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# Teaching at the Top of the Class: Black Female Educators' Perspective on Teaching High Achieving Black Children

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TEACHING AT THE TOP OF THE CLASS: BLACK FEMALE EDUCATORS'
PERSPECTIVE ON TEACHING HIGH ACHIEVING BLACK CHILDREN


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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the action steps that Black female educators take when teaching high achieving Black students. More specifically this study investigated the way that the participants implement instruction in their classrooms for high achieving students. This study included five Black female teachers from four predominately Black school districts in a small town in the Midwest. Critical Race Theory and Othermothering were used as theoretical frameworks to examine the importance of the role that Black female educators play in today's urban classrooms.

The terms *gifted* and *high achiever* are often used interchangeably in research studies; however, there are distinct differences between the learning styles of the two. Data from this study cannot be generalized; however, it can act as a tool to begin dialogue between school administrators, counselors, and classroom teachers to discuss their perspective about the unique learning styles of high achieving and gifted Black students in schools. Findings from this study revealed that in order to plan for their high achieving students, the participants' took advantage of their instructional planning time in order to develop effective lessons.

Findings from this study also revealed that although the women's use of the African tradition of othermothering allowed them to develop a personal connection with their students, the role of othermothering also informed their instruction when working to meet the academic needs of the high achieving student population. Additionally, othermothering was extended to every learner in the classroom.

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"Education is the greatest equalizer"

*-Horace Mann, 1848*

Chapter 1

**Introduction**

Advocates of gifted education programs in America argue that one of the biggest benefits of gifted education is that it provides young people with maximum opportunities for self-fulfillment (Hebert, 2011). This is done through the development and expression of one or a combination of performance areas where superior potential may be present (Renzulli, 1986). Although this idea may be well intended, for some young people, the opportunity of getting into a gifted program is far from reality.  According to Donna Y. Ford (2012), gifted education consistently comes under scrutiny and criticism regarding the persistent and pervasive underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education. Nationally, Black students are underrepresented in gifted education by at least 50% and Hispanic students are underrepresented by some 40% in gifted programs (Ford, 2010, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection, 2006). Literature has also documented that most of the students that qualify for and are placed in gifted programs and advanced classes are predominantly Caucasian or Asian students (Bernal, 2002; Ford & Harris, 1999; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Totoman, 2002; Grantham, 2003; Lee, Matthews, & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008, Worrell, 2007; Wyner et al., 2007).

With that being said, there have been significant attempts to broaden the term giftedness. According to the United States Department of Education's (1993) *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* report, giftedness includes; children and youth with outstanding

talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of

accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

These children and youth exhibit high performance capacity in intellectually creative, and/or

artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require

services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. Outstanding talents are present in

children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human

endeavor. Although gifted and talented educational programs have been shown to produce

substantial long-term educational benefits with related social and economic advantages, these

programs are populated mostly by white, middle-to-upper class students (Harvard Civil Rights

Project, 2004).

Lack of access to such educational opportunities perpetuates the segregation of nonwhite

students growing up in poverty (Orfield & Lee, 2005). As reported by the U.S. Department of

Education (2005), between 1978 and 1997, Hispanic students indentified as gifted increased

from 5.2% to 8.6% nationally. Also during that period, Black students identified as gifted

dropped from 17. 0% to 15.7% In addition to these pertinent findings is the fact that Black males

have been disproportionately placed in special education classrooms (Harry & Anderson, 1994;

Kearns, Ford & Linney 2005; Watkins, & Kurtz, 2001) and underrepresented in gifted and

talented programs (Grantham, 2004).

Of special concern is the neglect of the talents of children who are economically

disadvantaged or of a racial or ethnic minority population. These are the students who may be

overlooked for programs that would identify their talents and provide relevant and appropriate

educational services addressing their needs (Fraiser & Passow, 1994; U.S. Department of

Education, 2007). This disenfranchisement in education keeps that underrepresented group of children in regular education classrooms, instead of classes that will address the needs of those learners.

School districts with a high population of Black students fall significantly below average in terms of gifted and talented programs (Morris, 2004). Most poor minority children find themselves in schools that lack a rigorous curriculum; are less well-equipped in terms of educational resources such as libraries, textbooks, and especially technology. Barton (2003) postulates that these school districts employ less experienced or less qualified teachers. The lack of a rigorous curriculum, limited resources in terms of textbooks, libraries, and technology are the obvious factors that contribute to the lack of gifted programs in low performing schools.

Other school-related issues include the confusion about how to identify gifted minority children, because these students may underperform on typically used measures, such as IQ tests or other standardized achievement tests. Strategies to address this problem include incorporating more culturally relevant indicators of ability (e.g., oral expressiveness for verbal ability) into identification protocols (Ford, 1996); the use of performance-based assessments (Sarouphim, 1999; VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & de Brux, 2007); the use of nonverbal ability tests and the use of different cutoff scores based on appropriate norming groups (Lohman, 2005).

But even if low performing schools have gifted programs and have appropriate procedures in place to identify students, questions arise as to what to do for these students socially. Many Black students enter gifted programs and do not see children who look like them (Singleton, Livingston, Hines, & Jones, 2008). They feel inferior and tend to withdraw from classroom activities (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; & Ford et. al, 2002). According to Dunn, Burke, & Whitely (2000), "another problem with gifted education is that students become bored or irritated in

school precisely because they are required to follow the same rules in the same way and in the same amount of time as everyone else; therefore, teaching identified gifted and talented students with the same curriculum and instructional methods as regular education students leads to apathy and disinterest in learning" (p.6). Results with such dismal findings give advocates of gifted education little hope when speaking on behalf of those children who go unnoticed in predominately Black school districts.

According to Frasier, Garcia and Passow (1995), the success of gifted Black students depends on the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, counselors, and school administrators. Interestingly, what has not been mentioned in the literature are the ways in which Black female educators work tirelessly day after day to provide instructional support to meet the needs of every child in their classrooms; beyond Standardized Testing, these educators realize the value of molding the minds of the children who live in communities where bright futures are often times only dreams. It would be easy for teachers to give children "permission to fail" Ladson-Billings (2009) when the environmental factors impact their lives outside of the classroom. However, effective teachers of Black students maintain high expectations for their students (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and do not pity them but empathize with the students (McAllister & Irvine, 2002) so that students have the best possible chance of mobilizing themselves and empowering their families and communities. Pang and Gibson (2001) noted that Black educators are far more than physical role models; they bring histories, value orientations, and experiences to students in the classroom.

According to hooks (1994), Black female teachers carry with them gendered experiences and perspectives that have been historically silenced and marginalized in the discourses of teaching and learning. When exploring the integral role that Black female educators play in providing

instruction to gifted Black children, in no way is it being implied that Black teachers are the only group who can and should be teaching this group of highly talented children. It is not the researcher's intent to make determinations about non-Black teacher's dedication and commitment to gifted Black children or the communities in which they serve. As Gay (2000) stressed "the ability of teachers to make their instruction personally meaningful and culturally congruent for students account for their success, not their ethnic identity per se" (p. 205). This study is designed to allow a group of Black female educators the opportunity tell their stories about what has worked for them when working to meet the needs of those highly intelligent Black students, the challenges that they have faced when doing so, and the intrinsic rewards that they have received given the chance to teach such academically talented young people.

## Problem Statement

Although there is a considerable amount of research focused around the underrepresentation of minority children in gifted education, there is limited research that provides in-depth exploration on the counterstorytelling focused around Black female educators. Currently there is no research about the type of instruction Black women  provide when working with high achieving Black children who attend school districts with large populations of minority children that do not have gifted and talented programs.

This population of women was chosen for this study because according to Landson and Lewis (2006), "an overwhelming percentage of teachers in all schools, particularly urban schools are White females" (p.13).  Interestingly, teachers of color tend to seek employment in urban schools. In fact, Frankenberg (2009) found that "Black teachers comprise 15% of teachers in urban schools, which is twice their share of the entire public teaching force" (p. 264).

Black female educators who work with Black children from low-income communities work under adverse conditions: overcrowded classroom sizes, and limited instructional resources; this is due in part to disparities of funding at the federal, state, and local level (Education Trust, 2006). With these setbacks brings a concern about the population of high achieving students who are underrepresented in gifted classes (Losen & Orfield, 2002). This leaves Black female teachers with the job of balancing much of their instructional time trying to address the needs of both the high achieving students and those children who fall significantly below grade level in core academic subject areas.

## Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of this study was to examine the action steps that Black female educators take when implementing instruction in their classrooms for those students who are high achievers. More specifically this study will provide teachers, school counselors, principals, and parents with valuable insider information in the form of personal narratives. These narratives were told by Black female educators who have been able to navigate through school district mandated curriculum for all students in the regular education classroom while teaching with rigor and high expectations for those high achieving Black students in their class. It is through the use of counterstories that others will begin to understand what daily classroom experiences are like for this group of educators (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Black female educators in school districts with a predominately Black student population shared a first- hand account of the challenges they encounter when attempting to meet the instructional needs of their high achieving Black students.

This study was grounded in the use of counterstorytelling; therefore, by engaging in counterstorytelling, Black female educators were able to share their experiences as teachers of high achieving Black children in school districts that are located in the metropolitan area of the Midwest. More specifically the counterstories gave these educators the opportunities to critically reflect on their positions regarding the challenges that they have faced when implementing instruction to their high achieving students in their regular education classrooms.

## Research Question

The question that this researcher sought to answer was:

In school districts with a large Black student population and limited gifted education opportunities, what action steps do Black female educators take in order to address the needs of high achieving Black students in regular education classrooms?

The other sub-questions that the researcher investigated were:

1. How do Black female educators recognize high achieving students in their classrooms?
2. What obstacles do Black female educators face when addressing the needs of the high achieving population?
3. What support do Black female educators receive from building administrators and other support staff when they have gifted students in their classrooms?
4. How does the ethic of care (othermothering) inform the type of instructional support Black female educators provide when teaching high achieving Black students?

## Significance of the Study

Over the last five decades, there has been a vast amount of research that focus on the topic of gifted education (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Ford, 1996; Landrum, 1987; More et al., 2006; Peterson, 2003; Renzulli, 1978). Within the last two decades there has been some attention given to the limited number of gifted Black students identified for gifted education programs (Ford, 2012). However, thorough examinations of gifted education literature indicate that there have been no studies done that focus on the significant role that Black female educators play when implementing instruction to high achieving Black students in the urban elementary classroom setting. Through counterstorytelling, the narratives of the Black female educators of this study can provide pre-service teachers and those new to the profession with a more in depth perspective of characteristics, philosophies, and insights about Black teachers that other teachers, from any ethnic background, can use to improve their experiences in working with Black students and in particular high achieving Black children. Additionally, by allowing Black female educators to share their experiences about teaching high achieving Black students from low-income communities, this may provide novice teachers with insight into the types of instructional teaching strategies that work best with high achieving Black students in urban schools.

## Delimitations

This study occurred during the summer and fall semester and it included school districts in the metropolitan area of the Midwest. Only five Black female educators from elementary schools with a large Black student population were targeted and may not represent the views of their respective districts.

**Limitations**

Interview time was a limitation due to the fact that interviews were conducted beyond school hours and school days.  The next limitation involved the availability of participants; therefore interviews and the focus group were only conducted at a time convenient to the participants. Finally honesty included the participants being truthful about their responses to questions asked since this study did not consist of direct classroom observations.

**Assumptions**

1.  Participants will provide honest information regarding their perceptions about high achieving Black children, instructional practices used to teach this population of children, and testing measures used to identify high achieving Black children in their classroom.

2.  Participants will be accessible for researcher interviews.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study the following terms will be defined as:

**Black/African American-** A race of people born in America who are of African descent. *Those two terms are used interchangeably throughout the study.*

**Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka**- this lawsuit challenged the constitutionality of racial segregation in public schools. In December, 1952, the U.S. Supreme Court had on its docket cases from Kansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Virginia which also challenged segregation in public schools. The U.S. Supreme Court consolidated all 5 cases under one name: *Oliver Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. This collection of cases was the culmination of years of legal groundwork laid by the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in its work to end segregation (Maruca, 2003).

**Critical Legal Studies-** a leftist legal movement that challenged the traditional legal scholarship that focused on doctrinal and policy analysis in favor of a form of law that spoke to the specificity of individuals and groups in social and cultural context (Gordan, 1990).

**Critical Race Theory-** CRT challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Bell, 1995; Calmore, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995, 1996; Harris, 1994, Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) According to Soloranzo & Yosso (2001) CRT has at least 5 themes that form its basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy:

1.  The Centrality and Intersectionality of Race and Racism

2.  The Challenge to Dominant Ideology

3.  The Commitment to Social Justice

4.  The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge

5.  The Interdisciplinary Perspective

*\* An in-depth discussion of each tenet will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2*

**Counterstorytelling**- a method of telling a story that "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" Delgado and Stefancic, (p.

161).

**Culture-** the sum of the total of learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation. (Li and Karakowsy, 2001)

**Differentiated Instruction-** according to Carol Ann Tomlinson (as cited by Ellis, Gable, Greg, & Rock, 2008) is the process of "ensuring that what a student learns, how he or she learns it, and

how the student demonstrates what he or she has learned is a match for that student's readiness

level, interest, and preferred mode of learning" (p.32).

**Gifted child** - child or youth with outstanding talent who performs or shows the potential for

performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of his or

her age, experience, or environment. (Department of Education, 2007).

**High Achieving Student-**   a complex thinker, a multitasker, focused and driven, goal oriented

future focused and often intense in engagement (Thayer, 2013).

**High Needs School District-** The federal definition of high-need addresses issues of poverty and

of teacher quality because these issues have been most closely linked to low student

performance. In Missouri, high-need eligibility adopts federal standards for poverty level and

district-level data on percent of course taught by highly qualified teachers (Retrieved April 20,

2013, from www.education.UMKC.edu)

**Low- income community**- communities where the schools in the district has a high poverty rate,

students receive free and reduced school lunch, the school district is defined as a "high needs

district", and students live in subsidized low income housing.

**Othermothering**- described as a "universalized ethic of care" or a "collective social conscience"

(Case, 1997 pp. 26, 36) in which the caring that othermothers engage in is not simply

interpersonal but profoundly political in intent and practice. In urban classrooms exemplary

African-American women teachers use the familiar and familial mother-child relationship as a

guide for their interactions with students. (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

**Wordle-** a free web tool that allows users to create word clouds by entering text. A Wordle is also a creative cloud of words that can be used to convey a message. (Retrieved January 31, 2015, from www.wordle.net)

**Summary**

This chapter identified the topic, purpose of the study, statement of the problem, delimitations and assumptions, significance of the study, and the rationale of the research study. It also provides operational definitions of important terminologies that will be used throughout the study. Chapter Two will consist of a literature review that explores the historical background of gifted education programs in American public education. Additionally, the next chapter will further explore the disparities between gifted education programs and the underrepresentation of Black children who fail to receive services for these programs by exploring Critical Race Theory and its impact in education.

Chapter Two will also take a closer examination into the role that Black female educators have played historically in schools highly populated with Black students. And finally, Chapter Two will conclude with a discussion of the theoretical framework used to build this study. Just as a home needs a firm foundation to support the structure, in qualitative research, the theoretical framework is that logical representation that includes concepts that indentify what will be explored, examined, measured or described (Desjardins, 2010).

Chapter Three will discuss the methodology that will be used to collect data for the study. The data sources for this study includes: individual interviews, focus group interviews, and analytical memos.

**Chapter 2**

**Literature Review**

Chapter Two is a review of literature as it relates to gifted education programs in American public schools.  As reform in education continues to impact the way children are taught in schools, one thing has been a constant reminder to educators and policy makers: "Kids are not the same, they learn in different ways" (Nehring, 1992, p.156).

This chapter has been divided into four sections. Section one provides an historical overview that highlights those individuals who made immense contributions to the field of gifted education. Additionally, section one will examine the use of intelligence testing as a means of identifying students during the period that those pioneers in the field conducted studies. Finally, insight from prominent Blacks who lived during that era will be discussed to show the stark contrast between what White psychologists and scholars believed qualified a child as gifted compared to their colleagues who had differences in their theory.

Section two examines Critical Race Theory and the ways in which racism found in education stagnates high achieving students of color; especially when it comes to the type of instruction they receive in their classrooms. Therefore an examination of the proponents of CRT will be explored in order to discuss the complexity of race and gifted education in the American public school system. Section two will also take a closer look at differentiated instruction, which is one form of instruction provided to high achievers. Although advocates of gifted education stress the importance for this type of instruction, Archambault (1993) found that only a small number of teachers even offer differentiation in their classrooms; this is especially a problem in urban schools which tend to be underfunded and overcrowded. Interestingly this information has been missing from research since that time.

Because this study explores the perspective of Black female educators who teach high achieving students in schools that are predominately Black, section three will explore the role that the African tradition of othermothering plays in the classrooms of Black female educators. Interestingly, the theory of othermothering was birthed out of the Black feminist movement of the 1970's. In fact, it was Hill-Collins (1991) who stated that Black feminism can be defined as "women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary Black women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society" (p. 9). In urban education as well as on college campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the tradition of othermothering permeates throughout the school community. This is why there is a need to undertake a study that shows that when othermothering and Critical Race Theory in education converge, together the two theories could possibly solicit more dialogue about teaching practices necessary to reach America's most underused resource: high achieving Black students.

## An Historical Overview of Gifted Education and Intelligence Testing

Historically, educating those individuals of high intellectual ability was considered quite intriguing. In fact, attempts had been made to provide appropriate education for the gifted child (Witty, 1951). Individuals who possessed intellectual superiority came to be esteemed during the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution (Kotschnig, 1939). Interestingly, there was some attention given to the education of gifted children from the seventeenth through the early part of the nineteenth century. This was due in part to a political philosophy which stated that "all men are created equal". As this philosophy relates to the American education system, this posits that education was a fundamental right for every non-minority child born in the United States of America (Alexander & Alexander, 2009).

**Pioneers in the field of Gifted Education**

**Francis Galton**

Near the mid-nineteenth century, interest in gifted education was sparked once again when in 1869, psychologist Francis Galton published a book titled *Hereditary Genius*. This book was based on his study of 500 British men in history. In his book, Galton argued that genetics was the source of all intelligence and in particular the genius. Galton's work in the field of gifted education was well received by many of his colleagues. Though many at the time respected the beliefs of Galton, in today's field of psychology, additions have been made to further support his views. Psychologist have also added that genetics is not the only contributing factor to intelligence, but a rich environment, and the appropriate opportunity to transform the seeds of intellect into a rich bounty of talents are necessary as well (Hollingworth, 1938).  As Galton's book was published in 1869, other successors of his work conducted studies that have ultimately had a lasting impact **in the field of gifted education.**

**Lewis Terman**

The work of Stanford University professor Terman was considered by many in the field of gifted education work conducted by a man of his time (Dai, 2010). Terman was the first person to embark upon a large-scale longitudinal study of brilliant young people. In 1921, his first collection of research was titled *Genetic Studies of Genius: Mental and Physical Traits of a Thousand Gifted Children*. The basic purpose of his research was to determine to what degree the gifted child varied from the average child of normal intelligence (Jolly, 2008). Terman's subjects consisted of 1,528 10 and 11 year old children with an IQ of 140 or higher (Jolly, 2008). Influenced by the work of Galton and Darwin, Terman also believed that intelligence was a

hereditary biological trait. For example, one point of interest in his study showed that his subjects could identify relatives who were Presidents or Vice-Presidents of the United States, writers, generals, statesmen, and Supreme Court justices (Terman, 1925).

The initial demographic data from his study also showed a population that was White, middle class, and with parents holding advanced schooling when compared to the average population of children of Jewish heritage. Terman noted that "the heredity of our gifted subjects is much more superior to that of the average individual" (Terman, 1925, p.83). He also concluded that the findings from his study directly supported the hypotheses that males are more intelligent than females. Terman stated that "exceptionally superior intelligence occurs with greater frequency among boys than girls" (Terman, 1925, p.54). Coincidently, 10 years after Terman's study, a woman by the name of Leta Hollingworth pioneered enrichment programs for the gifted at a time when prescriptive education for the gifted consisted almost solely of acceleration (Stanley, 1978).

**Leta Hollingworth**

As a college educated woman during that period in history, Hollingworth grew frustrated with the notion that she was to stay home and attend to domestic chores around the house (Hollingworth, 1942). She set out on a journey to rebuff the notion that she could not advance in a "man's world" (Ludy, 1990, p.4). Whereas in the Terman study, the research was based solely on White middle to upper-class advantaged families (Gold, 1982), the Hollingworth study included some low-income and immigrant groups with a variety of ethnic background (George, Cohn, & Stanley, 1979). Hebert (2011) posits that a review of the gifted education movement in this country reveals that  Hollingworth (1926, 1942) was the first educator to advocate

educational programming that addressed the counseling needs of gifted children with sensitivity to the needs of the culturally diverse (p. 306).

In 1922, the Hollingworth study was administered as a longitudinal study on 55 students with IQs over 155. The study lasted three years (Hollingworth, 1922), and the goal was to explore multiple aspects of the children such as psychological makeup, social skills, and family backgrounds.  According to Silverman (1990), "Hollingworth had a strong interest in understanding the way highly intelligent children learned to survive in a world where they were constantly searching for minds similar to their own" (p.171).

The research of Galton, Terman, and Hollingworth have all resulted in highly publicized studies in the field of gifted education; however historical literature based on Black intelligence is closely related to the profession of psychology. The profession has maintained loyalty to the racist themes that have perpetuated the perception that Black's intelligence is innately inferior to that of Whites (Franklin, 1991). In his 1916 published book *The Measurement of Intelligence*, Terman discussed the poor showing of Black, Native American, and Mexican children on IQ test by stating that:

> *Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come. The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and Negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew…there will be discovered enormously significant racial differences…which cannot be wiped out by any scheme of mental culture.* (Karier, 1975, p. 368)

**Opponents of Gifted Education and Intelligence Testing**

According to Franklin (1990), beginning in the early 1920s, Black social scientists conducted research and published studies that called into question what the intelligence tests were actually measuring. In 1924, Horace M. Bond director of Education at Langston University in Oklahoma; refuted the "mulatto hypothesis" which stated that Blacks who performed well on intelligence tests and received high scores did so because of a high percentage of "White blood" (Bond, 1924, p. 63). In 1927, he published a study on *"Some Exceptional Negro Children",* and reported that of the 32 Black students in Chicago he gave the Standford-Binet Test, "One little girl made a score of 142". Coincidently, Terman had earlier reported that only 33% of White students had I.Q. scores above 106. Bond purported that "Neither this child nor her parentage evidences any admixture of White blood". He went on to say that "of the five children with the highest scores, not one was lighter in complexion than the brown races of Africa" (p. 259).  Morris (2002) asserts that leading Black social scientists and intellectuals in the United States such as Horace Mann, and W.E.B. Dubois found themselves having to refute the racist findings of some their White colleagues who asserted that Black people were intellectually inferior to Whites.

Although gifted education has its roots in psychology, there have been perceptions insinuated by many prominent White experts in the field which have implied that Black children are educationally inferior to White children (Morris, 2002).  As a result, this has influenced teacher nominations when deciding who gets selected into gifted education programs (Ford, 2008). Needless to say, there is a pervasive underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education programs across this country. Children of color and lower socioeconomic levels are overrepresented in classes for the mentally retarded and underrepresented in classes for the gifted (Ford, 2012; Sapon-Shevin, 1994).  These disparities in education continue to widen the

achievement gap instead of closing it. This is due in part to the continued legacy of covert forms of discriminatory practices that are found in the field of business, health care, politics, and education. Since the years of the Civil Rights Movement of 1955, experts in the field of Social Justice have taken the charge of exposing racial practices found in these fields and have offered suggestions for ways to improve race relations.

## Critical Race Theory

Undoubtedly, America has had its share of racial tensions. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement which began in 1955, Blacks fought against the social ills of racial oppression. During the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's, Black leaders such as Charles K. Steele, Fred L. Shuttlesworth, Bayard Rustin, and of course Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the fight to end racial discrimination in southern parts of the country. Although their efforts were deemed a major victory in the eyes of most Americans, there were some who believed the fight for justice and equality was not as swift as it could have been.

The inception of Critical Race Theory (CRT) began in the mid-1970's when Derrick Bell (a Black man) and Alan Freeman (a Caucasian) became distressed with the slow progress of racial reform following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Unlike its predecessor, the Civil Rights Movement, Critical Race Theory has been described as an eclectic and dynamic type of legal scholarship that matured during the 1980's over perceived failure of traditional civil rights litigation to produce meaningful racial reform known as Critical Legal Studies [CLS] (Taylor, 1998). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), while CRT draws from European philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, it also draws upon the radical American tradition

exemplified by Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movement of the sixties and early seventies.

Critical race theorists focus on the effects of race and racism, while addressing Whiteness and White Supremacy on the "meritocratic" system (Cook 1995; Crenshaw 1995; Dalton 1995; & Matsuda, 1995).  Peggy McIntosh (1998) noted that "White Americans know that their White skin opens many doors for them whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us" (p.81). McIntosh's statement is supported by the argument of Cheryl Harris (1993) in which she posits that Whiteness itself is a kind of property dating back to the ownership of persons as slaves and the usurpation of Native American land rights. These property interests continue into the present and undergrid "the settled expectations of relative White privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline" (p.1714).

In a collection of CRT writings, Kimberly Crenshaw (1995) states that there is no "canonical set of doctrine or methodologies to which CRT scholars subscribe.  What unifies these scholars is their common interest to understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have created and manifested in America; CRT scholars seek to change the bond that exists between law and racial power" (p. xiii).  Therefore, the ultimate goal of Critical Race Theory is to transform the way society organizes itself along racial and hierarchical lines. In a pursuit of these interests, scholars examine five basic tenets.

**Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

**The Centrality of Intersectionality of Race and Racism**

Cresnshaw (1988) posits that CLS and CRT differ in the sense that Critical Studies scholars critique mainstream legal ideology for its portrayal of United States society as meritocracy but fails to include racism in its critique. According to Delgado (1995) "racism is normal, and not aberrant in American society because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order; it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture" (p.xiv). An example of this was found in the research of DeCuir and Dixon (2004) when a Black student from their study described the racial and cultural climate at an elite predominately White independent school. The student asserted that "everybody knows that racism exists. So when it comes out, they [faculty and students] aren't surprised" (p.26). Although the student recognized racism in the school, the student perceived that racism was so commonplace within the school that when it was apparent, few were surprised. Anderson (1988), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Shujaa, (1994) contend that because of the legacy of racism, schooling is problematic for Black students, especially those attending predominately White schools.

**The Challenge to Dominant Ideology**

Secondly, CRT closely examines what is called "interest convergence" in American society. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), interest convergence happens when White elitists as well as working class White Americans benefit from racism so they see no need to change it. Bell published an article in the Harvard Law Review in 1980 that outlined his theory of why the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of ending racial segregation in public schools. The court's ruling was based on the landmark case of 1954: Brown versus the Topeka Board of

Education. In his article, Bell argued that the NAACP Legal Defense Fund had been litigating school desegregation cases for years prior to the 1954 case. Oddly, in 1954 the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs of that landmark case. Bell questioned the intentions of the Court's ruling; especially since the court almost always unanimously ruled in favor of the defendants. He hypothesized that during that time in American history, the United States wanted to improve its image in the eyes of the Third World. So in order to do that, the U.S. needed to soften its stance against domestic minorities. This, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2012) is where the interest of Whites and Blacks were converged; however, according to Bell, this was only brief for Black Americans during that period in history.

Bell's article was met with criticism from liberal authors including some who say that Chief Justice Warren's reliance on psychological criteria to find any harm against segregated blacks was unnecessary.  However; in later years, legal historian Mary Dudziak (2004) carried out extensive archival research in the files of the (U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Justice). She analyzed foreign press reports, as well as letters from U.S. ambassadors abroad, all showing that Bell's intuition was correct. When the Justice Department intervened on the side of the NAACP for the first time in a major school-desegregation case, it was responding to a flood of secret cables and memos outlining the United States' interest in improving its image in the eyes of the Third World (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

**The Commitment to Social Justice**

A third theme of CRT is the social construction thesis in which Eurocentric versions of U.S. history reveal race to be a socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another  (Banks, 1993).

Delgado (2012) takes it a step further by stating that "race and races are products of social thought and relations; races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retrieves when convenient" (p.8).  An example of this is the fact that in one instance persons of color may be perceived as simple-minded, aloof, and unassuming people who find pleasure in serving those from the majority. Yet in another instance, that same group may be depicted as lazy, loud, violent, and out of control (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The problem with the social construction thesis is that it makes overgeneralizations about individuals based on race; however it leaves out the pertinent fact that everyone regardless of race may have overlapping or conflicting identities at one time or another.

**The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge**

    CRT employs counterstorytelling as a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) counter-storytelling "helps us understand what life is like for others and it invites the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (p.41). Black, Latino, and Native American stories are considered counter-stories because they challenge the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse- the majoritarian story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Although CRT has been used largely in the field of legal research, it has found its place into education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have been credited for introducing CRT to the field of education nearly 19 years ago.

**The Interdisciplinary Perspective**

    The final tenet of CRT challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most traditional analyses and insist on analyzing race and racism by placing them in both an historical

and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990).

## Critical Race Theory in Education

Education gives individuals the academic skills needed to advance in reading, writing, mathematics, the social sciences, and technology. According to Alexander and Alexander (2009), "in America during the 1700's, state constitutions held that education was a fundamental right" (p.40). A fundamental right is inherent in the individual and constitutes a protected claim that need not be earned; rather, it is immanent in the human being as entitlement (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Interestingly, that was written into the Constitution over 150 years prior to the landmark ruling of Brown v. the Board of Education. Now some 50 years after the U. S. Supreme Court Ruling of Brown, which was about ending school segregation, the achievement gap among White and Black students still has not closed.  CRT in education challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education (Bell, 1995; Calmore 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Delgado 1995; Harris 1994; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

According to Soloranzo and Yosso, (2001) CRT was first introduced to the field of education in 1994 when Tate wrote an autobiographical article entitled From Inner City To Ivory Tower: Does My Voice Matter In The Academy?, in the journal of *Urban Education*. In the article Tate draws on principles of CRT to reflect on his elementary education at  a successful urban Catholic school by contending that his education was built on two epistemological pillars: centric and conflict theories.  Centric theory postulates that there is this sort of blindness to cultural differences as though they do not exist; while conflict theory asserts that those with the most

resources exercise power over others through inequality and injustices. Interestingly, in Tate's academic career in mathematics education, his "voice" began to create tension as he challenged the traditional academic discourse. The following year Ladson-Billings and Tate wrote a paper entitled Toward A Critical Race Theory Of Education in the *Teachers College Record*. The paper provided an argument for the application of CRT in education.

The fight for Civil Rights along with the Civil Rights Movement certainly has its place in American history. According to Ladson-Billings (2010) "one of the recurring themes that characterized the school/ Civil Rights legal battles was equal opportunity" (p.17). Equal opportunity in education means that children of color should have access to the same school opportunities as White students (i.e. funding, instruction, and assessment,). School funding is one of the areas of that underscores inequity and racism in public education (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

**Funding**

In the summer of June 2013, the Missouri Supreme Court upheld a 1993 state law that gives students living in unaccredited school districts the option to transfer to neighboring districts. In turn, the unaccredited districts must pay for students' tuition and transportation cost. This was the case with two school districts: Normandy School District and Riverview Gardens School District; both are located in predominately Black communities in St. Louis, Missouri. Prior to 2013, both districts lost school accreditation due to consistently poor scores on Standardized Tests (St. Louis American Newspaper, 2013). The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provided guidelines of how to implement this mandate and administrators of the two unaccredited school districts abided by the transfer law and the Department of Education guidelines. Parents of the children from the two unaccredited districts had the option

of transferring their children to predominately White suburban school districts as far as 35 miles away from the neighborhoods where the children lived.

Needless to say, the transfer law was met with outrage from parents in both the Black and White community. Some of the Black parents were concerned about the bus travel from one community to another; while some White parents feared the schools in their community would start installing metal detectors because the children from the unaccredited districts may come to the receiving districts starting trouble. The parents also feared overcrowded classrooms and lowered academic averages. Initially, there was so much bickering between the adults that no one seemed to be concerned about how the children from the districts felt. When the local news reporters interviewed Black and White students, it was discovered that they were not only excited, but welcome the idea of going to school together. To this date, there have been no media reports of any school violence between Black and White students at the suburban schools.

Since the start of school, administrators of the two unaccredited school districts have made a plea to the governor, policy makers in the state capital, and the Commissioner of Education regarding the financial burden the school transfers were costing the districts. According to an article in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* newspaper, the estimated cost of the school transfers cost both districts roughly $23 million dollars for the fiscal school year. (School transfers. October 16, 2013).

The decision to extrapolate funds from a school district leaves it in so much financial distress that administrators are left with no choice but to begin to cut out programs in order to save money; this was the case with the Normandy School District. The Riverview Gardens School District had available funds in reserve to pay tuition for those students whose parents wanted to

continue to be part of the transfer program. Unfortunately, one of the things that have already taken place in the Normandy School District has been the decision to layoff support staff and certified staff. The districts that received student transfers gained millions of dollars and as a result have financially benefitted from the school transfer program. There is a huge disparity in education when the lack of funding hinders progress in some districts and economic gains in others. CRT argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism (Ladson-Billings, 2010).

**A current update on the two unaccredited districts**

After a long year of financial hardship and decisions about dismantling the Normandy School District, the Missouri Department of Education decided to lapse the district and open it under a new name: Normandy Collaborative Schools. In the summer of 2014 a five panel state appointed school board was sworn in to oversee the newly named district. Given a clean slate and becoming fully accredited once again, area school districts that once took the school transfer students from Normandy decided to turn away hundreds of students for the upcoming school year. When a reporter from a local newspaper asked the Superintendent of one of the accredited school district about the decision to turn away the transfer students from Normandy, she stated that the newly formed district would be able to use that school transfer money to pay staff and buy needed classroom materials to help the children.

Interestingly, the annual tuition for each transfer student was $11,034. All total the transfer students brought $3.4 million dollars in revenue to the accredited district for the 2013-2014 school year (School transfers. October 12, 2014). However the State Board of Education voted to cap tuition for the 2014-2015 school year to $7, 200. When parents of students from the

Normandy School District decided to take the opposing school districts to court over the transfer law, a county court judge for the state ruled in favor of the parents of the transfer students citing "It is in the public interest for the plaintiffs to prevail. Every child in this community has a right to a decent education" (School transfers. October 12, 2014).

Although the Riverview School District was not affected by the changes in the transfer law, it did receive some news that has impacted its future. For the 2013-2014 school year, the district showed improvements in attendance, academics, and college and career readiness. With its improvements, the district is now a few points away from provisional accreditation (School district ratings. October 12, 2014).  This is certainly encouraging news for students, parents, teachers, and staff of that school community.

Because this study focused on high achieving Black students in urban schools, the researcher would be remiss if no attention was given to the disparity of high achieving Black students in gifted education programs or the lack of programs in urban schools.

According to Ford (2012), "educators must ensure that communication with all families is transparent-that Black and Hispanic parents are viewed as legitimate and valuable members of the gifted education community" (p. 75). In spite of the negative press that Black parents receive, most want their children to receive a good education complete with a rigorous curriculum, unlimited resources, and school facilities that create conducive learning environments. For the high achieving student this is especially important.

CRT suggests that current strategies presume that Black students are deficient. In schools that are predominately Black, all of the children are taught the same way; Ladson-Billings (2009) posits that instructional approaches for Black students typically involve some aspect of

remediation. Remediation is a form of instruction that teaches basic skills along with a significant amount of repetition. This type of instruction is especially a concern for teachers who have high achieving students in their classrooms along with a high percentage of students who work below grade level. For the high achievers, differentiated instruction is necessary.

## Instruction for High Achieving Students

### Differentiated Instruction in Gifted Education

In her book titled *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) said that "although a class is a complex and dynamic place, the primary enterprise must be to teach" (p. 135). When looking at the challenges that children in urban schools face, the way in which children are taught effects their academic progress over the course of their years in school. Instructional implementation is also a key piece when working with high achieving students. As Reiss (1998) posits, "curriculum instruction should provide rigor and higher level thinking in order to meet the needs of this population of learners" (p. 75). Instruction along with a well-designed curriculum can have a tremendous impact on student learning. The problem with that idea is that no two children learn the same way (Nehring, 1992).

According to Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch (1998), teachers enter a classroom with a single lesson that they deliver to learners at a single pace and through a single instructional approach. Tomlinson along with other advocates of gifted education have called for Differentiated Instruction as a central teaching strategy to use with high achieving students. As defined in chapter one, differentiated instruction refers to planning curriculum and instruction for academically diverse learners (Tomlinson, 2006). It is usually regarded as accommodating learning differences in children by identifying students' strengths and using appropriate strategies to address a variety of abilities, preferences, and styles.

In a brain research study conducted by Kesner, Bolland, and Dakus, (1993), it was suggested that academically diverse students make sense of essential understandings and skills by:

1. Teaching that is based on concepts and principals that govern them. Concept-based teaching increases the likelihood that each learner can construct and enhance frameworks of meaning.

2. See the relationship of parts and the whole of what is being studied.

3. Launching curriculum from key concepts and principles that invites advanced learners to extend their understanding in a way that is meaning-rich as opposed to repeating the unknown or engaging in trivial enrichment.

Tomlinson (2000) maintains that differentiation is not just an instructional strategy, nor is it a recipe for teaching, rather it is an innovative way of thinking about teaching and learning. Mulroy and Eddinger (2003) add that differentiated instruction emerges within the context of increasingly diverse student populations and creates an optimal learning experience for students.

**A look inside the differentiated classroom**

Classrooms are the place where minds are cultivated in concepts that develop academic growth, and according to Tomlinson (1999), developing academically responsive classrooms is important for a country built on the twin values of equity and excellence. In attending to issues of equity and excellence, she posits that schools establish heterogeneous communities of learning while building solidly on high-quality curriculum and instruction that strive to maximize the capacity of each learner. Tomlinson provided insight into an example of differentiated classroom instruction when she discussed the day she observed a middle school history teacher. She noted that the teacher was conducting a study about ancient Rome. To begin her lesson, the teacher

used a master list of facts, terms, concepts, principles, and skills that stemmed from her understanding of the discipline of history as well as the districts learning standards. Among the important skills that students applied were using resources on history effectively, interpreting information from resources, blending data from several resources and organizing effective paragraphs. The teacher also began her lesson with an essential question that allowed students to ponder ways that their life and culture would be different if they lived in a different place and time.

For the task, students had to assume the role of someone from ancient Rome (i.e. teacher, healer, farmer, slave, etc.) Students based their choice on their interest. They also worked alone and with others who selected the same topic. The students were allowed to use a wide variety of print, video, computer, and human resources to understand what their life in ancient Rome would have been like. The teacher worked with both the whole class and small groups on evaluating the availability and appropriate use of data sources; since her goal was for each student to increase his or her skill level in each area. Based on Tomlinson's observation and note taking, she noted that students found their teacher's class to be engaging. Students discovered that from their lesson about ancient Rome, they were able to make connections between their own lives and the lives of the ancient Romans. From Tomlinson's observation it is clear that this middle school teacher's class benefited because of careful planning and the effective implementation of differentiated instruction into a history lesson. However, Tomlinson cautions teachers who assume that this type of instruction is a simple task.

**Barriers**

Because planning for differentiated instruction is so time consuming, many teachers feel overwhelmed when trying to plan lessons for students. As Tomlinson (1995) found, a case study of one middle school's experience with differentiated instruction revealed initial teacher opposition toward modifying instruction to suit learner variance. Added to this were administrative barriers including teacher dissention about being instructed to implement differentiated strategies by district officials. These were contributing factors which had an impact on the teacher's sense of self efficacy (Tomlinson, 1995).

Other barriers included teachers perceiving differentiated instruction as a fad that would pass, concerns over time allocated to prepare for differentiated lesson, unease over student assessments and preparation for testing, as well as disquiet regarding classroom management and perceived teacher insecurity over a change in their role (Tomlinson, 1995). These barriers impede differentiated instruction from being implemented into the regular education classroom setting; this is especially challenging in urban school districts. These problems persist in these districts when they are bombarded with so many instructional initiatives or the professional development used to launch these initiatives and support teachers' continued learning is too frequently ineffective (Ahram, Adeyemi, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2013).

Far too many high achieving Black students are overlooked for gifted education programs (Ford, 2008). In urban schools, gifted education programs are usually one of the first programs to be cut when state funding is cut. Coincidently in many of those schools, there is no enrichment classroom for high achieving students to receive the instructional support necessary. Supporters of gifted education understand the need for the inclusion of gifted and talented minority students

in gifted education programs; however professionals and laymen alike have often reacted

ambivalently to these children, while appreciating their special qualities, some still doubt their

right to special educational enrichment on the grounds that it enhances "elitism" (Perry &

Hilliard, 2003).  An example of this was found in a study by Harmon (2001) when she examined

six gifted Black inner-city elementary students who were bused to a predominately White school.

During the interviews, students identified the characteristics of effective and ineffective teachers.

Results from the study found that effective teachers indicated the use of direct instruction,

flexible ability grouping, cooperative learning, differentiation of curriculum, instruction, and

evaluation, and authentic problem solving. While the identification on the characteristics of

ineffective teachers and their instructional methods supported Ford's (1996) research on

underachieving gifted Black students that identified the following: low teacher expectations, a

hostile classroom environment, feelings of alienation from teachers and classmates, lack of racial

diversity among students, and lack of multicultural curriculum. These are factors within the

school that impact underachievement of gifted Black students.

For Black female educators in urban schools, the task of addressing the needs of high achieving

students can be daunting and overwhelming; yet if the potential of this gifted group is nurtured it

can help meet the nation's need for a more qualified, talented workforce (Ford, 1996; Maton &

Hrabowski, 2004; Moore, 2006; Moore, Madison-Colemore, & Smith, 2003).

**Othermothering**

*As I was walking a parent (one of my of many single mothers) to the door after finishing up*

*our parent teacher conference for the first quarter, she turned to me and said "Ms.*

*Brown, I really like you being my child's teacher this year and he likes being in your*

*classroom". I humbly thanked her, and she went on to say "my son be telling me that he likes*

*you too. He be saying Ms. Brown reminds me of a mother while I'm here at school". I*

*replied, "Yes I have to get on the kids sometimes like mothers do". She replied "that's good*

*Ms. Brown cuz that shows that you care." (Parent Teacher Conference, October 25, 2013)*

**An overview of Othermothering**

Since the early 1940's, there has been a breakdown in the Black American family (Wilson,

2009). Unemployment and no benefits given to Black Military Veterans caused some men to

leave their families in search of better opportunities. With the absence of the male in the home,

many women were left to become both mother and father to their children, leaving the household

to be headed by a female (Wane, 2000). The absence of the Black male presence in the home

also takes a significant bearing on the financial well-being of the family. Most single Black

women that do have jobs are unable to be strongly committed to their child's education due to

their work schedules. Even with there being one paycheck coming into the house oftentimes that

is not enough to cover the family's basic needs and added expenses. As a result, many of these

single women qualify for and receive government assistance.

Interestingly, in the 1980's then President, Ronald Regan commented that women on welfare

were "welfare queens" (Gustafson, 2011) painting an image that depicted these women to be

Black women who refused to work. This statement is consistent with the views of those political

pundits like former Republican Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich

who have accused current President Barack Obama of being a "food stamp president who allows Black people to live off of other people's hard earned money" (Washington Post, 2012). Critical Race theorists have suggested that this form of stereotyping has affected people who live in poverty; with poor Blacks being the most disenfranchised.

In respect to children living in poverty, Wight, Chau, and Aratani, (2010) postulate that they are likely to be minorities and Blacks. Ward 8, within the Nation's capital, Washington DC, has a poverty rate of 40% and an employment rate of 28.5 % (Robinson, 2010). According to 2009 data derived from the U. S. Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 14 million children live in families who have incomes below the poverty level (Wight, Chau, & Aratani, 2010). The poverty level in 2008 was $22,050 for a family of four (Cauthen & Fass, 2009).

Even with the dismal statistical findings of Wight, Chau and Aratani (2010) that depict the break down in the Black family, as well as the negative perceptions that some in politics have about Black women on welfare, what many of the politicians tend to forget is that in spite of the insurmountable obstacles many of these women face, most have been able to raise their children to grow up to become successful adults. In order to maneuver through a system that was designed to keep poor people of color from succeeding, it takes what older Black women call "motherwit" (Cook & Fine, 1995).

Motherwit can be described as an intrinsic understanding of survival skills needed to move through life successfully in spite of a lack of formal education.  According to Tronto (1993), patterns of Black mothering can be associated with a universalized ethic of care. It is this type of internal wisdom that women have to raise children in communities torn apart by violence and substance abuse that runs rampant in urban neighborhoods, but what is astounding, is that even

with all of the setbacks that plague poor Black neighborhoods, there continues to be remnants of what can be defined as an othermothering tradition which remains (Collins, 1991).

Since the earliest period documented in the history of the world, Black women have been the nurturer and mother of civilization (Akil, 1995), and have innately used othermothering as a means of caring for young children within their communities. Othermothering can be defined as a Black woman's maternal assistance offered to the children of blood mothers within the Black community (Case, 1997). The concept of othermothering grew out of a survival mechanism during slavery when children and biological parents were separated at auction, and "fictive kin" would take on mothering responsibilities for the orphaned children (Case, 1997; Guiffrida, 2005; Hirt, Amelink, MeFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008). Additionally, othermothering acted as a survival mechanism serving as a response to the "ever-growing need to share the responsibility for child nurturance" (James, 1993, p.45). Othermothering in Black communities involves the same hard work, self-sacrifice, mentoring and love that Black women give their own children. The bonds that are created between those who mother and those who are mothered are passed down through a "lineage of mothering" (Wane & Adefarakan, 2012, p. 112).

According to Bernard and Bernard (1998), "Black mothers are expected to pass on the torch to their daughters, who are expected to become the next generation of mothers, grandmothers, or othermothers, to guard future generations" (p.46). An example of this was found in a study by Wane (2000) in which she compared community mothering based on her experience of living as a single Kenyan woman raising her daughter in Canada, to the experience of othermothering of the Embu women in a Kenyan village in Africa.  According to Wane (2000), "Othermothers usually care for children; community mothers take care of the community" (p.114). The results from her study found that other than the women in Canada being from different racial

backgrounds, there was no significant difference in the way Canadian community mothers and Kenyan othermothers took care of the children within the community. Wane (2000) also found that among Embu women, mothering was a cultural phenomenon. For example, women without children prepared meals as if they were expecting a number of children for both the midday and evening meals. If no child dropped by, the women packed the food and took it to a home where there were children. James (1997) posits that "the action of such women stand as evidence of the extent to which mothering is not limited to females with biological offspring, but is a community practice" (p.44).

**Othermothering in education**

The practice of othermothering has progressed into the school environment (Collins, 2000). There have been numerous studies that had looked at how Black teachers use the theoretical framework of othermothering and care towards Black students as a pedagogical practice within the classroom (Foster, 1993; Guiffrida, 2005; Loder, 2005; Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004; St. John & Cadray, 2004).

Collins (2000) explains that Black female teachers often continue this tradition of othermothering with "mothering the minds" of their Black students (p. 191), and educators take on the familial roles (Foster, 1993; Loder, 2005). The tradition of othermothering currently exists within urban elementary schools and Black female educators play an integral role in fulfilling the pyschoeducational needs of the urban child (Case, 1997).

For most Black female educators, they have grown up in or have had similar life experiences that are relatable to their Black students; therefore it is natural that they show a sense of empathy for their students. According to hooks (1994), Black educators have had a vested interest in the education of Black children since the days of Jim Crow to Brown v. Board of Education.  Much

can be learned from the ways in which Black female teachers engage and empower Black

students. One of the most profound ways that this can happen is when teachers provide

instruction that is culturally relevant.

**Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Successful Black female teachers work tirelessly to implement instruction that is culturally

relevant to the needs of the Black student populations; Ladson-Billings, (2009). According to

Tillman (2004) "African American teachers see the potential in their African American students,

consider them to be intelligent and are committed to their success" (p.282). Culturally relevant

teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the

dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009).  Some examples of the negative effects of the

dominant culture are brought about by not seeing one's history represented in literature being

taught in the classroom, or textbooks that simply do not provide an accurate depiction; for

example textbooks that only show pictures of successful athletes representing the minority

culture instead of professions that require a higher education or advanced degree.  Studies with

similar findings (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2004) posit that culturally relevant teaching is a

pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using

cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes; therefore it is important to

understand that educators who work with high achieving Black children must have an

understanding of the child's culture as well as include it in the daily instruction.

During the days of segregated schools, Black teachers were especially committed to the needs of

their students and the community as a whole.

Because of the hard work and dedication of Black teachers, students did not want to let them down (Siddle-Walker, 2000). The students put forth effort by achieving academically and socially because

> *Teachers held extracurricular tutoring sessions, visited homes and churches in the community where they taught, even when they did not live in the community, and provided guidance about "life" responsibilities. They talked with students before and after class, carried a student home if it meant that the child would be able to participate in some extracurricular activity he or she would not otherwise participate in, purchased school supplies for their classroom, and helped to supply clothing for students whose parents had fewer financial resources and scholarship money for those who needed to go to college.* (Siddle-Walker, 2000, p. 265)

This genuine compassion and concern has been described as othermothering (Collins, 1991) because the students sense the care of the teacher, this in turn propels them to do their best in the teacher's classroom. Interestingly Mawhinney (2012) posed a rhetorical question that asks: When does caring as a teacher become too much?

**Othermothering on the campus of one Historically Black College**

Mawhinney (2012) wrote a piece entitled (Othermothering: A Personal Narrative Exploring Relationships between Black Female Faculty and Students). In this narrative, she describes her experience with othermothering, student-teacher relationships and unwritten institutional policy. Prior to writing her personal narrative, Mawhinney taught for three years at a Historically Black University (HBCU). She used the conceptual framework of autoethnography and personal narrative to explore the notion of othermothering. As she reflected on her years as an instructor at an HBCU, she discovered that othermothering relationships created depressive guilt.

According to Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) depressive guilt happens when a teacher feels that they are not meeting or attending to the needs of their students.

Results from the narrative showed that Mawhinney (2012) went above and beyond to fund a program so that high school students could receive Scholarships. The situation activated her othermothering instincts (Collins, 2000). Unfortunately when she decided to use her own funds to support the scholarship program at the university, Mawhinney accumulated $9,000 in credit card debt and as a result this caused great financial distress. Mawhinney discovered that her care-sickness evolved, and the self-sacrificing of othermothering and the ethic of care took a toll on her both emotionally and financially. When Mawhinney decided to leave the HBCU, once again she felt the sense of depressive guilt (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991) because she felt she was abandoning her college students by leaving the institution to teach at a Predominantly White University (PWI).

**Othermothering in urban elementary schools**

Contrary to the personal narrative of Mawhinney is the work of Case (1997), who presented an account of Black othermothering by examining the lives of two Black female educators who worked in two urban Connecticut school districts; one of the participants was a second year principal, the other a fifth grade teacher with 25 years of teaching experience.  Both women had strong reputations within their school district for their nuturing and maternal identification. As Case conducted her study, she found that both women focused on the students' educational and emotional needs. From their biographical stories it is apparent that both women attributed their innate ability to act as a nurturer from the women responsible for their upbringing. Interestingly one of the critical pieces that resonate in Case's (2007) study is the fact that both women set firm expectations for the children. As one participant put it "they (children)

know what the boundaries are" (p.31). In the study by Mawhinney (2012), she admitted that she

did not set clear boundaries with her students with regards to her expectations, so as a result she

overextended herself by attempting to meet the educational and social needs of every Black

student enrolled in her class as well as her colleagues.

Even with the deterioration of most urban communities across this country, there continues to

be those women; those othermothers who believe that it is their obligation to nurture and protect

this generation of young people who will ultimately be our leaders of tomorrow.

Othermothering has a direct link that can be traced back to slavery in this country; coincidently it

has made its way into urban elementary classrooms that are taught by Black female educators.

Based on the information presented in this section, it is important to consider is the possibility

that Black student academic achievement is enhanced when educators implement an

othermothering approach (Case, 2007).

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this research study will be both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Othermothering. Both frameworks will be described separately; then there will be an explanation to show how these frameworks are interwoven together to show a connection between the two theories as they relate to this study.

One of the highlights of CRT is the use of counter-storytelling. Delgado (1989) uses this method and argues that it is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told, and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse- the majoritarian story (Delgado, 1993). For instance, counter-stories serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical  functions: (a) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (b) they can understand and transform established belief systems; (c) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and (d) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality alone (Delgado, 1989; Lawson, 1995).

By engaging in counterstorytelling, Black female educators' experiences as teachers of high achieving Black children in four urban school districts in the Midwest will be closely examined. More specifically their counter-narratives will give these educators the opportunities to critically reflect on their positions regarding the challenges that they have had to face when implementing instruction to their underrepresented high achieving students in the regular education classroom setting. The idea that racism permeates in the field of education is a basis to use CRT to examine

the implications that it has on children of color who are not only high achievers, but also students who attend schools heavily populated with children of color. More specifically, the participants in this study will be able to tell their counter-stories and lived experiences as educators who take on the role of an othermothers of the students in their classrooms.

There have been numerous studies that have looked at ways that Black female educators use the theoretical framework of othermothering and care toward Black students as a pedagogical practice within the classroom (Foster, 1993; Guiffrida, 2005; Loder, 2005; Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004; St. John & Cadray, 2004). According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) when understanding how Black women show care for their students, it is critical that we contextualize their thoughts and actions within their particular cultural and historical legacies. Othermothering grew out of the Black feminist movement and as Beaufoeuf-Lafontant (2002) posits it is derived from Alice Walker's (1983) term Womanist and is used generally to represent the cultural, historical, and political positionality of African-American women, a group that has experienced slavery, segregation, sexism, and classism for most of its history in the United States. Black female educators bring some of the same experiences that the students they teach bring to the classroom; therefore, they are able to understand the struggles that their students face.  Black women not only have a vested interest in changing dominant constructions, it is a lived reality that is not represented in mainstream feminism nor the dominate culture (Collins, 1991).

Exemplary African-American women teachers use the familiar and familial mother-child relationship as a guide for their interactions with students. As Kathe Jervis (1996) concludes in her article about an innovative public school:

> For such a promise of personalized schools to be fulfilled, faculties have to adopt

Carrie's [an African-American teacher's] attitude about children. She often says, "When I am in a quandary about how to handle a child, I think, 'What would I do if that child were my child?' and 'How would I want that child handled were my son or daughter in that situation?'" Parents have an urgency about their own children. We need to feel the same urgency when we teach other people's children. (p. 570)

It is because of that sense of empathy and care that Black female teachers in urban schools show toward their students that the researcher chose the theorectical framework of counter-storytelling and othermothering. The two theories intersect in such a way that they allow for a personal, and in depth framework from which to examine the participants and their teaching. It was the belief of the researcher that there was a counter-story that needed to be told by Black female teachers post Brown v. Board of Education who felt a sense of personal accountability for uplifting the people of their community.

## Summary

This chapter began by exploring the history of Gifted Education in American schools and the decision by experts in the field to disregard Black children from the discussion. Critical Race Theory was examined in greater detail and in particular the significance of CRT in education. Concomitantly, Critical Race Theory looks through the lens of race, gender, and socioeconomic status to expose that subtle and at times blatant racism which have allowed Whiteness as property to be a guiding factor that excludes Blacks and other minority groups (Harris, 1993). Courts across this country have heard cases about inequalities in housing, education, health care disparities, and most recently policies on gun laws targeted to prevent Black males from being killed at the hands of those assailants who rely on the Stand Your Ground Law.

Even with those instances of racism lies the fact that children in this country deserve the right to a quality education. In urban schools, there tends to be a large demographic of certain ethnic groups: Black and Hispanic. It is up to the teachers in these communities to provide safe and caring classrooms where children are allowed to grow. The role that these teachers (mostly women) play is critical to the academic development of the child.

**Chapter 3**

**Methodology**

This chapter discusses procedures that were used for the researcher's study. A rationale for the methodology used, identification of the participants and site selections are discussed. This chapter also discusses the coding process and the steps taken or decisions made by the researcher for the initial codes, as well as the significance of each of them as it pertains to this study. A detailed description of the way data was collected and the analysis process are also covered in this chapter as well.

**Introduction**

The current research sought to understand a topic that was of personal interest. However, by underpinning a study that could possibly evoke conversation regarding the perspectives of effective Black female educators who teach high achieving Black children, this could spark dialogue that would develop in teacher education programs in universities as well as in school districts that have a large population of Black children.

The purpose of this study was to examine the action steps that Black female educators take when implementing instruction in their classrooms for those students who are high achievers. More specifically this study can provide readers with personal narratives from Black female educators who have navigated through school district -mandated curriculum for all students in the regular education classroom, while teaching with rigor and high expectations for those high achieving Black students in their class. The use of counterstorytelling allowed Black female educators in this study to give their perceptions about those Black students in their classrooms that are academically successful.

## Research Question

The question that this researcher sought to answer was:

In school districts with a large Black student population and limited gifted education opportunities, what action steps do Black female educators take in order to address the needs of high achieving Black students in regular education classrooms?

The other sub-questions of interest were:

1.  How do Black female educators recognize high achieving students in their classrooms?

2.  What obstacles do Black female educators face when addressing the needs of the high achieving population?

3.  What support do Black female educators receive from building administrators and other support staff   when they have gifted students in their classroom?

4.  How does the ethic of care (othermothering) inform the type of instructional support Black female educators provide when teaching high achieving Black students?

**Research Design**

Qualitative research was selected over quantitative research for this study for several reasons. First, one strength in qualitative methods is that it allows the researcher to uncover the "whys" and "how" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5) of an issue or individual's experience. It allowed the researcher to deeply question why things may be and helps to uncover truths of an experience. Therefore, through the use of qualitative methods, the researcher was able to question how instruction is provided to high achieving students in a regular education classroom setting.

Another reason qualitative research was selected, is because it can be used to study small groups. For this study, the group consisted of 5 participants. A group of this size is less appropriate for quantitative research which looks at larger sample sizes and primarily looks at statistical data to answer research questions. Although quantitative research could have provided some analysis on gifted education, and students in schools with a large Black student population, it lacked in allowing the researcher to go in-depth on the topic through the use interviews and observations.

Merriam (2009) discusses six common methods used for conducting a research study. For the purpose of this study, basic qualitative research was used.  According to Merriam (2010), a basic qualitative study looks at the following:

(1) How people interpret their experiences

(2) How people construct their worlds

(3) What meaning people attribute to their experiences

In order for the researcher to capture the very essence of the perceptions Black female educators have about teaching high achieving Black students; it was beneficial to conduct a study that was based on the daily teaching practices of the classroom teaching. And in doing

so, the participants' reflections were based on the place of familiarity to both the teacher and the students. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (p.3).

Basic qualitative research has also been termed, generic qualitative. It is defined as being less guided by a specific and established set of philosophic assumptions, based in the various qualitative methodologies (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Therefore, generic qualitative research applies aspects of various qualitative methodologies. It lacks inclusive adherence to all components of a particular approach. This level of flexibility, in drawing from various approaches with less established sets of rules, made the generic qualitative approach most appropriate for this study.  This study incorporated the following:

1.  An Ethnographic Design, which seeks to gain knowledge of a lived experience by immersing into the culture of the group.

2.  Grounded Theory, which seeks to draw meaning from data collection.

3.   Critical Qualitative Design, which seeks to critique and evoke change.

By using components from each of the methodologies, this allowed the researcher to develop personalized interviews to address the research questions.

**Site Selection**

The study covered four school districts in a metropolitan area in the Midwest.  According to the regional chamber, this metropolitan area is the 19th largest in the United States with a population of 2.8 million. The metropolitan area includes a total of 15 counties. This area spans both sides of two rivers, with a footprint that extends into two states.  There are 165 different school districts in the metropolitan area; additionally there are more than 850 public schools. All districts are funded by local tax levies with varying assessment rates. Municipalities play a central role with the local tax bases of each school district funding new and existing educational programs and services, as well as providing maintenance and upkeep to the facilities. (Education, February 15, 2014).  The participants in this study currently work in high needs schools districts where the student body is more than 75% or more Black

**Selection of Participants**

The intent of this study was to use purposeful sampling. Gall, Borg, and Gall (2007) define this as the process of selecting cases that are likely to be "information rich" (p.178) with respect to the purposes of a qualitative study. It is also important to note that this study applied a nonprobability sampling strategy because participants were not selected by chance; as would be the case with random sampling. Merriam (2009) suggests that this is a method commonly used in qualitative research. Patton (2000) discusses homogenous sampling, as a type of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling consists of selecting information-rich cases in a strategic and purposeful manner. The specific type and amount of cases are dependent on the purpose of the study and resources. Homogenous sampling is a specific type of purposeful sampling, which provides a more focused sampling group and reduces variations. In addition, homogenous sampling simplifies the analysis process. Because this study targeted a specific group, the

homogenous sampling method was used.  According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) homogenous sampling is the opposite strategy of maximum variation sampling- which illustrates the range of variation in the phenomena to be studied. With homogenous sampling, its purpose is to select a sample of similar cases so that the particular group that the sample represents can be studied in depth. The primary sampling criterion included five Black female teachers in high need area school districts; all participants were regular education classroom teachers in grades K-6 grade.

Because this study looked at a broad range of school districts in the metropolitan area of the Midwest, the researcher limited the number of possible participants to include in this study. To achieve this, the researcher used snowball or chain sampling. According to Noy (2007) snowball sampling is arguably the most widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research in various disciplines across the social sciences. It is sometimes used as the main vehicle through which informants are accessed, or as an auxiliary mean, which assists researchers in enriching sampling clusters, and accessing new participants and social groups when other contact avenues have dried up. Merriam (2009) posits that snowball sampling "involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you established for participation in the study" (p. 79). As Atkinson and Flint (2001, p. 1) observe, it "lies somewhat at the margins of research practice." In addition, there is a wealth of related sampling terms and concepts, such as chain, referral, link-tracing, respondent-driven and purposive sampling, which further contribute to the lack of integration and coherence of snowball sampling (Bieranacki & Waldorf, 1981; Heckathorn, 1997; Patton, 1990; Spreen, 1992). By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). There are benefits to using snowball or chain sampling for a research study:

(1) The researcher is able to get the number of participants needed for the study.

(2) The researcher can direct the informants as to the identities and numbers of referents to whom they refer, and she or he may later decide who and how many of the potential informants will be contacted and to what degree they will contribute to the research (Noy, 2007).

(3) Positive information is supplied solely by the informants—a state which is captured in the term 'respondent driven' sampling (Heckathorn, 1997); it is the respondents who *drive* the sampling process onward.

Two Black female teachers from the researcher's district were invited to be a part of the study as well as a Black female teacher who works in another urban district. Once they accepted, each of the participants were asked to provide contact information for at least one other Black female educator who works in urban education at the elementary level and would be valuable to this study. Once the names of teachers were recommended, the teacher was contacted via email. At that time the researcher provided the specifics of the study and allowed the teachers the opportunity to ask questions for clarification and determine if they wished to participate in the study.  Finally, participants read and signed a consent form. The consent forms (See Appendix A and B) and interview protocols (See Appendix C and D) were part of an approved study by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) when she met with them for their individual interviews. The purpose of this study was reiterated to all participants.

**Study Participants**

**Ms. Derby**

The researcher and Ms. Derby have worked in the same school district for the last 18 years. Of those 18 years, they both worked in the same building for approximately six years prior to Ms. Derby moving to another school in the district that goes from grades four through six. Ms. Derby and the researcher talked periodically about her doctoral endeavors, so once the researcher received IRB approval as well as the graduate dean's approval to move forward with her research, she saw Ms. Derby at a faculty meeting and asked her if she would be interested in being a participant in her study. Ms. Derby agreed to the request and both the researcher and Ms. Derby planned a day and time that would be convenient for an individual interview to take place. Additionally, Ms. Derby was asked if she could recommend another Black female educator in her building who might be interested in participating in the study.  Ms. Derby provided the name of her grade level partner and stated that she believed her partner would be willing to share her experiences of working with high achieving Black students at the upper elementary level.

**Ms. Ellington**

Ms. Ellington, the youngest participant in her early 30's, was very eager to be a part of this study. In fact, when the researcher contacted her via email to ask her about participating in the study, Ms. Ellington responded immediately and agreed to participate. She also shared with the researcher that she was also a doctoral student at another university in the area. She discussed her research topic in the email and again stated that she would be happy to be a participant in the study. Coincidently, the researcher met Ms. Ellington through a member of her church. This church member also happens to have children who attend the school where Ms. Ellington

teaches. The researcher knew this parent was actively involved in her children's education and was also aware of the fact that one of her children was in the gifted program at her school. The researcher had been discussing her schooling at the university as well as the type of research she was interested in conducting. When the time came to seek participants for the study, the researcher's church member came to her mind when she thought about the way she would seek out participants using snowball sampling. Ms. Ellington is known around the community as an outstanding teacher and the parent emphasized the fact that she was a really good teacher. So once her church member provided her with Ms. Ellington's district email address, she was contacted her via email. An explanation of the type of study that the researcher was planning on conducting was explained in detail. Within hours, Ms. Ellington responded to the email and also provided her school and cell phone number as a point of contact as well. The researcher followed up with an email to determine a day and time that an interview could take place. Once that was in place, the next piece of data was collected.

**Ms. Paige**

   Just like Ms. Derby, the researcher and Ms. Paige started out working in the same building 18 years ago until she (Ms. Paige) moved to another building in the district that goes from grades four through six.   On the day Ms. Derby was asked to participate in the study, Ms. Paige was not present at the faculty meeting; therefore she was contacted via email the next day. The purpose of the study was explained in the email and Ms. Paige was asked to contact the researcher if she needed clarity about the research study. Within the same day, Ms. Paige replied via email accepting the researcher's request to participate. She was contacted again through email to set up a time and day that her individual interview could take place; she was also asked if she knew of a Black female educator in another district who might be willing to participate in the study. Ms.

Paige stated that she knew at least two teachers, but that they worked in a nearby unaccredited school district. The criteria of the study sought Black female educators who teach in predominately Black schools, the schools needed to be either provisionally accredited or fully accredited. Because the criterion was explained to Ms. Paige, she realized those two participants' would not be contacted.

**Dr. Tamm**

The researcher met Dr. Tamm at the local university where they were both doctoral students. They were enrolled in several courses and were also part of a small cohort of other doctoral students. Dr. Tamm was familiar with the researcher's study and had even given her a few articles on literature related to her research topic. Because the researcher knew that Dr. Tamm worked in a school district that fit her established criterion, she decided to call Dr. Tamm and ask her if she would be willing to participate in her study. Dr. Tamm agreed to participate and a convenient time and day for her interview was planned. The researcher also asked Dr. Tamm to provide her with the name of another Black female educator in her district who she thought would be interested in being a part of the study. A name and district email address was given. The researcher contacted the teacher whom Dr. Tamm recommended, but she did not receive a reply.

**Mrs. McCausland**

The researcher met Mrs. McCausland through another teacher who was unable to be a part of this study. When Mrs. McCausland was contacted via email to participate, she accepted the invitation. A day and time was agreed upon by both the researcher and the teacher for her audio recorded interview.

An introduction of the participants of this study was provided as well as a detailed description

of the way in which the researcher contacted each individual.  The participants' willingness to be

a part of this study and share the action steps they take when implementing instruction for high

achieving Black students in their regular classrooms was examined through interviews, analytical

memos written by the researcher, and instructional artifacts (See Appendix F and G) provided by

the participants.

## Data Collection

The data that was collected for this study consisted of three sources: (a) interviews, (b) a

focus group interview, and (c) analytical memos. These sources acted as a catalyst into

understanding the teaching philosophy, empathy of care, as well as the understanding and

commitment of enriching those students who are high achievers.

### Interviews

The primary research method that was used in this study was the in-depth interviews. According

to Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), interviews consist of oral questions asked by the interviewer and

oral responses by the research participants. The interviewer is largely in control of the response

situation scheduling with the participant a mutually agreeable time and place to carry out the

interview. The type of interview that the researcher chooses is critical in the data selection

process. It was audio recorded and later transcribed and analyzed by the researcher.

Merriam (2009) identified three types of interviews: (a) highly structured, (b) semi-

structured, and (c) unstructured.  With highly structured interviews, the questions and the order

in which they are asked are preplanned or predetermined ahead of time. The problem with this

type of interview is that it is too structured and it does not allow the researcher to access the

participants' point of view. For the purpose of this study, some aspects of highly structured interviews were used (See Appendix C and D).

Semi-structured interviews are less rigid and more open-ended in terms of the participants' responses. The questions in a semi-structured interview are more flexible because the questions are not predetermined. However; there is some structure to this type of interview since specific information is needed from all participants in the study; this is when the highly structured interview protocol will be used. The interview format was semi-structured and one interview of each of the participants lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, it was be audio recorded and later transcribed and analyzed.

The third type of interview is unstructured. Merriam (2009) states that researchers conduct unstructured interviews when they do not know enough about the phenomenon to ask relevant questions. Unlike the highly structured interviews, there are no predetermined set of questions, instead the researcher asks questions as he or she observes the participants in their natural setting. For the purpose of this study, asking unstructured questions provided opportunities to look for commonalities and differences among the tape recorded interview responses of the participants in this study. Follow up interviews were necessary and were conducted in person. After transcribing those interviews, any responses that needed clarity were followed through by telephone and email.

**Focus Groups**

Approximately one week after the last individual interview was conducted and transcribed*;* one focus group session was conducted with the participants of this study.  The focus group interview lasted approximately 1 hour. It was audio recorded and later transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. A copy was provided to the participant for member-checking (editing) purposes. According to Bender and Douglas (1994), a focus group is a qualitative research method used for eliciting descriptive data from population subgroups. When considering a focus group it is important that both the researcher and the participants are interested in the topic. The development of the focus group was used to understand the knowledge that Black female educators have about instructional strategies and practices that they have found most beneficial to those high achieving students in their classrooms over the years. The focus group also provided a means for those experts in the field to discuss some of the commonalities and limitations that they have encountered when implementing instruction to that group of children.

**Data Collection Sequence**

The data collection process consisted of four phases:

Phase I. After the researcher received both IRB and the graduate dean's approval, she invited two Black female educators who work in the same school district as the researcher as well as one Black female teacher who works in another urban district to be a part of her research study. Next, the researcher asked the volunteer participant to recommend someone else suitable for the study.

Phase II.  The researcher contacted the participants to discuss the purpose of the research study; she also obtained consent (See Appendix A and B), and scheduled an individual interview as well as a focus group interview.

Phase III. The researcher conducted individual interviews with the study participants.  Interviews were tape recorded and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview format (See Appendix C) was semi-structured and were conducted at a location chosen by the researcher and the participant. All participants were asked the same questions; however the order that the questions were asked varied.

Immediately after each interview was conducted, a write up took place to reflect on thoughts and perceptions observed during the interview. Each interview was transcribed and shared with the participant for verification and member checking.

Phase IV. The researcher conducted a focus group interview with the participants (Appendix D). The focus group interview was tape recorded and lasted approximately one hour. The group met in a conference room at the nearest branch of the County Library (a room was secured by the researcher). The group assembled consisted of classroom teachers who shared their teaching philosophies as well successes and obstacles that they have encountered when implementing instruction for high achieving Black children in their classrooms.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection included pertinent information gathered from individual interviews; focus group interviews, analytical memos, and the development of an audit trail; as well as other relevant artifacts were collected from the participants. Because the purpose of this study was to examine the ways that Black female educators implement instruction in their classrooms for those high achieving Black students, counter-storytelling as it relates to CRT in education was used as an analytical frame to examine and show the relationship between data collected during this study.

According to Merriam (2009), "data analysis is the process used to answer your research question(s)" (p. 176). For the individual and focus group interviews of this study, responses were transcribed into textual data and shared with the participants for member checking purposes so that the information each participant shared was not misinterpreted or taken out of context. The use of open coding allowed themes and categories to emerge in the beginning stages of this study. One way this was done was through the use of constant comparative analysis.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed the constant comparative analysis strategy to be used as part of Grounded Theory. The idea is to take one piece of data and compare it with other data, similar or different, in order to develop a concept about the relationship between pieces of collected information. The researcher of this compared and analyzed data from individual and focus group interviews and observations. By looking for similarities and differences in the data collected from the Black female educators of this study, the researcher developed themes and categories that emerged.

Merriam (2009) posits that a researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or documents makes a comparison then develops tentative categories. The primary and secondary questions from this study were the guiding factors for developing themes and categories focused around the ways that Black female educators implement instruction for high achieving Black students in their classrooms; as well as the barriers they encounter when trying to meet the needs of this group of children. Throughout the data analysis process, memos (i.e. written self-reflections) were used to captivate the researcher's thoughts and insights of each phase of the research study.

The researcher used Wordle as a research tool. The purpose of Wordle was to develop an illustration that highlights the frequency of specific words repeated by the participants during their individual and focus group interviews. Although this process was a bit tedious, it was used in addition to the properties and dimensions associated with the analysis of Grounded Theory. Incorporating the participants Wordle examples also provided a more efficient visualization of specific words and phrases that were associated with each category and subcategory. These words and phrases ultimately contributed to the categories that emerged from the coding process (See Appendix F). The coding process brought four categories into fruition and they are explained in greater detail in chapters four and five of this study.

### The Coding Process

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), open coding is the process of analysis by which concepts are identified in terms of their properties and dimensions. For data analysis, open coding was the first step in uncovering meaning within the interviews. During this study, participants were interviewed once individually. After their interview was coded and transcribed, it was sent to them via email for member checking purposes. The same process was followed for the focus group interview as well. The focus group interview was conducted approximately three weeks after the final individual interview and coding process took place.

Once the participants reviewed the individual and focus group transcripts, they provided feedback simply letting the researcher know that their responses were accurate and no changes or corrections needed to be made. The participant's feedback allowed the researcher to continue on with the process of developing initial codes. Strauss and Corbin (1998) note that through open coding, the data is deduced, closely examined, and comparative analysis of similarities and

differences occur. This begins the more initial development of abstract concepts and termed categories. During open coding, the researcher worked to identify key words and phrases that reoccurred within the data. Those key words and phrases were grouped and provided the preliminary categories and subcategories. Additionally, as part of the open coding process, the researcher sought to use microscopic examination of data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This microscopic examination included line by line analysis. Following the researchers coding of the six interviews as well as her analytic memos, she reviewed the data; this was done in order to substantiate, cross check the data, and compare. Therefore, the next step included terming the categories which emerged from the data (See Table 3 of Chapter Four).

**Analytical Memos**

Analytical memos are also a key piece of information that helps a researcher begin to develop categories that are based on the data collected during interviews and, or observations. As researchers write a separate memo to themselves, they begin to capture their reflections, tentative themes, hunches, and ideas about things to pursue as the study begins to unfold (Merriam, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the researcher used coding to assign a designated place for various aspects of the data that was collected during each interview. This was be critical during this study since it allowed the researcher to access data as needed in both the analysis and the write-up of her findings. All data was stored on a flash drive that remained in the researcher's possession at all times. Notes were kept in a locked file to guard against losing data. At the culmination of this study, tape recorded interviews will be deleted and the researchers notes will be shredded in a paper processing machine at the home of the researcher.

**Audit Trail**

An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout inquiry (Merriam, 2009). Audit trails are used in qualitative research for the purpose of documenting the materials and procedures used in each phase of the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Not only was an audit trail developed to provide a detailed explanation of each phase in the data collection process in this study, it was also used to show the decisions that the researcher made when choosing to categorize themes as they developed after the interview process of each participant. The researcher wrote her reflections, questions, and the decisions she made as they relate to problems, issues, or ideas that she encountered in the data collecting process. This report was included in Chapter four under the subheading *identifying categories*. The audit trail has significant implications since it also acted as a guide for future researchers who wish to replicate a study similar to this one on high achieving Black children in urban schools.

**Triangulation**

To solidify the findings in case studies, researchers use triangulation; which is defined as the use of multiple data collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories as corroborative evidence for the validity of qualitative research (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2007). Triangulation methods such as interviews and field notes provided insights about similar events that emerged in this study.

For the purpose of this study individual interviews, focus group interviews, and analytical memos were compared in order to look for commonalities in the data that is relevant to the phenomenon under study.

**Member Checks**

Member checks are one of the most important components in a research study. According to Merriam (2009), member checks ensure internal validity or credibility. Member checks also rule out the chances of the researcher misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do; while identifying any biases or misunderstandings that the researcher has during an interview. Triangulation, member checks, long-term observations, peer examinations, conducting collaborative research, and clarifying the researcher's bias provide for maximum reliability and trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998). For the purpose of this study, individual interviews, a focus group interview, and artifacts provided by participants of this study were compared in order to look for commonalities in the data that is relevant to the phenomenon under study.

<div align="center">

**Delimitations and Limitations**

</div>

**Delimitations**

The delimiting factor of this study was the time period. The study began during the summer 2014 semester. The other delimitation is that this study included five Black female educators from elementary schools in the metropolitan area of the Midwest; therefore the views of the participants regarding high achieving Black students may not represent the views of their school districts.

Another delimitation was the fact that this study looked only at the perspective of Black female educators; therefore the views shared in this study are generalized to the participants. It is also important to note that this study examined the perspective of Black female educators and not that of Black male educators who may have a different perspective about high achieving Black students in their classrooms.

**Limitations**

Interview time was a limitation due to the fact that interviews were conducted beyond school hours and school days.  The next limitation involved the availability of participants; therefore interviews and the focus group were only conducted at a time convenient to the participants. Finally honesty included the participants being truthful about their responses to questions asked since this study did not consist of direct classroom observations.

<div align="center">

**Researcher's Position**

</div>

As a teacher, the researcher realized that she was an insider in the world of teaching young people. As a doctoral student, her role was to step away from the title of teacher and take on that of a researcher seeking to gain insight into instructional strategies that Black female educators use when teaching high achieving Black children in their classroom. One of the assumptions that the researcher had was Black female educators who participated in this study were teachers who implement instructional strategies for high achieving Black students in their classrooms as she has done during her years of teaching.

Having taught in the same school district for 18 consecutive years and having witnessed so many personnel and curriculum changes; particularly the dismantling of the gifted program in that district in 1999; it took the researcher back to 2007-2008 school year when a gifted Black student was in her classroom and there was no enrichment program, no special services, and no testing done to provide this child with the support that he needed. As the child's teacher, the researcher was left with the challenge of providing activities that were rigorous yet age appropriate for this high achieving student. What the researcher learned at the end of that school year, was that not only was the child being challenged, but the researcher was also able to learn

more about what worked for this child and what it took to ensure that he was getting the type of

education that he deserved. That year the researcher also found it rewarding when some of the

other students who were high achievers, were also able to keep up with the instruction that was

provided to this child and as a result, each one of those students entered third grade reading and

working on math problems above grade level. This is what makes the researcher so very

passionate about the research study that she embarked upon. The researcher wanted to learn

more about the instructional strategies that Black female educators use in their classrooms for

populations of high achieving Black children. It was also intriguing to develop a deeper

understanding of the role that othermothering and counterstorytelling played when instructing

this population of students.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the research methodology used to conduct this study. It was

determined that a basic qualitative study was the most applicable method because of the level

of flexibility,  and the ability to draw from various approaches with less established sets of

rules.  By using components from the methodologies of ethnography, the phenomenological

design, and the critical qualitative design, this allowed the researcher to develop personalized

interviews to address the research questions that focus around Black female educator's

perspectives on teaching high achieving Black children in the metropolitan area of the

Midwest.

To achieve this analysis, a causal comparative method was conducted through focus

groups, individual interviews, and the collection of apposite documents that relate to the study.

The data was then be transcribed for accuracy. Coding and categories were beneficial as

themes emerged through this process which ultimately added to the validity of the study. It was

also important that member checking with the participants as well as peer review aide in

adding to the validity and reliability of this study.

**Chapter Four**

**Participant and District Demographics**

According to Hebert (2011), students who are high academic achievers possess an internal motivation that enables them to remain focused on reaching their goals. Because of this intrinsic motivation, it is imperative that teachers become the facilitators of learning rather than instructors who orchestrate every move made by students (Tomlinson, 1999). This is an especially important thing to consider when working with high achieving Black students in urban elementary schools.

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to examine the ways that Black female educators implement instruction in their classrooms for those Black students who are high achievers. In order to accomplish this task, the chapter is organized in terms of the specific overarching research question: In school districts with a large Black student population and limited gifted education opportunities, what action steps do Black female educators take in order to address the needs of the high achieving Black students in regular education classrooms? To answer this question, the researcher documented the perspectives of those educators' who are responsible for educating this group of learners on a daily basis. By giving this group of Black female educators a platform to share their personal stories, they reveal the successes as well as the barriers that they have faced when working with that population of students in the regular education classroom.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In section one; each participant's educational journey is shared through their narrative. Section two provides a detailed description of the participating school districts as well as the demographic background of each district. Finally, section three provides a summary of the chapter.

**Teacher Demographics**

For this study the researcher interviewed five Black female educators who teach in school districts with a 75% or higher Black student population. The names of each participant was introduced in Chapter 3 as the researcher provided details of how she used snowball or chain sampling to contact them for her study.   This chapter will go even further by providing more background information about each of the participants, their educational levels, and their years of service in the field of education. Although the researcher audio recorded each participant's background information, it was not used as part of the data analysis of this study. Instead, participant background information was provided as a means of introducing each individual who made a contribution to this research study.  Further, it is important to note that in order to maintain privacy and anonymity; pseudonyms were given rather than the teachers' and districts real names.

The participants of this study are all Black female educators who have spent their entire teaching careers working in predominately Black school districts. As seen in Table 1 below, the participant's background information is provided with respect to their names, their age, and their highest degree earned.

TABLE 1

*Participant's Personal Background Information*

| Teacher | Age | Educational Level |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ms. Derby | 50+ | Master's Degree; Math Education |
| Ms. Ellington | 32 | Master's Degree; Elementary Education |
| Ms. Paige | 50+ | Master's Degree; Social Studies Education |
| Dr. Tamm | 40+ | Doctor of Philosophy; Educational Leadership and Policy Studies |
| Mrs. McCausland | 50+ | Master's Degree; Social Studies Education |

Three of the participants are 50 and older. Table 1 also shows that all of the participants have earned at least one Master's Degree in education, while one of the participants holds a Ph.D. in Education.

TABLE 2

*Participants' Employment Information*

| Teacher | District | Current Grade | Years in District | Years in Other Districts | Years of Service in Predominately Black Schools |
|---------|----------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Ms. Derby | Rose Hill | 6th | 19 | 4 | 23 |
| Ms. Ellington | N. Marion | 3rd | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| Ms. Paige | Rose Hill | 6th | 19 | 0 | 19 |
| Dr. Tamm | Monroe | 1st | 1 | 15 | 16 |
| Mrs. McCausland | LaFontaine | 4th | 10 | 11 | 21 |

Table 2 shows that four of the five participants have taught in other predominately Black school districts prior to the one where they are currently employed. Only one participant has taught in the same district her entire teaching career. Two of the participants work as 6th grade teachers in the same school district. The participants' grade level assignments range from first to sixth grade. Finally, all of the participants have been in education for more than five years. In the next few sections are additional details about each of the participants.

**Ms. Derby**

When you first meet Ms. Derby, you cannot help but feel a genuine sense of warmth in her welcoming smile. Ms. Derby- a tall Black woman in her mid 50's was busy in her classroom making sure her students desks where lined up perfectly in small groups the day that her interview took place. When the researcher arrived in her classroom, she looked up briefly when her name was called and said "Hey there, how you doing? Come right on in. I'm just getting these desks the way I want them." As the researcher began recording, she had Ms. Derby provide her with some background information as it relates to her educational background and experience:

> I've been teaching for a total of 23 years. After I got my Bachelor of Science Degree in Education, I taught at a Montessori school for four years. I liked teaching there and I was an eighth grade teacher. At that time, I taught all subject areas, but for some reason, I've always loved math. So during probably my second or third year at the school, I decided to go back to school and pursue my Master's Degree in Math Education. After my fourth year at the Montessori school, I began working here in the [Rose Hill School District]. I've taught 5th and 6th grades for the last 19 years. I like the big kids…I can't deal with them lil babies honey (laughs). For the last…I'd say about 17 years, I've taught 6th grade. My grade level departmentalizes, so I am the math teacher for the 6th grade.

**Ms. Ellington**

When the researcher arrived at Ms. Ellington's school, classes had ended for the day and there was only one other car on the lot.  She walked up to the front of the school and rang the buzzer to gain entry into the school; she rang it a couple more times before a young Black boy who looked to be about 7 or 8 walked passed the door, went down a hall, then came back and opened the door. When he let me in he said "hi, my mom is in her office and she told me to let you in". Ms. Ellington was working as an administrator during the summer session, but provided a great depth of information about her role as a classroom teacher during the regular school year. Ms. Ellington, a young vibrant teacher, was sitting behind a desk, but once the researcher entered the office, she immediately stood and extended her hand. "Hello, I'm Ms. Ellington, so nice to meet you". A few pleasantries were exchanged as the researcher was getting her questions from her folder and setting the audio recorder on the table next to Ms. Ellington's desk.

As the researcher reiterated the purpose of her study, the two women also talked about their pride in teaching in their respective school districts and what a positive impact they have been able to contribute to the teaching community. It was evident from their conversation that Ms. Ellington truly enjoys what she does and that passion for teaching came through as she talked about her educational journey as well:

> Growing up, I had two sisters and our mom worked hard. Although we grew up
>
> on welfare, I didn't let that hinder me from following my dreams. Me and my
>
> sisters made a pact all those years ago that we would make something of
>
> ourselves to make life better for our children. I always did well in school and it
>
> was just my dream to become a teacher. It was because of that determination
>
> that I earned  my Bachelor of Science, Master's Degree, and now I am pursuing

my ED. d. in Education. When I first started teaching, I taught at a gender- based

charter school. I had a class of all 6th grade girls…now you would think girls

wouldn't be as challenging as boys…but oh no…those little girls were a hot

mess!...defiant, disrespectful, bad attitudes…just..no…no mam. Mind you this

was my first year of teaching, so I'm like, am I in the right profession? I guess I

just didn't like the whole charter school idea…it just wasn't for me. So the next

year I landed a job teaching here in North Marion School District. I've been her for

the last 7 years.  I've taught 5th grade and for the past 4 years, I've been a 3rd

grade teacher.

**Ms. Paige**

Out of all the participants in this study, Ms. Paige was the most soft spoken. On the afternoon

of her interview, she was sitting at her desk on the computer. She was very welcoming and

immediately stopped working at her computer so that her audio recorded interview could begin.

Ms. Paige talked about her teaching journey by describing her job placement as "stable":

I've been in the [Rose Hill School District] my entire teaching career. Although I started

my career  in the classroom late in life, I've enjoyed every minute of it. I taught 3rd grade

for about 2 years, then I taught 4th grade for 13 years. We departmentalize so I was the

Social Studies/Science teacher. During that time, I earned my Masters in Social Studies

Education. When one of the 6th grade teachers retired about 4 years ago, I took her

position; so I'm currently the 6th grade Communication Arts teacher.

**Dr. Tamm**

Intuitive and insightful, Dr. Tamm recently earned her doctorate degree in education, although she admitted that being hooded was a proud moment that seemed to pass by ever so quickly.

> When my advisor hooded me, it was such a surreal moment. But once I stepped off the stage, it was like…okay…that's it?...All the excitement and anticipation of graduating was over.

Dr. Tamm shared her teaching journey by discussing the many positions she has held in two school districts.

> I've been an educator for the last 16 years and I've always worked in districts that have a predominately Black student population. In the district that I worked in prior to coming to [Monroe], I was a reading specialist. I also taught 3rd, 5th, and 6th grade. I have been an elementary school reading coach, a middle school reading coach, and also a 4th grade teacher. It was very stressful during my final year in the district because I was getting closer to earning my doctorate degree and it seemed like so many administrative changes were taking place throughout the district. I was seeking a job opportunity elsewhere, so after lots of prayer, I received a phone call from the principal of an elementary school in the Monroe School District to work as a first grade teacher…I was ecstatic to take that job! So last school year was actually my first year in the district.

**Mrs. McCausland**

When the researcher arrived at Mrs. McCausland's school, she was waiting by the front door of the building and was very welcoming.

As Mrs. McCausland began to speak it was obvious that she was not from the Mid-west; in fact, her accent was quite unique. As she began to share her educational journey, she stated that she was a displaced resident of New Orleans, Louisiana

> I actually worked in corporate America for about 17 years after graduating from
>
> Dillard University in New Orleans. I was a double major; I majored in both Business
>
> Administration and Elementary Education. My job in cooperate America allowed me
>
> the opportunity to make a great salary, however the downside to that was that I had to
>
> travel a lot and at that time, I had two small children. It was difficult being away from
>
> my boys, but by the grace of God, I was blessed to have such a supportive husband. We
>
> also had our immediate family who played an important role in assisting with the
>
> children.
>
> When my job relocated out of the country that was a blessing in disguise. For the first
>
> few months I just stayed at home and took care of my family, but it wasn't long before I
>
> got bored. One of my best friends was telling me about some substitute teaching
>
> positions available in her district. So I decided to apply. I got a call back almost
>
> instantly. My first assignment was at a middle school for a semester. OOH child….that
>
> was something there…the kids were too grown acting for me. I did not like the middle
>
> school assignment at all so I left before the middle of the semester. My next assignment
>
> was at an elementary school in a low- income community…I loved it! The staff was
>
> great as well as the students and parents. During that time I passed all for parts of the

teachers exam and earned my Master's Degree in elementary education in the process.

At the end of the school year, the principal offered me a job as a permanent 5<sup>th</sup> grade

teacher.

When the next school year started Katrina (hurricane) happened and my family and I

relocated to the mid-west because we have relatives here. Once we found a place to stay

and we got the boys in school, I applied for a job in several districts, however

LaFontaine called me back immediately once they found out I was a displaced teacher

from New Orleans. So I have been teaching 4<sup>th</sup> grade in the district since 2005. All I can

say is God has been with me throughout this journey.

The introduction of each of the participants provides a glimpse into their educational journey.

Each of them shared background information about their past experiences that have led them to

their current teaching positions.  In Critical Race Theory (CRT), the participant's shared

experiential knowledge is legitimate and key to understanding their lived experiences (Solorzano

& Yosso, 2001). Their experiences as women of color tell an intricate story that could easily be

overshadowed by majoritarian stories which are placed at the forefront of education. For each of

the participants, they have relied on their faith, family, and self-determination to guide them in

their teaching careers. Each of them shared the fact that they have always taught in

predominately Black schools; perhaps by choice, or because a teaching position became

available and they needed employment.  Loder (2005) contends that female Black women have a

strong identification with the Black community at large. But whatever the case may be each of

the participants of this study work in school districts that are representative of their culture.

**School District Demographics**

For this study, four school districts that have a 75% or higher Black student population were included. In terms of the racial make-up, these districts are located in neighborhoods that range from moderately diverse to neighborhoods that are predominately Black. When considering the socio-economic composition, the homes in the neighborhoods where these school districts are located range from privately owned to low-income rental housing. If one were to consider the change in the racial demographics of overtime, these districts have changed drastically in the last two decades.

As a life-long resident of this Midwest town, the researcher has seen the drastic changes in the racial makeup of the school communities that are included in this study. Apple (2006) found that "white flight" debilitates school districts and causes long-term effects on communities. Over the last two decades these school districts have seen an exodus of middle to upper class Whites who have chosen to move further west of these northern neighborhoods. Below, Table 2 shows the demographics of the participating school districts.

Below in Table 3, the names of the school districts included in this study are shown. Each of the districts are located in predominately Black neighborhoods; however the number of schools vary based on the size of the community. For example, one of the school districts has a total of 20 elementary schools, seven middle schools, and five high schools. Another district only has four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. In the larger school districts, the Black student population is smaller than in districts that are located in the smaller communities.

TABLE 3
*Number of Schools and Percentages of Black Students who attend Participating Districts*
_____

| District | Elementary schools | Middle Schools | High Schools | Black student population |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rose Hill | 4 | 2 | 1 | 97% |
| N. Marion | 6 | 2 | 2 | 83% |
| Monroe | 20 | 7 | 5 | 75% |
| LaFontaine | 19 | 4 | 4 | 80% |

_____

As seen in Table 3, the participating school districts' are listed. The numbers of schools at the elementary and secondary level show a wide range in terms of the number of schools in each of the communities. The percentage of the total number of Black students enrolled in each district is also shown; these percentages range from a 75% to 97% Black student population.

**Rose Hill School District**

Rose Hill School District is the smallest of the four districts in this study. It is located in the Northeast section of town. There are four elementary schools, two middle schools, and only one high school in the district. According to a recent data report from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2014), the average teacher to student ratio is 20:1.

In terms of the ethnic make- up of students in the district, 97% of the students are Black, 1% of the student population is Caucasian, 1% is Hispanic, and the other 0.1% is Asian or Indian. The homes surrounding the schools in this district are fairly small; although in some areas there

are larger ranch style brick homes. There are some small private owned businesses in the

neighborhood, and a big named grocery store chain as well as restaurants nearby (Retrieved

April 20, 2014, from www.stlregionalchamber.com).

With those businesses and restaurants, there is some revenue that comes to the community

which in turn benefits the district. In fact one of the participants talked about the renovations that

has taken place in her school building and other school buildings over the summer

> The new updates to the school entryway certainly make the school more
>
> appealing when you first walk in. Before the brick walls were dark and we couldn't
>
> hang up any banners on the wall, so it made the school look cold and unwelcoming.
>
> Now the new banner on the wall which reads "We are all winners" can be seen by
>
> children when they enter the building every single day. They can be reminded each
>
> day that they are winners not matter what struggles they face on the outside, when
>
> they come into this building, they can be confident to know that we believe in them
>
> (Ms. Derby, 6th grade teacher).

## North Marion School District

The schools in the North Marion school district have all had extreme renovations within the

last ten years. This district is centrally located and the community is the most diverse of the four

districts in this study. The Black student population in North Marion is 78%, the Caucasian

population is 17%, the Hispanic and Indian populations are 2%, respectively while the Asian

population is 3% .There are a total of six elementary schools, two junior high schools, and two

high schools. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2014) found

that the average teacher to student ratio in this district is 18:1.

The homes and apartments surrounding this district vary in sizes. There are a large number of grocery store chains, drug stores, restaurants, and parks in this community. Parts of the community appear trendier than others, yet the homes and apartments near the schools are well kept which makes the school community welcoming especially for those families new to the area. Again, in terms of diversity, North Marion has a large representation of a variety of ethnic groups who make up this community; interestingly, it was discovered that Ms. Ellington expressed the concerns she has about the lack of diversity within the district:

> I will say my first year when I entered the district, they had this big diversity workshop…even…um I didn't attend, but um, I'll just honestly say with that alone, they say it's diverse, but the schools are split up. The district really doesn't represent the diversity that it speaks of. The schools are split up…I mean you still have your white and black schools and um that's something that I've never really agreed with working in the district (Ms. Ellington, 3rd grade teacher).

**Monroe School District**

Located in the far north area of this Midwestern town, the Monroe School District is the largest of the four districts in the study. All of the schools in this district are fairly new or have been renovated within the last 10 years.  The homes surrounding most of the schools in this district are well maintained. Although there are businesses throughout this community and stores see a steady flow of costumers on a daily basis, some of the well-known department stores have closed and have been replaced by small chain retail stores. There are newly built homes in many areas of the community along with older structures that are also well kept.

In terms of the district demographics, there are a total of 25 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, and 5 high schools. The district has a 75% Black student population, and a 20.1% Caucasian student population. The Hispanic and Asian populations are both 2%, while the Indian student population is 0.1%. And according to the most recent data from the state's Department of Education, the average teacher-student ratio is 18:1.

**LaFontaine School District**

This district is the second largest of the four in this study. Located in the northeast area of town, LaFontaine has a total of 19 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 4 high schools. The district has an 80% Black student population and a 16% Caucasian student population. The percentage of Hispanic students in 3% while the percentage of Asian students is 0.8%, followed by the Indian student population which is 0.2%. The teacher to student ratio is 17:1.

LaFontaine spans into another neighboring community and many of the homes surrounding this district are older. There are some newly well-known businesses in this community, yet the majority of them are small privately owned stores. Driving around the district and looking at the schools, it is apparent that each building is taken care of in terms of outside maintenance; although none of the schools appear to have undergone any upgrades with regards to outside renovations. Mrs. McCausland spoke of her school while walking to her classroom with the researcher:

> The schools in this district are in a nice community that just gives you a small town feel you know?...In some ways it reminds me of where I grew up down south…everybody knows each other and everybody is like family (Mrs. McCausland, 4th grade teacher)

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the participants as well as the demographics of their respective school districts. In this chapter, the participants reflected on their educational journey and shared their years of experience working in predominately Black schools. This chapter also highlighted the demographics of each school district by discussing the infrastructure of the communities where these school districts are located. The participating school districts in this study are in communities that range from racially diverse neighborhoods to predominately Black neighborhoods. A description of the school districts demographics includes a breakdown of the racial make-up of the districts as well as their rank in terms of the number of schools that serve the children of the communities. The next chapter will provide an analysis of the data collected during the individual and focus group interview of the participants.

**Chapter 5**

**Analysis and Discussion**

**Introduction**

This chapter analyzes and discusses the primary themes that the researcher discovered in the five individual interviews of the participants, the analytic memos, as well as the focus group interview. Data were transcribed and coded using the open coding approach. Therefore, this chapter has been divided into two sections. Section one includes the analysis section of the categories that emerged from the codes during participant and focus group interviews; while section two provides a summary of the chapter.

**Identifying categories**

Specific concepts that emerged from the data included: Curriculum, Stigmas, Personal Connections, and Above Average Abilities. These basic concepts led to the development of four preliminary categories: (1) Instructional Planning, (2) Restrictions, (3) Cultural Relationship, and (4) Student Learning Styles.

The next step included using axial coding to relate categories to subcategories. As seen in Table 3, these categories were a reflection of what the researcher identified in the data collected. According to Merriam (2009) "Categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research. In effect, categories are the answers to your research question(s)" (p.185).  It was determined that Instructional Techniques was derived from the subcategories (a) curriculum and (b) data tracking since both are deeply rooted in the teaching and learning process. Initially the researcher considered naming her second category Adverse Obstacles based on the codes identified during

the coding process. However, it was determined that Restrictions would be a more feasible name because it looked at specific instructional limitations that impede the teaching and learning process in the classroom, whereas the category Adverse Obstacles would look at environmental factors that may affect learning (i.e. homelessness, emotional or physical abuse, etc.). The category of Cultural Relationships was derived from the cultural relationship that the participants shared with their students. However as the participants discussed their own personal journey, they reflected on those Black female educators who impacted their lives positively, and contributed greatly to the way they teach students in their own classrooms. Therefore Cultural Connections was derived from the subcategories (a) personal experience and (b) othermothering in the classroom. After further review of the coded transcripts, the researcher noticed the similarities between Cultural Connections and the participants daily classroom practices; therefore, a fifth category which was tentatively called Teaching Philosophy and the subcategories (a) teaching philosophy and  (b) beliefs about high achieving students  were eliminated. During the interviews, the participants provided their own definition to describe high achieving students. Surprisingly, they also identified differences in abilities among high achievers and gifted students. Based on this finding, the researcher decided to name her fourth category Learning Styles as opposed to her initial category tentatively named Above Average Abilities. Upon final review of the final categories, it appeared that the initial key words and concepts fit appropriately; therefore this reaffirmed through the analysis that the appropriate categories were defined.

Table 4 shows the categories and subcategories that emerged through the coding process. The category labeled *Restrictions* includes three subcategories that show the types of limitations associated with that category. *Student Learning Styles* includes one subcategory that examines how the participants identify high achievers in their classrooms. Both *Instructional Planning* and *Cultural Relationships* have two subcategories.

TABLE 4
*Categories and Subcategories*

| Categories | Subcategories |
| --- | --- |
| Instructional Planning | Curriculum |
|  | Data Tracking |
|  |  |
| Restrictions | Instructional Materials |
|  | Administrative Support |
|  | Professional Development Opportunities |
|  |  |
| Cultural Relationships | Personal Experience |
|  | Othermothering |
|  |  |
| Student Learning Styles | Identifying those at the Top of the Class |

**Instructional Planning**

The participants discussed how important planning is when designing lesson plans for their students. Two of the most important inquiries of this study were to examine the ways in which teachers implement instruction for those high achieving students in their classrooms as well as identify the types of instructional strategies that they use in their classrooms. So having this group of Black females share their teaching practices provides some insight into how they plan lessons that address the needs of their highest achievers.

**Curriculum**

According to Tomlinson (2003), instruction is the most critical piece of the learning process. That is why it is imperative that teachers plan lessons that will engage students while allowing them to take ownership of their learning. The primary focus of this study was to allow Black female educators the opportunity to share their stories of how they address the needs of the high achieving Black students in their classrooms on a daily basis. The participants provided further explanation into the type of instruction necessary in order for those high achievers in their classrooms to be successful.

> I think that an enrichment student needs to be challenged more. I feel like even
> in my class alone I had one student in particular who was just always finished with her
> work. So you have to have something in place for those particular kids and if you
> don't I feel like they become a problem. So um, knowing that I saw that in the first
> week of  school, I'm like you know what, I have to put something else in place for her.
> So just knowing that for early finishers this is what you do next. And then looking into
> the curriculum and making sure that you have those extended activities; because I

know for  this district we've actually adopted a lot of the Common Core Curriculum

and that's really advanced. It's so above where our kids are its scary. But I know even

for my enrichment kids they struggled with a lot of the Common Core material that I

introduced this particular school year. So I have to be honest, I'm a little nervous with

how that's going to look next year. I know I look for components in the curriculum to

take it up  a step. So their all doing the same thing but at different levels, so I think

that's so important when you're planning your lessons to just kind of have those

students in mind. Because you know they're going to get finished…what more can

they do? So that's always an extension to what I'm doing each day. (Ellington, 25-

40).

As Mrs. McCausland plans her lessons, she is also aware of the important fact that her lessons

for her high achievers are also based on her direct observation of that group of students:

Well…I would say that good teaching and observation is essential so that

the needs of every learner is met. For the high achiever it's so important for me

to make sure that I challenge them. As I plan my lessons, I look for components in the

curriculum that are geared specifically towards the high achiever. Those lessons

typically delve into critical thinking skills. I have found that the science and math

lessons especially give those students a chance to analyze provided information as well

as challenge text book hypothesis by looking for other ways to solve a problem or

phenomena. The average students and lower achievers need more guided and direct

instruction from me, but my high achievers can work indirectly with me and still do

well in class. (McCausland, 24-33)… I try to differentiate instruction so it's

challenging and then I use a variety of  instructional strategies that address the diverse

students. (McCausland, Focus Group, 100-101).

In Ms. Ellington and Mrs. McCausland's classrooms, they plan their lessons with the high achieving students in mind. Both women look for components in the curriculum that allows them to plan lessons that challenge this group of students. On the one hand, Ms. Ellington looks ahead as though she uses her lesson plans as a road map or guide; always having those extensions of a specific lesson available for those early finishers which allows them to think analytically. Mrs. McCausland on the other hand, plans lessons based on her direct observation of students. She also uses the opportunity to use math and science lessons as a way of allowing those high achievers to challenge or question a formula by looking at other ways to solve problems as opposed to settling with theory based solely on textbook phenomena.

In a book made popular among professionals, *Twice as Less: Black English and the Performance of Black students in Mathematics and Science*, Orr (1987) argues that the performance of African-American students in mathematics and science is crippled by the use of "Black English". However, Jones (1990) refutes that theory by challenging Orr's understanding of "Black Language" as well as her understanding of skill in teaching.

> Concepts in mathematics and science can be communicated and explained with many tools: the written or spoken work, pictures, diagrams, special symbols, manipulative materials, or a combination of these. If a student fails to understand a mathematical concept, the first place to look for the reason is in the teacher's use of communication.( p.84)

Because both women spend time planning meaningful lessons that will address the needs of every learner, they are fully aware that children come to their classrooms with diverse

understanding or familiarity of concepts that will be presented to them. However, when considering those at the top of the class, Ms. Ellington and Mrs. McCausland use components of curriculum to look for lessons that provide meaningful enrichment for their high achieving students.

Coincidently, researchers have paid attention to inappropriate academic programming and have noted that a mismatch between instructional approaches and the learning styles of gifted students exacerbates underachievement if students are not provided with encouragement or viable ways of expressing their talents (Hebert, 2011).  Ms. Ellington expresses that notion so eloquently when she discussed the importance for educators to always make sure that they are "planning their lessons with those high achievers in mind". (Ms. Ellington, 39)

There are times when extended lessons include additional projects that allow students to transfer knowledge from one subject to the next. And more often than none, teachers who want to make sure they provide enrichment for those high achievers include those activities into their lesson for those students:

> I think that the high achieving student should be challenged. They should have more challenging activities that's going to keep them thinking, keep them on their toes. Um…(pause) things that they can not necessarily just do in the classroom but they can take it out and experience the things in life in general…something they can take back home. And I guess the difference with the regular ed (education) students, I guess they pretty much, you're kind of pushing them as well, but you're not necessarily giving them a big project per say where they can't handle it. (Paige, 17-23).

Dr. Tamm explained how technology is used in her classroom to challenge her high achieving first graders:

> So for enrichment…again we have the ipads, we have computer lab time, so
> they have those activities that they can participate in. And that differs from out and out
> classroom instruction because again I'm kind of teaching to that middle to low. So
> when they get on that ipad, I'm like "okay I want you to do a little research for me. I
> want you to find out about this and this or whatever the topic is and I want you to be an
> expert". So that gives them an opportunity to go and do some research, and then they
> have that opportunity to share out in the classroom because they *love* to talk about what
> they  know. So that's that focal point for them because it enriches them because they're
> like "hey I got an opportunity to search on the internet about this animal. So it pumps
> them up and it gives them that motivation that they need and it gives them that intrinsic
> because they able to share out. Because again it's not just the *teacher* telling and the
> *teacher* sharing, they have the opportunity to be the expert.  (Tamm, 95-106)

Ms. Paige and Dr. Tamm plan lessons that allow those high achievers to work on individual or group projects. Lessons that are done this way give those high achievers a chance to work in a way that keeps them interested in learning even if they are working alone. As stated in chapter 1, Dunn, Burke, and Whitely (2000) found that one of the problems that high achievers encounter in school is the fact that they become bored or irritated precisely because they are required to follow the same rules in the same way and in the same amount of time as everyone else; therefore, teaching identified gifted and talented students with the same curriculum and instructional methods as regular education students leads to apathy and disinterest in learning. Those variations of lessons in the classrooms of Ms. Paige and Dr. Tamm allows for a

culminating project that provides different levels of content and activities that will challenge all

students, including the high achiever.

Having an awareness of the culture of the children contributes greatly to their success in the

classroom, in fact, research and theory suggest that educators and counselors who understand

and address the needs of cultural styles of culturally diverse students into the curriculum promote

and enhance achievement among these students (Ford & Harris, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2002). In

Ms. Derby's classroom, she implements lessons that include her student's culture, as well as

their familiarity of background knowledge or experiences so that they can make those real world

connections with what they are being taught:

> I just try to engage the students in complex problem solving…um…exploring ideas and
>
> issues, and classroom activities that actually draw on the student's culture, their
>
> experience and knowledge. (Derby, Focus Group, 104-106)

According to Ladson-Billings (2010), CRT sees the school curriculum as a specific artifact

designed to maintain a White supremacist script (p. 29). However, Ms. Derby makes it her goal

to plan lessons in such a way that it draws upon her students' culture.  By going beyond the

school curriculum in order to incorporate her students' cultural experiences into the lessons, Ms.

Derby employs the womanist characteristic of political clarity. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002)

posits that Black female teachers see racism and other systemic injustices as simultaneously

social and educational problems; this being the case of the school curriculum that often times

leaves the stories of people of color out of its text or presents them in very miniscule places in

history. By including the student's cultural experiences into her lessons, Ms. Derby finds a way

to make the lessons relatable to her students. This is an important piece that educators often

times forget to include. When working with gifted and high achieving Black students, the

students' culture cannot be left out of the equation when planning instruction for this group of

students (Ford, Grantham, and Whiting, 2008).

Ms. Derby negates from the white supremacist script that CRT speaks of, to incorporate

lessons that keep her students actively engaged in the learning process because the lessons are

representative of their culture. This is why student engagement is so critical to learning. Along

those same lines is the value of student assessment.  Student assessments and data based on

assessment results are also an important educational tool to consider when making informed

decisions based upon the academic needs of those high achieving students.

### Data Tracking

One of the trends in education over the last decade has been the use of data collecting.

Classroom teachers track data on students based on their test scores on preliminary data collected

during the first few weeks of school, weekly assessments,  end of the unit assessments, and of

course Standardized Test results. This is done in order to guide instruction based on the

individual needs of the student as well as compare the progress of students within a school,

district, and or state. In fact when school administrators walk through a teacher's classroom and

jot down observational notes of what they see in the classroom, there is a section on the form that

asks if the teacher has a data wall up in the classroom as well as how the data is being tracked to

inform instruction. Mrs. McCausland discusses data in her classroom:

> My district has done a great job in providing PD geared toward data
>
> tracking and to use it to determine the type of instruction each student needs. For the
>
> high achiever, I taught them how to use student data sheets to track how well they

are learning specific learning goals set for the quarter. I also have a data wall in my

classroom. The data wall tracks students' success in math. When students reach or

surpass a determined goal set, we have a classroom celebration. The kids love that.

It is especially rewarding to hear them encourage their classmates who don't always

meet the learning goal at the end of the week or the end of the quarter.(McCausland,

 59-66)

The reasoning behind students tracking their own data has a great deal of benefits.  This

reasoning supports Fuchs and Fuchs (1986) who found that having students track their progress

using a rubric or scoring guide increases interactions between teachers and students. Both Mrs.

McCausland and Dr. Tamm found that when they provided their students with the opportunity to

track their own data, student achievement improved for all of the children not just the high

achievers in their classrooms.

Well they can look at their own data and say " hum…I need to do better, I need to

improve, what can I do?" So we want to start putting more of that on the students so

they can take ownership of what they need to do. ( Tamm, 66-68)

The participants believe in celebrating academic success, but they also find that encouraging

those students who do not always reach a set goal is also critically essential as well. The notion

that failure is not an option does not appear to exist in their classrooms and is evident when

celebrating the accomplishments of all students.

    When Mrs. McCausland and Dr. Tamm engaged in hands- on teaching and learning by first

modeling how to track data and providing immediate feedback, it allowed students to learn to

become more responsible for their own academic growth by setting personal goals.

Dr. Tamm explains her use of data sheets:

We do have data sheets where we put their information on. So it's color coded

and you can type in their numbers that type of thing. I also have in my classroom a data

wall so students are aware of where they are in relation to other people and where they

need to be in relationship to the district and building goal. So they have that, so one of

the new things that I'm going to put into place for my students this year is that they track

their own personal data. I think that they also need to be able to understand that this is

where I am, this is where I need to go; and then set goals in relationship to what their

data says. (Tamm, 52-59)

 In Ms. Ellington's district, she shared the type of data tracking that is done. She talked about

the frequency in which discussions often occur, she had this to share:

Yes we have progress monitoring all the time. And for my lower kids, it's more

consistent…like sometimes it's weekly, sometimes it's biweekly. For the high achiever,

we look at the data based on the Common Core Standards. So we look to see if a specific

strand… like in reading, the skill may be cause and effect relationships. We look to see

how students score on a unit pretest; which is really based on prior knowledge. Then we

we track data again during the post test (after the concept is taught). That's when we

look for trends…we do the same thing for the lower achievers. But for the high

achievers, we try to see what we can do to take the skill up to the next level where they

can be challenged. (Ellington, 113-120)

CRT challenges the idea that poor and minority students lack the intellectual ability to

complete rigorous assignments therefore they need remedial assignments that are based on a

series of basic recall. In Ms. Ellington's classroom, she looks for ways that she can challenge her

high achievers once they have reached mastery of specific concepts in reading by taking the

skills or concept up one or two grade levels above her student's current grade. And there are

those times when data collection is used to determine which students would benefit from work

above their current grade level. The use of formative or summative assessments provides those

indicators that are necessary for students who may need a more differentiated form of

instruction. Ms. Derby sees the benefits of challenging her students to excel 2 to 3 grades above

grade level. Her expectations are high and her confidence in her students show. The end result;

Ms. Derby's 6th graders are able to master targeted skills in core subject areas. Ms. Derby

explains it this way:

> Yes we always track that data. Some of the success that we've had was due to
>
> those students who were able to master 7th and 8th grade skills from a 6th grade
>
> perspective. We also challenge them from different avenues including math,
>
> reading, and language arts across the board, 2 to 3 grade levels ahead of where
>
> they're currently at. So depending on the skills and the background knowledge
>
> of my students, many of the math lessons are introduced on a 6th grade level and
>
> reinforced on a 7th grade level…for instance, equivalent fractions may be introduced
>
> from my 6th grade book. Next students are expected to apply those same skills on a
>
> 7th grade level using ratios and proportions; that's when the data is analyzed…it's
>
> analyzed from both instructional resources. (Derby, 13-22)

Ms. Paige also sees data as a means of tracking student progress over a predetermined period of

time. Because she is the Communication Arts teacher for the 6th grade at her school, she uses

data tracking to see how students are progressing through genres of writing:

> Sometimes I do track it (data) depending on what I'm looking for. I may write it down
>
> and see, okay by a study in so many months or whatever to see… like maybe writing for

example. If they're getting different parts…like we may do poetry, and I may talk about

certain parts of poetry and how you address it and things like that and they get it if they

make those connections. The high achiever might have a little bit more in depth of what

they say or kind of think outside of the box, and they bring those experiences to their

writing. (Paige, 42-50)

  Ms. Paige is passionate about planning her writing lessons in a way that causes those high

achievers in her classes to think "outside the box". It is important that her creative writers bring

their lived experiences as well as their imaginative ideas into the classroom. What she looks for

is the level of depth and detail those students add to their writing. What she looks for is how their

writing captivates listeners and whether or not their writing shows that they have fully

understood the objective of the lesson. Having a teacher like this who celebrates the creative

thinker allows her to develop lessons around genres such as poetry which allows those high

achievers to explore the quality of words and metaphors. In Ms. Paige's classroom, she

welcomes creativity and in fact she fosters that creativity through instructional activities for her

students.

The participants' explanation of how they plan lessons for their high achieving students,

as well as the way data is tracked for their students shows the importance that effective

instructional planning has for student success. A point to consider is the fact that the way these

teachers plan lessons and use data may not be any different from the way teachers in more

affluent school districts plan or discuss student data. However; what makes this group of

women's classroom experiences different from those in districts with a smaller Black student

population is the fact that they see the importance of challenging those high achievers in their

classrooms. In fact the word "challenge" was used over 18 times during the individual and focus

group interviews by all the participants. Each one of the participants saw the value of challenging those students who are at the top of their class therefore they planned instruction accordingly. This is certainly something that should be taken into consideration when negative labels are placed on districts that may be viewed as poorly performing simply because of its student population. Again the views of this group of Black female educators' do not necessarily reflect the views of all Black female educators; however, their views certainly provide insight into what has worked for high achievers in their classrooms.

Like many school districts that have faced budget cuts and the lack of funding, the school districts in this study have had its share of limitations. It is through the voices of these participants that their daily classroom accounts shed insight into the specific types of restrictions these educators and their students have had to endure in spite of these obstacles.

### Restrictions

Restrictions are those things that place limits on a desired goal.  Restrictions can limit a person from progressing from point A to point B. Similar to adverse obstacles-which also impede progress; restrictions in education may range from time management in terms of having time to teach an entire lesson with limited interruptions, to not having enough space in the class to accommodate the number of students assigned to that room. The participants of this study discussed some of the restrictions they have faced when working with their high achieving students.

**Instructional Materials**

It is not a secret that because of the economic challenges faced in this country in recent years that school districts have had to make some hard pressed decisions that have involved its staff members. Layoffs in districts due to budget cuts have also included the dismantling of high school sports programs, after school programs, educational resources have become sparse, and in many districts that have high percentages of minority students; gifted education/enrichment programs have been abolished.

Many of the districts that have been affected the most have been districts in rural and urban communities, as well as those suburban communities where a large number of minorities reside. Other concerns in schools that have large populations of Black and Hispanic students are the lack of support staff, overcrowded classrooms, and limited educational materials (i.e. textbooks, and other instructional aides). When considering those high achieving Black students whose teachers participated in this study, the researcher discovered that the overwhelming majority felt that one of the limitations in their classroom was the constant availability of materials to support their high achieving students. In fact, 4 of the 5 teachers cited that as a limitation, but it was not the only limitation.

> Challenges…being able to find enough material to challenge them on a daily basis. Making sure that you have enough assignments that are um…centered towards their progress versus the others that you may have in your classroom. (Derby, 8-10)

Ms. Derby's concern is finding enough materials to challenge her high achievers on a daily basis. She does not find that there is a lack of teaching materials for this group of learners, but her concern is that there are times when the materials are scarce and not always

readily available from day to day. The fortunate thing for school districts everywhere is the fact that administrators have been able to purchase technology for the classrooms and this allows teachers to "surf the web" for teaching resources. There are countless websites that provide free access and are geared specifically toward the gifted/high achiever.  One website that is free for gifted students of all ethnicities is www.kidsknowit.com. This website's mission is to provide the highest quality of educational activities, products, movies, music and games that challenge gifted learners.

   Again, most of those websites allow teachers to print out lessons so that high achievers are working on skills that are at their ability level. Ms. Paige uses the web in her classroom.

> Well sometimes we may not have materials that they can use so I plan my lessons
>
> for two weeks. When I do that, I plan a set day to stay after school so that I can look
>
> for lessons that support my high level students. Usually if I don't find anything that
>
> I want to use in our Reading Street program, I'll surf the web so that I can look for
>
> lessons that are aligned with the specific skill I'm teaching at the time. I do look for
>
> interactive lessons for those kids…lessons that involve that higher level of
>
> complexity that challenges them. (Paige, 25-31)

Critical race scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posit that students in schools need instructional materials to support their learning. However, districts with large populations of minority students are typically in poor low-income communities. Limited school funding from the local and state levels leaves these districts in dire need of necessary instructional materials to support the students who attend these schools.

   Yet for Ms. Paige, she felt the need to go online to look for supplemental materials that she could use with her high achievers. She also talked about spending time after school

looking for materials online as well as looking for student friendly websites that have lessons

that can be adapted for that group of students. Many educators are passionate about the big

ideas of their discipline and strive to learn all they can in the discipline to share with their

young protégés (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 345). Ms. Paige's willingness to take extra time after

school hours to adapt meaningful lessons for her high achievers shows how committed she is

to developing her expertise in this area even when she finds that the instructional materials

for her high achievers at her school are limited.

    Mrs. McCausland shared the same concern as both Ms. Derby and Ms. Paige in terms of

the limited instructional materials for her high achievers but she also shared an additional

restriction that challenges her daily classroom practice:

    Wow… the limitations of working with high achievers…(pause)…I guess

    would have to say the one that stands out as a top limitation would be having enough

    material that challenges this group throughout the year so that they do not become

    bored with class work. I would also have to say the class size and the number of low

    achievers in the classroom. For the past 3 years, I have had a large class size of

    anywhere from 25-30 students. So with that being said, a large number of them at

    least 1/3 of them came to me reading on a first grade level. So imagine trying to

    teach 4th grade work to students who haven't even mastered first grade reading

    skills. Needless to say, the majority of my time is spent working that group of

    struggling students. It frustrates me at times because I don't always feel like I get to

    work in depth with my higher achievers and I don't think it's fair to give them lots

    of busy work…to me that doesn't equate to being a gifted or high achieving student.

    So…yeah…those are two limitations that I can think of right off hand. (McCausland,

36-48)

For Mrs. McCausland, not only did she find the limited teaching materials in her building as a setback, she also discussed the large class size and the number of students who enter her classroom working below grade level.  Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, and Willms (2001) find that the number of students in the class has the potential to affect how much is learned. A large class size also affects how much time the teacher is able to focus on individual students and their specific needs rather than the group as a whole.

Mrs. McCausland admits that she finds it challenging to give her full time and attention to her high achievers because she has to make sure she is doing all she can to provide remediation to her lowest achievers who have been tested but did not qualify for an Individual Educational Plan also known as an IEP. This would allow those students who need individualized instruction at a remedial level to work in a smaller group setting with a teacher who specializes in this area.

Ms. Ellington shared similar views as Mrs. McCausland when discussing her restrictions in her classroom:

Um…limitations for working with high achievers…um I guess I would have to say they sometimes feel like they don't get all of my attention and that goes with that you know…I can't even think of the term but it's like fairness. Like every student thinks they get the equal amount of time, but you have to allow time for each student. So even with me for reading, my high readers, I only meet with them once a week. My low readers, they need me more so I see them four times a week. So they don't get the same amount of time, but it's fair because my low readers need me a little bit more. So I feel like that is an obvious limitation. Like I don't have as much contact with them because

I have students who are underperforming so much that they really do pull most of my

time. But I try not to let that get some of my students down so I feel like for me like I

have my schedule posted.

Because for me as a teacher, you move around so much and it's easy to forget; so I

have my times posted. Each student gets their schedule so they know when they meet

with me. So with my high achievers I try to make it something special; so they're a

book club instead of guided reading groups. So they know…they run their own group,

they're leaders, so I don't sit in with them. I'll check in, but I don't sit in. So I'll try to

give them more of a privilege because they don't get me as much, so I think that goes

over well. So I would have to say the availability that I have with them. (Ms. Ellington,

43-59).

In Ms. Ellington's class, she finds that it is challenging to meet with her high achievers daily

during reading instruction so she tries to compensate by allowing those students to be part of a

book club. The book club in her class allows that group to have more flexibility in their groups

although they have specific chapters and assignments that must be completed. Posting a schedule

of her days and times that she meets with her groups also gives those high achievers time to talk

among themselves about the types of questions they have for the teacher when she meets with

them. Ms. Ellington makes time for each reading group in her class as she confessed that her

posted schedule also keeps her on target so that she is addressing specific learning goals in

reading. According to Tomlinson (1999), educators work to become the facilitators of learning

rather than instructors who orchestrate every move made by students.

Book clubs in Ms. Ellington's class allows her to offer directions and provide advice for her high achievers that allow the students to become responsible for their own learning, even though she has some reservations about only being able to meet with her book club one day a week.

For Dr. Tamm, her restriction as a new teacher to her district last school year is one that has become quite common for teachers in districts across the country:

> I would say that as a new person, I did find that I was lacking resources that I needed and I guess the expectation was that I was suppose to go and spend personal funds to fill in that gap which at this particular time that was not possible. They (the district) have excellent electronics as far as ipads and computers and those types of things. But I don't think the materials were where they needed to be, but fortunately I had an administrator who was like "hey if you see something that you think would work with your students, use that". So we did have that option of bringing in some things you know, we weren't just bound and tied to the curriculum and the materials, and the programs that were in the district although there were some things that were mandated. (Tamm, 29-37)

Dr. Tamm found that there was a lack of resources needed to support her high achieving students; so much so that she felt the expectation from district administrators was to spend her own money to meet the needs of students in her class. This is certainly not uncommon. With limited funding, teachers in school districts have found themselves spending their own money buying necessary school supplies or teaching materials for their classrooms. In most districts, many of the teachers who spend their own money on supplies for their classrooms are never reimbursed although some districts do give teachers a stipend that for many teachers is not enough to pay for needed materials.

According to a recent survey by insurance firm Horace Mann (2013), 26 percent of the 814 teachers surveyed stated that they spent $400 of their own money on supplies; this is a 3 percent increase from 2011 in the number of teachers spending that much. The Federal Education Budget Project (2013) found that only 9 percent of the total K-12 education funds come from the federal government. So, this leaves classroom teachers in a dilemma of trying to improvise and fill in those gaps to make up for what is needed in the classroom.

Because of the support of her principal, Dr. Tamm and the other teachers in her building are able use supplemental materials that they already have in their possession which alleviates the idea of spending their own money. This allows the teachers in Dr. Tamm's building to continue to be able to pace instruction and stay on track with the academic direction of her school district. It is encouraging for teachers when they have principals who understand the importance of supporting their staff. After all, the school principal is also considered the instructional leader of the school.

**Administrative Support**

The support of school administrators as well as district administrators is extremely important to any school's success. Blasé and Blasé (2000) suggest that school administrators can show support of their teachers by asking for input in decisions that affect them. When asked about how often the conversation comes up between the building administrator and staff about ways to support the high achieving student population, Ms. Derby described the conversations as something that happens on a regular basis:

> Constantly, constantly everybody is a high achiever, everybody is…now whether
> you get them to that point of their highest momentum is between you and that student
> everybody we set the goal high for *all* of our students. We *want* all of them to be that

high achiever, and one high achiever's rate may differ from another high achievers

rate; everybody's not the same. What I may consider high achievement for one

student may not be high achievement for another. …um…I will say that my principal

does support the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers by making sure that the netbooks and the teacher

SMARTBOARD in the classroom are up to date. At grade level meetings, he always

encourages us to engage students in complex problem solving and student

exploration…*and*…he has really cool incentives/clubs for high achievers school wide

like the 100% club and the Student Government. (Derby, 28-38).

Ms. Derby states that the conversations about high achievers come up often during faculty and

weekly data team meetings. She also alluded to the fact that her grade levels expectations are that

all students succeed no matter their academic level. She acknowledges that one high achiever

may do extremely well in one subject area, but not find the same success in another. This is

important to know; especially when considering gifted students. According to the Davidson

Institute for Talent Development (2003), strategies that work for one group of gifted students

will not necessarily work for all gifted students.

Ms. Paige also stated that the discussion about ways to support high achievers comes up

regularly though she admits it is especially discussed when it is time to prepare for state

assessments.

   It comes up pretty regular…yeah pretty regular, but…I mean a lot of times in testing, um

preparing for testing things like that, it comes up pretty regular. (Paige, 4-5)

 Like Ms. Paige, Mrs. McCausland stated that the discussion about high achievers comes up

more often within the last school year than in the past. She explained her belief of why she feels

her building administrator is engaging in more conversation about this group of learners:

Um…that discussion has come up more often within the last year than

it had in the past. I think much of the discussion around the Common Core

Standards has forced administrators to see the importance of providing material

that's rigorous and challenging as a means to push all students-especially the

high achiever- beyond grade level expectations. (McCausland, 70-74)

In Dr. Tamm's district, she felt that the discussion about ways to address the high achieving

student population does not happen as often as it should. It is important to keep in mind that Dr.

Tamm is a first grade teacher, so her grade level is not required to take any annual state

assessment; this may explain why there is limited discussion about the high achieving student

population.

Um…I don't think it comes up as much as it should. I think most of the times

if it's addressed it's because they're talking about "gifted students"…it may be

addressed in that manner but..I don't think it's something that's addressed or comes

up as much as it should…so that's something that I need to make a mental note of

that we need to bring to the table when we're having grade level meetings or when

we're having staff meetings. So it's not something that's really discussed a lot. I think

the focus is mostly on PBIS which is the Positive Behavior Intervention Support so

we're looking at those types of things and data from that, but not necessarily how are

we moving kids along the continuum; especially those kids that are higher achieving..

not necessarily gifted but are higher achieving. So I think that is an area that we need

to brush up on. (Dr. Tamm, 109-119)

Ms. Ellington had a different perspective about the discussion of the high achieving student

population in her building. She described her frustrations with her grade level partners who use

data team meetings to share their frustrations with the building administrator about not having as many high achieving students in their classroom as she does:

> Okay…so this is the issue, with the high achieving population…and you're talking about the students who are part of the gifted and talented program in the district, they and I'm not sure if this school is the only one that does this but they offer parent request. So in my class I have a lot of students who are part of the gifted program. But it's not because the teachers are throwing them in my room, the parents are writing letters "I want my child in Ms. Ellington's room". So each year I have most of the high achieving students. Some teachers are not very happy about that, but it's like that through every grade. (Ellington, 119-124)

Ms. Ellington also discussed how she always feels that she has to justify the reason why she has such a large number of high achievers in her classroom every year.

> I'm offended because even if I had low kids, I'm still going to work hard and I feel like I proved with that with the kid that I had reading at a level three and moved him up. Some of the teachers think it's easier for me and I really don't agree because even with my high achievers, they're still making gains. There still some things and they're coming to me that they have no clue about, but when they leave they know. And even for me I feel like as a third grade teacher, yeah they're coming in high but third grade is completely different from second grade. And we have the state assessment to prepare for so I have to take it up a lot. So I don't know, sometimes I feel like even for me, I'm a little bit taken back because I can't help you know with the parents requesting me, because I think that's the biggest issue with our school as a whole with the high achievers because the parents pick…it's not like okay your kid will be here.

(Ellington, 130-140)

Ms. Ellington made no mention of the number of discipline problems she had in her classroom and based on her interview transcripts, it is apparent that she works extremely hard to prepare all of her students for academic success; therefore, disciplinary problems that persist in her classroom are handled almost immediately.

The participants discussed the type of support they receive from their building administrators when the conversation about addressing the high achieving population is presented. Ms. Derby, Mrs. McCausland, and Ms. Paige all felt that there has been more discussion about that group of learners, especially with the new set of standardized testing that challenges students to work sometimes two or three grade levels from where they are currently. Dr. Tamm felt that her building principal does not have as much conversation about addressing the needs of the high achievers in her building especially at the primary level; however there is discussion about the gifted students who are bused to another building once a week to receive individualized instruction from a teacher who specializes in gifted education.

Ms. Ellington described her grade level meetings as "venting sessions" where her grade level partners discuss their concerns about the number of high achieving students in her classroom and make it known to the building principal that they would like to have an equal amount of those students in their classrooms as well.

The participants definitely had different perspectives about the ways that their building administrator supports them and their effort to teach their high achieving students in their classrooms. Much of the support that the teachers receive appears to be limited in nature. Another factor that can also impact instruction for the high achieving population is a better understanding of teaching techniques and strategies that have worked for successful teachers of

gifted students. These types of presentations take place during professional development. Unfortunately, the cost for training and workshops can be very costly, especially for districts that are already operating on an extremely tight budget.

**Professional Development Opportunities**

In most districts, professional development is thought of almost exclusively in terms of formal education activities, such as courses or workshops (Miller, Lord, & Dorney, 1994). Although professional development is meant to give educators time to reflect, analyze, and refine their own professional practices, a 2013 report on professional development by the National School Boards Association Center for Public Education noted that most teachers are not given the kind of professional development that would help them.  The participants' experiences with professional development within their school and district varied.

> I am going to have to say *no*. The focus for this district over the past couple of years has been student engagement. So it's not really targeted to like a specific race, um it also was differentiated instruction, so I feel like with that, you are reaching all students but it never was anything specific. (Ellington, 13-16)

In Ms. Ellington's district, the professional development that her district offers has been focused around engaging all students in the learning process. She has attended professional development sessions that focus on differentiated instruction for all learners as well. There was no professional development specific to gifted Blacks in her district however.

In Ms. Derby and Ms. Paige's district, they also found that the professional development offered focused on topics other than high achieving Black students:

> Um right now they (PD committee) are offering several topics as it relates to the Common Core Standards for students in math and engagement…student engagement.

(Derby, 37-39).

Ms. Paige talked about her desire to attend a workshop or seminar that focuses around high

 achieving Black students:

  I haven't come across anything like that in this district. I would love to attend any

 workshop that touches on that group because it would be helpful for me as a classroom

  teacher. (Paige, 54-56)

Similar to professional development offered in Ms. Ellington's district, there is a focus on

student engagement; however, neither Ms. Derby nor Ms. Paige could recall Rose Hill School

District ever offering professional development that focused on enrichment for high achieving

Black students in a district that is 97 percent Black. Although Ms. Derby mentioned attending

professional development the focuses on the newly developed state assessment known as the

Common Core, there was no discussion about any specific group of learners.

Mrs. McCausland, on the other hand talked about the types of professional development

her district has offered in recent years that was closely related to addressing high achievers. In her

district there are monthly workshops offered on the weekends. Teachers who volunteer to attend are given

a monetary incentive.

> There are workshops monthly that we are offered and these
>
> workshops focus on student achievement as well as how to track data to look at
>
> student success. Um…I can't recall attending any workshops in my district that
>
> focus specifically on gifted African American students per say…
>
> I have attended a couple of workshops that focused on differentiated instruction,
>
> but it wasn't targeted specifically towards differentiated instruction for that
>
> group of learners. (McCausland, 16-21)

Both Mrs. McCausland and Ms. Ellington talked about attending professional development focused around differentiated instruction; however they stated that it was not targeted toward one specific group. Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) findings of CRT in education found that school districts that have large populations of minority students suffer poor reputations and low status. Because of these perceptions and limited funding, the districts in this study used its financial resources to provide professional development targeted toward the large percentage of students needing remediation. As a result, the participants were left to address the academic needs of their high achieving Black students without having the exposure to the types of instructional strategies necessary to challenge this group of learners.

The monthly professional development offered in Mrs. McCausland's school district focuses around student achievement and data. Like the other teachers, she has never attended a session that highlights ideas, strategies, or suggestions to support high achieving Black students, although she has attended a couple of workshops that focused on differentiated instruction. The restriction of the district offering only a couple workshops such as that is similar to the problems Tomlinson (2005) found when she conducted a case study of one middle school. The teachers in the case study felt they did not have enough training to properly implement differentiated instruction into their classroom. Coincidently, Ford (2012) reported professional development focused around gifted and high achieving students of diverse backgrounds was limited. She also found that if teachers did attend professional development that focused on that topic, there was no follow up and no liaison to communicate with when support is needed to work with that population of students.

In the Monroe School District where Dr. Tamm works, there is a building designed specifically for gifted students. On a selected day of the week, gifted students in grades K-5 are bused from their

school to the building where the gifted center is located. Dr. Tamm shared her perspective of the professional development opportunities offered for high achievers in her district.

> Basically this district does a lot of PD. One of the things their main focus for
> this year and last year is assessment literacy. So you're looking at different aspects
> of your teaching. You could be looking at how you're giving feedback to students,
> how you're incorporating students into the learning environment. Now as far as
> the gifted aspect…I personally have not seen anything that was geared to those
> students because we have a gifted center, so those teachers would probably have PD
> specific to what they're teaching. But they (gifted teachers) come into the
> classrooms and they come in and they do lessons especially at the beginning of the
> year because that's when they're testing for gifted students. But I haven't really
> seen any PD specifically for gifted students. But I think with the assessment literacy
> and the cultural competence, they're trying to encompass it in a broader spectrum.
> So we have ELL students, we have gifted students, we have low achieving students;
> so it's kind of a general thing, it's not anything specific to those students.
> (Dr. Tamm, 123-135)

Dr. Tamm's district has invested money in professional development that relates to assessment literacy for teachers. This is helpful because it allows teachers to learn more about the specifics of identifying students who are reading at various levels; this is especially important because the typical classroom has such a broad range of readers. Professional Development such as assessment literacy also gives teachers a better understanding of how to provide corrective feedback to students as well as create a learning environment that promotes literacy in the classroom.

There is also value in professional development that focuses on assessment literacy since it addresses strategies that teachers can incorporate in lessons that will keep the high achievers involved in the learning process. Dr. Tamm explained that the gifted center has teachers who are certified in gifted education. At the time of our interview, she was unsure whether or not there are Black female educators who work at the center. Ford (2012) found that nationally only about 15% of teachers are non-white, so the number of Black educators at the gifted center could possibly be non-existent at this time. Therefore the professional development that the teachers at the gifted center attend may or may not address a specific race of gifted learners.

The participants of this study discussed the types of restrictions they encounter in their classroom when working with the high achievers in their classroom. Teachers like Ms. Derby, Ms. Paige, and Mrs. McCausland expressed the need of having instructional materials that are readily available so that their high achievers would not be forced to complete lessons that are minute and simple in nature. Ms. Paige discussed going online to find lessons for her high achievers that are aligned with the set of learning goals she has her students to master by a determined time during the quarter. In Ms. Ellington's case, she felt that time constraints caused her high achievers to feel that she was not giving them enough of her attention, while Dr. Tamm discussed her concern with spending her own money on materials for her high achievers that her district was limited in supplying.

Each participant described the type of support they receive from their building principal in terms of addressing the high achieving students in their classrooms. Much of the discussion has often focused around state testing and not daily strategies to support those children per say. The teachers have attended professional development in the past, though it was not

targeted specifically to address the gifted or high achieving Black student population. Because professional development is designed to focus on strategic ways to address students, in predominately Black communities, school districts do not train teachers properly when working with high achievers (Ford, 2012). This leaves educators searching for supplemental support on their own time.

For the participants of this study, they are passionate about what they do and they take advantage of the opportunity to seek out instructional planning that works well with that group of learners. They also exhibit the characteristics of an othermother where the ethic of care extends to all of their students in their classrooms (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). In addition to being committed to the students in their schools, the participants also felt a strong connection to the communities where they work. Although only one of them (Dr. Tamm) shared that they live in the school community, the participants talked about how they see a little of themselves in their students when they were in that stage of life. It is this personal connection between the participants and their students that has played a part in the way they teach and advocate on behalf of their brightest students.

## Cultural Relationships

Culture in chapter one was defined as the sum of the total of learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation (Li and Karakowsy, 2001). Like other cultural groups, the social and cultural experiences for Blacks are unique.

Much can be learned from the community experiences which are part of the culture. Those unfamiliar with the Black culture may learn that families use a variety of child-rearing practices that may or may not map neatly onto schooling practices (Ladson-Billings, 2001). They may also

learn of the tradition of "other mothering" (Collins, 1991) which plays an integral part in the

maternal capacity of the Black community. As Ladson-Billings (2001) posits, learning to see

students with strengths as opposed to seeing them solely as having needs may inform the

pedagogical practices of teachers in positive ways (p. 209).

If teachers are going to be able to create positive change in their classrooms, it has to begin

with an appreciation and respect for the culture of the students in the school community where

they teach. Effective teachers establish a rapport with their students by making those personal

connections with them. Much can be said about a teacher who is able to successfully bridge the

gap between student and teacher through their own personal life experiences.

**Personal Connection**

The importance of appreciating the unique differences that students bring to the classroom is

something that has in recent years been overshadowed by the constant discussion of high stakes

testing. However, that is something that simply cannot be overlooked in today's classroom. The

participants of this study understood how critical it is to connect with their students on a daily

basis, and they shared their reasons behind why they felt this was so important; especially for

their high achieving Black students.

> I always share my background knowledge and from which I've come. And
>
> try to instill in them that the brightest star may not always be the best star to
>
> follow. So I always share my background knowledge with the students and
>
> sometimes that helps out a whole lot, because they see you as something
>
> totally different. But when they find out   that, you know some of the things
>
> that you're going through, I've been through and it's ok. (Derby, 46-51)

Ms. Derby shares with her students the things that she experienced when she was the age of her students. She especially makes it a point to let her high achievers realize their potential by sharing a part of her life with them so that they can see that it is okay to be different from their classmates in terms of earning good grades or having an appreciation for learning. She supports that statement by instilling in them that those entertainers and sports figures that they try to emulate are not necessarily the best people to follow.

Ms. Derby found that as a sixth grade teacher her students are extremely impressionable. She has to be aware that they are at a stage in life where they want to fit in with the "cool crowd" even if it means downplaying their academic talents in order to fit in with the popular students. According to Stepanek (1999) there are times when the gifted student experiences isolation and pressure to hide their abilities but minority students tend to feel the weight of these forces to an even greater degree. Black high achievers especially feel the need at times to choose between using their talents and fitting in with their peers (Ogbu and Davis, 2003).

Ms. Derby's personal connection allows her students to see her as someone who has already experienced the things they are currently facing. Her ability to relate to her students on a level beyond academics creates a safety zone in her classroom that provides the nurturing classroom environment that othermothers make it a priority to establish (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

Ms. Paige, the other sixth grade teacher, discussed how she includes the Black experience into several of her lessons. In doing so, she also develops a personal connection with her students:

> Well for one I make sure that I bring in some type of lesson…I try to keep
>
> my lessons (not every lesson) but I try to, so that they can get those African

American experiences that they may not have outside of class, I try to bring

that in the classroom…you know different things like Black astronauts or

somebody that they won't see as themselves. You know I try to bring that in

to teach to have something to talk about or discuss. Because a lot of times

you know our African American students don't, they don't see themselves in

those roles so I usually bring those things in to teach and help them get that

idea that you know you could  become this person if you want to. (Paige, 66-

73)

In a reading or science lesson about space explorations, Ms. Paige makes sure that she

includes discussions and activities that highlight Blacks who have made contributions to that

field. She shows her students that there are people in the field of Science, Aerodynamics, and

even Astrology who look like them.  Here, Critical Race Theory and Othermothering converge to

show similarities between the two theories. For instance, Ms. Paige talks about the way she

incorporates the Black experience into some of her science and reading lessons. She, just like the

other participants, venture away from the master script of the curriculum when they feel it is

necessary to give voice to the culture representative of their students.

This master script that CRT scholar Ladson-Billings (2003) speaks of mutes or erases stories

of Blacks who challenge the dominate culture authority and power. Ms. Paige's use of including

the Black experience into her lessons also exemplifies the political clarity that Black female

educators include in their classroom lessons in order to teach the whole child as opposed to

addressing only the academic aspect (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

What Ms. Paige does with her lessons is key to propelling those students who may have a

wide interest in the sciences. When her students can identify with people who look like them

when that area is typically occupied by Whites or Asians, it shows them that in spite of the lack of Blacks in that field, the ones who have pursued that as a career have found their profession rewarding, both personally and professionally. In her role as othermother, she understands the necessity of seeing through the stereotypes as false representations of children's realities and possibilities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

Ms. Paige also makes personal connections with her students by using famous athletes. She reiterates the fact that famous athletes that her students look up to had to work hard to get to where they are:

> As far as the negative criticism that high achievers may get from their classmates, like calling them a nerd or something, once I hear that I may say I'll try to bring up an example of a person that has achieved so that they can understand that it's okay…it's okay to be bright because things come your way when you're bright and you're making the grades a lot of things fall in place. Just people that are out here, you know just different people that are out here that they may be aware of, different athletes, things  like that; they didn't just come up ya know being an athlete, they had to go through some  process. So I try to kinda bring it back to them to let them know it's not easy being bright but you have to know that you'll reap some benefits. So it's not a bad thing…and I try to give them examples of people who have come up because they don't-they may only see one way. (Paige, 73-83)

Just like Ms. Derby, Ms. Paige also reassures her high achieving students by letting them know that in spite of the peer pressure that they face, they will overcome that obstacle in time. Both women also encourage their students by letting them know that having a love for learning is something that can reap bountiful rewards for them in the future.

The connection that Ms. Ellington, an 8th year teacher and the current grade level leader, shares certainly shows the strong ties she has with her students; it could be the fact that she was the youngest participant of this study who, through hard work and determination, was able to move out of the type of community that some of her students are currently living in at this time. When asked how she supports her high achieving students so that it encourages cultural pride and high scholastic achievement, she reflected on her own personal journey.

> I think that in that particular situation…I really just share my personal experiences. I feel like, um…it's kind of that *Teaching with grit* and I'm not even done reading the book  but it's just bringing in like real situations. So as an African American myself I feel like I share my experiences and I talk about how I was viewed because I went to a predominately white grade school where I was maybe one of three blacks in my classroom, and then my mom moved to a school district that was predominately African American and it was a culture shock for me. So I share this with my kids if I see a situation similar to that. But um I moved to the predominately African American neighborhood and I was looking for the white kids and I'm just like okay, this is different for me. And when I got into school, there was a lot of chaos, but I sat there, I was doing my work, and they said "she's acting white". They didn't want to hang with me. So I didn't let that change who I was; they called me a teacher's pet, and it was really, really strange for me because at my old school I

didn't stick out like that (laughs). But then I came here (to all Black school) and it was really weird how I was received. And um…I told my kids you know what, your background is not determined; your outcome does not determine your success at where you're going. And I try to drill that into my kids all the time. I think that when you connect with personal experiences, you know, letting them know that you've been there; um and letting them know that you don't have to stay in this place that you're in. Like I grew up in a low-income community which is like a "hoodville" so to speak, but um, we got out. And I share with them all the time; like for me that was important. (Ellington, 158-177)

Ms. Ellington shares her journey of the year she transferred from a predominately White school to an all-Black school. The new school brought many challenges for her with the obvious one being that she was no longer one of only three Black students in her class. She was now in a class with all Black students. Her reflection of what it was like to be told by her classmates that she was the "teacher's pet" or that she was "acting White" because she worked hard and earned good grades supports the work of Dawsey (1996) who examined the controversial issue of Black students who are accused by their peers of "acting White".

In his book *Living to Tell about it: Young Black Men in America Speak Their Piece*, Dawsey (1996) highlighted how the popular press has reported how Black children discourage their high achieving peers from earning A's. Ogbu and Davis (2003) suggest that Black students' academic behaviors reflect their beliefs that performing well lessens their acceptance by their Black peers (p. 36).

Through her own personal story, Ms. Ellington is able to get her high achieving students to see her as someone who values education and who is committed to the success of her students, even when they move on to the next grade level:

> So I tell my kids to be proud of who you are and I ask them all the time -even though it's third grade- what do you want to be when you grow up? And I'm like, you have to know now. And I'm like you know what if you're not sure, come get me next year and I want to know. And I encourage them you know when you graduate from high school, email me you know? I want to know, I want to hear your success stories. So really for me, it's all about the personal experience. I know how it feels; I've been there and just kind of encouraging them along the way; like if this is what you want to be when you grow up, you have to make sure that you're successful in school. Not just this year, but next year and on and on and on. So um, just really just encouraging them. I feel like pouring into them making sure that they know that I care. I think that is like the most important reason. But if the students know you care, I feel like they do excel a lot more. But um that's it. I think just my personal experience, all I really have is my story and that's what I'm sticking to. But I feel like my students receive it a lot better when I'm able to connect with them on that level. (Ellington, 181-194)

Similar to Ms. Ellington, Dr. Tamm, an educator whose worked in various capacities for the last 15 years also connects with her group of first graders, yet the difference is that she does it through storytelling. When asked how she promotes cultural pride and high scholastic achievement in her classroom, she talked about how she shares stories during her class story hour so that the children can hear stories that show character traits that they themselves may often

posses. Dr. Tamm is aware of the fact that those types of stories lead to teachable moments that enable her to connect story text to real life situations.

> Well one of the things that I have employed is storytelling. So I let them know
> about examples of students who weren't successful versus students that were
> successful. So I want them to…well basically I just keep it real…I'm just
> going to say. And what I mean by that is I don't sugarcoat the fact that they
> are African American students and that there is an expectation that you're
> going to have to do more to prove yourself versus some other ethnicity that
> may not have to do as much as you do. So I make sure that they are informed,
> I keep it kid friendly so that they can understand what I'm talking about
> and I'm not talking over their heads. (Tamm, 75-82)

Dr. Tamm uses language that her first graders can understand, but she makes sure that her students realize that because they are Black, they may have to work harder in life to deflect the negative stereotypes that society will place on them simply because they are Black. Both Dr. Tamm and Ms. Ellington have conversations with their students that may not be common or even considered acceptable in other classrooms. Yet, they make these sacrifices to educate their students about the realities they face as Blacks. Dr. Tamm talks to her first graders about the importance of getting a good education although society may have lower expectations of them. Yet, she engages in these real conversations with her young students. Although she inferred which group she was speaking of who would have it a little easier, Dr. Tamm does imply that her Black students will have to work harder in order to prove themselves as competent individuals.

Mrs. McCausland, an educator with over 20 years of teaching experience does not lose sight of the fact that because of the way she relates to her high achieving students, it encourages them to continue to strive for excellence in her classroom.

> What I do as a teacher is I support my students by encouraging them to do their   best on homework, test, as well as inside and outside of the classroom. I share stories with my students about my years in school as a child their age. I do that so show the connection between my challenges in the past and how they relate to what they are facing now. I let them know that it's okay to get good grades in school; that it's okay to like school and have a love for learning-especially at this grade level. I try to incorporate lessons about famous people into our class discussions so that the children can see that those famous African Americans grew up in similar situations like them but they didn't let that stop them from achieving their goals. I really do all I can to stress the importance of getting a good education by letting them know that it's okay to be smart, that it's okay to speak using correct grammar…you know? I feel that this is really important for my high achievers to know because often times children from this community who strive for excellence get ridiculed and give up with negativity. And one thing that I don't want is my students to equate giftedness or high scholastic achievement as "acting white". (McCausland, 81-94)

Like Ms. Paige, both Dr. Tamm and Mrs. McCausland incorporate the Black experience into their lesson; whether it is through books that are read aloud to the class or through class projects followed by a discussion. To add to this, each of the participants takes the opportunity to share their own personal journey during those "teachable moments" in their classrooms. According to

Ms. Derby, this gives her students an opportunity to see her as someone who can relate to them because she has already experienced some of the challenges that they are currently facing.

Each of the participants saw the need to have these types of conversations with their students. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), these types of conversations that some Black female teachers have with their students probably would not take place if they were teaching in predominately White schools (p.79). Instead the master script (Ladson-Billings, 2003) would dictate what is taught in those classrooms; leaving the voices of the Black community silenced so that the majoritarian story is told (Love, 2004). As Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) asserts, "exemplary African American women teachers use the familiar familial mother-child relationship as a guide for their interactions with students" (p. 74). Several research studies suggest a correlation between cultural connections of Black female teachers and a concept of the maternal in their practice (Byrd & Green, 2011). Based on the data collected from the participants of this study, they employ the tradition of othermothering as part of their daily classroom practices.

**Othermothering**

As defined in Chapter 1, othermothering is described as a universalized ethic of care in which the caring that othermothers engage in is not simply interpersonal but profoundly political in intent and practice (Case, 1997). For the women of this study, they talked about how the caring relationship of the own Black female teacher influenced the care they show towards their students. On the day of the focus group interview, Dr. Tamm was unable to participate in the focus group discussion; however, she agreed to meet for a separate interview at a later date.  Her reflections have also been included in this section.

Each of the participants provided a vast amount of insight into the role that their most memorable Black female teacher had in shaping them to take on the familial role of othermothering to their students.

Ms. Paige reflected briefly on her sixth grade teacher and talked about the compassion and care of this educator:

> One particular Black female teacher comes to mind…she was a 6th grade teacher. She tried to give us what we needed academically but she was more of a nurturing lady. I mean she was honest and talked about life lessons. She was very affectionate you know? We knew that she really cared about us and she wanted us to do our best. (Paige, 330-333)

Ms. Ellington reflected on the year she transferred from a predominately White school district to an all-Black district. She was a high achieving student who did not realize her potential because it was never encouraged prior to her attending school in the all Black district. It was during that year when she transferred to her new school that she met the educator who influenced her the most.

> I remember when I went to elementary school I was bused to a predominately White school district. So I had a lot of White teachers and I did not feel smart at all. I felt like there was a difference, the teachers always said it. But when I went to a predominately Black school district, and it was crazy, I had one teacher and she took me aside and she basically asked me where did I want to go to college. And I was like "well I'm not smart enough to go to school". And she was like "why would you say that?" And I was like "I always felt like that". And I mean from that moment, she encouraged me for life by telling me that I am smart, that I can go to college, and she told me to keep in

contact with her. She told me that she wanted to see me do well in life. I felt like that whole middle school year she kept true to her word, like even in high school she kept up with me. And like here I am working on my 4th degree and in 7th grade I was saying "oh I can't do it, I'm not smart enough". And I feel like that teacher gave me the confidence I needed. Like she believed in me and that's all I needed and I never got that at the other school district. Because I didn't have anybody to push me and it was like they never believed in me…you know? It was like they just let me be…And so it matters and that's what I hold to like every day. And so for me it is so important that I uplift my students. And it is so important for me to be real with them and share my experiences with them, so that they can have that same experience. I mean I tell them "you can be just like me. My mom was on welfare and we grew up and we didn't have a lot, but that didn't mean that was going to be my same life". It's like giving them those conversations up front hits home and it matters. (Ellington, 309-329)

Ms. Ellington's reflection of her teacher and the honest conversations she has with her students about her family's financial struggles as a child allows her students to see her as someone who is relatable. McAllister and Irvin (2002) suggest that effective Black teachers do not pity their students, but empathize with them so they will take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them. This comes from knowing the students entrusted into the teacher's care. Again, it is that familial mother-child relationship that Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) talks about in her research.

Mrs. McCausland's grade school teacher made it her business to see that all of her students were successful in her classroom regardless of their home life:

> I can remember this one Black female teacher that I had when I was in
>
> grade school. This woman made sure that everyone achieved even if you had to
>
> come after school to get additional help. She was always there…*always.* And she never
>
> gave up on us…she never gave up because even if students, regardless of whatever
>
> baggage they may have had, she knew that she had to makeover for the students and
>
> she also knew that she had to prepare herself for all of the challenges that she was
>
> going to face…she…she was good. (McCausland, 302-308)

Mrs. McCausland used that reflection of her most memorable Black female teacher as a blueprint for the way she interacts with her fourth grade students in her predominately Black school.

> A lot of times students will play a sport and they'll say "you coming to see
>
> me play my game?" and I tell them sure I'll be there. And when I show up… "Oh
>
> Mrs. McCausland was at my game." And after that, that child is so different they're
>
> like a different kid in the classroom. (McCausland, 389-392)

Similar to Mrs. McCausland's support of her students beyond the classroom, Ms. Derby shared a funny story about one of her students who had a change in behavior after she showed up at his baseball game as she promised him she would:

> And sometimes I think about this one little boy and for whatever the reason he just
>
> wouldn't do right and it didn't matter what class he went in, but I'm going to tell you
>
> what really changed him; I promised him that I was going to a baseball game that he
>
> was playing in. And that Sunday, when I showed up at that baseball game, from that
>
> point on changed his whole attitude in the class. You know it's been times when I've
>
> showed up at a student's church for service. And they were shocked but I let them know

"I'll come to your church to show you how concerned I am about you". (Derby, 363-

369)

Coincidently, Ms. Derby also reflected on a Black female that she had in grade school who

developed a system where students who were afraid to speak in front of the class could write any

unanswered questions from a class discussion down and place them in a box to be read the next

day.

> I had a couple of Black female educators who were very instrumental in the way that I
>
> teach today and there's one in particular who like everyone else said she didn't play;
>
> however she was one of those teachers that…I wasn't the one that would sit up front and
>
> raise my hand all the time even though I may have had a question. And so she
>
> developed a system where she allowed us to put questions in her mailbox. And then she
>
> would address those questions the following day without even saying your name. That
>
> was a big step for me and today I do the same thing. So when my kids have
>
> questions…because you know you're going to have those students with those burning
>
> questions but in fear of feeling "dumb" or sometimes they don't want to be the ones that
>
> um…let everybody know that they're smarter than everybody else. So they won't
>
> always jump in and ask a question, but will put questions in the mailbox for me to
>
> address the next day. And you don't necessarily call their name, but you make sure you
>
> definitely address their question or issue. (Derby, 334-346)

Because Ms. Derby's teacher was observant, she found a way to allow her soft spoken

students to become more involved in classroom discussions without having to speak in front of

the other students. Careful planning and observation like that are necessary in order for teachers

to make adjustments to their teaching strategies regardless of their own ethnic background

(Ladson-Billings, 2009). Having an awareness of this will better fit the learning style of the students.

During Dr. Tamm's interview, she reflected on her most memorable Black female teacher who happened to be her work-study teacher back in high school. As she reminisced on her teacher, she talked about how her teacher encouraged her to go to college, when she had no interest in higher education.

> The most memorable African American female teacher I had was my work-study teacher. She was a no nonsense type of woman who had our best interest at heart. She really cared about how we handled ourselves as young ladies. She presented to me the option of attending college (I had NO desire to go to college!) She made it seem possible for me to do and excel in areas (especially personal growth) that I would not have otherwise thought I could be good in (such as math). She really influenced the way I respond to students now because she always told us to "focus on our education". I find myself saying that to the young students I teach because their focus is on everything BUT learning. I also don't necessarily think of myself as an "othermother" although many would due to the nature of my work. I tend to think of myself as a life-line to children. Many of them have extremely difficult lives and I want to be a force that shows them that there are other options in life and that they can make it despite of their present circumstances. This is the role I share with the young girls in the girls' club I co-sponsor in my building. (Dr. Tamm, 14-27)

The maternal role that the participants play in their classrooms as instructor and othermother is also reciprocated in the way their students view them.

> I remember one time I was absent and I came back, I  heard one of my students say

"mama home". (Derby, 356-357)

> And I also believe that there are parents that do work, they at least want to know that
> their child is going to be addressed and you're going to be the mother in that
> classroom for that kid day after day after day. (McCausland, 355-357)

> I believe that giving students a pat on the back is a way of letting them know that they
> matter. Just like my 6th grade teacher who I admired, I try to encourage my students by
> letting them know that what they are doing will pay off and to never give up. (Paige,
> 376-378)
> That's why I believe home visits are so important. I think it is so important to go into
> the home, see how they live, sit on their couch. The most important point is to set
> goals. (Ellington, 382-384)

> I see myself as more of a life line for my students…not necessarily an othermother. I
> want my kids to know that our classroom is a safe place, which may not be anything
> like what their life is like at home. (Tamm, 351-353)

The familial mother-child relationship between the participants and students was not just limited to their high achieving and gifted population, in addition the ethic of care was shown toward every child in their classroom in some way (i.e. during instruction, extra support on an assignment, providing a listening ear to problems outside the classroom that effect learning, etc.). Because of the teachers' commitment to their students, the children sense this care of the teachers, and this care pushes them to do their best in the teachers' classroom (Milner, 2006).

Bonner (2000) posits that along with the familiar role of the teacher, it is also important that teachers be able to determine the most effective instructional methods and instructional tools to be used in the classroom. For this reason, teachers must have an understanding of student learning styles. When working with those at the top of the class, understanding how gifted minority students learn is an important variable of effective teaching (Dunn & Dunn, 1992).

**Student Learning Styles**

Understanding that every child will not grasp concepts as easily as others is crucial to being an informed teacher. Having an awareness of a student's culture and planning lessons that celebrate the rich traditions of the students' heritage is consistent with being a culturally relevant teacher (Ford, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2009; McIntosh, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). These two factors contributed greatly to the participants' perspective of working with high achieving Black students. The teachers also took into account the realization that social norms such as peer pressure negatively affected their high achieving and gifted students' willingness to actively participate in class.

Based on their years of experience in the classroom, the participants have seen many types of learners pass through their classrooms. Needless to say, adjustments have been necessary to fit the learning style of all of their students, including their highest achievers.

**Identifying Those at the Top of the Class**

According to Hébert (2009), Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner revolutionized contemporary thought on intelligence through his theory of multiple intelligence. In his research, Gardner (1983) rejected the traditional view that aptitude consists strictly of the ability to reason and understand ideas. Gardner's 1983 book *Frames of Mind* unveiled separate human capacities that those identified as gifted exhibit: verbal-linguistic; which is characteristic of those students with an advanced vocabulary. For learners that exemplify logical-mathematical intelligence, they are able to think abstractly when presented with numerical concepts to solve.

The learner who is a visual-spatial learner has the ability to form mental images of their environment, and in turn, transform those images into physical ones. Those learners who are

musical have the ability to perceive pitch and create rhythmic patterns; while the bodily-

kinethestic learner exhibits fine or gross motor abilities.  The learner with interpersonal

intelligence has an understanding of others and is aware of what motivates them; while the

learner with intrapersonal intelligence has an understanding of self. Years later he added

naturalistic to those capacities. A student who exhibits this style of learning can recognize

patterns and relationships to nature.

Coincidently, Gardner's (1983) theory broadened the traditional testing practices that were

used and unfortunately excluded children of color. In fact, the United States Department of

Education (1993) adopted Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence as the framework for

identifying gifted students. Gardner's ideas have had the most influence on new efforts to

identify underrepresented youngsters (Hébert, 2009).

When the participants were asked to share their personal definition of a high achieving Black

student, their definitions were closely related to Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence. In fact

Ms. Derby's definition was linked to Gardner's core capacity of intrapersonal intelligence.

> Some students that are able to build that stamina, that "stick with it attitude" are
>
> those students who I consider to be high achievers. A high achiever may be a student
>
> who is willing to um preserver no matter what to get the job done. (Derby, 3-5)

Ms. Ellington's definition was also connected to Gardner's intrapersonal intelligence although

she also mentioned the impact that parental involvement plays in supporting her definition:

> I would have to say um…you said in a few words geez. Um students who
>
> are involved with the educational process. So those who are participating, those who

have parental involvement, um those who are willing to ask for help, um…I feel like

I'm giving you a lot of words, I'm sorry…um…they just have a desire to want to

learn. So no matter where there background…no matter, you know what background

they have, they desire to do something different. (Ellington, 4-9)

Ms. Paige's definition of a high achiever reflects Gardener's theory of both verbal-linguistic

intelligence and logical mathematical intelligence:

Like what they can or cannot do or should be able to do? They should definitely

be able to um…um read, write, you know the basic things and plus a little more,

because if they're high achievers they should be able to write complete sentences

with details and things like that. Where they're showing their feelings …things like

that. With math I would expect that they should definitely be on the level

where they should be; whether it's um algebra or anything higher than that, they

should be able to do that. (Paige, 9-14)

Dr. Tamm provided her definition of a high achiever and included the term "intrinsic

motivation" to explain that inner determination that some high achievers exhibit. Gardner's

theory of intrapersonal capacity was also evidence in her personal definition of a high achiever.

I guess for me I would describe a high achiever as someone who's definitely

meeting whatever the standards are for the state and for that school district.

Um I would also describe a high achiever as someone who exhibited a real

excitement about learning. Because I think that they need that intrinsic motivation to

be a high achiever. So those would be some things I think of when I think of a high

achiever; someone who, who goes above and beyond just the basics, whatever those

basics are. And I mean they don't have to be gifted, but just a person who really puts

forth a lot of effort and detail in whatever their work is. (Tamm, 4-11)

Like Dr. Tamm's definition of a high achiever, Mrs. McCausland views a high achiever as

someone who is intrinsically motivated, although she does not necessarily view that quality

as a sign of giftedness.

> I would define a high achiever as a student who achieves a goal. What I
>
> mean by that is a high achiever would be a student who gets high marks or good
>
> grades; they do the work that is required and they do it well. High achievers tend to
>
> be organized, they also have good time-management skills which is why they turn in
>
> neat and tidy work on time. High achievers are not necessarily gifted although some
>
> are; however, high achievement is not a sign of giftedness. I would also say that high
>
> achievers need an educational environment beyond what is offered in the average
>
> classroom -but not necessarily the same environment required by gifted kids- in
>
> order to be successful. (McCausland, 4-12)

Mrs. McCausland spoke more about the organizational skills that high achievers possess. Yet

one strong point that she and Dr. Tamm made was that there is a distinct difference between

a high achiever and a gifted student.

Ms. Ellington discussed her districts testing procedures used to qualify a student for the gifted

education program. She shared her concerns about the testing practices and also explained why

she believed some of her high achievers are overlooked for the program.

> I can speak about [North Marion School District] and think back to my classroom
>
> last school year. For instance I think a few students who were in the gifted program,
>
> you know they were the gifted kids, but I also had like two students that were high
>
> achievers. And me as a teacher, you know I'm thinking like why aren't they in the

gifted program? I feel like they were performing in the classroom just like the

students in the gifted program. So for me I didn't really see a difference academically

in those students, but it's a test that they take. Like I don't know if they're looking

for the creative side of it and that's why they didn't get in. But for me I was just

really a little confused because academically they're really on the same level…but

this is just my opinion from what I see in my classroom between the high achiever

and the gifted student. To me they are performing on the same level. (Ellington, 68-

77)

Ms. Paige views the high achiever as someone who is not that positive about learning. She

describes them as students who are in constant battle with doing well or choosing to fail. Ms.

Paige finds the gifted student to be a child who can earn good grades without putting much effort

into the learning process.

There is a difference. A high achiever has the potential to achieve. They don't always

display a positive attitude towards academics or learning. They are in constant battle

with themselves. They also can internalize their actions which gives them more

meaning. I think that the gifted student always achieves without thought to the

process. They usually show consistent achievement without thinking on the process

that it took to get to the answer. (Paige, 81-85)

Mrs. McCausland described the difference in learning styles found in a high achiever and a

gifted student. Again, she acknowledges that a student can be both a high achiever and gifted at

the same time. Mrs. McCausland also discussed specific academic areas that the student may

show signs of giftedness.

I feel that like high achievers aren't necessarily gifted, although some high achievers

are also gifted as well. But I did not have any gifted students, um…but some of the students were gifted in math…in the math class. (McCausland, 78-80)

Dr. Tamm sees more of a similarity between high achievers and gifted students. As she explains:

I'm not an expert on either one; however, I would say that their learning styles would be more similar than they are different. For example, the high achiever's thinking abilities are similar to those of the gifted learner. However, the gifted learner's thinking tends to encompass greater extension, even abstract quality. So I guess that could be considered a difference. (Dr. Tamm, 38-42)

Perhaps the most revealing of all the descriptions provided by the participants was the way Ms. Derby described specific learning patterns that exist between the high achiever and gifted student.

I would say basically I see sort of a difference because for a high achiever…a high achiever I believe remembers the answers; whereas a gifted learner would…they'll posses those unforeseen questions where you'll say "wow", where the high achiever is really interested, the gifted learner may be curious about it. A high achiever works hard to achieve and a gifted learner they just know without even working hard. A high achiever (and you know sometimes it goes both ways) because a high achiever can be gifted as well. Because you will have those children that will answer the question in detail. Where a gifted learner may just ponder on multiple perspectives…a high achiever may perform at the top of the group; however the gifted learner, they may go beyond the group. You know, the high achiever learns with ease and then the gifted learner…they already know it. Where it takes six to eight repetitions for the high achiever to master, for a high achiever it may only

take one to three repetitions. Both types are more of the creative thinker. (Derby, 86-97)

There are differences in the way children learn, even those students who work above grade level. But as Ford (2012) contends, Black and Hispanic students continue to be underrepresented in gifted and enrichment programs. For schools in low-income communities, there is a strong possibility that there are no enrichment programs. This leaves the regular education teacher with the responsibility of providing necessary enrichment for that population of learners (Morris, 2004). Because of the unique learning styles of high achieving Black students, CRT highlights the fact that race cannot be overlooked  when educators plan lessons or design curriculum based around this group of learners.  When looking at high achievers beyond the elementary level, Hillard (1992) finds that Black students are less likely to be assigned to honors or advanced placement classes and are more likely to find themselves in special education and vocational tracks. Failure to examine the unique learning styles of gifted Black children leaves them in the continued cycle of institutionalized racism that marginalizes an entire population of students based on policies, procedures, and rules designed for the academic success of White students (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

Below in Table 5, the definitions of the learning styles that the participants provided to describe the high achiever and the gifted student were their own. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used those shared descriptions and developed a table that identifies the distinct differences between the two types of learners as provided by the participants.

Table 5

*Learning Styles between High Achievers vs. Gifted*

| Indicators of Learning Style | High Achiever | Gifted Student |
|---|---|---|
| Informative | Knows the answers | Asks the questions |
| Performance | Works hard | Performs with ease |
| Ideas | Has good ideas | Has original ideas |
| Class Rank | Is a top student | Is beyond his or her age peers |
| Study Habits | Sets aside time for study | Does not need much time to study |
| Self-Critique | Is satisfied with his or learning | Perfectionist and highly self-critical |
| Repetition | Needs 6 to 8 repetitions for mastery | Only needs 1 to 2 repetitions for mastery |

Table 5 identifies the distinct characteristics between high achievers and gifted students. Under *class rank*, the participants believed that a high achiever is a top student while the gifted student is beyond his or her age peers. The indicator under *repetition*, the participants believed that a high achiever needs six to eight repetitions of a concept for mastery while a gifted student only needs one to two repetitions for mastery of a skill.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the development of the categories as well as the personal narratives shared by the five participants. These narratives were told through the eyes of Black female educators who teach in school districts where over half the student population is Black. The participants shared their insights about the successes and the failures they have encountered when teaching high achieving Black students in their classrooms.

Data were collected and analyzed from individual and focus group interview transcripts. The teachers' perspective of teaching high achieving Black students were identified and discussed within the following categories: Instructional Planning, Restrictions, Cultural Relationship, and Learning Styles. The findings indicate that although the women's use of the African tradition of othermothering allowed them to develop a personal connection with their students, the role of othermothering also informed their instruction when working to meet the academic needs of the high achieving student population. Additionally, othermothering was extended to every learner in the classroom. It was also determined that the terms *gifted* and *high achiever* are often used interchangeably in research studies; however, there are distinct differences between the learning styles of the two.  According to Cathcart (2010) a high achievers approach to learning is focused on mastery of the curriculum; whereas gifted students tend to focus on what they perceive as important and interest. These interest often times span beyond the curriculum.

The researcher also found that in order to plan for their high achieving students, the participants took advantage of their instructional planning time in order to develop effective lessons. The instructional planning was also attributed to careful review of curriculum and student data from daily assessments that check for understanding. These things are what allowed the high achievers to remain actively engaged in the learning process.

The following chapter will provide a detailed summary of the study, as well as conclusions, and recommendations for future studies.

**Chapter Six**

**Summary of the Study and Research Findings**

**Introduction**

How does effective planning and instruction address the needs of those children who are at the top of the class? In this study five Black female educators from four predominately Black elementary schools in the mid-west shared their perspectives of the type of instructional planning they use in their classrooms for the high achieving Black student population. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research. Information presented in this chapter is a reflection of the data analysis examined in Chapter Five. Again, the views expressed by the participants as well as the researcher does not represent the views of all Black female educators who teach in school districts that are predominately Black.

**Summary of the Study**

**Overview of the Problem**

According to Ford (2012), Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in gifted education programs. She finds that nationally, Black students are underrepresented by at least 50% while Hispanic students are underrepresented by 40% in gifted programs. In districts with large populations of Black students, gifted and talented programs fall significantly below average in terms of teacher certification in that area (Morris, 2004).

This study was guided by the researcher's personal experience of having one gifted Black student and several high achieving Black students in her classroom in 2008. Prior to that year, the district cut the enrichment program because of limited funding. This left classroom teachers

with the dilemma of having to teach students who were working one to two grade levels above their current grade. During that time, the district provided countless professional development opportunities focused around providing remedial support for those students working significantly below grade level, yet there was no mention of, and no urgency to continue to support the academic needs of the high achievers once the enrichment program was eliminated.

During the 2008-2009 school year, an interest was sparked and the researcher saw the need to investigate the topic. Frankenburg (2009) found that Black teachers only comprise 15% of the teaching force in urban schools while White female teachers dominate the field. Countless research studies surrounding Black children in low-income communities have been told through the eyes of non-Black experts in the field of education. Sadly, this has left the voice of Black educators out of the discussion; and more importantly, the voice of Black women educators have been missing from the literature. Although their narratives have been significant in understanding what their teaching experiences were like before and during the Civil Rights Movement, much of their added expertise has been limited because of the majoritarian narratives told about gifted Black children.

Barton (2003) postulates that schools in districts that are located in communities with high percentages of minorities employ less experienced or less qualified teachers. However, it was discovered that the participants in this study have 58 years of teaching experience collectively. Additionally all of them hold at least one Master's Degree in Education, one participant has a Ph.D. in education, and one participant is currently enrolled in a doctoral program at a local university.

Ford (2012) contends that the success of Black students depends on the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, counselors, and school administrators. So what have educators with cultural –and in many cases- personal connections done in their classrooms to counter these ideologies? The researcher set out to find answers to this question by investigating the perspective of Black female educators through data collected in narratives told through the eyes of the participants.

## Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer the following question:

In school districts with a large Black student population and limited gifted education opportunities, what action steps do Black female educators take in order to address the needs of high achieving Black students in regular education classrooms?

The other sub-questions of interest were:

1. How do Black female educators recognize high achieving students in their classrooms?

2. What obstacles do Black female educators face when addressing the needs of the high achieving population?

3. What support do Black female educators receive from building administrators and other support staff   when they have gifted students in their classroom?

4. How does the ethic of care (othermothering) inform the type of instructional support Black female educators provide when teaching high achieving Black students?

Each of the questions is addressed separately with discussion about how it is informed by the findings of this research. The researcher used the voices of five Black female educators who currently work in school districts that have a 75% or higher Black student population. This study examined the ways that instructional planning allows the participants to navigate through their curriculum so that they are not only meeting the needs of the lowest performing students in their classrooms, but they are also addressing the academic and emotional needs of their high achieving students as well.

The stories shared by the participants offer a viewpoint that has a strong correlation between the teaching beliefs and practices of Black female educators before and during the Civil Rights era; yet what makes their vantage point so different is the fact that they are currently on the "front line" educating students who are part of a generation that values the rich and famous lifestyle of today's celebrities, as opposed to  upholding the true value of what it means to celebrate the high scholastic achievement of those within their own community.

## Review of the Methodology

This study highlights the experiences of five Black female educators who teach in four different predominately Black school districts in a small Midwestern town. The participants teach in the regular education classroom setting; therefore, they work with students who range in academic abilities of low, average, and high achievers. The researcher chose a qualitative research design instead of a quantitative design because as Merriam (2009, p.5) purports; qualitative methods answer the "how" and "whys" of an issue and allows those types of questions to uncover truths of lived experiences shared by participants. Components of

ethnography, grounded theory, and critical qualitative design were also incorporated in the study

to seek answers to the research questions.

The ethnography method allowed the researcher to immerse into the classroom culture in

order to gain knowledge of the lived experiences of the participants (Merriam,

2009).Components of grounded theory allowed the researcher to gain meaning from the data

collected (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Finally, critical qualitative design gave the researcher the

opportunity to critique current practices in terms of inequalities as they relate to high achieving

Black students and the Black women who teach this group of learners (Gall, Gall, & Borg,

2007).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Othemothering were used as the theoretical frameworks for

two reasons:

1. CRT uses counterstorytelling as a method of telling the story of the experiences
   that are often not told (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

2. Othermothering contextualizes the thoughts and actions of Black women within
   their particular culture and historical legacies (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

In order to gain insight into the perspective that Black female teachers have about high

achieving Black students in their classrooms, the researcher had to establish an organized way

that would allow each of the participants to share their counterstories. Through individual

interviews and a focus group interview, data were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim based

on the participant's responses. The researcher was able to triangulate data from the interviews

and her analytical memos. This process was instrumental in developing the initial codes and

subcategories that emerged during the coding process.

**Findings**

**Addressing the Academic Needs of the High Achiever**

*Major Research Question*

*What action steps do Black female educators take in order to address the needs of high achieving Black students in regular classrooms?*

Tomlinson (2003) advocates instruction for high achievers that is rigorous enough to accelerate and enrich the regular curriculum. She suggests that this be achieved through differentiated instruction. Each of the participants planned lessons that gave their high achievers an opportunity to take ownership of their learning. In fact, two of the participants shared an activity that their high achieving students use during small group instruction (see Appendix F).

Being intentional when planning lessons for high achievers can reduce the risk of allowing those students to become bored. According to Martinez and Snider (2000), when the needs of the high achievers are neglected, this can cause students to suffer from boredom and frustration which leads to students acting out negatively.

One of the participants noted that early on in the school year, she saw that there was a student who completed assignments in short periods of time. This participant understood the importance of looking into the curriculum to make sure that she included extended activities that kept that particular child engaged. Careful planning such as that can help eliminate the chances of students being left with too much idle time.

Two of the participants felt that by allowing their high achievers to work either independently or in a group with others, who are on their same ability level, gives those students the freedom to discuss, argue (constructively), and analyze issues as well as concepts. The participants talked about their role in the learning process while at the same time being actively engaged in the

development of their student's academic progress. Planning lessons that are designed to address the academic needs of every student is important; however, of equal importance is the development of well-established rules which should be clear, concise and age appropriate.

Ladson-Billings (2009) contends that the culture and lived experiences that Black students bring to the classroom setting are legitimized as they (students) become part of the "official" curriculum (p. 127). One of the participants mentioned the idea of engaging her students in classroom activities that draw on the student's culture and personal experience. In districts with large minority student populations, the idea of incorporating the student's lived experiences into content area could have positive implications for student achievement at all academic levels.

Another benefit of effective instructional planning included the use of data tracking. For the participants of this study, data tracking was used as a means of monitoring student progress and providing feedback to students about their progress. Dwyer (2014) finds that in the classroom, effective feedback is a great way for teachers to use collected data in order to improve student learning. The participants discussed the types of data they collect of their students in order to improve students outcome on certain concepts or skills. Much of the data that the participants talked about collecting was related to literacy and mathematics.

Some of the participants shared the benefits of data tracking in their classrooms:

(1) Students are taught to track their own individual data. This is based on the way they see their teacher tracking whole class data.

(2) Students are celebrated once a desired goal is met.

Those students who are unable to achieve a desired goal are still celebrated for their efforts. A classroom environment where students are taught that mistakes are not failures, can alleviate feelings of resentment and in some instances rebellion from students who may

perform below grade level when compared to their classmates.

Even though all of the participants agreed that data tracking was an important component when using curriculum to plan lessons, none of them gave any specifics about how it is used to monitor high achievers beyond a certain unit of study. One participant however, commented on her high achieving sixth graders' ability to master mathematical concepts that were one to two grade levels above their current grade. Because many high achievers earn consistently high test scores, it is important that educators keep in mind a valid point made by one of the participants who felt that classroom teachers should constantly be asking themselves questions such as "what's next?", and "what do I need to do to take my kids to the next level?"

The participants' belief that instructional planning for the high achievers should include lessons that go beyond the basic recall and memorization supports the literature of Tomlinson (2009). In her research on differentiated instruction, Tomlinson found that teachers who implement this form of instruction in their classrooms create an environment where students are able to select activities they want to complete independently or in a small group based on freedom of choice (See Appendix F and G).

Similar to Tomlinson's (2009) research, the participants also felt that the inclusion of enrichment components they used when planning lessons challenged their high achievers and allowed them to master targeted skills above grade level. The participants' ability to plan lessons that included depth of knowledge goes against early research by well-known psychologists such as Terman and Galton who postulate that Black children are intellectually inferior. Current literature on predominately Black schools also claims that much of the instruction provided to students is remedial and lacks rigor (Barton, 2003).

The findings from this study support the research of Ford (2008) who notes that teacher

expectations of Black children impact the type of instruction they receive. The more a teacher

actively engages students in the learning process (Thayer, 2013) the more the teacher becomes

familiar with their students. And in doing so, the teacher becomes familiar with the various

learning styles in the classroom setting.

**Identifying High Achievers**

*Sub-Question One*

*How do Black female educators recognize high achieving students in their classrooms?*

When the discussion came up about the ways in which the participants identified high

achievers in their classrooms, each teacher provided their own personal definition based on their

classroom observations. High achievers were defined as students who were successful at

mastering specific skills at and above grade level. They were also described as students who

perform at the top of the class because of their consistent work ethic.

Three of the participating school districts have a gifted or enrichment program that services

students in grades K-6. In the district where two of the participants work, district administrators

launched an enrichment program during the 2013-2014 school year for students in grades 7-8;

the program has been extended for students in grade 6 for the 2014-2015 school year. During the

focus group meeting, the women described the similarities and differences between the learning

styles of these types of learners. Two of the participants felt that students can be both a high

achiever and gifted; however one of the women believed the only difference was that gifted

students possess the ability to think more abstractly than the high achiever.

Another participant questioned the testing procedures that her school district uses to

determine a student's eligibility for the gifted program. She felt that there were no distinct

differences between the gifted students who were in the pull-out enrichment program compared to her high achievers who were not selected. This supports the literature of Ford (1996) who asserts that problems arise when students are overlooked for gifted programs because of the testing instruments used to determine a Black child's eligibility or because of a teacher's nomination may be solely subjective. The literature of Ford and Grantham (2008) finds that when administering intelligence tests, problems may arise. They found that these problems range from the test being administered by an educator who may have limited experience with testing high achieving children. Another problem that Ford (2012) finds is that intelligence tests do not measure the everyday experiences of various populations. These findings substantiate the concerns that advocates have about the underrepresentation of high achieving Black children in enrichment and gifted education programs.

What is missing from the literature is a discussion about the unique learning styles found in high achieving Black children. All of the participants' descriptions were similar in terms of describing high achieving students in their classroom which was consistent with the work of Cathcart (2010) who posits that high achievers are able to master the given curriculum at a very high level. She also found that high achievers finish set tasks, and generally present their work well and take pride in doing so. Each of the participants provided similar descriptions when they described the characteristics associated with high achievers. In their descriptions, it was discovered that there are distinct differences between the learning styles of high achievers compared to gifted learners. Further examination revealed that the participants' years of teaching experience, content knowledge, teacher engagement, and familiarity of their students aided their ability to identify specific characteristics that distinguish these two types of learners from one another.

The unique learning styles that exist between high achieving Black children and gifted Black children should be investigated further because it may have implications for the kinds of instructional strategies needed to work with that population of children. It is also imperative that educators have an understanding of the learning styles of every student in their classroom. Once that is established, the teacher can begin to plan the type of lessons that students are going to be taught, however, there are times when problems may arise and instruction simply cannot proceed as planned.

**Challenges of Teaching High Achievers**

*Sub-Question Two*

*What obstacles do Black female educators face when addressing the needs of the high achieving population?*

The participants were asked to discuss some of the limitations associated with instructing high achievers in a regular education classroom. Some of the women felt that the lack of readily materials for those students added to their frustration. In fact one of the participants felt that district administrators may have made an assumption that the teachers would be willing to spend their own money to fill in those gaps where additional enrichment materials were needed. Another participant felt that her high achievers felt slighted because she did not spend as much time working with them during small group reading instruction. She believed that by allowing them to run their own book club; that was her way of compensating them for those days when her time is devoted to working intensely with her struggling readers.

Although those concerns certainly impacted the way the participants were able to effectively teach that group of learners, the biggest limitation that they found was the lack of professional development opportunities focused solely on high achieving and gifted minority students. The

National School Boards Association Center for Public Education (2013) found that most teachers are not given the kind of professional development that would effectively support them in their classrooms. When asked about the kinds of professional development offered in their districts, the participants talked about topics that ranged from literacy, student engagement, to tracking student data. Two of the participants said that there had been professional development on differentiation but felt that it was not targeted to a specific racial group of learners. Professional Development opportunities targeted at addressing the population of high achieving Black students were not offered in these districts. For well over a century there has been debate about the intellectual capability of Blacks. In fact, arguments have been made by well-known scholars and psychologist such as Terman, Piaget, and Galton who postulate that Black people are intellectually inferior to Whites. Schools today are immune from the realities of history and the pervasive unspoken beliefs in the scientific community that doubt the intellectual capacity of Black people (Morris, 2002). The lack of professional development opportunities that highlight minority gifted and high achieves can certainly impact a teacher's ability to understand the culture and the unique learning styles of those students. This is especially important when teaching in schools that are predominately Black. Ford (2012) contends that professional development is vital; it should be of the highest quality ongoing, rigorous, and address real issues as well as tough issues.

The leadership role of a school principal is critical as building administrators take on the task of being disciplinarian and instructional leader; so collaboration between the building leader and staff members is critical to the success of the students. According to Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2007) an effective principal supports teachers by providing the resources necessary in the classroom for instruction and learning to take place.

Participant interviews revealed that discussions about the high achieving populations are discussed in grade level and faculty meetings when discussing the annual state assessment; this assessment determines the accreditation status of school districts. Although the high achieving students in grades 3-6 typically score in the advanced range on the state-wide assessment, some of the participants who teach in those grade levels stated that their building principal supports them in their daily classroom practices by continually working closely with them to ensure that technology and textbooks used in the classroom are current and provide enrichment components that allow for  a construct of knowledge as opposed to facts that are simply based on recall.

One of the participants discussed the types of school incentives and clubs that her building principal promotes in order to highlight the accomplishments of high achievers. However, she felt that much of the discussions in grade level and faculty meetings tend to revert back to the academic needs of those students who score below grade level on standardized test. The participant who teaches first grade felt that although her building principal supports those students who are in the pull-out gifted education program, she felt that when it comes to discussing data from weekly and unit assessments for her high achievers who were not selected for the program, there needed to be more discussion among staff that would look at ways the teachers could move high achieving students along the continuum. Limited discussions about what to do to support this group of learners cause problems with stagnation. This certainly creates boredom in students, particularly high achieving students.

This was a problem that Martinez and Snider (2009) found among gifted students as well. In their work, they noted that gifted students are often bored at school because they do not perceive a valued purpose to the school assignments. Again, communication and the support of the building principal can evoke the type of dialogue necessary in order to see these changes take

place in predominately Black schools that would better accommodate the needs of those high achievers.

In his research of schools that serve poor minority children, Barton (2003) finds these schools lack a rigorous curriculum and are less equipped in terms of educational resources such as textbooks and technology. This finding may be true of the schools in Barton's study however, generalizations cannot be made for every school that serves poor minority children.

Prior to conducting this study, the researcher made the assumption that her participants' would reveal that limited instructional materials for high achievers was their biggest limitation; yet that was not the case. What they felt was that instructional materials were not always readily available when teaching a specific lesson and as a result, they had to include supplemental enrichment materials or resources that were complimentary to a specific concept. These resources were found online as well as from older curriculum series that their districts purchased in years past that addressed a targeted skill which supported the high achievers in the classroom.

*Sub-Question Three*

*What support do Black female educators receive from building administrators and other support staff when they have gifted students in their classrooms?*

Findings from this study revealed that the building principals' position on addressing the academic needs of high achieving students had no significant bearing on the way the participants' planned instruction for those learners. Additionally it is important to note that the participants did not discuss whether or not support staff (i.e. instructional specialist, school counselor) assists them in the planning process when addressing the academic needs of their high achieving students.   However, each of the participants' felt their principal was supportive in terms of making sure text and technology in the classroom was available for every student. The

interviews also revealed that conversations about high achievers are often addressed when the discussion is related to Standardized testing. This however did not negate from the fact that the principals viewed the participants as the experts in the classroom. This finding is the direct opposite of literature that finds that poor minority schools employ less qualified and inexperienced teachers (Barton, 2003).

Tomlinson's (2009) research on differentiated instruction showed that teachers in her study felt they were not given enough training on that type of instruction in order to use it effectively in their classrooms. Similar to the participants' of this study who also revealed that Professional Development was limited and often times only focused on teaching strategies that emphasized remediation. One of the problems that Critical Race Scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) finds with racism in education is that it perpetuates the negative stereotypes that have been used to marginalize the poor as well as people of color. Professional Development workshops that discuss remediation and leave out any mention of ways to support high achieving and gifted Black students gives in to the theory from historical literature that postulates that Black children in predominately Black schools are not teachable beyond remediation.

This study opposes that claim and in fact, reveals just the opposite is true when Black students are instructed by teachers who have high expectations. As the literature of Ford (2012) states, Professional Development for gifted students needs to be: (1) of high quality, and (2) ongoing. The limited Professional Development opportunities focused on high achieving Black students that the participants' have experienced in their districts, allowed them to rely on their familiarity and understanding of their student's culture in order to push for high scholastic achievement of every learner; this was possible based on their own personal connections.

**Connecting with Learners**

*Sub-Question Four*

*How does the ethic of care (othermothering) inform the type of instructional support Black*

*female educators provide when teaching high achieving Black students?*

Othermothering in the classroom extends the student's primary relationship between mother and child to a shared responsibility between child and community. According to Hillard (1976), Black students are assumed to be relational- so their learning styles are often characterized by freedom of movement, variation, creativity, divergent thinking approaches, inductive reasoning, and a focus on people (p. 649). Specifically focusing on people and relationship building enabled each of the participants to connect with the students in their classrooms.

Coupled with their own personal experiences of growing up in the Black community the women shared their personal stories with their students as a way to show them that what they are currently experiencing, their teacher has already experienced those similar struggles. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) points out that within their cultural construction of womanhood, Black female teachers profoundly embrace a maternal image. As each of the participants in this study reflected on their most memorable teacher, each one of them credited a Black female teacher from their past as the person who influenced them the most. Each of the women talked about her teacher's ability to nurture students by making every child in the classroom feel that they mattered. Coincidently, the women took pride in discussing the way they take on the role as an othermother towards their students. Some of the women found that once they showed up for an after school activity that they were invited to attend (i.e. game, church, etc.) it changed their student's perception of them as just being a classroom teacher. They believed that the

relationship between them and their student was made stronger because it left the child with the image of the teacher "showing up" and being there for them.

One participant felt that she was more of a life line for her students as opposed to an othermother. She believed that because some her students come from homes where chaos and dysfunction are the norm; her classroom is that safe place from those negative encounters that her students have to endure once the school day ends. Another participant embraced the familial mother-child role of othermothering in her classroom. She even shared a funny story about a day that she returned to school after being absent and she overheard one of her students say "mama home".

For the participants in this study, othermothering was not exclusive to only the high achieving population although they believed it was important that they take advantage of those teachable moments during class to address instances where a high achiever may be teased by their peers for acting like a "nerd" or for trying to "act white". It is then that the participants felt the need to take time away from a lesson to speak to their students about the value of a good education. As one of the women stated she makes every effort to incorporate the Black experience into her lessons so that her students can see Blacks in areas of academia or sports that they typically would not be seen.

The participants felt the necessity to emphasize the importance of having an education and doing well in school because each of them believed that at times their high achievers masks their abilities for fear of not fitting in with their classmates (this was definitely the consensus among the teachers who teach at the upper elementary levels). This finding supports the literature of Ford (1992) who posits that the possibility that Black students may sabotage any chance they have of succeeding in school is a disturbing prospect in urban and gifted education.

The othermothers from the predominately Black schools in this study created the type of nurturing environment where every child has an opportunity to be successful. As it was previously discussed, each of the participants' have worked in predominately Black school their entire teaching career. Based on data collection from their interviews, it was discovered that the participants' commitment of teaching in all Black schools shows a correlation between their cultural connection and their desire to uplift their community. This finding supports the research of Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) who examined the tradition of othermothering in urban schools. She also found that Black female educators in her study had that same desire as the participants' of this research study.

Researchers have found that Black female educators who embrace the role of othermothers do so by establishing a relationship that is similar to the familial mother-child relationship. The strong cultural connections that the participants' had with their students was reflective of the way they incorporated lessons that highlighted the Black experience. Again, this stems from the data in this study which aligns with that done by Ladson-Billings (2009) and Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002). The conclusions in her study also point to an educator's acceptance, appreciation, and awareness of the culture of the children they teach. It is important to note that this is not being implied to say that Black female educators are the only group who practice culturally relevant teaching principles in their classrooms; this was however, a finding that was revealed by the participants' of this current research study on their perspectives of teaching high achieving Black students. For the participants', they were able to take those teachable moments in class to highlight and celebrate the success of every child in their classroom regardless of their academic ability.

In her book, *Marva Collins Way: Returning Excellence to Education* (1990/1982), Black educator Marva Collins emphasizes her fundamental belief that

> a good teacher can always make a poor student good and a good student superior. The word teacher has its roots in the Latin word meaning to lead or to draw out. Good teachers draw out the best in every student; they are willing to polish and shine until the true luster of each student comes through (p. 6)

For the participants of this study, each believed that they have been able to successfully do that for many of the students who have come through their classroom door.

## Summary

This chapter discussed the findings that were revealed from the data collected in this study. The chapter also compares literature that is similar to or in direct opposition of the current research study. The final chapter provides a conclusion that briefly talks about the overall goal of the study which was to examine the action steps the participants take when addressing the academic needs of high achieving Black students in the regular classroom. Chapter Seven will also discuss the implications of this study and offer recommendations for future research on the topic of high achieving Black students as well as Black female educators.

**Chapter Seven**

**Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Research**

Five Black female educators from four predominately Black school districts in the Midwest were asked to participate in this study. The intended goal of the researcher was to give them an opportunity to tell their story of how they have been able to navigate through district mandated curriculum in order to address the academic needs of high achieving Black students in their classrooms.

**Implications for Practice**

This research study revealed that the participants were intentional when using district curriculum to plan lessons for high achieving students in their classrooms. However, the study also revealed that one of the biggest limitations was the lack of professional development opportunities focused on high achieving and gifted Black students. One way that participating school districts could support this group of learners is by reevaluating the types of professional development offered to the teachers in the district. For instance, if these districts rely heavily on data to guide instruction, perhaps professional development focused around inquiry-based or project-based instruction would be beneficial for teachers because it would provide them with a more accurate picture of the learning needs of those high achievers; in turn teachers would be able to better assess the concepts that these students are mastering beyond their current grade level.

It is hopeful that the findings from this study will encourage administrators, school counselors, preservice teachers at colleges and universities as well as current classroom teachers to take a closer look at the role that the African tradition of othermothering plays in the

classroom. The ethic of care has its roots in the culture of the Black community. This is why

districts in communities with large numbers of poor and minority children should require

educators to participate in sensitivity training presented by educators and school volunteers who

represent the community. Those individuals could become mentors or liaisons for those new to

the field of education.

Along those same lines school districts in communities of color should provide additional

training for educators to gain more understanding of the unique learning styles associated with

high achieving and gifted minority students. In doing so, this will make them better equipped to

determine the most effective instructional methods that are needed to be used in the classroom

for these groups of learners. An appreciation of the students' culture can certainly refute the

negative stereotypes that are often associated with children of color.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the work from this study, the researcher generated three additional questions that

could add to the current body of literature surrounding the topic of high achieving Black

children. Future research is needed to explore the questions arising out of the research study,

therefore, these recommended inquires for future research are in no specific order.

The first recommended inquiry is based on direct classroom observation. The participants

discussed in detail the type of planning and instruction that is done in order to work with their

high achieving students, so the first recommended inquiry seeks to find out what differentiated

instruction for Black high achievers look like in these classrooms. An additional question is:

What does differentiated instruction for high achieving Black students look like in other

predominately Black school districts across the country? This might allow for sharing the best teaching practices that would address the unique learning styles of Black children.

The second recommended inquiry would look at a larger number of school districts to compare the type of enrichment that is provided to high achieving Black students from schools that are predominately Black compared to those high achieving Black students who attend predominately White school districts. Do high achieving Black students in elementary, middle school, and high school receive enrichment as part of their daily classroom instruction? How many in that enrichment group are girls? How many are boys? Biases or limited opportunities could hinder Black students from participating in enrichment groups.

The final recommended inquiry is to examine the role that the tradition of othermothering plays among Black teachers who teach in schools that are predominately White, so this recommended inquiry asks; Do Black female teachers in predominately White schools able to build strong relationships with the Black students in their classrooms or buildings? This could enhance the ability of White educators as well as educators of color to understand and support their Black students.

**Personal Implications**

The things that stood out the most during this dissertation journey was the fact that even with the limitations in the lack of readily instructional materials for their high achievers, or the time constraints that sometimes interfered with the participants availability to work with that group of learners on a daily basis; the participants used what they had (i.e. textbooks, supplemental materials, and cultural knowledge) to provide necessary instruction for all of their students. Like so many Black female educators before them, the participants set high expectations for all of their students and as Ladson-Billings (2009) posits, they did not give their students permission to fail. The voices of the participants contributed to this current body of literature by offering alternatives for the ways in which Black children are taught in schools.

At the time of this study, the country has once again been reminded of its ugly history that is deeply rooted in racism and injustice. Poor communities across this country continue to show a repeated pattern of racial profiling while the school districts continue to struggle to achieve the same academic success as the more economically affluent districts that have the resources to provide for its student body. Sadly, gifted and high achieving Black students are often times an afterthought in conversations. At predominately Black schools, these students are frequently overlooked because of the need to support the large number of students who are performing significantly below grade level. Black students in many predominately White schools are not recommended for enrichment programs due in part to the limited number of teacher recommendations, the students themselves dropping out of the programs because they are the only Black person in advanced classes, or because of the teachers unfamiliarity associated with the learning styles of high achieving and gifted Black students.

During a recent gathering at the university, the researcher was having a conversation with another doctoral student who teaches at a middle school in a predominantly White district. The topic came up about gifted Black students. The teacher stated that at a grade level meeting, one of her colleagues (non-Black) was discussing one of her Black female students and admiring the child's ability to excel in her class. Her colleague said that she just did not know what to do with the child and wanted to know her thoughts. The Black teacher said that she suggested the woman have the student tested for gifted education based on the things she was sharing with her about the student. The Black teacher said that her colleague was taken aback by her suggestion and replied "no, I think she's just a high achiever, she definitely wouldn't fit the category of gifted". The unfortunate thing about the conversation is the fact that this colleague was totally unaware of how her comment negatively impacted the Black teacher. Critical Race Theory's tenet of the intersectionality of race and racism finds that although this type of thinking does exist by some non-Blacks, it is considered normal and commonplace in society (Dixson, 2006). And in this educational setting a Black student performing well above her peers certainly would not give place to consider her for gifted education because after all, this young student does not fit the description of a gifted student.

It is that assumption made by those in education who believe that Black children cannot possibly be considered gifted that supports the research of Ford (2012). She found that Black and Hispanic students are consistently underrepresented in gifted education programs because of underlying biases that many educators have about gifted minority children. And if this is the case, then the rhetorical question becomes how many more students of color have we as educators overlooked or failed to consider for enrichment and gifted programs because of our personal prejudices?

Deficits like this will continue if districts do not provide training for teachers so they are better equipped to identify and teach this population of students. This is why as educators it is so important that we take on the initiative to become advocates who are willing to understand the unique learning abilities of every student in our classroom. And in doing so, we can help all of our students reach their highest potential; a potential that will eventually place them at the top of the class.

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Appendix A
Individual Consent Letter

**Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies**
**UM-St. Louis College of Education**

One University Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4400
Telephone:  314-852-7204
Department Phone Number: 314-516-5944

**Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study**
High achieving Black students in urban elementary schools

Date

Name

Address

City/State

My name is Sheandra P. Brown. I am a doctoral student at the university. I am conducting a research study focused around high achieving Black students in metropolitan area school districts in the Midwest. The title of my dissertation is:

*Teaching at the top of the class: Black female educators' perspective on teaching high achieving Black children.*

You are invited to participate in a research dissertation project that will help in analyzing your role as a Black female educator instructing high achieving Black children in the regular education classroom. You have been asked to participate in the research because of your knowledge and experience in working in regular education classrooms in schools that are in low income communities. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the research. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, and free to skip any questions you choose, without affecting that relationship.

Again, the purpose of this study is to examine the types of instructional strategies that Black female educators use when working with high achieving Black children in the regular education classroom setting.

If you agree to participate in this research, you can expect:

➢ The researcher will ask you to share your teaching philosophy as well the obstacles you have encountered when attempting to address the academic needs of the high achieving population in your classroom.

➢ The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. A copy will be provided to the participant for member-checking (editing) purposes.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this research.

There are no monetary or other compensatory benefits of participation in this research, though it is hoped that participants will enjoy the interview discussion.

The only people who will know that you are a research subject are the interviewer and the members of my dissertation committee. Because a pseudonym will replace your name when the interview is transcribed, class discussion of my research project will not involve your name or any identifying information. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. No information about you, or provided by you during the interview will be disclosed to others without your written permission, except:

• If necessary to protect your rights or welfare (for example, if you are injured and need emergency care or when the University of Missouri-St Louis Institutional Review Board monitors the research or consent process); or if required by law.

No personal information will be shared with others without your consent. All recorded information will be used solely for the dissertation research project. Audio recorded information used for this study will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation work.

Please specify any contact restrictions you want to request for this study only.

If you volunteer to be in this dissertation study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You also may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.  If you decide to end your participation in the study, please complete the withdrawal letter found at http://www.umsl.edu/services/ora/IRB.html, or you may request that the Investigator send you a copy of the letter.

I am the researcher conducting this study therefore, if you have questions later, you may contact me at **(314) 852-7204; via email at spb6x2@umsl.edu, or browns@jenningsk12.us**. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call Brenda Stutte, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at (314) 516-5897.

If you are enrolled as a student at UMSL, you may choose not to participate, or to stop your participation in this research, at any time. This decision will not affect your class standing or grades at UM-SL. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

**Remember:** Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

You will be given a copy of this form for your information and to keep for your records.

**I have read the above statement and have been able to express my concerns, to which the investigator has responded satisfactorily. I believe I understand the purpose of the study, as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved.  I give my permission to participate in the research described above.**


_____          _____

Participant's Signature          Date                    Participant's Printed Name



_____

 Researcher's Signature                          Date

Appendix B
Focus Group Consent Letter

**Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies**
**UM-St. Louis College of Education**

One University Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4400
Telephone:  314-852-7204
Department Phone Number: 314-516-5944

**Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study**
High achieving Black students in urban elementary schools

Date

Name

Address

City/State

My name is Sheandra P. Brown. I am a doctoral student at the university. I am conducting a research study focused around high achieving Black students in metropolitan area school districts in the Midwest. The title of my dissertation is:

*Teaching at the top of the class: Black female educators' perspective on teaching high achieving Black children*.

You are invited to participate in a research dissertation project that will help in analyzing your role as a Black female educator instructing high achieving Black children in the regular education classroom. You have been asked to participate in the research because of your knowledge of gifted education in schools that are in low income communities. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the research. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, and free to skip any questions you choose, without affecting that relationship.

Again, the purpose of this study is to examine the types of instructional strategies that Black female educators use when working with high achieving Black children in the regular education classroom setting.

If you agree to participate in this research, you can expect:

➢ The researcher will ask you to share your educational background and years of experience in education (in particular) gifted education.

➢ The focus group interview will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. It will be audio recorded and later transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. A copy will be provided to the participant for member-checking (editing) purposes.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this research.

There are no monetary or other compensatory benefits of participation in this research, though it is hoped that participants will enjoy the interview discussion.

The only people who will know that you are a research subject are the interviewer and the members of my dissertation committee. Because a pseudonym will replace your name when the interview is transcribed, class discussion of my research project will not involve your name or any identifying information. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. No information about you, or provided by you during the interview will be disclosed to others without your written permission, except:

• If necessary to protect your rights or welfare (for example, if you are injured and need emergency care or when the University of Missouri-St Louis Institutional Review Board monitors the research or consent process); or if required by law.

No personal information will be shared with others without your consent. All recorded information will be used solely for the dissertation research project. Audio recorded information used for this study will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation work.

Please specify any contact restrictions you want to request for this study only.

If you volunteer to be in this dissertation study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You also may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.  If you decide to end your participation in the study, please complete the withdrawal letter found at http://www.umsl.edu/services/ora/IRB.html, or you may request that the Investigator send you a copy of the letter.

I am the researcher conducting this study therefore, if you have questions later, you may contact me at **(314) 852-7204; via email at spb6x2@umsl.edu or** browns@jenningsk12.us. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call Brenda Stutte, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at (314) 516-5897.

If you are enrolled as a student at UMSL, you may choose not to participate, or to stop your participation in this research, at any time. This decision will not affect your class standing or grades at UM-SL. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

**Remember:** Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

You will be given a copy of this form for your information and to keep for your records.

**I have read the above statement and have been able to express my concerns, to which the investigator has responded satisfactorily. I believe I understand the purpose of the study, as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved.  I give my permission to participate in the research described above.**


_____          _____

Participant's Signature             Date                    Participant's Printed Name


_____

 Researcher's Signature                    Date

Appendix C
Individual Interview Protocol

1.  In a few words, how do you define a "high achiever" in terms of their

    abilities in academic areas such as Mathematics, English and Language Arts,

    Science, etc?

2. What type of classroom enrichment does a high achieving student need and how is

    it different from instruction or enrichment for the  typical student?

3.  What are some of the limitations of working with high achievers in your classroom?


4.  What have your successes been with high achievers?


5.   How do you track that data to help you inform the type of instruction provided to that

    group of students?

6.  How often does the discussion come up about the importance of addressing the high

    achieving population? (i.e. faculty meetings, grade level meetings, etc.)

7.   Are there Professional Development opportunities provided for teachers to attend

    that focus on gifted Black children? If so, be specific about topics

    offered

8.   Research studies have looked at the impact that peer pressure tends to have on

    children in schools. As a Black female educator, what do you do to

    support high achieving Black students in your classroom that encourages

    cultural pride and high scholastic achievement especially when working with

children who are often times ridiculed by peers who believe that being smart is a

 negative thing?

Appendix D
Focus Group Protocol

1. What is your teaching philosophy?

2. Specifically what is your teaching philosophy regarding high achieving Black students in urban education?

3. How do you address the special needs learner across the spectrum of abilities?

4. As a classroom teacher how do you implement instruction to address the high achieving students in your classroom?

5. Is there a difference between a high achiever and a gifted student and if so, how would you define the difference?

6. How important is it that school districts in urban communities place more emphasis on the high achieving population of minority students and why?

7. Are there barriers that impede your district from addressing the needs of the high achieving population? If so, please explain. If there are no barriers please be specific in explaining the steps that your district takes to ensure that this population of children is having their academic needs met…

8. There are educators who do not feel that modified lessons and curriculum for high achieving Black students in urban schools is necessary since the

   majority of poor minority students come from poverty and need a great deal of

   remedial support. What would you say to those educators who feel that way?

9. Can you reflect on one Black female teacher that you remember in school?

10. Reflecting on that one Black female teacher, how have you brought what you learned

   from that teacher into your classroom-particularly when you work with high achieving

   Black students?

Appendix E

**Categories, Subcategories, Properties, Dimensions**

CATEGORY: Instructional Planning
SUBCATEGORIES: Curriculum and Data Tracking

Curriculum
| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
|---|---|
| P:challenge | D: memorize-to-analyze |
| P: collaboration | D: grade level planning-to-vertical team planning |
| P: components | D: whole class-to-differentiated |
| P: cultural competence | D: non inclusive-to-inclusive to all |
| P: enrichment | D: remedial learning-to-advanced learning |
| P: expectations | D: low-to-high |
| P: exploration | D: led by teacher-to-led by student |
| P: instruction | D: small groups-to-individual |
| P: knowledge | D: recall-to-analysis |
| P: pacing | D: extended time-to-early finisher |

Data Tracking
| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
|---|---|
| P: assessment | D: pretest-to-posttest |
| P: data collection | D: tracking sheet-to-data wall |
| P: goals | D: regression-to-progress |
| P: pacing | D: weekly-to-quarterly |
| P: responsibility | D: teacher directed-to-student directed |
| P: supportive | D: no encouragement-to-encouragement |
| P: targeted skills | D: basic-to-advanced |
| P: trends | D: similarities-to-differences |

CATEGORY: Restrictions
SUBCATEGORIES: Instructional Materials; Administrative Support; Professional Development

Instructional Materials

| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
|---|---|
| P: content | D: lecture-to-interactive |
| P: curriculum | D: mandated-to-flexibility |
| P: expenditures | D: district purchases-to-I used my personal funds |
| P: supplemental resources | D: scarce-to-unlimited |
| P: textbooks | D: outdated-to-current |

Administrative Support

| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
|---|---|
| P: availability | D: by appointment only-to-the door is always open |
| P: communication | D: discussion relates to testing only-to-helping high achievers along the continuum |
| P: encouragement | D: seldom-to-frequent |
| P: expectations | D: low-to-high |
| P: focus | D: basic learners-to-advanced learners |
| P: involved | D: not part of the discussion-to-part of the discussion |
| P: knowledgeable | D: unfamiliar-to-expertise |
| P: responsive | D: rarely-to-always |
| P: supportive | D: left to fend for myself-to-my principal is helpful |

Professional Development

| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
|---|---|
| P: attendance | D: half day-to-full day |
| P: discussion | D: remediation-to-enrichment |
| P: focus | D: general-to-specific |
| P: frequency | D: annually-to-quarterly |
| P: inclusiveness | D: targeted grades-to-district wide |
| P: requirement | D: mandatory-to-voluntary |
| P: support | D: no contact information-to-contact information |

CATEGORY: Cultural Relationship
SUBCATEGORIES: Cultural Connection; Othermothering

Cultural Connection

| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
|---|---|
| P: acceptance | D: it's not cool to be smart-to-it's okay to be smart |
| P: adapting | D: the only one-to-faces that look like mine |
| P: awareness | D: no pride in culture-to-pride in culture |
| P: self-reflection | D: no discussion beyond curriculum-to-share personal journey with my students |

Othermothering

| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
|---|---|
| P: common goal | D: one time thing-to-everlasting partnerhsip |
| P: compassion | D: just another student-to-letting them know they matter |
| P: guidance | D: find your own way-to-pouring in them all I can |
| P: honesty | D: playing it safe-to-I keep it real with my kids |
| P: relational | D: these kids-to-my kids |
| P: reliability | D: can't be counted on-to-can count on me |

CATEGORY: Learning Styles
SUBCATEGORIES: Identifying those at the top of the class

<u>Identifying those at the top of the class</u>
| PROPERTY: | DIMENSION: |
| --- | --- |
| P: attitude | D: nonchalant-to-eager to learn |
| P: effort | D: inconsistent-to-consistent |
| P: engagement | D: off task-to-eager to participate |
| P: love of learning | D: no interest in work-to-takes pride in work |
| P: momentum | D: just enough to get by-to-stick with it attitude |
| P: motivation | D: play it safe-to-welcome the challenge |
| P: preparation | D: unorganized-to-well organized |
| P: understanding | D: can't grasp concepts-to-grasps concepts easily |

Ms. Derby's perspective of high achieving Black students

Ms. Paige's perspective of high achieving Black students

Ms. Ellington's perspective of high achieving Black students

I uplift my students they get overlooked
differentiate instruction they need to be challenged
components that support enrichment
enrichment high achievers
challenge them you're going far
smart successful
encouraging the high achievers
I want my son to be challenged celebrate them
you're smart acting white creative
connect with personal experiences
share my personal experiences

Dr. Tamm's perspective of high achieving Black students

Mrs. McCausland's perspective of high achieving Black students

Appendix F- Student differentiated literacy activity (Primary Level)

Name_____          Date_____

## George Washington Carver: A Weed is a Flower

# Tic-Tac-Toe Reading Choice Board

**Directions**:  After reading the story, complete three activities to complete a TIC-TAC-TOE.
Mark your choices with X's or O's and staple your completed work together.

| **VOCABULARY** | **VOCABULARY** | **RESPOND** |
|---|---|---|
| Write a story using each of this week's **vocabulary** words.  Illustrate your story. | Use the dictionary to look up the meaning of these words. Write the definitions.<br>unusual original  scientist  accomplish  process  excel  research  opportunity | George Washington Carver studied peanuts.  Tell what the effect of his studies was.  Write at least 5 sentences.  Illustrate your work. |
| **GRAMMAR** | **WORKING WITH WORDS** | **LANGUAGE** |
| Write a sentence using each of these words.<br>is      am      are      was<br>were | Read *The Latest Ideas,* Find all the words that end in –er or –est.  Write them in new sentences.   Then think of 5 more words that end in –er or -est.  Write them in sentences too.  Illustrate your favorite sentence. | Make a list of ten synonyms. Use each word in a sentence. |
| **DRAW CONCLUSIONS** | **WRITING** | **COMPREHENSION** |
| Why do you think that Dr. Carver served guests a meal made entirely of peanuts?  Write at least five sentences and illustrate your answer. | Make a poster of a famous person. Tell what they did and why you chose them.  Write at least 8 sentences. | What was the **author's purpose** in writing the story?  Why do you think the author wrote <u>A Weed is a Flower</u> – to entertain, to inform, or both? Why? |

Appendix G- Student differentiate math activity (Intermediate Level)

## Monstrous Math

**Description:** In this lesson, students use fraction circles to create a "fraction monster." Students practice their skills in adding fractions with unlike denominators. The activity also provides an opportunity to integrate creative writing into the math curriculum.

**Goals:**

1. Students will be able to add fractions with unlike denominators.
2. Students will use their creative writing skills to construct a short story.

**Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to create a "fraction monster" using at least four different types of fraction circle pieces (halves, twelfths, thirds, etc.).
2. Students will be able to add the fractions in their "fraction monsters" to arrive at a total value.
3. Students will be able to write a creative short story about their "fraction monsters."

**Materials:**

- Ellison cutouts of fraction circle pieces [each type of fraction (halves, thirds, fourths, etc.) should be a different color]
- white sheets of construction paper
- glue
- pencils
- paper

**Procedure:**
Review the addition of fractions with different denominators. Write a couple of problems on the board, and review how to find a common denominator. Inform students that they are going to do some "monstrous math problems" today. Put the box of Ellison cutouts in a central location. Explain that the cutouts represent fractions of whole circles (you may want to sketch a couple of examples on the board -- one circle divided into thirds, another circle divided into sixths, etc.). Let students know that each color represents a different fraction (ex. a yellow piece is 1/2, a red piece is 1/4, etc.). Ask students to use at least four different types of fraction circle pieces to create a "fraction monster." Students can glue their pieces on a sheet of white construction paper. Remind students to put their names on their papers.

After students have created their monsters, they should add up the fraction values that they used.

Students should record their work on a piece of paper (to be collected later). Ask students to share their results to see who has a monster made up of the most whole circles and who has a monster made up of the least whole circles. [**Author's Note:** The teacher may want to award "prizes" to the student with the highest fraction value and the student with the lowest fraction value.]

To tie this activity to language arts, have students write a creative short story about their monsters. [**Author's Note:** I had my students write stories related to space exploration, since that was a topic we were studying in science. I also had the class vote on the most creative story.] Remind students to check their work for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

**Assessment:** Collect and display students' "fraction monsters" and stories. The teacher should collect students' computations to check for accuracy in adding unlike denominators. The teacher should also review students' stories for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

## Monster Math Rubric

|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mathematical Accuracy | The sum total of fraction pieces is not correct and is not close to the correct sum. | The sum total of fraction pieces is close to the correct sum. | The sum total of fraction pieces is correct. | The sum total of fraction pieces is correct AND all work is shown. |
| Use of Shapes | Monster includes 0 – 1 shape. | Monster includes 2 – 3 shapes. | Monster includes all 4 shapes. | Monster includes multiple pieces of all 4 shapes. |
| Creativity/Originality | Monster does not show creativity. | Monster is somewhat creative. | Monster shows creativity. | Monster is colorful and creative. |
| Effort/Neatness | No effort went into creation of the math monster. | Work shows some attempt was made at creating the math monster. | Work shows student put forth effort into creating the math monster. | Work shows student put forth extra effort in creating the math monster. |
| Story | Math story is less than half a page and/or does not include math concepts. | Monster story is half a page and includes math concepts. | Monster story is one page and includes math concepts. | Monster story is one page or more, includes math concepts, and is grammatically correct. |