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by

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May, 2011

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE INSTRUCTION IN
PRIMARY READING: THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE AND FOCUSED
PEDAGOGY IN ELIMINATING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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Dedication

"We owe it to our ancestors and to the sacrifices they made, to continue to achieve higher goals while maintaining our identity."

-Unknown

This work is dedicated to the blood, sweat and tears that my ancestors shed to construct countless opportunities for those that followed; to my husband, who traveled a similar road in acquiring the language of power and learning mainstream values; to my children, who continue to grow and assume their place as global citizens; and to my parents for enduring the trials of raising a highly critical and inquisitive child.

Acknowledgements

As quoted from the New York Time Bestseller, *The Shadow of the Wind*, "Every book, every volume...has a soul. The soul of the person who wrote it and of those who read it and lived and dreamed with it." This research has become a part of my soul. However, it is the result of countless blessings and supports. This journey would not have been possible without the head of my life, the Lord Almighty. Truly, with him all things are possible. My faith in the Lord and his plan for me brought my dreams to fruition. I am grateful for his continuous blessings.

I would also like to acknowledge my family for their support and sacrifices. To my awesome partner in life, my husband, Chris, thank you for loving me enough to help me see my dream. Although we may not always see things the same way, I know in my heart that you are constantly in my corner and want the best for me. I appreciate your willingness to pick up the slack on the home front and your belief in me and my abilities.

To my children, thank you for your patience and inspiration. There were many days when I had to divide my energy and attention; and never once did you complain. In fact, your smiling faces as you peeked in the door were reassuring. I knew that you were behind me.

Deon, your journey is just beginning. You have seen me through tough times and celebrations. When there was no one else, you were always there. Without intention, you have been my inspiration for many years. I appreciate your calming spirit and your quiet

strength. You are more powerful than you realize and I look forward to watching and supporting you as you pursue your dreams.

To my baby girl, Crissy, you are a blessing. Thank you for keeping me grounded and reminding me about the importance of family. Your birth gave me clarity and opened my eyes to the humility of motherhood. Every day, I am a little bit better because of your unconditional love. Your innate curiosity is a source of greatness; and it will take you far. In you, I see the future.

To my parents, thank you for never accepting anything other than my unmitigated best; and for teaching me to persevere in the face of adversity. You all raised me to dream without limits. I appreciate your willingness to let me soar. There have been many goals that I have set for myself and you have supported each one.

Finally, meeting the demands of my crazy, hectic life would not have been possible without my friends and extended family. There were those who were always ready with an understanding ear or a reassuring word. Others gave of their time and talent to ensure that I realized my dream. Thank you for your unending support, guidance and encouragement.

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Simspon-Butler, Johnna T. "Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction in Primary Reading: The Power of Knowledge and Focused Pedagogy in Eliminating the Achievement Gap for African American Students." Unpublished Doctor of Education Doctoral Thesis, University of Houston, March, 2011.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore best practices in meeting the needs of African American students in the primary grades and to investigate teachers' knowledge of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction (CLRI). The mixed method, sequential-explanatory design included the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative portions of the study incorporated cross-sectional, descriptive research to ascertain teachers' knowledge and perspectives of CLRI, as well as a non-experimental, comparative analysis of African American and Caucasian student performance. Qualitative data collected through a semi-structured discussion group expounded upon the quantitative phases of research. A mixed data analysis integrating all three data sources provided insight into designing effective classroom instruction and addressing the achievement gap. The findings from this research imply that primary educators who endeavor to learn about and value students as individuals, understand each student's level of progress as a reader, and act upon this collective knowledge with an instructional methodology that influences how students approach new learning will find greater success in meeting the needs of African American students.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Speaking from Personal Experience

“Ann, do you have a white maid?” and “You talk funny.” These phrases come from my youth and childhood. These phrases stand in stark contrast to other phrases, such as, “You read the announcements at church ‘cause you talk good,” or “You call ‘em ‘cause you sound like a white person.” My formative years were dotted with these types of comments. In hindsight, I really had something to be proud of. In a sense, I had become bilingual. Like most young children, I had mastered my home language by matching my language models, my parents, in speaking African American English (AAE). However, through some twist of educational fate, I had also gained facility in Standard English (SE).

It would be many years before I recognized the value of my gift. There were points in my life where I opted to highlight my gift – and other moments when I worked extremely hard to disguise it. I spent many years feeling like a “sell out” for abandoning AAE when sitting in class, but I knew that speaking Standard English was a path to academic success. I also distinctly recall holidays and summer vacations with my relatives; and how easily I slid into that casual yet comforting register. Though I still can vividly picture those moments in time, I do not associate those times with fear or negativity. However, I clearly recall my conscious study of the environment and making decisions as to which language would be appropriate for the setting.

Some years later, I stood in my office, sandwiched somewhere between baffled and offended. Although, I knew that many African Americans described my speech, as

“talkin’ white,” I had always been curious about the dominant culture. Did they view my speech in the same manner as their own, as something subpar or as something different? I felt deep in my core that my speech would one day be a topic of conversation with a white person; however I never expected the topic to be openly addressed by a coworker. That moment presented itself just as I was completing a full day of work.

Before rushing out to pick up my children one afternoon, I decided to make one last phone call. Earlier in the day, a parent had contacted my administrative assistant regarding a concern with his or her student. My day had been busy; and this was my first free moment to return the call. I felt confident that I would be able to resolve the parent’s concern very quickly, so I placed the call. We spoke very casually about the issues in her child’s classroom. The conversation ended amicably, and I hung up the receiver. Just as I turned to begin packing up my belongings, I heard the words. My coworker innocently asked, “Why do you talk black when you talk to black people?” I was not altogether surprised by the inquiry; I knew the question would come from someone at some time, but still I was unprepared when it actually happened. I had indulged daydreams about this moment, each featuring my very professional responses. Yet, my response to in the moment was more a reflection of my cultural pride than my professionalism; I quite simply replied, “Have you ever considered that I talk white when I speak to you?”

My personal narrative is germane to my research on AEE in that I, unlike some of my African American childhood peers, managed to successfully master my home language along with the rules of Standard English -- sans parental and direct educational intervention. This feat served as a platform for my success in learning to read. Like many of my African American counterparts, I did not enter the public school

environment already able to read. In fact, I can only recollect one bookshelf in my childhood home, and its shelves were filled with precious collectables – albeit on the very top shelf – plus several texts, a corporate yearbook, a volume on black history and a bible. My early childhood career was not void of literature, as the daycare that I attended for kindergarten exposed me to reading. The instructors in this setting were not degreed educators, but they laid for me a rudimentary foundation for later reading success.

Connecting Language to Reading

Long before children begin to decode and recognize written words, they begin to explore the unique relationship between symbolic units (words) and the sounds that humans attach to those units. Children who possess emergent literacy skills have, generally, mastered many of the fine nuances of their particular linguistic structure. In the view of noted nativist and linguist, Noam Chomsky, human language acquisition derives from an innate process. The human brain is in some way “prewired” to allow humans gain facility in their respective home language. Many of his theories on language acquisition are based in his supposition that “all children share the same internal constraints which characterize narrowly the grammar they are going to construct” (Chomsky, 1977). Subscribers of the Chomskian model of language acquisition purport that children’s home language is developed through a series of trial and reinforcement with adults. Research indicates that prior to three years of age, it is difficult to detect differences in the language development of children who speak SAE and children who speak AAE. During this period, the morphosyntactic development of children who speak AAE differs very little from that of children who speak SAE. However, between three

and five years of age, children who are acquiring AAE begin to use a greater number of nonstandard grammatical forms (Wyatt, 1998).

African Americans and AAE

It would be imprudent to assume that every African American child speaks AAE. The use of AAE is dependent upon several different factors, including geographic region, socioeconomic status, education, gender and age (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2002). Each of these factors varies across the country. Outside of the aforementioned variables, one must consider that many African Americans speak in a manner that borrows specific aspects of AAE, such as phonology and lexis, but fail to use the grammatical structure that is generally associated with AAE speech. With the extremely large number of variables it would be difficult to determine how many African American students actually arrive in public schools speaking AAE. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, during 2008-2009 school years, Texas public schools educated 4,752,148 students. Of this number, 672,754 of the students were identified as being African-American, or roughly, 14%. In the particular district referenced in this study, 16.8% of the approximately 104,000 students were identified as African American. Within that pool rests the subject of this study, an elementary campus of approximately 1,082 students, from which, 19.6% of the student body was identified as African American during the 2008-2009 school year. This percentage yields approximately 212 students of varied age, gender, and socioeconomic status – and a large margin of error in extrapolating the number of students that could potentially be viewed as speaking AAE on this particular campus.

The campus studied in this body of work is nestled in the midst of a predominately middle-class, suburban neighborhood. The student body is a vibrant mix of cultures and languages, with some 19 different languages spoken by the students and their families. The 2008-2009 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report reported that 19.6% of the students served were African American. Forty-one point two percent of the student population identified as Hispanic, 12% identified themselves as Asian, 26.8% identified themselves White, and a small portion denoted that they were Native American. Then, over the last five years, the campus's rate of free and/or reduced lunch has steadily increased; the most recent count of free and reduced lunch placed 51.2% students in the educationally disadvantaged category.

African American Students as an Underperforming Student Population

The existence of a prevailing achievement gap in the reading performance of African American and Caucasian students is heavily researched and well-documented (Au, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay, 2000; Hawley & Neito, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2006). Despite the push for multicultural curricula, many researchers continue to purport that the systems governing American schools are designed to negate African American culture and its natural place in education (Au, 1993; Gay, 2000; Hawley & Neito, 2010; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Although not intentional, this type of cultural destructiveness and incapacity prevails in many American classrooms (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003).

There is an overwhelming body of evidence to suggest that African American student performance in the United States public school system is noticeably below that of

their Caucasian peers. Despite several legislative hallmarks in recent United States history, such as *Brown v. the Board of Education*, which worked to eliminate segregation in public schools, and the Civil Rights movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African American students continue to lag behind other students in classroom performance and on national exams. Although each state has an individual measure for student performance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is highly recognized as a viable, national representation of American students' academic performance in the area of reading. In 2009, the most recent data set, African American performance on the fourth grade Reading NAEP indicated that a mere 15% of the students tested were "proficient or advanced" in reading. Some 32% of the population scored in the basic range, and a startling 53% of the African American students that were tested scored in the below basic range. Caucasian student performance on the same assessment was markedly different, as demonstrated by 41% of the students testing in the "proficient or advanced" range. Thirty-six percent of the population scored in the basic range, and a mere 23% of Caucasian students tested scored in the below basic range. In Texas, the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American student performance parallels the underachievement seen at the national level (See Figure 1.1). Forty-three percent of Caucasian students tested in the "proficient or advanced" range, while a dismal 20% of African American students scored "proficient or advanced" on the same assessment (State Education Data Files, 2010). Unfortunately, the disparity between the reading performances for each population is not an isolated incident, as similar patterns can be found in many other states and in a multitude of classrooms across the United States (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

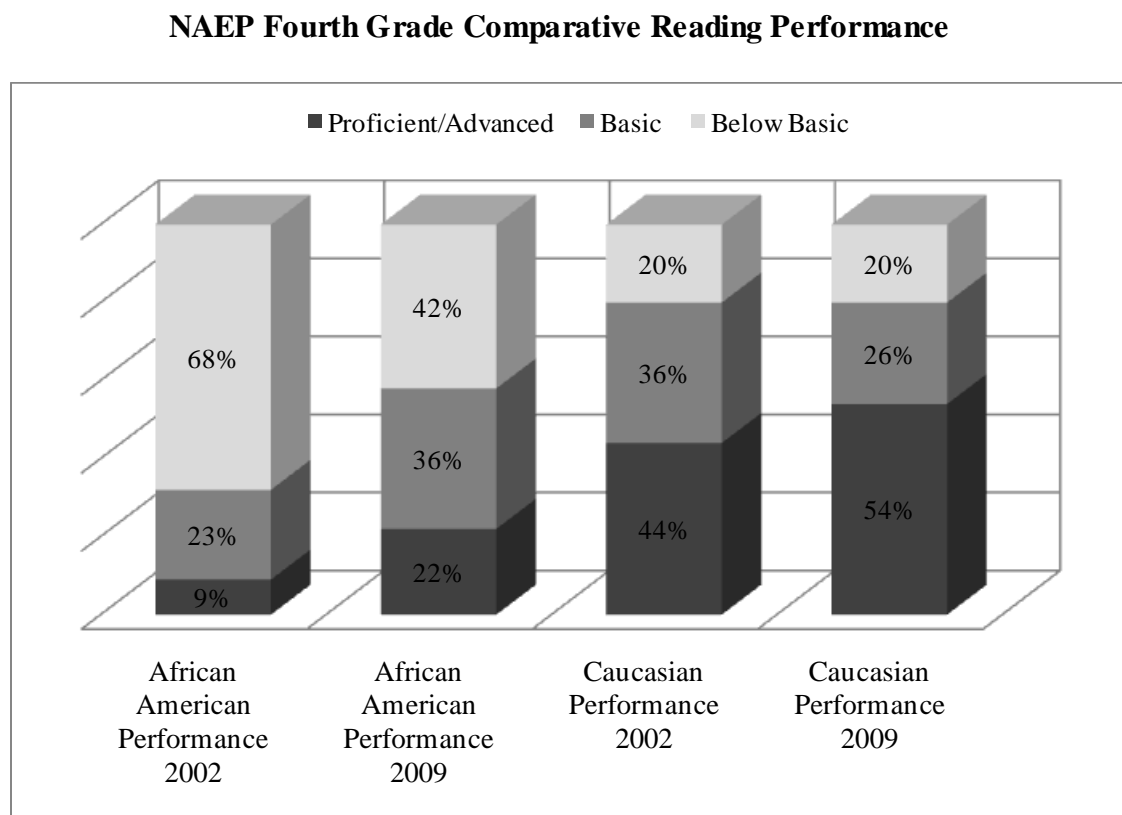


Figure 1.1. NAEP fourth grade comparative reading performance.

In Texas, public school students in grades 3-11 participate in an annual assessment to measure their mastery of the state-mandated curriculum. Students are assessed utilizing the state developed Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in multiple areas depending upon their enrolled grade; however, testing in mathematics and reading occurs every year. According to data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), only 81% of the African American third grade students tested on our target campus demonstrated mastery of reading TAKS, while 93% of their Caucasian peers demonstrated mastery of the third grade reading TAKS.

Despite focused and coached instructional strategies, the African American students on this campus continue to lag behind their Caucasian counterparts. As these results are mirrored with assessments across the nation; consequently, researchers have studied and cited multiple reasons for African American students' academic underperformance. Much of the research focuses on socioeconomic and/or cultural factors and not on teachers' ability to effectively provide instruction for this segment of the student population. Sociolinguistics, the study of language and its connection to society and various cultural norms, holds many implications for education. Along with ensuring that teachers possess the requisite knowledge and skills to effectively provide primary reading instruction, cultural and linguistic relevance should be a primary consideration to effectively educate African American students.

Language and reading are inextricably intertwined. As such, students who master early literacy possess a cursory knowledge of linguistic structure, recognize redundant patterns with automaticity, and demonstrate written and spoken facility in SAE. In the educational setting, AAE should not be viewed as needing correction, but rather a linguistic connection to African American culture and heritage. The ancestors of most African American students spoke several languages, and the population has a long and rich history of multilingualism. African American students should, therefore, find success in becoming biliterate when their teachers demonstrate the requisite knowledge to help students make cultural connections in acquiring Standard English for academic success.

The Study

Selection and Statement of the Problem

Most educators have rather staunch opinions regarding approaches to instructing English Language Learners, and educators, legislators, and theorists regularly ponder the solutions to closing the achievement gap. Research indicates that children who speak Standard English generally perform better academically than those students who use non-standard English (Wheeler & Swords, 2001). Although planning for and supporting students in a diverse society is a current trend in education, many educators have moved just beyond tolerance, as they are not equipped with the knowledge and skills that are necessary to meet the needs of their ever changing classrooms.

The African-American community and their documented educational struggles are rooted in the annals of slavery. During that dark period in American history, most African-Americans had no access to education. In fact, over 90% of them were unable to read and write even at the end of the 19th century (Foner, 1988). Through their continual struggle for freedom and/or equality, the African-American community never lost sight of the key to real freedom and access to power, which is education. Education as a field, too, has moved past the ill-founded belief that African-Americans are less intellectually adept than their Caucasian counterparts; the right to a quality education dominates as one of the 21st century's major civil rights issues (Rice, 2010). Our generation continues grappling with the performance of African American students, ushering diversity into American classrooms, and understanding the role that race and culture play in student

learning. However, educators are just beginning to explore the connection between linguistics and classroom performance.

Language is fundamental to learning, and mastery of academic language is crucial for accessing core content curricula (LeMoine, 2010). Experienced and pre-service teachers are frequently deficient of the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure that students gain facility in the basic language of school. The purpose of this study is to address the following questions:

1. How much knowledge do educators possess on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction (CLRI)?
2. Is the Reader's Workshop model an effective instructional approach for eliminating the achievement gap for African American and Caucasian primary students?
3. What attributes do teachers perceive as important to meeting students' needs in a diverse learning environment?

The research will be complemented by investigating educators' knowledge of language and examining AAE as a home language, along with reviewing national, state and campus data related to ethnic trends in reading performance.

Significance of the Problem

Research indicates that African American English is far more than a dialect. Often, the term "Ebonics" is used to describe the particular grammar, syntax, paralinguistic, and gestural features of African-American communication. Dr. Robert Williams, an African-American social psychologist, coined the term to describe African-

American modes of communication and expression (Baugh, 2005). However, for the duration of this research, African American English (AAE) will serve as the preferent discussion term.

AAE and its unique patterns of discourse have been widely studied by the linguistic community. As professionals, linguists shed light on the connection between the African-American students in today's classrooms and their African ancestors. There is also a litany of research that purports the implementation of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (CRLI) as a means to close the achievement gap that exists in most educational settings (Au, 2006; Gay, 2000 & Ladson-Billings, 1994). This research establishes a general consensus to define the specific traits of culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Au (2001), to find success with educating students in a multicultural setting, educators must be proficient in implementing a wide range of pedagogical strategies that facilitate active student engagement in literacy learning and incorporating students' culture. As such, by studying the history of slavery and slave trade in the United States, along with the speech patterns indigenous to speakers of Niger-Congo languages in West Africa, educators can design instruction that couples their expansive knowledge of supporting English Language Learners with the knowledge of AAE sociolinguistics.

Problem Hypothesis

This study seeks to facilitate awareness of AAE to improve classroom supports for African-American students in suburban, elementary settings. Through providing educators with an awareness of the historic context of AAE, as well as the grammatical

and syntactical patterns unique to this type of communication, educators can begin to appreciate the beauty of African-American language and culture. They can also target instructional strategies that will assist students in becoming proficient speakers of Standard English and equip them with the knowledge and skills to ascertain when utilizing those skills is most beneficial. As educators begin to broaden their horizons, they will recognize that language differences will always exist and understand – and help students understand – how to grow into a second language by honoring and validating their native culture and home language.

Delimitations of the Research Investigation

No study is without limitations and possible challenges to the validity of the body of work. The sequential explanatory design calls for data integration to occur in several stages. The initial portion study is confined to selected survey responses from one group of professional educators at an elementary campus in a large, suburban school district in northwest Harris County in August of 2010. The second phase of the research is limited to the students' academic performance on:

- a. Kindergarten End of the Year Language Arts Benchmark
- b. First Grade End of the Year Language Arts Benchmark
- c. Second Grade End of the Year Language Arts Benchmark
- d. Third Grade Reading TAKS Performance.

Another limitation of this study centers on individual teacher perception of the impact of language on students' classroom performance. Finally, a limitation of all correlational research is the unpredictable nature of trends that emerge between variables.

Generally, researchers cannot prove that the relationship between the variables signifies a cause and effect relationship (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). However, the research will seek to establish a significant contribution to the field of study.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature and Research

In the United States education system, the African American student population has, traditionally, been viewed as underperforming and/or low-achieving. Schools, in their traditional design, present additional challenges for students who are products of homes where AAE is the home language. Educators may view the students' home language as inferior and as a direct reflection of weak intellectual ability or low educational aspirations, causing students to lower their own academic expectations (Adger et al. 2007). Students who are routinely corrected for using their home language in the school setting may develop oppositional attitudes towards the dominant culture and school in general (Delpit, 1995; Ogbu, 1999). However, students who are not presented with an opportunity to master Standard English may flounder as they attempt to gain facility in the academic language that is required to successfully navigate a school environment.

As educators, we are charged with interpreting a plethora of lengthy state and district requirements and then translating these requirements into curricular objectives and activities for each student. To that end, it is imperative that educators have the capacity to distinguish between imperfect knowledge of English and cognitive obstacles to learning (Fillmore and Snow, 2000). To support students whose native language is AAE, educators will benefit from understanding the development of language in children. Regardless of a students' linguistic and cultural background, language is a vital development domain as students enter school. Although research indicates that children gain linguistic competence in their first or home language by the age of four, there is still

much to be done in the way of supporting language development (Cogswell, 1996). As they matriculate through American classrooms, students are presented with opportunities to acquire the grammatical structures and strategies for the more sophisticated and precise ways of using language that are associated with an academic setting (Fillmore and Snow, 2000). Educators play a critical role in this process; those teachers who understand how a student's linguistic competence in their home language impacts other language acquisition will have greater success in meeting the needs of African-American students and other Standard English Learners (SELs). Therefore, teachers' understanding of educational linguistics, even a cursory understanding, is a vital skill.

Language Acquisition

Noam Chomsky, a leading American linguist, is considered the father of modern linguistics. His theories propose a scientific explanation for human language acquisition. According to Chomsky's theories, the ability to acquire language is an innately human quality; the human mind is biologically programmed for the physiological aspects of speech, as well as the organization of language. In his work with Universal Grammar, Chomsky posits that there is a universal pattern or template for all languages, and humans are born with the capacity to understand and manipulate spoken word. As evidence of this unique gift, Chomsky examines the ability of infants and young children to quickly acquire language with little outside influence. Within his work, Chomsky notes that the ease with which children acquire their first language. He supports his nativist theory through two very astute observations:

1. Children are exposed to very little correctly formed language. When people speak, they constantly interrupt themselves, change their minds, make slips of the tongue, and so on. Yet, children manage to learn their language all the same.
2. Children do not simply copy the language that they hear around them. They deduce rules from it, which they then use to produce sentences that they have never heard before. They do not learn a repertoire of phrases and sayings, as the behaviourists believe, but a grammar that generates an infinity of new sentences (Chomsky and language, online).

These humanistic and nativist views are in direct contrast to the work of a behaviorist, B.F. Skinner, and his theory of human language acquisition.

B.F. Skinner, a prominent American research psychologist well-known for this work in behaviorism and operant conditioning, posited that human language acquisition was due to a learning process involving the shaping of grammar into a correct form through reinforcing other stimuli. In the same vein as philosopher and environmentalist John Locke, Skinner believes that human beings are “blank slates,” and that the child’s environment shapes his or her learning and speech development. Skinner holds that children are conditioned to use correct grammar as a result of positive reinforcement, and negative reinforcements helped to extinguish incorrect grammar.

Psychologist Jerome Bruner is best known for his discovery learning theory, but he poses a different perspective on language acquisition, one based in the LASS. The LASS, or Language Acquisition Support System, is considered a response to Chomsky’s

LAD. Based in modern theories of interactionism and constructivism, the LASS refers to the importance a child's social support network. Bruner posits that each child's social support network functions in conjunction with innate mechanisms to encourage or suppress language development. His work centers around his belief that adults and infants have conversations despite the infant's inability to speak. According to Bruner, the interaction between the communication partners, such as in games and non-verbal communication, builds the structure of language long before the child is able to communicate verbally.

Although their theories on first language acquisition differ, Chomsky, Skinner and Bruner agree that language is an extremely complex, cognitive task. There are five areas that facilitate language development:

1. Pragmatics: the study of language in its social context. Pragmatics is often described as the social part of language.
2. Semantics: the study of how meaning in language is created by the use and interrelationships of words, phrases, and sentences. Semantics can also be defined as the meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence.
3. Syntax: the study of the order and relationships between words and other structural elements in phrases and sentences. Syntax can also be defined as the organization of words in sentences.
4. Morphology: the study of the structure of words in a language, including patterns of inflections and derivation. Morphology encompasses the combination of sounds into basic units or meaning or morphemes.

5. Phonology: the study of the system or pattern of speech sounds used in a particular language. Phonology is the sound system of language.

Along with the aforementioned five areas, African American language is a heavily researched area. Ironically, very little of the research uncovered by linguists and/or sociolinguists has transferred into the educational area. Educators, generally, possess a basic knowledge of the inhumane period in American history, which supported slave trade and slavery. However, they have a limited knowledge of the institution's impact on the language that many African American students speak today.

Linguistic Knowledge and the Classroom

Experts agree that reading and writing call primarily on deep linguistic processing, not on more peripheral auditory or visual perception skills. Language knowledge and language proficiency differentiate good and poor readers (Moats, June 1999). Ironically, many educators are lacking the linguistic knowledge necessary to meet the varied needs of the learners within their classrooms. As the phenomenon of African American underachievement is widely known, educators charged with educating AAE-speakers focus, generally, on what they perceive as linguistic deficits and what students are unable to do. This historical perspective is reflective of some early studies of African Americans and the English language, when a writer characterized the entire race as being “thick of tongue and feeble of mind” (LeMoine, 2010), and, thereby, incapable of mastering Standard English. Yet, we now understand that language is fundamental to learning; and mastering academic language is an essential part of accessing core curriculum.

While linguists have continued to advance their knowledge within the field of sociolinguistics, education has yet to realize the true benefit of this growing body of work. Sociolinguists have not agreed upon the origins of the language that is shared by many African Americans. However, the study of the language known as Ebonics, African American Vernacular English, Black Vernacular English, Black English, and African American English has evolved to the point of dispelling the myth that African Americans are incapable of mastering Standard English and bound to a “language of illiteracy” (Christensen, 2008). Understanding the sociocultural context of language leads educators toward a rudimentary understanding of serving African American students and recognizing “that the linguistic style that a student brings to school is intimately connected to with loved ones, community and personal identity” (Delpit, 1995, p 53).

Although schools across the nation proclaim that they are making great strides in cultivating environments that embrace diversity, they negate their efforts by forcing African American students to abandon their home language without support for their linguistic differences. Schools often view AAE and its value as aberrant. As SELs, African American students are perhaps the most overlooked and underserved language minority population in American education. Well-intentioned educators frequently alienate AAE speakers with disrespectful practices, such as attempting to correct what they perceive as poor grammar or using literature that is devoid of familiar cultural referents. However, when we instruct African American students in the history of AAE and its grammatical and syntactical rules, and we encourage the students to share their

newly acquired knowledge, African American students can gain greater proficiency in moving effectively between their home language and Standard English.

African American English from Africa to America

The first Africans to arrive in the English North American colonies came in 1619 on a Dutch ship. The twenty Africans aboard this vessel were not slaves, but rather indentured servants. To pay for their passage, they agreed to work for their sponsor for a predetermined amount of time. After the servants settled their debt, they were free. However, the colonists quickly calculated that this arrangement was not nearly as profitable as slavery, as slaves were afforded only basic human needs and their children would become property of the master.

African-Americans and their connection to Non-Standard English have roots in the horrific annals of slavery. While there are several theories behind the development of AAE, the creole hypothesis initiates with the slaves that came to America passing through the Niger-Congo region of the African continent (Smith, 1998). This theory asserts that AAE evolved from a language developed in West Africa as a result of the slave and commercial trade between Africans and Europeans from the sixteenth century. As a practice, slave traders deliberately mixed Africans from different tribes to ensure that their ability to communicate or make plans for mutiny was significantly diminished. However, the trans-Atlantic Middle Passage experienced by the slaves was quite lengthy. During the arduous journey, the captives found it necessary to develop a means of communicating amongst themselves, as well as with their captors. Many of the captives were multi-lingual speakers of dialects such as Mandingo, Akan, Western Bantu, Wolof,

Twi, Hausa, Yoruba, Dogon, Kimbundu, Bambara, Igbo (Lemoine, 2010). Therefore, they were able to develop what linguists refer to as a pidgin, or a simplified mixture of two or more languages. Based upon this theory, the African captives' pidgin language grew into a creole language because of its use by the slaves. The hybrid language carried English words, but it remained steeped in an African rule system (Smith, 1998).

As involuntary immigrants in a new world, African slaves were forced to abandon their home languages and learn a new language without the benefit of formal instruction. As such, many of the new immigrants utilized the rule-governed system of their native tongue and incorporated English words. This practice allowed the slaves to communicate with other slaves from different parts of the African continent, but more importantly, it afforded them the ability to comprehend and communicate with their masters. This practice continued for hundreds of years. Therefore, most of the slaves acquired English through a total immersion model, and they continued to relexify their home language to match a foreign model. This practice was repeated itself for over 400 years, as the slaves sought to survive horrific conditions and build new connections in America.

According to the works of Carter G. Woodson, the entire institution of slavery was based in dehumanizing Africans and convincing these descendants of a rich and proud heritage that they were inferior to their masters. Caucasian slave owners concocted a system that allowed the dominant culture to reign supreme while profiting from African labor. Oppression was rampant and reinforced by slave codes, which included penalties for learning to read and write. Even though many Caucasian Americans supported the institution that denied slaves essential rights and liberties, Africans successfully

developed a unique culture, as well as a sense of community. Through emancipation and the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans gradually gained access to public education. Landmark cases, such as *Brown v. the Board of Education*, ensured that all students could be educated in the same environment; however, legal precedence has a limited effect on the manner in which African Americans are viewed within the confines of some American classrooms. In an educational setting, African American students are often viewed and acted upon from a perspective that judges them as deficient. “ In the study of language in school pupils [are] made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some particular possession of the Negro which they should despise rather than direct to study the background of this language as [the product of] a broken-down African tongue- in short to understand their own linguistic history” (Woodson, 1990, p.17).

Through educating students on the grammatical structure and history of AAE, we provide them with an avenue to establish pride in their home language, as well as gain facility in Standard English. As Standard English is, generally, the language of school and work, it is also the language of power. By presenting students with opportunities to maintain what James Paul Gee describes as an “identity kit,” and helping them to explore the benefits of acquiring a secondary code, education can open the door to unforeseen possibilities and global citizenship. In order for our students to be successful in navigating a global society, they must master the ability to “code-switch.” African American students, like all students, will flourish as readers when their teachers help them build connections on their own prior knowledge, not the thoughtless condemnation or altogether rejection of their home culture.

Linguistics and Reading

The correlation between oral language and developing early reading skills in students has been well-established (Bee and Boyd, 2007). Researchers and linguists understand the role that syntax, phonology, and schema play in growing emergent readers, and they expect educators to possess an understanding of the structure of the English language, as well as its role in formal reading instruction. This knowledge, coupled with an understanding of African American culture, can significantly increase AAE-speakers' facility in reading Standard English and accessing the core curriculum. As language knowledge and proficiency differentiate between good and poor readers, it is imperative that students develop an awareness of the linguistic units that lie within a word and fluency in recognition and recall of letters and spelling patterns that make up words (Moats, 1999).

Reader's Workshop a Balanced Approach to Reading Instruction

Reader's Workshop is an instructional approach developed through the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project that involves demonstration of specific reading skills, supported practice, tailored instruction and continuous formative assessments (Calkins, 2010). Proponents of Reader's Workshop place great emphasis on the model's ability to engage students and encourage interaction between readers and text. Students see themselves as readers, and their teachers work to establish a learning environment that marries explicit instruction in reading strategies with opportunities to practice each strategy in whole group, small group, peer and independent settings. The model also

fosters independence and lends itself to differentiation for individual students' needs.

Students engage in several capstone routines each day:

1. Teacher Read-aloud/Mini-lesson
2. Guided and Independent Reading
3. Closing Meeting (Caulkins, 2010).

For the read-aloud/mini-lesson, the teacher selects a book, poem, or text and reads it aloud in a whole group setting. While the teacher reads the exemplar text, he or she consciously models a new reading strategy for the group. To support the new learning, teachers may opt to create an anchor chart with key information about the reading strategy. Immediately following the mini-lesson, students “launch” into independent reading. To maximize instructional time and provide equitable interaction to each student, teachers employ two instructional practices: guided and independent reading. While much of the class engages in independent reading, the teacher meets with small, homogenous groups of students to target a specific reading strategy or skill. Between guided reading groups, the teachers move about the room, conferring with individual readers who are reading from self-selected “just right books” about the text and/or application of the strategy from the mini-lesson. To guide future instruction, teachers keep copious notes, frequently in the form of a “monitoring notebook,” and track their work with both groups and individuals. The lesson cycle is punctuated with a closing meeting, which is a communal share time. The whole group reconvenes and the teacher yields the floor to allow students to share their reflections on the strategies they attempted during independent reading and make connections to previous lessons. The entire process supports students as they experiment with new reading strategies and ensures that

students receive a great deal of high-success reading experiences, which closely mirrors the theoretical strands that Alfred Tatum proposed in his work, *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap*, as integral in providing quality literacy instruction.

Teachers' Knowledge Informing their Practice

In their work, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom discuss the process of connecting African American students to the world of academia. They quote Pedro Negura who states that “in order to ‘counter and transform’ African-American ‘cultural patterns’ fundamental change in American education will be necessary” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Since its establishment in the 19th century, the national system of formal education has been at the center of continuous debate. During most of our nation’s history, many Americans have assumed that the primary purpose of school is to provide students with the skills to survive in our society. This traditional view purports that an educator’s task is to simply work with students until they have demonstrated mastery of a predetermined model. However, in the progressive school of thought, the educator serves as the facilitator of learning in classrooms where students’ interest helped to provide an appropriate and engaging learning experience. To that end, the majority of the teachers who are in today’s classrooms, as well as those in teacher education programs, will also be charged with educating students from diverse ethnic, racial, language and religious groups in their classrooms. Therefore, the goal of multicultural education follows that of progressive educators, in that educators must equip themselves to not only to help students meet

academic requirements, but also to help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to bridge and participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civic action that will push our country into becoming a more effective democratic agency (Howard, 2006).

Gloria Ladson-Billings' work defines "culturally relevant" pedagogy and seeks to establish a connection between school and culture. Ladson-Billings posits that educators must address their personal understanding of diversity. Traditionally, educators have "attempted to insert culture into the education, instead of inserting education into the culture" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In an effort to remedy the discontinuity, sociolinguists have suggested that educators incorporate students' mother tongue to support students on the path to academic success.

Along with the idea of establishing a connection between home and school through language, researchers have worked to define culturally relevant teaching in the same vein as the work of Paulo Friere, pedagogy of opposition that is committed to collective empowerment. Ladson-Billings states that culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria:

1. Students must experience academic success.

Educators work to help students feel comfortable in the learning environment, but focus specifically on addressing students' academic needs. Ladson-Billings highlights the efforts of Ann Lewis, who found methods of engaging the African-American boys in positive classroom leadership opportunities.

2. Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence.

Because they understand that school is often seen as a place where African-American students cannot maintain their culture/personality and be academically successful, culturally relevant educators utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning. Ladson-Billings highlights several instances, wherein educators involve parents and community members in learning and afford students an opportunity to communicate using their home language to acquire Standard English.

3. Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.

Ladson-Billings asserts that culturally relevant classrooms encourage students to move beyond academic competence into utilizing students' newfound skills to critically examine instances of social injustice in their community and the world.

As the United States was founded on the premise that immigrants would enter the country and then assimilate into the metaphorical "melting pot," education has been presented from the standpoint that culture, ethnicity, and race are negligible. Through this assimilation, we have identified a dominant culture; however, the minority demographic is growing in American classrooms. Each day educators welcome students from diverse backgrounds. Although most schools push students toward accepting mainstream culture's norms and values, experienced multicultural educators understand the need for students to gain facility in the dual worlds of their home community and the mainstream community (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Many educators see multicultural education as supplemental. They believe that African-American students, if diligent and hard-working, will simply excel if the current model for curriculum development is

infused with lessons on historic American-American personalities. This presumption is culturally insufficient. Current data reflects the need for change. To ensure that more African-American students reach their full academic potential, it is imperative to continue to scrutinize and challenge the current order, so that students can see the value in themselves and their community.

The Debate

In recent years, the debates surrounding African American students, language, dialectical differences, and academic performance have gained renewed momentum within the educational area. Educators, politicians, and parents have outlined their respective positions on the debate. However, most people outside of the field of linguistics become befuddled merely in the terminology. There are multiple terms for the home language of African Americans, and most stakeholders use those terms with little consistency. In the 1960s, it was acceptable to use the terms Negro speech, Negro English, or Negro American dialect. The terminology of the Civil Rights Era morphed into Black English or Black English Vernacular (BEV) during the 1970s. In the mid-1980s, America progressed toward the politically correct practice of referring to Americans of African descent as African-American; by 1991, the linguistic community began using the term African American Vernacular English (AAVE). However, in the new millennium, sociolinguists frequently refer to the language as African American English or AAE.

AAE is often deemed as “bad” English or slang; however, the historic language is rich and systematic, with patterns of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and usage that

reach outside of the southern or ghetto realm. Through the work of sociolinguists, AAE has been characterized by a set of rules that is as distinct as Standard English. Therefore, students who arrive on the steps of American public schools and enter those halls speaking AAE should not be seen as having poor English skills, but rather as students with the potential to become biliterate.

One very important aspect of culture that significantly impacts teaching and learning is language. Learning relies heavily on effective communication between teacher and student and student to teacher.

“Students may experience difficulty mastering academic concepts when the students are not well versed in Standard English, which is defined as a version of English that educated people regard as appropriate for most types of public discourse, including most broadcasting, almost all publication, and virtually all conversation with anyone other than intimates” (Nordquist, n.d., ¶ 1).

Occasionally, students who speak English experience difficulty when they have not acquired a basic understanding of the general sociocultural rules of Standard English.

Although the controversy over AAE has ceased in the new millennium, it remains that many African American students enter classrooms with AAE as their primary language. These same students consistently fail to master state and district standards at an alarming rate. Thus, educators continue to study and hypothesize about the achievement gap. Many activists purport that our tests are culturally biased, or that struggling students are the product of a system that is more culturally-tolerant than it is culturally-responsible. Linguists note the marked difference between the oral language patterns of Caucasian and African American students.

African American students frequently arrive at school versed in a language that differs from Standard English. Therefore, one might argue that the reading difficulties that many African American students experience are a result of their readiness to study and read in the variant language system of Standard English, the language pattern that is presented in most American classrooms. AAE may provide a name for what many educators see as an obstacle. However, it would not be wise to base the achievement gap that exists between white and black students solely on black students' lack of experience with Standard English. After all, there are many factors that contribute to literacy acquisition. In fact, the primary barriers to school literacy learning do not lie in the details of sounds, grammar, and vocabulary. Instead, the barriers were those created by schools' failure to acknowledge and appreciate students' home cultures and to build upon the interactional styles and everyday use of language with which students were already familiar (Au, 1993).

Language is Power

Standard English is the language of power in the United States. To ensure that every student has access to the benefits of that power, it is important that students master this language. This does not mean that students should never utilize their home language; rather, it means that students should be taught to distinguish between the demands of each situation and determine which language is appropriate for a given situation. Greene and Walker present code-switching as “a linguistic tool and a sign of the participants’ awareness of alternative communicative conventions. Furthermore, code-switching has been described as a strategy at negotiating power for the speaker and reflects culture and

identity and promotes solidarity.” Code-switching to the socially preferred language/dialect is a viable method for ensuring that students can participate fully in the academic rigors of the language arts classroom, as well as in their homes and/or neighborhoods. AAE is the correct language for many of the social situations African American students will encounter. By insinuating that their use of the AAE language is incorrect, educators stifle students’ confidence and devalue their culture. They also cause unnecessary confusion to students who are growing to understand language.

A great deal of the research on developing literacy in children is steeped in both constructivists' and social interactionists' theories of development. Theories proposed by constructivists posit that children must have opportunities to actively participate in an environment to learn new information. Wheeler and Swords present a language response characterized as a constructivist approach, which is rooted in the knowledge that language comes in variable components. This linguistically-informed model recognizes that the student’s home language is not any more deficient in structure than the school language. Therefore, educators focus on helping students explore and internalize the grammatical differences between the Standard English and their home language. When students are equipped with this knowledge, they can successfully navigate multiple social and academic situations by code-switching between the language of the home and the language of the school as appropriate to the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose (Wheeler & Swords, 2001). Educators who design lessons that honor their students’ culture, as well as support acquisition of Standard English, are more learner-centered.

This study will extend the scholarly research on African American students' home language and culture as a prerequisite for learning. It is hypothesized that providing educators with an awareness of the historic context of AAE, as well as the grammatical and syntactical patterns unique to this type of communication, will help educators begin to examine and develop an appreciation for the beauty of African-American language and culture. With these new understandings, they will be better equipped to target instructional strategies that will assist students in becoming proficient speakers of Standard English, which then will provide those students with greater access to the core curriculum – and then close the achievement gap that exists in many classrooms across America.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides a description of the methodological structure for a mixed methods study to explore best practices in meeting the literacy needs of primary African American students. The research aimed to investigate teacher's knowledge of language, examine AAE as a home language, and hypothesize about the impact of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction as a tool for closing the achievement gap that exists between African American and Caucasian Students. To study the aforementioned aims both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Creswell (2003) highlights the benefits of employing multiple methods to explore and explain a research problem.

The Purpose of the Study

For African American students, a culturally responsive approach to teaching reading capitalizes on students' communicative styles, cultural schemata and experiential frames of references to improve reading proficiency and achievement (Au, 2006; Callins, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Montgomery, 2001; Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson & Tlusty, 2000; Tatum, 2006). Mastering the academic language of school is a cognitively demanding task. Such mastery is dependent on teachers possessing a broad knowledge of words, phraseology, grammar, and pragmatics, as well as imparting that knowledge on students (Cummings, 1981). The purpose of this study is to explore best practices in meeting the needs of African American students in the primary grades and to investigate teacher's knowledge of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction (CLRI).

Review of Research Questions

The conceptual framework of this study recognized that educators are charged with interpreting a plethora of lengthy state and district requirements and translating these requirements into curricular objectives and activities for each student. However, to support students whose native language is AAE, educators must possess at least a cursory understanding of language development in children. Those who understand the manner in which a student's linguistic competence in their home language impacts any other language they are working to acquire will have greater success in meeting the needs of African American students. To explore the benefits of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction within primary-age classrooms, the study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How much knowledge do educators possess on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction (CLRI)?
2. Is the Reader's Workshop model an effective instructional approach to eliminate the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian primary students?
3. What attributes do teachers perceive as important to meeting students' needs in a diverse learning environment?

Design Summary

The design of this study followed a mixed methods research scheme. According to Wersma and Jurs (2005), mixed method is a term more commonly associated with evaluation than educational research. However, the model readily lends itself to

investigating several issues and various viewpoints. A mixed methods research design integrates both quantitative and qualitative procedures in collected and analyzing data (Creswell, 2003). The sequential explanatory design of this study calls for quantitative data from an archival survey and student performance to be analyzed prior to collecting qualitative data.

Two quantitative reviews were performed in this study. Initially, the research encompassed a review of archival survey data from a professional development session on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction by Dr. Noma LeMoine, who presented for the campus in August of 2010. The target population for this portion of the study included kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth and fifth grade teachers attending the training, all of whom were charged with teaching Language Arts. The research sought to glean information from a non-experimental, self-report by focusing on three questions from the survey's Likert scale responses to tabulate frequency tables for each group of responses.

A second phase of the study furthered the quantitative investigation by seeking to complete a non-experimental, comparative analysis of African American and Caucasian student performance on three district assessments and one state assessment. The instruments included:

- a. Kindergarten End of the Year Language Arts Benchmark
- b. First Grade End of the Year Language Arts Benchmark
- c. Second Grade End of the Year Language Arts Benchmark
- d. Third Grade Reading TAKS Performance.

Sample populations for the comparison were established by eliminating any student who did not present four continuous years of enrollment at the research site. Based upon the instructional history of the campus, students enrolled during this time period would have benefited from the Reader's Workshop model of balanced literacy, which is a factor in the study. Assuming continuous enrollment, students receiving Special Education supports were also eliminated. To explore disparities in achievement with the model, the final population was sorted by ethnicity. To complete this phase of the research, African American and Caucasian student performance was compared to examine the models' impact on closing the historic achievement gap between the two populations.

The qualitative factor in this study followed the quantitative phases and involved collecting data from a discussion group with kindergarten Language Arts teachers from the same campus. The discussion followed an article entitled, *Another Inconvenient Truth: Race and Ethnicity Matter* by Willis D. Hawley & Sonia Neito, which makes a case for maximizing learning outcomes for students by recognizing the manner in which a student's race and ethnicity influence teaching and learning. For this portion of the study, the researcher assumed the role of a participant-observer in the discussion, intending to have the participants to discuss the implications of the article and responding to one framing question, "In working with an ethnically/racially diverse population, do kindergarten educators note any significant language differences?" However, the reading appeared to foster thoughts of diversity with the group, and the course of the conversation shifted from language to identifying practices that would support instructional practice in a diverse environment. This change significantly impacted the last research question. To adapt to the unexpected course, the third research question morphed into one that

endeavored to identify the essential components of educating students in a multicultural classroom. To analyze the data, the responses were converted into a narrative format, reviewed, and organized by relevance. The analysis of the data sought to establish variables from the responses before determining any association between variables.

The final treatment of the data involved triangulation of all data sets. The research aimed to substantiate and expound upon individual findings by corroborating the results of the quantitative data from the archival survey and campus data in order to determine how much knowledge educators possess on CLRI, as well as the effectiveness of the Reader's Workshop Model in eliminating the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students. By integrating data from the interpretation of the qualitative information from the discussion, the research explored best practices in meeting the needs of African American students in the primary grades and investigated teacher's knowledge of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction (CLRI).

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data and Findings

Introduction

Chapter IV will discuss the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study. A sequential explanatory design began with a quantitative analysis of three questions from a campus professional development survey. The categorical data gleaned from the archival survey responses was disaggregated using a frequency table for two categorical variables. The next phase of the study involved a second quantitative analysis utilizing student achievement data. A qualitative analysis of a single, kindergarten article study highlights the knowledge of primary teachers in educating students from culturally diverse backgrounds, as well as their thoughts on educating ethnic minorities in their suburban, American classrooms. By incorporating both quantitative and qualitative inquiry methods the research sought to provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2003). Analysis of the data collected is presented in tabular, pictorial, and narrative forms. The information reported in this chapter is organized as follows: a review of the selected research questions and data analysis based on categorical values; a longitudinal, comparison of students' academic achievement; and narrative data from the discussion group. To ensure confidentiality, campus and participant identifiers have been excluded.

Data Analysis for Research Question One

The first phase of this non-experimental study focused on exploring elementary school teachers' knowledge of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction

(CLRI). Archival survey data from one of the campus's professional development sessions served as a research instrument. Of the original 61 surveys collected, the research focused solely on selected responses from the 30 respondents who indicated that their major area of responsibility included Reading/Language Arts. The three areas examined from the survey included:

- Survey Item 3. Rate your knowledge on this subject before the training,
- Survey Item 5. The staff development content will be useful as I perform my professional duties, and
- Survey Item 6. The staff development content is important to improve student outcomes.

As these three items directly address the educator's prior knowledge of and feelings toward CRLI's impact on teacher actions in relation to student performance, the research will focus on compiling responses to paint a reflection of research question one: How much knowledge do educators possess on culturally and linguistically responsive instruction? A descriptive analysis of the data was compiled utilizing frequency tables to identify relationships between the data and primary (kindergarten through second grade) and intermediate grade (third through fifth grade) teachers' responses.

Table 4.1 embodies a descriptive analysis of the responses collected regarding respondents' knowledge of CRLI prior to completing the one-day professional development session. The continuum of responses is denoted as follows: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, and Poor with only responses having one response being recorded. Two teachers indicated that their knowledge of CRLI was poor. Conversely, a single

teacher rated their knowledge of CRLI as very good. The majority of the population, 27 teachers, noted that they possessed good or fair knowledge of CRLI.

Table 4.1

Survey Item #3: Rate your knowledge on the subject before the training (n=30)

Grade Level		Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Primary	Count	0	1	11	6	2	20
Intermediate	Count	0	0	3	7	0	10
Total	Count	0	1	14	13	2	30

The next two survey items (5 and 6) followed a different continuum of responses.

Responses to both items were collected according to the following response continuum:

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with only responses having one

response being recorded. Item 5 focused on the usefulness of the staff development

content in the educators' professional duties. Once again, descriptive statistics were

conducted through cross-tabulation of teachers' responses according to the grade level

that they are charged with instructing, as detailed in Table 4.2. Of the 30 respondents, one

response of "maybe" was eliminated when it did not align with the established

continuum. Information reflected in Table 4.2 indicates that all (n=29) respondents felt

that CLRI would be useful in performing their professional duties, with 11 of the

respondents agreeing and 18 respondents strongly agreeing.

Table 4.2

Survey Item #5: The staff development content will be useful as I perform my professional duties (n=29)

Grade Level		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Primary	Count	12	7	0	0	19
Intermediate	Count	6	4	0	0	10
Total	Count	18	11	0	0	29

The third survey item (6) sought to reflect CLRI's impact on student outcomes. A descriptive analysis of the frequency and percentage of survey responses according to the grade that teacher was assigned to teach was conducted. The information in Table 4.3 reveals that 100% (n=30) of respondents felt that CLRI is important to improving student outcomes. With respect to importance, eight respondents agreed and another 22 respondents strongly agreed.

Table 4.3

Survey Item # 6: The staff development content is important to improve student outcomes (n=30)

Grade Level		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Primary	Count	16	4	0	0	20
Intermediate	Count	6	4	0	0	10
Total	Count	22	8	0	0	30

The purpose for reviewing the survey responses was two-fold. The first purpose was to ascertain the population's level of knowledge with CLRI, and the second was to examine the beliefs associated with that knowledge. Collectively, an analysis of the data yielded a general (good to fair) knowledge of the subject matter, as well as utility in improving student outcomes.

According to Geneva Gay (2000), "there is a direct link between student achievement and the extent to which teaching employs the cultural referents of students." A basic understanding of CRLI would allow teachers to recognize the need for additional supports with emergent readers; however, it would limit their ability to design and implement effective interventions for SELs. The sequential design of this study supports the intent to utilize the survey data as an impetus to conduct another quantitative measure reviewing longitudinal student performance.

Data Analysis for Research Question Two

The second phase of the study focused on examining the academic performance of students participating in Reader's Workshop, a balanced literacy model, which is touted for its success in meeting the varied needs of learners. The longitudinal time series quasi-experimental design employs students' race, by federal definition, as the independent variable; and student performance on four different district and state reading assessments as the dependent variable. This study includes comparative data between the years of 2007 and 2010 to review students' progress in meeting grade-level standards. To facilitate the analysis of the data, students who routinely received Special Education supports outside of the General Education classroom were excluded from the study population, along with any student who had been retained after his or her kindergarten year. Following the selection of thirty student participants, the students were coded according to their races as recorded for federal use. Finally, the academic performance for each student was recorded for each year (see Table 4.4). To accurately reflect the interaction of the variables, the information in Table 4.4 was converted into Figure 4.1, which highlights the percentage of students in each ethnic group that met grade-level standards in reading each year.

Table 4.4

Four Year Student Reading Performance on the End of Year Assessment

Student	Federal	Kindergarten	First grade	Second Grade	Third grade
001	A	1	1	1	0
002	C	1	1	1	1
003	C	1	1	1	1
004	C	0	1	1	1
005	C	1	1	1	1
006	C	1	1	1	1
007	A	1	1	1	1
008	C	1	1	1	1
009	C	1	1	1	1
010	C	1	1	1	1
011	A	0	1	1	1
012	C	1	1	0	1
013	A	1	1	1	1
014	C	1	1	1	1
015	C	1	1	1	1
016	A	1	1	1	1
017	C	1	1	1	1
018	C	1	1	1	1
019	C	1	1	1	1
020	C	1	1	1	1
021	C	1	1	1	1
022	A	1	1	1	1
023	A	1	1	1	1
024	A	0	1	1	1
025	C	1	1	1	1
026	C	1	1	1	1
027	C	1	1	1	1
028	A	1	1	1	1
029	A	1	1	1	1
030	C	1	1	1	1

n=30

African American= A

Caucasian=C

Meeting the grade-level standard= 1

Failing to meet the grade-level standard=0

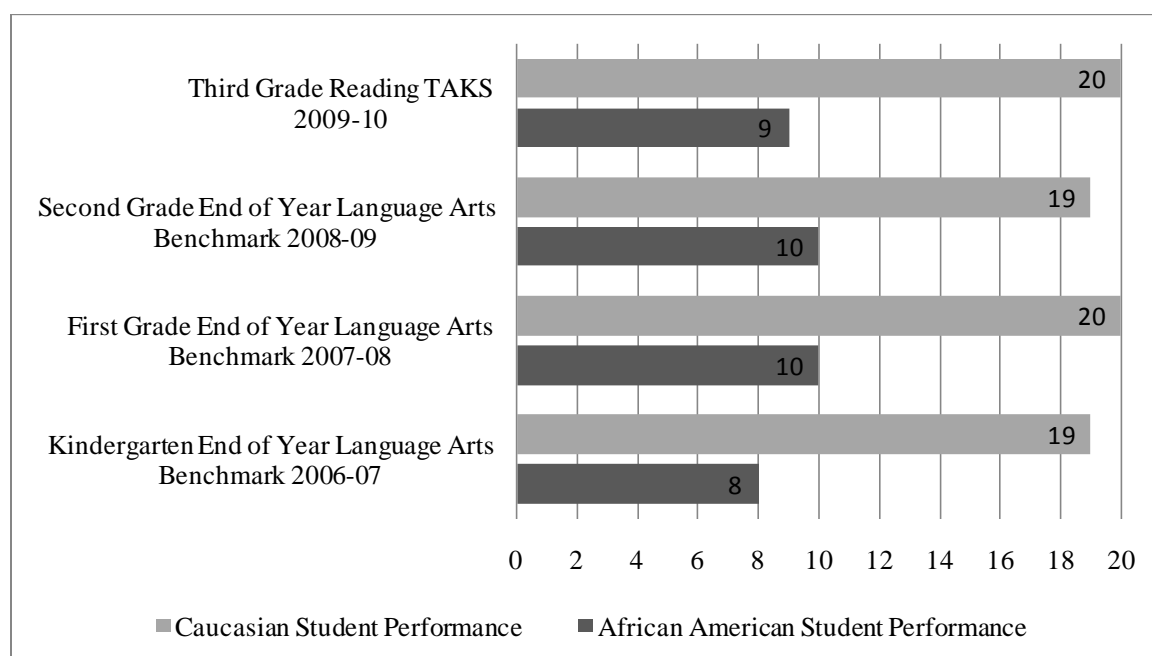


Figure 4.1. Longitudinal comparison of Caucasian and African American students' reading performance.

Caucasian students outperformed their African American counterparts in reading by 15% during their kindergarten year. However, the academic performance of each group was equitable during their first grade year, when 100% of both student groups successfully met the standards for reading. In 2008-2009, the students' second grade year, African American students maintained their 100% success rate, while one student from the Caucasian population failed to meet the standard. During their third grade year, which is the first year that students participate in the state assessment system, one African American student failed to meet the passing standard and Caucasian performance increased to 100%. Examination of the data demonstrates that the instructional model of balanced literacy appears to be an effective means of serving African American students in a cultural diverse learning environment. The model's tailored approach to reading

instruction meets the needs of Caucasian and African American students equitably. Research from Schmoker (2010), supports the model's lesson cycle, in that each new concept or strategy starts "with a clear, curriculum-based objective and assessment, followed by multiple cycles of instruction, guided practice, checks for understanding (the soul of a good lesson), and ongoing adjustments to instruction."

Data Analysis for Research Question Three

For many years, research was steeped solely in quantitative methodology. Those who relied on the definitive numerical yield of such studies frequently overlooked the rich abundance of data that lies within the human experience. It is almost impossible to quantify thoughts and feelings, yet much may be gained from the study of them. Combining quantitative and qualitative measures in research can "...add insight and understanding that might be missed when only a single method is used" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.21). To enrich the quantitative analysis of teacher knowledge and student achievement, I conducted a qualitative analysis of data from a semi-structured group discussion with eight kindergarten teachers from the research site to expound upon the numerically-based observations.

As a building administrator currently employed on the campus, I have daily interactions with the teachers who participated in the study. As it is not unusual for the team of teachers to meet with me and discuss interventions or concerns for students, I had the natural advantage of an established rapport, as well as previous experience with discussing issues concerning race with the group. During the previous school year, the professional staff worked in grade level cadres to complete a book study on

differentiation. The conversations that spawned from studying Carol Ann Tomlinson's *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom: Strategies and Tools for Responsive Teaching* frequently focused on meeting the needs of minority students. To respond to the staff's professional development needs, the campus principal continued the focus on differentiation during the current school year. However, this time with a focus on routinely assessing students' classroom performance and acquiring the tools to effectively serve academically fragile student populations.

The staff members participated in reviews of current and historical achievement data, literacy training, several book and article studies, as well as the aforementioned professional development session with Dr. Noma LeMoine. The discussion selected for this analysis followed another campus-based article study with an article entitled, *Another Inconvenient Truth: Race and Ethnicity Matter* by Willis D. Hawley & Sonia Neito. During this phase of the research, I assumed the role of a participant-observer by serving as the moderator and loosely directing the interaction and inquiry of the group. The survey results that I analyzed during the initial phase of this sequential-explanatory model provided partial insight into elementary Language Arts teachers' general knowledge and perceptions of CLRI. Therefore, the initial intent of this phase was to explore teachers' perspectives on language differences in African American and Caucasian students to determine the need for CRLI. To effectively address the topic, I treated the group of teachers as one would a focus group.

Kreuger (1988) defines a focus group as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment." Frequently, focus groups meet to discuss a specific topic, so I felt that this

design was the best method to explore my intended topic. Under the principal's direction, each teacher received a copy of the article and I met with the teachers to confirm the date, time and place for the discussion. Our meeting began with casual conversation. I initiated the discussion by reviewing the round table discussion format that I utilized with the campus book study on differentiation. Presenting each participant with an uninterrupted opportunity to share their thoughts ensured that the issue would be examined from multiple viewpoints. With a collective frame of reference, I introduced a few more guiding principles and asked the group to share their "ah-ha moments" from the reading. I opened by making statements to connect the article and the presentation from Dr. Lemoine, and posing a framing question, "In working with an ethnically/racially diverse population, do you note any significant language differences?"

The participant to my immediate right picked up her article, reflected for a moment and launched into a discussion of school culture and helping students' develop *"an internal sense of feeling like they want to push themselves."* This led to a discussion on modeling for students how to work at something that is challenging and the intrinsic rewards that are garnered from mastering a concept that was difficult. With these two points, the discussion quickly diverged from the original framework and assumed a new path. Because qualitative inquiry is emergent rather than tightly prefigured (Creswell, 2003), I opted to follow the open-ended discussion. The ensuing line of thought provided unique insight into teachers' level of cultural awareness and daily interactions within diverse classroom environments.

Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive and therefore highly subjective. Peshkin (1988) notes that subjectivity is the "amalgam of the persuasions that stem from

the circumstances of one's class, status, and values interacting with the particulars of one's subject of investigation" (p.17). In his article, *In Search of Subjectivity-One's Own*, Peshkin parsimoniously characterized six I's: the Ethnic-Maintenance I; The Community-Maintenance I; the E-Pluribus-Unum I; the Justice-Seeking I; the Pedagogical-Meliorist I and the Nonresearch Human I that I engaged in filtering through the sociopolitical issues presented throughout the discussion (p. 18). To facilitate the analysis, the 42 minute session was recorded and later transcribed to inductively explore the patterns and relationships that naturally occurred during the course of the conversation.

When I read through the transcription for the first time, I was seeking confirmation. Although the discussion had not followed the intended path, I knew that it was full of rich data. I had prepared my mind to look for strands that emphasized language. Seeing only hints of language in the data, I decided to convert the transcription into a "word cloud." The word cloud allowed me to identify repetitive themes via word choice. A cursory review highlighted the following key words: know, think, something, different, talking, parents, child, school, and culture. I used the list to frame my thinking as I made another attempt at reading the transcription to identify patterns within the conversation. I made the decision to use groups of the most frequently occurring words as my initial codes: 1. know and think; 2. different and culture; 3. talking; 4. parents, child and school. In a further attempt to glean meaning from the transcription, I color-coded the transcription according to the new groupings. Statements that closely mirrored the four headings were highlighted throughout the document. The act of reading through the document in search of a specific attribute made the data less cumbersome. Following

several subsequent readings, I made the decision to take a step away from the data. I worried about my personal-self clouding my research and impacting the validity of my findings.

After several days, I returned to the coded translation with a renewed understanding a plan. I realized that my moments of introspection were actually enriching the process. Each time I reviewed the data, I was essentially seeking a new research question. While this revelation did not serve to clearly define a new question, it sparked a new idea for treating the data, examining the coded material in homogenous groupings. Using Microsoft Word, I created four documents that listed the information from the initial codes in their new groupings and reread the information to infer individual and collective meaning. The act of viewing the transcription in this new format allowed me to quickly eliminate extraneous information. Any statements that failed to contribute to the developing pattern of understanding were eliminated and some statements were reassigned to one of the three remaining categories.

In reviewing the revised data set, I realized that the points brought forth in the discussion did not center on the differences between African American and Caucasian students as much as on supporting every member of a learning community in a diverse environment. Three distinctive themes clearly emerged: 1). open dialogue and/or discussions; 2.) understanding and valuing differences; and 3.) school environment/climate. The following are representative examples of the statements elicited during the course of the discussion (each sentence represents a change in speakers):

Open dialogue and/or discussions. The first theme that materialized highlighted the benefits of establishing open lines of communication with students, colleagues and students. Four members of the group sought to attest to the power of candid conversations.

Most schools were not characterized by open discussions and issues related to grades and effortness [sic]...we're not shying away from that, and they said they felt like people did shy away from these discussions 'cause they didn't want it to be anything negative or to cause more conflicts.

I think that's a good point that we're starting those conversations, and it did make people feel kind of, uh, at the beginning of this is what we're focusing on. I was like this is what we're not doing well. So, focus on what we're not doing well, and we'll get better, and then we'll focus on something else.

I think part of the reason and maybe – maybe we're more like the white people because it's like a sensitive subject, and you don't want to accidentally make somebody think that you think a certain way or that you...you know what I mean? Just want to be very like you see about everything. And so I think it just gets uncomfortable.

...more conversations that we can have like that, that we can understand, that we can honor, that we can do things of that nature and we are gonna have more ah-ha [moments].

In short, teachers acknowledge the power of openly discussing issues of race and culture. However, they also admit that candid conversations on race and culture are not common place in most schools. According to Cornel West, “Race is the most explosive issue in American life precisely because it forces us to confront the tragic facts of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust” (West, 2001, p. 155-156). When adults engage in open discussions to explore various racial perspectives it allows those who possess knowledge on particular topics to have the opportunity to share it, and those who do not have the knowledge to learn and grow from the experience. In schools, these conversations are enriched when they extend beyond the students and staff members.

Parents and community members can be an untapped wealth of information. One of the greatest challenges in creating an atmosphere that encourages open dialogue is acknowledging and developing supports for the awkwardness that group members may encounter when sharing. Forging ahead with the discussion when it appears that some things are better left unsaid may be frightening. Those who participate must acknowledge their fears and courageously move beyond it.

Understanding and valuing differences. When the staff began to openly discuss diversity and the role it plays in a public school environment, a second theme emerged. The cadre’ quickly began to reflect on ways to help students and their families feel valued. As this topic seemed to be one of consensus, they also readily shared the manner in which they felt different beliefs impacted their interactions with students and parents.

...there are some things that we have learned recently that are tied to race and ethnicity and experience and things like that, and it’s kind of like on some unsaid

level, it's like rude to discuss it, but if that's a compilation of who you are and I need to know who you are to do a better job with you, I think it's – it's bad when you discuss it in a negative condescending way but if I've learned this, study it so that I can help you better, then I think that, you know, that's – that's valuing it.

...if you find something that you're not generalizing... to a whole group, but even just the awareness of – oh, I might need to look or think of that differently of looking at, you know, of the best way to approach you.

...families to see that we value their talents and maybe that would bring more of 'em into school...

...you can't tell someone that their belief is, I mean, flat out wrong because they could honestly say my belief is wrong...

...promote supportive conditions. It really made me think of some of the things that we're doing this year like we've always done [like]the cultural parade, but in addition to that, now we're doing different activities every month to let the children express what their culture is like and what their traditions and beliefs are at home, and we display it in the school, and it was also talking about how you need to be able to talk to your children and know where they're coming from and their background and their home

They're feeling very inhibited about it or their culture is not something that they feel like that's something you share at school, or it's not something that they feel like...

So, that's another issue of we need to be careful not to say that all African-American families want to know about slavery and want to identify with their history that way, just like not all African-American families want to identify with their roots from Africa. It's different for each of 'em. You can't just say all of 'em want to do this, you know.

The group's comments reflect the challenges that are frequently associated with establishing cross-cultural understandings between the school and a student's family. However, the comments also highlight the professionals' interest in increasing their levels of cultural awareness.

Long before students enter a classroom, parents lay the groundwork for the student's cognitive and social development. Parents focus on "socialization for culture and school rather than instruction whereas teachers focus more on instruction and socialization at school. These two roles represent different but essential resources for children's development" (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008, p.48). When teachers endeavor to educate students with a limited understanding of the family's perspectives on raising children or their educational goals, their actions may undermine the home-family relationship and impact the parent's social control over the student. Diverse learning environments facilitate biculturalism by allowing students to maintain their home values and function successfully within the school setting. Knowledgeable educators can work

with students and families to develop classroom practices that are reflective of mainstream culture's values and enrich learning by respectfully incorporating each students' cultural ideals.

School environment/climate. Along with understanding and valuing individual differences, school climate was another central theme. In fact the following exchange paved the way for the entire session:

I liked this part that was on page 69, where she says that your school culture is part of, you know, helping with the whole issue of helping these students to succeed, and that building in them the drive or the desire and motivation to succeed is really critical to it, and I think that that's a huge factor to build in kids starting from even our kindergarteners that they want to do well in school – that it matters to them – that they have an internal sense of feeling like they want to push themselves.

I think you walk a fine line with self-esteem because we have a culture of self-esteem right now where we think that self-esteem is garnered from – from hearing that you're doing a great job. When really self-esteem is, in my mind, it's garnered from hard work and sometimes being frustrated and sometimes not getting it right the first time and then that struggle to succeed and try is what builds self-esteem because it builds a sense of I can and a sense of competency.

We are focused so much on what people do well that we don't recognize the effort. We need to find ways that are recognition of effort

A student's environment and purpose provide the sociocultural context for constructing meaning. The act of learning is constructing meaning. Constructing meaning is an extremely complex cognitive process that is dependent upon a sociocultural process, which addresses a student's social and emotional well-being. In the process of forming their identity, students continually cultivate a system of beliefs about themselves and their abilities. This process of cultivation can be defined as self-esteem. "Self-esteem is the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living. It is the sum total of the view an individual has for himself or herself" (Jones-Wilson et al., 1996, p. 406). A student's self-esteem can be affected by reinforcement that they routinely receive from a teacher.

African American students tend to have high levels of global self-esteem; however, studies show that this population is characterized by lower academic self-esteem when compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Jones-Wilson et al., 1996). Global self-esteem, which is defined as generalized feelings of self-worth which are not specific to a particular situation is high among African American student populations; however domain specific self-esteem, which relates to how students see themselves within academic confines are often lower (Jones-Wilson et al., 1996). Therefore, educators must create learning environments that are brimming with recognition of effort. Effort is a precursor for learning and may compensate when students lack ability. Without positive reinforcement it is difficult for students to continually take the risks that are necessary for learning.

The staff members were eager to share their perspectives; however, there was a very limited discussion of language, leading the researcher to conclude that, in general, educators see cultural differences in children but do not view language and/or the acquisition of Standard English as the most pressing constraint in meeting students' needs. It appears that educators' lack of exposure to minority cultural practices and norms are the greatest hurdles to helping students find success within the classroom. Some of the responses to the semi-structured discussion group support the belief that classroom teachers are often ill-equipped in the areas of multicultural education, multicultural methods, as well as resources. As caring professionals, educators would like to ensure that they honor a students' home life, yet they have limited opportunities to explore any beliefs that fall outside of those in mainstream America. The collective examination of the session revealed that aside from personal teaching traits, most of the participants were limited in their knowledge of addressing differences. Conversely, they were eager to openly discuss challenges and adopt practices that honored diversity.

Conclusion

The employment of mixed data analyses to research the complex social phenomenon that is education has been widely recognized (Pole, 2007). Integrating qualitative and quantitative data and appraising both data sources to generate overall inferences or enhance findings is clearly supported as a means for data analyses in educational research (Creswell, 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). The triangulation of multiple data sets helps one explore truths from differing perspectives. Through the different phases of the research, I drew upon survey results, student achievement data and

transcripts to explore incongruous views. A review of the data from the survey items revealed that the majority of elementary Language Arts teachers on the campus possessed a basic understanding of CRLI. This knowledge allowed them to recognize the need for additional supports with emergent readers. However, their lack of formal CRLI training may hinder their ability to design and implement effective interventions for speakers of AAE and other SEL populations. A subsequent analysis of the Reader's Workshop model through comparisons of longitudinal student academic performance proved that the individualized approach to literacy instruction was a viable means to address the achievement gap. The basic framework encourages frequent teacher modeling as students to use language as a means to learn. Finally, the qualitative inquiry intended to explore teacher perceptions of language differences actually highlighted several common themes in multicultural education. Teachers appreciate opportunities to openly discuss beliefs and practices that differ from their own, because they recognize the impact those candid discussions have on creating and maintaining a positive school environment. The findings of the study are in alignment with the tenets of differentiated instruction. Because the action can only occur when teachers become extremely proficient in understanding their students as individuals, differentiation marries instructional practice and diversity.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations of this mixed method, sequential-explanatory research study and the quantitative and qualitative findings. Information in this chapter is presented in the following sections: summary of study, summary of findings and recommendations, which will encompass pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

Educational research and assessment data from public schools across the nation highlight the fact that African American students are achieving disproportionately below their white peers (Jackson & Davis, 2000). In reading, only 22% of African American fourth graders reached the level of proficiency and an alarming 42% failed to meet even the basic standard on the NAEP (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). While it is often thought that this discrepancy is a reflection of the rigorous demands of mainstream culture and the persistence of educational inequalities for minority students in public schools, the reality is 40 years of desegregation and civil rights legislation cannot effectively ameliorate more than 300 years of oppression.

As the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students enrolled in Texas public school continues to grow, it is imperative that educators recognize that culture and language are central to learning. While there are many educators who recognize and accept the diversity of their students, they frequently fail to acknowledge the impact that cultural and linguistic variances may have on individual student's thinking, classroom

communication and overall performance. As students learn about themselves and the world around them within the context of culture, minority students will benefit from pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including cultural references and adapts lessons to reflect ways of communicating and learning that are aligned with the tenets of multicultural education (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to explore best practices in meeting the needs of African American students in the primary grades and to investigate teacher's knowledge of CLRI. Although sociolinguistic research has produced multiple theories on the historical development of AAE, the language is frequently regarded as a broken dialect that formal schooling should endeavor to eradicate. While structured supports like California's Standard English Proficiency program and Georgia's contrastive analysis approach have produced a plethora of strategies to boost African American students' academic performance in reading, their implementation has been limited and the gap between African American and Caucasian achievement persists.

The sequential-explanatory study began with a quantitative review of three survey questions from a professional development session in August 2010 to ascertain the population's knowledge of CLRI. Subsequently, a non-experimental, comparative analysis of African American and Caucasian student performance on four reading assessments explored the effectiveness of tailoring reading instruction for students via the Reader's Workshop instructional model. The study concluded with a qualitative phase that entailed interpretation of data from an article study to determine what attributes

teachers perceive as important to meeting students' needs in a diverse learning environment.

Summary of Findings

In *The Skin that We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*, Asa Hilliard stated,

“Teaching and learning are rooted in and are dependent upon a common language between teacher and student. Language is rooted in and is an aspect of culture. Culture is nothing, more, nor less, than the shared way that groups of people have created to use and define their environment” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p.89).

The research supports a belief that respect and acceptance of a students' home language and culture is a prerequisite for learning. Frequently, schools are viewed by the community as the supreme arbiter of what is appropriate or acceptable. African American language and culture are often considered inferior. As it is the language of school; work; and mainstream America, Standard English is recognized as the language of power. Thus, students are needled into forgoing their home language and cultural norms to find success in mainstream classrooms. To ensure that school and classroom cultures are respectful and supportive to students' unique and varied needs, teachers should routinely endeavor to provide instruction in Standard English, as well as understand the language of their African American students sufficiently enough to celebrate the delicate interweave between language and culture. Teachers must acquire

the skills to effectively diagnosis weakness and teach reading to students whose culture and language may differ from that of the school.

The findings support the view posited in this study that educators' awareness of the historic context of AAE, as well as the grammatical and syntactical patterns unique to this type of communication, will enable them to appropriately design instruction that highlights the beauty of African American language and culture while targeting instructional strategies that will assist students in becoming proficient readers and gain facility in Standard English. A mixed data analysis integrated the following findings:

Finding 1: Language Arts teachers at the research site possessed a general working knowledge of CLRI. Their basic understanding of CRLI would allow teachers to recognize the need for additional supports with emergent readers; however, it may limit their ability to design and implement effective interventions for African American students.

Unlike English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learners (ELL), Standard English Learners (SEL), traditionally, have not benefited from a formalized English language support program. Federal law requires that all ESL students be provided with an educational program that provides them access to the core curriculum and opportunities for English language development. Teacher preparation programs strive to prepare teachers to face the linguistic issues that typically belie non-English speaking and/or limited English speaking in public school settings; however, there are few programs or professional development opportunities that focus on meeting the needs of SELs. Therefore, educators, generally possess a basic knowledge of AAE

and helping African American students attain academic proficiency with Standard or academic English. In order to appropriately serve AAE speakers, their teachers must know how to effectively teach reading to students whose culture and language differ from their own. They must also understand how to facilitate a student's decision to add another language form to their repertoire.

Finding 2: Reader's Workshop, a model of balanced literacy, has proven to be an equitable instructional approach in meeting the primary literacy needs of African American and Caucasian students.

Researchers at the Nation Center for Education Statistics (NCES) studied the academic performance of students entering kindergarten during the 1998-1999 school year. Their work highlights the racial disparities that exist between African American and Caucasian students' reading performance prior to participating in formal schooling. Similar patterns of disparity were reflected in an analysis of the current research data. The parent study from the NCES demonstrated little change in the initial trend with a follow-up study of student performance at the end of the students' first grade year. The campus that was the subject of the current research presented a distinct change in the academic chasm that existed following the students kindergarten year. In fact, at the close of the student population's first grade year 100% of African American and Caucasian students met the minimum standards for reading. These results point to the soundness of the Reader's Workshop model in meeting the literacy needs of both target populations. The pattern of success with subsequent assessments further extends the supposition that the model serves as an instructional sound practice for diverse learning environments.

Finding 3: Through open, reflective dialogue with the diverse members of the learning community, teachers are afforded with greater opportunities to explore the cultural norms and values that govern students' daily interactions and thereby, impact teaching and learning.

Personal bias and lack of cultural knowledge may serve as road blocks on the path to student achievement for many African American students. While there may be little that educators can do to remove personal bias, open, reflective dialogue can open their eyes to changes that will strengthen their pedagogical practices. To ensure that African American students feel included in schools, classroom environments should endeavor to help students see themselves as capable, connected and contributing members of the learning environment. The act of engaging in routine meaningful and purposeful discussions about students and their needs will influence teacher behavior. The task of seeking a deeper understanding of the unique, cultural practices and home language of these students will, in turn, help educators see their students “strengths as opposed to seeing them solely as having needs” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p.209).

Recommendations

On the cusp of the new millennium, President Bill Clinton announced One America in the 21st Century: The President's Initiative on Race. The movement called for a renewed national conversation on race; and was viewed as essential in preparing our nation for global citizenship. Preparing students for global citizenship is akin to the

original, Jeffersonian aims of American education, which sought to prepare young, white males for the duties of citizenship in the rapidly expanding America.

Today, many education proponents point to the mounting stacks of curricular objectives and America's current breadth without depth approach to educating children as the downfall of our educational system. This research proposes lack of teacher knowledge and an educational focus devoid of consideration for student traits as being responsible for the historic underachievement of African American students. Carol Ann Tomlinson defines student traits as the areas "that teachers must often address to ensure effective and efficient learning" (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 3). In order to successfully meet student's needs educators should consider student's readiness, interest, learning profile and affect. While readiness, student's knowledge and skill related to a particular sequence of learning, and interest, the topics that naturally evoke curiosity in learners, are the focus of most educators, consideration of a student's specific learning profile frequently evades even the most seasoned teachers. However, CLRI necessitates constant consideration of a student's learning profile.

The survey data from the initial research question exposed a level of understanding, but a lack of expertise with regard to teachers' knowledge of CLRI. Although teachers clearly identified the importance of this instructional approach in their daily interaction with students, only a small percentage of the participants indicated that they were well-versed in the principles that govern CLRI. Unfortunately, introduction to African American language and culture is not a focus of many teacher education programs. Therefore, it is incumbent upon culturally diverse campuses to locate, develop and provide professional development opportunities for their staff. Researchers have

undertaken the task of exploring the effectiveness of CLRI in California; however, future research to explore its effectiveness in Texas would provide insight into the benefits of these supports with African American students in another large state.

A subsequent review of students' academic performance on several year-end reading assessments explored patterns of success for Caucasian and African American students with the Reader's Workshop model. An analysis of the data proved the instructional approach to be equitable in meeting the unique needs of both populations. The format of Reader's Workshop allows students to practice internalized tools for selecting and comprehending literature. Through utilizing the newly acquired skills and conferring about their experiences, students who were once reluctant to read find themselves with the skills needed to be a successful reader. Teachers who implement a less interactive approach to reading instruction may not be as successful in establishing interactions between readers and their text. To build legions of proficient readers, educators should adopt models of reading instruction that are not only steeped in the belief that students need to acquire specific literacy skills, but also recognize the importance of conferring with students to diagnose and tailor reading instruction. The results of the second quantitative measure suggest a need to determine the effectiveness of Reader's Workshop with other minority populations.

Finally, the qualitative portion of this research examined the attributes that kindergarten teachers perceive as important to meeting student needs in a diverse learning environment. The discussion highlighted three recurrent themes: 1). open dialogue and/or discussions; 2.) understanding and valuing differences; and 3.) school environment/climate, which draw upon student traits. Schools frequently espouse the

great strides they are making in cultivating environments that embrace diversity; however, they often contradict their stated efforts by overtly forcing African American students to abandon a great deal of their language and culture to conform to the mainstream environments created in public school settings. To counteract insensitive practices, campuses should generate opportunities for educators to engage in dialogue amongst themselves and with other members of the community to increase staff members' knowledge of the cultural norms and values that directly impact the learning lives of their students. Future investigations might explore the process of integrating culturally-based literacy instructional strategies and the affect of multicultural literature on student engagement.

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Appendix A: Human Subjects Consent Form



UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

May 2, 2011

Ms. Johnna Simpson-Butler
c/o Dr. Cameron White
Dean, Education

Dear Ms. Simpson-Butler:

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction in Primary Reading Instruction: The Power of Knowledge and Focused Pedagogy in Eliminating the Achievement Gap" was conducted on April 4, 2011.

At that time, your request for exemption under **category 4** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review.* Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Enrique Valdez, Jr.".

Enrique Valdez, Jr.
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **April 1, 2016**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 11345-EX