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# Contributing Factors that Affect the Achievement of African-American Females Taught by Caucasian Teachers on the Arkansas Literacy Exam: A Case Study

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Contributing Factors That Affect the Achievement of African-American Females Taught by  
Caucasian Teachers on the Arkansas Literacy Exam: A Case Study

Contributing Factors That Affect the Achievement of African-American Females Taught by  
Caucasian Teachers on the Arkansas Literacy Exam: A Case Study

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative intrinsic case study was designed to assist Caucasian educators with the researched academic skills and behaviors to engage African-American females in the learning environment. The study provided strategies and recommendations to promote self-worth, self-motivation, self-efficacy, and morale in African-American females when they did not perform as well as or higher than their Caucasian peers in a high school English classroom on the state literacy examination instructed by a Caucasian teacher. The research site was a low socioeconomic urban high school with a majority of minorities with several native based home languages. The study took an in-depth approach to find the contributing factors that cause African-American females to score 'Advanced' at a much lower rate compared to their Caucasian peers under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers initiated by the interest of researcher, an African-American female. Data collection of the methodological process included interviews from educators, collection of artifacts and documents, and classroom observations. The data were analyzed through open coding, axial coding, and triangulation (audit trail) to produce selective codes from themes and categories. Six theories emerged from selective codes as findings: Training, social behaviors, learning behaviors, changing expectations, curriculum resources, and literacy skills. Policy, methodology, and validity directed the study. In belief, the findings of the results will give insight to African-American parents, teachers, principal, superintendent, the school board, community, legislatures, and testing companies in regards of the need to include culture.

*Keywords:* Cultural gap, Caucasian teachers African-American females, high school, functional literacy, achievement gap, high expectations, resiliency, self-efficacy, multicultural education

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I give special acknowledgement to the school staff and superintendent for the opportunity to research at your school site. I realize that your time is very precious. Your dedication donated so much to the case study in finding the factors that contribute to African-American female literacy achievement.

## DEDICATION

To God be the glory for making a way through difficult times! You, my Lord, heard my prayers. I thank you for the strength to complete the task and for placing family and friends in my life to keep me encouraged.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my family. To my daughters, Kristen Ellis, D.D.S. and Ameerah Smith, you allowed me to witness a dramatic change within a ten-year period of literacy instruction as I monitored your studies during your public education years. I pray that my loving grandchildren, William and Lauren, will have teachers who will promote their intellectual abilities to achieve the highest performance in literacy. GG loves you!

To my parents, Elijah and Emma, who have given me inspiration since I was a little girl and exposed me to life outside of Arkansas so that I could grow culturally and intellectually, I thank you! Because of their poverty experiences, I was self-motivated to seek higher degrees than their Master's Degrees in Education. I pray that I have made you proud!

To the man that truly loves me, my rock and burden bearer, you gave me room to breathe and live the dissertation. You never interrupted my studies and allowed me to do what I needed to complete the dissertation. You empowered me to discover strength within me that I didn't know existed. You encouraged me, cheered for me, kept me in prayer, and gave me phenomenal support. What precious love to have during the writing of my dissertation!

*The Road Not Taken*, a poem by Robert Frost, has been in my life since I was eight years old. The poem served as an inspiration and motivator for me:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

I dedicate these lines of the poem to inspire “you” to pursue your dreams!

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

No Child Left Behind (2002) brought major attention to performance assessments. Due to the major curriculum changes, the focus has been on testing. “The scope of education isn’t supposed to be based on what’s tested; it’s the other way -around. “Never send a test out to do a curriculum’s job” (Wallis & Steptoe, 2007, p. 3). Every Arkansas high school administered the standardized 11th grade literacy assessment to determine the level of reading and writing skills. The performances were based on a four-tier score: Below Basic (BB), Basic (B), Proficient (P), and Advanced (A). This exam, Grade 11 End-of-Level Literacy examination, revealed that the number of African-American female students who were successful in scoring Advanced was disproportionately lower in comparison to their Caucasian peers. This case study is intended to identify the stumbling blocks that are preventing African-American females from scoring at the same rate or higher than their Caucasian peers on the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian teachers.

‘Literacy’ in the State of Arkansas’s education program referred to public high school students’ skill levels in literary skills, content, and practical lesson strands noted in the Arkansas English Curriculum Guide. Writing skills assessed included content, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics (Arkansas Department of Education, 2011). These strands were assessed through The Learning Institute’s (TLI’s) quarterly assessments, where student scores are kept in a database. No Child Left Behind (2002) assigned the performance levels.

The high school that was used in the study is classified as a low socioeconomic school, with 80% free and reduced lunch students in 2011, and is located in a district where 34 different native languages were spoken in the home. In 2011, the school having grades 10th through 12th was in Year 6 of school improvement. The racial subgroups recognized for the state testing

results are Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian. The demographic makeup of the school is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

*Student Demographic Data*

	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	371	26.65
Latino or Hispanic	518	37.21
African American	241	17.31
Asian or Pacific Islander	99	7.11
Native American or Alaskan	44	3.16
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3	.22
2 or More	116	8.33
Total Population	1392	

*Note.* The enrollment count (rounded to the nearest hundredth) of 10th through 12th graders as of October 3, 2011.

### **Background of the Study**

President Obama (2010) emphasized that the biggest single thing we can do to give every American child a fair chance in life is to get great teachers into struggling schools. Since the year 2000, the high school under study has had four different principals. The English Department is staffed by Caucasian female and male teachers only, as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

*Two-Year Trend of English Teacher Demographic Data*

	2011-12		2012-13	
Grade	Caucasian		Caucasian	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
10th	1	3	1	5
11th	1	3	1	4
12th	1	2	1	3

*Note.* There are no other racial representations for English teachers (principal, personal communication, July 27, 2012, and April 29, 2013). The chart shows that female teachers outnumber the male teacher.

**The Learning Institute Assessments**

Grade 11 students practice literacy skills using the formative TLI formative assessments. TLI is a database company that provides the school district with its state criterion-referenced and its own formative assessment scores. The company provided an array of analyzed data to enable educators in the classroom, district, or state to provide professional development for educators to improve their skills in technology, instructional strategies, and literacy. The teachers and coordinators created literacy pacing guides (a school-year instructional timeline of when to teach the literacy skills). The five-year reading and writing strand analyses of the African-American and Caucasian female students are shown in Tables 1.3, *Five-Year Grade 11 Reading Strand Analysis*, and Table 1.4, *Five-Year Grade 11 Writing Strand Analysis*.

Table 1.3

*Five-Year Grade 11 Reading Strand Analysis*

Year of Strands	Literary Passage	Content Passage	Practical Passage
2008-2009			
African American	55.8	52.8	58.1
Caucasian	66.3	63.5	66.8
2009-2010			
African American	69.3	73.3	69.2
Caucasian	72.8	75.2	72.8
2010-2011			
African American	55.3	55.2	58.9
Caucasian	70.2	67.3	72.3
2011-2012			
African American	51.5	60.8	64.4
Caucasian	61.4	74.6	75.4
2012-2013			
African American	63.0	64.1	73.3
Caucasian	69.7	71.4	79.5
5-year summary			
African American	59.0	61.2	64.8
Caucasian	68.1	70.4	73.4

*Note.* The Learning Institute (TLI) database provided the data.



Table 1.4

*Five-Year Grade 11 Writing Strand Analysis*

Year of Strands	Content Domain	Style Domain	Sentence Formation Domain	Usage Domain	Mechanics Domain
2008-2009					
African American	70.3	70.6	79.3	83.0	93.2
Caucasian	75.2	76.4	88.1	91.1	91.4
2009-2010					
African American	74.7	74.8	89.2	90.8	93.2
Caucasian	75.9	76.0	87.8	92.0	91.9
2010-2011					
African American	71.3	71.2	82.2	81.9	84.0
Caucasian	79.8	79.8	90.8	92.4	92.5
2011-2012					
African American	74.5	74.6	85.4	87.1	89.2
Caucasian	82.3	82.3	92.1	92.2	93.4
2012-2013					
African American	78.0	78.5	87.9	88.7	89.1
Caucasian	80.4	80.9	91.0	93.2	93.9
5-year summary					
African American	73.8	73.9	84.8	86.3	89.7
Caucasian	78.7	79.1	90.0	92.2	92.6

*Note.* The Learning Institute database provided the data.

The literary, content, and practical reading strands (Table 1.3) in 2010-2011 dropped significantly since 2009-2010. African-Americans females performed at a higher rate from 2008-2009 to 2009-2010. From 2010 to 2011 their literary, content, and practical scores all dropped (by 14%, 18% and 11% respectively). The skill areas that showed the largest drop in writing included: sentence formation (7.0%), usage (8.9%), and mechanics (9.2%). The same drop occurred in the areas of content, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

Over the three years, the African-American females scored the highest in 2009-2010. Table 1.4 shows that the African-American females scored higher in sentence formation and

mechanics (2008-2009 and 2009-2010) than their Caucasian peers. The differences were negligible. What could have happened in 2009-2010 to cause such an increase?

Looking at the last two years, Caucasian females still excelled in literacy compared to the African-American females. The gap appeared to close in writing skills for 2012-2013 but not enough for the African-American females to achieve as well or higher than the Caucasian females.

### **Adequate Yearly Progress**

The Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability End-of-Level Literacy score results for the subpopulations (identified racial groups) determined the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012). The school chosen for this study was tagged in Year 6 of school improvement for August 2010-2011 and Year 7 for August 2011-2012. The parents of these students received a letter from the school each when AYP status was not met. These parents had the option to send their child to another school that was not under school improvement. The AYP literacy target was 83.88% in 2011-2012 and grew to 91.94% in 2012-2013. The 2013-14 NCLB literacy achievement target for AYP was 100% prior to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility in 2012-2013 removing these AYP targets.

### **The Score Reporting Process**

The district staff first disaggregated the data prior to the start of the school year. These data contained school, class, and individual scores. As a result, the data displayed a prescription of the student's strengths and weaknesses in literacy. An Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) was designed for each student who scored below Proficient.

## Literacy Coaches

Coaching entailed modeling instruction, making classroom observations, and providing teachers with constructive feedback and professional literacy development. The school has had a literacy facilitator (literacy coach) who worked intensely with the English teachers and principal. The interventionist instructed students to achieve the goals based on their AIP. In addition, the district secondary literacy coach is housed at the district office. Also, literacy collaboration meetings with other English teachers within the district were organized by the district literacy coach.

## Statement of the Problem

A comparison of the percentage of African-American females who scored Advanced on the Grade 11 Literacy Exam to Caucasian females is shown in Table 1.5 named *Local Literacy Score Comparison of Female Students Scoring Advanced*.

Table 1.5

*Local Literacy Score Comparison of Female Students Scoring Advanced*

School Year	African-American Females	Caucasian Females
March 2009	0%	2%
March 2010	0%	3%
March 2011	4%	26%
March 2012	8%	16%
March 2013	11%	26%

*Note.* The percentages represent the racial population of students scoring Advanced on the Arkansas EOL Literacy exam.

From 2009 to 2013 the African-American females' scores steadily climbed for Advanced by 4% in March 2011; to 4% in 2012; and to 3% in 2013. Caucasian females' scores rose tremendously in March 2011 but fell in March 2012 (by 10%). The Caucasian females' score increased by 10% in 2013 to become 26% again. Even with the Caucasian females' scores declining (2012), the data still showed a large literacy achievement gap between the Advanced

scores of the two subpopulations. Subsequently, Caucasian females outperformed African-American females by 15% (2011), 8% (2012), and 15% (2013).

One identified problem was having a Caucasian teaching staff, mostly female teachers, who had African-American female students in their classes who did not identify with the racial culture and expectations of the teachers and vice-versa. The other identified problem is that the African-American females performed much lower than their Caucasian counterparts on the state literacy exam (as shown in Table 1.5). In conclusion, the case study focused on finding the reasons why African-American females did not succeed at a rate comparable to their Caucasian peers on the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to understand why 11th grade African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers were not achieving literacy results on the state exam comparable to those of their Caucasian female peers. The research identified contributing factors that prevented African-American female students from achieving Advanced scores on the state literacy exam. Kunjufu (2002) found that from kindergarten to the twelfth grade the achievement tests showed a 200-point difference between Caucasian and African-American children. Through the research design, this case study discovered the identified contributing factors.

The results of the study were shared with teachers, principals, parents, school board members, community members, legislatures, and assessment companies. As stated previously, the outcome of the study resulted in the contributing factors that affect the literacy achievement of African-American female students on the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian teachers.

### **Research Question**

The research question identified for this study was:

What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam?

### **Conceptual Design**

The purpose of the research design was to provide a framework for this case study based on the premise that African-American females did not achieve at comparable rates to their Caucasian peers under the instruction of Caucasian teachers. This study was designed around the literacy achievement scores based on the Arkansas End-of-Level Grade 11 literacy exam results from 2008-2013. It was also based on the relationship indicators between the students and their teachers. The qualitative approach defined the best practice for the researcher to explore the factors contributing to the literacy achievement of African-American female high school students. The factors were found through the experiences of the principals, the district literacy coaches, and the selected (for variety) English teachers within the setting. Hence, “Descriptive research designed around a case study – focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a single setting” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534).

### **Research Setting**

The high school is located in Northwest Arkansas. Overall, it was a majority minority school having grades 10th through 12th with a low socioeconomic status of 80%. The school day was from 8:10 to 3:10 with a half-hour lunch. English was a required subject yearly and taught by highly qualified teachers in a classroom setting. Realistically, every English teacher was Caucasian.

Around the second week in March, every 11th grader took the state literacy exam either by a paper test or an alternate assessment portfolio. A few of the English classes were in an inclusion setting. The overall literacy goal was to increase students' scores to at least Proficient or Advanced. When a student fell below these results, he or she was placed on an AIP the next year. Thus, the student was remediated based on his needs assessment to elevate his or her skills to proficiency.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings that emerged from the electronic surveys explored factors that led to an increase in student literacy skills. Literacy skills have been included in all subject areas which meant that the study benefited all subject area teachers and students. Therefore, this case study was shared with the participants and any other interested parties.

### **Theoretical Sensitivity**

Theoretical sensitivity had been characteristic of a researcher to maintain “objectivity and sensitivity to the research and the data necessary for making discoveries” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p 43). It consisted of four components: personal experience; professional experience; personal knowledge of the literature; and analytic rigor.

### **Personal Experience**

The fact that African-American females were not achieving Advanced scores on the Arkansas EOL Literacy Exam, with very few scoring Advanced in subsequent years, aroused the researcher's curiosity. As an African-American female educator and parent, the researcher desired to discover why this situation was happening when the English teachers of the Caucasian and African-American females were the same. Also, the researcher's daughters took the same state literacy exam.

The researcher was self-motivated to succeed. The researcher always felt compelled to do better educationally than the researcher's parents, since they grew up "dirt poor" and still succeeded. The researcher has a specialist's degree, which is higher than the parents' master's degrees. The researcher also has high expectations for her daughters to achieve higher degrees than she did. The support system provided by her parents, teachers, relatives, and family friends has been a valuable resource. For example, the researcher had an 11th grade Caucasian English teacher, Mrs. Miller, who accepted and motivated all students regardless of race. The course was hard and once involved a 6 a.m. test on *Macbeth*. The researcher felt compelled to perform well in the course because the teacher had high expectations for every student and because she truly loved them.

From the age of 5 to 18, the researcher competed in speaking contests that included African-American orations and poems in an African-American girls' organization (at national, state, and local levels) that taught her to enunciate words and to speak fluently. One of the sponsors was her mother. Yearly, her motivation was to win at the speaking and sewing levels, which resulted in funded trips as well!

Her mother recently told her that Grandma Hozetta (with only an 11th grade education) taught English to her mother's peers in a one-room school building. The researcher's family teases about the researcher's mother and sisters speaking "proper English" with great enunciation which was unusual to the researcher because the family was raised on a farm, very poor. As a child, if the researcher spoke "proper" English, her peers would tease or criticize her, thinking that she was felt she was better than they were. The youngest daughter of the researcher who scored Advanced on her state literacy exam asked why the researcher spoke differently on the phone than when not on the phone. The researcher later realized that this process was code-

switching, a term learned during this study. Hence, language is affected by context. Code-switching is speaking informally to match a particular surrounding and then changing the language to fit another context. In an educational setting, Hale (2001) considered it as crossing a gap between the real world of the student's expectation and what is spoken in the classroom.

The researcher experienced various testing situations in her life from first grade to the doctoral program where she was surrounded by low expectations and biases in some environments. As a parent the researcher monitored the assessment periods of her two daughters who experienced state-mandated literacy tests in the public school.

The oldest daughter studied honor English courses as the youngest daughter studied advanced placement English courses over a 10-year span. This intrinsic in-depth qualitative case study is therefore important to the researcher because she can identify with it as an African-American female, parent, and professional educator. Hence, the researcher sought for researched reasons of the existence of the literacy achievement gap between high school African-American and Caucasian females.

### **Professional Experience**

The researcher's experience as an educator included 14 years as an administrator, 12 years teaching (adult education and physical science), one summer as a paraprofessional, and less than six months as substitute in a couple of Arkansas school districts prior to teaching. The researcher also drove a school bus during the last couple of years of teaching to pay for the master's degree in Educational Leadership.

The researcher's current position is a supervisor (since 2006). The researcher has a close working relationship with the state's assessment department and testing companies. The researcher also abides by the Arkansas testing policies and procedures. Data are gathered,



stored, distributed, and interpreted. The researcher also supervises TLI formative assessments. The district assessment department prepares thousands of assessments quarterly for grades K-11. The researcher trained certified teachers and administrators how to administer the state assessments at various times during a school year. In addition, the researcher was asked in Fall 2012 by the state department to train new district test coordinators in Arkansas. In early 2013 one of the state department personnel nominated the researcher for the position of the Test and Measure Expert on the National Assessment of Educational Progress board. In the past, the researcher administered state-mandated assessments as a teacher and as an assistant principal.

### **Personal Knowledge of the Literature**

From the researcher's personal and professional experiences, the topic drove her to research items related to literacy achievement, academic skills, instructional strategies, and social and learning behaviors. "...the research problem in qualitative research is to provide a rationale or need for studying a particular issue or problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 102). The research of the literature supported the outcomes of the data collection. Hence, the literature review contained research findings from scholarly experts in the field which derived the basis for the research question and electronic survey questions. Hence, the outcome of the data provided research findings to respond to the research question.

### **Analytic Rigor**

The electronic surveys were crafted with open-ended questions that related to the literature review and the research question to result in data collection that was coded. Analysis began with open coding of sections to individual words and phrases. The data were coded to produce categories and themes. A conceptual model must be built during axial coding to determine if there is enough data to support the interpretation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). "Codes

and categories were sorted, compared, and contrasted until saturated...until analysis produced no new codes or categories and until all of the data were accounted..." (Creswell, 2007, p. 290). Another examination of the categories happened. The researcher examined them to discover how the axial codes linked to produce the selective codes. In other words, the categories discovered were compared and combined to reveal theories. A common interest of important data between the participants and the researcher emerges to tell a story, which is grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Creswell (2007) defined the theoretical framework of an argument or study as a person's personal expertise of the topic, the theory to base the study, and the literature review as a foundation to generate themes to answer the research question. The researcher utilized personal expertise as a student, educator, and parent. Implementation of the theorist's (Lisa Delpit) book as the theoretical framework guided the research.

Lisa Delpit (2006), a progressive African-American educator, discussed the challenges that she faced with African-American students. The challenge was that there is a division between the culture of the home and the school. This division empowered the Caucasian middle class which symbolized a "culture of power." In unison, the researcher discovered through data analysis the reasons why African-American students were not achieving at the level or better than their Caucasian peers when the instruction was the same.

When a student walked into the principal's office, it was similar to a minority walking into a white organization or a woman walking into a room full of men. This person experienced a culture of power. This person felt unsafe, disrespected, or insecure. Students have entered the classroom of adult cultures daily. Therefore, how the teacher presented himself or herself to the

student influenced how the student was motivated and if the student felt a part of the learning environment (Kivel, 2004).

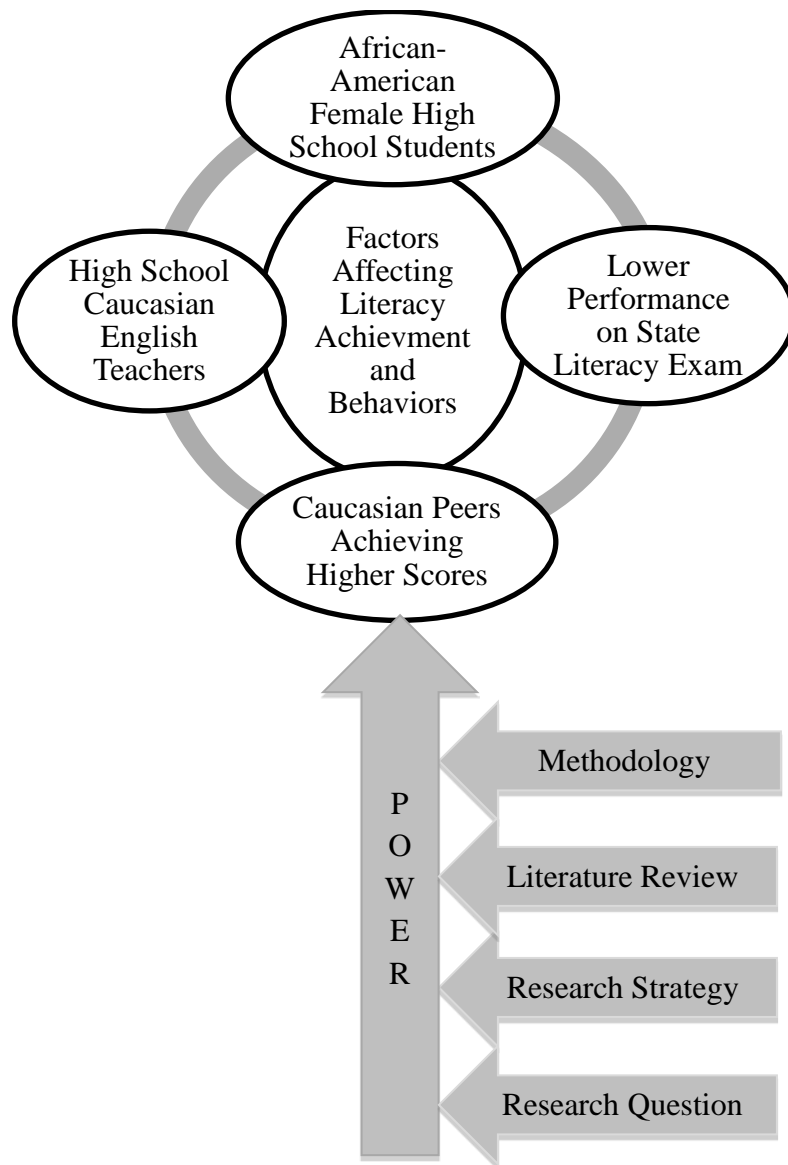
The “culture of power” means:

- Issues of power are enacted in classrooms;
- There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power”;
- The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power;
- If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier; and
- Those with power are frequently least aware of, or least willing to acknowledge, its existence, and those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (Delpit, 2006, p. 24-25)

African-American female students did not score Advanced (overall 0%) in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. When an African-American female finally achieved an Advanced score in 2011, only 4% of the African-American female population made the score (as shown in Table 5).

The researcher’s curiosity about this issue led to a desire to research the literacy achievement scores of 11th grade African-American females under the instruction of only Caucasian teachers. The researcher’s professional experiences as an educator and a parent of two African-American females who were taught by Caucasian English teachers in high school also determined the subject of the study. The researcher’s work experience, the research question, the literature review, and the methodology narrowed the researcher’s focus to the research topic. Hence, *Figure 1.1* is shown as the conceptual framework map designed by the

researcher to demonstrate the factors that affect literacy achievement and behaviors of high school African-American females in comparison to their Caucasian peers when taught by the same Caucasian teacher.



*Figure 1.1.* The conceptual framework map designed by the researcher explains the factors that affect the literacy achievement and behaviors based on the literature review, research question, research strategy, and the methodology. The theoretical framework—*The Culture of Power* (Delpit, 2006)—is the basis for the conceptual framework.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

It was assumed that the certified staff selected to participate would contribute to the study but might be uncomfortable with answering the survey questions. An electronic survey (SurveyMonkey.com) generated the first responses. The survey allowed the participants to respond comfortably in their choice of environment. Hence, the English teachers could use the results to help raise the literacy achievement scores of not only African-American females but also all students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The results of this study might not be generalized to apply to all African-American females in other school districts because the learning environment and socioeconomic status might not be the same. The researcher was physically removed from the initial phase of questioning because of the researcher's position and race. Therefore, an electronic survey was sent by email and regular mail to the identified participants in hopes to create a stress-free environment when they responded. The survey generated initial responses, after which the researcher contacted the participants and asked follow-up questions through individual email. During the classroom observations and reading the survey responses of the participants, the researcher avoided preconceived notions as an African-American female that could have affected the results. Therefore, a member check was performed.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

No students were requested to participate in the study so they were not filed on the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol form. The study involved selected certified staff as participants. Any 11th grade student taking the alternate assessment instead of the paper test for the state literacy exam was indirectly included in the study. During the classroom observations,

the researcher was not aware of which students were paper testers or alternative assessment participants. The findings could apply to all students, regardless of race, in a highly diverse low socioeconomic high school.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following explanations are given to familiarize and provide an understanding of the terminology used in this study.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).** A measurement included in the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) that was used by the U.S. Department of Education to determine how public schools and districts were performing academically using the results from standardized tests in English language arts and mathematics. Results were determined for whole school groups as well as for subpopulations of students (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012).

**Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program (ACTAAP).** It was defined to “improve classroom instruction and learning; support public accountability; provide program evaluation data; and assist policy makers in decision-making” (Arkansas Department of Education, 2011, page 1, para. 3).

**Arkansas End-of-Level Literacy examination.** An exam taken in March by 11th grade students each school year that consisted of specific reading and writing skills involving multiple choice answers and open responses. The Arkansas English Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks guided the exam’s criteria for testing the students (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007).

**Combined population.** All student subpopulations tested except first-year Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students (Arkansas Department of Education, 2008).

**Critical literacy.** It was defined as the practice of exploring the text through reflection, action, transformation, questioning, and examining techniques (McLaughlin & Devoogd, 2004).

**Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA).** A type of fund created for elementary and secondary education under President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 to shorten the achievement gaps between primary and secondary students. No Child Left Behind was its reauthorization enacted under President George W. Bush in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

**ESEA Flexibility.** It is a revamp of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It focuses on the school itself and the needs of the student to achieve, without the comparisons to other schools or districts specified by the NCLB Act (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012).

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).** It was an act of standards-based education reform under President George W. Bush. It measured the literacy (grades 3rd through 8th and 11th) and math (grades 3rd through 8th) achievement of all students. Students were to reach 100% proficiency or above by the year 2014. Teachers were highly qualified. In return, the school would be placed in “School Improvement” if it did not reach AYP for two consecutive years. Funding was provided for disadvantaged students. The law took effect in January 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

**SurveyMonkey.com.** An online survey tool used to design survey templates and collect data. The program gathered and sorted responses by providing feedback of the data. An email containing a hyperlink of the survey was one way of sending the survey (Finley, 2008).



## **Summary**

Chapter One demonstrated the need for the study by outlining its purpose and the focus through the research question: What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam?

The researcher's interest was to improve the literacy achievement scores of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian teachers in a diverse, low socioeconomic high school in Arkansas. The data supported the need for the intrinsic case study.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation has consisted of five chapters. Chapter One comprised an introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research question, the significance of the study, assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study, and research terminology. Chapter Two included a detailed review of the literature (historical background, search strategy, factors that influence academic and social success, the quality of instruction, theoretical framework, and significance). Chapter Three included the research design and timeline, site and sample selection, observations, electronic surveys, document collection, participants, depth versus breadth, the researcher's role management, and trustworthiness. Chapter Four defined the findings and major themes using data management strategies of the participants' electronic surveys and the procedural breakdown of the study. Finally, Chapter Five contained interpretation of the data, selective codes, theories, the research question, recommendations to the field, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

Literacy included speaking, reading, and writing skills in the English language. All students in the 11th grade were tested yearly on identified critical literacy skills (End-of-Level Arkansas Literacy Exam) that produced scores of Advanced (A), Proficient (P), Basic (B), and Below Basic (BB) as defined by the Arkansas Department of Education (2008). High school African-American female students had not been successful in literacy achievement in comparison with their Caucasian peers. Hence, the research question for the case study was: What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam?

The purpose of the literature review was:

- A. To share past researched findings to answer the research question;
- B. To show what methodology other researchers used; and
- C. To demonstrate the literacy achievement gap between high school African-American and Caucasian females.

The literature review related to academic achievement through instructional strategies, learning and social behaviors, and academic skills that were necessary to pass the state literacy assessment.

## **Historical Background**

The school's English curriculum was state-based and referred to as the curriculum frameworks, which is revised every six years (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012). Arkansas implemented the Common Core Standards (CCS) for the 11th grade literacy in 2013-2014. Online exams were taking the place of paper exams for each state that was a member of the Common Core State Standards Initiative whose purpose was to improve college and career skills in English and mathematics. The Arkansas Board of Education voted in 2010 for the standards. This new initiative compared school results that were already members. In August 2012, the NCLB Act (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012) was absorbed by the federal government into what is now called the ESEA Flexibility.

The provisions discussed from the historical perspective were No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), the Arkansas State Board of Education, Arkansas Grade 11 End-of-Level Literacy Exam, the AIP, and the introduction of Advanced Placement English. All of these were based on federal and state government legislation.

### **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

Senator Ted Kennedy introduced the NCLB (2002) bill of the ESEA in 2001. It was passed in 2002. The bill mandated for teachers to be highly qualified by meeting certain criteria, and provided funds for schools in need of improvement. Schools and districts were to meet target scores for literacy to reach certain achievement standards. Accountability to the Arkansas Department of Education (2008) gave some teachers an incentive to "teach the test." Arkansas state exams are rigorous and based on curriculum standards. The NCLB policy (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012) was to improve academic performances in the core subject areas. The NCLB tracked an individual student's performance, based on state-mandated test

scores and expressed in an AYP report showing each subgroup, defined the percentage of proficiency or above. Individual schools and districts were identified as high or low achieving using the AYP calculation. If a school or district did not make AYP in a subpopulation, then it was placed on alert status for that subpopulation. If a school did not reach AYP for a second year, it was put into its first year of school improvement. The school had to report to parents by letter that it is not a high achieving school, identifying the subpopulations affected. Parents then had the choice of sending their children to another school that met AYP. Arkansas's African Americans made a two-point gain on the EOL Literacy Exam:

While one or two percentage points may represent small steps in our efforts to close the achievement gap, these are still steps in the right direction – These results also show us that we must continue to push for meaningful changes in our approach to the entire teaching-learning process at the high school level. There is still a great deal of work we need to do, Dr. James said. (Queue, Inc., 2006, p. 1)

Some states appeared to make their state examinations easier (Dykeman, 2005). Because a few United States' schools and districts participated in this type of action, accountability for literacy was created.

### **Arkansas State Board of Education**

The board implemented federal policy and adopted educational policies approved by the state legislatures. The ACTAAP EOL Literacy exam was a requirement based on the Arkansas Legislative Act 35. If a student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP) stated that he or she was unable to test under regular conditions, the student took an alternative portfolio assessment. The portfolio had teacher involvement (taking pictures, collecting artifacts, organizing the portfolio,

etc.) to prepare for scoring. The district test coordinator trained the school's test administrator (counselor) who in turn trained the school's staff on the procedures and security of the exam.

The district received an Arkansas Commissioner's Memo from the state department to implement the policy in the district and schools. The state exam included the norm-referenced and criterion-referenced skills that measured thinking skills and problem-solving strategies, including real-life performance skills.

### **Arkansas Grade 11 End-of-Level Literacy Examination**

The first EOL Literacy exam began in 2006. The Arkansas Grade 11 End-of-Level Literacy examination was based on the Arkansas English Language Arts Curriculum Framework. The exam was developed by Arkansas teachers and the Arkansas Department of Education. The test was produced based on the Arkansas English Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks (Arkansas Department of Education, 2008). The reading and writing strands come from these frameworks. The types of questions and skills tested included:

1. The reading of the literary, content, and practical passages of reading in a multiple choice format; and
2. The literary, content, and practical passages along with the content, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics domains that are in the format of open response items.

The student received a performance and scale score of Below Basic (0–168), Basic (169–199), Proficient (200–227) or Advanced (228–249). An “NA” score meant that the student did not attempt to write an open response. The NA resulted in a zero score.

The reading skill performances were based on:

1. A literary passage that included a short story, poem, a novel, or an essay;

2. Content passage that consisted of a nonfiction prose selection that gave information about people, places, events, or situations; and
3. Practical passage had useful selected information that might include a brochure, handbook, recipe, manual, or how-to guide.

The writing performances were based on these skills:

1. Content domain was the writer focusing on a central idea in an organized text;
2. Style domain showed the writer's ability to control the language and tone of the writing that affected the reader. Vocabulary, sentence variety, tone, and voice were demonstrated;
3. Sentence formation domain included the student's ability to create mature, appropriate sentences that expressed his thoughts;
4. Usage domain was the student's ability to demonstrate the proper use of nouns, subject-verb agreement, pronoun case, and word usage; and
5. Mechanics domain included the use of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and paragraph formatting demonstrated by the student (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012).

The reports were disaggregated and analyzed to find skills that the student was not accomplishing. If students' scores were under Basic or Below Basic, they were placed on an AIP for remediation for the next year. The TLI database showed growth projection reports that determined how the students would perform on the next ACTAAP literacy exam based on the growth model. The Arkansas Legislative Act 35 required the state to demonstrate increased (gained) learning based on two categories. The first category was longitudinally based on value-added calculations. The second one was an annual performance category based on performance

from the prior year (Arkansas Department of Education, 2008). The growth model was aligned to the Arkansas Content Standards and was not dependent on a scaled score. A specific point was assigned to a particular performance sub-category. Hence, a student's growth performance was based on two adjacent years. Arkansas was one of the seven states granted rights to use the growth model (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007).

### **The Academic Improvement Plan**

There were multiple ways in which a student's AIP was developed. The plan for the student was created using the quantitative method (the Grade 11 End-of-Level Literacy Exam and other norm-referenced tests given by the teacher). The qualitative method for the AIP included teacher observations, classwork, and any other pertinent work. A baseline was established on the performance of the student's skills. A plan was established to display the student's goal and served as a guide to alert the teacher when the student reached the indicated skill. Individual and group sessions with the students involved discussion of the scores. Non-repeating 11th grade students were remediated in the twelfth grade. Otherwise, the student was remediated in the 11th grade if he or she repeated that grade.

### **Advanced Placement English**

The Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science (AIMS) was implemented in the year 2009-2010. Teachers were trained and referred minority students who were less likely than others to have taken advanced placement courses. Advanced Placement (AP) English courses in literature and composition and writing were offered. Even if the student did not score a 3 or higher to receive college credit, he or she was more than prepared for college courses.

The number one reason for African-American students not taking AP courses was the lack of teacher referrals in high schools and low teacher expectation of their academic potential.

The number two reason was test scores. The classroom environment ought to have cultural responsive instruction to produce a blended education. Being responsive signifies that a need must be addressed. “The less we know about each other, the more we make up” (D. Ford, personal communication, February 9, 2012). By the time these students graduated from high school, there was a four-year achievement gap between African-American students and their Caucasian peers. An increase of student empowerment was needed as prejudices and stereotypes decreased through social action and social justice. Every school subject should be infused with multicultural content. The teaching population was about 75% Caucasian female while the school’s staff population was 85% to 90% Caucasian. African-American male teachers represented only 1% of the teaching population, catering to a student population that was on an average of 47% African American. A teacher’s philosophy needed to be that the teacher enjoyed teaching their children (taking ownership), not “those” children (not showing ownership).

Ladson-Billings (1994) said that when students are in mostly white programs, fear, anxiety and stress arose. The number one reason for high dropout rate of African Americans was largely due to them not finding the classes interesting. The second reason for it was that students wanted the opportunity to have real-world experiences. The teachers with a cultural practice in the classroom were those who sought for knowledge from the African-American students. Kunjufu (2002) related that there was no staff of color in 44% of United States schools. Furthermore, only 3% of African-American students were in the gifted and talented programs.

### **Search Strategy**

The review of literature was based on (1) relevance, (2) policy, (3) theoretical framework, and (4) validity of the purpose of the current study. The research was designed around the



research question in relation to the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers. Any publications that did not apply to the research question were excluded.

Because this study began in 2007, the research was based only on the No Child Left Behind (2002) policy. In the fall of 2012, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) was modified according to a new federal ruling (ESEA Flexibility), which was mentioned in the study but was not the main basis for this research.

The search strategy ranged from 1968 to 1986, 1992 to 1997, and 2002 to 2013. The most current research was used unless it referenced a theory that related to earlier years. The electronic database for the researcher's searches included EBSCO, ProQuest, ERIC, policy briefs, peer reviewed journals, dissertations, personal communications from experts, the Arkansas Department of Education website, books, assessment manuals, and Arkansas testing data. TLI's website had a wealth of state and local EOL literacy data. The keywords searched were African American and black, female(s) or girls or women, Caucasian and white teacher(s), literacy, achievement, achievement gap, urban, high school, secondary education, literacy, examination and assessment, motivation, Black English, printing disability, multicultural education and multiculturalism, high expectations, cultural gap, socioeconomic status, self-efficacy, gaming devices, Pygmalion Effect, and No Child Left Behind and NCLB. The search results were wide with 202 searches using the keywords African-American and black, female(s) or girls or women, and Caucasian and white teacher(s). The researcher used her experiences and basis of the theoretical framework to reduce the searches. The search narrowed to 97 after adding the keywords: reading skills, reading tests, reading comprehension, and functional literacy. The search narrowed the range of the years from 2000 to 2012. The researcher added the rest of the keywords as previously written to reduce the search to 50 in the study.

The literature review included what the researchers said about the classroom environment and student-teacher behaviors in relation to African-Americans under the instruction of Caucasian teachers. The research question was: What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam?

### **Factors That Influence Academic and Social Success in Literacy**

#### **Black English**

Graves (1997) discussed Ebonics in reference to the “Black English” described by others. He felt that slang should be ignored in the classroom as a language for African-American children to compete educationally, professionally, academically, and had no part in Ebonics. Racial stereotyping was a barrier toward the success of African-American students (Carter, 2008).

#### **High Expectations**

A teacher’s belief in his or her students’ high expectations had to embrace all students. In reality, this was not always the case for every student. Marzano (2010) demonstrated in a four-step process that not all teachers share this belief in high expectations. In the first step, the teacher identified the students who had low and high expectations. This process assisted the teacher to realize that he categorized the students. The second step was the most difficult because the teacher had to admit that he had a preconceived notion about a student. This might have involved biases about certain ethnic or academic groups. By identifying the two groups early, the process helped the teacher to correct any biases. The third step identified a student’s knowledge that the teacher had a differing view of their learning expectations. The student became reluctant to answer challenging questions and had no physical contact with the teacher

such as eye contact, verbal greetings, or dialogue. Meanwhile, the student was missing the opportunity for verbal interaction and practice in how to respond to challenging questions. The student was lost academically. The fourth step required teachers to take a positive, affective tone to eliminate low expectations of students. The teacher had to treat all students equally. There had to be a transformation of these students by asking them challenging questions and physically communicating with them. Therefore, this segregated treatment had to end to allow high expectations to begin.

High expectations depended on growth. D. Reeves (personal communication, May 17, 2010) spoke about a book called *Mindset* by Carol Dweck that expressed the idea that students must be able to embrace challenges—promote a growth mind, not a fixed mind. He encouraged districts to hold their colleagues accountable for the learning and to give their students feedback. He stressed that feedback had to be accurate, timely, and specific. The best practices were those in which one could not tell the regular education students from the special education students in the inclusion classroom of a 90-90-90 school. The ratio of athletes and musicians' practice sessions compared to performances is 100:1. He pointed out that mistakes are made. When more feedback was delivered to the students, there was less grading. A school in Atlanta, Georgia, gave students the option to make an A or B on the final exam during the last week of school or to give feedback two weeks before school was out. Reeves added that in the first year, 69% of the students received an A or a B. The next year, 92% of the students received an A or a B for their final grade. When feedback was given, the attendance rate increased, the failure rate decreased, and teacher morale increased. The outcome demonstrated that the students who were told by the teacher that they worked hard became successful in any task. The Pygmalion Effect

in this study demonstrated that the best effects happen when you love the students enough to challenge them. Hence, when you expect more from the students, you will get more.

Feldman and Prohaska (1979) studied the Pygmalion Effect in reverse. Students were given either positive or negative information about their teacher to see if it would help to motivate them. The teachers were not told what the students thought about them. The nonverbal behavior of the students toward the teacher was then recorded. The students who had positive expectations had a 65.8% score, while the negative students earned a score of 52.2%. The positive students were recorded as making more eye contact with the teacher. In another experiment, students were asked to display either a positive or a negative behavior toward the teacher. Teachers that witnessed positive behavior felt happier. The observers discovered that the teachers taught the lesson effectively. It was shown that teachers can be affected by the nonverbal expressions of student expectations.

## **Behaviors**

Kunjufu (2002) observed that in middle-class schools, teachers often have low expectations for African-American students. Teachers should master negative behaviors by looking to change them to positive ones. Kuykendall (2004) suggested that if a student was a great liar, he should be praised for the power of exercising his imagination and making others believe what he said. A student who cheated should know that it was bad behavior but should also be acknowledged for his determination to do well. If a student was careless, he should know that our historical geniuses did not pay attention to detail. The author went on to advise similar strategies for sneakiness and arrogance. It is best to punish the behavior and not the person when a negative action occurs.

Self-discipline was very important for learning to happen. Kafele (2002) recognized that the African-American parents should first discuss with their child the purpose of going to school. Teachers should not know the students better than their parents. Children have to be in compliance with the teachers' rules and regulations so behavioral expectations are discussed. Most of all, students should know how to handle conflict. Kunjufu (2002) wrote that the fourth-grade reading level was a projection to determine the students who would end up in prison. Many African-American fourth-grade students (63%) were reading below their grade level. Special education students also lived mostly in the office, resulting in school suspensions; 80% of these students were referred by 20% of the teachers.

### **Resiliency, Morale, Self-Motivation, and Self-Efficacy**

The four factors enabled African-American females who were not successful in school to find success later in life: resiliency, morale, self-motivation, and self-efficacy. Resiliency referred to the ability of African-American females to bounce back from adversity. In a qualitative research involving African-American daughters of single mothers, their resilience was found to come from five factors: (1) positive self-image; (2) enjoyment of learning and achieving; (3) expectation to do well in school and life; (4) participation in after-school activities; and (5) listening to and obeying their mother (Davis, 2008).

Morale and self-motivation were important in the learning environment. Parents must instill a sense of self-worth and implement a value system (the foundation for motivation) in their child. Kunjufu (1986, p. 58) said, "A good education should make you economically independent and self-sufficient by teaching you skills to make a product or provide a service." Furthermore, Hoffman & Nottis (2008) emphasized that the student's motivation depended on

the learning environment while self-efficacy might depend on the feedback given which was likely to develop in a low stress, positive environment.

Self-efficacy was one of the most important factors that promote achievement in African-American females along with maternal support and ethnic identity (Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008). These females could cope with life's expectancies if more cognitive and reasoning skills were involved. They became more proactive when they had self-esteem and self-efficacy (Werner & Smith, 1992).

### **The Arts and Literacy**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) State Coordinator, A. Mangiantini (personal communication, June 20, 2010), in her presentation *Are We Doing Enough*, demonstrated that students with four more years of art in high school have higher scores (528 compared to 480 for non-artist students) in critical reading achievement SATs. Spatial-temporal reasoning and reinforcement of social-emotional and behavioral objectives were demonstrated because of the arts. Students who operated at a higher level of music had long-term memory. Art training worked to improve attention and cognition. Skills learned in the arts can transfer to science. The 2008 NAEP found that African Americans (130) and Hispanics (129) scored much lower in the southern schools in music. African Americans scored much lower on the NAEP in visual arts. Music labs were a part of the definition of a complete education. Therefore, students should be encouraged to take more arts in the curriculum to increase literacy skills.

## **Print Disability**

D. Rose (personal communication, June 23, 2010), a cultural diversity expert professor at the University of Tennessee, said that the printed assessments are a disability in this digital era. Teachers were imposing stress on students every time a textbook opened. The environment, not genetics, caused this disability. Dr. Rose at the National Conference on Student Assessment (NCSA) emphasized that reading disabilities resulted from organic dysfunctions. She referred to the *National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS)*, which had been a law since 2006, stating that textbooks had to be transformed digitally for elementary and secondary students. Awareness and assessment of print disability could guide instruction. Her slide presentation showed how print disability affected three areas of the brain and influenced the way students learn:

1. Recognition network stored the knowledge that could be used in the future. This network was located at the back of the brain;
2. Strategic network had input skills. This was located at the front of the brain, and was used to organize actions; and
3. Affective networks consisted of values. The brain values items differently depending on what the person was hungry for, predisposing the brain to receive a certain type of information. This area was located under the top parts of the brain.

The framework for design was representation, expression, and compression. Print disability afforded the same framework. The material should be presented in such a way that the various learning styles are addressed. Otherwise, the amount of information was limited to students to whom print was accessible. For example, the news media provide the deaf with captions and the

blind with read-aloud, coding, etc. In schools, students usually received adequate accommodation for their disability based on a 504 plan or an IEP.

Delpit (2006) pointed out that people of color are uncomfortable with research. Students of color learned rules from the teacher which they were not taught. As a result, they might turn away from learning. When a teacher empowered himself or herself before students of color, it reduced the power of the student. The teacher had to come to a realization that he or she was not the only expert in the classroom. Writing helped the students to realize that they had power of their own instruction through describing their own experiences. On the other hand, there was a difference in the language of African-American teachers compared to Caucasian teachers. It was the same with a working-class mother compared to a middle-class mother. The Caucasian teacher or middle-class mother might give a child a directive through a question, “Would you like to take your bath now?” suggested an alternative. An African American or working-class mother, on the other hand, would say, “Boy, get your rusty behind in the bathtub.” Delpit (2006) demonstrated how the same instruction can appear differently to the two different cultures in the classroom. If a Caucasian teacher gave a directive to an African-American student in the form of a question, the student might think he or she had a choice to act or not because it was not a direct statement. African-American children acted on the basis of the familiarity of authority, their guardian. The student did expect the teacher to have control and to control him or her. If a teacher conveyed the impression that his students could learn, the student will learn because authority spoke. To avoid misunderstanding, teachers need to allow the students to be experts in teaching them about their African-American culture. Students who shared their culture were likely to have an interest in the instruction when the teacher explained the procedures and rules



for learning and also why the learning is happening. Hence, higher achievement could take action in the classroom.

### **Technology in the Classroom**

D. Rose (personal communication, June 23, 2010) researched the way in which electronic games helped students to prepare for what was on the standardized test. Students needed more innovative assessments and games that promoted innovative thinking. According to Rose, schools that were designed for the Industrial Age were now archaic. She added that schools should be prepared for the virtual, electronic learning environment.

Technology has had implications on student assignments. B. Daggett (personal communications, August 2, 2011), President of the International Center for Leadership in Education, believed that students should become independent in using their own technological devices with Internet access in the schools. He felt that educators should introduce the students to the Wolfram Alpha and the Dino technology. He also mentioned that districts need to change their policies on the use of technology in the classroom. Future educational trends will reflect changes that include finance, globalization, and demographics. He added that using technology in the learning environment could help the students compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Quality of Instruction**

#### **Delivery of Instruction Determines Achievement**

A Caucasian English teacher stated three problems that may arise when culturally diverse students are taught by Caucasian teachers:

First, garnering authority from students of color tends to be a problem for White teachers because of differing cultural conceptions of what counts as legitimacy.

Second, authority issues with respect to knowledge and discipline seem

intensified in classrooms with White teachers and students of color when cultural incongruence is a factor. Third, how authority is socially negotiated as legitimate power through classroom talk can determine students' access to participation and engagement in teaching and learning. (Ford, 2010, p.11)

Q. Suffren (personal communication, June 16, 2009), Chief Academic Officer at The Learning Institute (TLI), discussed how there had been no change for the state on the Arkansas Grade 11 EOL Literacy exam from 2007 to 2008 (51% Proficient and Advanced). The data research expert said that Massachusetts had made tremendous growth over Arkansas and the nation. The United States was the only nation that made basic educational skills the achievement mark for K-12 education. Suffren stressed to the Arkansas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (AASCD) members that the quality of instruction that students received from their teachers determined their level of achievement. Background knowledge in reading (social studies, history, science, etc.) was also considered very important. It was further emphasized that the teachers needed a content-specific professional development with support, and that the school needed a vertical connection of grade-level selections in reading. Teachers, Suffren stated, also needed to take ownership of what was best for the students instead of what they taught to favor the best. As B. Williams (2003) argued:

It is not enough simply to make the curriculum more rigorous. The literature is clear about the need for a scaffolding or bridge between the cultures of the school and the home in order to teach all students to high academic standards. (p. 102)

### **Master Teachers and Literacy Coaches**

Minority students and those from low-income families were 1.2 to 3.4 times more at risk of having a learning disability in reading at an early age than other students. This was very

apparent once these children managed to reach high school, as a large portion of American students struggled with reading all the way through to the 12th grade. The results of the study showed that students gained in reading skills by having individualized instruction and the help of a literacy specialist (Vernon-Feagans, Kainz, Amend, Ginsberg, Wood, & Bock, 2012).

Kunjufu (2002) recognized that master teachers had high expectations for their students and expected them to learn. They understood the difficulties the students experienced in the community and at home. A multicultural teacher expressed multicultural values to all of his or her students. Thus, the teachers became the facilitators while the students discovered the answers.

The Arkansas Department of Education (2012) defined the term Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) as those who met the criteria as outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). This rationale could be the first step toward becoming a master teacher of culturally diverse students. Kunjufu (2002) pointed out that teachers needed to stop using the same, outdated lesson plans from 10 years ago. Teachers were quick to tell students that they had theirs (an education) and that the students needed to get theirs. According to Kunjufu (2002), African-American students were more likely to have under-qualified teachers. He stated that a long-range study showed that high-scoring classroom teachers had students who would eventually achieve top scores. The study also showed that low-scoring teachers had students who continued to drop under the achievement line and possibly could bottom out.

According to Viadero (2010), literacy coaches in schools helped increase students' reading skills by 32% over a three-year period. Furthermore, this increase was greater in schools where teachers were receptive to more coaching and when the teachers had a network system.

## **Teaching to the Test**

S. Brookhart (personal communication, June 20, 2010), an author, ASCD faculty member, and independent consultant, had more than 20 years' experience studying and writing about classroom assessments. It was stated that if the district's state-mandated tests were summative in nature, then growth could not be estimated because each common examination needed to cover material that the students studied. Summative assessments could predict how the students will perform on the formative assessments. If the benchmark tests did not come from an item bank, then teaching to the test was greater with the validity of the scores being questionable. The standards not addressed or taught made it unrealistic to have 80% to meet the standards. Teachers needed to understand that the students and what it entailed to demonstrate proficiency on the assessments, how to teach those literacy skills, and how the learning of the skills was important.

## **Using Higher Order Thinking Skills**

Bayerl (2007) emphasized that students become comfortable with challenging textbooks and materials when taught using Bloom's Taxonomy (higher level), graphic organizers, and comparing-contrasting charts. Tankersley (2006), of the Park Hill School District in Kansas City, Missouri, mentioned that best practices improve literacy skills in each content area. The students did well on tests when the curriculum was taught at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. The students became more comfortable when taking the state exam.

An assessment researcher with Pearson, Inc., M. Young (personal communication, June 20, 2010), described a problem-solving exercise. A group of writers was given images to write a storyboard (in reference to the science assessment). They were told to think aloud. As the writers worked, the researchers coded their statements into categories (impasse, solution, operators, backtracking, etc.). The research found that 74% of the statements of the experienced

writers indicated forward motion. The problem was defined, evaluated, and moved to a solution. Among the inexperienced writers, however, 46% were writing extraneous statements, spinning their wheels, and stalling a lot. The research concluded that the inexperienced writers would need support. The writers had difficulty in responding to the task. It was recommended that specific information was needed for an additional task. Therefore, it was important to give accessible, task-relevant materials and additional task-specific information.

### **Recognizing Cultural Diversity to Close the Achievement Gap**

Kafele (2004) indicated that African-American students became more involved in the instruction when their history was taught. This was one of the strategies for effective teaching in a diverse classroom. He wrote about the absence of African-American history in the textbooks studied by students. Ladson-Billings (1994) said that African-Americans were unique in race and had a distinct culture. When students were exposed to the culture, it helped to close the achievement gap. Bayerl (2007, March) indicated that science teachers should instruct students on writing structures and styles that would give the students power. The author defined school-wide as the teaching, writing, speaking, and thinking practice of all the content areas.

D. Reeves (personal communication, May 17, 2010), founder of *The Leadership and Learning Center*, emphasized at the 90-90-90 Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, the necessity of teaching students to read and write in order to remove poverty from their future. He also stated that educators should not patronize students. Patronizing was not done in athletics, so why do we do it in the classroom? He added that it was important to tell the students the truth—the real racism was found in communicating low expectations.

A new vision of teaching along with personalized diverse learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century was explained in a recent study:

The explosion of learner diversity means teachers need knowledge and skills to customize learning for learners with a range of individual differences. These differences include students who have learning disabilities and students who perform above grade level and deserve opportunities to accelerate. Differences also include cultural and linguistic diversity and the specific needs of students for whom English is a new language... Teachers need to recognize that students bring to their learning varying experiences, abilities, talents, and prior learning, as well as language, culture, and family and community values that are assets that can be used to promote their learning. To do this effectively, teachers must have a deeper understanding of their own frames of reference (e.g., culture, gender, language, abilities, ways of knowing), the potential biases in these frames, and their impact on expectations for and relationships with students and their families... teachers need to provide multiple approaches to learning for each student. One aspect of the power of technology is that it has made learners both more independent and more collaborative. The core teaching standards assign learners a more active role in determining what they learn, how they learn it, and how they can demonstrate their learning... [to] encourage learners to interact with peers to accomplish their learning goals. (Hill, Stumbo, Paliokas, Hansen, & McWalters, 2010, p. 5)

At the NCSA conference, C. Stumbo (personal communication, June 23, 2009) said that we talked about reading and math, but we did not talk about race. The data did not tell the story about passion, moral outrage, or the commitment to overcome racial disparities. Therefore, she added, we would have to offer the support and know-how for teachers to become familiar with racial diversity. D. Hill (personal communication, June 23, 2009) said that educators have difficulty talking about race. Educators disaggregated the data for the purpose of cultural

competency learning (to bring the culture into the learning). To remove racial achievement gaps, schools should look at suspension rates, attendance rates, college attendance, graduation rates, incarceration rates, curriculum instruction, teacher expectations, classroom management, number of minority students taking advanced placement classes, rigorous curriculum, teacher quality, cultural competence, and socioeconomic status.

Hale (2001) wrote that Caucasian students from high-income families did especially well on standardized achievement tests. It had therefore been said that African-American students were genetically inferior or had a deficient inheritance. Caucasian students usually took vacations during their school years and got to see the world. Economically disadvantaged students could not afford to do so. The Caucasian students thus had more direct physical experience of the world described in the textbooks than non-Caucasian students.

Evans (2006) said that children of low socioeconomic background revealed a low performance level in literacy. Their literacy skills must be developed in a school setting rather than depending on their homes to instill these skills. In this school district of study, many parents had two jobs that kept them from home at night to assist their child with the study of the next test. Some parents were identified as illiterate or lacking the literacy knowledge to assist their child. Suburban students were less likely to mention testing negatively in comparison to students in urban schools (Hoffman & Nottis, 2008).

### **Accommodation Teacher Readiness**

Some classroom teachers due to lack of training were still inadequate about the needs of students of different cultures and languages. To maximize the school-family connections and increase academic achievement, the spiral of accommodation teacher readiness was created to improve the students' cognitive development and their academic achievement. The framework

of Accommodation Readiness Spiral for the English Language Learners (ELL) in diverse classrooms consisted of six levels that progress from Level 1 (readiness for critical reflection on practice) to Level 6 (readiness for application and advocacy). The six levels that provided the teachers with the appropriate classroom tools were: 1. critical reflection on practice; 2. CLD students and families; 3. environmental factors; 4. curricular issues; 5. programming and instructional factors; and 6. application and advocacy (Herrera & Murry, 2005). The concepts attached themselves to double helices, making a spiral. The double helices had a strand that represented the apparent readiness of the teacher. This meant that the teacher's response to diversity in the classroom might not correspond to the second helix, which represented demonstrable and effective readiness. The apparent part contained the preconceptions of what teachers believed about the students' cultures and languages. The demonstrable or practical readiness was opposite of the apparent. The spiral became weak and unstable when attention was not directed to the differences of the helices. In other words, some teachers were inadequate in the classroom to accommodate the growth of other cultures and languages. Teachers prepared with readiness and efficacy. Professional development also helped. The research of accommodation readiness contributed to academic resiliency, student engagement, self-efficacy, acculturation, and biculturalism (Murry, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Rosenthal (1968) conducted a study on the Pygmalion Effect which found that students will perform based on the teachers' expectation and beliefs about them. First and second grade teachers were told the names of students who would succeed based on a disguised IQ test. The teachers were given a list of the students who were successful, which might or might not have been factual. The results were gathered. Later, the same exact test was given to the students.



All grades showed an increase in the mean score. The first and second graders had a statistically significant gain in their scores. The experiment proved that teacher expectations had a significant impact on student achievement.

An example of Delpit's (2006) theory was illustrated in a previous research conducted by Reynolds (2007), who used the Pygmalion Effect. The Pygmalion Effect was when someone communicated an expectation to another person. The person would perform the request much better because it was communicated in a positive manner and with high expectations. In a study involving 374 college students (51% female), a teacher was told that her randomly selected sample was high performers (the randomness was not disclosed by the researchers). Another teacher (A) was told that the students had performed highly on a previous exam. The instructional support staff member (B) was told that her group did not do well on the past exam and was not expected to do well on the next. Support instructors were always new to the classroom each year. The opposite of the Pygmalion Effect was the Golem Effect, which was exemplified by the supervisor in negative verbal communication to the staff about the students. The results of the study were:

1. When the teacher had no prior knowledge about the students and was told that they were high performers, despite them being randomly chosen, the students' performances were higher;
2. When the supervisors expected high performance from their workers and communicated this verbally, the workers performed at a higher rate;
3. When the students were told, on the basis of high expectations, to complete a task within five minutes, they accomplished it in less than that time; and
4. When the teachers received negative information about students and fell into a pessimistic mindset, the students' achievement rate was lower.

## **Significance**

The purpose of the state literacy assessment was to provide data on students' literacy performance statewide. Educators could use the data to determine the lack of literacy skills that needed to be addressed and to provide professional development to improve instruction and African-American female learning behaviors. The state literacy assessment data showed that under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers, African-American female students did not achieve Advanced scores as frequently as their Caucasian peers. Every year there were very few, if any, African Americans scoring Advanced on the Arkansas literacy exam. This concern was highly troubling and prior to this study, it was unexplained. The study sought to discover how educators could increase the literacy scores to Advanced of 11th grade African-American females.

## **Summary of the Review of Literature**

The review of literature provided a synopsis and an overall evaluation of the current research to address the research question: What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam? The researched findings of the literature review were revealed.

The Arkansas Department of Education changed the state's school curriculum to the Common Core Curriculum, meaning that all Arkansas students' achievement levels based on test score results could be compared to those of students in other states under the ESEA Flexibility. According to the mandates of the state department, local school districts must comply by assessing the students using summative and formative literacy assessments. After act was passed in 2001, teachers were accused of teaching the test because of the stress of the AYP reports that

showed student achievement in a teacher's classroom. It was found that African-American females did not perform in literacy with regard to the criterion-referenced and norm-referenced skills as well or higher as their Caucasian female peers. The examination included reading and writing performances of multiple choice and open-response items and was graded on a scale of Advanced (highest), Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. If a student performed below Proficient, he or she obtained an AIP for the next school year.

There were researched factors that influence academic and social literacy success. Racial stereotyping was a barrier toward literacy achievement in African-Americans even though their speech patterns constituted a cultural language in themselves. For African-American students to have succeeded in literacy, high expectations had to become a realistic belief among teachers. Teachers needed familiarity with the four-step process of high expectations. Educators were encouraged educators to embrace the challenges by holding themselves accountable and delivering accurate feedback. Students' negative behaviors, such as lying and cheating, became entrenched by teachers' low expectations. The teacher that practiced turning students' negative behavior into something by seeing the good in what the student had done made positive results for the student. Furthermore, it was apparent that teachers' rules expressed their expectations of students' behavior. Teachers that strived for a relationship with the students in which the teachers knew them better than their parents had much more achievement success.

Other contributing factors to the African-American female's academic and social success were resiliency, morale, self-motivation, and self-efficacy. Five factors promoted the academic success of students. These involved high expectations for learning, listening and obeying, enjoying learning, having a positive self-image, and possessing an expectation of wellness in life. The parents had to become involved and instill a sense of self-worth in their children. Ethnic

identity and self-efficacy under a maternal support system helped African-American females cope when more cognitive and reasoning skills were also involved.

Learning became hard when an African-American student was not familiar with the background of the material at hand. Teachers needed to recognize that African-American students were addressed differently by their parents than were Caucasian students. For African-American students, having a Caucasian teacher could cause stress and low self-esteem if the cultural difference was not recognized in the classroom. Print disability explained how brain functions caused stress in the learning environment while printed assessments entailed disadvantaged students in this digital era. Various learning styles should therefore be addressed.

Students who participated in four years of art exercised their spatial-temporal reasoning and social-emotional behavior. They succeeded with higher SAT scores. Technology in the classroom supported the skills of electronic gaming that was often in the home environment. Students should therefore have access to electronic devices in the classroom. Hence, school and district policies need to change to accommodate technology.

As noted previously, teachers influenced student learning and the quality of instruction, which in turn determined the level of achievement for a student. Professional development that addressed the content area was valuable in assisting teachers to motivate students to learn. Grade-level selections of reading in school were helpful. Although there were highly qualified teachers in classrooms, African-American students encountered more under-qualified teachers, resulting in low scores. Outdated lesson plans were not working. Within a three-year period students' reading skills increased by a third under literacy coaches. Examinations should cover the materials that the students studied. When a teacher taught to higher levels of Bloom's

Taxonomy and used visual study aids, the students performed higher on assessments. Hence, teachers should not teach to the test.

The achievement gap could be closed if educators recognized that the cultural diversity of students was not like their culture. African-American students were more involved in learning when the teacher had an interest in implementing the African-American culture. Science teachers, for example, should focus on writing structures and styles that would empower students to achieve regardless of whether they had an existing poverty issue. Data from test results should be disaggregated to bring culture into the learning experience. The suspension, attendance, and graduation rates of high school students should be observed to remove racial achievement gaps by placing these students into advanced placement courses with a rigorous curriculum. Minority students did not do as well as their Caucasian peers, especially those from higher incomes. However, the educator should remember that the data does not tell the student's life story. Literacy skills should be developed in a school setting instead of the educators depending on the homes to educate the students. Some of these students' parents were illiterate themselves and could not educate their children. Accommodation teacher readiness promoted self-efficacy and skills that assisted teachers to prepare for culture and language diversity in the classroom. To maximize the school-family connections and increase academic achievement, the staff should become acquainted with the spiral of accommodation teacher readiness. Hence, the spiral was created to improve academic achievement and cognitive development.

### **Summary**

The review of the literature supported the Pygmalion and Golem Effects and the culture of power through the research. The facts about African-American females who were taught by Caucasian teachers and how this affected their literacy achievement rate were researched in the

literature review. The motivation of the students depended on the expectations of the certified staff for the African-American female students. The score results of the examinations showed that racial and cultural diversity had an effect on student achievement. The major findings were lack of high student expectations, behaviors, and the importance of acknowledging cultural diversity in the classroom by implementing multicultural lessons to increase student performance.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

African-American high school females did not perform in literacy as well as their Caucasian peers on the Arkansas literacy exam. African-American females' literacy scores (from 2010 to 2011) were 4% higher while Caucasian females' scores rose 23%. The Caucasian females performed 15% better in literacy than the African-American females in 2010. The data showed a large literacy achievement gap, reflected in the difference between Advanced scores of the two groups. One identified problem was having a Caucasian teaching staff, mostly female teachers, who had African-American female students in their classes who might not identify with the racial culture and expectations of the teachers and vice-versa. The other identified problem was that the African-American females were achieving much lower scores than their Caucasian counterparts on the state literacy exam. The intrinsic case study focused on finding the reasons why African-American females did not succeed at a rate comparable to their Caucasian peers on the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers. The research question that provided the focus for this study was: What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam?

### **Research Design and Timeline**

The study concerned itself with the literacy achievement gap of African-American female students in comparison to their Caucasian peers. The methodology of this study was designed to find the factors that contribute to this achievement gap. The methods of the study, as described by Robert Yin (Creswell, 2007), included an identified group of participants to survey, observing the classroom environment, collecting artifacts, providing the number of African-American

females observed in the classroom, and collecting results through data analysis. The web-based survey was piloted much earlier using 3 to 100 participants. Hence, the methodology explains the validity of the study through triangulation.

The timeline of the study began during the coursework of Fall 2007. Table 3.1, entitled *Researcher's Activity Timeline*, lists the activities of the program and the date of completion.

Table 3.1

*Researcher's Activity Timeline*

Program Activity	Date
Began Doctoral Coursework	Fall 2007
Passed Oral and Written Comps	Fall 2009
Submitted Chapters 1, 2, and 3 to Committee	February 2013
Chapters 1, 2, and 3 Proposed	March 11, 2013
Resubmitted Revisions of Chapter 1, 2, & 3	April 24, 2013
Institutional Review Board Approval	May 13, 2013
Electronic Survey Sent to Participants	May 2013
Data Coded	July-August 2013
Final Dissertation Submission Date	October 25, 2013
Defend Dissertation	November 13, 2013
Graduate with Doctorate in Educational Leadership	December 21, 2013

*Note.* The chart reflects the date or timeframe of each activity.

A copy of the Institutional Review Board Protocol is located in Appendix D.

### **Site and Sample Selection**

The urban low socioeconomic high school was chosen by the researcher for the study. The high school building has 10th, 11th, and 12th graders, over 1300 students. It has a majority of culturally diverse students with mostly Caucasian teachers. After reviewing the test scores of



African-American females in comparison to their Caucasian peers, the researcher desired to study why there was a wide achievement gap in literacy between the two subgroups.

### **Observations**

The observation period involved the researcher sitting in the classroom and observing without prejudice or preconceived notions. After the completion of the surveys, the researcher made classroom observations. The researcher gathered class times and days that the selected teachers would have African-American females in the classroom. Focusing on the data helped the researcher to be more objective during observations. The researcher documented various observations with detailed notes on a piece of blank paper, noting the behavior of African-American female students in the classroom environment and sketching the classroom. The behaviors watched were the students' eye contact with the teacher, response to questions, their response to the assignment(s), and general posture. Simultaneously, the researcher also observed the visual posting of the learning objective; the posting of classroom rules; a posted rubric or printed handout; students' posted work; learning centers; differentiated instruction; the spatial arrangement of the furniture; the number of African-American females in the classroom; the teaching position of the teacher (sitting or standing and point of location); and where the African-American females were located in the classroom. A review of the observations produced more collection of data. The researcher located the students prior to documenting the observation. Furthermore, the confidential data scanned and uploaded into the researcher's secured storage.

## **Electronic Surveys**

The participants received a packet containing a letter of information (Appendix A) and an informed consent form (Appendix B) to participate in the electronic survey that included a paper copy (Table 3.2) of the survey to preview. The researcher used an online survey tool designed from the concepts of the literature review, the theoretical framework, and the research question called SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey, 2012) as the initial data collection instrument. After the superintendent's approval (Appendix C) and the IRB's approval (Appendix D), the in-depth survey was sent to each participant using a hyperlink in the email. The participants' follow-up questions for clarification and a member check were sent by email with an attachment of the participant's survey questions and responses. The purpose of sending the survey online was to remove any undue stress, allow the participant to respond without a time limit, and to respond in his or her own setting without the presence of the researcher. The survey linked to each participant to acknowledge their identity so that the researcher knew whom to ask clarifying questions and which responses to send during the member check. Member checks were performed for clarification of abbreviations, lack of understanding, and to verify that the participants stated what they wrote. Half of the participants made revisions.

The participants had a two-week time frame to respond to the online survey. The survey closed within the allotted time. Each participant received 9 to 15 questions, depending on the staff member's position. The last few questions in the survey generated demographic data about the participants. "In using questionnaires researchers rely totally on the honesty and accuracy of participants' responses" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Table 3.2

*Principal, Literacy Coach, and Teacher Survey Questions*

Principal Survey Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What strategies have you as an individual educator employed in closing the literacy achievement gap between African-American females and their Caucasian peers?</li> <li>2. In 2010 African-American females performed higher than their Caucasian peers in literary, practical, content, style, and usage. What do you believe caused the dramatic change?</li> <li>3. What social behaviors have you observed in the classroom that, promote success of African-American female students?</li> <li>4. What social behaviors in the classroom and hallways have you observed among the African-American females?</li> <li>5. What means of communication do you use to communicate with the African-American parents and what type of feedback do you receive from them?</li> <li>6. What do you know about how African-American females learn?</li> <li>7. How did diversity training (or related training) assist you in working with African-American students (if no training, reply NONE)?</li> <li>8. What professional development, courses, or workshops increased your knowledge of cultural awareness to promote social and academic strategies in the classroom for African-American females?</li> </ol>
<b>DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. What was your education major for bachelor's degree? Master degree? Specialist degree? Doctorate degree?</li> <li>10. What are your areas of certification?</li> <li>11. What did you teach prior to becoming a principal and how many years did you teach each subject area?</li> <li>12. How long were you a principal for this school?</li> <li>13. In what other positions did you serve as an administrator (include the number of years for each position)?</li> <li>14. What did you teach prior to becoming a principal and how many years did you teach each subject area or grade level?</li> <li>15. What is your gender (male or female)?</li> <li>16. What is your race?  <input type="checkbox"/> White   <input type="checkbox"/> Black   <input type="checkbox"/> Asian   <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic   <input type="checkbox"/> Native American   <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or more races </li> </ol>
Literacy Coach Survey Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What strategies have you trained the teachers or implemented into the English curriculum to close the literacy achievement gap between African-American females and their Caucasian peers?</li> </ol>

2. In 2010 African-American females performed higher than their Caucasian peers in literary, practical, content, style, and usage. What do you believe caused the dramatic change?
3. What academic indicators have you observed that promote literacy achievement among the African-American females (mark all that apply in each area)?

Reading:

- a. literacy
- b. content
- c. practical

Writing:

- a. content
- b. style
- c. sentence formation
- d. usage
- e. mechanics

Other:

Please list

4. Which of the following African-American resources do you include in your curriculum?
  - a. films or movies
  - b. authors
  - c. multicultural materials
  - d. guest speakers
  - e. other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. What gaming devices or software programs do the students use for interactive literacy (please name)?
6. What do you do to assist the English teachers in learning strategies to keep African-American students' interested in their class?
7. What do you know about how African-American females learn?
8. What other skills (not listed above) are needed to pass the Arkansas 11th grade literacy exam?
9. How did diversity training (or related training) assist you in working with African-American students (if no training, reply NONE)?
10. What professional development, courses, or workshops increased your knowledge of cultural awareness to promote social and academic strategies in the classroom for African-American females?

## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

11. What was the education major for bachelor's degree? Master degree? Specialist degree? Doctorate degree?
12. What are your areas of certification?
13. How many years have you served as a:
  - a. Literacy coach at this school?
  - b. Teacher at this school?
14. What did you teach prior to becoming a literacy coach and how many years did you teach each subject area or grade level?
15. What is your gender (male or female)?
16. What is your race?

☐ White ☐ Black ☐ Asian ☐ Hispanic ☐ Native American ☐ 2 or more races

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Teacher Survey Questions

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1. What steps have you as an educator taken to close the literacy achievement gap between African-American females and their Caucasian peers?
2. In 2010-11 African-American females performed higher than their Caucasian peers in literacy, practical, content, style, and usage. Were you teaching then? If so, what do you believe may have caused the dramatic change?
3. What are the social behaviors you have observed in the classroom among female students (mark all that apply)?
  - a. negative student interaction
  - b. very little or no teacher interaction
  - c. tardiness
  - d. high absenteeism
  - e. in-school suspension
  - f. talkative
  - g. not turning in or doing assignments
  - h. asking a lot of questions or giving feedback
4. What academic indicators have you observed that promote literacy achievement among the African-American females (mark all that apply in each area)?

Reading:

  - a. literacy
  - b. content
  - c. practical

Writing:

  - a. content
  - b. style
  - c. sentence formation
  - d. usage
  - e. mechanics

Other: Please list.
5. What other skills (not listed above) are needed to pass the Arkansas 11th grade literacy exam?
6. By what means do you communicate with African-American parents?
7. Which of the following African-American resources do you include in your curriculum?

films or movies

  - a. authors
  - b. multicultural materials
  - c. guest speakers
  - d. other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
8. What gaming devices or software programs do the students use for interactive literacy (please name)?

9. What professional development, courses, or workshops increased your knowledge and awareness to promote literacy achievement through social and academic skills in the classroom for African-American females?
10. What feedback have you received from African-American females about how they learn?
11. How did diversity training (or related training) assist you in working with African-American students (if no training, reply NONE)?
12. What professional development, courses, or workshops increased your knowledge of cultural awareness to promote social and academic strategies in the classroom for African-American females?
13. How would your African-American female students rate your availability for assistance before or after school (1 is not available to 5 being available most of the time)?
14. How would your African-American females students rate you in responding to their questions and comprehending your answers (rank from 1 being the lowest to 5 being the highest)?
15. Indicate at which level(s) you believe your African-American females are reading?
  - a. Below basic reader
  - b. Basic reader
  - c. Proficient reader
  - d. Advanced reader

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

16. What was your education major for the bachelor's degree? Master degree? Specialist degree? Doctorate degree?
17. What are your areas of certification?
18. How long have you taught English at this school?
19. What other subject areas or grade levels did you teach (include how many years) prior to this teaching position?
20. What is your gender (male or female)?
21. What is your race?  
☐ White ☐ Black ☐ Asian ☐ Hispanic ☐ Native American ☐ 2 or more races

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*Note.* These survey questions represent the principal, literacy coach, and the teacher participants.

### Document Collection

A comparison and contrast of the documents collected from the participants was studied for comparison and contrast. A collection of the artifacts was gathered from the teachers during the group meeting with all participants. Hence, the artifacts collected were requested through a formal email and on site.

Teachers learned to list three to five general classroom rules based on *The First Days of School* (Wong & Wong, 2005) if they attended the New Teacher Induction workshop. One

teacher designed a brochure to include information about the teacher, the syllabus, class rules, grading policy, and calendar. Other documents collected were the Arkansas Comprehensive District and School Improvement Plans, 2012 ADE Progress Report (school), *2013 Report Interpretation Guide Grade 11 Literacy Exam*, the researcher's notebook with field notes, and the researcher's calendars (2012-13 and 2013-14).

A follow-up email was sent sporadically to the participants when the data was not clear to the researcher. This email served as the member check. Afterwards, identified participants clarified their responses or expanded on responses.

### **Participants**

Seven participants were certified members (the principal of the school, a past principal, literacy coordinators, and English teachers). Patton (2007) said that there is not a defined sample size in a qualitative study. The literacy coaches were the district's secondary literacy coordinator and the school's literacy facilitator. The teachers were regular classroom English teachers and an Advanced Placement English teacher.

The superintendent's packet contained a letter to confirm the researcher's participation by signature from the superintendent (Appendix C) giving the researcher permission to do electronic surveys and classroom observations. The document also explained the process. Each participant received an agenda of the purpose of the study and the sequence of the procedures with an explanation of how the data would be collected by mail and email to raise awareness to the study and familiarity of the procedures. If a participant chose to opt out of the study, the participant had the option to do so. A packet for the participants included a consent form (Appendix B) along with an agenda. The information was first sent by email. The packets were hand delivered by the researcher to the site and presented to each participant. The participants whose consent

forms were not previously sent were signed in the presence of the researcher. The observations began on site after the teachers signed.

### **Depth versus Breadth**

The reason for doing this study was to raise awareness. Patton (2002) stated, “Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context and nuance” (p. 227). By using an electronic survey, data were produced by participants in the field. Observations and document collection added more evidence to respond to the research question.

### **The Researcher’s Role Management**

The researcher was the instrument for the data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). The current study’s researcher was well versed in state assessment requirements of testing and served on the state assessment committee. The researcher must avoid bias, although it was fine for a researcher to bring his or her expertise to the research (Bryant, 2004). The researcher respected the voice of the participants and did not deviate from their responses to provide the findings of the research question. The researcher kept all information confidential to the extent allowed by law and university policy. It was important that the researcher must be careful not to speak or bring his or her opinions into the study, as it could cause ethical issues. The researcher sent an email of participant responses to review. Therefore, the methodology followed the research design closely (Coffey, 2009).

### **Trustworthiness**

In any such research, it was necessary to win the trust of the participants, learn the culture, and check on any misinformation introduced by the researcher and participants. Creswell (2007) suggested two validation strategies to build a successful case study. One was to



utilize an online survey. The other was to do a member check after the surveys were completed. He also stated that multiple validation strategies should be used when a study was in “one’s own backyard,” which applied to the researcher’s qualitative study. Various questions should be based on the individual research questions to find the indicators that enabled the high-achieving low-socioeconomic students to be successful. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized that “the six methods for assuring trustworthiness were prolonged engagement, persistent engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail.”

### **Prolonged Engagement**

The data collection process occurred by collecting data on the day of the observations and by retrieving electronic artifacts. The researcher had professional expertise of eight years on literacy achievement and assessments from educational experiences in present field for 26 years. The researcher was able to process the data thoroughly using knowledge of the subject matter. The research design had various steps that allowed for validation of the findings.

### **Persistent Engagement**

Allowing the participants to review their responses and to revise their responses for any inconsistencies was the process that accomplished persistent engagement. The knowledge and best practices of literacy skills, knowledge of how African-American female students’ behaviors and learning styles, staff professional development, artifacts, and actual outcomes were utilized for the evaluation of inconsistent responses of the survey questions. The researcher was adamant about finding out everything—looking at all data, even the data that did not fit (discrepant case analysis).

## **Triangulation**

Surveys, observations, and collected documents were parts of the triangulation for the current study. The observations took place in the identified classrooms. In order to capture true data, the researcher asked the principal to observe the classrooms. In addition, the researcher gathered artifacts before and during the observations.

## **Member Check**

Creswell (2007) believed that the most critical step in providing credibility is member checking. Member checking consisted of sharing the surveys via email with the participants to gain feedback of the accuracy and credibility of their responses. This process was also to make sure that the responses represented each participant's voice. Shared characteristics between the participants were thus noted by the researcher. Creswell also noted that the participants direct the case study by taking part in it and examining the rough drafts of what they stated for clarification. Hence, corrections were made to the script by replying to the email with a scanned survey attached or by noting corrections with a Microsoft Word attachment.

## **Peer Debriefing**

Peers served as an instrument to validate if the researcher was thinking correctly or if the researcher was deviating from a point of focus. The peers served as a critical friend. The researcher would communicate with peers in person or through phone calls, texts, and email for feedback. There was a trust factor between the peers and the researcher.

## **Audit Trail**

To confirm the data, the researcher undertook an audit trail. Data were securely stored on computer hard drives, electronic secure storage, and portable storage devices. The data included: (a) an open-ended and demographic questioning electronic survey responses to represent each

type of participant, (b) collected documents and artifacts, (c) field notes, (d) snapshot drawings of the classroom, (e) researcher's journal and calendar, (f) results of data analysis, and (e) results of document analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was prompted by the survey results, individual answers, group answers, and environmental factors. All of the tools provided factors that contributed to literacy achievement. The data (surveys, observations, and document collection) were analyzed through open coding, axial coding, triangulation, and audit trail. A peer review or member check was a part of the process using the validation strategies. Common themes and categories were created from axial and selective coding. Theories were produced from revisiting the data of categories and themes that was collected, analyzed, and processed as a visual (Creswell, 2007).

### **Summary**

The methodology was designed based on an intrinsic case study of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers. The factors and behaviors that contributed to their literacy achievement were discovered through triangulation of the data. A member check confirmed the validity of the researched data. The confidentiality of the participants was respected. Peer debriefing resulted in a way of checking the researcher's focus and approach. The results were shared with them. The confidentiality is based on the extent allowed by law and university policy.

Survey data, document collection, and observed data were analyzed by reading thoroughly and carefully. Data analyses resulted in open, axial, and selective codes. Common categories (axial codes) were grouped to yield selective codes, which became theories. Hence, the theories answered the research question.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was finding the researched factors and behaviors that contribute to literacy achievement on the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian teachers. The ultimate goal was to correlate the theoretical framework, *Culture of Power*, and the research question to the findings of the triangulated data collections. Lisa Delpit's *Culture of Power* (2006) stated:

- Issues of power are enacted in classrooms;
- There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power”;
- The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power;
- If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier; and
- Those with power are frequently least aware of, or least willing to acknowledge, its existence, and those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 24-25)

Thus, this study addressed awareness of why a literacy achievement gap exists between African-American females and their Caucasian peers exists under the instruction of Caucasian teachers.

The case study was based on grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Electronic surveys were the primary source of data. There were five participants that took the survey. The survey participants were two principals, two literacy coaches, and a teacher. Observations and

data collection added to the data. Eight documents were collected and read. In addition, three classroom observations were thoroughly documented to contribute to the data and validate some of the codes.

The qualitative study was done to answer the research question through triangulation of the data from the electronic surveys, observations, and data collection. This study was researched to produce a literature review that would help design the questions and validate the responses to the research question. After completion of the study, the reader will become aware of the researched factors and behaviors that contributed to the students to achieve Advanced on the Arkansas Grade 11 Literacy assessment. Chapter Four includes findings that correlate to the theoretical framework, the literature review, and the research question. The ultimate goal of Chapter Four is to reveal the data collected and to display the open and axial codes from the triangulation of the data. Therefore, Chapter Four will present the description of each participant, data management strategies, procedural breakdown, findings and major themes, principal participants, literacy coach participants, the teacher participant, and the conclusion.

### **Audience**

The primary audience addressed was high school English teachers, high school principals, district administrators, school board and parents. The study also contributed researched information on literacy achievement to state and federal legislatures, the state board of education, and testing companies. The objective of the study was to answer the research question and to provide practitioners researched information to help 11th grade African-American females achieve at a higher rate on the state literacy examination. Hence, the findings of this study could be beneficial to the school of study.

## **Research Question**

The survey questions were created based on the theoretical framework, *The Culture of Power* (Delpit, 2006), and the literature review. The research question was: What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam? To respond to the research question the researcher posed a variety of open-ended questions and demographic questions for the three types of electronic surveys. The questions were designed to identify the commonalities of the participants' responses to answer the research question. Document collection included the teacher's syllabus, the Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (2011-12 and 2012-13), and the Arkansas Department of Education's School Performance Report. The overall goal of the coding was to identify the perspective of the certified staff involved in literacy instruction in the high school. Thus, axial codes were derived from open codes to present academic factors and behaviors that contributed to the literacy achievement of African-American females on the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers.

## **Data Management Strategies**

### **Audit Trail Notations**

The audit trail consisted of electronic surveys, the researcher in the field, document collections, and coding (Creswell, 2007). The data were combined through analysis producing open, axial, and selective codes. In essence, the different types of surveys were designed for each participant type: principal, literacy coach, and teacher.

The qualitative case study included a high school English teacher, the literacy instructional facilitator, the district literacy coach, and two principals. The electronic survey

collected information of each participant's qualification and number of years served with the school. The participants responded to a survey of open-ended and demographic questions. Each participant experienced three or fewer years of service at the school. Originally, there were seven participants, but two participants did not want to take the survey after signing the participation form. The participants felt coerced into signing the form (see later procedural breakdown). According to their supervisor, they felt that I would think of them as racist if they responded to the survey. The participants did allow me to observe their African-American female students in their classrooms on that day.

All participants were Caucasian females except for one Caucasian male. The demographic data were produced in the electronic survey. Table 4.1 entitled *Demographic Information of Each Participant* shows the participants; the years served at the school; number of years in the current position; total years in education; and their race, gender, and highest educational degree.

Table 4.1

*Demographic Information of Each Participant*

Participants	No. of years Served at the School	No. of Years in Current Position	Total No. of Years in Education	Race	Gender	Degree
PRIN1	4	2	18	Caucasian	Female	Doctorate
PRIN2	3	3	19	Caucasian	Male	Specialist
LC3	3	3	21	Caucasian	Female	Master
LC4	3	6	32	Caucasian	Female	Master
TCH5	1	1	1	Caucasian	Female	Bachelor

*Note.* PRIN means for principal, LC means literacy coach, and TCH means teacher.

The data collection techniques began with a written approval letter from the superintendent to conduct the study at the school. The superintendent copied the letter to the principal. The researcher informed the principal of the need to do classroom observations which was granted by the principal. The researcher observed three different classrooms with only one African-American female in each class. After the initial observation, the teachers did not want to participate in the survey. District administrators did a pilot study of the surveys for content validity. There were no revisions needed. Correspondingly, they found nothing wrong with the survey questions.

The researcher reviewed and analyzed the collected data (surveys, observations, and document collection) using the grounded theory. The surveys were of three types: teacher, literacy coach, and principal. Thus, the purpose of the three different surveys was to produce the open and axial codes for literacy achievement and behavior to reveal selective codes based on different educational perceptions and to express the similarities and differences.

The researcher did the coding manually until exhaustion of the data occurred through axial and open coding, which built validity. The process of descriptive coding included thorough reading of electronic surveys, data collection, and field notes. This process analyzed and produced patterns of major recurring themes and subthemes that were identified as open codes and axial codes. The axial codes were color-coded during the coding process for identification purposes. The electronic survey automatically stamped the date. The other data collection and notes were date stamped by the researcher. The researcher created a numerical code for each position and each participant to keep the coding confidential.

**Electronic survey.** The researcher used SurveyMonkey to design the electronic survey. The three different surveys for each participant were created based on the theoretical framework



and the literature review to trigger responses that would answer the research question. All documents were stamped, coded, and filed. The participants received a participant permission form and a copy of the survey for their position prior to taking the survey electronically. An electronic hyperlink was sent to each participant through the researcher's personal email. Meanwhile, an alphanumeric code was assigned to each participant during the data analysis to trace any response back to the source.

The participants prior to submitting their survey had the opportunity to clarify, validate, or change their responses. The researcher reviewed the responses in the survey. A follow-up email (member check) was sent to the participant containing the phrase (for meaning of Gradual Release Method) or abbreviations (i.e., Af-Am, CUB, etc.) in question. In return, the participant would respond to the email with an explanation to support the statement, phrase, or abbreviation.

The data analysis formed open codes to produce axial codes (categories) through triangulation of the data. Table 4.2, entitled *Participant Code and Survey for Audit Trail Notations*, displays the notation, code, survey type given to each participant, and the building site of the participant. PRIN represents principal; LC represents literacy coach, and TCH represents teacher.

Table 4.2

*Participant Code and Survey for Audit Trail Notations*

Notation	Code	Survey Type	Site
PRIN	1	Principal	School
PRIN	2	Principal	District
LC	3	Literacy Coach	School
LC	4	Literacy Coach	District
TCH	5	Teacher	School

*Note.* The table indicates three types of participants.

**Observations.** The researcher went to the site and collected observational data. The researcher intended to make another trip to the site for a second collection of data but was approached with some challenges (explained in Procedural Breakdown, p. 70). With careful review, the researcher discovered that through analysis of the data, enough data were collected without having to make a second visit.

The researcher was able to conduct observations in the classrooms of teachers that did not desire to participate in the survey. The teachers signed the consent form prior to the observations. Detailed notes and drawings from each classroom were documented on colored paper. From the observational data, I observed one African-American female in each classroom. Table 4.3, entitled *Observation Codes for Audit Trail Notations*, lists the observational codes, type of observation done, and the site where the observation took place.

Table 4.3

*Observation Codes for Audit Trail Notations*

Observation Code	Type	Site
OBSV1	Documentation and Sketch	English Grade 11 Classroom1
OBSV2	Documentation and Sketch	English Grade 11 Classroom2
OBSV3	Documentation and Sketch	English Grade 11 Classroom3

*Note.* Three different observations happened in the school.

**Document collection.** The researcher collected various types of documents. Documents were collected from the participants and online resources accessible to the researcher. Table 4.4, named *Document Collection Codes for Audit Trail Notations*, contains the name of the document, the code to represent it, where the document was retrieved (site), how it was obtained (resource), and the type of document that it was. Moreover, the documents created by the district and the state identified in Table 4.4 are of public knowledge, except for documents belonging to the researcher.

Table 4.4

*Document Collection Codes for Audit Trail Notations*

Document	Code	Site	Resource	Type
Syllabus	DOC1	School	Participants	Classroom 2012-13
Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (ACSIP)	DOC2	District	Online	Literacy Section 2012-13
ACSIP	DOC3	School	Online	Literacy Section 2012-13
Arkansas Department of Education School Performance Report	DOC4	State	Online	State Report of Data 2012
ADE Grade 11 Literacy Exam Report Interpretation Guide	DOC5	State	Printed Copy	Manual
Researcher's Calendar	DOC6	Secured	Personal	Calendar 2012
Researcher's Calendar	DOC7	Secured	Personal	Calendar 2013
Researcher's Journal	DOC8	Secured	Personal	Journal

*Note.* Artifacts consist of state department, district, school, and personal documents.

### **Procedural Breakdown**

A procedural breakdown happened prior to collecting the data with the electronic surveys. The researcher had the IRB approval. The participant packets containing the information were sent by email and mail. A few participant forms were not returned to the researcher after two weeks. The researcher decided (with the principal's permission) to go to the schools and do observations if the teachers signed the participation. All three teachers signed the form. Hence, the observations took place on the same day.

The researcher returned to the researcher's personal office. There was a meeting in the researcher's supervisor's office (unrelated to the study). While present in the office, the

supervisor received a phone call from the principal concerning the researcher while at the school site. The supervisor stepped into the next room while speaking to the principal. After the phone call ended, the researcher was asked if it was announced that the researcher was from \*\*\* (building location). It was pointed out that it was not the right thing to do because the teacher participants felt that they were forced to sign the participant form. In addition, all the school's participants except the principal were upset and did not want to do the study according to the supervisor. The researcher became distraught. The researcher felt that there was no inappropriate action made and was in disbelief. The researcher had experienced in the past a few accusations perceived by others in the district (always feeling under attack).

The timeframe was mid-May during the time and the researcher was running out of time to collect data (summer vacation approaching). The researcher knew that a central office administrator had stated that the principal would mentor the researcher and provide any assistance needed for the study. Again, the researcher could not understand why the supervisor was contacted first believing that the principal should have contacted the researcher firsthand. The supervisor ended the conversation by saying to contact the principal and see what the principal had to say. Ironically, the researcher thought that the supervisor was speaking for the principal because it had been common practice events where the principal contacted the supervisor directly instead of the researcher about situations in the researcher's department. The researcher didn't mind the supervisor knowing but felt that any situation should also be told to the researcher directly. In the past, the researcher adjusted to such gestures by ignoring the personal hurts and disbeliefs.

The supervisor told the researcher not to do the study at that school or at any school in the district. The supervisor said that there was a personal principal friend in \*\*\* (a large school

district in Arkansas with a majority of African-American students) where that principal would allow the study to be carried out. The supervisor called the principal who was unavailable. I with anxiousness stated that the demographics were not the same. The study would change completely. The supervisor asked the secretary of the department if she agreed that the researcher should study the school. The secretary agreed.

After leaving the supervisor's office in panic, the researcher called a principal at \*\*\* (a school in another district). This principal said that the teachers could not participate in the study because the teachers had a lot of initiatives and other matters to complete at the end of the school year. The researcher truly understood. Above all, this mishap was not the principal's problem.

The researcher felt compelled to call the university's advisor to seek advice. The advisor was very disappointed because the principal or mentor had just finished the program and should have some understanding and to assist the teachers to understand the purpose of the study. The advisor suggested that the researcher contact the superintendent who signed the document of permission to do the study. With the advisor in disbelief, the researcher was told to contact the superintendent and explain what had happened. Furthermore, the advisor felt that the superintendent would offer suggestions.

On the next day the researcher contacted the superintendent by phone. After the conversation began, the researcher began to cry. The superintendent did not understand why the study couldn't be done for the same reasons as the advisor felt. The superintendent disappointedly said that the principal should have connected with the teachers to help them to understand the process of the study. The superintendent inquired about the persons who piloted the questions. The researcher responded that the committee and IRB (within two days) approved the surveys. Later, a few district administrators read the questions and did not find anything in

error or offensive with the surveys. The researcher's hurt lifted a little after hearing that news. The superintendent wanted to know who directed the researcher to another school district. After responding to the superintendent, the researcher heard a hard blow of his breath. There was no future conversation on this event with the superintendent.

The researcher kept trying to reach the supervisor to acknowledge that the superintendent was called and what the conversation consisted. The supervisor angrily asked the researcher why the superintendent was called. The researcher answered that the advisor requested the call. The supervisor said that the researcher should have contacted the designated district administrator who managed the study process. With madness the supervisor stormed out of the researcher's office while saying bye to the researcher's secretary as she hurriedly left the office to contact the district administrator. To this day, the researcher had not heard a word about the study.

The principal stated (by email and texting) that contact would be made with the researcher which took a day or two. The superintendent advised the researcher to ask for the principal's assistance with the questions if they were perceived as too strong, which the researcher did. The principal did not find anything wrong with the questions. The researcher was asked if the researcher wanted to return to finish the observations. The researcher replied that enough data was collected. The principal was relieved. Being inquisitive, the researcher asked the principal why the teachers refused to respond to the teacher's survey. The principal gave permission for the researcher to inquire. The principal immediately said that the teachers thought that the researcher would believe that the teachers were prejudice. The researcher missed something there – she really did. That response was above the researcher's understanding. The researcher thought within herself what would make them feel that way but

did not ask to avoid any future disruptions. Hence, the researcher interpreted this awful event as culturally biased which related directly to the study.

In continuation with the conversation, the principal suggested that the researcher do something to smooth the teachers over so that they would participate in the study. The researcher was going to give tokens of appreciation after the data collection but presented the appreciation gifts early. A token of appreciation with a thank you card attached was prepared that day. The researcher proposed the idea to the principal that every participant could take the survey at the same time in a computer lab during their Professional Learning Community (PLC) session since each participant at the school knew who the other participants were. In spite of the appreciation gesture and suggestion to the principal, two of the three teachers still refused to take part in the study.

### **Findings and Major Themes**

In this chapter the findings from the coding of the data were found in three sections. The sections were principal, literacy coach, and teacher participants. The data were produced from triangulation of surveys, observations, and document collection. Likewise, this qualitative case study based on grounded theory reflected the researched factors and behaviors that promoted African-American females' literacy achievement in relation to their Caucasian peers taught by Caucasian teachers.

### **Principal Participants**

The two principal participants took the electronic survey. The principals represented each gender. In the past, the average number of years served in this position was three years.

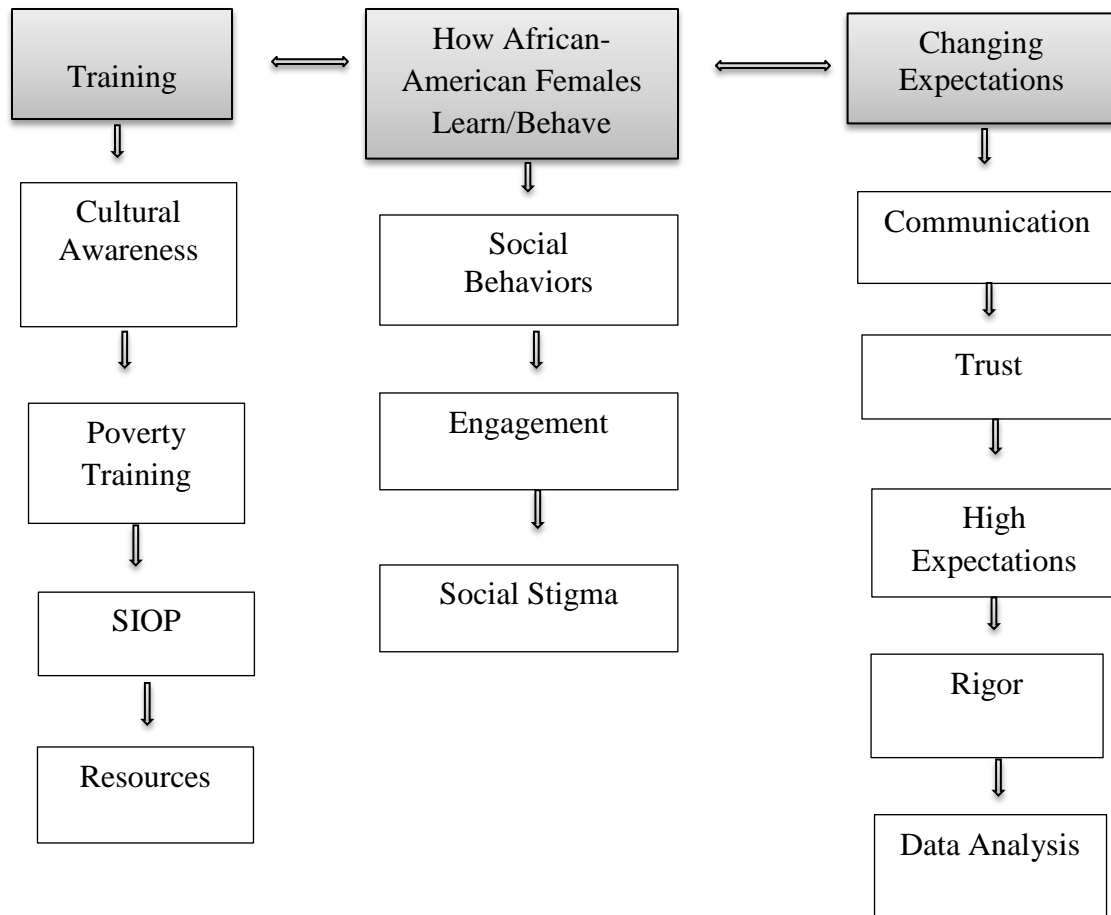
PRIN1 is the current principal of the school and completed two years in the position. The principal had these areas of certification: special education P-12; social studies 4-8; and building



level administration P-5 and 7-12. Other administrative positions in which the principal served were special education coordinator (two years); coordinator of assessment and accountability (four years); and assistant principal (three years). The current principal is a Caucasian female, being the first female principal of the school. She taught five years in special education (self-contained, resource, co-teaching, and indirect services) and reading for two years. Also, she recently received a Doctorate in Educational Leadership.

The second principal, PRIN2, was a past principal of the school. PRIN2 is a Caucasian male. He served as principal for three years. His other administrative positions included: junior high assistant principal (three years); high school assistant principal (one year); and junior high principal (four years). He recently served as the Director of Secondary Education (two years). He taught social studies in an alternative education school for four years before entering administration. Subsequently, PRIN2 had a Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership.

Open and axial codes were generated from the principal survey data. The three identified categories (axial codes) were training, how African-American females learn and behave, and changing expectations. *Figure 4.1*, Axial and Sample of Open Codes of Principals, showed the axial and open codes in a clustered matrix that emerged from the participants' surveys.



*Figure 4.1.* Axial and sample of open codes of principals. The axial codes are in color. The open codes flow beneath the axial codes.

## Training

The first major category (axial code) produced from the open codes was training. The axial code training summarized the open codes from the outcome of the data analysis. Hence, the open codes produced from repetition of the data for this axial code (training) was cultural awareness, poverty training, *Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol*, and resources.

The first open code of training was cultural awareness. Cultural awareness was a training that would enrich the principal's and staff's knowledge about African-American values, beliefs, and behaviors. The principals used the phrases cultural awareness and diversity training interchangeably. "Training in cultural awareness promoted social and academic strategies in the classroom" (PRIN2). Experience with teaching African-American females helped:

My background in teaching African American females students has included courses and professional development in diversity among learners, poverty training, meeting the needs of all learners, and strategies for students not achieving... I have not received training targeted to one specific gender. (PRIN1)

The principals mentioned when they taught African-Americans females. It did not address their role as an instructional leader in their current position. One principal mentioned that there was no training experienced. African-American cultural awareness training did not exist at the school because the instructional leaders (principals) did not present training to the teachers. When the instructional leaders promote and implement the training, the staff would believe it was a necessary entity. Particularly, the researcher always felt honored whenever her race was recognized among a group as important.

The second open code was poverty training. The district full of professional development intensely trained the staff with poverty training. The author, Ruby Payne, addressed the staff in person a couple of years ago at their first official district-wide staff meeting prior to the

beginning of the start of school days. The training was already in effect prior to her visit. “Ruby Payne’s poverty training helped to understand diversity ... I also learned how poverty functions into interactions and communications” (PRIN1). “Poverty training for all races” (PRIN2) increased the knowledge of cultural awareness. Principals connected poverty training to cultural training. Besides, poverty referred to the low-socioeconomic status and not specific culture.

The third open code mentioned was *Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol* (*SIOP*). *SIOP* was a thorough training of three consecutive days designed for English Language Learners (ELL). The researcher heard about the reputation of the *SIOP* from a few staff members and how the instructional strategies that were beneficial to not only teach ELL but all students. It was believed ELL scores on the Benchmark increased tremendously because of the *SIOP* implementation. Both principals cited *SIOP* as a professional development that increased their knowledge of cultural awareness, but they were not specific about which cultures. *SIOP* training in the district takes place yearly.

Resources were the fourth open code produced as a theme. Resources provided supplemental materials for instruction. The resources that the principals found helpful were workshops named *Assessment for Students*, *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*, and *Understanding by Design*. These resources were helpful to promote social and academic achievement and learning behaviors in African-American females. One principal sent teachers to a workshop to improve instructional strategies. The principal emphasized that “...increase the instructional strategies ...by sending Literacy...teachers to *Laying the Foundations Training*” (PRIN2). The researcher (June 2011) noticed that in March 2011 African-American female literacy scores outweighed their Caucasian peers. The principal indicated that this training helped African-American females to raise their March 2011 TLI literacy scores more than their Caucasian peers did. Therefore, resources were the last open code for the training category.

There was a change in staff yearly and a change in the principal's position almost every three years (PRIN1; PRIN2). Generally speaking, training would be needed every year.

### **How African-American Females Learn and Behave**

The second major category (axial code) identified from the data was how African-American females learn. This category also included how the African-American females behave. Three open codes exhausted for this category were social behaviors, engagement, and social stigma. Thus, learning and social behaviors of African-American females made a difference in the outcome of their learning experiences.

The first open code of the category was social behaviors. Behaviors were the ways in which an African-American female acts upon entering the school campus, or how she behaved between classes, at lunch, in the classroom, and with adults and peers. PRIN1 stated, "I have not observed social behaviors isolated to only African-American females in the classroom or hallways." PRIN1 also mentioned, "Higher level discussion opportunities among students which gives an opportunity to interact among students." PRIN2 did not observe social behaviors in the classroom or hallways that pertained to African-American females exclusively stating there were no social behaviors he "would be able to differentiate from other races." The principals observed no behavior isolated to African-American females. The researcher noticed social behaviors of African-American female students. The students waved and smiled; a couple of students hugged; held a guy's hand; ran with excitement to another peer; met at lockers; looked in their purses; stopped by the restroom; shouted loudly; laughed outrageously; discussed a test; spoke of what they were going to do for the weekend or if they were going to the game and what they were wearing; and a few returned to positive behavior because the researcher set eyes on them. These behaviors had been experienced among students of any race. The difference was that they would react to correct behavior in the presence of an African-American female because she was

a student's mom; she was known in the African-American community; there were personal ties to the African-American female; or because the researcher was their assistant principal at one time. In contrast, the researcher experienced negative behavior of African-American females when they were confrontational or just loud in the hallways when it was against the rules.

The researcher as a student of public education exhibited hardly any negative social behaviors because of the high expectations her parents had for their child in the school setting. The researcher was not allowed to upset the classroom by disobeying rules and disrespecting the teacher. The researcher's parent held the adults' word as honor of the truth. The researcher believed a stronger connection with the school staff and parents would result in positive changes in behavior of African-American females.

The second open code generated was engagement. "We [staff] attempted to break down the 'uncool' barrier associated with higher levels of engagement" (PRIN2). The principal was speaking of increasing the number of minority students into advanced placement classes. In order for the students to be successful, there had to be levels of higher engagement. The researcher remembers that her African-American daughters were not engaged in the lessons if it did not have some "cool" meaning or addressed their learning behaviors. Otherwise, they were bored. When the youngest daughter was bored, she drew or talked to entertain herself although she still heard the lesson. She displayed this behavior in church when her dad preached the sermon. However, she stated everything that he said and even the way he made the remarks. Because an African-American female did not set eyes on a teacher's eyes (what most Caucasian teachers wanted), it did not mean that the student was not paying attention. During the observation (OBSV2) one African-American female played with items in her purse before she put it down. It was during a group discussion. The African-American female returned to the conversation as if there was no purse present. The researcher was very impressed with that

moment because she was very busy in that purse and yet still she was engaged. As stated by one principal, “I believe higher levels of learning can be achieved when students are allowed to engage in focused learning groups” (PRIN2).

The district had a *Closing the Achievement Gap* committee for a few years based on state policy that was referred to in this statement: “... It helps me know that African-American females may limit their academic ambitions due to the challenges of social acceptance within their own community” (PRIN2). As noted by the researcher’s experiences with her own children, it was recalled that when the teacher implemented strategies to include African-American culture, her children stayed engaged in the learning and talked about it when they went home, experiencing growth in self-worth.

The last open code generated from the data was social stigma. Social stigma was witnessed in a classroom. During an observation (OBSV1) a male student negatively and loudly interrupted the learning of an African-American female. There were four adults in the classroom. The female never made a remark to the student prior to his comments. He picked on her because she was engaged in the lesson. In observation what was displayed to the researcher was that the only African-American female in class was doing well with the activity until he interrupted her learning. The interruption could have happened because the male student (maybe had a learning disability) could not have grasped the activity well enough so he caused a distraction. Therefore, the female’s positive learning behavior turned into a negative social behavior against the norms due to the negative disruption of the male. With the knowledge of a past experience of one principal, “It has helped me understand the social stigmas that students have to work through when they demonstrate academic success” (PRIN2).

## **Changing Expectations**

The third category (axial code) named was changing expectations that was derived from the exhaustion of open codes. Changing expectations would probably take at least three years before full implementation (Fullan, 2001). Thus, the principal data produced these open codes: parental communication, trust, high expectations, and rigor.

The first open code of changing expectations was parental communication. There was a lack of parental involvement from the African-American community. A few parents told the researcher that they do not enter the school because of a bad situation that they experienced or because of how other adults in the school addressed them. It was difficult at times to encourage parents to place their child in a higher-level placement course. A few parents would be puzzled if they felt that the school was positioning their child for failure. In addition, experiences with negative issues were explained, “Communication which is initiated due to negative issues has feedback which can include, anger, tears, profanity, silence, or walking out of the office” (PRIN1).

Parents and students receive communication “through announcements, postcards, and conferences...Feedback varies depending on the purpose of the communication. For communication regarding positive issues, feedback is positive with hugs, positive body language, frequent eye contact, and defending of the principal” (PRIN1). Students received a class syllabus of the English course to communicate the class assignments and assessments. Hence, African-American parents would have drawn their attention to the syllabus because of the noted African-American resources used in the curriculum (DOC1; DOC2).

Principals needed to open the lines of communication and become more accessible to parents. African-American parents should not be perceived as a “threat” when concerned with their child’s academic and learning behaviors. “I believe in connected calls, newsletters, PTA



meetings, parent nights...Communication happens in the hallways after parent nights...ballgames...grocery store and it happens intention” (PRIN2). The researcher’s past principals always knew her parents. It was the business of the parents to make sure that happened. Most students behaved in a positive manner when they knew their parents were communicating with the school staff.

The second open code for changing expectations category was trust. Building of relationships began with trust. There were generational ties of lack of trust within African-American families. One principal tried to build trust with the African-American parents in the school during the change of schedules to AP classes. As clearly stated, “The most powerful trust building communication happens with individual one-on-one meetings with parents” (PRIN2).

The researcher as an administrator made positive phone calls to the parents prior to having to deliver any negative news. Relationships were built. For example, when a student observed the researcher communicating with the parent in Spanish, the student’s behavior changed to a positive one. There was no longer a language barrier between the parent and the researcher. On the contrary, this did not mean that principals speak Ebonics (Black English) to communicate with African-American parents. It meant that principals open the line of communication and have African-American females to witness the exchange in order to establish trust.

The third open code identified was high expectations. High expectations should reach students through positive messages from the school staff. “We [staff] made high expectations the norm and fun with incentives, advertisements, t-shirts, video, etc.” (PRIN2). This statement was in recognition of changing the behaviors of the number of minority students enrolled in advanced placement courses. “Raising expectations and moving the culture from one of enabling poor performance to one of demanding that students commit to higher levels of

learning” (PRIN2). It was also acknowledged that the dramatic increase in the African-Americans’ literacy achievement performance in March 2011 on the TLI assessment over their Caucasian peers was due to increased enrollment in the advanced placement courses. Meeting with parents should focus on raising expectations. Hence, principals should have accessible knowledge of academic and discipline data when communicating with African-American parents. As stated by a principal:

Meetings may need to appear as chance, but they should always be focused on the intention of raising expectations and helping students to achieve their goals. I do not believe that it is always possible to agree, but I do believe it is always possible to understand. (PRIN2)

Rigor was the fourth open code of changing expectations. AP courses were rigorous. This meant that they required more work and skills because they were harder and more time consuming. When a student did well in the course, the student overcame many obstacles and increased his or her learning skills. The principal wanted minority students exposed to rigorous courses. In addition, the staff took a lead to eliminate biases and promoted high expectations among students who would normally not take AP courses:

The educational team ...chose to stand in the gap. We chose to be the person that expected students to enroll and do well in AP courses. We did not accept ‘I can’t’ as an answer. We chose to give students the right to fail or succeed. We attempted to eliminate biases that would cause us to close access based on assumptions that might be triggered by the level of poverty a student came from. There were great attempts, strategies, and student incentives (money token if successful on the AP exam). Students made commercials about Advanced Placement classes through the East Lab that were shown through the school announcements. Students in advanced placement classes wore

t-shirts of the names of the classes that they attended to give a cool message that taking Advanced Placement courses was a part of student life. I facilitated meetings with individual students and their parents to challenge them to take more rigorous courses. (PRIN2)

This last open code of this category was data analysis. Data analysis was a process that disaggregates data. Data disaggregation happened on the district level by district coordinators and administrators to place in the hands of the principals. Most of the data was analyzed on a district and classroom level. The data was broken down to one student within the schools. Comparatively, the researcher was familiar with the multiple ways the district had with looking at the data from the district level to the school level to the classroom level and then to each individual student.

“Analysis of data as a whole and individually” (PRIN1) was the step taken to close the literacy achievement gap. The district’s accountability office did the analysis of data. The central office staff trained the school administrators and literacy coach. The facilitator [literacy coach] analyzed data, trained the staff, and organized collaboration meetings. “We aggregated and disaggregated all the data for the purpose of determining student learning and behavioral needs” (DOC3). A literacy interventionist is located in every school to help Basic and Below Basic students reach their full potential in hopes of raising scores to Proficient and above on the literacy exam. An AIP was written for a student who fell below proficient on the literacy exam (DOC2). The literacy coach in the school was entitled the literacy instructional facilitator. Instructional facilitator would “provide high quality professional development for teachers through various methods” (DOC2) based on the outcome of deficient skills. A school intervention team analyzed the results of TLI formative assessments to target remediation and

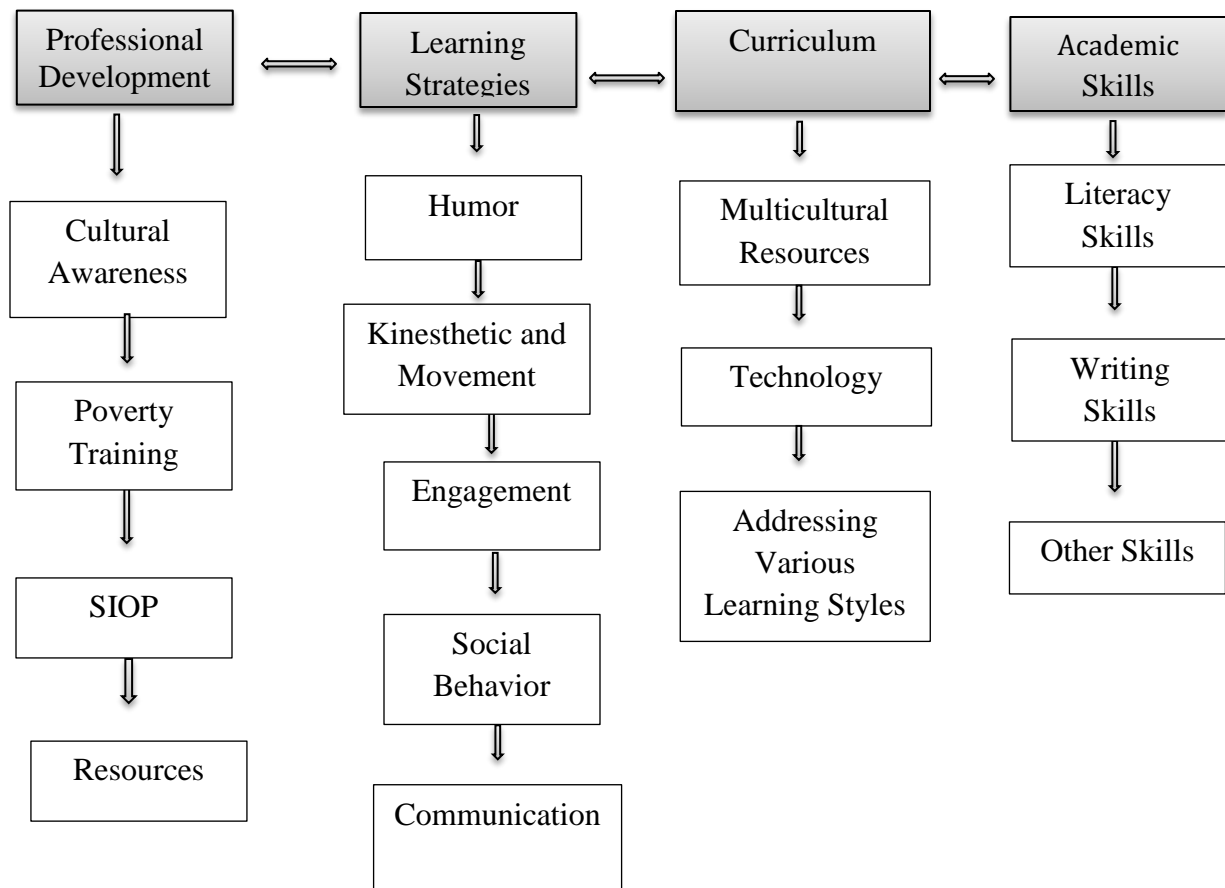
acceleration of students. In other words, literacy test results were used identify areas of weakness (DOC2).

### **Literacy Coach Participants**

The two literacy coach participants (LC3 and LC4) took the electronic survey. The official title of LC3 was literacy instructional facilitator. The coach is located in the school and has been in the position three years. The literacy coach is a Caucasian female. LC3 has a master's degree. Her certification areas were middle school English or language arts, secondary school English or language arts, and secondary school oral communications. She taught one year of 7th grade English; two years of 8th grade English; eight years of 9th grade English; eight years of 9th grade English honors; eight years of oral communications; eight years of Pre-AP English II; six years of English II; two years of English III; and six years of English IV Pre-AP. She served one year as the district secondary literacy coordinator. According to the ACSIP plan (DOC3), her task was to provide training in literacy lab strategies. Her collaboration with the teachers was documented. She was to ensure that writing instruction was integrated in all core classes. Documentation of such stated skills were placed in lesson plans. Collaboration meetings were also documented. LC3 did observations and reflections to increase curriculum alignment, learner engagement, instructional skills, and to have assessments using high-yield strategies. The plan also stated that Developmental Reading Assessment was administered to 10th and 11th grade students who scored five or more grade levels below their current grade on the STAR assessment. Reading intervention supported these students through individualized instruction and resources such as a classroom library, which were current. Monitoring of student progress occurred weekly in Tier III reading class. Also according to the ACSIP, LC3 researches literacy intervention strategies and teachers had technological resources to implement collective inquiry research for staff collaboration in literacy.

Participant LC4 was the current district's secondary literacy coordinator who provided instructional support for the district's secondary English teachers and facilitators. Coaching entailed modeling instruction, making classroom observations, and providing teachers with constructive feedback and professional literacy development. The instructional literacy facilitators and interventionists received training and support from the secondary literacy coordinator. The Learning Institute's Grade 11 literacy formative assessment was supervised by LC4 for inspection of errors by her and her selected literacy teachers. LC4 is a Caucasian female. She is housed at one of the district's administrative buildings. Her areas of certification were English 7-12 and journalism. She served six years in her current position. She taught for three years at the school under study and taught for 23 years in Oklahoma. LC4 spent 32 years in education. She was a yearbook sponsor for two years; taught creative writing for one year; and taught English 9-12 for 26 years. She had teaching experience with "remediation, low-ability and regular ability [students], College Bound, Honors, Pre-AP and AP English classes" (LC4). In addition, LC4 was to attend professional development according to the district's *ACSIP* (DOC2).

Four axial codes derived from the open codes from their data. The axial codes (categories) were professional development, learning strategies, curriculum, and academic skills. *Figure 4.2* named Axial and Sample of Open Codes for Literacy Coaches displayed the outcomes in a clustered matrix of axial and open codes that emerged from these participants' surveys.



*Figure 4.2.* Axial and sample of open codes for literacy coaches. The axial codes are in color. The open codes flow beneath the axial codes.

## Professional Learning

Professional learning category (axial code) was named from four open codes.

Professional learning was the same as training. Ironically, the literacy coaches had the same open codes as the principals. The open codes were cultural awareness, poverty training, *Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol*, and resources.

The first open code of the axial code was cultural awareness. LC4 stated, “I had no training that led to additional cultural awareness of Af-Am [African-American] females...I did have a workshop on the history of jazz that gave me insights into Af-Am [African-American] culture.” More about training was expressed by a literacy coach:

Training in poverty, ELL, and sociological and cultural issues in education (latter in graduate school) have increased my awareness of the variables that impact the academic performance, readiness, attitude, behavior, and needs of all students in ‘sub-groups’, not just African American students. (LC3)

The literacy coaches were aware that the African-American culture existed but it was not addressed in the classroom. The coaches had not been trained on African-American culture or instructional strategies, just as principals and central office administrators were not trained. The researcher trained the new teachers at the *New Teacher Induction* and trained a junior high school about the various cultures in the district. There were many “aha” moments after becoming aware of the various cultures. The staff was able to communicate with parents and students based on the knowledge of culture. An Asian student turning his or her back to you would be offensive in the Caucasian culture if they did not know that this Asian behavior was a sign of respect when reprimanding him or her. “All Instructional Facilitators will provide high quality professional development for teachers through various methods and spend at least 80% of each day or week in the classroom teaching students or modeling for teachers and serving as

teacher mentors” (DOC2). “I have long been intrigued by the neurobiology of learning and have read extensively in this field” (LC3). Therefore, literacy coaches could not present modeling of literacy instructional strategies that addressed the academic and learning behaviors of African-American females to teachers if they had not been exposed to the professional development themselves.

The second open code was poverty training. Most of the district staff had poverty training but it did not fully address African-American females’ academic and learning behaviors. Some African-American females fell in the category of poverty. LC3 stated, “I know that Ruby Payne’s work on generational poverty suggests that students living in such circumstances lack cognitive structures for the organization of some content...not all African American females are living in generational poverty.” LC4 became acquainted with poverty training through Ruby Payne’s workshops, “an area for which many Af-Am [African-American] females qualified.” Evans (2006) said that children of low socioeconomic background revealed a low performance level in literacy. Not all African-American females fell in the poverty category. Literacy coaches were paid in salary with Title I funds. Therefore, training resources were available through the funds also (DOC2).

*Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol (SIOP)* was the third open code. Strategies designed through *SIOP* helped African-American females as well according to one literacy coach. In support, “I believe the SIOP strategies were also invaluable as explicit strategies that worked well with all students, including Af-Am [African-American students]” (LC4).

The district and school staff supported and believed in *SIOP* training (DOC2; DOC3). *SIOP* mostly addresses ELL. Furthermore, the researcher knew that these instructional strategies had been affective in increasing literacy scores.



The fourth open code was resources. There were a number of resources that were produced in the data by the literacy coaches. “I have not trained teachers in any strategies specifically or exclusively targeting African American females” (LC3). To close the gap between them and their Caucasian peers, the only workshops that the literacy coach partook of were those involving poverty, ELL students, and struggling readers. This literacy coach was exposed through reading and college to other resources involving African Americans:

My own reading of Jonathan Kozol and books such as *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* have allowed me some measure of awareness and sensitivity. Additionally, I have been a member of Morris Dees' Teaching Tolerance since my undergraduate days and an associate in the *Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights* in the United States from 1990 to 1995. These two organizations have also served to increase my knowledge of diversity and issues related to it. (LC3)

The information produced by the literacy coaches and other documents demonstrate why African-American female training was needed. Hence, the literacy coach could serve as trainers.

### **Learning Strategies**

The way African-American female students learn was based on learning strategies. Learning strategies was an axial code named for the open codes that the data generated through an exhaustion of coding repetitiously. In addition, the literacy coach electronic survey revealed the following six open codes about learning strategies: Humor, kinesthetic, movement, engagement, social behavior, communication, and visual learner.

The first open code of learning strategies was humor. African Americans learned through humor and were engaged through humor. Ask the Sunday morning Baptist preacher. The researcher noted that humor was the antidote to sadness and it made safe play. LC4 mentioned, “African-American female students seem to learn best from those with whom they feel a bond

and who appreciates humor.” The larger the African-American family, the more humor, excitement (loudness), and talent existed at family gatherings. The researcher’s spouse came from a big family of thirteen children. Entertainment happened through humor. The researcher had seen the best plays by one of the husband’s deceased sister that resulted in people crying from hard laughter. The researcher observed humor, smiles, and laughter among the African-American females. There was no disruption of the learning environment. In addition, African-American females laughed at themselves about incidents that happened during their learning experiences and were still engaged (OBSV1, OBSV2, and OBSV3).

Movement had always been a part of African-American culture. Sundays were filled with dancing and a lot of movement that was encouraged in African-American churches. The preacher moved during his presentation of the sermon. The researcher and friends created movement in games like jumping rope, playing hopscotch, and Red Rover. When the researcher sat in meetings and the music played, she fought back the movement to sway to a song because it was not proper etiquette among the Caucasian peers. To explain more, on Sundays the researcher experienced rhythmic movement in church while on Mondays she had to calmly sit as the African-American female students had done in the classroom. In essence, addressing movement in instruction acknowledges the gift of rhythmic movement that was such a part of the African-American females’ culture.

The literacy facilitator (LC3) in one classroom modeled kinesthetic and movement activities for the teachers. Students went from their seats to the whiteboard to place their sticky notes to give a visual poll of the class. This was an opportunity for the African-Americans to have a movement time during the transition (OBSV1). In support of this type of activity, it was stated by one of the literacy coaches:

I have observed that students of poverty, color, and low-language skills (i.e., ELL) are primarily visual and kinesthetic learners and are almost always oral learners as well; therefore, I advise teachers to include pictures, videos, photographs, and even teacher-drawn figures to visually explain concepts while they are simultaneously explaining the concepts orally. I also advise teachers to include multiple teaching strategies that involve physical projects, both in and out of class, also better engage the kinesthetic learners...I also advise teachers to include multiple teaching strategies that involve physical activities and movement, such as the use of foldables and student coloring or drawing, as well as carouseling around the room. (LC4)

The literacy coach would model or explain the activity. The coach had an African-American female to act out how the behavior was explained to her. In addition, another kinesthetic strategy in the classroom was exchanging seats to take on a new role with a partner when signaled by the literacy coach (OBSV1).

The third open code in the learning strategies category was engagement. "I have done a lot of work with teachers on engagement, student-centered instruction, questioning (specifically, questioning to stimulate thinking/learning), deep processing of vocabulary, and cooperative learning" (LC3). Kinesthetic activities were much needed during instruction. It engaged the African-American female because they were raised on movement. The researcher had observed students in the past learning by making raps out of assignments. Classical music was used in the researcher's classroom because it eventually engaged all learners. A brain research workshop based on Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences several years ago stimulated the researcher to use the music. At the same time, the students did not want to do assignments or assessments without the classical music playing during independent work when the researcher taught from 1995 to 1999.

The fourth open code was social behavior. African-American females were social human beings like most all girls. Some girls were disciplined for their behavior because it was not understood. The researcher had a charming child that charmed her teachers and peers. She was mostly able to escape discipline because she showed fondness to every teacher and in return the teachers adored her. She would nurture the relationship with charm, hugs, and her brilliant smile. Because of the relationship that she built with the teacher, the teacher could get her to do anything including silence her talking, one of her gifts. In recognition of African-American female gifts, it was stated, “The thing that I was most aware was the humor of many of my students, frequently loud and raucous...I joined in, appreciative of their gifts” (LC4).

The researcher observed the negative behavior when an African-American male made loud negative outbursts, interrupting the thinking of an African-American female. There were three certified teachers (included the literacy facilitator) in the room. There were no comments for a while to address the behavior but there were looks, mostly to see how the researcher would react as the observer. The researcher did not react because the researcher was only present to observe. The African-American female cried as she yelled at the male student to be quiet because she was trying to focus (OBSV1). The African-American female expressed an interest in the activity. One of the teachers told the researcher that something was wrong (mood wise) with the African-American female when she entered the room. As recognized, the teacher had familiarity of the African-American female’s daily moods due to a certain type of relationship with the student.

The fifth open code produced from the literacy coach surveys through data analysis was communication. Sharing one’s own personal experience with students built communication between the student and the teacher. One literacy coach shared, “I shared my upbringing which was similar to that of many of my students. I also was respectful of their racial and cultural

heritages, showing understanding and acceptance of who they were” (LC4). In the end, the researcher’s children were more respectful and wanted to do their work to please the teacher when this type of relationship was presented before their peers.

This literacy coach communicated with African-American students on a personal level. Here is a different perspective of communication:

My primary communication with all parents, regardless of ethnicity, is to speak to them about our Reading and Comprehension and Crucial Reading classes. This is done in a large group. I also send a letter explaining the classes and their student’s reading level. Additionally, I provide all of these parents with my phone number. Other communication is actually more of a referral when parents come to \*\*\* with a question or concern regarding their student’s achievement, reading, ACT or PSAT performance, or any other literacy related concern. (LC3)

## **Curriculum**

The third axial code or category was curriculum. Curriculum was derived from the open codes of multicultural resources and addressed various learning styles. Thus, these strategies in literacy produced rigor and high expectations.

The first open code of curriculum was multicultural resources. LC3 implemented authors, films, movies, guest speakers, and multicultural materials as curriculum resources. In show of support, the survey data calculated that 50% of the coaches used African-American films or movies; 100% incorporated African-American authors; 100% used multicultural materials (not specified); and 50% used guest speakers.

The second open code was technology. Gaming devices were named specifically. Gaming devices were not in the curriculum. “The only interactive software currently used at [school] is GradPoint for credit recovery...not specifically for literacy” (LC3; DOC2).

GradPoint was a software that helped students graduate if they had not enough credits. “Online sites appropriate to literacy learning and gaming” (LC4) were shared with the teachers. Hence, the resources were shared but might or might not have been used by the teachers.

The third open code was addressing various learning styles. Addressing various learning styles helped a student to learn the concept the way that she learned best. “I believe teachers must understand individual student learning styles and adapt their teaching to those styles” (LC4). To address the various learning styles, “We have an influx of younger literacy teachers in our district trained in explicit instructional strategies” (LC4). Veteran teachers were not mentioned in the data as knowing how to address the learning styles. According to the school’s *ASCIP*, the facilitator (literacy coach) trained the English teachers. It was stated in the plan that “the facilitator will model instructional strategies” (DOC3). One of the observations included the literacy coach modeling (OBSV1). “I provide workshops that continue to emphasize instructional strategies that focus on appropriate-interest texts, different strategies to incorporate group work, and the use of explicit instructional strategies for reading, writing, and vocabulary” (LC4). According to the secondary’s Comprehensive Literacy Model, there were components for reader’s and writer’s workshops. The reader’s workshop components were reading strategies, vocabulary study, reader’s response writing, read alouds, and independent reading time. The writer’s workshop components were process writing, portfolios, peer conferences, teacher conferences, and language arts terminology under the state’s literacy frameworks. Exam prep sessions were another way to address the African-American females learning styles (DOC3). Usually the prep sessions were held on Saturdays. With an explanation, one literacy coach wrote:

I instituted after school and Saturday EOC prep sessions that focused on deconstructing sample EOC essays, through analysis of the rubric, utilization of CUB [C=Circle the

command word (the verb); U=Underline the “what” of the command; and B=Bracket all important information to be included (for example, numbers) for the OR [open response] prompt, answering the OR prompt, making inferences, and determining vocabulary through word attack strategies. (LC3)

Another way to address learning styles was using student-centered instruction. “I have done a lot of work with teachers on engagement, student-centered instruction, questioning (specifically, questioning to stimulate thinking/learning), deep processing of vocabulary, and cooperative learning” (LC3).

It was instrumental for training on brain research and learning styles to promote academic achievement for African-American females. Therefore, teachers could use learning styles to enhance learning according to the students’ academic need and also to control behavior by addressing the needs, goals, social nature, and beliefs of the African-American female (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

### **Academic Skills**

The last category (axial code) produced from the open codes was academic skills. The open codes were literacy, writing, and other skills. Literacy and writing primarily comprised the state literacy exam (DOC 2; DOC 3; DOC4; DOC5). Academic skills would be taught for African-American females to achieve in literacy. Most of all, the instruction had to include the skills that were necessary to pass the state Grade 11 Literacy exam.

The first open code was literacy. The skills for reading selected by the coaches in the survey were 100% for literary, content, and practical (LC3; LC4). These same skills were located in DOC2 and DOC3. The district and school *ACSIP* plans were created under the state’s format by a school and district team. As a deadline, the *ACSIP* plan was due early in the school year (DOC2; DOC3; DOC5).

Writing was the second open code generated by the data for the axial code academic skills. The writing skills calculated by the literacy coach survey data showed 100% agreement between the coaches for content, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics (LC3; LC4; DOC2; DOC3; DOC5). Simultaneously, other identified writing skills were explicitly addressing organization for coherence and developing content through elaboration (LC3).

The third open code for academic skills was other skills. Other skills were necessary skills that the literacy coaches noted that were needed to help African-American students to pass the state literacy exam. “Grade-level reading skills, critical thinking skills, and logical thinking skills” (LC3; OBSV1) were other academic skills. The coach felt that these skills were needed to pass the Arkansas Grade 11 Literacy exam. “...I have found that most of my students are weak in this area [vocabulary] and need explicit instruction to develop their vocabulary skills” (LC4). All literacy coaches mentioned the need to increase vocabulary skills. In addition, “Greek and Latin root and affix study, explicit instruction in making inferences, word attack strategies, and activating background knowledge” (LC3) were additions as other reading skills.

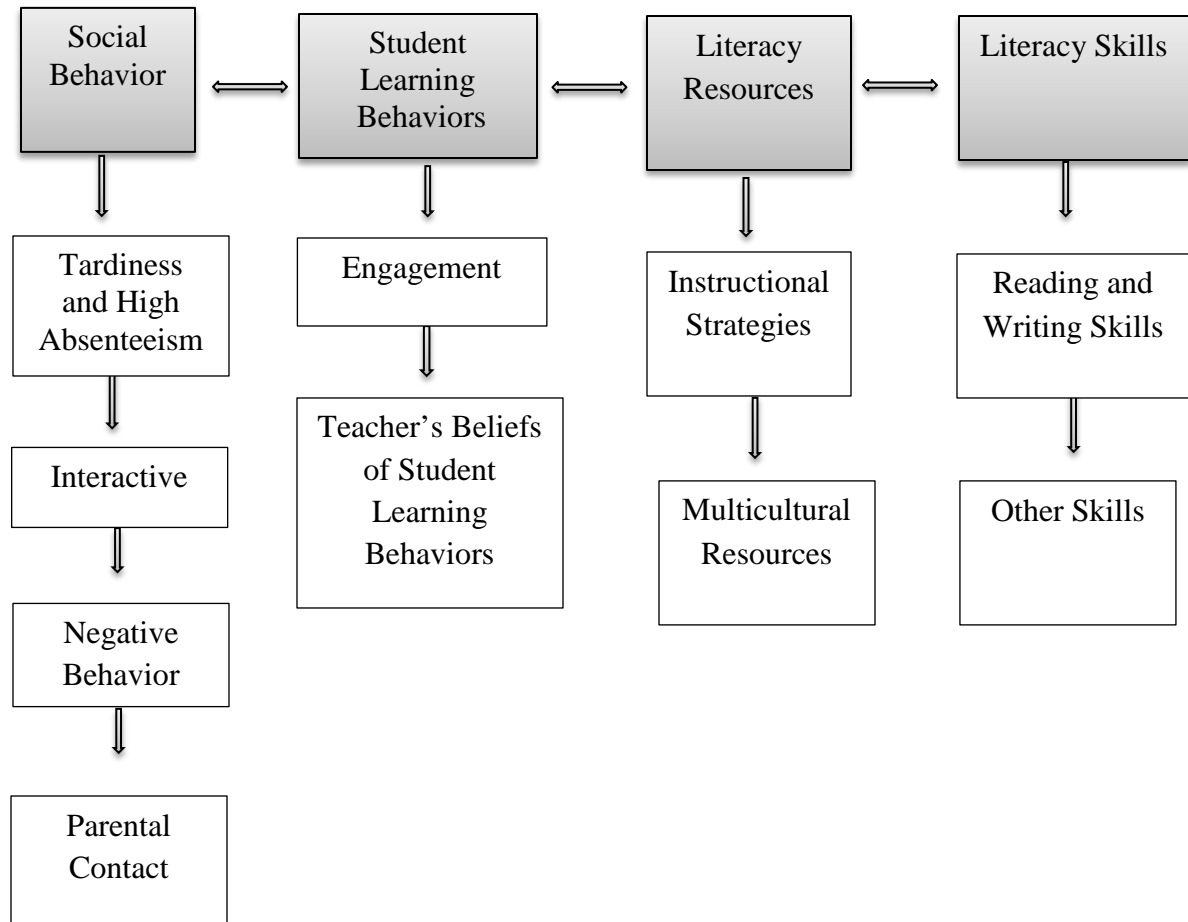
### **Teacher Participants**

There was only one teacher participant that took the survey. TCH5 is a Caucasian female that had a bachelor’s degree. Her certification areas were secondary English and cheer coach. She taught English at this school for one year. TCH5’s internship included teaching in the areas of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> English, journalism, and publications.

No response was provided in the survey to explain the African-American females achieving higher than their Caucasian peers did in 2010-2011 on the state literacy exam because she was not teaching at the school. Hence, the observational data showed that there was one African-American female of an average of 30 (3.3%) students per classroom observed (OBSV1; OBSV2; OBSV3).



Recalling that there were three teacher participant forms signed, two teachers withdrew from the study because they believed that the researcher would judge them as prejudiced if they responded to the survey questions. The teachers communicated this information to the principal who then relayed the information to the researcher (DOC6; DOC8). Therefore, the axial coding and open coding were derived from one teacher. *Figure 4.3, Axial and Sample of Open Codes for the Teacher*, reflected in the clustered matrix the axial and open codes produced.



*Figure 4.3.* Axial and sample of open codes for the teacher. The axial codes are in color. The open codes flow beneath the axial codes.

## **Social Behaviors**

The first category (axial code) was social behaviors. Various social behaviors were noted by the teacher and by observations conducted by the researcher. There was only one African-American female per English class during the observations (OBSV1; OBSV2; OBSV3). It was observed that African-American females play with their hair and cross their legs. The first open code of social behaviors was tardiness and high absenteeism. The survey was designed for the teacher to select social behaviors observed among the African-American females. The teacher selected tardiness and high absenteeism. However, "I've noticed more males" (TCH5) was the response that she added in regards to tardiness and high absenteeism (DOC4). The researcher was told that one African-American female was absent. In the classrooms observed, the researcher only saw one African-American female per class (OBSV2).

The second open code was interactive. An African-American female had great enunciation and was very comfortable expressing herself through debate (OBSV2). African-American females were not afraid to speak or express their opinions. The females were quite calmer than their African-American male peers (OBSV1; OBSV2; OBSV3). During one observation, the African-American female had a quiet mannerism but she was not shy to participate in the activities. The literacy coach and the student communicated face to face when the literacy coach approached the student. The student was comfortable with her in her space (OBSV1). African-American females felt comfortable interacting with their teachers and peers. They allowed the teacher in their personal space. The African-American females were comfortable approaching other students and asking for assistance or assisting the students who needed their help. There was interaction between the teacher and African-American in each observation (OBSV1; OBSV2; OBSV3). The African-American females comfortably

approached the teachers to discuss the lessons (OBSV2; OBSV3). In one classroom the African-American female allowed her Caucasian female peer to view her netbook screen. She was doing independent work for the majority of class time (OBSV3). The researcher observed social behaviors of interaction (pair and group work) and negative behaviors (OBSV1; OBSV2).

As a parent the researcher had many conversations with the youngest daughter who was very sociable. It did not deviate from the child's engagement but it interrupted others and the teacher. When the researcher stated the next step for correcting the child's talkative behavior, the teachers made excuses (sugar coated the child's behavior). The researcher became confused because either the teachers wanted the talkative behavior stopped or did not – teachers felt maybe that the cute and precious young lady would not like them anymore or it would affect their relationship. The behavior was still addressed by the researcher to the child. The researcher followed up with the teachers later to see if the student's behavior changed (not talking during the wrong times). In other words, the teacher's relationship with the researcher's daughter appeared to be more important.

The third open code was negative behavior. An African-American female engaged in the learning activity was disrupted due to a continuous outburst of an African-American male shouting at her which turned into an argument between the two students. There were three certified persons (females) in the room. The African American female shouted at the African-American male, “\*\*\*\*\*, you are talking too loud. I can't hear her [the partner]. ...That's what I'm doing. Dang (she begins to cry). Why don't you shut up? You are so freaking irritating” (OBSV1). The researcher noted that it took two minutes after the dispute for the African-American female to leave the classroom. The female requested to leave with permission to regain her character. She returned calm four minutes later but was not quite her usual self,

sitting facing from the side of her desk and looking off to the side. She was not into the learning activity. Prior to the incident, she was extremely involved in the learning experience modeled by the literacy coach (OBSV1). The teacher communicated with the researcher that she knew that something was wrong with the student when she entered the classroom. This teacher knew the moods and behavioral characteristics of the student (OBSV1). The researcher left the classroom. The researcher noted that it took the African-American female absence from the room to calm the African-American male. The certified personnel watched for a while before the literacy coach who presented the lesson addressed the male student up close (OBSV1). In observation, a social stigma existed due to the African-American male disrupting the learning environment of the African-American female (if she took ownership of the stigma) in the presence of their classmates.

The fourth open code produced was parental contact. Parental contact was communicated through “email, letters, or phone calls...also at parent-teacher conferences” (TCH5). Parent-teacher conferences happened twice a year. Report cards were handed out quarterly. In addition, ConnectEd was a communication technological tool that sent recorded and texted messages to parents and staff (DOC3).

The staff said that they desired parental involvement. There was a parental involvement coordinator in the school (mandated by the state department’s policy). As the researcher experienced as an African-American parent and educator with involvement, teachers believed that the researcher was there to observe them. They did not know how to respond to the researcher when questions were asked by the researcher. On the other hand, the teachers behaved as if they wanted to guide what the parent (researcher) asked concerning the student. The lack of parental involvement appeared to be because parents did not feel comfortable

approaching teachers. From the researcher's experience teachers needed to know that parents can make a big difference in correcting the student academic and social behaviors. When things were negatively done to the parent to turn the parent away, it became the teacher's loss.

TCH5 also noted that African-American females might not turn in assignments but that it was frequent among the African American males. Thus, parental contact was very beneficial when these behaviors were exhibited.

### **Teacher's Belief of Student Learning Behaviors**

The second axial code was student learning behaviors (based upon the teacher's belief). The researcher observed African-American females were involved in the learning experience. There was movement, technology used, open discussions in a group, teacher and student interaction, and student-to-student interaction. The females were receptive to the teachers' instructions and peer assistance. African-American female students did not turn in or do assignments as observed as a social behavior chosen from choices on the electronic survey by the teacher. In review of these observations, the researcher noticed that every African-American female crossed their legs during the learning activities which they were constantly working on the assignments (OBSV1; OBSV2; OBSV3).

The first theme was engagement. The students were allowed to move by changing seats with the partner and by walking to the white board to place sticky notes to indicate their belief in the assignment (OBSV1). African-American females needed to move. Sitting a long time could cause boredom. They played with objects or their hair which could have distracted from the lessons (OBSV2; OBSV3). It was imperative that teachers move around the classroom to keep the African-American females engaged. Lessons with movement or projects that included movement were also helpful. One African-American female student used a netbook to work on a

project in the classroom and had freedom to move to other students for assistance or to assist them. There was no deviation from the norm or rules (OBSV3). Furthermore, “They also learn better when we do something hands on or interactive” (TCH5).

One teacher engaged the students by introducing the lesson after passing out a reading selection. The teacher gave the students directions and went to her desk. The students worked in two different groups. The African-American female worked in a group of with three Hispanic females. She later approached the teacher’s desk and had direct eye contact with the teacher. The student was not afraid to interact with the teacher. As the African-American student read, she moved the paper close to her eyes, put it on her desk (continuing to read), and then she leaned forward to read. Even though the student was busy playing with her purse or goofing off, she was still engaged in the reading and the discussion activity. Her voice was not loud or low. She had great enunciation (OBSV2). The adjustment of paper could be a sign of the student needing glasses. This particular African-American female controlled the discussion over her group mates. There should be a time restriction so that all members of the group could contribute. She needed no assistance except when she asked the teacher a question. With emphasis, “Engagement is the key” (TCH5).

“Most of my students need examples to learn” (TCH5). Examples served as a guide for the lesson and keep the student engaged. An example of the partner activity was demonstrated by the teacher using the African-American female as a model for the lesson. Students were to draw what their partner described. The African-American female used her finger to air draw as her partner gave her the description as they were back-to-back in their seats (OBSV1). Because it was noted through the study that African-American females were kinesthetic learners, having the female student to model the activity was helpful.

The second and last open code of student learning behaviors was teacher's beliefs of student learning behaviors. TCH5 said that her African-American female students were proficient readers in the classroom. Students scored Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced on the literacy state assessment. Hence, this qualitative case study was to introduce teachers to promote proficiency on the Arkansas Grade 11 Literacy exam.

TCH5 believed that African-American female students always responded to the teacher and asked questions. It was also believed that the students comprehended the teacher responses. TCH5 mentioned that the African-American females asked a lot of questions and gave feedback and that she was always available to assist African-American females. The researcher noticed that a question was asked per African-American female students during the observations (OBSV1; OBSV2; OBSV3). TCH5 would monitor the room while the literacy coach taught the class and responded to questions asked by any student. Furthermore, the teacher did interact with the African-American female (OBSV1).

### **Literacy Resources**

The third axial code was literacy resources. The open codes of instructional strategies and multicultural resources generated the category literacy resources. In naming, literacy resources were materials and strategies that could strengthen literacy skills.

The first open code identified through an exhaustion of data was instructional strategies. "Even if it's just a baby step; I want progress. I haven't taught any race differently from another, but rather tried individualize instruction based on each student's needs" (TCH5). The teacher believed in individualized instruction to meet every need of each student. As a response, the teacher explained the meaning of the Gradual Release Method:



It's where you start off modeling what you want the students to do/learn, then you do it again together as a class, (then sometimes you may let them work in groups or pairs), and finally they do it on their own. (TCH5)

The researcher saw the method used among the students when the literacy coach modeled the instruction for the teachers. The students worked in pairs after the literacy coach demonstrated the activity. Furthermore, the literacy coach asked the African-American female student for assistance to introduce the activity (OBSV1).

The second axial code for the category was multicultural resources. The multicultural resources included in the teacher's curriculum were "films or movies, multicultural materials" (TCH5). The class syllabus contained African-American resources of poets, authors, and civil rights movement person, Martin Luther King (DOC1). Kunjufu (2002) recognized that master teachers had high expectations for their students and expected them to learn. They understood the difficulties the students experienced in the community and at home. A multicultural teacher expressed multicultural values to all of his or her students. The teachers became the facilitators while the students discovered the answers. TCH5 demonstrated through her syllabus (DOC1) that African-American poets and authors were utilized in the classroom as multicultural resources. Students also had access to technology by using an electronic device which could have included their own. As a rule, students had access to the Internet to locate any sources under school policy when using any electronic device (OBSV3).

### **Literacy Skills**

Literacy skills were the fourth axial code derived from the open codes of reading, writing, and other skills. Literacy skills (reading and writing) were taught and assessed in the 11th grade. Students had to practice these skills to pass the Arkansas Grade 11 examination. There were

other skills that the teacher believed that were needed to pass the exam. By state law, students studied four units of English to graduate (DOC 4).

Reading and writing skills were the first open codes under literacy skills. Literacy, content, and practical were the identified reading skills. The writing skills identified were content, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics (DOC2; DOC3; DOC5; DOC6; LC3; LC4; TCH5). The skills were incorporated within instructional strategies using plays, poems, argumentative writing, short stories, and research projects (DOC1). EOC prep sessions were held during the first and second semester. For example, EOC boot camp happened during the third and fourth quarter of the school year (DOC1).

The second open code for literacy skills was other skills. Other skills used to promote literacy achievement were reading strategies and questioning strategies. Another skill mentioned was literary devices (TCH5). The researcher observed reading and questioning strategies. In addition, feedback from the African-American students and from the teachers to these students was observed by the researcher (OBSV1; OBSV2; OBSV3).

### **Summary**

The researcher listed and supported the axial and open codes identified through triangulation of electronic surveys, observations, and data collection. The electronic survey contained open-ended questions and demographic questions. The three different participant types of electronic surveys were created from the theoretical framework, literature review, and research question to generate responses for data analysis. The three participants were two principals, two literacy coaches, and one teacher. The observations happened in the classrooms. Detailed notes and drawings reflected the results of the observations. Furthermore, data collection entailed a classroom syllabus, district and school *ACSIPs*, *Arkansas Department of*

*Education School Performance Report, Grade 11 Literacy Teacher Handbook*, researcher's calendars, and researcher's journal.

Chapter Four displayed direct quotes of the participants. These quotes contributed to the study to reflect what was in place as a part of the curriculum, what instructional strategies were taught in the classroom, and whether or not there was knowledge of the African-American female learning and social behaviors. In addition, the observations and data collection of artifacts served as factual evidence for the research of the case study.

The axial codes (categories) in this qualitative case study, derived from the open codes of the principal electronic surveys, were: training, how African-American females learn and behave, and changing expectations. The literacy coach survey developed axial codes from the open codes that were professional development, learning strategies, curriculum, and academic skills. Axial codes produced from the teacher's survey data of open codes were social behavior, student learning behaviors, literacy resources, and literacy skills. Chapter Five included interpretation of data, selective codes, theories, research question, recommendation to the field, recommendations for further research, and summary.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this case study was to understand why 11th grade African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers were not achieving literacy results on the state exam comparable to those of their Caucasian female peers. The research identified the contributing factors (or lack thereof) that prevented more African-American female students from achieving Advanced scores on the state literacy exam. Kunjufu (2002) found that from kindergarten to the 12th grade the achievement tests showed a 200-point difference between Caucasian and African-American children. Through the research design, this qualitative case study discovered the identified researched factors and behaviors based on the grounded theory.

Three different groups of participants took the electronic survey. The questions were open-ended. In addition, each survey type was designed to project similarities and differences among the groups through triangulation of the data.

The results of the study are shared with students, parents, teachers, principals, district administrators, superintendents, school board members, the Arkansas State Board of Education, state and federal legislatures, and testing companies. The outcome of the study resulted in the contributing factors that affected the literacy achievement of African-American female students on the state literacy exam under the instruction of Caucasian teachers.

Chapter Five described the grounded theory generated in this study to show the relationship of the literature review, responded to the research question, and stated the theories and findings. After data analysis, codes were generated. Therefore, open codes produced axial codes from each type of survey data.

## **Interpretation of Data**

The data analysis produced 11 axial codes. The principal data produced 3 axial codes from 12 open codes. The literacy coach data produced 15 open codes to make 4 axial codes. As an outcome, the teacher data formed 10 open codes to produce 4 axial codes.

The researcher compared the axial codes. The commonality among the axial codes was training and professional development. Hence, these axial codes were produced from the open codes cultural awareness, poverty training, *Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol*, and resources.

Other commonalities of axial codes existed between the participants' survey data were how African-American females behave (principal) and social behaviors (teacher). These axial codes were produced from the open codes like social behaviors, social stigma, tardiness and high absenteeism, interactive, negative behavior, and parental contact. Social behavior was used as an axial code (teacher) and as an open code (principal and literacy coach).

The next commonality among the axial codes was how African-American females learn (principal), learning strategies (literacy coaches), and student learning behaviors (teacher). The open codes that led to the axial codes were engagement, humor, kinesthetic and movement, social behavior, communication, and teacher's beliefs of students' learning behaviors. On the other hand, engagement was a repetitive open code from the teacher and principal data.

One axial code that stood alone was changing expectations (principal). The open codes communication, trust, high expectations, rigor, and data analysis formed this axial code. Hence, there were no commonalities between other participants' survey data.

Curriculum and literacy resources were axial codes that have commonalities with the literacy coach and teacher survey data. The open codes led to these axial codes. Thus,

multicultural resources, technology, addressing various learning styles, instructional strategies, and multicultural resources were the open codes.

Academic skills and literacy skills were axial codes that shared the same open codes. The open codes that were shared were literacy skills, writing skills, and other skills. The interpretation of the data was explained through the open codes that produced the axial codes and commonalities among the axial codes to create the selective codes. Hence, the selective codes became theories that responded to the research question.

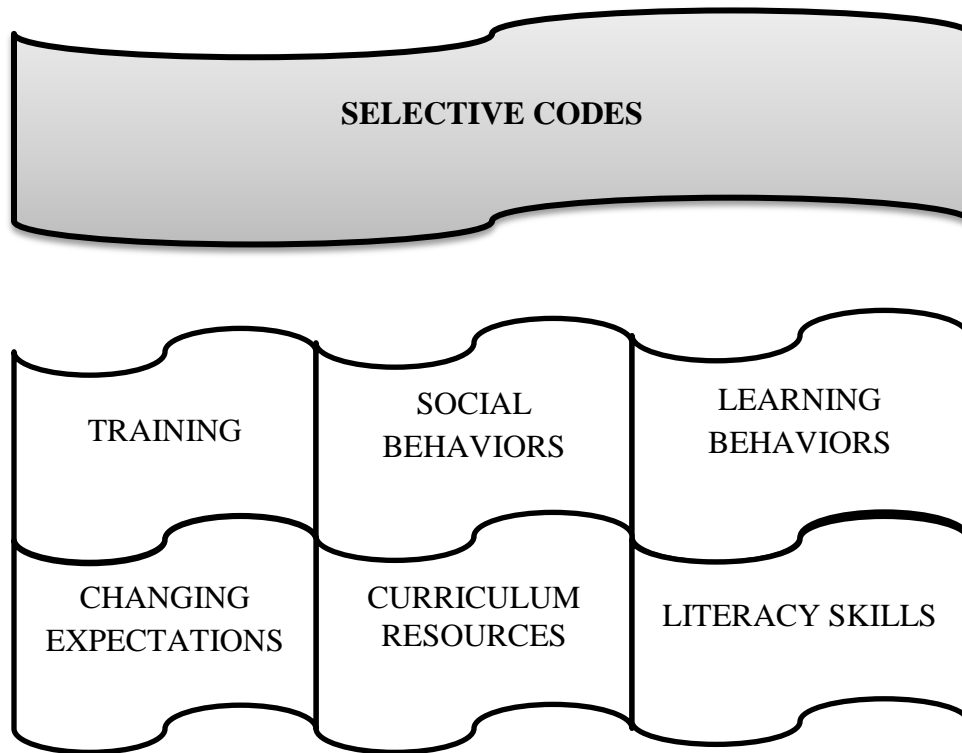
### **Selective Codes**

Careful coding through triangulation of the data produced open codes. After axial codes were formed from the open codes, the researcher reviewed carefully the axial codes for commonalities and differences to produce selective codes or major trends. The selective codes address the research question. Training and professional development merged to become training. Next, how African-American females behave and social behaviors combined to create the named axial code, social behaviors.

Other axial codes merged to create more selective codes. How African-American females learn; learning strategies; and student learning behaviors joined to make the selective code, learning behaviors. Furthermore, changing expectations is a selective code that stood alone and had no commonalities among the axial codes.

Curriculum and literacy resources merged to form curriculum resources as the selective code. Academic skills and literacy skills combined to form literacy skills as the selective code. These codes were carefully analyzed to identify the theories by the researcher and to compare them to the theoretical framework and literature review. *Figure 5.1* named Selective Codes That

Answer the Research Question, showed the selective codes that merged from common axial codes to produce theories which answered the research question.



*Figure 5.1.* Selective codes that answer the research question.



## Theories

There were six theories for this qualitative case study. These theories derived from the open and axial codes. Thus, these axial codes sometimes merged with others, making trends that produced the selective codes which were the theories (Creswell, 2007).

### Discussion: Theory One

The first selective code that emerged from the data was training. Four open codes created the axial codes, or major categories, which responded to the research question. The axial codes were shared between the principals and the literacy coaches. The axial codes were (1) cultural awareness, (2) poverty training, (3) *Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol*, and (4) resources.

**Training.** The certified English teachers, literacy coaches, and principals had to accumulate 60 hours, which included technology (six hours), parental involvement (two for teachers; three for administrators), maltreatment, autism, bullying, blood borne pathogens, and Internet security. As far as training, the teachers and administrators (unless 12 months) participated in the workshops during on or off contract time.

The training had to include 48 hours of school- or district-based professional development. Usually representatives of the certified staff presented the training. Title I funds provided training funds for literacy coaches. Teachers had the option of being exposed to in-district, out-of-district, or out-of-state training. Subsequently, it was at the discretion of the principal or district administrator.

The study revealed cultural biases. In addition, there was no training in African-American female learning and social behaviors. The teachers were learning instructional

strategies from poverty, *SIOP*, *Assessment for Students*, *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*, *Laying the Foundations Training*, and *Understanding by Design* workshops. As the data demonstrates, cultural awareness training of African-American females was much needed in the school. The cultural awareness training would not happen unless the administrative staff took the initiative to communicate the importance of it.

There was awareness among the principal and literacy coach participants of the behaviors of the African-American females but not in reference to African-American culture. The teachers have needed the training to help African-American females excel. The training would promote building trusting relationships with the students and gave educators knowledge of how African-American females learn. Therefore, instructional strategies could be taught that addressed those learning behaviors using humor and movement.

To remove racial achievement gaps and biases and to add cultural competency learning, educators must look at the attendance and suspension rates, graduation rates, college attendance rates, socioeconomic status, and teacher expectations to increase the number of African-Americans taking AP classes. “Garnering authority from students of color tends to be a problem for White teachers because of differing cultural conceptions of what counts as legitimacy” (Ford, 2010, p.11). As a final point, the staff needs training in African-American female learning styles, behavior, and culture.

The school had multicultural students of close to 34 languages. Cultural awareness training was needed, especially of African-American culture to motivate African-American females to raise their literacy achievement in English classrooms. Accommodation teacher readiness promoted self-efficacy (academic motivation) in students and skills to prepare teachers for culture and language diversity in the classroom. To maximize the school-family connections

and increase academic achievement, the staff has to become acquainted with the spiral of accommodation teacher readiness. Therefore, the spiral demonstrated an improvement in the students' cognitive development and their academic achievement (Herrera & Murry, 2005).

### **Discussion: Theory Two**

The second selective code was social behaviors that emerged from the axial codes. The open codes were social behaviors, social stigma, tardiness and high absenteeism, interactive, negative behavior, and parental contact. Social behaviors were experienced in and outside of the classroom. An African-American female's social behavior was different when they were in a classroom setting where there was a culture of power, the Caucasian teacher.

**Social behaviors.** Caucasian teachers must know that African-American females perceived their form of disciplining differently from the discipline experienced at home. These females were told what to do and when to do it at home. Discipline from the Caucasian teacher was more of a choice or option—as if they were being asked to choose to behave or not. In addition, Kuykendall (2004) stressed that discipline consisted of punishing negative behaviors not the student (preserve the student's dignity).

Most African-American females learned from Caucasians to look them in the eyes. Frequent eye contact was important to demonstrate to Caucasian educators. The African-American females were known to cry, have anger, use profanity, be silent, or walk away (PRIN1). In reality, it was customary for African-American females not to look the parent or grandparent in the eye when being scolded. If the eyes were disrespectful, the female was subject to quick disciplinary measures. It was a learning experience for most African-American females to look others of another race in the eye. If the educator had a relationship with student, a stern look via eye contact would cause a positive reaction of the once negative behavior.

Therefore, Caucasian educators need training to know what to do to quickly rid the negative behavior, such as use of profanity and regarding a negative reaction to a peer.

Parental contact was vital for tardiness and high absenteeism. It was stated that these behaviors were not seen much among the African-American females. African-American females must attend school and be on time for classes to receive all instruction from the teacher and feedback. Feedback had to be accurate, timely, and specific (D. Reeves, personal communication, May 17, 2010). Parental communication needed to happen so that there was an exchange of communication between the parent and the teacher or principal. Parents wanted to know about the achievement and behavior of their student. When you won any parent on your side, the trust factor existed in the relationship between the teacher and the parent. African-American parents would correct negative behaviors if they knew what was happening. Caucasian staff must be careful of their posture or visuals that they present to parents. For example, looking a parent in the eye may reflect to the parents that they were stupid or that you felt they were not of your caliber, especially if they were not educated. Educators must become familiar with the African-American females' social behavior so that parental communication could include the good of the student too. Students knew when a teacher or principal truly cared about them; this was no exception for African-American females. Even though communication happened through technology, it was more meaningful when it was in person.

Delpit (2006) called to attention that Caucasian parents offered choices, while African-American parents gave directives without any choices. If a Caucasian teacher gave an option in the form of a question to an African-American student misbehaving, the student might feel that he or she had a choice to act upon the request or not. This action could result in disciplinary issues because African-American children felt they had a choice even though they knew better.

Delpit (2006) called this an act on familiarity of authority. Parents were their child's familiarity of authority until they were taught the rules of power (classroom and school rules). Hence, the teacher should be familiar with the disciplinary rules of the African-American culture.

African-American females might cling to other African-American females, especially if they did not feel that they were a part of the school culture. The interactive gathering was part of African-Americans relaxing in their own cultural setting; for example, speaking Black English and laughing loudly. African-Americans might sing or do group cheers involving stepping. African-American females could be taught to have self-discipline when they knew the rules of the power of culture. In reference to the Pygmalion Effect, if the educator believed that the student was an angel, in return the student would behave like one.

African-American females built relationships with teachers who cared about them and expressed a sense of humor. Another way to build a relationship was to attend the student's extracurricular activity after school. Relationships were not built until the African-American female could trust the educator. From experience, when any student favored an educator, the educator could get major results in classwork and projects from the student. In this case, educators could also promote an increase in the students' literacy achievement scores (state exam) by being the student's achievement cheerleader.

African-American females could develop a social stigma among their African-American peers if the peer made them feel that they were "shining above" where they should have been. A social stigma can form, too, if the Caucasian teacher projected that the African-American culture had no self-worth. This situation could lead to negative behavior of the student toward the teacher. It can also lead to withdrawal of having a relationship with the teacher. The trust factor would not exist between the two. The staff needs to watch for this negative form of behavior and

change it by doing what was based on the research. The students should be taught the rules of the culture of power so that they can exist in the learning environment (classroom) of the power. African-American parents should tell their child the purpose of an education. Behavioral expectations should be part of the conversation. Students should be taught how to handle conflict (self-discipline). In reality, the data revealed that a few of the staff did not notice any difference in the social behaviors of African-American females, while it was also noted that they could be loud.

### **Discussion: Theory Three**

Learning behaviors was the third selective code. Learning behaviors derived from the axial codes of how African-American females learn; learning strategies; and student learning behaviors. It was very important that teachers and literacy coaches knew the learning behaviors of African-American females. Hence, if African-American females were to be successful on the exam, then there should have been some adaptive measures to incorporate how they learned.

**Learning behaviors.** African-American females learned from kinesthetic activities and activities that involved movement. African-American females learned to move and be expressive to music in church. Rhythm was part of their heritage. The researcher's daughter would move to the beat of the church drum in the womb. Movement could consist of changing seats with a partner during an activity; drawing in the air; or using gaming devices. Technology was a great tool to keep African-American females engaged. Student life had been a digital world. Students bringing their own devices or using one of the school's devices guarantees participation in the learning activity. In addition, Edwards (2014) said, "I strongly believe that digital conversion cannot succeed without a pervasive culture of caring." Therefore, digital learning kept African-American females engaged.

Other instructional strategies researched to promote achievement in African-American females included student-centered instruction, questioning to stimulate thinking and learning, and cooperative learning. Group open discussions, teacher and student interaction, peer interaction (working in pairs or in groups), and complimenting the students were more strategies to use during instruction.

African-American females still had social stigmas to face for their desire to learn. It was shown that social stigma existed when the African-American male picked on the African-American female who was participated in the learning activities (OSBV1).

...authority issues with respect to knowledge and discipline seem intensified in classrooms with White teachers and students of color when cultural incongruence is a factor...how authority is socially negotiated as legitimate power through classroom talk can determine students' access to participation and engagement in teaching and learning. (Ford, 2010, p.11)

Teachers should communicate positive behaviors to overcome negative behaviors and elaborate on high expectations to African-American students (Kunjufu, 2002). In return, students would then be responsible for their positive behavior because they learned the behavioral expectations that would lead to self-discipline (Kafele, 2002).

#### **Discussion: Theory Four**

The fourth selective code was changing expectations. This phrase was also the axial code. The open codes that created the axial code were communication, trust, high expectations, rigor, and data analysis. The researcher chose not to combine the axial code. Changing expectations focused directly on the educators and not the students.

**Changing expectations.** Caucasian teachers must adopt a different mindset to teaching African-American females. Usually teachers wanted their state-mandated test scores to look good (high achieving). First, the educators had to express a change in expectations. Based on the data, changing expectations (rigor, high expectations, modes of communication, etc.) existed among the nonteaching staff (principals and literacy coaches), but it is not fully implemented into the classroom by the teacher. It should be communicated and implemented at the classroom level.

Communication was an exchange between two or more people. The educators must listen to African-American females. Furthermore, educators must listen to what is not being directly said. Listening skills contributed to learning, meaning teachers could learn from the African-American female students about their culture and learning behaviors. Domain 2A (Indicator 2) of the *Arkansas Teacher Excellence Support System (TESS)* training, which the state of Arkansas adopted recently, referred to the respect and knowledge of students' background and life outside of the classroom (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013). Hence, teachers in fall 2013 were observed for this skill.

Teachers communicating high expectations promoted literacy achievement. According to Kunjufu (2002), master teachers had high expectations of students. The teacher expressed multicultural values to all students. Marzano (2010) said that not all teachers share a belief of high expectations. The students knew when an educator expected high expectations. He also stressed that feedback must be accurate, timely, and specific. Student feedback was important when it came to high expectations. In addition, other ways to promote high expectations was through verbal interaction using higher level discussions, using the higher level of Bloom's



Taxonomy, increasing the enrollment of African-American females in AP English classes, and accommodation teacher readiness.

Teachers and principals can promote rigor by placing the African-American students in AP English classes. Those that had an interest in college would benefit even if the student did not receive a score to obtain college credit. The learning environment should be rigorous whether it was an advanced or regular class. In addition, literacy coaches could research and assist teachers with implementing rigor.

Data analysis was done yearly when the state scores arrived in the district. The district analyzed the scores to give the school a snapshot of its subpopulations. Intervention was provided for students who scored below proficiency. Data analysis did not give explicit instruction to the staff reading the data about how African-American females learned or how to raise their literacy achievement scores. It did reveal skills that demonstrate proficiency or not. Therefore, it was imperative to know about the researched factors and behaviors that could promote literacy achievement in the 11th grade.

A culture of power existed between new and veteran English teachers. It was uncomfortable for some teachers to participate in this qualitative case study (DOC6, DOC8) because of their thinking that the researcher would think they were prejudiced which supported cultural biases. The fact of the matter was “Those with power are frequently least aware of, or least willing to acknowledge, its existence, and those with less power are often most aware of its existence” (Delpit, 2006, p. 25). Hopefully, this study raised awareness for the teachers to revise some of their instructional practices to address the academic and learning behaviors of African-American females in the classroom.

### **Discussion: Theory Five**

The fifth selective code was curriculum resources. This theory was derived from the axial codes, which came from the open codes multicultural resources, technology, addressing various learning styles, and instructional strategies. Curriculum resources included multicultural materials, guest speakers, and online sources. With major emphasis, these resources enriched the lesson.

**Curriculum resources.** Multicultural resources included lessons with instructional strategies that contained African-American sources. These were also strategies and materials that strengthened literacy skills. These sources could be fictional, real-world, or located on the Internet. African-American curriculum resources could also include film, movies, and guest speakers.

Print disability produced stress when a student opened a textbook. There was a law, *National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS)* that stated to transform textbooks digitally for secondary students. Thus, the printed material should address various learning styles (D. Rose, personal communication, June 23, 2010).

Technology was a phenomenal tool because it attracted and engaged young people. Gaming devices engaged students because they were already drawn to the digital world. The Internet, video games, and electronic devices were as much a part of their lives as eating and sleeping. M. Graham (personal communication, September 25, 2013) showed through projection on a screen where the standard stated, "...use technology and digital media strategically and capably ...to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use". With that being said, multicultural resources should include more than Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. Introduce students to African-American inventors, poets, producers, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and local African-American successful females to keep them engaged.

Individuals were different and, therefore, individuals had different learning styles. Long ago students learned the way that teachers taught based on their comfortable teaching style. With the contributions of brain research, educators learned that addressing different learning styles promoted engagement. African-American females were engaged and attentive in the learning environment when they were using technological resources, kinesthetic, and movement strategies.

### **Discussion: Theory Six**

Literacy skills were the sixth selective code merged from the axial codes of literacy skills and academic skills. These axial codes were created from the open codes. The open codes were literacy skills, writing skills, and other skills.

**Literacy skills.** These skills were needed to perform at a proficient level or above on the state literacy exam. The literacy skills that teachers should teach African-American females were literary, content, and practical. Content, style, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics were the writing skills that the females must master. These literacy skills were defined by the state board of education to be tested in the 11th grade. Thus, the skills on the state exam were multiple choice or open-ended responses.

Students received practice using *The Learning Institute* formative assessments with immediate feedback. Feedback should include one-on-one discussions of their strengths and weaknesses. Interventionists assisted the students who scored basic or below basic in literacy on the state exam. The interventionist used *TLI* database as a tool to quarterly monitor the literacy achievement of the students. As an after-school enrichment class, EOC prep sessions and boot camps included practice and drills of the skills that were needed for the literacy state assessment.

Training, social behaviors, learning behaviors, changing of expectations, and curriculum resources focused on the outcome of African-American students learning literacy skills. Instructional strategies assisted teachers with teaching the skills to African-American females. These instructional strategies included grade-level reading skills, critical literacy skills, critical thinking skills, and logical thinking skills. Deep processing of vocabulary skill was very important because the data indicated that African-American females were weak in that area. These skills could be incorporated in the curriculum resources to include African-American history lessons. African-American students were engaged in the lesson when their heritage was taught (Kafele, 2004). It was important to have all strategies and resources in the learning environment for African-American females to achieve on the state literacy exam.

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this case study was to understand why 11th grade African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers were not achieving literacy results on the state exam comparable to those of their Caucasian female peers. The in-depth electronic surveys provided data that produced open codes. The open codes resulted in a name for the axial code. The axial codes were reviewed for similarities and differences to name selective codes, theories.

The research question for the findings of the study was, “What researched factors and behaviors contribute to the literacy achievement of African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English teachers on the state literacy exam?” The literature review and the theoretical framework led to the survey questions. The survey questions, observations, and data collection generated data that went through a process of data analysis based on the grounded theory. The selective codes responded to the research question of what factors and behaviors

contributed to literacy achievement on the Arkansas literacy exam. Training, social behaviors, learning behaviors, changing expectations, curriculum resources, and literacy skills answered the research question.

### **Recommendations to the Field**

The researcher believed that ignorance occurred when one did not understand or possessed fear of the unknown of other cultures unlike his or her own. When one became familiar with the unknown, it released a freedom of knowledge and openness for learning for all parties involved. Therefore, it removed the culture of power between those who interacted with African Americans and became familiar with the culture.

The researcher's recommendation to the field included teachers, principal, superintendent, school board, parents, community, legislatures, and the Arkansas State Board of Education. The researcher had the following recommendations:

#### **Teachers**

Based on the data analysis results of end-of-level literacy scores, teachers should express a desire to become acquainted with African-American culture to help African-American females achieve at an equal or higher rate than their Caucasian peers. Cultural bias existed in the school. Teachers should request training from their principal in African-American female cultures to learn explicit instructional strategies that address African-American females learning behaviors. The teaching staff can utilize the expertise of the facilitator and the district literacy coach. Instruction should include multicultural resources (using all sources) to engage the African-American females. Obviously, African-American female student learning behaviors and teacher instructional strategies do not correspond.

Teachers are the first line of contact with African-American females. Most of the students' day is spent in the classroom. Teachers should respect Black English but not accept it in assignments or in the classroom. Teachers should also be inquisitive and ask the students about how they learn and about their culture (learn directly from the students). This gesture helps with parental communication. Calling a parent with positive remarks of their child builds trust with the parent. Having a parent on the teacher's side helps to promote student learning and control negative disciplinary actions. For expert advice, teachers can also collaborate with their African-American peers. The African-American teachers could provide feedback or make referrals.

Electronically, Google mail (Gmail) is free. Students in English classes could create an email account for the use of the students and the parents. Gmail issues phone numbers through the account. When there is no response, the Gmail converts the voicemail to a text or an email. There would be no excuse for parents to say they were not contacted or teachers to say that they could not reach a parent.

Disciplinary actions should include discipline with dignity. The educators' rules are taught for African-American females to know and practice with a zero tolerance. Teachers should encourage self-motivation, self-efficacy, self-discipline, and morale with African-American females. This cannot happen if the teachers do not have an open mind frame to implement what they learn and is not beneficial to African-American females.

### **Principal**

Initiating a cultural fair that includes African-American culture is a dynamic way to express an appreciation of African-American culture and promote self-worth among African-American students. African-American staff members and students should be part of the

planning. Therefore, it is important for Black History not to occur only in February of every year.

The principal should research African-American culture training for the staff that includes learning behaviors, social behaviors, explicit instructional strategies, and multicultural resources. The principal should observe these recommendations in classroom walkthroughs and observations. In addition, Domain 2A of *TESS* (Knowledge of Students) is a justification to become familiar with the culture. Therefore, the researcher recommends for teachers and principals to read *Other People's Children* (Delpit, 2006) to grasp strategies for teaching students of diverse cultures.

When the principal has data conversations, he or she should include how the instructional strategies are working and what skills need to be emphasized to promote higher achievement for African-American females that are not proficient or above. Teachers should exchange procedures that worked for them. The conversation should include reviewing individual student suspension, attendance, and tardiness reports. Furthermore, the principal should seek the expertise of the counselors and social workers to reduce these actions.

Before and after school, during lunch duty, and in the hallways, the principal should communicate with the students throughout the day. Individual conversations build trust with the authority figure. In addition, the principal can strategically place himself or herself in the school environment to communicate with African-American parents. With guidance, a parent watching how the principal reacts to their child will build or break parents' trust of the principal.

The principal can create a mentor group for African-American females before school, during lunch, or after school. The mentors can also expose the students to college. Some of these African-American females will not attend college. Some of the females are first

generational college students. Exposing the students to positive African-American women as role models would shed light on the importance of being “successful” in school.

Another supportive suggestion is to have the district parental involvement coordinator, the school’s parental involvement coordinator, a couple of teaching staff members, and the principal to plan an informational program for parents of the importance of Advanced Placement courses for their child in connection to the state test scores. African-American students’ testimonies are most beneficial. Hence, there should be an exchange of communication where both sides respectfully speak and listen for the betterment of African-American academic achievement.

The staff could provide African-American organizations (sororities, churches, etc.) that tutor African-American females with resources (with parental permission) to provide extra help in literacy outside the school. African-American parents can hear about school activities every Sunday in the church. Furthermore, the school should send newsletters and announcements of activities to African-American churches to keep parents updated.

### **Superintendent**

Textbooks could be electronically digitized to include African-American culture. Digitalizing the textbooks removes print disability.

The superintendent could have a brown bag luncheon or afternoon snack meeting with African-American parents and community members. Also, the community board member should be present. The human resource superintendent should be summoned to have the task of recruiting African-American females and males as instructors and administrators in the school. These African-American educators can serve as role models for the students. This recruitment can be justified by the Minority Teacher and Administrator Recruitment Plan, which states, “The



purpose of this report is to comply with Arkansas Code Ann. § 6-17-1901, *et seq.*, which requires school districts with more than five percent (5%) African-American or other minority students to prepare and submit a Minority Teacher and Administrator Recruitment Plan” (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013). More than likely, the school and district would have liaisons to the African-American community.

The superintendent could lobby the state legislatures to implement African-American resources in all courses. To be ahead of the future policy, the superintendent could select the school as a model.

### **School Board**

The school board should adopt policies to have African-American resources and instructional strategies or programs in the curriculum to acknowledge African-American culture year-round. The board adopts policies from the state legislatures, but the local board should monitor full implementation of the policies or apply additional policies that will work for the cause of this case study. It would be most helpful for the board to hire African-American teachers to serve as role models for the students in teaching and administrative capacities. School board members can also utilize their district’s *Closing the Achievement Gap* (state policy) committee to research African-American female achievement and recommend solutions to the board.

Because of Internet policies, the school board may have to adopt a policy for students to create Gmail accounts for their parents. The students can share the electronic account, which enables the parents and students to be on the “same page” of knowledge from the staff. This policy can fall under the parental involvement guidelines.

## **Parents**

African-American parents should not be passive and allow their females to make low achievement scores (Basic or Below Basic) on the state literacy exam. Parents must realize that educating their children begins in the womb and continues for the duration of their lives. An African-American female's first role model is momma. Therefore, parents should teach their child about obeying authority figures and practicing self-discipline.

Parents need to attend all meetings that the school holds for them concerning their child. They need to stay in contact with the teachers via phone calls, notes, email, or text messaging and not wait until the end of the nine weeks to find out grades and take disciplinary actions. Parents should listen closely to church announcements of the school's or district's communication and respond to electronic communication. When their child needs more practice with literacy skills, parents can contact the teacher for assistance to work with the child at home, make provisions for a tutor, or allow the child to stay after school for extra help. Furthermore, parents should feel welcomed to visit their child's classroom.

Parents need to ask their child daily about her learning outcomes. If parents do not understand the assignment, they can still have conversations with the student of what the assignment is about and know if the child is successful in class or needs assistance. Besides, questioning the child about assignments involve the parent and child in an academic conversation.

African-American parents should expose to their children intellectually to places outside of the city and the state. If a parent cannot afford to travel with the child, the public library provides DVDs, books, and the Internet (virtual travel) that can give close to the same experience. During the summer, the parent should keep the child busy with reading and

exploring local museums and art exhibits. To rephrase it, parents and students now have smart phones and access to free Wi-Fi in public places—no excuse.

### **Community**

The African-American community, churches and other organizations, must extend invitations to educators to enlighten them on African-American culture. There should be mentoring programs for African-American females that can start with local sororities and other women's organizations. Most African-American females training begin in churches. Churches and organizations can implement tutoring programs and programs that expose the African-American females to college environments. In addition, the community can build an African-American museum or have a section exposing the community to African-American history in the area.

Community organizations and colleges can offer African-American females scholarships and grants. Colleges should reach out to African-American females early in their high school years, recognizing that the female may be a first generation college student. Furthermore, they could sponsor camps to acquaint students and parents to college life.

### **Legislatures**

State legislatures adopted African-American resources in the Arkansas social studies curriculum. All curriculum areas could include African-American resources by law, not just social studies. The trend of African-American literacy scores prove that the lack of achievement exists. In reference to the federal legislatures, No Child Left Behind (2002) did not address African-American learning behaviors nor did it include instructional strategies to accommodate the behaviors. Therefore, legislatures should present the concern to the education committee to

create a law for implementation of an English curriculum that consists of African-American culture.

The state or federal legislatures could also pass a law where educators' of certain races or ethnic backgrounds should be employed in schools that consist of that student population. Hence, there would be staff members that serve as resources to understanding the students' cultures and ethnic groups and serve as role models for the students.

### **Literacy Assessment Companies**

Testing companies who will write high school literacy assessments need to engage African-American females. The tests are stressful. Using African-American resources within the test would engage the females. In effect, test scores may rise.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher's recommendation for future research is to do a study using African-American female graduates from the school. The study should involve participants of advanced placement, regular, and special education courses to identify the characteristics of their admired teachers that motivated them, their feelings of instruction from Caucasian teachers, and what was advantageous and difficult to experience as an African-American at the school. The school tracks their graduates. Therefore, it wouldn't be a hard task to survey the African-American female graduates to discover if they continued their education or what they are doing in the workforce.

Another recommendation for the future is to survey African-American parents. Find out what their perceptions of the school is. Taking a survey of the parents could provide data on where the gaps are between the African-American community and the school, their perception of school involvement, and what the child's feedback was during attendance at the school.

## Conclusion

*Brown v. Board* (1954) overruled *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that upheld the separate but equal law. The 1954 court case stated that the law was unconstitutional and violated the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment. For the first time officially and lawfully, white females and black females learned in the same classroom. Years later (59) African-American females and Caucasian females are in the same classroom but there is a separation of learning experiences. These females learn under Caucasian English teachers in the school. A culture of power exists in the classroom that holds racial and cultural biases. In order to remove that power, educators at the school must acknowledge it first and then have an open mind to the importance of African-American female learning behaviors to implement instructional strategies that accommodate the learning behaviors.

This qualitative case study based on grounded theory was performed at a low socioeconomic, diverse high school. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) mandated that by the year 2014 every student would be 100% proficient or above. The district 2012-13 *ASCIP* states that “ALL \*\*\* Public Schools students taking the state mandated criterion-referenced Grade 11 Literacy exam will score proficient or above” (DOC2). Based on the performance of scores for the past five years, African-American females are not performing at the rate of their Caucasian peers on the Arkansas Grade 11 Literacy exam.

An electronic survey (containing open-ended and demographic questions) collected data from five participants who were two principals, two literacy coaches, and a teacher. The researcher documented detailed observations and collected various documents. Data results from the surveys, observational data, and document collection went through triangulation. The researcher reviewed the data to find open codes. The open codes were analyzed based on

grounded theory to create axial codes or major categories. The resulting axial codes represented each participant group. The researcher developed selective codes, or major trends, based on the commonalities of all the participant groups' axial codes. The selective codes were training, social behaviors, learning behaviors, changing expectations, curriculum resources, and literacy skills. These selective codes provided a response to the research question. In other words, they are the researched factors and behaviors that promote literacy achievement of African-American females on the state literacy exam when competing with Caucasian peers in classrooms taught by Caucasian teachers.

There is an unparalleled connection between the cultures of the African-American females' home life and the school learning environment due to an existence of a culture of power (Delpit, 2006). Challenges are faced in the high school English classrooms to close (not just narrow) the achievement gap between African-American females and their Caucasian peers under the instruction of Caucasian teachers. In conclusion, this qualitative case study can provide guidance.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

Participant Letter of Information

### APPENDIX B

Informed Consent, Participant

### APPENDIX C

Informed Consent, School District

### APPENDIX D

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

## APPENDIX A

### Participant Letter of Information

Date

Participant's Name

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear [Mr./Miss/Mrs./Dr. Participant's Name],

I am a qualitative researcher in the educational leadership doctoral program at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. *Contributing Factors that Affect the Achievement of African American Females Taught by Caucasian Teachers on the Arkansas Literacy Exam: A Case Study* involves 11th grade African-American females who have not performed well on the state literacy assessment. There is a large achievement gap of performance on the exam between these females and the Caucasian females. The females study under Caucasian English teachers. The literature review findings show that Caucasian teachers lack cultural knowledge and relationships on how to instruct with high expectations and motivate African-American students. The findings of the study will provide educators opportunities to raise African-American female students' literacy achievement scores.

The methodology of the study includes an online survey, follow-up interviews by a designated person (if needed), classroom observations by myself, and a collection of artifacts. The in-depth qualitative study will benefit the students, teachers, literacy coaches, principal, superintendent, school board, and the Arkansas Department of Education. All participants and interested parties will have access to the data and the findings under the law and the University policy. No identifiable information will be used in any publication of the research. The researcher will have access to individual responses which will be stored electronically using a password. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact (IRB/RSC Coordinator-Research Compliance) at (address). The phone number is \*\*\* and email is \*\*\*. You may also contact my faculty advisor, \*\*\*, EDLE Graduate Advisor/Associate Professor in Room \*\*. His email is \*\*\* and the phone number is \*\*\*.

Respectfully submitted,

Felicia R. Smith

UA Doctoral Candidate

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent, Participant

#### **Participant Informed Consent Document**

##### **Title of the Research**

Contributing Factors that Affect the Achievement of African-American Females  
Taught by Caucasian Teachers on the Arkansas Literacy Exam: A Case Study

##### **Purpose and Benefits**

The purpose of this study is to research contributing factors that could promote an Advanced score on the Arkansas *EOL 11th Grade Literacy* exam and to reduce the achievement gap between African-American females and their Caucasian peers under the instruction of the same Caucasian teachers. The literature review findings show that Caucasian teachers lack cultural knowledge and relationships on how to instruct with high expectations and motivate African-American students. The findings of the study will provide educators opportunities to raise African-American female students' literacy achievement scores.

##### **Procedures**

Instruments include an electronic survey, follow-up interview, and classroom observations. After the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval of the consent form, the participants will receive an electronic survey via email. The participant will receive a copy of the electronic survey to be familiar with the questions prior to completing the survey. The follow-up interviews, if needed for clarification, will be conducted by the researcher's designee and will be held at your workplace. The researcher will conduct two different classroom observations and collect artifacts. The researcher will have rights to individual surveys and follow-up interview data. Anonymous participants' quotes may be used in the latter chapters of the published dissertation. The participant's completion time is approximately 30 minutes for the survey and 15 minutes for the follow-up interview.

##### **Risks, Stress, and Discomfort**

There is no risk involved in the study. If a person feels uncomfortable, stressed, or feeling discomfort at any point with answering questions or discussing the matter, the person may retrieve herself/himself from the study without any penalty or loss of benefits.

##### **Confidentiality**

As an African-American female researcher, biases have been removed by having others to preview the questions and piloting the electronic survey. There is also a respect of confidentiality of your responses and your name to the extent allowed by law and University policy. The research results will be shared with any persons of interest and any educational organization. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB Compliance Officer listed in the attached letter.

##### **Subject's Statement**

The information of the research process is clear to me. I realize that I am participating in the study on a voluntary basis—I will not be compensated for participating. I will also have rights to the data once the study is completed. I do understand that my name will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. I may withdraw from the study anytime without any penalty or held responsibility.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent, School District

Date

Superintendent  
Organization  
Address  
City, AR Zip Code

Dear [Superintendent],

This letter is request to conduct my research as a part of my doctoral degree at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. I am under the supervision of Dr. Carleton Holt (his title). I would like to have permission to send an electronic survey via school mail to the participants which may lead to an interview at the \*\*\* High School campus. The participants are the immediate past and current principals, the district and school's literacy coaches, and selected English teachers.

Over the years, I observed the testing data for the district. I realized that there was a tremendous gap between the African-American females and the Caucasian females. The purpose of this study to understand why 11th grade African-American females under the instruction of Caucasian English are not achieving literacy results on the state exam comparable to those of their Caucasian female peers. Therefore, I would like to include your district, specifically \*\*\* High School. I feel that my study entitled, *Contributing Factors that Affect the Achievement of African-American Females Taught by Caucasian Teachers on the Arkansas Literacy Exam: A Case Study* will definitely benefit the students, teachers, literacy coaches, principal, school board members, and you.

My methodology includes an electronic survey, follow-up interviews on site by a designee, classroom observations by the researcher, and a collection of artifacts. The participants may decline the interview anytime that they are ready. Data collected will be confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

If you have any questions regarding my study or would need additional information to assist you to reach a decision, please contact me at (phone number) or by email (email address here). You are welcome to contact my adviser, Dr. Carleton Holt, at (phone number) or by email (email address).

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas. I hope that the results of the study will benefit the organization and the participants directly involved.

If you agree or disagree for me to do my research in your school/district, please complete the consent form below and send to me or I can pick it up. Thank you for the consideration of allowing me to do my research study at \*\*\* High School within your district.

Yours sincerely,

Felicia R. Smith  
UA Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Leadership



## APPENDIX D

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board

May 13, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: Felicia R. Smith  
Carleton Holt

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 13-05-701

Protocol Title: *Contributing Factors that Affect the Achievement of African-American Females Taught by Caucasian Teachers on the Arkansas Literacy Exam: A Case Study*

Review Type: ☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 05/13/2013 Expiration Date: 05/12/2014

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 7 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

210 Administration Building • 1 University of Arkansas • Fayetteville, AR 72701  
Voice (479) 575-2208 • Fax (479) 575-3846 • Email [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu)

*The University of Arkansas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.*