upbeat personality and flexibility. I have a lot of tricks up my sleeve for keeping the kids engaged.
Katie	5	I enjoy arts and crafts, as well as drawing, so I think this is an asset I may bring to the classroom. I like to do lots of hands on activities that incorporate art.
Misty	5	One thing I think I bring to the classroom is that I can easily relate to boys. Since elementary school boys rarely get a male teacher, I hope this aspect of my personality will help us bridge a gap that can sometimes cause barriers.
Brenda	3	One asset that I will bring to my class is patience. I am generally an extremely patient person, especially when it comes to teaching others.
Violet	1	One special skill that I bring to the classroom is my ability to draw. I have an artistic side that has been extremely helpful in all my educational experiences.
Sammie	4	One of the best things that I have to offer the students in my classroom is an understanding of where they are coming from. I have learned to connect with these students in a way that they can relate to me.
Kissie	3	I think my greatest assets are that I am passionate and hardworking. I strongly believe in making learning fun and interactive. Therefore, I plan to incorporated lots of interactive activities into my classroom this fall. I also believe in creating an environment where students feel safe and comfortable.
Monet	2	Something that I believe that I can bring as an asset to the classroom is my adaptability skills. Being able to adapt and having the sense to do that on the spot will hopefully help with classroom management as well.

Table 3-1. Continued

Name	Grade	Description
Sally	1	I am a technology specialization, which is the skill or asset I believe I can bring to my classroom this semester.
Mykayla	1	One asset that I'll bring to the classroom (hopefully) is my previous experience interning in a high-poverty school. I'm really eager to spend time learning each student's assets and ways that I can cater instruction to meet their needs.
Olivia	1	One special skill I bring to the classroom is my ability to make reading interesting for many students....I don't mind acting silly and making funny voices to help children enjoy the story.
Teresa	2	I feel a bond with my students already because I live in the same neighborhood as them and I am aware of the music, activities, and speed of the majority of the students. I can relate to them and find it easy to get on their level.
Buffy	3	One special asset that I have to bring to my classroom is my love or reading. I am excited to introduce my students to some of my favorite chapter books from third grade. I hope that my passion for exploring the world through literature will motivate my students and give them purpose in their own learning of reading this year!
Cassidy	5	One asset that I have that I would bring to the classroom is a love for writing. I want to change their feelings about this subject.

### **Role of Researcher and Other Faculty**

This type of action research allowed me as an African American researcher to take a collaborative stance and serve as partner alongside the interns. I contributed expertise as needed as a participant in the process as well as the facilitator for the visit. Other participants (seminar leader and supervising professor who were Hispanic and White respectively) added their resources to the research process by providing credibility to the findings by allowing the preservice teachers to debrief in class and during the seminar following the church visit. I conducted interviews with both the professor and seminar leader midway through the study and again with the professor after the study in order to debrief my initial thoughts about the findings and triangulate my data to add credibility to my findings.

## **Community Experience/ Intervention**

These interns were provided with an introductory experience to build their knowledge of the majority culture of the students in their schools to impact their perceptions of their students and to impact practice in the classroom. This intervention, which all participants perceived as significant, focused on a visit to an African American church.

I decided to use a church visit as the intervention because of the role it plays in this community and the potential for immersion into what might seem like a foreign culture to these students. The church is a major source of support in the African community (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991). Interns attended church services at a church in the neighborhood in which their students lived. This church has partnered with schools in this area through their education initiative by providing financial support as well as mentors, tutors and volunteers. The church has a membership of approximately 2000 members and has only been in the neighborhood for seven years. It is not only the biggest spiritual resource for the community but also provides educational, financial, and physical resources to the neighborhood. The participants attended the main service at 11:00 a.m. and were invited to a short reception afterwards with church leaders, members, parents, and students. This intervention was part of an out of class experience that was required by the course instructor.

## **Data Collection**

There were two primary sources of data collected to examine the impact of the community experience on the knowledge and instructional practices of the preservice teachers. One source was the on-line reflective journal entry, which provided information about what the preservice teachers learned from the experience and the

implications for practice. The second source was a class session where the preservice teachers debriefed their visit and discussed their learning and the implications for teaching. Both data sources are described below in more detail.

**Reflective writing based on community experiences.** After the community experience, students were asked to write an online reflective journal entry about the experience. Based on the church experience the course instructor required a one page formal written reflection in which the students shared their learning, linked it to a reading on the characteristics of African American culture, and described how they might use what they learned in teaching. The specific directions for the reflective report were for the interns to reflect on what they observed and what they learned about the culture during that the service and the interactions with the members before and after the service. The exact prompts were: 1) What have I learned about African American culture or perspectives? 2) What did I see or hear that I think will help me to teach my students better? 3) What specific ideas do I have about how to use this information in my classroom practice?

Students were asked to post their responses to the prompt immediately following the church experience. Student responses were framed by what they had learned about culturally responsive pedagogy in their class based on readings and taped examples of culturally responsive teaching. The journals entries were analyzed to determine the impact of the experience on the interns' cultural knowledge and implications for their teaching practices.

**Class debriefing on the community experience.** The participants were able to share their feedback from the church visit during a class session. I was able to attend

the class where the professor asked the group to respond to 1) what they learned about African American culture; 2) what they learned about their students; and 3) what implications for teaching they drew from the experience. Notes from this class session were analyzed.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is defined as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 145). In this study, qualitative data analysis was used to organize the information into categories and to try to identify relationships among the categories. Specifically, the data were analyzed to examine participants’ perceptions of the church experience and the implications for teaching. By using the system of triangulation, the two data sources (written reflections about community experiences, and a class debrief session) and interviews with the professor and seminar leader yielded more meaningful analysis and added credibility to the study.

Inductive analysis allowed me to look for patterns of meaning from the data collected. The purposes for using an inductive approach were 1) to filter the data into a format that can be useful 2) to look for patterns between the research objective and the data collected 3) to form a conclusion about the data as it relates to the research question. An inductive model outlined by Hatch (2002) was used. On an informal level, data analysis began as data were collected (Hatch, 2002). Inductive analysis went from the particular, detailed data (transcripts and typed notes from the class session) to the general (codes and themes) (Creswell, 2002). More structured, formal data analysis



consisted of transcribing, identifying themes, and drawing conclusions about the data. These steps were done simultaneously and repeatedly (Gough & Scott, 2000).

Prior to analysis all reflective comments from journals and class session were transcribed verbatim. Key ideas derived from the comments were written in the margin of the documents as they were examined. These codes were color coded and grouped into nine categories. The nine categories that emerged were: *belief in children, conviction, feelings and emotions, expression, participation, energy and movement, music and expressive use of language, family and community, and other.*

I then looked for quotes to support the categories to see if there were sufficient references throughout the documents to substantiate it as a major category. As a result of this analysis process, the categories were narrowed down to three themes. These themes were *family and community, music and movement, and affect and expressive use of language.* Some initial categories such as *expression* collapsed into *feeling and emotions* and then finally into *affect*. The categories of *convictions, belief in children, and other* did not have substantial data to hold up as themes. Within each theme the preservice teacher quotes were analyzed to come up with lessons learned about culture and implications for teaching.

### **Trustworthiness of the Findings**

The process of triangulation was used to validate the findings. In order to increase the credibility of the study, I used debriefing with the professor and the seminar leader on their analysis of the impact of the interventions as seen through written assignments posted in the online journal, observed in the classroom setting, and discussed in class. Triangulation and peer debriefing are important factors in ensuring the quality of a qualitative inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Two interviews were held with the

professor. One was in the beginning and one at the end of the semester. The seminar leader was also interviewed at the end of the semester. My findings were substantiated by the professor and the seminar leader.

### **Limitations**

In the heuristic approach there is no assurance that the things which have been coded are always the same sort of thing and further limitations include the possibility that not everything was captured during data coding.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This study examined the reflections of preservice teachers in relation to their experiential knowledge gained through active learning of the African American culture as well as the perceptions and beliefs of these teachers concerning the home life of these students and their lives in the community. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions: 1) What do these preservice teachers perceive and report learning about African American culture from the cultural experience and 2) What implications for teaching do they derive from their immersion experience. As the preservice teachers involved in this study talked about what they saw and learned in one African American church experience they broadened their image of African American home life, community life and culture and linked their learning to ideas about how to more effectively motivate students to learn and scaffold them toward success. The teachers' insights showcase their emergent knowledge about the differences in the cultural norms that might guide their students' interactions in school and shape their perspectives about learning. What did they see and what did they learn?

### **The Church Visit**

As I rounded the corner to my school, I could see that the faculty parking lot was filled with cars. As I drew closer, I could see that the parking lot was filled with young ladies, mostly white women, standing in groups talking among themselves. This was an unusual sight for this day, Sunday. This was the group of young university preservice teachers that I would escort to a neighborhood church located only two blocks away. As I parked, I wondered what the topic of discussion was within the various groups. As I got out of the car, all the dialogue ceased and everyone turned to me. I greeted them

and explained that we would walk the two blocks to the church to attend the service and a reception afterward. To my surprise there were no questions or comments at this time. I could see though that there was a sense of anticipation among the young ladies.

As we entered the church, we were greeted by men and women at the entrance to the church, wearing white gloves and smiles from ear to ear. These greeters welcomed us warmly with hugs and words. As we stepped through the vestibule, we were embraced by yet another team dressed in matching skirts and blouses. Members of this team, ushers as they are called, graciously escorted us to seats reserved for us in the sanctuary and handed us programs that outlined the service and church announcements. Words of welcome were even illuminated on large screens at the front of the church. As we took our seats, people all around us began to come to us and greet us with hugs and kisses and words of welcome, letting us know that they were glad to have us here.

As the service began our attention was drawn to the front of the church where a church announcer went through the church events and announcements and once again welcomed our group to the church service. She used humor and used her voice to stress important aspects of these announcements. She fervently announced the start of the service and a team of six worshippers accompanied by a choir and the audience began a rousing selection of spiritual songs and prayers. All around the building people stood and sang and prayed together for several minutes. There was no restraint as the people clapped, swayed, danced, sang and shouted. I looked around at the interns who had accompanied me there. They were standing, looking, and listening. After a few minutes some interns began to participate by clapping and moving with the music.

Prior to the start of the sermon, the parishioners further participated in the service by presenting their tithes and offerings. Even this event was participatory and high energy. While over 800 people paraded from all ends of the church to deposit their contributions in the baskets held by the ushers at the front of the church, the 75 member choir provided another highly spirited gospel song as the pageantry of givers made their way from all over the church, including the crowded balcony overhead.

When the pastor rose to go to the pulpit to speak, he was warmly greeted with applause and a standing ovation. Many further showed their respect by shouting words of adoration (and affirmation?) to the leader of the church. The pastor used the Bible to give hope to the congregation. His vivid use of language and the use of imagery illustrated his topic. He used intonation to impart seven important areas to inventory our lives. The pastor reached the climax of his sermon with a fire and brimstone interpretation of the rapture. As the sermon ended, the congregants were urged to come to the front to the altar for prayer and salvation. As the people gathered, they openly showed emotion and were embraced and supported by other congregants. The team of ushers provided walked to and fro and provided fans and tissues for those that needed them. Everyone in the church appeared affixed on just supporting each other.

Following the service, the interns wove their way through a sea of parishioners who thanked them for coming and invited them back as they made their way to the fellowship hall where they met with the team of pastors and ministers. During the 20 minute exchange, the pastors and ministers explained the various kinds of support the church provide for children and education. Following the presentation, the preservice

teachers took time to mingle with the church leaders and ask questions. They left together and chatted openly about their experience.

### **Preservice Teacher Learning: Lessons Learned and Implications for Teaching**

As the preservice teachers reflected about the visit on the website, all commented on the sense of family and community that they witnessed as a part of the church service. All of them noticed that the church makes a great effort to include everyone within the community of the church.

Many of the preservice teachers reported that they felt very welcomed from the moment they entered the sanctuary and they noted that the church seemed to place an emphasis on embracing and welcoming people. Several of the preservice teachers confessed that they were uncertain or uncomfortable as they were entering the church, feeling as they were entering unfamiliar territory. Yet, they described an unanticipated feeling of being welcomed and included from the beginning to the end of the service.

The learning from this experience broke down into three major themes: Family and Community, Music and Movement, and Affect and Expressive Use of Language. Within these themes, six lessons learned and four implications for teaching emerged, as outlined in Table 4-1 below. In the following narrative section, I expand the lessons learned about culture, the implications for teaching, and connections to research.

## **Family and Community**

### **Cultural Lessons about Family and Community**

A characteristic that the teachers noted immediately was the emphasis on family and community. This is connected to the concept of communalism which Boykin and colleagues define. as “..the fundamental interdependence of people, where one places importance and priority on social bonds, mutuality, and proactive interconnectedness

with others” (Boykin, Tyler and Miller, 2008, p. ). They highlight this as one key attribute of African American culture. Through attending the church service, the preservice teachers took away two lessons related to communalism.

Table 4-1: Summary of Lessons Learned and Teaching Implications(2)

Theme	Lesson	Teaching Implications
Family and Community Relationships	1. The African American community places great emphasis on family and inclusiveness.	Teachers must create a classroom where all students and families feel welcomed and supported.
	2. African American culture has a strong emphasis on relationships that bridge family and community.	Teachers must place more emphasis on collaboration.
Music and Movement	3. There is an emphasis on music in the African American culture.	Teachers should incorporate music, clapping, singing, dance, and movement into the classroom.
	4. There is an emphasis on movement and a high level of energy in the African American culture.	
Affect and Expressive Use of Language	5. There is a high affect and vocal expression in the African American culture.	Teachers must take into account that affect and expressive use of language is part of the learning style for African American students.
	6. There is a reliance on expressive use of language in the African American culture.	

**Lesson one: The African American community places great emphasis on family and inclusiveness.** The preservice teachers described the ‘warm’ and ‘inviting’ feeling at the church service and noted that members of the church welcomed newcomers and made the necessary accommodations to move them beyond their initial feelings of discomfort. They described the feelings of inclusiveness and many commented that inclusion of family and all members of the community were powerful messages they took from the service.

The most meaningful or apparent aspects were those represented by family and community. (Olivia)

I saw the church really make a great effort to include the family. (Mykayla)

There is an evident connection with the family, other families and the overall community. Many of the activities and programs that were going on involved the whole family. (Sammie)

We were aware immediately that the church valued embracing and welcoming people. (Sally)

Having the opportunity to attend really gave me the opportunity to see how close of a family the community outside the school is and how it embraces ALL people. It was very evident how important family and community are to the people of the African American culture. There was no one sitting by himself or herself and if they were they were graciously greeted by those people sitting next to them and immediately included in with others sitting around them. There was a very warm and inviting feeling at the church that should be modeled in the classroom as well. (Monet)

Attending church I observed was that no one sat alone as everyone was greeted and welcomed to sit w/others during the church services. (Teresa)

**Lesson two: African American culture has a strong emphasis on**

**relationships that bridge family and community.** Preservice teachers not only noted the feelings of affection and connection within the community of the church. They also observed that the church members displayed enthusiasm and were supportive of and honest with one another. They noticed regular shows of affection as well as reassurances provided by church members to one another. Finally, they commented that members felt comfortable enough with one another to be able to laugh, cry, and respond in emotional ways to one another. When making these observations, what stood out to the preservice teachers was the strength of the relationships that they saw and they noted that these relationships were not bounded to families but connected within the entire community of the church. Their lessons came from both their observations and from the messages they heard from the pastor conveying expectations that members help one another.

The African American culture in Gainesville, Florida is a tightly knit sort of 'togetherness' and it is characterized by its culture which includes a church



built on the belief in community relationships and bonds. In fact, it is reported that the family community aspect of church has something for everyone desiring to participate or be involved. It is stated to be quite clear that church members have their own sense of self responsibility for providing assistance to others and the community. Actions taken in assisting others are to be such that these actions are community- rather than individually-based actions. (Molly)

The opportunity to attend church was according enabled me to observe the family , church and community relationship and the manner in which these are interwoven into the African culture. (Monet)

There is an evident connection with the family, other families and the overall community. Many of the activities and programs that were going on involved the whole family. The community is a strong component of African American culture as many people engage in each other's lives daily. (Sammie)

There is an emphasis on community in the African American community. It was obvious that these people looked out for the interest of the community over the interest of the individual (Alice).

### **Implications for Teaching Related to Family and Community**

Studies of schools and teachers that facilitate high achievement in urban schools suggest that schools should help to create a positive school culture and connect school to students' lives and cultural backgrounds (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2005). The preservice teachers made connections between the interactions they observed during the church service and positive classroom environments. They noted that positive environments should include a family and communal atmosphere similar to what they observed during the church service. After reflecting on the church experience, preservice teachers reported several ideas they planned to implement in their classrooms based on what they learned.

**Implication: Create a classroom where all students and families feel welcomed and supported.** Implications for teaching from this experience centered on making the classroom an overall comfortable and warm environment that embraces

everyone's differences and strengths as well emphasizes the value of working together. To build community, the preservice teachers suggested the importance of providing opportunities for students to work together and scaffold learning for each other. In addition, they noted that students are accustomed to having an open and warm relationship with adults in their life. Many of the preservice teachers vowed to create a classroom setting with a feeling similar to what they had experienced during the church service.

Perhaps [I should] make sure that I am in attendance [at church] once a month or try to make it to events that the families will be at. This way I have a chance to talk to them, but it's strictly on their turf and a safe way for me to get to know them. (Mykayla)

I plan on using the students seating arrangements at tables as a way to build a positive community atmosphere like at church. (Molly)

I would build classroom community by creating class laws/Constitution, 'erasing mistakes with erasers, and [holding] morning meetings. (Misty)

I need to connect to the community as a resource. (Violet)

Students love to share stories of their lives and families..I can have time once a week where students share stories of their lives...(Sally)

**Implication: Place more emphasis on collaboration.** The teachers observed that the culture of the African American community in this study is one that is tightly knit and characterized by 'togetherness'. The noted that the church ensures that there is something or some aspect of participation available for everyone and that everyone in the church has a sense of responsibility for assisting others and the community-at-large. These assistive actions are community-based rather than individually-based. They observed that the church was a place in the African American community where no one was alone. This motivated the teachers to think about how to foster stronger

collaboration among students in their classrooms. Many talked about increasing their use of cooperative groups and other collaborative learning structures.

I will use cooperative groups with my students. (Violet)

In my classroom I will incorporate learning activities that will give students an opportunity to function as a family. (Sammie)

I would like to have my students have an opportunity to decide (to some extent) what they are learning about in the classroom. (Cassidy)

[I think it will be important to incorporate more partner work and social interactions... (Kissie)

### **What the Research Says About Family and Community in the African American Culture**

Lessons one and two focus on the impact of the family and community in African American culture as witnessed in the church visit and on how lessons about family and community might be used in the classroom to foster more culturally relevant classrooms.

In these lessons, preservice teachers noted that there is an emphasis on family and inclusiveness in the African American culture. Preservice teachers' observations about the importance of family and community are consistent with research on African American culture. A core value in African American culture is communalism which involves giving without the expectation of receiving as well as the belief that the concerns and needs of the group take priority over individual rights and privileges. This indicates a sense or feeling of duty toward the group. In communalism, a person's sense of self or belonging is based largely on group membership, and belonging can be a source of pride. Sharing and cooperation are encouraged as ends unto themselves, whereas self-centeredness and actions or behaviors driven by selfish gain is viewed

negatively (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1998; Coleman, 1998; Boykin, Coleman, Lilja & Tyler, 2004; Boykin, Tyler and Miller, 2008).

As implications for teaching practice, the preservice teachers communicate their views about the pedagogical implications of the cultural emphasis on community. These preservice teachers learned that they need to create a classroom where all students and families feel welcomed and supported. Their conclusions are consistent with conclusions drawn by Foster (1993) who interviewed 18 teachers who had been recognized as outstanding teachers of African American students. Conclusions from the interviews revealed that the teachers used their memories of their own childhood teachers who served as surrogate parents for the students they taught. These memories served as the foundation for how they viewed their role as teacher. Kinship was used to describe their relationships with their students. Family and connectedness were a part of the culture. Other researchers studying effective teachers of African American students make similar points. The teachers are able to form positive relationships with students and their families and increase their willingness to participate in schooling. You may often see them in the community, visiting homes, attending churches, or frequenting neighborhood businesses (Foster, 1993). This same research by Foster, also spoke to what was noted in the second implication. These preservice teachers realized that they needed to place more emphasis on collaboration. This need is supported in the literature. For example, most of what happens in the classroom hinges on competitive behavior and individual achievement. In the mind of teachers deemed good teachers, learning became a social event. Learning was done as a group

(Foster, 1993). This implication as well is supported by numerous researchers (Steele, 1992; Ogbu, 1993; Gay, 2002).

### **Music and Movement**

The next group of lessons identified stemmed from music and movement. Boykin and colleagues conceptualized that movement includes the interwoven montage of movement expressiveness, dance, percussiveness, rhythm, and syncopated music (Boykin, 1986). African American students that embrace these aspects of culture, as witnessed in the church service, rely on these entities as ways to engage in life itself and are actually vital to the psychological health. Also conveyed in the movement theme is rhythmic orientation toward life that is manifested in speech patterns or physical activity. Finally, the manifestation of receptiveness to a rich and expansive movement and gestural repertoire is present in their movement theme (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2008).

The preservice teachers in this study note that music and movement are clearly embedded in the African American culture. Preservice teachers reflected that seeing the intensity and degree of verve and physical movement that occurred in the church put into perspective the challenge for their students.

### **Cultural Lessons on Music and Movement**

African American music is derived from the tribal polyrhythmic music from West Africa. African music was nurtured in slavery and was used to pass on history, teach lessons, soothe the pain of suffering and relay messages (Stewart, 1998). The African American music as witnessed in the church visit used call and response, syncopation, percussion, improvisation and use of multi-part harmony to create spirituals. Members of the African American culture often express themselves through their music.

**Lesson three: There is an emphasis on music in the African American community.** The preservice teachers in this study noted that music was clearly embedded in the church service. The pervasiveness of song, rhythm and chanting in the church service was clearly evident and readily reflected on by the preservice teachers. The preservice teachers reflected that the music was contagious and everyone, including themselves, was drawn into the music that was seemingly being made by only a few instruments. Everyone was totally engrossed in the music as it resounded throughout the sanctuary.

Music held a power over individuals in the congregations as they sang and danced. Music is an important part of the culture of the church. I saw the power the music had over the congregation as everyone sang and danced. They didn't only sing...they felt the music in their souls. (Olivia)

You could not have been present at the Sunday service without taking away the importance of rhythm and music. The level of joy brought forth through the music was contagious and invited participation from all present. (Alice)

I observed the importance of music in the African American culture from our visit to the church. (Violet)

Music and rhythm are played throughout the service..it sounds phenomenal with just two instruments. (Mikayla)

Lesson four: There is an emphasis on movement and a high level of energy in the African American culture that was evident throughout the church service. African dance find its earliest roots in the dances of the African slaves in America (Malnig, 2009)). Dance in the African American culture was a part of every day life and special occasions. Many of the traditional dance genres as elements of the expressive body language of the Africans still exist in the African American culture today (Fabre & O'Meally, 2008). The enslaved Africans were unable to bring physical items with them from their motherland but purposely recreated their dance traditions in American as a

preserved artifact from their heritage (Malnig, 2009). The preservice teachers noted that creative and expressive movement was an integral part of the church service. The amount and intensity of movement in this traditionally solemn experience left an impression in the minds of the preservice teachers. Usually restricted to standing and sitting quietly, these preservice teachers realized the emphasis of unrestricted movement in the African American culture.

I learned the about the emphasis on movement and rhythm. I noticed the emphasis of levels of energy and movement in their singing and reciting prayers. (Kissie)

Seeing the intensity and amount of physical movement that occurred in church put into perspective the challenge for my students. (Buffy)

People are constantly swaying and moving. (Mikayla)

The pastor did not simply stand behind the podium and speak to the church but he walked around, used arm gestures... While the pastor was engaging and kept my attention, the members of the church did not just sit and listen, they stood up, raised their arms. (Molly)

### **Implications for Teaching Regarding Music and Movement**

Once the students recognized the pervasiveness of music and movement in African American culture they used that knowledge to reflect on the classroom behavior of their students and to identify pedagogy that might be more engaging for their students. For African American students for whom this is a major theme, music and movement, taken separately or coordinated, are ways of engaging life itself and are vital to their psychological health. Also, conveyed in the movement is a rhythmic orientation toward life that is manifested in speech patterns or physical activity.

**Implication: Incorporate music, clapping, singing, dance and movement into the classroom.** The manifestation of and receptiveness to a rich and expansive repertoire of movement and gestures is also a part of this cultural theme (Boykin, Tyler,

and Miller, 2008). Preservice teachers noted that it is imperative that opportunities for the cultural themes of music and movement to be included in the classroom. Preservice teachers realized the importance of including choral response and kinesthetic activities in their lessons. Opportunities for movement and music would help in creating a culturally responsive classroom.

One specific way that this information applies to the classroom is allowing my students to voice themselves during instruction. Allowing the students to chorally respond....maybe we could use more music in class. The high amount of energy and movement can be incorporated into the classroom through kinesthetic activities and teacher enthusiasm for the lesson's focus and students' success. (Katie)

I could try to create activities where vocal expressions are incorporated. For example, having the students repeat formulas or mnemonics out loud may help them to remember. I could also create rhythmic ways of learning various things such as tables, formulas, or definitions. I also need to incorporate rhythm and movement into lessons. I plan to include more hands on activities as well as breaks in between subjects where the students can get up and move around. (Kissie)

I am trying to incorporate music into our daily routine; even something simple like playing classical music in the background during activities to break the silence in the classroom. Allow students to stand during instruction...have 'brain breaks' between lessons; play kids music and allow them to dance for a couple of minutes. (Olivia)

Incorporating movement and music into the classroom will engage students as it did at the church. Songs can be modified to integrate different lessons and/or skills that students can make up on their own or use from other sources. (Monet)

Although I am not going to allow my students a free for all with movement, enthusiastic words and dancing, I do believe my classroom can be more culturally responsive when I incorporate them. I will also provide opportunities for students to dance, sing and move around the classroom. Math, reading science and even social studies can be taught with dancing, singing, rapping, or drumming. For physical activity we sometime have freeze dance that give them the chances to have that free but appropriate spirit. (Sammie)

Since movement is such a major component of my students' culture it would be useful to incorporate kinesthetic activities into my lessons. (Violet)



To use this in the classroom, I think I could start to include more music or movement in some of my lessons. Perhaps the children will learn basic addition and subtraction facts if put to a song that they can move to. (Sally)

### **What the Research Says About Music and Movement as Part of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Lesson three highlights an enormous emphasis on music in the African American community. As noted in the reflections from preservice teachers, music was a key part of the services. From start to finish, they were engulfed by the sound of music and singing. The music is a participatory act and is often used in the church to illustrate another theme in African American culture that did not emerge as a major theme in this study--spirituality. Music is often tied to spirituality in the African American church. Music has been included in studies that show that over two thirds of students indicate a preference for music in combination with movement and expressiveness and 88% of students in one study identified music as vital to their psychological health (Boykin & Bailey, 2000).

Movement as an emphasis was documented in Lesson four. Movement was identified as one of three Afro-centric cultural themes that must be present to provide positive cognitive contexts for African American children (Boykin & Bailey, 2000). In Boykin and Bailey's study (2008) approximately 72% of the students indicated that their homes were filled with movement, music and rhythm and 62% of the students indicated that movement and music were vital to their psychological wellbeing and that of their family. Gestures and exaggerated movement were identified by 60% of these students as being inherent in their home life. The current study shows that the church experience enabled preservice teachers to clearly identify the saliency of music and movement for their students.

The implications for teaching practice for the use of music and movement during lessons was well documented in the preservice teachers' on-line entries. Likewise, numerous researchers document the fact that African American students learn more when the cultural theme of music and movement is included with the lesson (Boykin & Allen, 1998; Allen & Butler, 1996; Gay, 2002). In a study by Boykin and Allen (1998), African Americans students were asked to complete tasks with the use of music and movement. African American students outperformed their counterparts on these tasks. In another study, music and movement were not included and the students were required to focus only on the given tasks (Allen & Butler, 1996). In this instance, White students out performed the African American students. In addition, it was reported that the African American students showed signs of disengagement and off task behavior. These studies further suggest that in the presence of culturally responsive pedagogy (i.e., the incorporation of music and movement) students did better academically. This research makes the case for music and movement as core elements of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Another study by Allen & Butler (1996) investigated two instruction strategies that included music and movement. The first strategy incorporated lots of movement and music and the second strategy included very little movement and no music. The results showed that the African American students taking part in these lessons performed better on multiple-choice reasoning test with the use of movement and music. In contrast, the white students scored better on the low movement, no music assessment. The study highlights the positive connection between music and movement in higher achievement in African American students.

In an additional study, Hanley and Noblit (2006) showcased a hip hop workshop that allowed the genre of poetry in spoken word as a way to tap into the relevant cultural theme and tie it to academic learning. Hip hop provided a platform for students to connect with literacy goals and allowed the African American students a venue to demonstrate their strengths using free styling and verbal and conceptual improvisation. If we are to increase the academic achievement of these students teachers need to incorporate cultural themes such as music and movement into their instruction.

### **Affect and Expressive Use of Language**

#### **Cultural Lessons about Affect and Expressive Use of Language**

The affect cultural theme includes emotional expressiveness and responsiveness, with an emphasis on not withholding emotions. Affect conveys that there is value contained in rich and complex emotional expression (regarding tone, quality, emphasis, volume and connotation), as feelings are believed to connect thoughts and behaviors (Boykin & Bailey, 2000). With regards to affect, there is a special perceptiveness of emotional cues. There is also a high degree of intensity in the expressions, suggesting a sense of feeling deeply and strongly about things. Therefore affect is deemed as at least important as cognition is in content and context (Boykin, Tyler, and Miller, 2008). There are two cultural lessons learned by the preservice teachers related to affect and expressive use of language. The final lesson focuses on implications for teaching practice as a result of observations during the church service.

**Lesson five: There is high affect and vocal expression in the African American community.** During the service, the preservice teachers realized that vocal expressions, shouting out, and emitting emotions through vocal expression was a staple in the church service. It was evident that pastor elicited these type responses and the

parishioners complied. The pastor performed and not simply preached. The legacy of the African American oral tradition manifests in various forms. African American preachers tend to perform and not just speak. Feelings are emitted through the preachers tone, volume and gestures. Call and response is another pervasive element of the African American culture. It is acceptable and common for the congregation to react verbally, show emotion vocally, and interrupt the preacher with shouts of affirmations (North Carolina Museum of History, 2009).

I now understand why many of my African American students are used to shouting out. From the church, I learned that vocal expressions are incorporated. The pastor had a way of telling like it is. (Teresa)

The pastor did not simply stand behind the podium and speak...he regularly changed his tone of voice...they shouted out 'Amen' whenever they felt something touch them or when they agreed with the pastor. They showed their emotion by clapping, jumping up and down, or raising their arms. (Molly)

The church members expressed all their emotions due to the warmth and welcoming environment. The church members felt comfortable enough to cry, laugh and respond in other emotional ways to the sermon and music because it was a safe environment. (Katie)

The pastor made the congregation laugh. At church many people spoke encouraging, enthusiastic words that lifted the audience. (Mikayla)

I noticed the emotional impact the music, prayers, and sermons caused in the congregation. Several members were crying due to the strong impact of the message. There were other members going around handing out tissues to aid their fellow congregates. (Kissie)

**Lesson six: There is a reliance on expressive use of language in the African American culture.** The preservice teachers readily identified the orality or expressive use of language in the service. Orality or use of language refers to the significance attached to knowledge gained and passed by word of mouth. It implies a special receptiveness to the spoken word and reliance on oral expression to carry meaning and

feeling. There is a strong reliance on the call and response mode of communication.

The expressive use of language centers on the idea that speaking is viewed as a performance and not just merely a way of communicating (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). Preservice teachers clearly noted that the church encouraged vocal expression and opinion.

There was a high amount of individual speaking out using call and response techniques (expressive individualism). (Katie).

The church encouraged vocal expressions and opinion. I learned the emphasis on vocal expressions. I now understand why many of my African American students are used to shouting out. From the church, I learned that vocal expressions are incorporated.... They also emphasized repetition. I noticed the constant shouting out to agree with a statement from the pastor. (Kissie)

I have learned that part of this culture is showing your appreciation and showing what you feel. (Cassidy)

The church was very vocal...I also no that while at the church we were surrounded by noise on tasks comments or agreements. (Debra)

The pastor did not simply stand behind the podium and speak to the church but he walked around, used arm gestures, and regularly changed his tone of voice. While the pastor was engaging and kept my attention the members of the church did not just sit and listen, they stood up, raised their arms and shouted out 'Amen' whenever they felt something touch them or when they agreed with the pastor. (Molly)

They supported each other as they expressed their spirituality. The pastor used imagery in talking about many things throughout the service and did so with a lot of detail. I don't think I have ever been in a service that gave me as many mental images of what the pastor was talking about as today's. (Alice)

Another perspective that I have is verve is needed to hold African American attention. (Teresa)

I have also learned that part of this culture is showing your appreciation and showing what you feel. (Cassidy)

## **Implications for Teaching Regarding Affect and Expressive Use of Language**

Strong affective strength and expressive use of language is another example of how the African American community relies on its oral tradition as a means for preserving history, morals, and other information in their culture. Affect and expressive use of language is another practice that is consistent with the tradition of a culture that like many others did not rely on the written word (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). From these observations, the preservice teachers were able to come up with pedagogical strategies that they could use in their classrooms to support these cultural themes.

**Implication: Teachers must take into account that affect and expressive use of language is a part of the learning style for African American students.**

Preservice teachers observed throughout the church service that affect and the use of expressive language was dominant in the African American culture. From the announcements to the benediction, descriptive language and imagery permeated the service. Oral participation was encouraged and expected. Preservice teachers vowed to create classrooms that incorporated a balance of call and response. They began to reflect on how to use animation in their lessons. In addition, they realized that classrooms could be places filled with active learning.

I need to take into account that students may not be accustomed to waiting to be called on.... Create a balance of choral response, free response and making sure that I am patient while they are learning to raise their hand (especially when they are young and newer to schooling). (Debra)

Specific ideas about how I can use this information that I observed in my classroom involves giving students the ability to freely participate without the restrictions of raising their hands and waiting for a turn. Taking part in a whole group lessons with the call and response format would allow students to be themselves and comfortable in an environment that can also be educational. (Monet)

There are two different approaches I plan to use when incorporating this new knowledge into my classroom. One approach is to incorporate more elements of call and response instruction. (Buffy)

I would allow the students to learn with verve. When learning about a topic I would like to have my students in small groups make up a song that corresponds to the content. (Cassidy)

Also I have noticed that students respond more to my teaching if I am animated. I thought this was simply because I was more amusing this way. Now, I think it could originate from a cultural norm...students who are African American are probably more accustomed to animated conversation. So, if I tap into my more animated self, I will probably be more likely to have positive results in my teaching. (Misty)

I now understand why many of my African American students are used to shouting out. From the church, I learned that vocal expressions are accepted and emphasized. Therefore, I could try to create rhythmic ways of learning various things such as times tables, formulas and definitions. I plan to use more discussions where my students will be able to voice their thoughts and opinions. I will then encourage them to make connections between their thoughts and the topic being presented. (Kissie)

### **What the Research Says About the Impact of Affect and Use of Language as it Relates to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Affect as it is used in the context of traditional African American culture is described as the acceptance of emotions as expressive. Expressive use of language coupled with the propensity for orality and expressive individualism are cultural themes that often do not fit well into the traditional classroom setting (Boykin & Allen, 1998). A culturally responsive classroom would allow these traits to be used to motivate, engage and challenge students. Ogbu (1993) argued that the speech patterns in schools are not conducive to high engagement for African American students. In fact, he states that some students view the disparity between patterns of communication from the home to school as a detriment to their learning and it impacts their belief in their ability to learn. He contends that this battle between students' home and school culture can have a devastating impact on African American students' ability to be successful academically.

Cleary and Peacock (1998) summed it up the need for culturally responsive pedagogy by simply writing that schools that recognize, embrace and utilize a child's culture into the day to day educational process have significant better success at education students.

All of the cultural themes observed by the preservice teachers can and should be applied in the classroom. These themes and implications were also evident in the classroom discussions following the immersion experience where the preservice teachers processed the church experience. Both the professor in the class as well as the seminar leader took the opportunity to debrief during the first class meeting after the immersion experience.



## CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine through action research the manner in which a cultural experience or intervention provided to preservice teachers served to build cultural competence to enhance effectiveness in teaching students in high poverty and primarily African American urban schools. I am a principal in one of these urban schools and initiated this study due to recognition of the need to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers for these schools and to prepare novice teachers to provide a culturally responsive classroom learning environment. Preservice teachers who enter the local college of education and who intern in the local high minority, predominately African American schools are predominantly white females who often do not possess the prior knowledge and experiences to connect with and make sense of the multicultural issues faced in the schools. The study was designed to provide a culturally authentic experience for these preservice teachers to assist them in connecting theory and practice. At the time of their internship, the students were taking a graduate level course in elementary curriculum that was based on the theme “Engaging All Students in Learning.” The course focused on classroom structure, climate, curriculum and instructional strategies. This would enable teachers to develop and learn from communities that fostered successful engagement in activities that resulted in learning.

As previously stated, there is a need to improve the educational experiences of African American students in order to increase student achievement levels for these students. Ladson-Billing (1998) notes that teachers need to engage in critical reflection concerning race and culture so that they can develop pedagogical practice that is culturally relevant. Culturally relevant pedagogy is necessary in order to foster the

academic achievement and economic success of African American students. The current study was designed to investigate the possible influence of a cultural event on the perspectives and planning of preservice teachers. The research addressed the following specific questions: (1) What do preservice teachers perceive and report learning about African American culture from a community experience? (2) What implications for teaching do preservice teachers draw from this experience?

The action research conducted in this study has been geared toward improving future preparation and support for preservice and novice teachers working in high poverty and mostly minority urban schools. The intent of this study was to enhance the professional practice of the researcher in her role as principal in one of the schools in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the study and examine how the learning of the preservice teachers relates to the attributes of African American culture drawn from the literature. I will also draw from the literature to talk about attributes that preservice teachers either failed to discuss or that were underemphasized or misinterpreted. Finally, I will speak from my role as principal and describe implications for my practice in working to prepare teachers to teach in high poverty urban schools. I will end the chapter with implications of this study for colleges and schools as they equip culturally responsive teachers to work in schools.

### **Summary of the Study**

As noted in the findings in this study the preservice teachers involved in this study believed that the home and community lives of the African American students they taught are rich with knowledge and that learning about their home and community would assist the teachers in providing better methods of classroom instruction in order to support the learning of their students. Both the preservice teachers and I gained a great

deal of knowledge as we entered into the lives of the African American students in their community and specifically as they attended the church attended by many of these students. The knowledge gained will greatly assist the teachers in providing a more culturally responsive classroom. The lessons learned by the preservice teachers include lessons relating to both the family and community of these students and ultimately the cultural background of the poor African American students.

### **Learning About the Culture**

This action research study was designed to accomplish two main goals: 1) to uncover or produce information and knowledge that will be directly useful to the researcher in working with novice and preservice teachers and 2) to empower the participants and researcher to use the information to impact their practices in their urban school settings. Preservice teachers were taken to an African American church to immerse themselves briefly in aspects of the African American culture. After the visit, preservice teachers were asked to reflect on their experience through an online journal. They were also asked to report on pedagogy derived from what they learned that they planned to include in their practice. This action research provided me the opportunity to try out ideas in practice as a way to add to the knowledge about how to help preservice teachers gain useful knowledge about African American culture. The findings of this study were presented in ten lessons that fall into three categories: family and community; music and movement; and affect and expressive use of language.

The first category was family and community. The focus on family and community in African American culture extends from days of slavery when it was common for families to be separated through sale. Even during slavery, many families managed to maintain strong family ties. Others, separated from blood kin, formed close bonds with

non-blood family and friends. African Americans depended on this idea of extended family to provide emotional and economic support (Elmer, 1980). Relationships are key in the African American community. This emerged as a major theme in the study. In the study there two cultural lessons related to family and community. In the first lesson reported, the preservice teachers observed that there was a major emphasis on family and inclusiveness. Coupled with that, the preservice teachers reportedly learned that the African American culture also puts a strong emphasis on relationships that bridge family and community. Finally, as a result of this learning about culture related to family and community, the preservice teachers in lesson three agreed that as teachers they must create a classroom where all students and families feel welcomed and supported. The preservice teachers reflected after their church experience that their classrooms should an overall comfortable and warm environment that embraces everyone's differences and strengths as well as working together. They described how the church was highly cooperative in assisting them and how they were welcomed into the church. As noted in this study the church itself was a warm and inviting place and the preservice teachers stressed that this feeling of a warm, inclusive, supporting and cooperative atmosphere is a model that could be effectively used in the culturally responsive classroom to scaffold students' learning. The final lesson reported that these preservices teachers realized the need for more collaborative work amongst the students in their classes.

The second category dealt with music and movement. Music and movement is deeply embedded into the African American culture. African Americans brought with them their memories of the rich music and dance traditions of the lands of their

ancestors. They have always remembered the importance of music to their West African forefathers where almost every activity was accompanied by music and dance appropriate to the occasion and special kinds of music and dance were provided for 'customs' (Stewart, 1998). They continued these practices in the New World and the dependence on music and dance still exists in the African American culture. Music and movement were major parts of the church services the preservice teachers attended.

After the dynamic church experience where it was evident that the music and movement were paramount in the culture. These preservice teachers witnessed the high level of energy in the church service where everyone was actively participating. They noticed that the pastor did not stand still behind a podium but instead walked around during the sermon to keep the attention of the congregation. Creative and expressive movement was a constant during the service. The gestures of the pastor were even exaggerated and humorous at times. The teachers all reported in terms of teaching lessons regarding music and movement that they would include more music, clapping and singing into their classroom.

The third category focused on affect and expressive use of language. There is a rich tradition of rich and complex oral language that stems from slavery (Raboteau, 1995). African Americans relied on the spoken word to tell stories and pass on cultural information. The emotional affect and expressive use of language to preserve history, communicate morals and inform are legacies of the African American oral tradition (Papa, Gerber, & Mohahamed, 2007). As evidenced in the church service, African American preachers tend to perform rather than simply speak (Fabre and O'Meally, 1994 ).

During reflections, the preservice teachers involved in this church experience were inundated with expressive use of language. They quickly realized that there is a reliance on vivid and passionate speech patterns in the African American culture. Speaking is more story telling or performing and not just communicating information. The teachers emphatically noted that one aspect of culturally responsive pedagogy witnessed during the church service was call and response. They also noted specifically that the church service was categorized by vocal and on task noise and affirmations. Expressive individualism and repetition were noted consistently as culturally relevant pedagogy realized in the service. The pastor used humor, imagery and animation throughout the service. He changed his tone often and relied on repetition to stress important points.

Collectively, the preservice teachers were struck by the cultural edict that the African American community is a free-spirited and open community and grappled with how they would apply this aspect of culture in classrooms instruction that traditionally been characterized by the teacher asking questions and the students raising their hands and waiting to take their turn to speak. Specifically, in a lesson related to implications for teaching, they vowed to take into account that affect and expressive use of language and incorporate strategies in their classroom that supported the spoken word.

### **What Can Teachers Learn from a Church Based Community Experience**

The African American church continues to be the nucleus of the community and the church still holds a great influence over their beliefs and behaviors (Billingsly & Caldwell, 1991). The church is a major source of support in the African American community. As learned in this study, the church the preservice teachers visited was the hub of the community and offered not only spiritual guidance but academic, financial,

and social guidance to name a few. In this African American community this church also serves as a social service center, financial institution, and political arena is the hallmark of the community (Lincoln, 1989). The church is a major center for support in this community and is a cultural icon in the African American community.

From this experience, the preservice teachers picked up on three key attributes of African American culture. From their perspective, the service clearly exemplified the attributes of family and community, music and movement, and affect and expressive use of language. They saw clear pedagogical implications that pushed them to begin to acknowledge the students' diversity and contemplate how they would incorporate their cultural ethos and experiences into the classroom learning community. Teachers were challenged to identify with their students' culture so that they could create a learning environment that teaches the whole child by reinforcing values, skills, knowledge for success in school and in society by linking classroom teaching to this out of school, community experience (Hackett, 2003).

### **Missed Opportunities**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, spirituality is a cultural theme that was not specifically noted by the preservice teachers. That could be because we were visiting a church and it was assumed that "church" was a major theme in the African American culture and it was, therefore, left unsaid. However, it should be noted that as discussed previously, the church is a major institution for learning and socialization and that many African Americans describe themselves as religious. Spirituality is one of the most distinctive features of African American culture (Hill, 1995).

Another theme that was alluded to by some but never emerged as a major theme from the reflections was that of verve. Verve is described as a keen desire for high

levels of stimulation. Even though movement and energy were developed as themes along with the music in the church, verve really speaks to being stimulated by and engaged in a number of elements or activities at the same time (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2008). As mentioned before, the energy and movement was described in the church but this cultural theme of verve speaks directly to the need to create classrooms that are highly engaging, multi-modal? and participatory. In addition, it includes the use of music and background noise to actually help students actually remain on task. In the culturally responsive classroom setting, verve allows for “controlled chaos” and active learning while the traditional classroom focuses on quiet, order and completing learning tasks.

Due to the fact that the preservice teachers were in a congregate setting, the sense of family and communalism was apparent but individualism also is a major theme in the African American culture. Individualism as it plays out in a culturally responsive classroom is in the form that there is a preoccupation with mastery and/or control of one’s learning environment with the notion of “being the best you can be” as a mantra (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2008). This manifests itself in the classroom by a sense of competitiveness and the desire to do better than everyone else. There is a underlining aura of rivalry that must be teachers must be cognizant of as to prevent the pitting students against each other for social rewards and power and prestige (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2008).

Individualism spawns competitiveness which is another cultural theme. The church environment did not reveal to the preservice teachers that this competitive theme has as several prongs, namely individual competition, interpersonal competition, or group competition. This theme needs to be understood because as this theme emerges,



teachers may be hesitant about developing the culturally relevant practice of collaboration due to management and behavior concerns.

Another theme that did not emerge was that of object orientation (Boykin, Tyler & Miller, 2008). The theme refers to a disposition where students focus on materials and possessions. Students often think that their value is contingent upon what they have. In high poverty, urban schools, this theme impacts student motivation and sense of efficacy. In addition, this theme combined with individualism and competition can quickly intimidate and discourage preservice and novice teachers and classroom management becomes an issue. As we strive to train, recruit and retain teachers, all these themes must be recognized and balanced in the culturally responsive classroom.

### **The Role of the Principal as Action Researcher**

As a participant and researcher in this study, I realized what a powerful experience the visit to the church was. Throughout the preservice teachers' coursework, they had been reading about culturally relevant pedagogy but had never had the opportunity to actually participate in the culture. The preservice teachers admitted that they would have never visited an African American church on their own, yet they had learned so much. As a principal, I have seen preservice and novice teachers who have the theory and the pedagogy but end up not being successful in classes in high poverty urban schools with African American students. It was incumbent upon me to investigate ways that would better help teachers construct their pedagogy as an extension of students' homes (Irvine, 1989). In order for teachers to do that, they must be familiar with the culture and the home life of their students. This study enabled me to provide an experience that allowed the preservice teachers, who certainly possessed the theory, an opportunity to create classrooms that are culturally synchronized. Through

conducting this action research, I was able to allow these preservice teachers of other ethnicities to acquaint themselves with core elements of the African American community.

In conducting this research, I found that there were a few studies that actually addressed the issue of cultural mismatches in the classroom and the effect it has on the students' ability to thrive academically. In the research found, most researchers cite elements as described in this study, physical movement, expression, animation, textured forms of expressions, authenticity and directness in expression and spirited dispositions as qualities from that spring from the spirits of African Americans (Hale, 2001). It has been long theorized that lack of cultural understanding contributes to lack of student success in the classroom. Principals and other educators can use qualitative research, action research specifically, to provide meaningful forms of interactions to teachers who are need to be aware of prevalent cultural themes that may come present themselves in the classroom.

The current study shows the power of one three-hour intervention in increasing the knowledge of white preservice teachers about African American culture and increasing their insights into the behavior and learning of their students. They immediately recognized instructional implications and also began to think about their entering assumptions about the behavior of their students and their responsibility in creating an environment where students would be able to behave appropriately and lean effectively.

### **Implications for Principals**

Principals could structure similar experiences for teachers in their schools to help introduce novice teachers to the culture of their students. With the help of teachers, parents and community members as cultural informants as I was, principals could

organize teacher experiences or interventions. Visits to churches could be organized and arranged through one of the contacts at the community church. Teachers could be invited and encouraged to attend community events and meetings. Forums could be arranged with members of the community to establish a platform for speaking about critical issues regarding cultural ethos. Parents and community could be encouraged to come to the school to speak or volunteer in classrooms. With the focus on parent and community involvement in the academic success of students, this is of paramount significance and must be embraced and supported by principals as best practice. Culture is central in learning. Learning about students' culture to make teaching more appropriate and effective for students is the heart of culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2002). Principals could provide first hand, authentic, and risk free opportunities for teachers to learn about the students' background, culture, current living situations, and learning styles by providing these experiences as they develop teachers. In today's diverse educational arena, the main focus of teaching has moved from the "what" to the "who" (Oran, 2009). As a principal, I was able to see the power of connection to community that could help inform novice teachers to help them gain cultural competence to create more culturally responsive learning environments.

### **Implications for Teacher Educators**

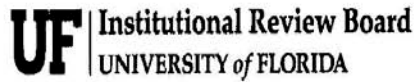
One insight I gained was that experiencing even one cultural event has tremendous capacity to impact teachers. White preservice teachers in courses in colleges of education tend to avoid analyzing their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors about issues of race and culture. They take an implicit vow of silence in class and plead ignorance or they try to undermine the importance of the issue (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). If they break the code of silence, the classroom discussion is relegated to a discourse of

shared generalizing or stereotyping. Another problem is that preservice teachers have few or no opportunities to have high quality, authentic experiences to interact with cultures different than their own. This opportunity to provide them with true “guided practice” in learning about different cultural themes proved to be invaluable. Many of the preservice teachers explicitly stated that they would have never taken the opportunity to immerse themselves in this way had it not been for this experience. Additionally, the role of shared reflective writing seemed important. Students posted and interacted about their experiences in an on line forum. The ability to reflect collaboratively on this cultural experience is a critical component of in teacher preparation. Reflection is a vital part of incorporating and processing issues of equity and social justice as we build teacher theory and practice (Howard, 2003).

### **Summary**

This study showed that providing cultural experiences to teachers unfamiliar with African American culture benefited them in terms of increasing their understanding the culture and enacting practices that were better aligned with prominent cultural themes. It is incumbent upon African American educators to conduct such action research to add to the limited literature on cultural alignment as it relates to teachers and students in the classroom. Giving teachers the opportunity to experience African American culture in its natural context can help move educators from a more theoretical approach to a more practical approach that fosters a more culturally sensitive point of reference that advances the move to a deeper understanding of teaching African America students in high poverty urban schools.

APPENDIX A



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DATE: August 25, 2009

TO: Felecia F. Moss  
16108 SW 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Archer, FL 32618

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair *ISF*  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: **Approval of Protocol #2009-U-807**  
The Impact of Cultural Informants in Building Preservice Teachers' Cultural Competence for Teaching in Urban Schools

SPONSOR: None

I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Your protocol was approved as an expedited study under category 7: *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Given this status, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from each participant. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research. If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, *including the need to increase the number of participants authorized*, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

It is essential that each of your participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB approval stamp and expiration date.

Your approval is valid through **August 4, 2010**. If you have not completed the protocol by this date, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl

## **Informed Consent**

**Protocol Title: The Impact of Cultural Informants in Building Pre Service Teachers' Cultural Competence for Teaching in Urban Schools**

**Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the use of cultural experiences for interns to build their cultural awareness in preparation for teaching in an urban school.

**What will you be asked to do in the study:**

As a part of your internship you will participate in discussions and experiences with community members, parents and elementary students to build cultural awareness and you will be asked to reflect on these experiences. You also will be video-taped and given the video-tapes to stimulate analysis and reflection. If you agree to participate in this study, you will also complete a pre and post survey to assess your knowledge of effective teaching in urban schools and participate in informal interviews with the principal investigator.

**Time required:**

Participation in this study will require no more than one hour per week beyond your regular commitments in your internship. Most weeks the commitment will be 30 minutes or less.

**Risks and Benefits:**

No more than minimal risks are involved. You will benefit from the experiences and the cultural informants as you build your knowledge base for effective teaching in urban schools.

**Confidentiality:**

Your information will not be discussed with the research supervisor, who is your course instructor, until after the semester has concluded and all grades have been submitted. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, your information will be given back to you. Your name will not be used in any report.

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2009-U-0807  
For Use Through 08-04-2010

**Voluntary participation:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. Participation or non-participation will not impact your grade as the researcher is not the instructor of the course. There is no compensation to you for participating in the study.

**Right to withdraw from the study:**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:**

Felecia Moss, Doctoral Student, Department of Teaching and Learning

Dorene Ross, Ed.D. College of Education Office 2215 Norman Hall Phone 273-4206

**Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:**

IRB02 Office Box 112250, University of Florida Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; Phone 392-0433

**Agreement:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2009-U-0807  
For Use Through 08-04-2010

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Felecia Moss was born in Jasper, Florida. She received a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education from the University of Florida in 1986. After teaching at the elementary level for several years, she returned to the university and received her Master of Arts in reading and literacy in 1992. She worked as a faculty member at Santa Fe Community and was Coordinator for College Advisement. During this time, she completed a Specialist in Education in Educational Leadership in 1995. Concerned with the number of students leaving high school and coming to college needing remedial classes, she decided to go back in K-12 education. She became an assistant principal at Newberry High School in 1998 and became principal there in 2002. Committed to literacy, she embraced her next challenge as principal in an urban, high minority, low performing school. She has been principal at Metcalfe Elementary School since 2005. The next phase in her professional career will include opening a school in an urban, African American community and impacting change through work with colleges of education in building cultural competence in teachers to more effectively work with African American students.

She currently resides in Archer, Florida with her husband Rodney and her daughter Miaya who is headed to law school. She also has a son, Davien, a student at Santa Fe College.