A CULTURE-FOCUSED STUDY WITH ACCOMPLISHED BLACK EDUCATORS ON PEDAGOGICAL EXCELLENCE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

By

MELANIE M. ACOSTA

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2013

To my family

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

A CULTURE-FOCUSED STUDY WITH ACCOMPLISHED BLACK EDUCATORS ON
PEDAGOGICAL EXCELLENCE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

By

Melanie M. Acosta

December 2013

Chair: Dorene Ross
Major: Curriculum and Instruction

To address the pedagogical needs of African American learners, some

educational researchers have rejected the seductive tendency to document damage,

but rather intentionally showcase excellence in Black education. They have studied

highly successful teachers of African American students, their teaching practices,

beliefs, and self-efficacy. What emerged were rich descriptions, characterizations and

interpretive frameworks of effective pedagogy, which constantly remind us that there are

exceptional educators doing great things in African American education (Delpit, 2012;

Hilliard, 2003). However, the strength of this work, which lies in its theoretical and

philosophical core, is often underemphasized in many preparation programs (Gordon,

1997; Murrell, 2002) and even less well represented in the majority of classrooms

across the country**.**

This dissertation presents a conception of pedagogical excellence for African

American learners as a way to help teachers and teacher educators understand the

comprehensive nature of good teaching for Black children in America. It builds on the

effective pedagogy literature as well as research on effective Black educators, and is

grounded in the cultural knowledge and perspectives of a group of community-nominated, accomplished African American educators.

Results show that pedagogical excellence for African American students is more expansively understood when African American cultural knowledge is employed as a basis for analysis and interpretation of teacher perspectives and practice. Specifically, an expansive vision of pedagogical excellence emerged in which the successful educator's abiding sense of urgency was understood in political and cultural contexts and was situated as an active tool to promote student success. Explicitly connecting African American community perspectives and cultural knowledge enhances our understanding and articulation of effective pedagogy in many ways. The kind of pedagogical excellence described in this dissertation can be used to guide teacher educators who are working with prospective African American teachers, pre- and in-service teachers who are working to enact a pedagogy of excellence, and administrators and policy-makers who promote equity.

CHAPTER 1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The State Of Black Education: An Urgent Crisis

The human potential of the Black population is underutilized (Freeman, 2005; Freeman, Camoy, Findlay, Joiner, Magyair-Beck, 1999). As defined by Freeman et al., (1999), underutilization of human potential is the "inappropriate matching of abilities with tasks (underemployment) or the lack of use of talents (unemployment), which prevents individuals or groups from maximizing their capabilities and or productivity" (p.147). Freeman (2005) further indicates that the underutilization of human potential for Black people occurs in education across four distinct periods; the transition to school, experiences within school, transition into the workforce, and experiences in the workforce. To illustrate this concept, consider the following example.

Jamal is a five-year-old Black boy entering kindergarten for the first time in a midsized city with a large Black population. Jamal is excited and eager to do all the things in school that he's observed of his older siblings. The first week of school, Jamal is repeatedly reminded to raise his hand before he moves; he is discouraged from helping his classmates; and every time he speaks his language is corrected. As the school year progresses, the reminders turn into reprimands, and the reprimands turn into behavior referrals. Jamal no longer wakes up excited to go to school. He carries this new dislike for school throughout his scholastic career, fueling disengagement and more negative experiences. As high school looms ahead, Jamal can't wait to quit. He's been placed in intensive remediation classes, which prevent him from pursuing his real passion for science and technology. After his third attempt on the latest high school

competency exam, he drops out, finds a job at a local restaurant, and dreams of inventions and cures for diseases of which the world will never benefit.

Unfortunately, the fictitious account above is the reality for many children of African descent across the United States (Boykin & Nougera, 2011). That schooling experiences are complicit in the Black underutilization of human potential is not surprising given the tenuous history of Black education in the United States and abroad (Anderson, 1988; Tyack, 1974; Woodson, 1933). As Darling-Hammond (2005) writes, "Despite the rhetoric of education as the great equalizer, the school experiences of African American students in the United States continues to be substantially separate and unequal" (p. 202).

Freeman's (2005, 1999) concept of the underutilization of human potential is indicative of the consequences of the crisis in Black education. Pervasive and debilitating, this crisis affects Black populations on the North American continent and abroad (Freeman, 2005). Reports on Black education confirm that neither Black boys nor girls fare well in American public schools (Boykin & Nougera, 2011). Black students are almost twice as likely as their White classmates to leave school before obtaining a high school diploma (Aud et al., 2010). In fact, in 2005, 52% of high school aged Black males dropped out of school as compared with 29% of White high schoolers (Education Week, 2008). Furthermore, Black children are disproportionately represented in lower academic tracks and special education classes. Corbett (2006) found that less than 4% of Black boys as compared to 21% of White boys are enrolled in gifted and talented programs. Ford (2012) summarizes the situation stating, "No other group of students is as underrepresented in gifted education as Black students" (p. 13) (as a personal

example, my 4th grade African American daughter has been in the gifted program at her school since 2nd grade (we have yet to see another Black female in the program despite the fact that Black students are 29.4% of the school population). Standardized assessment data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) document similar results in underachievement. Reading assessment reports for 2009 indicate that nationally, U.S. Black fourth and eighth graders read below basic levels of proficiency (53% and 44% respectively as contrasted with 23% and 17% of White fourth and eighth graders). Math assessment results show that about half of the U.S. population of Black students in fourth and eighth grade score below basic levels of achievement. In contrast, about one fourth of White students in the same grade levels score below the basic level of achievement in math. These data warrant critical study of the educational experiences of African American students.

The crisis in Black education is also evidenced in analysis of school infrastructure (resources, finance, hiring policies) and curricular factors (access to rigorous curriculum, delivery of curriculum, curriculum quality) Jonathan Kozol and Linda Darling-Hammond, as well as others, provide provocative descriptions and examinations of the disparate conditions of predominantly Black and Hispanic urban schools and predominantly White, suburban schools. In Kozol's (2005) analysis of U.S. educational disparities, he expressed outrage at inequities in school spending. Examining the state of New York, he pointed out that while New York City spent $11,627 on the education of each child in 2002-2003, the suburban towns of Manhasset spent $22,311, and Great Neck $19,705. In the epilogue, he concluded, "What is happening right now in the poorest communities

of America – which are largely African American communities… is the worst situation African Americans in America have faced since slavery" (Kozol, 2005, p. 313).

In turn, Darling-Hammond (2010, 2005) addresses inequities in public schools' most valuable resource, teachers. Her work reveals that schools serving large populations of Black children are least likely to offer the kind of curriculum and teaching needed to meet the new standards, have fewer qualified and experienced teachers, and the least amount of funds and resources to accommodate a school population with growing and diverse needs. She writes, "Minority and low income students are most likely to find themselves in classrooms staffed by inadequately prepared, inexperienced, and ill-qualified teachers because funding inequities, distributions of local power, labor market conditions, and dysfunctional hiring practices conspire to produce teacher shortages of which they bear the brunt" (p.211). In short, Black students receive a significantly lower quality of education in many school systems and are being victimized by substandard practices in American classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2005; King, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Murrell, 2003). Such conclusions are not aberrant, but reflect a worsening pattern of disinvestment in Black education.

Further complicating academic challenges is the pervasive use of exclusionary discipline practices with Black students. In March 2012, the Office for Civil Rights found that Black students are three and a half times more likely than their White peers to get suspended from school. Across the nation nearly one out of every six Black students (17%) was suspended at least once in 2009-10, compared to one in 20 White students (5%) (Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2011). Recent research notes the dangerous connection between use of exclusionary discipline practices and academic

underachievement (Arcia, 2006; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Arcia (2006) followed two demographically similar groups of children (matched on gender, race, grade level, family poverty, and limited English proficiency) for two years. The groups differed in the number of suspensions received by students in each group (one group received at least one suspension and the other group received no suspensions). He found that within two years, the suspended cohort was five years behind their nonsuspended peers in reading skills. He notes that though other risk factors may have contributed to differences between the suspended and nonsuspended groups, school suspensions may have initiated or maintained a process of alienation from the classroom and the learning process. Recently, Russell, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) concluded that over the course of time, school suspensions are a moderate to strong predictor of subsequent (high school dropout) and may contribute to the racial gaps in academic achievement between Black and White school children. Undoubtedly, these policies and practices as well as the disproportionate use of these practices with African American learners, constrain the efforts of many Black students who are seeking education through the public school system.

Apart from the barrage of statistics, what's most alarming is the unflinching acceptance of Black student underachievement as a universal, unquestionable fact. For example, I was recently elected to the school advisory committee at my children's elementary school. At our first meeting, the principal shared results from the previous year's standardized test results. As she rattled off numbers and demographics, she ended her spiel by sharing that the school did not make adequate yearly progress because, "the Black kids didn't make it in reading and the poor kids didn't make it in

math". Not a single soul questioned her comments nor was there any conversation about ways to help students improve their achievement in those areas. There was no sense of outrage or concern, but rather a sense of emotional detachment from the situation altogether. The principal just shared "the facts" and the case was closed, on to the next item of business. Similarly, I recently attended a forum where local politicians vied for the support of the Black community in a mid-sized Florida city. One community member asked the school board incumbent to share what she would do to improve the education of Black children in the city. The incumbent, a two-term member of the school board replied that she wouldn't do anything to improve Black student achievement because the school board was already doing an excellent job and what was really needed was more parent involvement and mentoring programs (keep in mind that elementary schools in this district that serve predominantly Black students have been cited as in need of improvement by the Florida Department of Education for the last eight years. This rating is based on student performance on the statewide Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). Instances of racial ajustice such as these are all too common in the schooling experiences of Black youth. Russell-Brown (2006) defines racial ajustice as, "legal indiscretions that go unrecognized, unchallenged, and unchecked" (p.58). Different from injustices, which are recognized by most people, ajustice is hardly recognized without careful examination (Russell-Brown, 2006). Left unchecked these acts of ajustice do not disappear; their impact is far reaching and limit the capacity for educational reform designed to significantly improve the educational success of Black school children the world over.

The education of Black people is in a state of crisis, yet there are some who remain oblivious. There are those who choose not to get involved, and there are those who ignore it altogether. Academic underachievement, structural inequities, subjective disciplinary measures, and disregard are but outward manifestations of a deeper, ideological emergency that outlines and continues to characterize Black education in dehumanizing ways. Under these circumstances, the education of Black school children will never fulfill its historic purpose (Perry, 2003), and the world will never come to benefit from the invaluable contributions of the Black population.

Teacher Education: A Promising Strategy to Help End the Crisis in Black Education

Some researchers have given considerable attention to the education and schooling experiences of African American children. They have studied success in Black education, which has produced culture-centered perspectives on improving educational outcomes for Black children. For example, in the field of Psychology, notable Black psychologists, challenge behaviorist theories of learning and articulate the connections between sociocultural contexts and human cognition; now widely recognized in brain based learning (Lee, 2005). These scholars call attention to the influential role that prior knowledge, cultural artifacts, belief systems, and social interactions play in teaching and learning processes. Similarly, researchers such as Irvine (1990), Ladson-Billings (1994), Lee (1993), Tate (1996), and others, have studied teacher pedagogy and revealed the insights and wisdoms of practice used by exemplary teachers of African American students. Conclusively, the idea that good teaching for Black children is predicated on a cultural connection emerges. This perspective suggests that the intentional implementation of pedagogy connected to the

19

cultural integrity, cultural history, and political context of Black people offers the most productive solution to end the pervasive trend in Black educational underachievement.

Though this literature is widely available, it is not widely used by teacher educators or in teacher education programs. Moreover, when teacher educators do attempt to incorporate the elements of this research into their courses, most skim from the top and leave their students swimming in the shallow end of the knowledge pool. That is, many teacher educators do not explicitly connect culture to pedagogy holistically in ways that build on the cultural ethos that shapes teaching and learning. As a result, prospective and practicing teachers have limited knowledge of how to demonstrate pedagogical excellence for their African American students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project is to work with community-nominated, accomplished African American educators of African American children to understand the cultural influences on their teaching of Black children. Previous studies of successful teaching of African American children (Ladson-Billings, 2009), the history of African American schooling and pedagogy (Siddle-Walker, 1996) and of Black teachers (Foster, 1997) provide a basis for the current study in its implications about the role of culture in teaching Black American children well. The present study is distinctive because it foregrounds African American cultural knowledge as a significant factor in effective pedagogy for African American children. It seeks to use African American culture to provide the necessary context for descriptions and perspectives of African American accomplished practice. Enabling these African American perspectives to frame the current study is important for adding to the existing literature of effective pedagogy for Black children throughout the Diaspora. More importantly, centering this study on the

views, beliefs, and values in some African American communities dislodges dominant perspectives about effective teaching that omit cultural considerations. Making cultural connections explicit in teaching also creates much needed space for the articulation of theories and philosophies about education that are grounded in social justice perspectives.

Research Question

This research study will address the following question: 1) How do African American teachers collectively describe and analyze the cultural influences on their pedagogy with African American children?

Significance of the Study

In order to promote learning, inquiry, and achievement in classrooms populated by Black children, teachers must understand African American culture, history, and experience so as to build on it in the classroom-learning environment (King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Murrell, 2003). Those of us bold enough to declare our concern about the education of Black children must recognize the transformative potential of research by working alongside African American people and building on their philosophical perspectives in Black educational studies (King, 2008; Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2009). This research project employed a qualitative, culture-focused approach in thinking about effective teaching for African American children. Research continues to document the critical role of classroom teachers in the education and schooling of children, particularly African American children. Therefore, researchers must act responsively by shaping and refining the knowledge and literature base.

It is also the hope that this work will continue the examination of the ways that culture significantly influences the work of good teachers at the level of consciousness

and ideology. In this way, the educational community can reconstruct models of culturally-influenced teaching that are comprehensive and offer teachers expansive interpretive frameworks that account for the complexity and psychological depth involved in educating African American children well. While this study alone is hardly capable of such outcomes, it may help to direct more attention towards culture in teaching and learning and furthering our understanding of the philosophical attributes of effective pedagogy for African American children. This approach to education reform has the potential to actualize the dream of educational excellence for all children of African descent.

Finally, it is hoped that this work will reiterate the invaluable impact of African American educators, teacher educators, and scholars in ending the crisis in Black education. Siddle-Walker (2012) asked, "What would happen if we added Black educators into the story of educational equity in the United States?" She responded, quite accurately that adding Black educators back into the story would complicate our simplistic understanding of education for African American children. She stated this is so because African American teachers have an expansive vision of educational quality and equity for African American children, which includes an educational equity and pedagogy agenda. The present study builds on Siddle-Walker's assumption of the importance of African American educator knowledge and perspectives and seeks to highlight some of the cultural insights that undergird successful pedagogical enactment. Such a project is indeed an ambitious task, and I readily admit my shortcomings. However, it may well be that through efforts such as this that we can begin to bring the crisis in Black education to an end.

Definition of Terms

- **African American cultural heritage**: The history of the African American experience that documents how African American people have persistently challenged and transformed mainstream cultural norms and practices that devalue and dehumanize people (King, 1994).

- **African American cultural knowledge:** Includes the skills, awareness, and competence that permit Black people to participate meaningfully in their culture in all of its changing regional and socioeconomic variations. Can also be referred to as cultural competence (King, 1994).

- **Axiology:** Part of one's epistemic philosophical orientation that represents values or value system. Also defined as the study of the nature of values and value judgments or the branch of philosophy dealing with values, as those of ethics, aesthetics, or religion (Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

- **Black**: The use of the term Black in this study refers to persons of African ancestry throughout the Diaspora including the Caribbean, the United States, and European countries. It will be used interchangeably with terms such as African American, Black American, of African descent, and of African ancestry.

- **Culture**: the total product of a people's being and consciousness that emerges from their grappling with nature and living with other humans in a collective group (King, 1994).

- **Culture-centered perspectives/pedagogy/research:** Represents perspectives that suggest educational approaches to transform the society and/or the educational process in honor community and cultural integrity. Pedagogy and research that incorporate an indigenous conception of cultural knowledge that reflects, values, and respects the integrity of indigenous African American culture must include social criticism as an important academic skill (King, 1994).

- **Cultural Knowledge**: refers to those learned behaviors, beliefs, and ways of relating to people and the environment that members of a cultural group acquire through normal processes of enculturation (King, 1994).

- **Process-building Methodology:** Providing multiple opportunities to engage, participate, share, affirm, and produce knowledge and the generation of theory from everyday shared realities by allowing participants to reflect on their own individual experience, and thereby, make connections with the shared experiences of other through dialogue for the purpose of making society more just for future generations (Hill & King, 2005)

- **Teacher effectiveness (literature-based):** Includes helping African American students master academic standards (including high performance on standardized testing). Also includes helping students develop cultural

competence (includes knowledge if heritage, knowledge of self, and sense of purpose). The word effectiveness will be used interchangeably with the terms successful, accomplished, exemplary, exceptional, and good in describing teachers who help African American students achieve educational excellence (Dubois, 1935; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Woodson, 1933).

- **Teacher effectiveness (parent-generated):** Good teachers of African American children are those who challenge my child (ren) to do the best they can everyday. They show my child (ren) how to complete their work and provide one-on-one support for my child (ren) when necessary. Good teachers are tough with my child (ren) but are always caring, fair and honest. They listen to me and maintain open communication with me whether it is good or bad news. Good teachers believe that my child (ren) can be successful and they won't let my child (ren) "slide through" because they understand the world my child (ren) will grown up and live in. Good teachers are an extension of my family and my community.

- **Western/Ethnocentric Research Paradigms:** Dominant research establishment perspectives, beliefs, or practices of the mainstream culture that adhere to supposedly scientific, objective, and politically neutral practice, which constitute, by contrast, non-culturally affirming knowledge production practices, methods, and theories (King, 2005).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 describes the current situation of Black education and established the need for the current study. Chapter 2 details the relevant research related to effective pedagogy for African American learners. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to situate the study in the literature and reveal the distinctive qualities of this study. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology that led to my findings. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 include journal articles that describe those findings. Chapter 4 presents an expansive vision of effective pedagogy for African American students, or pedagogical excellence, connected to the unique African American cultural heritage, while Chapter 5 addresses one particular ideological influence on African American pedagogical excellence. Finally, Chapter 6 is a discussion of the findings and its implications for research and practice. At its heart, this study is a detailed account of how culture and community can be used as tools in a

transformative Black education agenda (King, 2005) and the larger social justice project. This dissertation serves the additional purpose of making the connections between culture and pedagogy more explicit and promoting community empowerment and action. The outcomes are dependent on the cultural knowledge embedded an African American community conception of teacher quality and reflect its concerns and interests.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What does it mean to teach African American children well? How do African American teachers instruct black children in ways that enable them to achieve excellence in education? These two enduring questions define my focus as an emerging scholar. I have long recognized the contradiction between the way school officials typically define the role of a "good" teacher and the actual work of being a "good" teacher. Yet, I never dedicated much thought to critically studying these differences or why they mattered for the children I serve - until I started mentoring other teachers.

Shortly after I took leave from my position as a third grade teacher in a predominantly African American elementary school in Florida to nurture my then infant son, I began my doctoral studies. The previous school year I had served as a mentor teacher to a young, white female student teacher, Rebecca,[1] from the local university. She was a very diligent student who did not mind staying late and working hard, and we quite easily developed a friendship. We observed each other's teaching and gave constructive feedback. We planned lessons together and she had numerous opportunities to experiment under my careful supervision and guidance. I comforted and encouraged her when her first formal teaching observation by the university supervisor did not go as well as she had hoped, and she helped me refine the way I used technology in the classroom. We talked every day after school, reflecting on the day and making plans for the next. Our third graders excelled in so many ways and so did she. I do not share this to boast about my abilities as a mentor teacher (because I made

---

[1] Name has been changed

26

many mistakes), but to merely describe the environment in which Rebecca was situated. She did so well as an intern she was offered a full-time, fourth grade teaching position with same group of third graders she had taught in my classroom. As she taught her first year, we talked a lot, either by telephone or email. She shared how things were going in the classroom and provided me with updates about the children. Mostly though, she vented her frustration about the fact that the students' behavior was so different and pleaded for my help and advice on how to get the students to behave the way they had just a few months before as third graders. I listened intently and responded with what I thought were sure fire tips and strategies to improve the situation for her. "This has to work", I thought. These were the same techniques I had used with these same students and they worked beautifully. Unfortunately nothing I suggested worked, and we were both clueless as to why the things I recommended were unsuccessful for her. The more Rebecca questioned, the less I could explain or offer. I had no coherent way to explain why I taught the way I did, why my students performed with me the way they did, or even how I went about making those in-the-moment instructional decisions that facilitated my students' success other than to conclude that it was just in my nature and I had a special gift that she obviously didn't possess (which was certainly not the case). I began to question my own practice, "Was the way I taught appropriate? Was it right?" My inability to communicate my knowledge and perspectives in ways that Rebecca could replicate, or at the least understand, reduced my pedagogy to proverbial wisdoms with no theoretical and intellectual backbone.

I never believed for a moment that Rebecca was not capable of enacting the same kind of pedagogy I demonstrated in the classroom. She was able to observe me

in action and ask me questions, but she, and I, needed more. What was missing was an explicit metacognitive deconstruction, on my part, of the ideological and theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogy that appeared simple in observation. We both needed to be able to connect pedagogy to larger cultural, social, and political tenets in order for me to fully explicate theory and in order for her to understand the scope of the critical elements needed to successfully teach African American students. Not fully understanding the bounds of my own teaching was my greatest error as a mentor teacher, and one that bears explicit attention from the educational community.

My intern finished out the year as best she could, but moved to a different school the next school year. She is still teaching, and we still keep in touch. This past summer Rebecca sent me a text message sharing that she was awarded Teacher of the Year at her school, and she thanked me. She said my way of teaching influenced her as a teacher in more ways than I'll ever know. I was excited and moved by her accolades. Yet, it is precisely the "these ways of teaching that I'll never know" that have led to this study of African American pedagogy. What are the ways that African American teachers teach that move children of African descent to success? How does the current literature base describe this pedagogy, and is it consistent with African American community standards of educational excellence?

In Chapter 2, I will examine the literature on effective pedagogy for African American students. This analysis involves studying different and overlapping literature bases. First, I trace the paradigmatic shifts in the way Black student improvement has been conceptualized. Next, I discuss the literature on effective teaching of African American children, synthesizing the characteristics across different interpretive

frameworks. Finally, I will end with an in-depth review of the literature on successful

African American teachers of African American students, outlining salient conceptual

features.   Taken together, some of the literature on effective teaching of African

American children and the research on effective African American teachers present a

distinctive way of teaching that I recognize as pedagogical excellence. This review of

literature concludes with methodological considerations as well as the present study's

connections to, extensions of, and distinctions from the research presented.

Ideological and Theoretical Shifts in Conceptualizing Improvement in African American Education

Since the emancipation of enslaved Africans from legalized slavery, many have

concerned themselves with Black education (Anderson, 1988). In the early years,

northern philanthropists and missionary groups endeavored to provide means for

educating Black people; and in more recent years, educational researchers and school

leaders have theorized frameworks to improve the education of minorities, including

Blacks. Systemic improvements in African American education are intricately connected

to the dominating theories about the intellectual capacity and life condition of African

American individuals and communities. This section will provide a brief history of the

shifting ways educators and researchers have conceptualized the challenges in

educating African American children. This historical overview is necessary to

understand why significant emphasis is placed on the classroom teacher in the present

study. This examination is organized chronologically and identified by the educational

discourse (labels) dominating the era.

Discourse of Inferiority, Deficit, and Deprivation

As early as the 1800s, theories regarding the educability of enslaved Africans were circumscribed by a discourse of genetic or biological inferiority (Anderson, 1988; Kaestle, 1983; Woods, 1998).   It was theorized that African American people were mentally inferior by nature, and, as such, attempts to improve the mental capacity of Black people through formal training were of little use. This ideology had grave implications for the education of African Americans, and empiricism was used as a mechanism to justify slavery and educational exclusion (Woods, 1998). Researchers sought to provide evidence supporting a biological-based racial hierarchy, in which people of African descent were at the bottom not as a result of racial discrimination, but as the result of nature (Wynter, 2003). This view of African American people as a biological tumor on an otherwise healthy American system is evident in Gunnar Myrdal's theorization of race relations in the United States in the 1940s as "the Negro problem" (Myrdal, 1944). Though this was during the time before the advent of free public schooling, it is still significant in the history of African American education because it characterizes the ideological discourse of intellectual inferiority, in which the challenges of educating African American people were viewed as inherent in the individual. Tyack (1974) figuratively captures this ideological discourse. He writes, "To have been born black was normally to have been labeled a failure, an inferiority all too often justified by bogus science" (p. 217). This discourse remained intact well past the 1940s and served as a catalyst for the Eugenics movement of the early 1900s, and the proliferation of intelligence testing in education, which made it easy to locate the cause of school failure in the child (Tyack, 2007, 1974).

As demands for civil rights and democracy created more educational opportunities for African Americans, so too did the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and linguistics shift the ideological discourse about how to improve the educational achievement of African Americans (Hollins, 1994). Around the 1960s, the ideological discourse shifted from biological or genetic deficiency to cultural depravity in thinking about the challenges to be addressed in educating Black American children. These theories were fueled by sociological and linguistic research, which produced a number of models characterizing African American families and communities as abnormal, and culturally void (Hollins, 1994). In these models, the cultural and experiential backgrounds of African American, and other low income children were measured by their proximity to European American socialization, and were subsequently regarded as inadequate. For example, Orr (1987) employed the linguistic deficit approach in her study of African American language and math performance. Her work posited a correlation between African American English and difficulties in mathematics learning. Orr's work is based on the assumption that African American English lacks some necessary linguistic content that is essential to educational success. Within this discourse, the "problems" associated with educating children of African descent were connected to theories about the life condition and experiences of African American children. Thus educational improvement was rooted in programs designed to compensate for the Black child's deprived cultural socialization and condition (Hollins, 1994; King, 1994). The deficit discourse pervasive at this time also represents another shift in African American education, which validated the existence of a sociocultural context of learning. Through the intertwining of sociological and linguistic research,

31

scholars advanced the perspective that culture influences how children learn, which led to a growth of studies about different learning styles (Hollins, 1994).

Discourse of Effective Schools

Prior to 1971, efforts aimed at positively changing the education and life course of African American children were grounded in ideological theories suggesting that the "problems" of educating Black children were in the child (genetic and biological inferiority) and the family and community (cultural deprivation and cultural deficit). Though the idea that culture somehow influenced learning was part of the latter discussion, improvement was connected to a focus on identifying deficiencies in African Americans and communities and providing compensatory supports. Beginning in the 1970s, notable studies were conducted which changed the conception of improving educational achievement of Black children from a discourse of deficit to a discourse of effective schools.

Weber's (1971) study identified four successful programs for teaching reading to inner city children. Examination included four public elementary schools in the U.S., all of which had a high population of low-income children of color (two African American, one Puerto Rican, and one Mexican American). The findings concluded that children could become proficient readers if their public schools offered encouragement. Findings further identified eight variables which seemed to contribute to the success of these programs, which included: strong leadership, high expectations, a good atmosphere, strong emphasis on reading, additional personnel, use of phonics, individualization and careful evaluation of pupil progress.

Edmonds (1979) study followed this ideological shift and specified characteristics of effective schools and school leadership for low-income learners in urban schools. He

highlighted strong administrative leadership, high expectations for student learning, discipline and school order, basic skill acquisition, and monitoring of student progress through measured benchmarks of standards as key factors in effective schools. Edmonds (1979) concluded, "The educability of students derives far more from the nature of the school in which they are sent than it derives from the nature of the family from which they come" (p. 28)

Since these findings, research has continued to demonstrate that given the appropriate school environment and climate, African American children are capable of high academic success (Alston, 2004; Bell, 2001; Milner, 2006; Scheurich, 1998). These findings echo arguments made by countless African American parents, community members, and intellectuals currently and in previous decades, and led W.E.B. Dubois in 1935 to declare,

> Does the Negro need separate schools? God knows he does. But what he needs more than separate schools is a firm and unshakable belief that twelve million American Negroes have the inborn capacity to accomplish just as much as any nation of twelve million anywhere in the world ever accomplished, and that this is not because they are Negroes but because they are human. (Dubois, 1935, p. 333)

While these studies do not directly discuss classroom instruction and practice, they are important because they mark the theoretical shift in how educators and researchers approached improving African American education. The discourse of effective schools offered a more expansive ecological view of student success, in which the school played a critical role. Equally important, the discourse on effective schools shifted the focus from pinpointing the challenges in educating Black children, to identifying and documenting places of educational success for Black children. This change is important because it implicitly suggests that African American students are

not deviant and inferior, as once understood, but are capable of high levels of performance (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Discourse of Effective Teaching

The final discourse discussed in this section is a continuation of the effective schools discourse that states that African American educational outcomes are significantly enhanced by restructuring schools to better meet their needs. However, it shines a light on one particular school factor—teachers. The discourse of effective teachers is based on the assumption that individual teachers, as well as schools, are implicated in the educational success or failure of African American children. This discourse also assumes that it is more promising to identify avenues of success in African American education, examine those successes, and then replicate them on a larger scale (Hilliard, 2003, 1995). In the following section, brief discussion will be given to those key studies that serve as benchmarks in the expansion of the discourse on effective schools to include effective teachers.

Studies from the Institute of Research on Teaching (IRE) ushered in a new paradigm of educational research using ethnographic methods to study teaching. These approaches specifically attended to the ways teacher thinking shaped instruction and student outcomes as well as its connection to the work of effective teachers. This is important because prior to this, educational policymakers and scholars concerned about educational equity and improvement did not see much need for research on teaching or a need to upgrade the quality of the teaching profession. Teachers were either viewed as weak links in the educational process to be circumvented or as technicians to be programmed. In the late 1980s, perspectives about teaching and needed improvements in the education of urban, low-income children changed. It was now thought that the

key to success in low income and urban diverse schools was the creation of a profession of well-educated teachers prepared to assume new responsibilities and redesign schools for the future (Porter & Brophy, 1988). Additionally, examining the work of teachers gained increasing popularity as the view of teaching as a highly complex process was added to this discourse (Hollins, 1994; Porter & Brophy, 1988) Studies by Brophy (1981), Brophy and Good (1986/1987), Porter (1986), and others helped to move the profession of teaching and the education of low income children, which included African American learners, in a direction that heavily considered the work of teachers as critical to student outcomes. Through this work, a comprehensive set of characteristics and dispositions emerged which characterized effective teaching (Porter & Brophy, 1988). Effective teachers were pictured as "semi-autonomous" professionals who:

- Are clear about their instructional goals

- Are knowledgeable about their content and the strategies for teaching it

- Communicate to their students what is expected of them—and why

- Make expert use of existing instructional materials in order to devote more time to practices that enrich and clarify the content

- Are knowledgeable about their students, adapting instruction to their need and anticipating misconceptions in their existing knowledge

- Teach students metacognitive strategies and give them opportunities to master them

- Address higher as well as lower level cognitive objectives

- Monitor students' understanding by offering regular appropriate feedback

- Integrate their instruction with that in other subject areas

- Accept responsibility for student outcomes

- Are thoughtful and reflective about their practice. (Porter & Brophy, 1988, p.75)

The work of IRE, led by Jere Brophy, characterizes the discourse of effective teaching in that it suggests that the challenges posed in educating African American children can be met through the development of a cadre of teachers with the necessary dispositions and skills to teach them well (Hollins, 1994). In other words, the discourse of effective teaching is predicated on a theory of educational excellence for African American children, in which success is an obtainable expectation. To be sure, many African American communities have historically been guided by a belief in the innate capacity for high performance by African American school children given the proper environment and instruction (Anderson, 1988; Perry, 2003; Tyack, 2007). This is evidenced throughout the history of African American education, in the determined and self-reliant efforts of ex-slaves to educate their own children (Anderson, 1988; Gordon, 1994), in the demand for equitable resources as part of the school desegregation movement (Horsford, 2011), and in the surge of independent, African-centered schools (Shujaa, 1994; Lomotey, 1992).

Examination of the discourse about African American education over time captures how the thinking and approaches to improving African American education have shifted. While the discourse of effective schools and effective teaching provided a more productive and promising context for devising meaningful reforms in Black education, this work is incomplete in at least two ways. First, it fails to outline the features that characterize the effective teaching of African American children specifically in ways that particularize Afrocultural influences (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teaching strategies and dispositions are characterized as effective with all "diverse", "urban", or "low income" groups, which creates a homogenous category of otherness.

Essentializing pedagogy in this way perpetuates a White-middle class standard to which all others groups are measured to determine competence. This is harmful because it creates a surface view of culturally influenced practice that may disable educators from developing an adaptive practice tailored to the students in their specific classroom (Grant & Gibson, 2011). Second, this discourse is partial because it is missing the perspectives, knowledge, and theories embedded in many African American cultural groups, particularly African American educators (Delpit, 2005; Foster, 1994; Gordon, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Siddle-Walker, 2012). To offer a more robust understanding of what it means to teach Black children well, the remainder of this review will highlight the central features and characteristics of effective pedagogy for African American youth.

Effective Teaching of African American Learners

In 2003, Asa Hilliard proclaimed there was no mystery to successfully teaching African American children. His observations stemmed from several eyewitness accounts of effective teachers and schools that consistently help Black children achieve academic and cultural excellence He asserted, "It is clear that ordinary public school teachers can move students [African American] to the highest academic levels in a short period of time. It is not the children or their parents, poverty, culture or bilingual status that determine academic success. It is good teaching" (Hilliard, 2000, p. 6). Hilliard's position emanated from the understanding that teacher preparation is a critical factor in school improvement for African Americans (Milner, 2009). It also derives from the assumption that all teachers have the capacity to teach African American children well. Hilliard recognized that the pedagogical knowledge, exemplary practices, and perspectives of successful teachers of African American children are resources, which

must be recognized, legitimized, and supported as essential components of transforming schools. This way of thinking, along with a surge of African centered scholarship, led education researchers, mostly African Americans, to intensely study teachers who were recognized as effective in teaching learners of African descent. Before moving to analysis of this literature, it is critical to define the notion of effectiveness as it relates to Black education and to this study.

Criteria for "Effectiveness"

No examination of effectiveness in African American education is complete without an interrogation of the notion of "effective", "successful" or any other such adjective used to assess the teaching of African American children. Cooper (2002) notes that defining effective from an emic perspective is in line with African centered models of teaching black students. The emic perspective captures the values and norms from those within the group or community with regard to a particular condition or situation. In this sense, definitions of effective are culturally specific and reflect the larger goals and purpose of education for the community.

African Americans have historically valued education and perceived it to be a critical tool in the struggle for equity and liberation (Anderson, 1988; Perry, 2003; Watkins, 1996). Many African Americans have constructed a standard of success in education that takes into account the psychological demands placed on Black people given their particular status in the United States (Dubois, 1903). These standards include mastery of academic content, including the hidden curriculum. It also includes self-knowledge and cultural competence, which means that children are able to positively exemplify attributes reflective of African American culture and work for liberation (Hale-Benson, 1986; King, 1991a; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The report, Saving

the African American Child, produced by the National Association of Black School Educators (NABSE) in 1984 accurately summarizes the criteria for success and excellence in education and teaching of African American children. It stated,

> Quality and excellence in education for African Americans includes: excellence in the "basic skills", in liberal, vocational, economic, political, and spiritual education. But it includes, in addition, excellence in ridding our people of all vestiges of miseducation. This means that we must know ourselves and our condition. This means that the reclamation and restoration of our history and recognition and respect for our rich culture are priorities that are equal in importance to all other priorities. (NABSE, 1984, p.14)

The report identified cultural excellence in addition to academic excellence as standards of effectiveness in teaching African American school children. Additionally, Hale-Benson (1986) stated that black parents want the sociopolitical status of Black people to be conveyed to their children in school. She added that parents wanted this conveyed through teacher attentiveness to helping students develop a frame of reference in which they had a positive self-concept, a black identity, and a commitment to their people. These are certainly not recent or novel criteria, as evidenced in Dubois' (1935) analysis of separate schools for African American children in the early part of the twentieth century. He wrote,

> Theoretically, the Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is Education. What he must remember is that there is no magic, either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile public opinion, and no teaching of truth concerning black folk, is bad. A segregated school with inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing, is equally bad. Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. But other things seldom are equal, and in that case, Sympathy, Knowledge, and the Truth, outweigh all that the mixed school can offer. (Dubois, 1935, p. 335)

The criteria included by Dubois, NABSE, and Hale-Benson are consistent with how many Blacks in African American communities currently view teaching excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1991). In essence, a successful education for African American children must equip them with academic competency (including high performance on standardized tests) but equally must endow them with a high level of cultural knowledge. This means they should be able to identify with African American culture and have a firm understanding of their cultural legacy. African American success criteria also specified political consciousness related to the station of African Americans as a racial class in society (Hale-Benson, 1986; NABSE, 1984; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994). An education that fails to prepare children of African descent according to these standards is inadequate and inappropriate, and reflects the *miseducation* theorized by Carter G. Woodson almost 60 years ago (Woodson, 1933).

Interpretive Frameworks

What researchers have revealed about the pedagogy of exemplary teachers of African American children is that teachers orchestrate a highly complex and sophisticated practice in ways that are implicitly and explicitly consistent with African American culture. In an effort to make this pedagogy accessible to a broad audience, researchers developed interpretive frameworks, which include culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and warm demanding (Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Ware, 2006). In the next section, I discuss each interpretive framework, noting its contributions to a comprehensive view of pedagogical excellence. I then present Figure 2-1, which synthesizes the characteristics of effective teaching as documented in numerous studies of culturally relevant teaching and warm demanding. This kind of analysis is

important because it serves as a catalyst for deeper discussion and examination of the practice of exemplary teachers of Black youth.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings' (2009/1994) seminal study on culturally relevant pedagogy extended previous research validating the salience of culture in teaching, learning and achievement. Her work was a critical departure from earlier studies focused on sociolinguistics in its recognition of community-defined cultural standards of excellence in teaching as relevant to the achievement for Black students. In her theoretical argument, Ladson-Billings (1995) proclaimed culturally relevant pedagogy as a "pedagogy of opposition" rooted in the struggle for African Americans to reject their socially constructed alter ego as "other" and exist on their own terms. Ladson-Billing's made this critical assertion after she found that the teaching factor most significant in fostering educational excellence for African American youth was the teachers' ability to "assist students in their development of a relevant black identity which allowed them to choose academic excellence and still identify with African American culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 476). Observations and interviews demonstrated that the teachers were able to do this by attending to students' academic and social needs. Teachers worked dialectically between the dominant European American ideology and one consistent with many Black cultures by validating student knowledge and making the standard academic content accessible to students. Furthermore, the culturally relevant teachers in Ladson-Billings' study realized that teaching African American students was not teaching for individual success only, but for "survival of the person, the family, the community, and the people" (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990, p. 82).

The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy is important for the present study because it embraces the inherently political nature of education and schooling. By employing African American cultural standard of excellence as a basis for her examination, Ladson-Billings brings attention to the different meanings of success and the politics that shape the prevailing definition of teacher effectiveness as it relates to African American education. Another way this research validates the political is in its appropriation of African American culture as an attribute central to good teaching. Culturally relevant pedagogy counters a pejorative definition of African American culture and instead argues that cultural identification with Blackness can be a cornerstone of good teaching. In this way, Ladson-Billings explicitly includes the political terrain because historically, negative constructions of Blackness have been implicated in the political subordination of African descent people living in America. Conclusively, culturally relevant pedagogy contributes the political perspective to the vision of pedagogical excellence for African American students. It does not attempt to de-politicize teaching and learning, but rather implicates the political in the vision of what it means to teach African American children well.

Warm Demander Pedagogy

Initially conceptualized by Kleinfield (1975) in the context of Native American education, the concept of warm demanding has provided a useful framework for illuminating the distinctive nature and characteristics of African American pedagogy, since the late 1990s. First explained as a cross cultural teaching strategy that balances personal warmth with "active demandingness" (Kleinfield, 1975), warm demanding has evolved to represent an approach to teaching African American children heavily guided by culturally relevant teacher care and insistence (Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta,

2013; Roberts, 2010; Ware, 2002, 2006).   Ware (2006) offered the most extensive

construct for examining the features of warm demanding as it relates to the instruction

of African American school children. Warm demander pedagogy, according to Ware

(2006), is identified across three distinct teacher roles; caregiver, pedagogue, and

authority figure. As caregiver, the warm demanding teacher is dedicated to meeting

students' needs and ensuring their success. In addition, discipline formed an essential

attribute of a warm demanding teacher. These teachers teach with authority, and insist

that students meet high expectations for behavior and academics. Finally, as

pedagogue, Ware (2006) characterized the warm demanders in her study as educators

who used culturally responsive teaching, African American communication patterns

such as call-and-response, direct instruction, and inquiry-based learning techniques.

    The literature on warm demanding in African American educational contexts is

central to thinking about the pedagogical needs of Black children because it begins to

address critical aspects of good teaching that specifically target the psychological

complexity of African American pedagogy. Or rather those features of good teaching

that are difficult to identify by mere observation of teaching practice (Irvine, 2003).

Through the literature on warm demanding we "see" the successful teacher as heavily

influenced by the cultural knowledge and cultural values embedded in many African

American communities. Though this view of the exemplary teacher is encased in

Ladson-Billing's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, it is sometimes under-examined

or omitted in subsequent investigations of culturally relevant teaching. The construct of

warm demanding explicitly emphasizes the ideological principles at work in the teaching

of successful educators of Black students. Furthermore, it demonstrates how these

principles, characterized as care and authority, shape and manifest themselves in the practices of good teachers. It bears noting that the African American cultural connections that undergird warm demanding principles have seldom been explored. However, this pedagogical framework is important to the definition of teacher quality from an African American perspective given its ability to describe culture-specific perceptions of teacher effectiveness.

Over the years, several researchers have used these frameworks to further outline to contours of effective teaching practice for African American, and other culturally and economically diverse students. The bulk of this work provided vivid descriptions of the instructional practices and beliefs of successful teachers and is essential to a comprehensive picture of pedagogical excellence. Figure 2-1 below offers a synthesis of many of the salient features of effective teaching of African American learners as documented by researchers.

The research on successful teaching of African American children finds that good educators integrate a specific set of beliefs and culturally centered practices into a comprehensive approach to educating African American students. This pedagogy includes a set of beliefs and perspectives and instructional practices that function to benefit African American learners. This literature has made a valuable contribution towards identifying what works in improving education for African American children from a perspective that values African American culture. Outlining the perspectives and practices of exemplary teachers for teacher educators and practitioners remains a promising approach to ending the crisis in Black education.

Characteristics of Effective Teaching of African American children

Beliefs	Instructional Practices
African American children are intelligent (Cooper, 2003; Hayes, 2007; Howard, 2001; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipman, 1996; Milner, 2006; Ware, 2006).	**Use of African American communication patterns** (Blair, et al., 2012; Bonner, 2009; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pinestrup, 1973)
African American children have the capactiy for excellence (high expectations) (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994)	**Structure classrooms to promote positive relationships** (Cooper, 2003; Hayes, 2007 Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love & Krueger, 2005; Milner, 2003; Ware, 2006)
African American communities are viable partners in education (Cooper, 2003; Howard, 2001; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipman, 1996; Ware, 2006)	**Structure classrooms to promote collective success** (Howard, 2001; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipman, 1996)
Accountability for student learning (Hayes, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipman, 1996;)	**Build on student experiences to help studentsmake connections to content** (Cooper, 2003; Bonner, 2009; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994)
	Use of insistence to promote student achievement (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007; Howard, 2002, 2001; Ware, 2006

Figure 2-1. Documented features of effective teaching of African American children

However, more is needed to fully understand the breadth and depth of a pedagogy that is effective with African American children, given the specific criteria of effectiveness set by the African American community. The specific beliefs and instructional strategies used by effective teachers of African American children are connected to a larger set of ideological and theoretical views and dispositions that are linked to the particular cultural, political, and historical status of African descent people in America. These deeper perspectives function as the abiding source of pedagogical and instructional decision-making. Therefore another literature base, research on effective Black educators, can be examined because it often provides an insider view of additional elements critical to teaching African American children well in which the links between ideology and practice are included. Expanding the analysis of effective teaching of African American students to the level of ideology, axiology and

consciousness is important because it provides a more nuanced view of culture and how it influences teaching and offers a more holistic account of African American pedagogy. It is also important because as King (1991) asserts, without intentional explication of ideology, teachers may remain dysconsious, which refers to an uncritical state of mind with regard to social inequalities. The consequences of dysconsciousness are complicit in the persistent and worsening crisis in Black education. In the next section I will explicitly draw on the literature describing successful African American educators.

Effective Black Educators of African American Children

Ware (2002) wrote, "Black teachers have contributed to the academic achievement of black students with their unique pedagogy that affirms the importance of education and the relationship of education to academic, political, social, and economic success and advancement of African Americans" (p. 89). This reiterates Irvine's (1989) conclusion that African American teachers are more than role models for Black students. Black teachers often serve as mentors and counselors, who hold higher expectations for African American students and help them meet those expectations. Given this, understanding the pedagogy of exemplary African American teachers is critical to teacher education and African American student success. In the next section, I will present the research on pedagogical frameworks that specifically build on the teaching of Black educators, highlighting the contributions each framework makes to the conceptualization of African American pedagogical excellence. These include historical research on African American schooling and pedagogy and the research on effective Black educators.

Interpretive Frameworks

Historical Research on African American Schooling and Pedagogy

Educational historian Vanessa Siddle-Walker has written extensively about the nature of schooling for African American children during the period of legalized public school segregation (2000, 1996). From this in depth examination she concluded that schooling for African American children was highly "valued" within the African American community. She wrote, "Inequalities notwithstanding, many African Americans valued the cultural form of teaching and learning that developed in the segregated schools" (Siddle-Walker, 2000, p. 255). This conclusion challenged the prevailing assumption that early Black educational efforts were axiomatically inferior. One of her most notable findings was related to the many ways effective teachers of this era cared for African American school children. Siddle-Walker termed this "interpersonal caring" which she defined as, "the direct attention an individual gives to meet the psychological, sociological and academic needs of another individual or individuals (1993, p.65). She found that good teachers during this time demonstrated a deep commitment to student learning and success, and a demanding nature guided by an unflinching belief in the intellectual ability of students. According to her participants, the good teachers were the one who would not let students perform poorly nor let students give up on themselves. Instead, they were classroom leaders who embraced their authoritative role and used it to increase student achievement and self-respect, promote a sense of community, and mitigate an often-oppressive educational system. To students, these good teachers were "counselors", "benefactors", "encouragers", and "race cheerleaders" (Siddle-Walker & Tompkins, 2004). They were empathetic, yet expressed a sense of urgency and necessity in their teaching. Through her analysis of teacher care, Siddle-Walker

(1993) documented the psychological stance, or disposition of exemplary educators. This stance was manifested in the teacher's appropriate enactment of care and authority, and is also referred to as warm demanding (Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta, 2013; Ford & Sassi, 2013; Ware, 2006).

Siddle-Walker undoubtedly revealed the history of pedagogical excellence for Black students, which according to her teacher, student, and community research participants, was connected to social, economic, and political status of the African American masses. This historical documentation is relevant to the current study because it validates the existence and enduring nature of excellence in teaching African American children. In tracing the history of exceptional teaching in African American communities, this work also highlights the thoughtful and intentional manner in which effective teachers of African American children used their sensibilities and skills to orchestrate a powerful, purposeful pedagogy. This is important because it helps debunk the myth that good teaching of Black children is idiosyncratic and attributed to a "cult of personality" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 14). The history of African American schooling provides the necessary historical layer to a community-centered vision of excellence in pedagogy. Through this work we can gather that pedagogical excellence for African American students necessitates a distinctive teaching disposition connected to an enduring African American consciousness.

Research on Black Educators

The research on Black educators has grown exponentially over the last two decades. The work of Michele Foster (1997, 1994, 1993) features prominently within this literature and offers insight about the pedagogy of Black educators relevant to any discussion of exemplary teaching of Black children. Foster challenged the negative

depiction of Black educators as uncaring individuals who perpetuated the status quo. She argued, quite convincingly, that effective Black educators were a positive force in African American education and they enacted a culturally distinctive pedagogy relevant to their students. In this, Foster presented a cogent argument for the cultural study of teaching that emphasized African American axiology, or cultural values.

In Foster's (1994) literature synthesis, she revealed that the dominant characteristic of effective Black teachers was their "reliance on the cultural and social underpinnings of the Black community" (Foster, 1994, p. 227). She added that effective Black teachers maintained cultural solidarity with the African American community at large, which was explicitly and implicitly reinforced through classroom interactions and community recognition. This kind of communalism was evidenced in the teacher's expressed obligation and responsibility for the academic and social growth of students. Foster (1994) then connected this kind of "othermothering" to the authoritative stance highlighted in studies of Black teachers (Case, 1997; Collins, 2000). This demandingness, Foster explained was inherent in the kinship role they assumed in relation to students (1994). She stated, "When effective black teachers take on the role of kin, they embrace a complex set of behaviors that demand appropriate doses of firmness and nurturance" (p. 231). The practical implication she noted was that good Black teachers emphatically and insistently demanded that students put forth maximum effort to achieve at high levels. She described this bond between teacher and students as a kind of "connectedness" predicated on African American cultural values of communalism, self-determination, mutuality in relationships and social equality (Foster, 1994, 1993).

The inclusion of Black educator voices highlights the significance of African American cultural values on good teaching. These values were developed from a common African heritage and a distinctive American social location (Franklin, 1984). This inclusion moves the dialogue about teacher quality for African American children beyond the strategies conversation to a more critical analysis of the abiding cultural formations that give rise to a nuanced view of teaching excellence.

In 2012, Black educational historian Vanessa Siddle-Walker commented on her analysis of the collective efforts and contributions of African American educators in the South during the school desegregation movement. Her conclusion accurately summarizes the impact of Black educators on the lives of many African American children past and present. She argues, " Black educators took educating Black children seriously…Black educators were active and present throughout the equity agenda in this country and were more so equipped because they had an expansive child centered perspective, yet these are the voices we silence" (Siddle-Walker, 2012). Her most recent work comes almost 25 years after Delpit (1988) admonished the educational community for silencing Black teachers in curriculum development discussions, and after an increase in scholarly contributions which focus on the pedagogical expertise of African American educators working with African American children (Foster, 1993, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Milner, 2006; Mitchell, 1998; Roberts, 2010; Stanford, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000). Because the literature on African American teachers expands the conceptualization of effective teaching of African American children, it is necessary to continually work with Black educators to understand how their deep cultural traits are leveraged in the classroom with students. This literature base rounds

out the research on successful teaching of African American students. More

importantly, it reinforces the existence of a systematic pedagogy grounded in African

American cultural knowledge. Figure 2-2 below presents a graphic summary of the

salient features highlighted across the research involving exemplary Black educators.

Characteristics of Effective Black Educators

Political clarity	Racial uplift	Affirmative view of African American culture	Opposition	African American perspective of care
Good Black educators understand the way African Americans are positioned in society. They also recognize the existence of systemic inequality and racism.	Good Black educators are committed to the success of African American students because it contributes to community enhancement. They link classroom success with the overall advancement of African American people.	Good Black educators perceive Black culture as a distinctly rich and valuable resource to teaching and learning, but also to society at large.	Good Black educators view the classroom as a site of resistance to African American racism and subordination. They view their role as part social activist.	Good Black educators redefine the notion of care which connects teacher care to the larger philosophy of Black education.
(Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1993; Howard, 2001; King, 1991; Mitchell, 1998; Stanford, 1997; Ware, 2006). Beauboeuf-LaFontant (1999).	(Beauboeuf-Lafontant,1999; Blair et al., 2012; Cooper, 2003; Foster, 1993; Howard, 2001; King, 1991; Lipman,1996; Mitchell, 1998; Phillips, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Stanford, 1997; Ware, 2006).	(Blair et al., 2012; Cooper, 2003; Foster, 1991,1993; Haynes, 2007; Howard, 2001,2003; King, 1991; Lipman, 1996; Stanford, 1997; Ware, 2006).	(Dixson, 2003;King, 1991; Lipman, 1996; Mitchell, 1998; Stanford, 1997)	(Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 2002; Foster,1993; Howard, 2001; King, 1991; Lipman, 1996; Mitchell, 1998; Phillips, 2011; Roberts, 2010; Stanford, 1997; Thompson, 2004; Ware, 2006).

Figure 2-2. Documented pedagogical characteristics of effective Black educators.

The lines of research discussed above are reflective of a specific and systematic

effort to successfully educate African American children. The confluence of this work

creates a robust context for understanding the parameters of teaching for excellence.

The underlying concepts that guide these frameworks are rooted in traditional African

American perspectives and values that have supported many generations of Black

people in their desire for education and demand for educational quality (Gordon, 1993;

Perry, 2003). The convergence of these perspectives and values creates a culture-

centered vision of teaching African American students that localizes educational

excellence within the African American community. The current study builds on the

foundations of excellence in teaching established above by explicitly attending to the social, political, and cultural underpinnings of pedagogical excellence for African American learners and making them more explicit. It departs from the psychological foundations of teaching and learning and instead, draws from a rich foundation of sociological and anthropological research guided by African American interests in ways that employ culture as a systemic tool for educational equity, social justice and humanity (Gordon, 1997; King, 2005).

Pedagogical Excellence for African American Learners: Conceptual Connections		
Ideology:	**Beliefs:**	**Instructional Practices:**
Political clarity Racial uplift Affirmative views of African American culture Culturally relevant critical teacher care Opposition	Intellectual capacity of African American children Positive views of African American families and communities (solidarity) All children can learn Accountability for student learning	Insistence Connectedness Interdependent learning community Collective success Curriculum connected to student experiences Curriculum relevant to students' lives

Figure 2-3. Framework of pedagogical excellence for African American learners.

Conclusion

This review of successful teaching of African American children demonstrates that African American pedagogy is highly complex and encompasses a specific theoretical foundation. As discussed in the present review, the conceptual foundations for improving African American education have shifted, or expanded over time moving from a micro level focus to macro level emphasis in which the school and educators play prominent roles in the educational success of African American children. The

current study of African American educators is grounded in the ideological discourse of effective teachers and maintains the assumption that one of the greatest educational needs of the African American child is a teacher who enacts the kind of pedagogy that will facilitate their development and success.

The description of African American pedagogy drawn from this research illustrates the interconnectedness between culture and teacher practice, both of which must be specifically aligned to support children of African descent in achieving academic and cultural excellence. It also illustrates the potency of the Black educator perspective in designing sustainable and meaningful reforms for African American children, families, and communities.

Collections of studies of effective teaching of African American children and successful black educators inform the current study. Each body of work contributes a part in fully understanding African American pedagogy. That is, the current literature on African American pedagogy mainly draws on studies that examine separate aspects of good teaching. There is a dearth of research studying all of the pieces together in the pedagogy of good educators. This is particularly troubling given the persistent patterns of underachievement among African American learners. The current study addresses this gap by working with African American teachers to describe and analyze the cultural-symbiotic relationship between teacher consciousness and perspectives on practice. Methodologically, some of the studies that contribute to a description of African American pedagogy are largely designed and analyzed by researchers. The researcher proposes and designs the study, teachers are interviewed and/or observed, and then the researcher independently analyzes the data and delivers the written interpretation.

While these kinds of studies have increased our knowledge of what African American children need in a teacher and what Black teachers have to offer, they may underemphasize the specialized knowledge teachers hold. King (2008) argues that using the specialized knowledge of marginalized peoples as a liberating educational tool is missing from educational research. She further posits that teachers too need spaces for social science inquiry where they can better understand pedagogy, theirs and others, in order to challenge deficit perspectives and distorted views of African American people. Addressing this methodological gap is another aim of this study. Methodological choices enable researcher and participants to work collaboratively in a co-constructive effort. In this collaborative project, the traditional lines between researcher and researched were blurred as we worked together to understand how culture influences the pedagogical work of good African American educators.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

In 2008, my great aunt, Carrie Moore Porter died. My auntie Carrie was a gentle giant; a source of silent strength whose life was one of service to the community. My auntie Carrie was a teacher to many Black children in our small hometown. As I'm told, Auntie Carrie had a special gift, an invaluable ability to nurture and guide the development of young black children. They say she loved each child in her care just like her own and that she never turned any family away who needed her to *"watch"* their children. They say the children loved her so much that they didn't want to go home at the end of the day and that they would constantly call her *mama* or *grandma.* As an African American female, a teacher of African American children, and her niece, I am left wondering about her pedagogy and what she would say about her teaching. What were her perspectives about what is needed to teach African American children well? What cultural guideposts influenced her teaching? Why did she teach the way she did? When my aunt died her views, experiences, and knowledge, as with many incredible African American educators, remained sealed in memories, never rising to a level of empirical abstraction.

The brief epitaph about my great aunt Carrie illustrates one of the pressing issues in educational research. The issue, which King (2008) describes as *"the crisis"* refers to the absence of marginalized and oppressed people's epistemologies as a foundation of knowledge for teacher learning and for teaching. Research has evolved to encompass a variety of formulations, frameworks, and theories. However, those paradigms indigenous to the African and African American life world remain on the academic fringe or are ignored (Gordon, 1994).   Despite normative obscurity, several

Black researchers continue to make significant empirical contributions (Gordon, 1994, 1993; Tillman, 2006). Conclusively, these researchers employ culturally specific, theoretical and empirical processes, and offer several guiding questions for researchers. These questions probe the epistemic and ideological foundations of research and include; what counts as knowledge? How is knowledge constructed? From where does the knowledge emanate? Whose interests does the knowledge serve? Whose knowledge is privileged in societal institutions? (Carroll, 2008; Gordon, 1993; King, 2005, 2008; Tillman, 2002). King (2008) submits an insightful summary in her analysis of research paradigms in teacher education. She writes, "The crux of the matter is whose social vision prevails in racial-social justice-oriented research and how can this research be a liberating resource for social change (p. 708)?

Qualitative research, given its philosophical assumptions and naturalistic methods offers a promising approach for addressing the epistemic and ideological concerns that constrain research in the Black interest. This research approach can encourage social change and liberation through the co-construction of knowledge and the centering of culture throughout the investigative process (Tillman, 2006). This is so because often, qualitative methods emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality, in-depth understanding, the relationship between researcher and the researched and a commitment to "an emic, idiographic, and case-based position" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 37). Linda T. Smith (2005), an Indigenous theorist, emphasizes the prospective advantages of using qualitative methods to produce culturally nurturing, transformative research and action. She elaborates:

> Qualitative research is an important tool for indigenous researchers
> because it is the tool that seems most able to wage the battle of

representation, to weave and unravel competing storylines, to situate, place, and contextualize; to create spaces for decolonizing, to provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced, to create spaces for dialogue across difference, to analyze and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities, and realities, and to understand little and big changes that affect our lives. Qualitative research approaches have the potential to respond to epistemic challenges and crises, to unravel and weave, to fold in and unmask the layers of the social life and depth of human experience. (p. 103)

Although the field of qualitative inquiry is laden with theoretical and methodological contentions, Denzin and Douglas (2000) note that qualitative research has the capacity to accurately address issues of racial-social justice and lead to social transformation and greater human consciousness. Because I was interested in understanding a Black educator standpoint in ways that could use culture to spark positive collective action in Black education, I employed a qualitative approach. Additionally, given the emphasis on ethnicity in this study, a qualitative approach was used because of its potential to position culture as central to the research process (Tillman, 2006). The primary research question addressed was: How do African American teachers collectively describe and analyze the cultural influences on their pedagogy with African American children?

Chapter 3 begins with an explanation of the theoretical foundation for this dissertation research project. This includes a brief discussion of the philosophical constructs that influenced my ways of thinking about and working with the data. Then I will describe the methodological procedures taken in this study, which include an explanation of the research design, a social, histo-geographical description, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I will explicitly declare my subjectivities regarding this research and address research validity and credibility.

Theoretical Perspective

An emancipatory perspective served as theoretical guide for this study of African American educator pedagogy. Aspects from key philosophical constructs informed the perspective advanced in this research project in ways that align with my epistemological assumptions and methodological choices. In the next section I will briefly discuss the philosophical undercurrents of this study as they represent my own ways of knowing, and as they inform the methodology carried out in this work.

Philosophical Influences on Epistemology

African American epistemology. The emancipatory theory employed in this study derives from an African American cultural mode of rationality (Gordon, 1985). Rationality, in this sense, refers to "a set of specific assumptions and social practices that mediate how a group or individual relates to the wider society" (Giroux, 1980, p. 331). Modes of rationality are reflective of the interests that shape how the world is perceived by individuals and groups. Any mode of rationality can be readily identified by its "problematic", or the questions that are raised in that particular kind of reasoning as well as the questions that are incapable of being raised in a particular mode of rationality. From this perspective, Giroux (1980) writes, modes of rationality can be considered theoretical frameworks that can be understood by analyzing the depths and boundaries of their critique. It is this theoretical view that makes the emancipatory theoretical framework distinctive and appropriate for the present study.

According to Gordon (1985), African American epistemology, as a mode of rationality, is distinctive because of its ability to critique the epistemic foundations of knowledge, deconstruct society from an ideological perspective and merge critique and self-reflection with action in ways that are not exploitative or alienating (Giroux, 1980). It

58

recognizes that meaning is constantly negotiated as subjects interact with objects in the world. However, it locates such meaning and action within the societal context in order to examine how human actions might constrain or advance humanity. This "culturalist" model of meaning making attends to human experiences in ways that account for the workings of ideology, power, and consciousness in individual and group realities (Giroux, 1980). In other words, African American cultural theorizing, or epistemology, attempts to explain how human behavior, within societal macrostructures, negotiates, resists and transforms the effects of structures and systems of oppression. This perspective offers a new social framework based on cognitive autonomy from the existing social race-based classification system, which can result in liberation and greater humanity (King, 1995, 2005).

African American epistemology and the culture-centered knowledge it produces can be considered emancipatory because it is born out of the lived experiences, historical and contemporary, of African American people (King, 2008, 1995). Gordon's (1985) thesis intricately traced the legacy of a distinctive African American epistemology as reflected in the writings of early Black intellectuals, and in African American inspired art, music, and literature. In particular, Gordon (1985) extols Carter G. Woodson's (1933) thesis as central to the understanding of the emancipatory potential of African American cultural theorizing because it "reawakens our sensibilities to our own social experience, and to our own cultural history and aesthetics and values" (p. 13).

Gordon's work revealed the existence of a broader culture-systemic epistemology, which she organized around several overarching themes. These themes include service, self-help, political power, nationalism, economic autonomy, and self-

determination. These themes coalesce into a powerful frame of reference through which many African American people interpret their existence, decipher dominant ideology, and organize for change (Gordon, 1990, 1985).

African American epistemology was appropriate for my research for at least three reasons. First, this framework is culturally sensitive given that the themes that emerge from it are based on the lived experiences of people of African descent. This sensitivity is important because it can reduce the likelihood for misinterpretation and misrepresentation that has stifled educational improvement for African Americans many times before (Tillman, 2002). Second, Gordon's thinking about the liberatory potential of culture dislodges the dominant view that sees diversity and culture as hindrances to educational achievement (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2011). In place of this deficit view of diversity and culture, African American epistemology facilitates the creation of a vision of pedagogical excellence for students of African descent in America explicitly connected to it abiding cultural epicenter. Third, African American epistemology as a theoretical framework enabled the group to interrogate the idea of effective pedagogy at the level of consciousness and ideology.

Philosophical Influences on Methodology

Social constructionism. Constructionism posits the view that all meaningful reality is socially constructed and verified. Meaning is not inherent in the objects of the world waiting to be discovered. Rather, humans construct meanings as they interact with the objects in the world. Crotty (1998) affirms the intimate relationship between object and subject mediated by consciousness in his theorization of constructionism. He explains, "A subject's consciousness is directed towards the object; the object is shaped by consciousness" (p. 45). In this vein, the subject and object are interdependent in

60

such a way that "no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object" (Crotty, 1998, p. 53). The subject and the object are always united.

A social constructionist perspective places the social dimension of knowledge construction center stage. It emerges as we acknowledge the role of culture in the shaping of our consciousness. Culture is not restricted to surface traditions, customs and practices that emanate from a collective, but is best understood as the "source rather than the result of human thought and behavior" (Geertz, 1973, p.44). It guides our behaviors, shapes our perspectives, and endows us with a lens with which to focus and direct our consciousness. Social constructionists try to reveal and understand the ways in which communities participate in the creation of their reality. This constitutes a dynamic, ongoing process; where reality is produced by our collective interactions with the objects in the world (Crotty, 1998).

Black feminist epistemology. This study of African American educator perspectives was also influenced by Black feminist epistemology as articulated by Patricia Hill-Collins in the year 2000. In a precise articulation of Black womanist thought, Hill-Collins (2000) analyzes that for Black women, knowledge is rarely constructed in isolation, but is largely facilitated through the dialogue they have with each other in inclusive groups. It is in these collaborative, participatory spaces that African American women use dialogue to "invoke relationships and connectedness" and to "test and validate knowledge claims" in non-adversarial ways (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 280). Collins further explains that the use of dialogue to share personal experiences represents another assertion of Black women's theorizing. For many African American women,

61

living through experiences affords them a level of recognized credibility as one who has knowledge and, more importantly, wisdom. Thus experiential wisdom functions as a criteria for meaning.

These ways of meaning-making underscore two epistemological assumptions. The first addresses the issue of who can be a "knower". Knowledge, according to Black feminist epistemology, rests in the women themselves and is subjectively understood. Thus, "ordinary" Black women, their perspectives and experiences, are situated as intellectuals capable of sophisticated thought and critique. The second assumption addresses the ways in which knowledge is made and validated. Collins (2000) concludes that the importance of dialogue and experience in knowledge construction and validation underscores the perspective that "connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process" (p. 279). Therefore, dialogue through which personal experiences are rendered as sources of wisdom, facilitates the kind of connectedness in which people become more empowered and invested in one another.

Emancipatory educational research. Emancipatory educational research is designed to produce transformative knowledge generated through collective research with groups and individuals functioning as agents of their own change (Emancipatory Educational Research, 2012; Tyson, 2003). Emancipatory Educational research paradigms take methodological direction from the cultural frameworks noted above and present a potential paradigm for culture-centered research. These paradigms bring transparency to the research process by demanding a move away from positions of objectivity and neutrality and insisting on the researcher's disclosure and self-reflexivity.

In essence, the researcher is able to function transubjectively, which means he or she is encouraged to not only recognize subjectivity, but use these personal interests and commitments in the research process to further community aims.

The emancipatory theoretical perspective situated in this study is representative of some of the philosophical themes embedded in Black feminist epistemology, social constructionism and emancipatory education research. These themes (connectedness in research, culture as a mediator for meaning making, and researcher transsubjectivity), heavily informed this study's methodological design, data collection tools and processes and ways of approaching data analysis. Figure 3-1 below summarizes the epistemic and methodological influences on the theoretical perspective employed in this study as well as the ways it influenced the research process

Research Design

Rationale for Collaborative Inquiry

This study of African American educator perspectives employed a collaborative inquiry methodology. Collaborative inquiry methodology emphasizes a view of inquiry, which "allows us as human persons to know that we are part of the whole, rather than separated as mind over and against matter" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p.2). The principles embedded in collaborative inquiry emphasize inclusive participation, mutuality, and the co-construction of knowledge through deep interpretive processes (Bridges & McGee, 2011). Underlying these principles is a participatory perspective that privileges experiential knowledge, critical subjectivity and critical intersubjectivity. Experiential knowledge is knowing through participative resonance with a being, so that the knower feels both connected with the knowledge and distinct from it.

Emancipatory Theoretical Perspective

Philosophical Influence:

African American Epistemology (culturalist mode of emancipatory rationality)

Methodological Influences:

Social constructionism

Black feminist epistemology

Emancipatory educational research paradigm

Research design choices:

Kind of question asked
Community nomination participant selection process
Mutually beneficial research outcomes
Praxis-oriented
Collaborative inquiry:
--collaborative research meetings
--collaborative data analysis
--data collection processes
--shared decision-making
--working principles

Method choices:

Oral tradition of meaning making:
--Dialogue-based
   --Testimony
   --Verbal re-enactment
--Attention to non-verbal communication

Figure 3-1. Emancipatory theoretical perspective

Critical subjectivity reflects the knower's understanding of the contextual bounds of sense making and the ability to demonstrate this awareness in communication with others (Heron & Reason, 1997). From this, critical intersubjectivity emerges in which the knower embraces personal subjectivities and also understands how this personal experiential context may be consistent with and different from the reality of others. Critical intersubjectivity is enhanced through shared experience, dialogue, and feedback and exchange with others (Heron & Reason, 1997). The goals of collaborative inquiry projects are to create conditions of self-empowerment among co-researchers through active engagement in an iterative process of understanding, knowledge production, and action (Bridges & McGee, 2011).

In practice, collaborative inquiry operates as a process of cycling between four overlapping elements; (1) reflection, (2) the collective construction of knowledge fostered through dialogue with peers, (3) action, and (4) further group-decision-making (Heron & Reason, 1997). Knowledge is produced and validated in a shared space and grounded in the perspectives, experiences, and practices of the group. Researcher and participants function as *co-researchers;* thinking and generating ideas, designing and managing the project and analyzing and interpreting the data. Collaborative inquirers also operate as *co-subjects,* each individual participating fully in every step in the inquiry process and contributing to a collective view, theory or perspective. While full reciprocity is the envisioned premise of a collaborative inquiry methodology, co-researchers are not expected to participate in identical ways (Heron & Reason, 1997). What *is* demanded is the full inclusion of all voices, perspectives, and knowledge, from the beginning and throughout the entire research process. Hyland and Meacham

(2004) lament that what is missing in teacher education research and practice are "effective ways to use the subjugated knowledge of the dispossessed as a liberating educational tool for cultural well-being and human freedom" (p.123). The collaborative inquiry methodology advanced in this study was well suited to enable the research group to meet this need.

Description of Context

This study was conducted with a group of African American educators currently working in a small city located in Florida. The city's population as of 2012 was 123,903, in which 23% of city residents identify as Black or African American. The majority of African Americans live in the east quadrant of this city, which includes five elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools (all of which are public schools), five charter schools and four alternative schools or centers. The educator-researchers participating in this study are currently teaching in one of these schools serving a large population of African American school children.

Historically, Black education in the South is unique given how it developed within an overtly racist and oppressive social context (Anderson, 1988). Though Blacks were emancipated from slavery in 1863, they were subsequently forced into a new social system from which they were virtually denied citizenship. However, as Anderson (1988) argues, "A central theme in the history of the education of black Americans is the persistent struggle to fashion a system of formal education that prefigured their liberation from peasantry" (pp. 2-3). This theme is embedded in the geographic region in which the educators in the present study live and work, and is reflected in the development of schooling for African American children in the area. For example, this

city is home to Weldon Academy[1], the first Negro school built in the area. The school came about as a result of support from the African American community and the Freedman's Bureau (Laurie, 1986). According to media sources, Weldon Academy was the intellectual heart of the African-American community [in this city and surrounding area] for almost 60 years. Black teachers were groomed for their professions within the community and engaged children in a robust curriculum taught with full citizenship and freedom for all Negro people in mind (Laurie, 1986).

Weldon Academy set a remarkable precedent for Black education in the city, which was carried on by Carter G. Woodson High School, the segregated African American school that served this community for over 50 years. It was one of the two African American schools in the state to obtain full accreditation by the state-governing agency. In a conversation with J. Moore, a student at Weldon Academy, he stated that within the school, teachers committed themselves to the development of their students into future leaders and social transformers (personal communication, August 17, 2012).

Though obscured from plain view, the high level of educational quality inherent in this city's African American community exists in some of its predominantly African American schools today. In the early years of the new millennium, one of the elementary schools serving a 99% African American population reclaimed the legacy of excellence in Black education intrinsic to this city.   Under the leadership of an African American female principal, Duncan Elementary[2] School established itself as a community school dedicated to the educational achievement of its children. In a private

---

[1] Pseudonyms used in the description of the context

[2] Name has been changed

interview, one teacher, at Duncan Elementary during this time shared that teachers, this time Black and White, wanted to be at Duncan and they, along with staff, worked relentlessly to create an environment that made students want to be there, too (personal communication, A. Terrell, April 23, 2012; Bondy, Mayne, Langley, Williamson, 2005).

Smith (2000) argues that research must be "localized and grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations that operate in each indigenous setting" in order to prompt critical praxis and promote social change (p.229). Localizing the present study of Black educator urgency within the cultural-geographical history of Black education is important because it mitigates the assumption that a teacher's individual charisma accounts for his or her success or failure with Black children. Instead it connects the past and present under a deeper, more systematic set of abiding principles and perspectives, which are important to understand in order change the course of African American education towards excellence.

Participant Selection

To create the collaborative inquiry group, community nomination was used as a purposive sampling technique. In using this process in a similar study of Black educators, Foster (1993) defined community nomination as a process by which research participants are selected through "direct contact with local African American-communities, and is designed to capture the African American community's conception of what it means to be a good teacher" (p.374). The purpose of community nomination in this study was to reveal the "emic perspective", or insider view, on teaching African American children and use this culturally generated knowledge as the basis of inquiry. For the current study, obtaining African American community perspectives on good teaching for Black children was important because it recognized the knowledge and

experience embedded in African American communities as salient in the content it produces and the process used to gather such information. In other words, it represents a culturally affirmative research method informed by indigenous experiences (King, 2008).

By using community nomination, I was able to validate community knowledge about education and use this knowledge as the foundation for analyzing and understanding African American schooling experiences. Using community nomination as an empirical tool was an explicit attempt on my part to research for "cultural well-being" (King, 2008). In this case, researching for cultural well-being references examining cultural practices, as a basis for understanding African American community and student needs related to education. For example, all of the parents I interviewed stated that good teachers for their children are those who cared enough to demand that students consistently demonstrate excellence academically and socially. The parents' views on teacher quality expressed a vision of pedagogical excellence located in an African American historical view of schooling (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Furthermore, the parents' view transcended prevailing conceptions of educator quality focused on teacher candidates' entering grade point average and mastery of academic content. Centering collective perspectives in the research process is a way to honor and preserve community perspectives, which is essential in for conducting research with the community in mind. Ensuring collective well-being is a critical element of emancipatory educational research. It was important to this study because it linked teaching and teacher education with an enduring African American struggle for social justice and humanity in ways that spark action and coalition building (King, 2008).

To carry out this process, I visited a predominantly African American church, afterschool program, and community organization on separate occasions. All of the community members identified as African American and had one or more children attending schools within the local school district. At each site, I invited community members to participate in a structured conversation in which I asked overarching questions such as, "What must educators do to teach your child (ren) well?" or "What kinds of things would a teacher say or do that give you affirmation that he/she is a good teacher for your child?" (Appendix A for invitation) (Appendix B for protocol). From this, a collective definition of teacher quality was constructed. The groups developed very similar definitions of good teachers. Across the groups, community members noted that good teachers:

- challenge children to do their best everyday

- show children how to complete their work

- listen to parents and maintain open communication with them.

- are tough

- follow through

- won't let my child slide because they care and understand the world my child will grow up and live in

- are fair and honest

- believe in my child's capabilities

- provide one-on-one support for my child when necessary.

I then asked families to identify in writing the names and schools of any teacher whom they believed met the characteristics produced in our discussion. Their nominations were collected at the end of the meeting. These focus group sessions

lasted approximately one hour at each site and I took extensive field notes to capture key ideas.

A total of 12 educators were identified and invited through email to an introductory luncheon to celebrate their community nomination and solicit their participation in the study (Appendix C). Six of the nominated teachers attended the luncheon, and four educators plus myself elected to participate in the research collective. The other two teachers who attended the luncheon consented to participate, but were subsequently unable to continue due to extenuating circumstances.

The collective. As Table 3-1 indicates, each of the educators self-identified as African American and had a range of teaching experience from seven to thirty-five years. All of the educators were born, raised, and attended schools in the South. Three of the educators were native to the area, while two had relocated with their families, one three years ago, the other 12 years ago.

Table 3-1. Demographics of the collective

Name	Ethnicity	Edu. Level	Teaching Exp (No. of years)	Grade level	School size	% of African American students	% of students free or reduced lunch
Antionette	AA	M	9	Elem.	365	88%	95%
Jalonda	AA	S	13	Elem.	692	55%	82%
Harriett	AA	M	36	Elem.	692	55%	82%
Geneva	AA	M	22	Elem.	353	98%	96%
Monica	AA	M	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Two of the teachers knew each other because they were co-workers. Four of the educators were working in elementary schools at the time of the study, though further

conversations revealed that three had experience teaching at the secondary level and two were experienced special educators. The bulk of each educator's teaching experience was in predominantly African American, high poverty schools.

Biographical Sketch

Antionette. Antionette was born in Miami, Florida in the early 1970s and raised by her mother and father, both African American educators. After graduating high school, Antionette attended a local culturally diverse community college in Miami for two years then transferred to a large, predominantly White teacher education program in North central Florida to complete her bachelor's and master's degree in special education.

Jalonda. Jalonda was born in Immokalee, Florida in the late 1960s, and raised by her mother, an African American educator, and her father, an African American farmer. Jalonda spent eight years in the United States military after graduating high school, then attended a midsized, predominantly White teacher education program in South Florida to complete her bachelor's degree in special education. After relocating with her family to a city in North Florida, Jalonda earned her master's degree and education specialist degree in educational leadership from a small, predominantly White college of education in North central Florida.

Harriett. Harriett was born in Gainesville, Florida in the early 1950s, and raised by her African American mother, a homemaker, and her father, an African American skilled laborer. Harriett attended a segregated, all Black high school in Gainesville, then later received her bachelor's degree in elementary education from a large, predominantly White teacher education program in North central Florida. After teaching

72

for about 10 years, Harriett returned to her college alma mater and earned a master's degree in elementary education.

Geneva. Geneva was born in the early 1960s in the state of Tennessee and was raised by her African American mother and grandmother, both community teachers at the church Geneva attended while growing up. Geneva spent some years in the United States military, and then later attended a historically Black college in the state of Tennessee where she earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education. After teaching for some time in Tennessee, Geneva relocated to north central Florida to be closer to her daughter and granddaughter and continues teaching elementary school.

Monica. Monica was born in Gainesville, Florida at the start of the year 1980 and was raised by her African American mother and father, an office manager and educator respectively. After graduating from a predominantly Black high school in Gainesville, Monica attended a large, predominantly White university in north central Florida where she earned her bachelors degree from the College of Journalism. She later returned to her college alma mater and earned her master's degree in special education and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction from the same institution.

Data Collection

This section describes the processes and methods used to gather data for this study. First I will discuss two specific structures, or processes implemented to create conditions conducive to culture-focused research. This description of data collection processes will also include the actions taken, to logistically fold these processes into the inquiry and establish them as part of the collective's normal ways of researching. Then I will describe the primary data collection tool used engage in this collaborative inquiry.

Both data collection processes were employed under my direction and can be viewed as an external layer wrapped around the research collective. I also designed the data collection tool to be used within the research group. In the final part of this section I intimately describe the "ways of researching" or, research collective interactions that may have resulted from the data collection processes and tool used.

Processes

There were two processes implemented in this study at the time of data collection. These processes were conscious attempts on the part of the lead researcher to structure the research meetings and norms of interaction in ways that aligned with the theoretical premises of collaborative inquiry methodology. These two processes were inspired by the guiding principles of reciprocity and authenticity noted in collaborative inquiry research (Bridges & McGee, 2012). In writing on collaborative inquiry research, Donna Bridges and Sharyn Mcgee expound on the social benefits of reciprocal and authentic inquiry. They argue that the two principles of authenticity and reciprocity can help individuals and groups to, "**become** empowered to understand, produce knowledge and bring about active positive change in their own lives" (p. 213). Below each process is explained in greater detail, which includes a description of the specific actions I took to cultivate each process. I developed and appropriated these action steps in ways that were culturally appropriate for the research collective.

Reciprocity. A process for cultivating reciprocity was one implemented in this study. In collaborative inquiry, reciprocity refers to relationship building and attentiveness to participants as human beings. It is strengthened through the deliberate formation of non- hierarchical, mutually beneficial interactions and partnerships (Bridges

and McGee, 2011). This means collaborative inquirers must acknowledge and respond to the sociopolitical dimension of all research rooted in power and knowledge.

Authenticity. The second concept that guided the research meetings, authenticity, refers to truth and validity in research. Written research is viewed as authentic "when the voice it represents is genuine and true to the 'life-worlds' of those they are describing and analyzing" (Bridges & McGee, 2011). In this sense, truth means trustworthiness and cultural representation. This connects authenticity directly with the ethical, inclusive, and fair treatment of co-researchers, the value of research and reciprocity, and the catalytic or generative potential of research.

In this study of African American pedagogy, Figure 3-2 below displays the specific actions taken to cultivate an ethos of authenticity and reciprocity in the inquiry process. Implementing processes to create a reciprocal, authentic research space discussed above created the conditions necessary for the group to function in ways that genuinely built on the collective knowledge, experience, and perspectives of African American educators. Additionally it structured an environment that enabled the collective to move fluidly between the different elements of collaborative inquiry.

Tools-research meetings.

Partially structured research meetings provided the conditions necessary for the research collective to engage in the inquiry process. Here partially structured means that our conversations were organized and guided by common meeting objectives. For example, an agenda was collaboratively prepared for each meeting and I prepared a set of questions and topics to be discussed in each meeting. Yet, the meetings were flexible. This allowed the group to make connections between participant experiences and ideas. It also encouraged authentic expressions of ideas and elaboration. Five

research meetings occurred over the course of a three- month period. Meetings were held on weekday evenings at a local eating establishment frequented by many in the group. Duration of the meetings ranged from 90 to 120 minutes.

Reciprocity

- **Negotiation:** Welcoming discussion about data collection tools. Questioning ideas and knowledge claims. Situating conflict as part of the inquiry process (i.e. it's okay to disagree with others).
- **Enabling voice:** Allowing testimonies. Blending personal and professional experiences. Using African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Ignoring coventional question/answer conversation protocols.
- **Shared decision-making:** Group developed working principles for research. Group developed objectives for the project. Explaining procedures then allowing group to make descisions (mutuality & inclusivity).

Authenticity

- **Time & Space:** Structuring meeting to allow for reflection and engagement. Conducting meetings in a comfortable, unrestricted space. Working with group to develop a convenient meeting schedule. Prolonged engagement.
- **Collective validation:** Encouraging collaboration in constructing knowledge. Seeking help in explaining and building ideas. Asking for group confirmation regarding ideas. Member-checking and spiral discourse.
- **Expressivism:** Allowing group to determine mode of communication. Encouraging members to "reenact" or "recreate" experiences using voice, facial expressions, and gestures.

Figure 3-2: Data collection processes implemented in the collaborative inquiry.

Throughout the research meetings, I served as lead researcher; leadership in this respect meant facilitating the meeting and using my knowledge of research methods to assist in group decision-making. Prior to each meeting, I sent out a reminder email to all participants that included a rough draft of the upcoming agenda. After group members added, modified, and deleted agenda items, I sent a revised agenda, which was used during the meeting (Appendix D). Each meeting followed a similar format:

- Reflection: We re-read notes generated from introductory luncheon where we provided oral accounts and descriptions of our teaching (Example: group members revisited previously stated ideas and offered clarification by further elaborating on ideas, providing examples or describing memories of personal events).

- Debriefing: We elaborated, contested, changed, and refined our ideas.

- Text & visual elicitation: We re-read selected segments of transcripts—I selected portions of transcripts from previous meetings prior to each upcoming research session. I selected segments that would allow each participant to elaborate on ideas, statements and phrases. In meetings four and five, we examined a visual representation I drew based on previous conversations about the ways we described our teaching.

- New theorizing: Based on steps 1-3, we engaged in continued collective oral analysis of our pedagogy.

- Group decision-making: We negotiated aspects of the research project such as upcoming meetings and new ideas and activities to explore.

Interactions

As the meetings progressed, the group moved through three phases, or ways of interacting very similar to how Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis (1997) describe the use of voice in portraiture methodology. The first phase was characterized by congeniality. We engaged in "nice" conversation and spoke in reference to our individual pedagogy using language such as "What I do is…" Individual group members presented ideas, yet they were uncontested or were not probed for further clarification. We seemed to be "listening for voice", trying to capture the meaning, texture and cadence of others' voices (Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis, 1997, p.108). In the second phase, we began to develop a collective standpoint regarding our teaching. This phase was characterized by solidarity in that we perceived that a set of shared beliefs and practices existed within the group, which allowed us to delve into deeper analysis and interpretation of pedagogy. This is similar to "voice in dialogue" where both actor and portraitist "express

their views and together define meaning-making" (Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis, 1997, p. 103).

In the third phase, which was characterized as collective theorizing, we emerged into a non-hierarchical research collective. This was most noticeable in meetings four and five as we began to express ideas as representative of the entire group using words such as "What we do is…"Our words reflected a shared understanding and our conversation patterns referenced attempts to support one another in description and explanations of pedagogy. Our interactions were mediated by negotiation, in which we used facial expressions, verbal and non-verbal cues, gestures, and reenactments to probe, challenge, and refine presented ideas. As the lead researcher, I was careful not to let my comments assume sole authority or dictate the discussions. That is, I used voice similarly to that of a portraitist in which, "voice never overshadows the actor's voice, though it is sometimes heard in duet, in harmony, and in counterpoint" (Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis, 1997, p. 85). Conversations of this nature enabled the group to gather thick descriptions and detailed analysis of teaching from our collective cultural standpoint. All group meetings were audio recorded and I took extensive observational field notes. Figure 3-3 below presents a view of the research collective from an ecological perspective, which shows the environment in which research collective was nested and the subsequent interactions that may have been produced.

Data Analysis

Audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were analyzed in two phases. The term phase is used in this sense to characterize the different
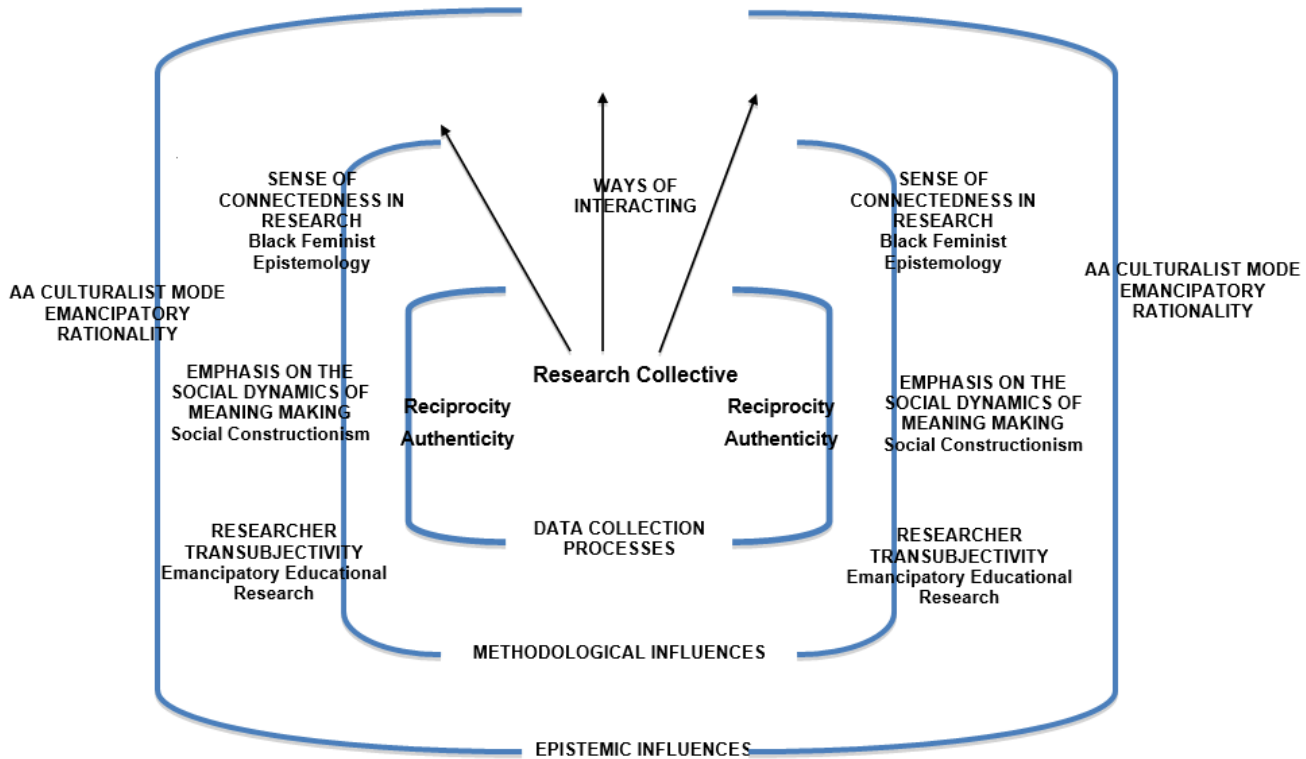
Figure 3-3. Research collective ecology

kinds of analysis done and does not suggest that data analysis proceeded in a

sequential or logical progression. On the contrary, some phases of data analysis were

overlapping, while others flowed from one to the other.

Phase one

The first level of data analysis, or framing analysis occurred as data were

collected. Grbich (2007) explained that this kind of analysis is a process not intended for

critique, but as a method for gaining a deeper understanding of the values and

meanings that exist within the data. I conducted a framing analysis during data

collection for three reasons: (1) to gain a sense of the emerging themes and key ideas

(2) to use this analysis as an elicitation tool during subsequent research meetings. The

preliminary analysis enabled the research group to surface the cultural perspectives on

teaching that might otherwise remain tacit. (3) To organize the data in ways that would make collective analysis in the next phases manageable for the research team. Conducting this analysis produced "frames of analysis" which "put rough parameters" on how the data was approached (Hatch, 2002, p. 164). Example frames from this step include, " instructional practices", "interactions with students", "interactions with colleges and administrators", "educational experiences- (teacher)", "what works with African American students", and "what doesn't work with African American students. This initial analysis was presented to group members as both an elicitation tool and as text for analysis.

I also developed a visual depiction of our thinking (Grbich, 2007) after research meeting three based on these frames, which was presented to the group in research meeting four (appendix E). The conceptual map provided a visual representation of the group's thinking, descriptions, and analysis of the cultural influences on pedagogy. We made modifications to the conceptual map, which was then presented again in research meeting five. By compiling this list of frames, I was able to organize the data in such a way that the entire research team could access and understand it. More importantly, this led the collective analysis to be more focused on addressing the research question because I was able to examine the topical direction of group

Phase two

Phase two involved collective analysis of the data, which overlapped with the framing analysis conducted in phase one. We used domain analysis in this phase to make sense of the data collected. In the collective phase, an inductive approach was used which, according to Hatch (2002) means organizing and interrogating data in ways that that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships,

develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories" (p. 148). Analytical procedures were carried out in a series of systematic steps that across the collective phase. The purpose of analyzing the data with the community-nominated African American educators involved was to ground the analysis in the cultural ways of thinking and knowing of the group. An additional underlying purpose was to provide an opportunity for the group of Black educators to crystallize their own understandings about the ways their lived experiences and cultural practices influence their teaching, which can be an emancipating experience in itself (Gordon, 1985).

First, I provided the team with a brief overview and explanation of the inductive analytical approach, using Hatch (2002) as a guide. Next, the group collectively read data segments organized according to the frames of analysis developed in the preliminary analysis. We then created an initial list of possible domains to describe group perspectives on the ways that culture influenced pedagogy. According to Hatch (2002), domains help researchers discover how individuals and groups "organize their understandings and operate in their worlds" (p. 165). Example of domains included; "ways to describe our cultural knowledge", "ways to describe our cultural values" "ways our cultural values influence the way we teach", " ways our cultural knowledge influence the ways we teach", "how my teaching style developed", and "reasons why some teachers are unsuccessful with African American students".

These domains emerged from our discussions about the data and I organized them by listing each, along with examples that supported them, in a separate document. During this step, I asked clarifying and probing questions as a way to guide the group in identifying the semantic relationship between included terms and cover terms. For

example, as we read the transcripts, the group noticed that we frequently spoke about maintaining high expectations for performance despite the challenges that may come with teaching African American students experiencing the negative impact of poverty. I followed up and asked, "What is the relationship between this approach and good teaching of African American children?" Their response led to the formulation of the domain "accepting no excuses is a way to teach African American children well". This example highlights my role during this phase. I served to demystify the research process as an analytical guide in addition to maintaining a participatory presence in the study.

In the next step, we read the domain sheets in order to identify and refine salient codes. Through this we developed interpretations and found examples from the data to support our thinking. Wolcott (1994) states that researchers should connect their interpretations to the research questions. Thus, the guiding questions we asked throughout this process were, "Why is this important for African American children?" And "How does our African American culture shape this perspective or practice?" It was in this process that some of the early codes, such as "classroom practices" were combined with others or dropped altogether. The collective analysis was a significant analytical step because it enabled us to make sense of our teaching within a "racialized discourse" and "ethnic epistemology" that fully acknowledged the complexities of culture in teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Additionally, it was important because it provided a culturally specific proxy for the subsequent independent analysis of data.

Phase three

In this last phase, I worked with the data independently. I applied African American epistemology (Gordon, 1990) as a theoretical lens to better understand how

the domains were connected to dominant African American cultural themes encapsulated in African American epistemology. To review, the themes embedded in African American epistemology include service, self-help, political power, economic autonomy, self-determination, and nationalism. Another purpose of this phase was to provide "culturally sensitive" theoretical language as a complement to the research team's theorizing (Tillman, 2002). One of the greatest challenges of research in African American and other communities of color is the crisis of representation (King, 2008; Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2009). For some Blacks in America, social science inquiry has furthered their subordination because of researchers' intent to portray and document damage. While an in-depth exploration of this is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the result, according to Tuck (2009) is a "pathologizing" research paradigm in which deprivation singularly defines Blacks as a cultural group. African American epistemology was appropriate because it enabled me to function as a researcher sensitive to the local complexities inherent in the phenomenon under study. Through this culture-focused approach to theoretical interpretation, the potential for misinterpretation and distortion of "the other" was reduced (Tillman, 2002).

To carry this refining analysis out, I read the emergent themes from the collective analysis. I then searched for similarities, and relevant distinctions between the educators' explanations and descriptions of each cultural theme. This merging of theory with data produced overarching themes that represented both the thinking of the group and some of the dominant perspectives encapsulated in African American cultural knowledge. These were the themes used to organize and report the findings in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Table 3-2 below presents a summary of the three phases of data

analysis and Figure 3-4 (end of Chapter 3) captures the flow of knowledge throughout the data analysis phases.

Table 3-2. Data analysis procedures

Framing Analysis	Transcripts from research meetings 1-4	After each research meeting	Framing analysis (Hatch, 2002)	Lead researcher(me)	More focused collective analysis. Manageable data sets.
Collective Analysis	Data sets developed during framing analysis process	During research meetings 2, 3, & 4	Inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002)	Entire research team (5 researcher)	Identification of themes related to effective pedagogy
	Graphic organizers	During research meetings 4 & 5			Generation of ideas for action
Refining Analysis	Data analysis record generated by the collective.	After all five research meetings have been conducted	Inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002)	Lead researcher (me)	Examination of data for examples that
	Transcripts from research meetings 1-5		Insertion of AA epistemology (Gordon, 1990, 1985)		represent philosophical features of AA epistemology

Research Validity and Credibility

Lather (1980) points out that researchers with openly identified interests in democracy and social justice must raise the level of empiricism of our work by reducing the ambiguity of what we do by using tools that will substantiate the validity and authenticity of this research within its own context. Therefore, in this section I provide a brief methodological epilogue that provides a descriptive definition of validity, credibility and trustworthiness as used in this study. The methodological epilogue also describes the subsequent action that has resulted from this research study. After the epilogue, I provide insight into the additional steps taken to create a high level of research validity and credibility in the study.

Methodological epilogue. The methodological choices made in this study were not chosen randomly. Rather, my choices represent thoughtful decisions that reflect the political nature of social science inquiry, by embracing the politics of research from a position of democracy (Lather, 1980). Furthermore, my own commitments to Black education and experiences as a Black teacher, parent, and community member significantly shape the way I think about the purposes of research as well as the design of this study. African American studies research such as this maintains explicit emphasis on the cultural well-being of the community. Therefore, validity and credibility in research are defined catalytically by the ability to produce meaningful outcomes that will improve African American life conditions. In other words, there is no "research for the sake of research" (Boykin, Franklin & Yates, 1979; Dubois, 1904; Woodson, 1933). Therefore one way validity and credibility in this study was determined was in consideration of the following two aspects**:**

1. Conversations about the research project: During the research meetings, group members made evaluative statements about the research, such as "this work is good" [session 4], "I never thought about that before" [session 2], "I told others about what we're doing [session 4] 'I was thinking about our discussions at my school the other day" [session 3], and "this is really making me think" [session 3]. These statements are evidence of research validity because they highlight the impact or influence the project had on participants' thinking and actions.

2. Ongoing activity: One of the collectively agreed upon outcomes of this research was the creation of a Black education organization focused on meeting some of the educational needs in the African American community. We spoke about this possibility explicitly in session 4, and have since met on two subsequent occasions after data collection to further consider and organize ourselves for positive action. As of August 2013, we have established a group identity (The Black Educator Action Team), a short list of goals and a plan of action aimed at meeting our stated objectives. The development and movements of this action group highlight the way research can be a strategically designed to positively impact communities of color, and increase the catalytic validity of the study.

Additional steps were taken to appraise the validity and authenticity of the study. As stated above, a focus on Black studies demand a commitment to community well-being (King, 2008; Tillman, 2002). In research this means configuring inquiry spaces that are equitable, privileging the interests, knowledge, and experiences of the community and using power in ways that promote inclusivity and action. In this study, member-checking, spiral discourse (Bishop, 1997) and prolonged engagement were tools used to increase the authenticity and validity of the research in ways that honored community interests. Additionally, when researchers observe ethical standards in qualitative research it obligates them to acknowledge the historic and existing forms of inequity and oppression, recognize the limitations of their own understandings and commit to action (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). The process of memo-writing enabled me to maintain a reflexive and reflective stance, which encouraged the kind of critical inter-subjectivity I needed to carry out this inquiry (Bridges & McGee, 2012).

On a final note, responsible, rigorous research inspires (e)pistemological awareness and methodological instantiation (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010; Koro-ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes 2009). This means reporting research in ways that reveal researcher theoretical positionality and evidence of methodological consistency. Koro-Ljungberg and colleagues (2009) report that when researchers are not explicit about their (e)pistemological and theoretical perspectives and methodological justification systems, their research can appear, "random, uninformed, and inconsistent" and may be indicative of "methodological sloppiness" (pp.688-670). Specifically, I pursued (e)pistemological awareness spatially, in which research design choices were connected to (e)pistemology and the research team's desired ways of knowing. This

highlighted the congruence of methods, theory and epistemology, thus increasing research rigor and credibility.

Subjectivity

As an emerging scholar, I approached this research from an openly ideological position of human freedom, citizenship, and transformation of the existing social order. My interests are in improving the education of African American children through teacher education curriculum and pedagogy. As a former elementary teacher working with predominantly African American children and families, my teaching career is a constant contradiction, a counter narrative to the theories of deficit and depravity that pervade discussions about the education of African American and other marginalized children. Theories of deficit and depravity suggest that most African American children are not intellectually capable of educational excellence and therefore, instruction need only focus on basic skills and minimum competency. What's worse is the assumption that these deficits are biological and inherent in the culture and socialization of people of African descent. In contrast, my reality is, in part, based on many interactions with intellectually curious, and capable African American children and their families who value education and understand its power. These rich teaching experiences serve as an experiential foundation for my development of theory and research in teacher education. My teaching experiences and interests in educational excellence (NABSE, 1984) for African American children influence the present study because they compel me to transcend dominant conceptions of effective pedagogy for African American learners and to search for more accurate and holistic descriptions, demonstrations, and analysis. More importantly, these experiences enable me to recognize the truly transformative potential of teaching and teacher education. Every time I run into a

former student or parent of a former student, I am reminded of the power of a good educator in the lives of Black children, and I am encouraged to search for ways to understand and describe this specialized power within the teacher education community.

My concerns are in the ways that orthodox ideology and episteme circumscribe the education of African Americans within a discourse of inferiority, blame, and deprivation. I am a married, professional African American mother of four amazing African American children in the public school system. Three of my children are boys. These experiences are not as comforting as my teaching experiences, yet they are catalytic and transformative just the same. In my own personal quest for quality education for my children I've had to confront this ideological and cultural hegemony in the form of cultural ignorance—as in the case when a potential teacher of my then four-year-old son remarked that she, "bet he [my son] don't even like to read". Or in the form of color blindness, as in the case when my son's fifth grade teacher said proudly in a conference that, "I teach children, not colors". Or finally in the form of negative generalizations—as in the case when the director of a prestigious preschool I was considering for my daughter said to me as soon as I walked in the door, "we don't accept Early Learning Coalition vouchers here"(Early Learning Coalition vouchers offer subsidized child care for low income families). These instances serve as constant reminders that my education, income, and professional level do not shield my family or myself from the impact of the elitist and discriminatory structure of knowledge deeply woven into the social fabric of American society. These epistemic and ideological concerns and experiences as an African American parent also shape this study in that

they force me to recognize the contradictions that exist between normative and African

centered constructions of good, successful, or effective teaching of learners of African

descent and privilege those perspectives that maintain the cultural integrity of the

African American community. With this being noted, I make no claims for objectivity in

this work. Instead, I welcome the subjective nature of collaborative inquiry as it has

encouraged me to contribute with participants in data collection, analysis and

interpretation. I own my subjectivities and by owning them I will become aware of the

depth of their impact.
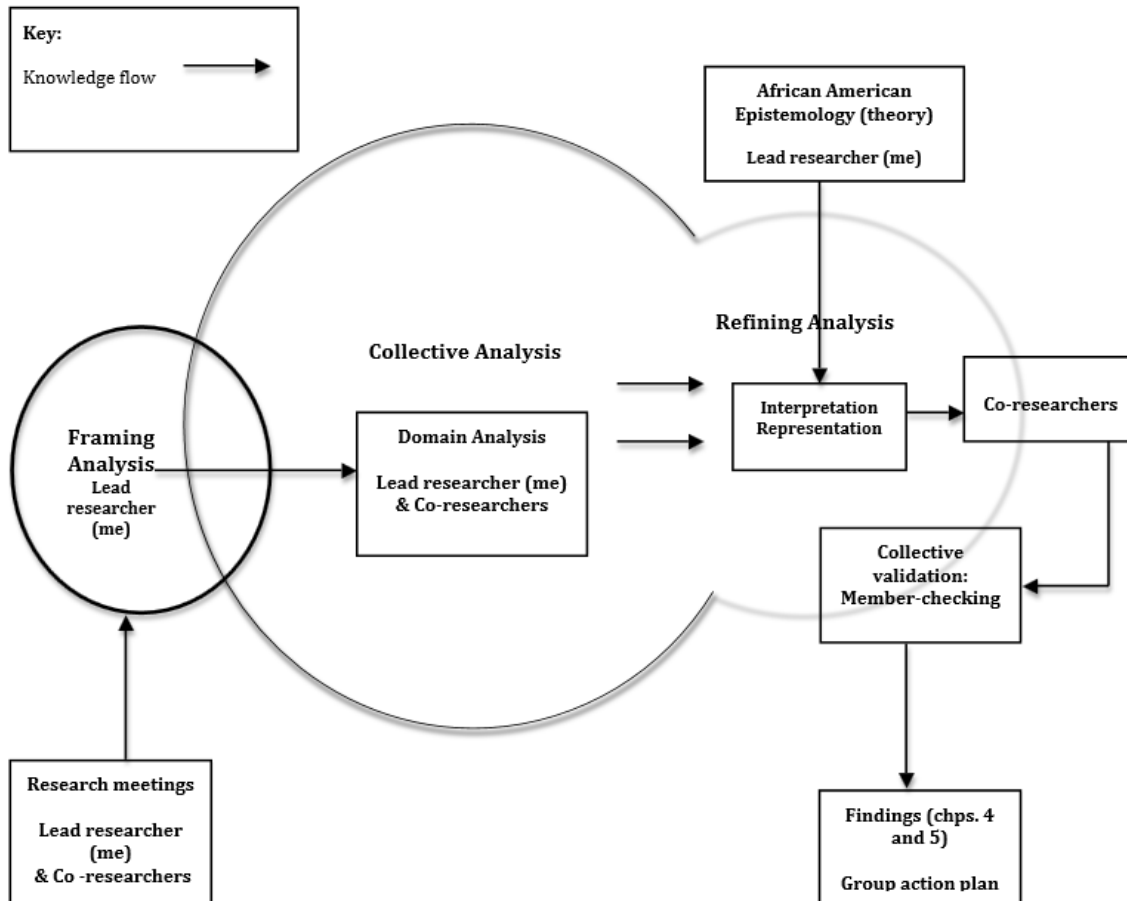
Figure 3-4. Data analysis knowledge flow.

Conclusion

In Chapter 3, I have outlined the theoretical underpinnings and methodological processes and procedures that guided this study of African American educators' collective perspectives of the cultural influences on their practice. This study used collaborative inquiry methodology grounded in an emancipatory perspective inspired by an African American epistemic framework, social constructionism, Black feminist epistemology and an emancipatory educational research paradigm. I worked with a group of community-nominated, successful African American educators. As demanded by this form of collaborative inquiry and culture-focused research, all participants were connected and involved in most aspects of the inquiry process. This kind of inclusivity and mutuality was cultivated by the careful implementation of data collection process designed to establish a research space where reciprocity and authenticity were normalized. Overall, Chapter 3 of my dissertation project reports on the aspects of a process-building methodology for community and culture-focused research.

CHAPTER 4
JOURNAL ARTICLE 1

Summary of the Findings

"Momma, why are we here and why are the Black people so mad?" asked my precocious eight-year-old son Joshua as we piled out of the minivan into the large crowd that gathered around the Martin Luther King memorial garden in downtown Gainesville. We had missed the beginning of the ceremony, so all Joshua heard as we walked towards the crowd was a very emotional speaker at the podium. It was the end of the summer 2013 and my family and I were attending an event to commemorate the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Immediately, my mind began searching for answers that would satisfy Joshua's appetite for curiosity. Joshua has always been boldly inquisitive. He is the child that will ask, with all sincerity, "Where do babies come from?" during the middle of dinner or "What does God look like?" right in the middle of Sunday morning worship service. Being his mother, I should have known that his questions were coming. It's one of the things I adore about him most.

My children are growing up in a very peculiar time in America. It is a time where it would seem they are free from exclusionary practices that limit their opportunities. They enjoy the right to a free public education and access to many services and resources. The advancement of technology and industry has created for them unlimited opportunities to think creatively and innovatively about what they will become and what they will do. There are no men in white sheets terrorizing their community and there are no public signs on water fountains or restroom doors that code them as inferior and less human. They attend multicultural schools and enjoy public friendships with children of different nationalities and ethnicities. Simultaneously, my children are growing up in a

time of confusion and contradiction. With one eye they watch Americans celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington in the year 2013, yet with the other they witness encroachments on their freedom and assaults on their Blackness. They are witness to the federal government's blatant disregard for the lives of thousands of poor Blacks in the aftermath of a devastating natural disaster. They hear of White men in control of the airwaves who call Black women out of their names as a matter of fact rather than opinion. They live in an era where non-racist individuals can gun down innocent young, Black boys with full legal impunity. The attend schools where culture has been erased from the curriculum or locates their cultural origins in oppression and subordination. So I believe their questions are valid and are indicative of a necessary psychological struggle to make sense of these conflicting forces in their lives (Dubois, 1903).

"Joshua" I replied. "We are here because I want you to know how important you are to this world". "I want you to witness the way African Americans have always worked together to make the world a better place for everyone." "And", I say with an air of finality, "I want you to see how people can use their anger and frustration to bring about positive changes for the community." I cannot say that this was the best answer to give, nor can I describe any noticeable reactions Joshua had to my remarks. What I can say is that Joshua's questions have made the findings from this study of African American educators all the more important because it tells me that our children, our community and the entire nation must be reminded of the goodness and capacity for excellence embedded in African American spaces.

92

The purpose of this study was to understand the cultural influences on the pedagogy of exemplary African American educators as they teach in predominantly African American schools. I worked collaboratively with a group of community-nominated African American educators over the course of a three month period to address the question, "How do a group of exemplary African American educators describe and analyze the cultural influences on their pedagogy with African American students?" Collective and independent domain analysis of the data produced a robust array of findings that reveal the cultural underpinnings of the practice of a group of African American educators nominated as effective with children of African descent. Table 4-1 (appendix F) represents a summary of the full spectrum of domains developed in the manuscripts presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The findings will be presented as two manuscripts, one in the remaining part of Chapter 4 and the other in Chapter 5. The article in Chapter 4 employs African American epistemology to emphasize the distinctive vision of teaching excellence as articulated by the group of African American educators involved in the study. It also highlights the ways that the group perceives the connections between their instruction and interaction with African American students and their African American cultural heritage. The article is targeted at journals that specifically report on issues in Black education, such as The Journal of Negro Education and The Journal of Black Studies. The article in Chapter 5 reveals similar cultural connections but focuses more specifically on illuminating the guiding perspectives that influence one characteristic of effective pedagogy of African American learners. This article poses implications for all urban educators and is therefore aimed at journals focused on education and schooling

in urban classrooms such as The Urban Review, Urban Education and Education and Urban Society.

Manuscript 1

Through Our Ebony Eyes: African American Educator Perspectives on Pedagogical Excellence for African American Children

In recent years, discussion over the quality of teaching has gained unprecedented attention in the educational community in response to the persistent underachievement of diverse student groups, particularly African American[1], compared to their European American peers. These conversations are warranted given reports indicating that as early as third grade, African American students demonstrate significantly lower achievement than any other U.S. ethnic group in reading, math, science, and problem solving (Darling-Hammond, 2010), are disproportionally represented in remedial and special education (Blanchette, 2006), and are two times more likely than White students to be suspended or expelled from school (Skiba et al., 2002).

These findings have spurred a much needed resurgence in demands for educational equality; however, as Siddle-Walker (2012) contends, we must not lose sight of the importance of the pedagogy agenda in obtaining educational equity for Black school children.

---

[1] African American is the term used to represent people of African descent dually socialized in American cultural norms. In this paper, it will be used interchangeably with Black, Black American to provide cultural descriptions of individuals, groups, and communities.

Her comments remind us that while there are exceptional educators doing great things in African American education (Delpit, 2012; Hilliard, 2003), their perspectives and practices are not in widespread use. This does not suggest neglect on the part of educational researchers. On the contrary, several researchers have studied the professional and personal lives of accomplished teachers of African American children, their teaching practices, beliefs, and self-efficacy (Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta, 2013; Foster, 1997; Hilliard, 2003; Hollins, 1982; King, 1991a; Ladson-Billings, 2009). What have emerged are rich descriptions, characterizations and interpretive frameworks of pedagogical excellence for students of African American ancestry. However, the strength of this work, which lies in its theoretical and philosophical core, is underemphasized in many preparation programs (Gordon, 1997; Murrell, 2002) and even less well represented in the majority of classrooms across the country.

Perhaps, programs for teacher candidates would fare better in understanding and promoting pedagogical excellence for Black children by crystallizing existing knowledge and linking it to dominant African American cultural and historical traditions. For example, approaches such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and warm demanding (Irvine & Fraser, 1998) have been designated as successful teaching frameworks for African American youth. The significance of these practices can be understood when examined through the lens of African American epistemology, and give rise to a common vision of teaching African American children well. In this paper I present the collective descriptions and analysis of what I identify as pedagogical excellence for African American children, to argue for more culture centered articulation of exemplary teaching for Black children in teacher education curriculum. From this

cultural viewpoint, exceptional teaching of African American children builds on the documented history of excellence in Black education and takes seriously the social location of African Americans (Perry, 2003). Thus, examination of pedagogy for African American youth must simultaneously attend to perspectives, practices, and the social and cultural history of African Americans in the US. I also argue that the fullness of this pedagogical vision can be richly understood and explained when interpreted using the cultural epistemology indigenous to many African Americans. This kind of examination suggests that many African Americans view, interpret, and evaluate teaching based on expectations and standards relative to the experiences of African Americans as a social group (Gordon, 1990). It also implies that pedagogical features more profound than personal charisma and singing rap songs with students account for the success many teachers experience when teaching African American learners.

The primary purpose of this research project was to investigate the influence of culture on the pedagogy of African American educators. More specifically, I wondered, "How do successful African American educators think about the cultural influences on their pedagogy?" The study is grounded in previous research on the cultural context of teaching and learning, and makes connections between culture and excellence in pedagogy for African American children more explicit.

Review of Related Literature

A host of research focused on describing pedagogical excellence for African American children exists, providing much needed visibility to the perspectives and practices of highly accomplished educators (Foster, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; King, 1991a; Mitchell, 1998; Stanford, 1996) Within this work are three overlapping research agendas explicitly focused on African American

96

schooling experiences. These include culturally relevant pedagogy, historical research on African American schooling prior to the desegregation of public schools and research on Black educators. Each offers critical insights into the nature and characteristics of excellence in teaching for African American school children that need to be explicitly linked to one another. Zeichner (2011) writes that teacher education researchers studying diversity must find ways to develop commonality in how we define key ideas and concepts that explicitly build upon research on similar issues in order to draw meaningful conclusions about what we know about a given topic.   In the following review of literature, I will examine these agendas to highlight what each has contributed to the vision of exemplary teaching for African American students. I will then analyze the commonalities across literature bases in terms of constructing an overall framework of pedagogical excellence.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings' seminal research on culturally relevant pedagogy extended previous research validating the salience of culture in teaching, learning and achievement (2009/1994). Her work was a critical departure from earlier studies focused on sociolinguistics in its recognition of community-defined cultural standards of excellence in teaching as relevant to the achievement for Black students. In her theoretical argument, Ladson-Billings (1995) proclaimed culturally relevant pedagogy as a "pedagogy of opposition" rooted in the struggle for African Americans to reject their socially constructed alter ego as "other" and exist on their own terms. Ladson-Billings made this critical assertion after she found that the teaching factor most significant in fostering educational excellence for African American youth was the teachers' ability to "assist students in their development of a relevant black identity which allowed them to

97

choose academic excellence and still identify with African American culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 476). Observations and interviews demonstrated that the teachers were able to do this by attending to students' academic and social needs. Teachers worked dialectically between the dominant European American ideology and one consistent with many Black cultures by validating student knowledge and making the standard academic content accessible to students. Furthermore, the culturally relevant teachers in Ladson-Billings' study realized that teaching African American students was not teaching for individual success only, but for "survival of the person, the family, the community, and the people" (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990, p. 82).

The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy as an example of pedagogical excellence for African American learners is important for the present study because it embraces the inherently political nature of education and schooling. By employing African American cultural standard of excellence as a basis for her examination, Ladson-Billings brings attention to the different meanings of success and the politics that shape the prevailing definition of teacher effectiveness as it relates to African American education. Another way this research validates the political is in its appropriation of African American culture as central to good teaching. Culturally relevant pedagogy counters a pejorative definition of African American culture and instead argues that cultural identification with Blackness can be a cornerstone of good teaching. In this way, Ladson-Billings explicitly includes the political terrain because historically, negative constructions of Blackness have been implicated in the political subordination of African descent peoples living in America. Conclusively, culturally relevant pedagogy contributes the political perspective to the vision of pedagogical excellence for African

American students. It does not attempt to de-politicize teaching and learning, but rather implicates the political in the vision of what it means to teach African American children well.

Historical Research on African American Schooling

Educational historian Vanessa Siddle-Walker has written extensively about the nature of schooling for African American children during the period of legalized public school segregation (2005, 2000, 1996). From this in depth examination she concluded that schooling for African American children was highly "valued" within the African American community. She wrote, "Inequalities notwithstanding, many African Americans valued the cultural form of teaching and learning that developed in the segregated schools" (Siddle-Walker, 2000, p. 255).This conclusion challenged the prevailing assumption that early Black educational efforts were axiomatically inferior in its recognition of African American standards of exemplary teaching. One of her most notable findings was related to the many ways effective teachers of this era cared for African American school children. Siddle-Walker termed this "interpersonal caring" which she defined as, "the direct attention an individual gives to meet the psychological, sociological and academic needs of another individual or individuals (1993, p.65). She found that good teachers during this time demonstrated a deep commitment to student learning and success, and a demanding nature guided by an unflinching belief in the intellectual ability of students. According to her participants, the good teachers were the ones who would not let students perform poorly or let students give up on themselves. Instead, they were classroom leaders who embraced their authoritative role and used it to increase student achievement and self-respect, promote a sense of community, and mitigate an often-oppressive educational system. To students, these good teachers

were "counselors", "benefactors", "encouragers", and "race cheerleaders" (Siddle-Walker & Tompkins, 2004). They were empathetic, yet expressed a sense of urgency and necessity in their teaching. Through her analysis of teacher care, Siddle-Walker documented the psychological stance, or disposition of exemplary educators. This stance was manifested in the teacher's appropriate enactment of care and authority, and is also referred to as warm demanding (Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta, 2013; Ford & Sassi, 2013; Ware, 2006).

Siddle-Walker undoubtedly revealed the history of pedagogical excellence for Black students, which, according to her teacher, student, and community research participants, was connected to social, economic, and political status of the African American masses. This historical documentation is relevant to the current study because it validates the existence and enduring nature of excellence in teaching African American children. In tracing the history of exceptional teaching in African American communities, this work also highlights the thoughtful and intentional manner in which effective teachers of African American children used their sensibilities and skills to orchestrate a powerful, purposeful pedagogy. This is important because it helps debunk the myth that good teaching of Black children is idiosyncratic and attributed to a "cult of personality" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 14). The history of African American schooling provides the necessary historical layer to a community-centered vision of excellence in pedagogy. Through this work we can gather that pedagogical excellence for African American students necessitates a distinctive teaching disposition connected to an enduring African American consciousness.

Research on Black Educators

The research on Black educators has grown exponentially over the last two decades. The work of Michele Foster (1997, 1994, 1993) features prominently among this literature and offer insight about the work of Black educators relevant to any discussion of exemplary teaching of Black children. Foster challenged the negative depiction of Black educators' as uncaring individuals who perpetuated the status quo. She argued, quite convincingly, that effective Black educators were a positive force in African American education, and they enacted a culturally distinctive pedagogy relevant to their students. In this, Foster presented a cogent argument for the cultural study of teaching that emphasized African American axiology, or cultural values.

In Foster's (1994) literature synthesis, she revealed that the dominant characteristic of effective Black teachers was their "reliance on the cultural and social underpinnings of the Black community" (Foster, 1994, p. 227). She added that effective Black teachers maintain cultural solidarity with the African American community at large. This, she stated is explicitly and implicitly reinforced through classroom interactions, community recognition, and was evidenced in the teacher's sense of obligation and shared responsibility for the academic and social growth of students. Foster (1994) then connected this kind of "othermothering" to the authoritative stance highlighted in studies of Black teachers (Case, 1997; Collins, 2000). This demandingness, Foster explained was inherent in the kinship role they assumed in relation to students (1994). She stated, "When effective black teachers take on the role of kin, they embrace a complex set of behaviors that demand appropriate doses of firmness and nurturance" (p. 231). The practical implication she noted was that good Black teachers Black teachers emphatically and insistently demanded that students put forth maximum effort to

achieve at high levels. She described this bond between teacher and students as a kind of "connectedness" predicated on African American cultural values of communalism, self-determination, mutuality in relationships and social equality (Foster, 1994, 1993).

The inclusion of Black educators' voices highlights the significance of African American cultural values in good teaching. These values were developed from a common African heritage and a distinctive American social location (Franklin, 1984). This inclusion moves the dialogue about teacher quality for African American children beyond the strategies conversation to a more critical analysis of the abiding cultural formations that give rise to a nuanced view of teaching excellence.

The lines of research discussed above are reflective of a specific and systematic effort to successfully educate African American children. The confluence of this work creates a robust context for understanding the parameters of teaching for excellence. The underlying concepts that guide these frameworks are rooted in traditional African American perspectives and values that assisted generations of Black people in their desire for education and subsequent demand of educational quality (Gordon, 1993; Perry, 2003). The convergence of these perspectives and values creates a culture centered vision of teaching African American students that localizes educational excellence within the African American community. The current study builds on the foundations of excellence in teaching established above by explicitly attending to the social, political, and cultural underpinnings of pedagogical excellence for African American learners and making them more explicit. It departs from the psychological foundations of teaching and learning and instead, draws from a rich foundation of

sociological and anthropological research guided by African American interests in ways that employ culture as a systemic tool for educational equity, social justice and humanity (Gordon, 1997; King, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on the philosophical stance conceptualized by Gordon (1990, 1985), which argues that African American epistemology is critical to educational theory, policy, and practice because it produces a mode of social theorizing about education in the public interest. As such, it creates a context for understanding the teaching of African American children that is both liberatory and democratic. From my position as an African American teacher educator and researcher committed to the education of Black children, a former school teacher of Black children and a mother of African American school-aged children, Gordon's theory is appropriate for my research for at least two reasons. First, this framework is culturally sensitive given that the themes that emerge from it are based on the lived experiences of people of African descent. This sensitivity is important because it can reduce the likelihood for misinterpretation and misrepresentation that has stifled educational improvement for African Americans many times before (Tillman, 2002). Second, Gordon's thinking about the liberatory potential of culture dislodges the dominant view that sees diversity and culture as hindrances to educational achievement (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2011). In place of this deficit view of diversity and culture, African American epistemology facilitates the creation of a vision of pedagogical excellence for students of African descent in America, explicitly connected to its abiding cultural epicenter.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed a collaborative inquiry methodology situated within an emancipatory educational research perspective (EER). Emancipatory educational research is designed to produce transformative knowledge generated through collaborative research with groups and individuals functioning as agents of their own change (Emancipatory Educational Research, 2012). EER maintains a focus on cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences with full regard for local complexities, power relations, and life experiences. Methodologically, emancipatory educational research supports Denzin's (2001) assertion that, "All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer... There is no possibility of theory- or value-free knowledge."(p. 325) and, as such, brings transparency in the research process by demanding a move away from positions of objectivity and neutrality. Instead, EER insists on researcher disclosure and self-reflexivity throughout the research process. Thus the researcher is able to function trans-subjectively as a fully invested partner in the project (West-Olatunji, 2005; Tyson, 2003). EER serves as methodological guide for researchers, such as myself, who operate from the ideological positions of democracy and universal human freedom. Who, like me, engage in research as action in the public interest (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Tyson, 2003) and who seek as I do to blur the boundaries between academic scholarship and activism in ways that are productive and healthy.

Research Design

The collaborative inquiry employed in this study preserves emancipatory research imperatives through its emphasis on a view of inquiry, which "allows us as human persons to know that we are part of the whole, rather than separated as mind over and against matter" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p.2). This view of inquiry emphasizes

inclusive participation, mutuality, and the co-construction of knowledge (Bridges &

McGee, 2011). In practice, collaborative inquiry operates as a process of cycling

between four overlapping elements; (1) reflection, (2) the collective construction of

knowledge fostered through dialogue with peers, (3) action, and (4) further group-

decision-making (Heron & Reason, 1997). Knowledge is produced and validated in a

shared space and grounded in the perspectives, experiences, and practices of the

group. Researcher and participants function as co-researchers; thinking and generating

ideas, designing and managing the project and analyzing and interpreting the data.

Collaborative inquirers also operate as co-subjects, each individual participating fully in

every step in the inquiry process and contributing to a collective view, theory or

perspective. Hyland and Meacham (2004) lament that what is missing in teacher

education research and practice are "effective ways to use the subjugated knowledge of

the dispossessed as a liberating educational tool for cultural well-being and human

freedom" (p.123).   The collaborative inquiry methodology advanced in this study is well

suited to meet this need.

Participant Selection

To create the collaborative inquiry group, community nomination was used as a

purposive sampling technique. In using this process in a similar study of Black

educators, Foster (1993) defined community nomination as a process by which

research participants are selected through "direct contact with local African American-

communities, and is designed to capture the African American community's conception

of what it means to be a good teacher" (p.374). The purpose of community nomination

in this study was to reveal the "emic perspective", or insider view, on teaching African

American children and use this culturally generated knowledge as the basis of inquiry.

In this study, I visited a predominantly African American church, afterschool program, and community organization on separate occasions. At each site, I engaged in a structured conversation in which I asked overarching questions such as, "What must educators do to teach your child (ren) well?" or "What kinds of things would a teacher say or do that give you affirmation that he/she is a good teacher for your child?" From this, a collective definition of teacher quality was constructed. The groups developed very similar definitions of good teachers. Across the groups, community members noted that good teachers:

- challenge children to do their best every day

- show children how to complete their work

- listen to parents and maintain open communication with them.

- are tough

- follow through

- won't let my child slide because they care and understand the world my child will grow up and live in

- are fair and honest

- believe in my child's capabilities

- provide one-on-one support for my child when necessary.

I then asked families to identify in writing the names and schools of any teacher whom they believed met the characteristics produced in our discussion. Their nominations were collected at the end of the meeting. These focus group sessions lasted approximately one hour at each site and I took extensive field notes to capture key ideas.

A total of 12 educators were identified and invited through email to an introductory luncheon to recognize and celebrate their community nomination and solicit their participation in the study. Six of the nominated teachers attended the luncheon, and four educators plus myself volunteered to participate in the research collective. The other two teachers who attended the introductory luncheon consented to participate, but were subsequently unable to continue due to extenuating circumstances.

The collective. As Table 4-2 indicates, each of the educators self-identified as African American and had a range of teaching experience from seven to thirty-five years. All of the educators were born, raised, and attended schools in the South.

Table 4-2. Demographics of the collective

Name	Ethnicity	Edu. Level	Teaching Exp (No. of years)	Grade level	School size	% of African American students	% of students free or reduced lunch
Antionette	AA	M	9	Elem.	365	88%	95%
Jalonda	AA	S	13	Elem.	692	55%	82%
Harriett	AA	M	36	Elem.	692	55%	82%
Geneva	AA	M	22	Elem.	353	98%	96%
Monica	AA	M	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Three of the educators were native to the area, while two had relocated with their families, one three years ago, the other 12 years ago. Two of the teachers knew each other because they were co-workers. Four of the educators were working in elementary schools at the time of the study, though further conversations revealed that three had experience teaching at the secondary level and two were experienced special

educators. The bulk of each educator's teaching experience was in predominantly

African American, high poverty schools.

Data Collection

Partially-structured research meetings provided the conditions necessary for the

research collective to engage in the inquiry process. Five research meetings occurred

over the course of a three- month period. Meetings were held on weekday evenings at a

local eating establishment frequented by many in the group. Duration of the meetings

ranged from 90 to 120 minutes. Throughout the research meetings, I served as lead

researcher; leadership in this respect meant facilitating the meeting and using my

knowledge of research methods to assist in group decision-making. Prior to each

meeting, I sent out a reminder email to all participants that included a rough draft of the

upcoming agenda. After group members added, modified, and deleted agenda items, I

sent a revised agenda, which was used during the meeting. Each meeting followed a

similar format:

- Reflection: We re-read notes generated from introductory luncheon where we provided oral accounts and descriptions of our teaching.

- Debriefing: We elaborated, contested, changed, and refined our ideas.

- Text & visual elicitation: We re-read selected segments of transcripts—I selected portions of transcripts from previous meetings prior to each upcoming research session. I selected segments that would allow each participant to elaborate on ideas, statements and phrases. In meetings four and five, we examined a visual representation I drew based on previous conversations about the ways we described our teaching.

- New theorizing: Based on steps 1-3, we engaged in continued collective oral analysis of our pedagogy.

- Group decision-making: We negotiated aspects of the research project such as upcoming meetings and new ideas and activities to explore.

As the meetings progressed, the group moved through three phases, or ways of interacting very similar to how Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis (1997) describe the use of voice in portraiture methodology. The first phase was characterized by congeniality. We engaged in "nice" conversation and spoke in reference to our individual pedagogy using language such as "What I do is…" Individual group members presented ideas, yet they were uncontested or were not probed for further clarification. We seemed to be "listening for voice", trying to capture the meaning, texture and cadence of others' voices (Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis, 1997, p.). In the second phase, we began to develop a collective standpoint regarding our teaching. This phase was characterized by solidarity in that we perceived that a set of shared beliefs and practices existed within the group, which allowed us to delve into deeper analysis and interpretation of pedagogy. This is similar to "voice in dialogue" where both actor and portraitist "express their views and together define meaning-making" (Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis, 1997, p. 103).

In the third phase, which was characterized as collective theorizing, we emerged into a non-hierarchical research collective. This was most noticeable in meetings four and five as we began to express ideas as representative of the entire group using words such as "What we do is…"Our words reflected a shared understanding and our conversation patterns referenced attempts to support one another in description and explanations of pedagogy. Our interactions were mediated by negotiation, in which we used facial expressions, verbal and non-verbal cues, gestures, and reenactments to probe, challenge, and refine presented ideas. As the lead researcher, I was careful not to let my comments assume sole authority or dictate the discussions. That is, I used

voice similarly to that of a portraitist in which, "voice never overshadows the actor's voice, though it is sometimes heard in duet, in harmony, and in counterpoint" (Lawrence-Lightfoote & Davis, 1997, p. 85). Conversations of this nature enabled the group to gather thick descriptions and detailed analysis of teaching from our collective cultural standpoint. All group meetings were audio recorded and I took extensive observational field notes.

Data Analysis

Audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were analyzed in three phases. The term "phase" is used in this sense to characterize the different kinds of analysis done and does not suggest that data analysis proceeded in a sequential or logical progression. On the contrary, some phases of data analysis were overlapping, while others flowed from one to the other. In the upcoming sections, I describe the methodological steps taken to analyze the data.

Phase one

Framing analysis. In the first phase, I conducted a framing analysis during data collection for three reasons: (1) to gain a sense of the emerging themes and key ideas (2) to use this analysis as an elicitation tool during subsequent research meetings. The framing analysis enabled the research group to surface the cultural perspectives on teaching that might otherwise remain tacit. (3) To organize the data in ways would make collective analysis in the next phases manageable for the research team. Conducting the preliminary analysis produced "frames of analysis" which "put rough parameters" on how the data were approached (Hatch, 2002, p. 164).

Phase two

  Collective analysis. Phase two involved collective analysis of the data. Domain analysis was in this process (Spradley, 1980). The collective analysis followed an inductive approach as described by Hatch (2002). According to Hatch (2002), inductive analysis involves "organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories" (p. 148). The purpose of analyzing the data with the community-nominated African American educators involved was to ground the analysis in the cultural ways of thinking and knowing of the group. An additional underlying purpose was to provide an opportunity for the group of Black educators to crystallize their own understandings about the ways their lived experiences and cultural practices influence their teaching, which can be an emancipating experience in itself.

  First, I provided the team with a brief overview and explanation of the inductive analytical approach using Hatch (2002) as a guide. Next, the group collectively read data segments organized according to the frames of analysis developed in the preliminary analysis. We then created an initial list of possible domains to describe group perspectives on the ways that culture influenced pedagogy. According to Hatch (2002), domains help researchers discover how individuals and groups "organize their understandings and operate in their worlds" (2002, p. 165). Example of domains included; "ways to describe our cultural knowledge", "ways to describe our cultural values" "ways our cultural values influence the way we teach", " ways our cultural knowledge influence the ways we teach", "how my teaching style developed", and "reasons why some teachers are unsuccessful with African American students". These

domains emerged from our discussions about the data and I organized them by listing

each, along with examples that supported them, in a separate document.

During this step, I asked clarifying and probing questions as a way to guide the

group in identifying the semantic relationship between included terms and cover terms.

For example, as we read the transcripts, the group noticed that we frequently spoke

about maintaining high expectations for performance despite the challenges that may

come with teaching African American students experiencing the negative impact of

poverty. I followed up and asked, "What is the relationship between this approach and

good teaching of African American children?" Their response led to the formulation of

the domain "accepting no excuses is a way to teach African American children well".

This example highlights my role during this phase. I served to demystify the research

process as an analytical guide in addition to maintaining a participatory presence in the

study.

In the next step, we read the domain sheets in order to identify and refine salient

codes. Through this we developed interpretations and found examples from the data to

support our thinking. Wolcott (1994) states that researchers should connect their

interpretations to the research questions. Thus, the guiding questions we asked

throughout this process were, "Why is this important for African American children?"

And "How does our African American culture shape this perspective or practice?" It was

in this process that some of the early codes, such as "classroom practices" were

combined with others or dropped altogether. The collective analysis was a significant

analytical step because it enabled us to make sense of our teaching within a "racialized

discourse" and "ethnic epistemology" that fully acknowledged the complexities of culture

in teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Additionally, it was important because it provided a culturally specific proxy for the subsequent independent analysis of data**.**

Phase three

Refining analysis. I independently applied African American epistemology (Gordon, 1990) as a theoretical lens to better understand how the domains were connected to dominant African American cultural themes encapsulated in African American epistemology. These themes include; service, nationalism, political power, self-determination/self-help and economic autonomy. As an initial step, I read the emergent themes from the collective analysis. I searched for similarities, differences, and relevant distinctions between the educators' explanations and descriptions of each cultural theme. This merging of theory with data produced overarching themes that represented both the thinking of the group and some of the dominant perspectives encapsulated in African American cultural knowledge. These were the themes used to organize and report the findings and include purposes of urgency and factors contributing to urgency. Each larger theme has subthemes, which will be shared in the next section. This layer of analysis was used to provide theoretical language as a complement to the research team's theorizing and analysis.

Methodological epilogue. The methodological choices made in this study were not chosen randomly. Rather, my choices represent thoughtful decisions that do not ignore the political nature of social science inquiry, but instead embrace the politics of research from a position of democracy (Lather, 1980). Furthermore, my own commitments to Black education and experiences as a Black teacher, parent, and community member significantly shape the way I think about the purposes of research as well as the design of this study. African American studies research such as this

113

maintains explicit emphasis on the cultural well-being of the community. Therefore,

validity and credibility in research are defined catalytically by the ability to produce

meaningful outcomes that will improve African American life conditions. In other words,

there is no "research for the sake of research" (Boykin, Franklin & Yates, 1979; Dubois,

1904; Woodson, 1933). Therefore one way validity and credibility in this study was

determined was in consideration of the following two activities**:**

1. Conversations about the research project: During the research meetings, group
    members made evaluative statements about the research, such as "this work is
    good" [session 4], "I never thought about that before" [session 2], "I told others
    about what we're doing [session 4] 'I was thinking about our discussions at my
    school the other day" [session 3], and "this is really making me think" [session 3].
    These statements are evidence of research validity because they highlight the
    impact or influence the project had on participants' thinking and actions.

2. Ongoing activity: One of the collectively agreed upon outcomes of this research
    was the creation of a Black education organization focused on meeting some of
    the educational needs in the African American community. We spoke about this
    possibility explicitly in session 4, and have since met on two subsequent
    occasions after data collection to further consider and organize ourselves for
    positive action. As of August 2013, we have established a group identity (The
    Black Educator Action Team), a short list of goals and a plan of action aimed at
    meeting our stated objectives. The development and movements of this action
    group highlight the way research can be a strategically designed to positively
    impact communities of color, and increase the catalytic validity of the study.

Findings

There is no shortage of scholarship representative of African American social

theorizing (Gordon, 1993). Within African American epistemology, themes reveal

"paradigms, values, meanings, and interpretive schemes reflective of the interests of the

African American community" (Gordon, 1993, pp. 449-450). Such work is located in the

cultural artifacts produced by African American scholars and intellectuals throughout

various academic disciplines and pop culture genres. Embedded in these cultural

artifacts are themes which, taken together, represent the major philosophical premises of an African American standpoint (Franklin, 1984).

The currents of thought inherent in African American epistemology include self-help, self-determination, service, nationalism, economic autonomy, and political power, and coalesce into a powerful frame of reference upon which many African American people interpret their existence, decipher dominant ideology, and organize for change (Gordon, 1990, 1985). Gordon (1993) found that the abiding African American epistemological guideposts speak to an overarching worldview and specifically inform the development of a distinctive educational perspective and practice rooted in African American experiential knowledge. In short, as Gordon concludes, "African American epistemology goes hand in hand with African American educational theory" (Gordon, 1990, p. 90). Fully understanding any explanatory framework or theory of achievement for African American children necessitates an examination of the ways that such paradigms function in relation to African American thought. These theoretical themes were the ideological foundation upon which many Black educators envisioned, designed, and organized the kind of teaching they perceived to serve the interest of students and the community (Gordon, 1985; Perry, 2003). As such, African American epistemology provided a powerful analytical tool in the current study to understand the education and schooling experiences of African American learners, which includes the kind of pedagogy that facilitates academic and cultural excellence.

The findings presented substantiate this argument. The collective theorizing produced knowledge about pedagogical excellence for African American children consistent with themes embedded in an African American mode of rationality. Analysis

of the data revealed three themes - doin' better through education, serving the

community by teaching, and there are no excuses- - which emphasize such

connections.

Doin' Better through Education

In 1960, African American educator Septima P. Clark wrote an essay extolling

the work of the citizenship education schools which flourished in the American South

amid a publicly contested battle for racial equality. In her essay entitled, Literacy and

Liberation, Clark proclaimed, "Literacy means liberation!" as she recounted the

successful initiatives of the citizenship schools. Such a pronouncement is indicative of

an enduring African American perspective inextricably linking literacy, or education, with

freedom, which is embedded in the themes of political power and economic autonomy

pervasive in African American epistemology (Anderson, 1988; Anderson & Kharem,

2009; Perry, 2003; Richards & Lemelle, 2005).

Analysis of the data revealed that this cultural theme was also embedded in the

discourse and group thinking about what teaching excellence means for African

American children. This was evident in the repeated emphasis of the idea that, the only

way to do better is through education [session 4].   We[2] frequently used phrases such

as "do better", "make it to the next level" or "get ahead" to reference to our thinking

about the overarching purpose of education for African Americans: to overcome a

persistent inequitable social context as a form of resistance. As the conversation cycled,

our collective voice mirrored this same commitment to educate for freedom and uplift.

The quote from one educator below illuminates the group's perspective.

---

[2] The plural first person noun is used throughout the findings to highlight the co-constructive design of the study in that my participation was as both participant and researcher as with all group members.

Jalonda: When you're in a school where all your teachers are black—they [teachers] know where you got to go, there is no time to be messin' around—this is an opportunity we didn't always have. So I think the whole culture is that how you get ahead in this world is through education. [session 3].

The comment above points to the shared understanding among some African Americans that education is still the most viable way to improve the African American social condition. It also underscores the sense of urgency felt by accomplished Black educators who link the value of education directly to the knowledge that education was not always a universal right or guarantee for African American people (Anderson, 1988). As conversation moved further into pedagogical analysis, we noted how this political agenda served as a key characteristic of African American exemplary teaching.

Geneva: When we say that we have these high expectations and that they [teachers who are not successful with Black students] may not have that, it's because they don't…

Harriett: They haven't lived it, haven't experienced it, know nothing about it…

Jalonda: and they think that if you just do…

Harriett: x, y, and z….

Geneva: that you'll be okay. When there's still the fact that our kids have to do more. We still have to do more.

Jalonda: And then to look at where we came from, we understand on another level that education is the only way that you are going to get ahead in life…

Geneva: exactly

Antionette: it is the only way that is gonna somewhat level the playing field amongst you and a White kid or an Asian kid or whatever. You know I think deep down we know that this is the truth, but for them education is education—everybody goes to school, everybody goes to college everybody is doing fine, but they don't understand that it is more to us than that…

Monica: so we hold a different value to education…

Harriett: we hold a different value to education because it is something that, once we get it, they can't take it away.

Antionette: Yes.

Jalonda: Exactly. [session 5]

Note that group members affirm their agreement and validation of ideas and knowledge claims by responding with the word, "exactly".

The idea the educators expressed above is that obtaining an education has culturally specific meanings. "Leveling the playing field" references the perspective that education serves larger purposes connected to increasing African American political power. It also references the educators' view that education is a productive way for African American people to demand racial-social injustice and assert their claim to citizenship. In this way, this conversation also highlights the moral and political imperatives embedded in the group's expansive vision of teaching excellence. These findings suggest that rather than attempt to depoliticize education by ignoring the political aspect of conceptions of pedagogical excellence, teacher educators should embrace the political implications of teaching and learning on ethical grounds as a way to scaffold teacher education students towards demonstrating excellence when teaching Black students. The group agreed that this political perspective was critical for African American students. Furthermore they believed that the pervasive underachievement of Black children was a consequence of the lack of transference of this perspective to younger generations of African American students. They lamented,

Antionette: Our kids can't be fooled by the fact that we have a Black president
                [everyone agrees and laughs].

Jalonda: That's what I have to tell my son all the time!

Monica: And that's a big part of it—YOU had to tell him that—they don't get it at school.
                So for all the rest of these babies out there no one is telling them that….

Geneva: but they have to know it….

118

Harriett: for they're survival—

Antionette: exactly!

Jalonda: And see that's why I think so many of our Black boys like come through like, "I ain't got to do nothing", "I'm just gonna chill". Cause they think that the world right here today is perfect, great and wonderful and they don't have to worry about anything…

Monica: and they don't see the racism that still exists because they haven't been slapped in the face with it.

Antionette; But it's coming [session 4]

As we continued in dialogue, the group readily used this political backdrop as a way to describe and make sense of specific kinds of interactions they had with students. Often in the conversation, we linked our thinking about student interactions to descriptions of interactions we had with our biological children. Though the following dialogue is lengthy, it captures the ways that the educators' pedagogy was linked to the theme of political power embedded in African American epistemology.

Jalonda: I had to tell my son right now today, he got in trouble cause he raised his voice at a teacher. He was trying to get his point across and of course he was getting louder and louder. And I just sat down and talked to him and said, "Look child—you're a black boy in America."

Harriett & Geneva: Umhmm.

Antionette: "Whatever you do is gonna be magnified times ten." "So although you did not feel that you were raising your voice, you were talking to a white woman so all she saw was a little black boy …"

Monica: getting angry…

Antionette: exactly getting angry….And those are the conversations that of course, they're [white teachers] not gonna have with our children, but those are the conversations that we have to have with our children. For them to understand, that just because we have a black president does not mean you can do what you want to do. …

Jalonda: And you have to work twice as hard to get the same results, you have to be twice as good. So I have them [conversations], and there is no other way.

Monica: Do you think that's critical to their success? Like do they have to know it?

Antionette: Oh yes, oh yes, it is extremely critical—

Jalonda: So we have these conversations and I would just hope that at some point –if I tell them in kindergarten, tell them again in first grade then tell them again in second grade—at some point I hope they will start to get it. Because at some point they gonna face that situation—and hopefully they will remember—oh, this is what Ms. J. was talking about. [session 3]

It must be noted that while the group agreed that these kinds of talks with African American students were critical, they realized that their shared cultural standpoint made it easier for them than other teachers to engage in this kind of conversation. However, in keeping with the guiding philosophy of "there are no excuses" the group concluded that "All teachers needed to be given the language to say these things without feeling afraid of the backlash" [session 5].

Finally, the theme of political power was foundational to the group's expressed sense of agency, in which they each described occasions where they were advocates for Black students, demanding that they be provided every opportunity to be successful. One of the educator's reflections highlights how each one acted on this politically bound philosophy of education by insisting that other educators avoid using prior conceptions of students to limit their possibilities.

> Jalonda: When all my kids are black and half of them male and 90% of 'em are in here [special education classes] because they got in trouble in elementary school… Even as a department chair I used to go to the transition meetings for students transitioning from middle school to high school, I used to see kids that were on that Special Ed track. They [other school personnel] wanted to automatically put them in Special E-I was like, "No, we're going to put them in Regular Ed. We're going to give them extra supports and we're going to put them in a learning strategies classroom –we're going to do things to help them be successful". [session 2]

120

This educator's reflection emphasizes the African American reality that many times, placement in special education does not lead to educational success. This educator, along with the other special educator perceived that a special education diploma would not prepare Black students to "make it to the next level" but would "keep students at the bottom of the totem pole" [session 1]. In this it is evident that through the eyes of the research group, education was as much about African American uplift and advancement as it was about academic achievement and individual economic prosperity.   The same educator continues offering a rationale for her resistance to the unchallenged special education placement of African American students. She shares:

> Jalonda: This is what they don't want to tell you; if you put them [Black students] in ESE there is no going back. There is no going back to regular ed. You spend one year in ESE and there are so many credits that you are gonna have to make up that it's impossible to catch up…. But if I start them in regular ed… then they have a chance. If they don't make it with all the supports that's okay. It's easier to go the other way…but they are going to start here [in regular ed]. [session 1]

 Interestingly, the fact that this educator fought so hard to keep African American students out of special education demonstrates her solidarity with students and community against a flawed system of education.

In sum, Perry (2003) questioned, "For what groups of African Americans is this [African American] philosophy of education still compelling? How would it be manifested, ritualized, and represented in the post-Civil Rights era?" (p. 51). The educators in the present study offer a response to Perry's queries. When analyzed through the lens of African American epistemology, it becomes apparent that they maintained a historic African American philosophy of education, which dramatically influenced their teaching. It may be that African American epistemology as an

interpretive framework facilitated this more nuanced vision of pedagogical excellence because it recognized the sociopolitical dynamics of teaching.

Serving the Community by Teaching

The idea of service and its link to education as a vehicle for group freedom and social reform has been a rallying call embraced by many people of African descent since their ancestors' brutal transplantation to the United States. Many Black educators in particular believed as Mary Church Terrell stated that, "Those of us fortunate enough to have an education must share it…we must go into our communities and improve it". Throughout the research meetings, the pedagogical rationale we described was consistent with an African American epistemological theme of service. Such service-oriented perspectives are evident in the dialogue about our purposes for pursuing a career in education highlighted below.

Antionette: The work we're doing is part of giving back to the community, and it's not about the paycheck…

Jalonda: If it was about the paycheck I'd a stopped a long time ago [laughter]. It's about that passion to give back…

Harriett: My reason for coming into teaching was I saw what needed to be done and I wanted to help some kids…

Monica: So you said you saw what needed to be done, what did you see?

Harriett: Our children…they were not competitive… and I'm thinking, it shouldn't matter what side of town you come from. What matters is the kind of support you're getting. So my thing was that I was gonna go in there and do the best that I could….

Jalonda: I think we serve a better purpose when we're with these kids [African American] cause these kids need someone who is going to advocate for them and put them to the wall and say—"Excuse me…"

Monica: "You gonna do better…. "

Antionette: "Don't even try it, I know you can do better than that. … "

Jalonda: right, exactly.

Antionette: It's about working with our youth and just trying to make a difference and make an impact in the community. [session 5]

In addition, this line of thought seemed to contribute to the understanding that service-work as educators was not limited to teaching academic content only. As expressed in each conversation, the group understood the challenges that might prevent some poor African American children from academic achievement, but they did not cower before them. Instead, they took an expansive approach to meeting the needs of children in the community, constantly referenced in the statement, "You have to teach the whole child" [sessions 1-5]. Whereas other teachers might draw clear lines of demarcation to limit their duties and responsibilities in educating poor Black children, this group of educators did not hesitate to offer students' guidance, advice and direction on academic and social subjects because they believed they were meeting critical student and community needs. In other words, they willingly assumed responsibility for helping students master academic content as well as the hidden school curriculum as part of their reasonable service to the community. Each participant reasoned that it was knowledge of the implicit cultural practices of schools that prevented many African American students form succeeding educationally. Therefore they described how they acted with urgency to help students understand and navigate the dominant culture embedded in many schools.

Harriett: That's the number one thing when I get in to my classroom—classroom management.

Geneva: cause if you don't have that…

Antionette: and it's not just behavior as in misbehavior, but just knowing how to come to school and sit in a seat and just not talk when the teacher is talking and

listen—just basic things that you would think children would come to school knowing how to do…

Harriett: respect …

Antionette: don't talk when an adult is talking …

Monica: so it's not—is it respect in terms of communication knowing when to talk—is it talking back, getting an attitude?

Antionette, Geneva, & Harriett: oh no, they don't do that…

Monica: Is it not understanding how the game of school is played?

Harriett: I think that's it, that's it.

Geneva & Antionette: Umhmm. That's right.

Monica: What do you do when you see that they haven't been taught that?

Harriett, Antionette, & Geneva: Teach Them!

Geneva: You have to. You have to teach the whole child, not just A, B,Cs and 1,2,3s….

Harriett: it's gonna take some time. It's not gonna happen overnight and you start telling yourself—I know that this isn't gonna be an overnight thing and I'm prepared to deal with it…

Antionette: and you model it every time you're in a situation—you stop and fix it right then.

Monica: right then?

Antionette: don't wait. [session 2]

As demonstrated in the above conversation, when teachers are connected to the communities in which they work in ways that promote the view of their role as community servant, they might be more willing to stand in the gap for Black kids and act with expediency to meet their unique needs.

Finally, this service oriented perspective seemed to create a more comprehensive view of the teaching profession, one inclusive of social reconstruction as

an overall educational objective. In other words, the view of teaching as service demanded active participation in building a new social order (Counts, 1932; Dubois, 1930). This link between service and action appeared constantly as we described the ways we interacted with children, families and other educators and in our explanations for those actions. The following comment from one educator is reflective of this action-oriented perspective. She recounted a recent instance in which she had to speak out in support of the community against her co-workers who wanted to organize a school-wide event at a time when most families would be unable to attend.

Geneva: All I gotta say is those other folks are fightin' it but we're fightin' it too. [referencing the school carnival]

Monica: They're fightin' cause they don't want you to have it?

Geneva: They wanna have it during school hours. This is a community thing. Girl you know I showed up and showed out! [laughter]

Monica: So you're working with the PTO?

Geneva: Yeah, because the thing about it is, we haven't had a PTO in I don't know how long… and I'm like, No, we finna' do this.

Antionette: yeah

Geneva: [I said to them] I know y'all don't think they work, but some parents do work and they want to spend the time with their children…

Harriett: Exactly…

Geneva: You know, we need to do something [session 2]

As a member of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) at her school, this teacher challenged the pervasive disregard for African Americans families, which possibly changed an inequitable practice at her school. Her actions demonstrate agency, or her belief that she possessed the power to challenge and change unfair

125

practices. From an educational perspective, this is indicative of a social reconstructionist demand that teachers lead in the social change movement.

Historically, many Black educators saw it as their duty to teach the masses of illiterate Blacks within the community as a form of collective survival, resistance, and liberation (Franklin, 1984; Perry, 2003). As illustrated in the collective perspectives above, some African American educators have kept the perspective that "one's own education is not just for personal advancement, but for the purpose of Black community development and empowerment" (Johnson, 2009, p.51). This seemed to result in a more purpose-driven vision of teaching excellence connected to a broader social justice agenda. The social justice objectives inherent in the service theme may otherwise be obscured, but it is highlighted as a standard of pedagogical excellence from an African American theoretical perspective.

There are No Excuses

One of the recurrent phrases said by each group member as we described our interactions and instruction was, "there are no excuses". In fact, we concluded that the kind of pedagogy we enacted with Black school children would best be called no excuses teaching [session 3]. To the group, no excuses teaching reflected the view that it was essential for Black children to direct their own educational future. It also highlighted the oppositional, or subversive pedagogical stance to create the conditions necessary for students, with or without help from the educational system. The collective's no excuses approach illuminates the distinctive African American ideals and values of self-help and self-determination evident in the independent organizational efforts of ex-slaves as well as in the scholarship of many early and contemporary Black educators and leaders (Anderson & Kharem, 2009; Anderson, 1988; Franklin, 1984;

126

Gordon, 1985). To put it simply, the collective reasoned that in the US educational system achievement would only come to African Americans through their own persistence, ingenuity, and solidarity.

A prevalent finding connected to the no excuses approach was the unwavering belief we had in the ability and capabilities of African American students. The group frequently expressed, "These kids [Black students] know what to…They know how to act…It's not a lack of intelligence that's stopping them" [session 3, 4, 5]. The group expressed a view that African American children possessed an innate capacity for educational excellence, and they just needed a guide. The following educator's reflection on her experience teaching African American kids in special education vividly captures this belief in students.

Jalonda: I had so many black kids that were in ESE that were gonna get a special diploma and I would look at these kids and say—baby why you in here? [I realized] they put all these black kids into my classroom not because they…

Monica: needed extra support academically….

Jalonda: yeah, it was because they were bad. Dumped them all in an ESE class. Now I'm working with a different population of students—you might as well have me in a regular education classroom. Because these kids are smart—these kids know. Now I'm gonna show them how much they know. Because if you in ESE you're thinking, "I'm in ESE, I must be dumb, I can't do this". So you know they had that mentality. And so I had to show them—that "Yes you can!" It gets them to understand that, "Wow, I am smart". And I'm like—"Yes baby you are". That's my mindset [session 1]

Instructionally, the no excuses philosophy, guided by self-help and self-determination served as the catalyst for subversive practices and pedagogical risk-taking. Such willingness to "push the limits" it seems, was linked to an understanding that in an educational system designed to maintain race and class inequity, these

127

educators had to be willing to teach for excellence, even if it was counter to "common sense" schooling practices. The following conversation is illustrative.

Jalonda: I was givin' my kids TABE tests in school so they would know what they would need to work on so they could take their GED and pass it—I wanted to give my students a GED class—cause [I knew and wanted them to know] that, "Yes you need to get your GED baby—that's the only way you gonna make it to the next level." They [school administrators] said I couldn't do it. They tied my hands. So I did it [gave a comparable test] under the table… [laughter]

Monica: so is that something we have to be willing to do?

Antionette: We have to be willing to do it before hours or after hours or whenever you could get it in there. …

Jalonda: I did it in the middle of the day honey—[I was like] "What you gonna do fire me?" I know what my kids need and I'm gonna give them what they need.

Monica: I started takin' that mentality too. So I learned the boundaries…

Antionette: how to push the envelope. …

Jalonda: and that's another thing—teachers are afraid to take chances. And rightly so—rightly so because there is no tenure or anything and they can fire you at any moment. But you got to be able to get some chances in there—you got to be able to sneak some chances in there.

Antionette: got to be a risk taker… right, right, [session 1]

Similarly, the teachers were guided by this self-determining, no excuses philosophical value as they taught in hyper vigilant school contexts. One of the educators described her experience of teaching in a school taken over by the state educational governing entity. She noted that she wasn't panicked, but was unmoved sharing, *"This is my house, my domain, my environment—you gotta deal with it. I will teach what you tell me to teach—but do not tell me how to teach it [session 1].*

Interestingly, this self-described no excuses view of teaching was also guided by a profound connectedness with students. As educators, when we looked at our students, we often saw ourselves. We surmised that we could "relate to these kids

128

[Black kids] because we were these kids" [session 4]. Part of this ability to relate came from reflection on our own educational experiences. Group members remembered the people in their lives who pushed and demanded excellence of them. All seemed to understand the importance of this role in their own lives and were compelled to act similarly with their students as a way to pass down the philosophy and values of self-help and self-determination, which had been inculcated in them. In talking about how they, "keep it real with students", the educators explained:

Geneva: Well my students know where I came from—I tell em.

Harriett: And that's what I do too.

Jalonda: Umhmm. Man I lived in a house where one room that was the whole house. We'd go to North Carolina every year picking sweet potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, and I'm out there in the field with my daddy and I'm starting school late every year because we didn't come back till November—I was not supposed to make it—so if I can make it—why can't you? I'm no different than you, I am no better than you are. I had my daddy sayin' education is important, pushing education, tellin' me education, education- Ok so you don't have your daddy telling you education is important, but you have me—tellin' you education is important—pushing education, saying education is important. What's the difference? There is no difference. There are no excuses [for student academic failure].

Monica: so you fill that role for them if they don't have it …

Antionette: if they don't have it—There are no excuses [session 3]

Subsequently, the group described the impact this had on their students, stating that sharing their perspectives with students let them know, *"they have choices"* and that just because they came from a particular background, didn't mean they had to stay there because they could, *"work hard and make a better life for themselves"* [session 3]

The group agreed that while some teachers carried perspectives about African Americans cemented in assumed intellectual and cultural deficits, they labeled such

views as "excuses" that hinder teaching stating, *"You cannot teach a child if you gonna give an excuse for that child's behavior or an excuse for that child's background - every time you turn around you're excusing this and excusing that… At that point you're only enabling the child and you're not really helping"* [session3]. Furthermore, they explained the potential consequences for Black children who do not have teachers to help them develop a no excuses, self-help mentality. They noted:

> Monica: So do you think it does a disservice to our kids if teachers buy into [negative] assumptions about our kids?
> Geneva: Yes, because [they will think] everyone is gonna feel sorry for me so I don't have to do what I need to do…
> Harriett: and they're gonna play that, self-pity.
> Monica: So what happens to our kids in the long run when they go through a series of educational experiences where people are like "poor baby"?
> Geneva: they are gonna continue to have that concept about themselves…
> Antionette: just look at mug shots. There you go. That's what's gonna happen to them. [session3]

Self-determination seemed to be an African American value deeply embedded in the pedagogy of this collective. It functioned implicitly providing focus to their instruction, framing their interactions with students, and fueling their oppositional educational stance. Some may describe this style as harsh and uncaring, but when viewed through an African American epistemology framework, it represents a systematic mode of care, urgently expressed and shaped by the African American existential condition.

Discussion and Implications

To date, a number of educational policymakers and practitioners have initiated changes in teacher education aimed at preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse public school population. Many of these changes have been made without consideration of the cultural influence on pedagogical excellence or the history of

130

educational excellence embedded in African American communities. As a result, marginal improvements have occurred in educational outcomes for African American school children and a discourse of hopelessness within the educational community grows (Delpit, 2005; Elderman, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2005). The present study speaks back to this sense of hopelessness by presenting the perspectives of African American educators who continue the search for goodness in Black education. Guided by the emic view of good teaching, the research presented in this paper incites necessary discussion about what vision of pedagogy has the greatest potential to restore excellence as standard in teaching African American students, and how this pedagogy might be framed in teacher education in ways that honor and validate that vision.

As the findings in this study demonstrate, when pedagogical excellence for African American students is analyzed with a "cultural eye" (Irvine, 2003), it assumes a distinctive purpose and orientation. The collective theorizing of the educators in this study was consistent with three prevalent themes inherent in African American epistemology: political power, self-help/self-determination, and service. These themes emerged after we collectively explored our thinking about specific pedagogical decisions made in predominantly African American educational settings. From this angle, it is clear that the intention to help Black students to use education as a tool to "do better", the sense that teaching expresses our commitment to community advancement, and the determination to help Black children succeed are deeply situated within an African American liberatory consciousness.

At the core of this liberatory perspective are African American cultural formations which speak to an ethical, rather than capitalist, social agenda (Anderson & Kharem,

131

2009). Each conversation was framed against this philosophical backdrop and converged to form a powerful, emancipatory pedagogy (Gordon, 1982; King, 1991a; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). Emancipatory pedagogy uses cultural knowledge to formulate interpretations of African American experiences and generate relevant learning experiences for students. For the educators in the present study, this emancipatory perspective functioned as a pedagogical organizer through which instructional practices were designed, interpreted, and enacted. Thus, when we interacted with and taught Black children, we did so with an ever-present sense of the specialized needs of African American school children as a social group. This produced a distinctive kind of pedagogical responsiveness connected to an abiding African American cultural consciousness in which pedagogy became an act of thoughtful and strategic resistance.

This aspect of the cultural context of teaching and learning may hold great promise for improving the education of African American children, yet it is this link that is most often missing from the teacher education curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2007, 2000). In my own experiences as an African American teacher educator, I have found that without this cultural context, some teacher education students struggle to develop habits of mind necessary to demonstrate pedagogical excellence for African American students, particularly those experiencing the negative impact of poverty. Duncan-Andrade (2011), King (1991b) and Murrell (2002) confirm my emerging speculations in their argument that without a deeper analysis of culture that moves beyond awareness of cultural traits, most teachers remain dysconscious, maintaining an uncritical

disposition with regard to sociocultural inequality. Thus they are unable to develop any kind of transformative pedagogical project.

Designing teacher preparation around this emancipatory approach may offer teachers opportunities to develop a critical perspective and intellectual awareness that can be converted into instructional strategies (Gordon, 1997). More research is needed to accompany existing approaches of emancipatory perspectives in teacher education such as those provided by (King, 1997), Gordon (1997), Ladson-Billings, (2000).

However one possible suggestion for teacher educators involves explicit examination of African American theories of achievement with teacher education students. These theories are often based on some of the cultural politics, history and values involved in educating African Americans (Murrell, 2003; Perry, 2003). Including these theories of achievement into the framework of effective teaching might help teachers develop a body of relevant cultural knowledge in which to situate their conceptualization of pedagogical excellence. Likewise, use of such theories might help to dislodge the preeminence of competing theories that locate the source of African American achievement, or underachievement, within the child, family or environment. In the present study, educators in the research group maintained a historical perspective on educational success for Black children that linked their teaching and the achievement of their students with political, economic and social gains. This perspective seemed to compel these educators to enact an emancipatory pedagogy that demonstrated their solidarity with the community. Restructuring the curriculum in ways that build on African American indigenous theories may help teacher educators construct a more cohesive, asset-based approach to educating Black children. This

approach can be considered more cohesive, or more sound, because it uproots the flawed, deficit-based structure of knowledge that seems to pervert even the most sincere attempts at cultural relevance in teaching (King, 1991).

These theories might encourage teachers to assume an anthropocentric stance in their examination of instructional practices. This stance encourages teachers to question the extent to which teaching practices align with the specific goals of education for some African American groups. It also demands teachers to interrogate the potential of teaching practices to meet larger community needs. Findings from of the current study suggest that the educators' culturally specific stance enabled them to critically assess the use of curricular programs in terms of its ability to help Black students "make it to the next level". As a result, the educators were able to make critical instructional decisions that more expansively met student needs. While it is uncertain the extent to which the group was driven by other social factors, such as gender, it is reasonable to suggest that these educators were better suited to meet student needs given the cultural influences on their teaching.

The outcomes of a more theoretically consistent, culture-focused approach to preparing teachers for African American children are promising. Teacher educators might find that they have a curriculum that truly reflects an asset-based approach to educating Black children from theory to practice. Teachers might find that they are better prepared to enter predominantly African American schools and teach in ways that promote educational excellence for students.

Additionally, the findings from this study provide a scaffold to support our thinking on how to best meet the professional development needs of novice African American

teachers. Researchers have documented that while some teacher education programs are approaching issues of diversity and equity in progressive ways, most of these efforts overwhelmingly cater to young, white females at the expense of teachers of color (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cook, 2013; Sleeter, 2008). To be sure, the rapidly changing demographics of American public schools, in which most urban schools teachers are White females while students are African American, Hispanic, or Asian Pacific Islander, creates a need to ensure that young White women in teacher education are prepared to teach for excellence. However, as Cook (2013) argues, the tendency to situate Whiteness at the center of teaching implies that Black teachers intrinsically know how to teach Black students, which ignores their pedagogical needs as education professionals. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider the pedagogy and curriculum used in teacher education in ways that recognize diverse needs, voices and perspectives.

As an example close to home, I taught in a predominantly African American, high poverty elementary school for six years and had achieved a level of confidence and success such that my principal recommended that I become a mentor teacher for prospective teachers. My final experience as a mentor teacher is my most memorable because in it I realized my own inability to clearly articulate my perspectives and rationalize my practice to my young white female student teacher in ways that were productive for her and accurate for me. I needed a framework to explain and rationalize what I now can articulate as features of pedagogical excellence. My inability to communicate my knowledge and perspectives in ways that my intern could replicate, or at the least understand, significantly underestimated the power and potential of the

135

ways I strategically taught my African American third graders, an issue of tremendous consideration in the area of preservice teacher clinical experiences. I never believed for a moment that my intern was incapable of enacting the same kind of pedagogy I demonstrated in the classroom. She was able to observe me in action and we talked frequently, but she, and I needed more. What was missing was an explicit metacognitive deconstruction, on my part, of the ideological and theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogy that appeared simple in observation. We both needed to be able to connect pedagogy to larger cultural, social, and political tenants in order for me to fully explicate theory and in order for her to understand the scope of the critical elements needed to successfully teach African American students.

My own experience highlights significant pedagogical needs of African American teachers that might be nurtured through their exposure and understanding of the work of exemplary African American educators. First, as my experience highlights, African American teachers need a language of excellence in pedagogy that positively accounts for the ways they may be thinking and teaching. Second, African American teachers, prospective and practicing, need ways to make sense of how some of their own perspectives and experiences with education, which often contradict Western theories based on psychological models (Gordon, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2007), may be connected to exemplary models of excellent teaching. That is, they need ways to help them associate, rather than disassociate, their culturally influenced views of education with good teaching. Third, African American teachers need ways to help them enact pedagogical strategies that build on their views.

The African American educators involved in this research project constantly connected their knowledge and values, which were situated in the larger political, economic, and social milieu, to descriptions and rationales of instructional decision-making. It seemed that without making an explicit connection to an emancipatory framework, the educators perceived that their characterizations of good teaching would be superficially understood at best and misinterpreted or denigrated at worst. Therefore, it is possible that African American epistemology as an educational theory may offer a context for the kind of pedagogical interpretation necessary to help prospective Black teachers identify consistencies between some of their own values and perspectives and those endemic to teaching Black students well. I am not suggesting that African American teacher candidates need a separate preparation curriculum; because an emancipatory pedagogical framework is needed for all prospective and practicing teachers. What I am attempting to address is a critical need to attend to the pedagogical needs of African American educators given that research continues to document their significant impact on the achievement of African American learners (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1989).

Finally, examining the pedagogy of exemplary African American teachers as a guide for understanding and interpreting the depths and bounds of good teaching might provide a way for these teachers to leverage their cultural resources in the classroom in powerful ways. Inside the teacher education classroom it may help them better describe and explain their perspectives about teaching and learning in ways that do not situate them as class outcasts and help them maintain their sense of professionalism and sovereignty. Thus, as with the exceptional educators in the present study, future African

American teachers may more easily convert their critical perspectives into social activist pedagogy.

Conclusion

Excellence in education has always been a cornerstone of the African American education movement (National Association of Black School Educators, 1984). Essential to their efforts, particularly among Black educators, was a shared vision of the kind of teaching Black students needed to prepare them to survive and to work for freedom (Foster, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 2013). According to Siddle-Walker (2013), teaching Black children was "designed to spur change by intentionally teaching generations of Black children citizenship, democracy, and voting as a means to confront oppression" (p. 208). Such a transformative pedagogical objective was powerful enough to create conditions for African American students to demonstrate academic and cultural excellence despite a tense and chaotic social environment (Perry, 2003). As such, this African American pedagogical vision bears great promise in developing a generation of teachers committed to educational excellence for African American children as a function of human freedom.

CHAPTER 5
JOURNAL ARTICLE 2

"No Time for Messin' Around!" Understanding Black Educator Urgency: Implications for the Preparation of Urban Educators

We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now...We must move past indecision to action."

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Jalonda: When you're in a school where all your teachers are black—they know where you got to go there is no time to be messin' around—this is an opportunity we didn't always have. So I think the whole culture is that how you get ahead in this world is through education.

Harriett: Back then the ancestors really wanted an education—they were risking life to get it, and here we just got it—its free—and you [students] out here actin' a fool….

Antionette: I don't think so…you gotta get it together.

Jalonda: Exactly

African American educators, [session 3]

Within the last two decades, educational researchers have generated rich descriptions of the work of educators who assist African American[1] learners in demonstrating high educational achievement (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, Hambacher, 2008; Ware, 2006). The bulk of this work provides snapshots of how educators persist in their efforts to help students meet teachers' high standards of achievement. Within these descriptions researchers attribute this persistence to the educator's sense of urgency around student achievement.

---

[1] African American is the term used to represent people of African descent dually socialized in American cultural norms. In this paper, it will be used interchangeably with Black to provide cultural descriptions of individuals, groups, and communities.

Simultaneously, a growing number of studies on effective Black educators describe the teacher's sense of urgency as the guiding perspective that manifests in the authoritative, insistent manner of exemplary African American teachers. Researchers note that this sense of urgency stems from an understanding that African American children not only can learn, but must learn (Foster, 1993; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Milner, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 2000). The research is clear that many accomplished Black educators who teach African American students are "warm demanders" who rely on their heightened sociocultural consciousness to push students towards high achievement (Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Ware, 2006, 2002). Thus, what can we learn from the perspectives of exceptional Black educators about their sense of urgency that can benefit all teachers of African American school children?

In this paper I argue that understanding the reasons and factors that contribute to the urgency of some Black educators provides a powerful explanatory backdrop for expanding what we know about insistence as it relates to African American student achievement. I also argue that teacher educators must redesign their pedagogy in ways that legitimately build on African American philosophies and perspectives if they are to be leaders in the effort to improve education for Black students in urban schools. I describe findings from a study of African American educators teaching in predominantly Black elementary schools located in the southern region of the United States. These findings were part of a larger collaborative inquiry research project in which four community-nominated educators were involved with me in a study of the cultural influences on their pedagogy with African American learners. The purpose of this particular manuscript is to describe the factors that contribute to the sense of urgency

these educators expressed and the ways it shaped their insistent posture in the classroom. The guiding question was: How do effective Black educators understand and make sense of their insistent stance as they share their perspectives on the cultural influences on their pedagogy? Given the data from national standardized tests of achievement that show a persistent trend in African American educational underachievement at the primary and secondary level, understanding more about the sense of urgency that guides good teachers of African American children is important.

African American Pedagogy

I situated this study of Black educator urgency within the literature on African American pedagogy because this work is intended to reinforce the cultural context of teaching and learning which is relevant to any discussion of the education and schooling experiences of African American children (Irvine, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2009). This is not to say that other research focused on successful teaching of African American youth lacks a cultural emphasis. To be sure, others such as Ladson-Billings (1994), Lee (1995), Milner (2012), Bondy and Ross (2008), and Ware (2006) have written extensively about successful teaching approaches for African American learners. This cannon of scholarship is also predicated on the central role culture plays in teaching and learning for Black children and has been essential in helping teachers and teacher educators understand the theoretical and practical foundations of successful teaching in diverse, urban, and/or high poverty contexts. The present study builds on this literature in that it reiterates the necessity of foregrounding culture as a critical factor in improving the preparation of teachers in ways that might yield more promising results for school-aged African American youth. To provide a conceptual background for the study of the concept of Black educator urgency, two bodies of literature are reviewed:

141

African American educator "ethic of care" and African American educator "ethic of moral authority".

African American Educator "Ethic of Care"

Care has come to signify a quintessential feature of good teaching, not just for African American learners, but for all students (Irvine, 2002; Roberts, 2010; Siddle-Walker & Snary, 2004; Thompson, 2004). Noddings (2002, 1992, 1984,) seminal work on care theory emphasized the complexity of teacher care. She defined care as dependent on the person and explained that care must be "perceived" by the cared for in order to be fully considered as caring behavior. Noddings concluded that establishing caring relationships in which students are viewed as more important than subject matter should be at the center of the educational system. Now educational researchers and teacher educators alike urge prospective and practicing teachers to enact a pedagogy mediated by care as an observable act, which includes positive relationships with children and a student centered curriculum. However, many teacher practices based on care theory are uncomplicated by the cultural filter through which care is perceived and understood (Roberts, 2010). This lack of cultural synchronization can create challenges to the educational achievement of African American students (Irvine, 1990). Therefore, it is important to examine the perspectives of care as is understood by cultural groups.

From the literature on exemplary African American teachers, a culturally based description of care for children emerges guided by a distinctive "ethic of care". For many African American teachers this care ethos includes assuming a maternal role in relation to students. Through this maternal role the educator's sense of urgency is expressed. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) captured this dynamic in her analysis of the traditions of caring noted in studies of African American female educators. In quoting Carrie Morris,

142

an African American teacher featured in one of the studies, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) writes, "Parents have an urgency about their own children. We need to feel the same urgency when we teach other people's children" (74). In this case, urgency is grounded in the teacher's connectedness with students such that she views students as her own rather than "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995).   Many parents have a heightened sense of the needs of their children, the potential their children have and the possible dangers their children might face. Because of this they act with urgency to ensure that their children's needs are met. They push their children to work to their potential and do their best to protect them from harm. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) revealed that exemplary African American educators express similar commitments and activism on behalf of all their students, and that their sense of urgency emanated from their ability to view and care for children as though they were biologically related.

Foster (1997), Roberts (2010), Siddle-Walker, (2000), and Thompson (2005) provide more insight into an African American ethic of care. The researchers linked the ways African American teachers cared for students to an abiding urgent consciousness steeped in an awareness of the many potential dangers awaiting Black students if they are undereducated. For instance, in Foster's (1997) compilation of life history narratives of Black teachers, educators expressed the realization that if they did not teach or if students did not learn, Black students might be more likely to engage in activities that had lethal consequences such as drug abuse, prison, or death. Teachers in Siddle-Walker's (2000) historical ethnography were described as teaching with a mission-like intensity driven by the ever-present recognition of what the world had in store for uneducated Black youth. Concomitantly, Roberts (2010) maintained that Black teachers'

caring behaviors and views were designed to promote academic achievement and societal survival in a racially hostile world. These findings, which reveal the sociocultural perspectives that influence teacher pedagogy, are consistent with both Foster (1994) and Ware's (2002) literature reviews on effective Black teachers. Both researchers noted that successful teachers of African American students almost always maintained critical race perspectives on education in which they recognized how race and racism shaped people's lives. These studies of African American pedagogy demonstrate that Black educators' perspectives on care included more than a love for children. Rather, their care reflected love born out of a keen understanding of how and why society marginalizes some and privileges others. This critical care perspective was central to effective African American educators' urgent insistent approach (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

African American "Ethic of Moral Authority"

African American perspectives on authority also are relevant to the discussion of Black educators' urgency. Delpit (1988) wrote eloquently about the miscommunications inherent in the differing perceptions of authority between teacher and students. In her essay, she explained that many African Americans view authority as something constantly earned by personal effort and demonstrated in personal characteristics. Delpit's explanation suggested that good teachers of African American students must first view themselves as an authority figure, and then demonstrate their authority in ways that are recognized by their students. Within the research on African American pedagogy, researchers note that effective Black teachers demonstrate a profound willingness and sense of duty to lead the class with authority in ways that facilitate student academic and cultural success.

Siddle-Walker (1993) reported that many African American teachers possessed a conscious authoritative presence and willingness to use power and authority judiciously in their teaching. She cautioned that the kind of authority these educators displayed was not to be confused with authoritarianism, in which authority stems from self-serving interests. In contrast, Siddle-Walker reported that Black educators used authority to increase student achievement and self-respect, promote a sense of community, and mitigate an often-oppressive educational system. Cooper's (2003) more recent comparative analysis reached similar conclusions about effective Black educators' use of authority. She reported that effective Black teachers of African American students consistently expressed their beliefs that Black children learned best when the teacher's style was firm, demanding and authority-based. Black educators perceived that their authoritative ethic was fundamentally connected to student learning and development and therefore they were committed to providing students with the kind of structure and authority necessary for their educational success (Cooper, 2003). Milner's (2006) explanation is helpful here because it illuminates the perspectives that may fuel the teachers' authoritative approaches. He declared that good Black teachers push and encourage students to reach their full potential because they understand that accepting mediocrity, or allowing Black students to "just get by" hinders students' ability to empower and emancipate themselves and their communities (p.93).

In describing the tough, no nonsense stance of Irene Washington, an African American veteran teacher, Irvine and Fraser (1998) implicated Ms. Washington's sociocultural views in the ways she insisted that students meet her standards of excellence. The researchers explained that the Ms. Washington's approach came from

the realization that she must "teach students well to save and protect them from the perils of urban street life" (p.56). Noblit (1993) characterized this approach as "acting with moral authority" (p. 37). In his case study of an African American teacher, he reported that the teacher's selective use of power was not only a demonstration of the teacher's care, but also emphasized and promoted the teacher's centrality to student learning and welfare. In other words, the teacher's use of authority underscored her perception that she and her students were kin-related; and like in many African American family relationships, effective African American educators' use of authority is necessary to keep Black children safe (Thompson, 2004).

African American teacher pedagogy embodies a distinctive set of professional, political, cultural and ideological dispositions centered in fundamental beliefs about education, schooling, teaching, and learning; and an unyielding commitment to see students succeed. The work of many successful African American teachers is situated in a framework that validates the cultural knowledge, experiences, and thinking of Blacks across the African Diaspora and seeks to construct a "figured universe" in which Black children are able to successfully pursue education despite the myriad of challenges embedded in an inequitable system of schooling (Perry, 2003). This figured universe counters the dominant ideology of Black intellectual inferiority and instead inculcates a counternarrative of excellence for self and community. Among teachers, such a perspective invokes an intense desire, or urgency to create the schooling conditions necessary for African American youth to learn and make sense of the world in order to change it.

To develop strong and clear support for the achievement of African American students we need studies that underscore the significance of culture in the schooling experiences of all students, research that links African American pedagogy to positive outcomes for Black students, and continued research into the sociocultural factors that shape the pedagogy of exemplary teachers of African American students. Research about the work of Black educators is critical given the documented positive influence Black teachers can have on Black students (Irvine, 1989, Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989; Milner, 2006; Villegas & Davis, 2008; Ware, 2002). This does not imply that all Black educators possess the same perspectives, or that culture is predictive of behavior. It does, however, acknowledge the specialized knowledge and perspectives of good Black teachers as it relates to excellence in education for African American school children.

Noblit (1993) urged the educational community to learn with and from African American educators given their sophisticated method of demonstrating authority and care in ways that promote community and achievement. In this spirit, I pursued this research to understand the factors that underscore the sense of urgency expressed by exceptional Black educators.

African American Cultural Knowledge

This study is grounded in the social theorizing of African American people, which produces cultural knowledge that has implications for education, schooling, and society (Gordon, 1990). This body of knowledge, produced by African Americans in academic disciplines and in genres of popular culture, is representative of the ways in which people of African descent in America produce, validate, and express knowledge in ways that help them make sense of their reality (King, 2008; Woods, 1998). Gordon (1990)

147

found that African American cultural knowledge includes specific themes such as self-help, self-determination, service, nationalism, economic autonomy, and political power, and provides a rich analytical lens for understanding the schooling experiences of African American learners as well as the kinds of pedagogy that promote educational excellence.

Examining any aspect of pedagogical excellence for African American students from an African American purview adds important depth to the analysis because such perspectives encompass an expansive educational agenda connected to the realities of the African American existential condition (Gordon, 1990; Siddle-Walker, 2013). King (1994) writes that understanding African American cultural knowledge in terms of its integrity and distinctiveness provides much needed clarity about the factors critical to African American educational success and elucidates the "missing links" in Black students' education. The current study employs the themes embedded in African American cultural knowledge as a theoretical heuristic to explain the characteristics of pedagogical excellence for African American youth. It specifically examines the views of exemplary African American educators about the sociocultural factors that influence their sense of urgency.

A Brief Note about Criteria for Effectiveness

This study is intentionally grounded in criteria for effectiveness set by African American community members. Many African Americans have constructed standards of success in education for Black children that include mastery of academic content, including the hidden curriculum. More importantly, these standards includes self-knowledge and cultural competence so that children are able to positively identify with African and African American culture and contribute to social reconstruction (King,

1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The report, Saving the African American Child, produced by the National Association of Black School Educators (NABSE) in 1984 accurately summarizes the criteria for success and excellence of African American children. It asserts,

Quality and excellence in education for African Americans includes: excellence in the "basic skills", in liberal, vocational, economic, political, and spiritual education. But it includes, in addition, excellence in ridding our people of all vestiges of miseducation. This means that we must know ourselves and our condition. This means that the reclamation and restoration of our history and recognition and respect for our rich culture are priorities that are equal in importance to all other priorities. (p.14)

In essence, a successful education for African American children must equip them with academic competency (including high performance on standardized tests) but equally they must be culturally competent and politically conscious (Ladson-Billings, 2009). An education that fails to prepare children of African descent according to these standards is inadequate and reflects the miseducation theorized by Carter G. Woodson more than 60 years ago (Woodson, 1933).

Methodology

Throughout the seven years I spent as an elementary school teacher of predominantly African American children, I participated in conversations about teaching with other Black teachers (mostly female) on several occasions. Many times, these conversations were forms of mental recovery from the barrage of mandatory workshops and curriculum guides that seemed to contradict or omit the wisdoms of practice that enabled us to move students towards high educational achievement. In these conversations, some formal and others more organically organized, we collaboratively

constructed our own truth regarding good teaching with full regard for our own multiple identities as Black, female, college degree holders, and the social location of African American people. We rejected notions of truth rooted in neutrality and objectivity and instead produced knowledge dependent on our individual and shared subjective experiences, lived reality and cultural values. The epistemic undercurrents that shaped these conversations represent my own perspectives about knowledge and truth and are reflected in a social constructionist philosophical paradigm.

Social constructionism acknowledges the role of culture in the shaping of our consciousness; and the subsequent impact it has on our experiences and interactions with objects (Crotty, 1998). Culture, defined here is not restricted to surface traditions, customs and practices that emanate from a collective, but is best understood as the "source rather than the result of human thought and behavior"(Geertz, 1973, p.44). It guides our behaviors, shapes our perspectives, and endows us with a lens with which to focus and direct our consciousness. I chose a qualitative approach because it recognizes the socially constructed nature of reality and because of its potential to bring about social change (Jeffries, 1997; Tillman, 2002).

In further reflecting on the pedagogical conversations I had with my African American teacher colleagues, one of the things I remember most is the power our collective theorizing had on my teaching. I was a relatively new, alternatively certified teacher who experienced success in the classroom, but I had difficulty contextualizing my teaching practices in ways that validated my social experiences and knowledge. However as a participant in these conversations with other teachers, I was able to begin developing a professional identity as an educator that resonated with me. I believe this

occurred because I was able to contribute to a larger theoretical project that encompassed my own individual thoughts and I was able to lend support and be supported by others in the construction of a relevant body of knowledge. Thus, thinking in solidarity with other educators was central to my professional development. The idea of collective modes of knowledge generation reflected in this example is another central aspect of social constructionism substantiated in Hill-Collins' (2000) Black feminist epistemology.

In her precise explication of Black womanist thought, Hill-Collins (2000) analyzed that for Black women, knowledge is rarely constructed in isolation but is largely facilitated through the dialogue we have with each other in inclusive groups. It is in these collaborative, participatory spaces that we use dialogue to "test and validate knowledge claims" in non-adversarial ways (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 280). The experience of participating in these conversations influenced my decision to employ a collaborative inquiry design for this research project. This methodology emphasizes inclusive participation, mutuality, and the co-construction of knowledge (Bridges & McGee, 2011). There are four elements involved in collaborative inquiry: (1) reflection, (2) the collective construction of knowledge fostered through dialogue with peers, (3) action, and (4) further group-decision-making (Heron & Reason, 1997). However, collaborative inquiry does not unfold as a linear progression of steps, but as overlapping cycles between each element. Collaborative inquirers are both researchers and participants. They share decision-making power in terms of research goals and inquirers are invested as full participants in each aspect of the study.

The collaborative inquiry employed in this study preserves the philosophical tenants of emancipatory educational research (EER). Emancipatory educational research is designed to produce transformative knowledge generated through collective research with groups and individuals functioning as agents of their own change (Emancipatory Educational Research, 2012; Tyson, 2003). EER draws together a range of "endarkened" (Dillard, 2000) social science theories that attempt to dismantle and dislodge racist and hegemonic practices, policies and structures of knowledge such as critical race theory (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995), culture-systemic theory (King, 2005, 1995; Wynter, 2005). Additionally, EER takes direction from non-Western research paradigms, which include blues epistemology (Woods, 1998), black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) and desire-based research (Lawrence-Lightfoote, 1997; Tuck, 2009). These paradigms bring transparency to the research process by demanding a move away from positions of objectivity and neutrality and insisting on the researcher's disclosure and self-reflexivity.

Methodologically, emancipatory educational research EER serves as methodological guide for researchers, such as myself, who operate from the ideological positions of democracy and universal human freedom, engage in research as action in the public interest (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Tyson, 2003) and who seek to blur the boundaries between academic scholarship and activism in ways that are productive and healthy.

Participant Selection

I used community nomination to identify study participants. Building on the concept of "native anthropology", Foster (1997) developed community nomination in order to gain an "emic" or an insider's view of the phenomenon under study. For the

current study obtaining African American community perspectives on good teaching for Black children was important because it recognized the knowledge and experience embedded in African American communities as salient in the content it produces and the process used to gather such information.

By using community nomination, I was able to validate community knowledge about education and use this knowledge as the foundation for African American schooling experiences. For example, all of the parents I interviewed stated that good teachers for their children are those who cared enough to demand that students consistently demonstrate excellence academically and socially. The parents' views on teacher quality expressed a vision of pedagogical excellence for African American children located in the history of African American schooling (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Furthermore, the parents' view transcended prevailing conceptions of educator quality focused on teacher candidates' entering grade point average and mastery of academic content. Using community nomination as an empirical tool was an explicit attempt on my part to research for "cultural well-being" (King, 2008). In this case, researching for cultural well-being references examining cultural practices, as a basis for understanding African American community and student needs related to education. This form of community mindfulness is a critical element of emancipatory educational research because it links teaching and teacher education with the African American struggle for social justice and humanity in ways that spark action and coalition building (King, 2008).

In this study, I visited a predominantly African American church, an afterschool program, and a community organization. At each location, I engaged in a one-hour focus group with parents or guardians of school-aged children where the topic of

conversation centered on unearthing community views of good teachers and good teaching of their children. All of the community members identified as African American and had one or more children attending schools within the local school district. At the end of the conversation, each person provided the names of educators he or she believed were good teachers and the name of the school where the teacher taught.

The collective. Parents nominated 12 teachers whom I then contacted through email to solicit their participation in the study. A total of six nominated teachers consented to participate however two teachers were unable to participate due to extenuating circumstances. As a result, a total of four educators plus myself comprised the research collective.

Table 5-1. Demographics of the collective

Name	Ethnicity	Edu. Level	Teaching Exp (No. of years)	Grade level	School size	% of African American students	% of students free or reduced lunch
Antionette	AA	M	9	Elem.	365	88%	95%
Jalonda	AA	S	13	Elem.	692	55%	82%
Harriett	AA	M	36	Elem.	692	55%	82%
Geneva	AA	M	22	Elem.	353	98%	96%
Monica	AA	M	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Research Context

This study was conducted with a group of African American educators currently working in a small city located in Florida. The city's population as of 2012 was 123,903, in which 23% of city residents identify as Black or African American. The majority of African Americans live in the east quadrant of this city, which includes five elementary

schools, two middle schools, two high schools (all of which are public schools), five charter schools and four alternative schools or centers. The educator-researchers participating in this study are currently teaching in one of these schools serving a large population of African American school children.

Black education in the South is unique given how it developed within an overtly racist and oppressive social context (Anderson, 1988). Though Blacks were emancipated from slavery in 1863, they were subsequently forced into a new social system from which they were virtually denied citizenship. However, as Anderson (1988) argues, "A central theme in the history of the education of black Americans is the persistent struggle to fashion a system of formal education that prefigured their liberation from peasantry" (pp. 2-3).   This theme is embedded in the geographic region in which the educators in the present study live and work, and is reflected in the development of schooling for African American children in the area. For example, the city is home to Weldon Academy2, the first Negro school built as a result of support from the African American community and the Freedman's Bureau (Laurie, 1986). According to media sources, Weldon Academy was the intellectual heart of the African-American community [in this city and surrounding area] for almost 60 years. Black teachers were groomed for their professions within the community and engaged children in a robust curriculum taught with full citizenship and freedom for all Negro people in mind (Laurie, 1986; Moore, personal communication, August, 2012).

Weldon Academy set a remarkable precedent for Black education in the city, which was carried on by Carter G. Woodson High School, the segregated African

---

2 Pseudonyms used in the description of the context

American school that served the community for over 50 years. It was one of the two African American schools in the state to obtain full accreditation by the state-governing agency. Within the school, teachers committed themselves to the development of their students into future leaders and social transformers (Moore, personal communication August 2012).

Smith (2000) argues that research must be "localized and grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations that operate in each indigenous setting" in order to prompt critical praxis and promote social change (p.229). Localizing the present study of Black educator urgency within the cultural-geographical history of Black education is important because it minimizes the "cult of personality" (Ladson-Billings, 2009) explanation that suggests that teachers' individual characteristics account for their success or failure with Black children. Instead it connects the past and present under a deeper, more systematic set of abiding principles and perspectives, which are important to understand in order change the course of African American education towards excellence.

Data Collection

Five partially structured research meetings were used to gather pertinent data. Here partially structured means that our conversations were organized and guided by common meeting objectives. For example, an agenda was collaboratively prepared for each meeting and I prepared a set of questions and topics to be discussed in each meeting. Yet, the meetings were flexible. This allowed the group to make connections between participant experiences and ideas. It also encouraged authentic expressions of ideas and elaboration. Over the course of three months, each meeting was held on a

weekday evening at a local restaurant for approximately 90 to 120 minutes. Each

meeting followed a similar format:

- Reflection: We re-read notes generated from introductory luncheon where we provided oral accounts and descriptions of our teaching. (Example: group members revisited previously stated ideas and offered clarification by further elaborating on ideas, providing examples or describing memories of personal events.

- Debriefing: We elaborated, contested, changed, and refined our ideas.

- Text & visual elicitation: We re-read selected segments of transcripts—I selected portions of transcripts from previous meetings prior to each upcoming research session. I selected segments that would allow each participant to elaborate on ideas, statements and phrases. In meetings four and five, we examined a visual representation I drew based on previous conversations about the ways we described our teaching.

- New theorizing: Based on steps 1-3, we engaged in continued collective oral analysis of our pedagogy.

- Group decision-making: We negotiated aspects of the research project such as upcoming meetings and new ideas and activities to explore.

Data Analysis

Audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were analyzed

in three phases. The term phase is used in this sense to characterize the different kinds

of analysis done and does not suggest that data analysis proceeded in a sequential or

logical progression. On the contrary, some phases of data analysis were overlapping,

while others flowed from one to the other. In the following section, I describe the

analytical procedures followed in the analysis of data.

Phase one

Framing analysis. The first level of data analysis, or framing data analysis

occurred as data were collected. Grbich (2007) explained that this kind of analysis is a

process not intended for critique, but as a method for gaining a deeper understanding of

the values and meanings that exist within the data. In this phase, I read the transcript from the previous meeting prior to the next. I identified emerging themes and patterns and noted issues requiring follow up. This initial analysis was presented to group members as both an elicitation tool and as text for analysis. Figure 5-1 provides a sample data sheet from one frame developed in this phase of analysis.

Phase two

　　Collective analysis. Phase two involved collective analysis of the data. We used domain analysis to make sense of the data collected. In this phase, an inductive approach was used which, according to Hatch (2002) means organizing and interrogating data in ways that that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories" (p. 148). Analytical procedures were carried out in a series of systematic steps that spanned across the second and third phase of data analysis.

　　 In step one, we (all research team members) collectively read data segments from the first research meeting and created an initial list of possible domains to describe group perspectives on the ways that culture influenced pedagogy. The purpose of this domain analysis was to "develop a set of categories of meaning…that reflect[ed] relationships represented in the data", which emerged through the group's interaction with the data (Hatch, 2002, p. 104). Examples of domains include: "kinds of influences on my pedagogy", kinds of interactions with colleagues- (positive)", ways current teaching environment affects our teaching", ways students respond to our teaching style", and descriptions of personal educational experiences" In step two; we read the domain sheets to identify and refine salient domains. This resulted in the elimination of some domains while others were collapsed into larger categories. We analyzed the

data within the domains in step three. Hatch (2002) argues that this critical step in inductive analysis involves "looking across domains" and "looking within domains "to identify complexity, richness and depth of the data. Some of the codes that emerged from this step include: "the fragility of educational opportunity", "we know where we came from", and "solidarity and connectedness". Working with community partners to analyze the data helped to ensure that the community perspectives and collective descriptions were prioritized above my individual interpretations. This kind of analysis can enable community members to be self-determining and empowered (Bishop, 2005).

Phase three

      Refining analysis. In step four, I independently conducted a comparative analysis to examine the similarities between the collective theorizing of the group and the dominant themes within African American epistemology: service, political power, nationalism, self-determination/self-help and economic-autonomy. The purpose of this step was to provide "culturally sensitive "theoretical language as a complement to the research team's theorizing (Tillman, 2002). One of the greatest challenges of research in African American and other communities of color is the crisis of representation (King, 2008; Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2009). For Blacks in America, social science inquiry in many cases has furthered our subordination because of researchers' intent to portray and document damage and deficiency in our lives and communities. While an in-depth exploration of this is beyond the scope of this article, the result, according to Tuck (2009) is a "pathologizing" research paradigm in which deprivation singularly defines Blacks as a cultural group. African American epistemology was appropriate because it enabled me to function as a researcher sensitive to the local complexities inherent in the phenomenon under study. Through this approach to theoretical interpretation, which

159

reduces the potential for misinterpretation and distortion of "the other" (Tillman, 2002). In other words, I was able to stand in solidarity with African American communities in the struggle for self-definition and representation, which meets fundamental requirements for Black existence in American society (King, 2008).

Validity and Credibility

Research standards that recognize ethical and moral objectives of responsible research were used to appraise the validity and authenticity of the study. This first entails a commitment to community well-being (King, 2008; Tillman, 2002). In research this means configuring inquiry spaces that are equitable, privileging the interests, knowledge, and experiences of the community and using power in ways that promote inclusivity and action. In this study, member-checking, spiral discourse (Bishop, 2003) and prolonged engagement were tools used to increase the authenticity and validity of the research in ways that honored community interests. Additionally, when researchers observe ethical standards in qualitative research it obligates them to acknowledge the historic and existing forms of inequity and oppression, recognize the limitations of their own understandings and commit to action (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). The process of memo-writing and enabled me to maintain a reflexive and reflective stance which encouraged the kind of critical inter-subjectivity I needed to carry out this inquiry (Bridges & McGee, 2012).

On a final note, responsible, rigorous research inspires (e)pistemological awareness and methodological instantiation (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010; Koro-ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes 2009). This means reporting research in ways that reveal researcher theoretical positionality and evidence of methodological consistency. Koro-Ljungberg and colleagues (2009) report that when researchers are not explicit

about their (e)pistemological and theoretical perspectives and methodological justification systems, their research can appear, "random, uninformed, and inconsistent" and may be indicative of "methodological sloppiness" (pp.688-670). Specifically, I pursued (e)pistemological awareness spatially, in which research design choices were connected to (e)pistemology and the research team's desired ways of knowing. This highlighted the congruence of methods, theory and epistemology, thus increasing research rigor and credibility.

Findings

The findings in this study provide insight into how a group of African American educators understand the abiding sense of urgency that compels them to teach in ways that promote student success. As the data were analyzed, two major themes emerged, one related to the purpose the teachers perceive for their determined approach, and the other associated with factors that contributed to their expressed sense of urgency. The first theme, purpose of urgency, has one subtheme and the latter, factors contributing to urgency, and has two relevant subthemes.

Purpose for Urgency

The educators explained their teaching approach in terms of how it serves their predominantly Black students. There was little disagreement over their stated reasons for insisting that students do their best and be the best they could be. One central perspective on purpose fueled their sense of urgency and guided their development as insistent, no excuses educators. This perspective focused on their understanding of the value of education for African American people.

Valuing Education

The sense of urgency expressed by the group was connected to the idea of teaching for real world purposes. These real world purposes were rooted in social justice and consistent with an African American vision of education as a strategy for liberation (Anderson & Kharem, 2009; Perry, 2003). These educators viewed their job as larger than teaching academic content. In fact, across the five research meetings there was very seldom talk about specific academic content as a necessity in helping African American children succeed. This is not to say that the educators thought academic success was unimportant given their thinking that "for the next generation, the only way to do better is through education" [session 3]. Rather it re-situates their urgency and their drive for academic achievement for Black students as radical strategies for social transformation (Mirza, 2004). Their pedagogy reflected the understanding that there was much to be gained and lost, not just for African American students but also for the entire community of African descent people living in America. This liberatory value and purpose for education is illustrated in the dialogue below.

Jalonda: When you look at where we came from, we understand on another level that **education is the only way that we are going to get ahead in life**…

Geneva: exactly…

Antionette: **it is the only way that is gonna somewhat level the playing field**. You know I think deep down we know that this is the truth, but for them [other teachers] education is education—everybody goes to school, everybody goes to college everybody is doing fine, **but they don't understand that it is more to us than that…**

Monica: so we hold a different value to education…

Harriett: **we hold a different value to education because it is something that, once we get it, they can't take it away.**

Antionette: Yes.

Jalonda: Exactly. [session 5]

As a result, they added that there was "no time" to waste. They meant that there was "no time" to waste bemoaning the challenges that can make it difficult for African American students, to demonstrate educational excellence. It also meant there was "no time" to allow students to "lag behind". Most importantly according to the group, "no time to waste" meant there was "no time" for Black students to not understand "the struggle", which referenced the African American experience of oppression and resistance. As they put it, every day they stood in front of students was an opportunity to share life lessons that "no other teacher would teach them" but that students needed in order to survive and sustain their cultural legacy. The group shared that "we can't let these opportunities [to teach Black kids what they need to know] pass by cause we might not get them again…. We have to capitalize on those 'teachable moments' "[session 5]. The educators' understanding of their own sense of urgency reflected a central idea embedded in an African American ethics of care and moral authority in that they realized the critical implications of a quality education for African American children. They perceived that it was their duty as educators to make sure that students were competent and conscious.

Furthermore, the group knew their purposes were not the same as many other teachers, and in fact, they perceived that these ideological and theoretical differences separated their teaching from that of other teachers. In the dialog below, the group revealed their distinctive purpose for education as they thought about their goals for African American students. In the following exchange, the term FCAT refers to the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test, the high stakes standardized examination

163

implemented to comply with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal education

legislation enacted in 2002.

Monica: What goals do we have for our Black students? I know we mentioned to getting ahead and making it to the next level, but what does that mean for African American children?

Antionette: I think it's that we want them to keep pursuing their education and **we want to let them know that no one can tell them otherwise.**

Harriett: You gotta want them to be well rounded [pause] and **want them to have a positive self-image**…

Antionette: to know that **education is power**, no one can take it from you…to take education seriously….

Jalonda: also we want to build in them a work ethic … **so they realize that they have to work harder than the next person**….

Monica: None of us said "I want them to get all A's and pass the FCAT". We want that too but [pause] **it sounds like we're thinking on a bigger scale when we talk about our goals for our students**….

Antionette: which other teachers may not have…

Geneva: **it may separate them from being the kind of no excuses teachers we're talking about here**…

Note that embedded in each educator's purpose statement is a political agenda

focused on helping African American youth develop a "relevant Black identity" (Ladson-

Billings, 2009) by inculcating in students an ethic of self-determination and an

oppositional consciousness. The group perceived that Black children needed this

psychological outlook to be successful in both school and life given the enduring

presence of racism in America and the daily assaults on Blackness, both of which

pervade society and linger in educational settings (King, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate,

199*). These themes are rooted in an African American epistemological view and frame

African American ethics of care and moral authority.   In the following segment, the

group elaborates more on their stated goals as they discuss contrasting definitions of

"successful" teaching.

Monica: I read something recently that said that African American teachers'
            definitions of care are different from what others think care is because to
            them care is shielding kids from realities, whereas **care for us means we
            have to [everyone says together] prepare them for the realities**.

Jalonda: I think they definitely see it that way. Their idea of care for our kids may be
            limited to passing the FCAT…

Antionette: or shielding them from the FCAT…

Jalonda: exactly. They [African American kids] are not growing up in this perfect
            world where they are not at some point gonna face racism or they're not
            gonna at some point miss out on an opportunity because they are Black.
            They [some teachers] think the best way for them to make sure our kids
            are successful is to get them to pass the FCAT—and **for us it's about
            life—**the FCAT is only one small portion of life that you have to conquer,
            but **day to day life; on the job, in the community… all this is what
            we're preparing them for**. [session 5]

The point is that if African American children are to demonstrate excellence in the

American educational system, then according to the collective standpoint of these

educators, then they need teachers who understand the part and parcel of the purpose

of education. That is, they have a firm understanding of the sociopolitical and

sociocultural, as well as the academic and socioeconomic implications of educational

achievement.

When one considers the enormity of the task of educating Black children from the

teachers' ethical perspectives, it becomes clear that the educators' sense of urgency

was guided by a transformative social agenda in which a well-educated Black youth is

central. The sense of urgency characteristic of effective Black teachers, and expressed

by the African American educators in this study was produced by cultural perspectives

and thinking about the specific educational goals and needs of African American

165

children. The findings above reveal that Black educators' urgency reflects an expansive value and vision of education that significantly shapes effective teachers' practice with African American students in urban classrooms.

Factors Contributing to Urgency

Analysis of the data revealed that not only did the group express their thoughts about the specific purpose for their urgent thinking; they also shared their perspectives on the kinds of sociocultural factors that converged to create this urgent consciousness. These can be described within two subthemes: (1) the miseducation of Black children and (2) the rejection of Western conceptions of blackness.

The miseducation of Black children

One idea reiterated several times throughout the research meetings focused on the group's perspective that many African American people, particularly those from younger generations, were far removed from an understanding of African American oppression and resistance and the cultural values that emerged from this experience. They spoke at length about the social misconceptions of the "post-racial" America in which they live (Bonila-Silva, 2009). This kind of dialogue emerged as they explained the reasons behind their intense and demanding teaching approach. For example, when the group talked about making sure students completed their assignments or shared stories about discussions they had with students about their behavior, conversations always went back to their view that students did not and yet needed to know the racial realities of the social world in which they live. This is highlighted in the following conversation:

Antionette: I think the perception is that with all the civil rights, we have come a long way—but **we know we haven't made it**. But I think on the other side, they say…—"We have a Black president so what's the problem"….

Jalonda: Martin's dream is still unfulfilled….and I think we got to a point where it seems like we're making progress; we're becoming doctors and lawyers…

Monica: not on a large scale…

Jalonda: yeah, but, we became more visible in the main stream—so people think we've reached the top because we are doing these things….

Geneva: and I think that's why it is got the point where it is bad for our children now—because I don't think the kids coming up understand that they have to do better than the next person or have to be better than the other person. They don't understand that for the next generation, the only way to do better is through education [said with H]

Antionette: And it's not being passed down. **We haven't made it—we're still climbing up the hill**. [session 4]

Historically, African American female educators used the mantra; "lifting as we climb" to describe their sense of obligation and mission they perceived was part of their job as teachers (Collins, 2000). This perspective was part of the maternal ethic of care they embodied in the way they assumed responsibility for the holistic education of their students.   Because the educators in the present study were conscious of the maintenance of racial-social injustice, it seems they too maintained this metaphor of "climbing" towards a better social status as noted in Antionette's statement, "we're still climbing". As the findings show, they used this phrase to explain their sense of mission and to rationalize the urgent nature of their teaching.

Their critique also extended to thinking about the consequences of public school desegregation. They shared,

Antionette: Sometimes I reflect on segregation versus desegregation.

Jalonda: Humph, I've have my thoughts about that too.

Antionette: Things are so…now we should be integrated, we should all, of course, be treated equally. But notice the breakdown of the community, of the family when desegregation came into effect—and now.. look at us now—we don't know our neighbors,. It's all about you…

Monica: and individual accomplishment…

Antionette: right! And the focus is not on education and going somewhere in life and excelling to higher heights.

Harriett: See before integration we had our own community is what I think. We stayed within our communities we all talked the same talk, we all kinda had the same type of ideas, same values, same morals. But then we crossed that integration line and that made us kind of loose our focus. We just wanna forget where we come from and who we are-it just broke up that family…what do they call it…not the bond…the family—

Antionette: elasticity…

Harriett: yes! It's not there. Its [education] is not a communal responsibility [session 5]

A second element of miseducation that fueled the teachers' sense of urgency was the cultural dislocation of African American students. They theorized that many Black school children had a kind of cultural amnesia in which they had no knowledge of their history—not just the struggle, but the sacrifices, the contributions, the values, and the strength. They perceived that a strong sense of identity, or cultural competence, which meant having a firm grasp of their cultural heritage would promote students' achievement motivation and desire to pursue education seriously. The following conversation is illustrative.

Harriett: Our kids today, they don't understand…and you know why they don't understand? Because they're not being taught African American history.

Jalonda: Yeah, they don't know that we didn't come from slavery. Our story doesn't begin with slavery; you have to go way back to find our beginnings. So you know if you look at it in that perspective that we came from slavery, heck they think they doing good to come from slaves, but we haven't even got back to the level where we were. How do you teach kids when they don't know? They don't know the history, they don't know the struggle—they just think everything is peaches and cream. You know they think the struggle is over because they haven't lived it, and its okay that they haven't lived it but they don't even know about it.

Antionette: Right, right. [session 4]

Although the group did not use the phrase "cultural dislocation" explicitly, what they shared about African American children not knowing the "history" and "struggle" is an indication of the kind of cultural knowledge they perceived young Black children did not have, but sorely needed to demonstrate educational excellence. As a result, the discussion segment below highlights the ways the educators made sense of their urgent and passionate mission to demand that Black children demonstrate academic and cultural excellence.

Jalonda: I remember it was Dr. Asa Hilliard. I heard him speak one time and this is what stuck with me. He said, "What do you expect from our children when they think they came from slaves"….

Antionette: not from kings and queens….

Jalonda: and not from kings and queens. "What do you expect if all they've ever known about their history is that we were slaves…."

Monica: They don't know whose shoulders they are standing on.

Jalonda: I can't remember anything else that happened that day. I remember him saying that, and from that point on I was focused on teaching Black kids where they came from [session 2]

To be sure, Jalonda shared that she heard the late Dr. Asa Hilliard speak in 2006 at a community event and not in her teacher preparation courses or in any teacher professional development workshop she attended. Jalonda's transformative response to Dr. Hilliard's message may be indicative of a promising approach to helping novice teachers develop the capacity to teach for excellence. Restructuring teacher preparation in ways that build on cultural epistemologies and include African American theories and perspectives may provide the link missing in African American educational reform.

In *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Woodson (1933) argued, "If the Negro is to be elevated he must be educated in the sense of being developed from what he is….a

knowledge of real history may advantage the oppressed rather than to the oppressor"
(pp. 67, 69). With similar convictions, the collective of Black educators in this study
expressed urgency in intent and action as they taught scores of young African American
school children.

Rejection of the Western construction of "blackness"

Previous studies of pedagogical excellence for African American learners
indicate that good teachers consciously and consistently use their professional positions
to reject pervasive views that defame African American culture and question the
intellectual ability of African American students (King, 1991a; Ladson-Billings, 2009;
Lipman, 1996; Mitchell, 1998; Stanford, 1996). Throughout the five in-depth
conversations, similar acts of resistance were described and explained as the educators
collectively made sense of their pedagogy. Every member of the group expressed a
sense of urgency that was connected to a need to challenge negative assumptions
about Black youths' intellectual capacity and negative perceptions about African
American people and communities. From this vantage point, resistance to assaults on
conceptions of blackness contributed to the underlying sense of urgency that compelled
these educators to push their students towards exemplary social and scholastic
performance. This finding emerged as the educators shared their own experiences in
an educational system in which they witnessed some of their students get pushed to the
educational margins.

The teachers described instances where Black students had been "sent out" of
the classroom because of their teacher's lack of sensitivity and regard [session 2],
"dumped" into remedial classes when there was no determination of a learning disability
[session 2], constructed as "bullies" when teachers were too afraid to discipline them

[session 3], and permitted to fail as teachers "made excuses" to justify poor student behavior or academic performance [session 3, 4]. These experiences functioned as cautionary tales and provided an explanatory backdrop for subsequent descriptions of the underlying contributors to their sense of urgency and the ways they responded pedagogically. Sharing these experiences also enabled the group to understand and interpret their teaching as an act of resistance. They agreed that teaching African American children well demanded an epistemic and ideological change in the way Black children are viewed.

Jalonda: if you come into the situation with these notions that the black kids – they're parents don't care for them- they're not gonna learn anything, they don't want to learn anything, they're just gonna misbehave…if that's what you're thinking is-you can be the best actress in the world there is no way you are gonna be able to convey love to those children.

Geneva & Harriett: that's right.

Antionette: So if you don't change your thoughts and your mindset before you get into the classroom with them, then you're already lost. [session 2]

At different points during the sessions, a couple of group members expressed that they specifically wanted to teach students that society had "thrown away" or work in reportedly failing urban schools. This demonstrates the oppositional aspect of their urgency, which also was conveyed in their descriptions of their instructional practices. Jalonda's reflections on her experiences as a special educator characterize the ways group members linked this oppositional stance to the urgency of their practice.

Jalonda: I had so many black kids that were in ESE that were gonna get a special diploma and I would look at these kids and say—baby why you in here? [I realized] they put all these black kids into my classroom not because they…

Monica: needed extra support academically….

171

Jalonda: yeah, it was because they were bad. Dumped them all in an ESE class. Now I'm working with a different population of students—you might as well have me in a regular education classroom. Because these kids are smart—these kids know. Now I'm gonna show them how much they know. Because if you in ESE you're thinking—I'm in ESE—I must be dumb. So you know they had that mentality. So I had to show them—that "Yes you can do this!" And then it gets them to understand that, "Wow, I am smart". And I'm like—"Yes baby you are". That's my mindset. [session 1].

Moreover, rejecting the dominant perspective that assumes Black intellectual inferiority is a requirement of asserting African American students' existence as human beings (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). Assumptions about mental ability and educability have traditionally been used to deny African Americans citizenship, maintain their subordination and designate their status as less human (Anderson, 1988; King, 2005). Thus promoting educational achievement for African American children requires teachers to constantly reclaim student's humanity and demand that they be treated as such. For the educators in this study, this meant taking corrective action when other educators attempted to dehumanize Black children through their approaches and practices. Geneva's recollection of an encounter with a colleague about one of her former Black students highlights how the educators' strong desire to challenge societal assumptions influences their agency and activism as well as their instruction.

Geneva: I went to check on one of the little boys I had last year. And his new teacher was like—"Well he's late for school, he doesn't show up—he doesn't eat breakfast, he's disruptive"—I looked at her and said—"Have you called his mother?" [she said] "Well she won't answer the phone". I said, "Well have you been across the street [where the student lives is directly across the street from the school]?" I said, "Are you scared to go across the street? I will go with you." … It's almost like they are afraid of us—like "Why are you afraid of black people?"

Jalonda: **It's a child, no matter how you look at it. That's a child, and that's the part they don't get…these are children…** [session 3]

172

From this exchange we get a sense that the educators had to continually reject the negative assumption that Black children and their families. It also demonstrates that they had to demand from their colleagues that they provide Black students with care and attention, things they felt all children need from their teachers. As conveyed above, building strong relationships with students and families seemed to be connected to their drive to reject the dehumanization of their students. This was also highlighted in their critique of unsuccessful teaching approaches with African American students.

Jalonda: They[teachers] don't try to understand why kids do stuff. And of course the kid may not know—but you make them[students] start to think about what they are doing, get them to understand that process so the next time they might do something they stop and think (mimics kids thinking about things)[AAteachers,session1, 8/32]

Antionette: Teachers need to do a little research—why don't you find out why he's [student] acting this way….

Harriett: talk to him, don't talk at him...

Antionette: ask a question or two…

Jalonda: because you get a lot from a kid. Sometimes kids are just mad at the world. And you have to be the one to break through that barrier [session3]

Interestingly, the educators' approaches to correcting and redirecting students also demonstrated their sense of urgency as a rejection of pejorative characterizations of African American school children. Specifically, in their reenactment of conversations with students, the focus of conversation was on helping students realize the good inside themselves as an impetus to make better decisions. They proclaimed that they reminded students that they were better than their current situation and that there was someone at school who believed in their abilities, believed they were better than how they were acting, and would not accept anything otherwise.

Antionette: I fuss and love at the same time. I sit right there and tell them –"Baby I know that you are not dumb, so why are you acting the way that you are acting?" The same one that I'm fussing at at 11:00 is the same one giving me a hug in the cafeteria at 11:05.

Monica: So you say to them—"I know you're not dumb so why are you acting dumb…"

Antionette: oh yeah. I always say, "I know you know better, I know you are smart". That's the expectation I set for them [session 2].

As the findings show, the African American educators collectively expressed a sense of urgency in their thinking about educating Black children. Their urgency was guided by their awareness of negative perceptions about people of African descent in America, and more importantly, their need to reject such harmful depictions. Their urgency, in effect, fostered a strategically subversive character in which they subverted, renamed, and reclaimed educational opportunities for each of their African American students. Indeed, the educators in this study did more than resist. Their descriptions of their practice and the African American community's perception of their efficacy with students suggest that their urgent sensibilities enabled them to create transformative possibilities for their Black students and communities.

Discussion

The findings from this collaborative inquiry revealed that the community-nominated educators expressed a sense of urgency in their teaching guided by the liberatory value they place on education for Black students and shaped by their recognition of key sociocultural factors. This urgent consciousness seemed to permeate the ways they think about and describe their teaching. Their collective theorizing offers much for teacher educators to consider as we search for ways to improve teacher quality in the public interest (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

Most clearly, the findings from this study expand emerging perspectives on insistence. To date, the concept of Black educator urgency is nestled within the literature on insistence as a critical feature of pedagogical excellence for African American students. Used interchangeably with words and phrases such as authority, tough, no-nonsense and demanding, insistence has come to signify a teacher's unwavering commitment to student educational success. Seldom addressed however, is the question, "why insist?" Ross, Bondy, Galingane, & Hambacher (2008) shed some light on the nature of insistence in their observation of effective novice teachers in high poverty, predominantly African American elementary schools. Their work draws from the literature on classroom management, culturally responsive teaching and positive classroom environments, and clarifies the purpose of insistence, as well as its' structure and tone. The researchers shared that effective teachers use insistence to create a psychologically safe environment that promotes high student engagement, motivation, and high achievement.

Ross and colleagues (2008) highlighted the connection between insistence and achievement for African American students. Their work offered novice teachers a framework for exemplary teaching that included a culturally defined conception of teacher authority, however the cultural connections between insistence and African American student achievement were underexplored and thus not explicitly conveyed. In this study, I situate insistence within the larger African American sociocultural context to expand Ross et al.,'s (2008) framework in ways that reveal the cultural linkages which make insistence a powerful pedagogical approach in Black education. Connecting the perspectives of community-nominated Black educators to the themes embedded in a

traditional African American way of thinking facilitates this more nuanced explanation of insistence. It emphasizes the ethical and moral aspects of insistence, which repositions insistence as a demonstration of care, a declaration of opposition to cultural hegemony and a strategy for liberation. As the findings demonstrate, these emancipatory perspectives undergird Black educator urgency and are the kind of cultural insights that can support urban education professionals in ways that promote academic and cultural excellence for African American learners.

Additionally, localizing the framework of insistence within an African American cultural context, which includes examination of African American cultural values, cultural knowledge and ways of knowing, can help teacher educators articulate a vision of pedagogical excellence for African American school children that transcends the narrow focus on surface cultural traits and characteristics. This is a pervasive trend in many teacher education programs, even in those that purport a focus on social justice and equity (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Murrell, 2002; Sleeter, 2012). In my own experiences as an African American teacher educator, I have found that some teacher education students struggle to make sense of the complexities involved in teaching African American students for excellence given their limited understandings of the symbiotic relationship between culture and learning (Lee, 2005). To illustrate, many of the preservice teachers I teach are young, white females who understand care in a literal sense. Here I mean they tend to focus on the "nurturing aspect of caring to the demise of abstract, justice-oriented views of care (Thompson, 2004). Thus, their concept of teacher care is constrained to the teacher as a docile caretaker. As a result, they often experience difficulty understanding how a teacher's insistent demeanor can convey care

and compassion for children and they are less likely to "push" and "demand" for fear they will be perceived as "mean" or "apathetic".   In these cases, teacher educators, together with their students can analyze perspectives on care and authority indigenous to many African Americans. Both emphasize the relationship between care and insistence in ways that can promote critical discussions about the facets of culture and cultural socialization that have a clearer link to student success.

As another personal example, I often find that teachers in urban schools perceive an either/or binary exists with regard to culture-centered instruction. They state that they want to provide culturally relevant instruction to their students, but they can't because of high academic demands and curricular mandates that make implementing culturally relevant pedagogy nearly impossible. In essence, they believe that they have to choose between culturally relevant teaching and high academic achievement that meets state standards. Their frustrations are valid when one considers that it is highly probable that they have been prepared in teacher education programs that limit analysis of culture in teaching to cultural celebrations and a focus on culturally salient instructional strategies. Or they have graduated from preparation programs that structure examination of the cultural context of teaching as something to supplement their existing practice so that they can get the African American kids to comply and perform well on standardized tests. Such practices in teacher education foster a narrow view of the significance of culture in teaching and learning and do not enable teachers to engage in the kind of cultural critique necessary to insist with the urgency of Black educators. What the findings in the present study reiterate is that helping teachers make sense of the connections between culture and academic achievement necessitates

explicit attention to the aspects of culture that have the most profound impact on student learning. Through this kind of analysis teachers can develop the kind of sociocultural knowledge that can be converted into culturally relevant practices such as insistence (Gordon, 1997). In this way, teachers might come to view culture as essential to learning and understand its transformative potential in the lives of African American children. Employing an explicitly cultural lens in this way can assist support the development of urban educators who have the psychological capacity to teach Black children for excellence because they understand, appreciate and can articulate how their pedagogy benefits African American children and is inherently connected to restructuring the social order.

Finally, using African American cultural knowledge as an interpretive and theoretical guide reveals how Black educator urgency and insistence can be considered culturally systemic features of African American schooling and pedagogy. Based on the educators' collective descriptions and explanations, its seems insistence was driven by an expansive sense of the necessity and utility of education for people of African descent in America and the need to challenge pervasive theories of Black academic inferiority and student miseducation. They expressed a value of education connected to its liberatory potential, which included political power and self-determination as well as economic security. In other words, they recognized the liberatory power of education to help African American youth empower themselves and their communities in ways that foster social change. This perspective cultivated the sense of urgency that led to their relentless, authoritative approach. However, this view is not an eccentric characteristic of these teachers nor is it a knee-jerk response to increases in urban poverty.

Traditional African American perspectives intricately link educational achievement to issues of political and economic empowerment for individuals and the entire African American community (Lee, 2005). Perry (2003) posits that the view and value of education held by many African American people in the years prior to desegregation was powerful enough to sustain their desire to pursue excellence in education despite the lack of any indication that education would lead to occupational security or economic prosperity. While I am not suggesting that including the African American community perspectives or the perspectives of Black educators is a panacea for all of the issues involved in educating teachers to teach African American youth. Rather, I am arguing that it is quite plausible to suggest that restructuring teacher education in ways that honor and build on community knowledge could improve teacher quality in ways meaningful and relevant to improving education for children of African descent in American urban schools.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

In 1986, famed songstress Whitney Houston clinched her title as a rhythm and blues (R&B) diva when she sung her rendition of "The Greatest Love of All". Ms. Houston's powerful voice immediately catapulted the song to the top of the Billboard music charts where it remained for three weeks straight. In fact, "The Greatest Love of All" was Whitney's second longest stay atop the music charts and remains a timeless musical masterpiece loved by millions.

I was eight years old when I first heard the song in 1988 and was immediately enamored with it. I was a longtime fan of Whitney Houston, often imitating the flavor of her voice as I sang into the hairbrush in front of my bedroom mirror. But this song was extra special. It was more than just a tune to hum on long car rides to church or randomly request from the radio deejay. Though I was a young child, I was always very observant and I noticed the differences in the kinds of reactions this song brought out of the people I knew and the kinds of interactions my family had around this one musical piece. From my eight-year-old observations, this song seemed to transcend the divide between the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the religious and the heathen, the educated and the uneducated. Despite the differences between the groups, I saw that everyone I knew could agree on this song and what it ultimately came to represent for Black people. "While I might have taken note of these reactions and interactions, I didn't give in to thinking about what was so special about this song. Actually, back then what I cherished most was the song's sultry blend of the keyboard and soft instrumental background matched against the way Whitney sang the words with such conviction and determination. It was uplifting and flavorful all at once. "The Greatest Love of All" is still

one of my all-time favorite R&B songs, though I have much more to appreciate about it as I think about my work as an African American female educator, parent and community member. Indeed I am still captivated by the keyboard, the instrumentals, and of course, Whitney's majestic voice. However, what now moves me are the actual lyrics of the song. She sings,

> I believe the children are our future
> Teach them well and let them lead the way
> Show them all the beauty they possess inside
> Give them a sense of pride, to make it easier
> Let the children's laughter
> Remind us how we used to be (Creed & Masser, 1977)[3]

In these first six lines, Whitney conveys what I believe is the enduring legacy of pedagogical excellence embedded in many African American communities. What I conclude now is that the "The Greatest Love of All" was, in reality, a lyrical thesis, a poetic manifesto about what matters most in developing the mind, body and spirit of young people based on African American community standards. Though my dissertation research took a different form of presentation, the key themes that emerged from this study teacher practice are alive and well in the ethos of this song.

The purpose of my dissertation was to understand the links between African American cultural influences and the pedagogy of exemplary Black educators teaching in predominantly African American settings. Another objective of the study was to design and employ an inquiry process that would promote a sense of collective empowerment and spark social action among the inquiry group. The community-nominated African American educators involved in this collaborative inquiry provided an

---

[3] The lyrics of the song were actually written by Linda Creed, a white woman whose African American cultural competence enabled her to write several African American R&B songs.

example of how cultural values and consciousness come to bear upon the perspectives and practices of exceptional teachers of African American students in ways that facilitate educational excellence. Through rich descriptions and analysis of the inquiry groups' thinking about the task of educating Black school children, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 presented articles that capture the "emic" view of pedagogical excellence for African American learners (Foster, 1997). Chapter 6 provides a brief summary of the research study and a thematic synthesis of the manuscripts presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The summary situates the study within the existing literature relevant to the topic and offers directions for future research. Chapter 6 will conclude with implications for school leaders, teacher educators and researchers.

Review of the Study

The literature presented thus far revealed three pressing issues in Black education. First, there is a wealth of research that highlights the elements of effective pedagogy for African American students—pedagogy that meets the standards of academic and cultural excellence embedded in many African American communities. Successful teaching in this respect is based on a set of fundamental beliefs about education and schooling, teaching and learning, children and families. (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Foster, 1997; Howard, 2001; Irvine, 2003; King, 1991b; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lipman, 1996; Mitchell, 1998; Stanford, 1996; Ware, 2006). These beliefs reject deficit perspectives of Black intellectual inferiority and degeneracy and instead, create a powerful narrative of African American educational excellence (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Perry, 2003). This research also indicates that successful teaching of African American youth encompasses a wide array of instructional strategies, which employ culture (implicitly and explicitly) as a necessary vehicle to help students access academic

182

content while maintaining their cultural integrity (Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta, 2013; Goodman, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Foster, 1994; Lee, 1995; Milner, 2003). Finally, the literature on African American education and schooling presents a compelling portrait of accomplished teachers of African American students. These teachers are characterized by their particular views on the profession, by their empathetic and demanding approach with students, and by their affiliation with the African American community (Foster, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996). They can also be identified by their demonstrated activism and advocacy on behalf of their students. Overall, we recognize these teachers by their expansive vision of education for Black children and their high level of personal accountability for student development and success. From this cannon of scholarship, African American pedagogical knowledge emerges as a promising framework to prepare all teachers, regardless of race, to teach for excellence. Yet, the bulk of this literature is missing from the teacher education curriculum. In fact, Foster (2004) posits that many teacher educators include only the literature that presents perspectives that are palatable to the young, White female student population, leaving the theoretical thrust of this knowledge base untouched. In many cases, the result is that some teachers enter classrooms each day unprepared to successfully serve the African American students under their care.

Closely related to the first issue, the second issue highlighted in the literature is the marginalization of culture centered teaching approaches in teacher education (Sleeter, 2012). Some teacher educators (and schools and colleges of education in general) are catered toward helping teacher candidates "survive" in classrooms with Black children, implicitly perpetuating the assumption of cultural deficiency (Foster,

2004). In practice this can amount to a narrow focus on helping novice teachers develop some level of "cultural awareness" and providing them with culturally compatible instructional strategies they can add to their teaching. Yet this kind of preparation is not powerful enough to help educators develop the capacity to demonstrate excellence in teaching African American students, or any other ethnic group for that matter. In fact, many scholars argue that these "additive" and "fragmented" approaches perpetuate educational inequity because they do not attempt to deconstruct and dismantle and flawed structure of knowledge from which inequity in education originates (Banks, 2000; Delpit, 1995; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Murrell, 2006; Sleeter, 2012). As a result, some teachers graduate from their preparation programs without a comprehensive vision of what it means to teach African American children in meaningful and relevant ways.

The third issue is connected to the second in that the marginalization of this knowledge base has resulted in the omission of Black perspectives and voices in debates about teacher quality and effective teaching. As the literature indicates, some African American educators have different standards of excellence in education, which emphasize community solidarity, political clarity and nationalism (Irvine, 2003; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996). These standards often result in a drastically different vision of education for African American children than that held by educational decision-makers at all levels. Thus, the issue within the overall literature on teaching and learning for African American children is one focused on the control and direction of the vision of Black education.

Driven by these three issues, I designed a research study to understand and describe the connections between African American values and consciousness and effective teaching in ways that make these connections more explicit for educators at all levels. It was also designed to privilege the educational vision, knowledge, and perspectives of exemplary African American educators and mobilize this group for action. This study contributes to our understanding of the nature of effective pedagogy for African American students by using African American cultural knowledge to make theoretical links between existing frameworks. This study also offers a nuanced, cultural perspective on the views and thinking that underscore what I have come to define as pedagogical excellence for African American children.

For this collaborative, emancipatory research project, I surrounded myself with community scholars and together we made sense of the cultural influences on our teaching of Black children. This participatory structure included a group of African American females who were currently working in schools with a large percentage of Black children, had a range of teaching experience, and were college-educated. The emancipatory philosophical undercurrents of the methodology dictated data collection and data analysis procedures grounded in mutuality and reciprocity. The collaborative design of the study directed the defined research objectives and outcomes, which privileged community interests and praxis. The methodological decisions follow in a rich tradition of African American research and offer teacher educators a promising approach to using the specialized knowledge of African Americans as a basis for research and practice in educator preparation.

To understand how a group of community-nominated, exemplary African American teachers thought about and made sense of the cultural specificity of their pedagogy, the study's overarching research question was: How does a group of successful African American educators describe and analyze the cultural influences on their pedagogy with African American children? This question was addressed in two ways. First, the research group collectively made sense of the data by analyzing the semantic relationships that emerged from careful reading of the transcripts. This ensured that the analysis and interpretation reflected the groups' cultural standpoint and perspectives on teaching. Second, I independently examined the data, searching across and within domains to analyze the consistencies between the collective perspectives and the themes embedded in African American epistemology. This independent analysis was not done to check the accuracy of the collective's ideas, but rather to merge theory with data in ways that validated and honored indigenous knowledge. To ensure that the perspectives of the research group were prioritized ahead of my individual thoughts, a summary of the findings from the independent analysis was presented to participants for review. The result was a process-building methodology for in depth study of African American pedagogical excellence.

Summary of the Articles

In a critical race theory analysis of teacher preparation, Ladson-Billings (1999) exposed the philosophical complexity of educating teachers for diversity in America as she problematized the notions of quality, excellence and difference prevalent in educational discourse. She asked,

> "What kinds of knowledge, skills, and abilities must today's teacher have? How are we to determine teaching excellence? Is a teacher deemed excellent in a suburban, middle-income white community able to

186

demonstrate similar excellence in an urban, poor community? How do we educate teacher educators to meet the challenges and opportunities diversity presents? How do we deconstruct the language of difference to allow students to move out of categories and into their full humanity?" (p. 242).

These questions have been at the heart of debates over teacher quality and African American achievement and schooling since formal public schooling came into existence in the United States (Anderson, 1988; Kaestle, 1983; Tyack, 1974).

Therefore, it is no surprise that in this study of African American teacher pedagogy, thinking about these questions featured prominently in the findings that emerged from analysis of the data. In light of their enduring nature, I have chosen to use these questions as a guide in thinking about the significance of this research and the implications of the study. In the next section, I summarize the articles in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 and present methodological considerations framed around these enduring questions.

"What Kinds of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Must Today's Teacher Have?" Cultural Complexities of Teaching

The articles complicate our thinking about what it means to teach African American children well by foregrounding culture in the descriptions of and perspectives on pedagogical excellence. These articles follow a legacy of Black education research that pushes the thinking about the "common sense" conceptions of effective pedagogy for African American students (i.e. care, authority, high expectations) that have become normalized in some teacher education programs (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Roberts & Irvine, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 2000). This does not suggest that these elements are inaccurate or ineffective with Black students. The intent here is to

highlight the significance of cultural specificity in articulating the facets of effective teaching for cultural groups, particularly African Americans.

The articles presented in this dissertation reinforce many of the essential features of effective teaching that populate the literature on teacher effectiveness. As the educators in this study indicated, high expectations, or a no excuses philosophy, was a central aspect of their pedagogy. They expressed a belief that all children can learn and a commitment to helping students succeed.   They also described the actions they took to demonstrate caring behaviors with their students. However, the articles extend the conversation about traits of effective teachers of African American children in ways that reveal the distinctive ways of thinking and knowing that influenced the decisions of these accomplished educators. The research group reasoned that it was the confluence of their cultural knowledge and cultural values that shaped the manner in which they demonstrated pedagogical excellence with Black children. In Chapter 4 the educators spoke about how African American cultural values such as self - determination and communalism framed their consciousness and led them to assume a more expansive role for themselves as educators, and hold an expansive vision of education for their students. In Chapter 5, the educators highlight the ways that their depth of African American cultural knowledge shaped their sensibilities, which led them to consistently push students towards educational excellence.

Murrell (2002) argues that the education community must "understand the cultural and conceptual framework "of effective teachers of African American children (p. xxvii). This means investigating the ways that culture functions as a philosophical and pedagogical organizer. Many studies of African American teaching styles have

already provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the cultural links between teacher pedagogy and African American student success. Several researchers note that effective Black teachers enact a unique pedagogy firmly connected to their African American cultural heritage (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002; King, 1991a; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Roberts, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Ware, 2006). The present study adds to this literature by exploring the connections that exist between African American cultural formations, Black educators, and pedagogical excellence. That is, it builds on the documented existence of these cultural connections and attempts to highlight these connections through collective descriptions and analysis. This kind of cultural examination of teacher pedagogy renders the connections documented in previous research more explicit, which can be a powerful tool for teacher educators.

My study also links the work of exemplary African American educators with the literature on effective pedagogy for African American students. To date, researchers have written extensively about the pedagogy of good Black teachers, highlighting their perspectives and practices that appear to significantly impact educational outcomes for African American children (Irvine, 2002). However, African American teacher pedagogy is seldom referenced as an interpretive framework for understanding successful teaching of African American students, nor is it frequently included in the research and practice of teacher educators in positive ways (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

The group of African American educators involved in this study conveyed a distinctive vision of education for Black children. Their teaching was nestled within a larger social justice project connected to the enduring struggle for African American

freedom and equity. Education, in their eyes, was a necessary tool to help Black

children develop the capacity to revitalize and sustain their communities. This is not to

say that the educators were not interested in the individual economic benefits of a

quality education. In fact, they viewed economic stability as major outcome of their

efforts to help students "do better and make it to the next level".   The point here is that

the vision of education projected by the research group was rooted in their mission to

teach as a way to fulfill the African American dream of democracy and citizenship.

My dissertation complements the literature on Black educators by presenting

another account of the work of effective Black educators that showcases their value

beyond that of role models for Black children (Irvine, 1989). It supports the documented

validation of African American teacher pedagogy as a thoughtful, unique and

sophisticated approach to educating children not based on folklore, but based on the

wisdoms of practice embedded in African American communities and educators. In this

way, this dissertation also contributes to the literature on Black educators by continuing

to encourage educational professionals to try to understand African American teachers'

situated pedagogy and how they "make meaning" within their classrooms and

communities and, more importantly, build on these perspectives in teacher education.

(Irvine, 2003).

Continued investigation into the ways that race and ethnicity influence the views

of good teachers will continue to create powerful linkages between who good teachers

are, what they know and what they do. Similar studies of situated pedagogies should be

conducted with different ethnic groups and across economic categories as a way to

avoid the seductive tendency to generalize across entire ethnic groups. In addition,

similar studies across gender lines should be conducted. Future studies should explore the pedagogy of Black male teachers to understand the ways that gender influences African American pedagogy.

"How Do We Deconstruct the Language of Difference to Allow Students to Move Out of Categories and Into their Full Humanity?" The Location of Culture in Teacher Education

As the articles show, empirical investigations that attempt to render culture a visible and viable presence in schooling are made possible by the designation of culture as a facilitator, rather than an inhibitor of good teaching (Gordon, 1997). In each manuscript, the findings reflected a collective reconstruction of excellence in African American teaching based on a culture-systemic theoretical perspective (King, 2005, 1995). This perspective did not render culture as an additive or supplemental element of teaching, nor did it encapsulate the definition of culture in essentialist terms. Instead, culture was located as an inherent source from which powerful descriptions and analysis of pedagogy originated, and referenced the abiding values, ideology, and consciousness that influence socialization and reality in its definition of culture. As a result, the findings are a demonstration of the transformative potential of culture in teaching, with implications for teacher education.

The educators involved were able to engage in an ideological analysis and critique of pedagogy through this culture-systemic approach. Both manuscripts capture the ways the group members thought about key differences between the ways they taught and the ways some of their teacher colleagues approached their craft. While they noted that some of these teachers were characterized as successful with Black children and some were not, the group described fundamental differences between their form of pedagogy at the level of epistemology and ideology. This form of epistemic

critique emerged in Chapter 5 as the research group questioned and challenged the definitions of success and effectiveness in teaching African American students. As they explained, successful teaching of Black children was about preparing students for academic and life success not just passing the latest high stakes standardized test. Research on successful teaching of African American students as well as on effective Black educators pointed out that good teaching necessitates an expansive focus that includes student social and emotional development. This is necessary because it prepares African American youth to develop strategies for survival and resistance to assaults on Blackness and inequity (Perry, 2003).

Analysis of the philosophical dimensions of good teaching also emerged in Chapter 4 as the group thought about the utility of education for Black students. They explained that their view of education as vehicle for individual and group advancement was a distinguishing characteristic of their vision of pedagogical excellence. This was further reiterated in the findings in Chapter 5. The educators explained that the particular value they placed on education for Black children as a tool for self and community empowerment made their kind of teaching unique because it encouraged a sense of urgency to act on behalf of indigenous African American communities.

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, findings indicated that the group members conveyed the sense that education meant something remarkably different to them than to their professional colleagues. They viewed education as a decisive strategy to bring about improvements in economic stability, political power, and an increased sense of racial pride. These examples highlight the kind of pedagogical analysis the group thought necessary in order to learn how to teach African American children well. They

conveyed a belief that examining effective pedagogy for African American youth necessitated a rudimentary explication of the epistemologies, ideologies and theories that undergird teaching. Irvine (2003) argues that accurately researching the pedagogy of African American educators demands a search for what may not be apparent on the surface. Other researchers have drawn similar conclusions in studies of exemplary teachers, which combined with the present study, present a clear argument for more cultural analyses of the epistemic, ideological and theoretical perspectives of accomplished teachers of African American students. In Ladson-Billings' (1994) seminal study, she noted the difficulty she experienced in trying to make sense of her eight teacher participants' practice by looking only at their instructional actions. She wrote that it was at the level of epistemology and ideology, or consciousness, that she was able to locate the power of the teachers' pedagogy. Several educational researchers follow in this Black intellectual tradition of inquiry, which probes the foundations of knowledge upon which the social world is organized (Gordon, 1985; King, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Woodson, 1932). These researchers pinpoint teacher thinking, values, and beliefs as the most salient features that characterize successful teachers of African American learners. This study continues this mode of intellectual critique by explicitly examining the ways in which African American social consciousness enters into the way good Black teachers think about, enact and explain their practice.

Further studies of pedagogical excellence for African American children should be conducted using a culture systemic critique. In particular, a culture systemic analysis is needed in studies designed to understand how efforts to better link theory and

practice in teacher preparation impact teachers' knowledge of cultural relevance in teaching African American students.   The debate over theory and practice in teacher preparation is certainly not a new one. Yet given the research presented here, as well as in previous studies that document a heavy emphasis on the theoretical aspects of successful teaching of Black students, we may need to reinvestigate different ways to bridge this divide. Have we swung the pendulum so far towards practice that we are limiting our ability to help teachers fully understand the breadth and depth of pedagogical excellence? In our quest to help young, White women "cope" with the prospect of teaching African American children have we lowered our expectation of these teachers such that we implicitly underestimate their capacity to understand and embrace educational theories indigenous to cultural groups other than European Americans? The research teams' emphasis on the ideological and theoretical domains of effective pedagogy imply that we must continue to empirically grapple with the concepts of theory and practice to find ways that build on the strength that each brings to the teacher education curriculum for the sake of Black children in American schools.

"How are we to Determine Teaching Excellence?" Methodological Considerations

As stated in Chapter 1, the crisis in Black education is, at its core, a crisis of knowledge. This does not mean that there is no sound knowledge base about Black education. The comment references the fact that while there are competing kinds of knowledge relevant to Black education, there has been little recognition of the potency of alternative epistemologies, or the effort to build upon them for educational improvement (King, 2005). As a result, the prevailing determination of teacher quality many not capture some of the most important aspects of effective teaching. The process of inquiry used in this study attempted to use research to address this issue.

This first required a methodology that would reframe the relationship between the "knower" and the "known" in research. That is, I needed methods built on the assumption that knowledge-making and disseminating was not exclusive to a few "intellectuals", but was also located in African American cultural modes of rationality. As subject, the fullness and complexity of the experiences of some Black community members was imported into the inquiry space and used to help the research collective define for itself the scope of pedagogical excellence.

In particular, the use of community nomination was helpful in designating community as the subject rather than the object of study. The collaborative inquiry methodology used was also helpful in this respect because it further situated the research collective as knowledge producers. In these ways, members of the research team were able to bring all of their experiences, identities and consciousness to the research process and claim it as part of their knowledge claims. This enabled the research group to "research for desire" (Tuck, 2009), which in this context means the group was able to see Black children, families and communities as whole entities and more than broken and damaged commodities. This was important because it represented a break from the either/or paradigm Black people often find themselves in from a Western perspective. By intentionally seeking community perspectives on quality teaching, I implicitly departed from the assumption of a monocultural or universal knowledge base. This opened the door for the recognition of indigenous ways of knowledge and thinking related to effective pedagogy and the use of such perspectives in building a concept of pedagogical excellence for African American learners.

Another way I used research to address the crisis of knowledge in Black education was the careful implementation of processes to create a reciprocal and authentic research context. This proved to be critical in devising a culture-focused research approach because it demanded attention to the interpersonal dimensions of research and the overarching objectives and outcomes of the study. Building on community knowledge in this study reinforced an inclusive view of teaching excellence. It also required a collaborative research context mediated by reciprocity, mutuality, and personal investment. In the future, research should be conducted to offer additional methodologies that intentionally recognize and build on community knowledge. Education researchers should work across the disciplines in fields such as anthropology to investigate the impact of methods designed to capture the emic perspective

Implications

Based on analysis of the findings as well as the related literature, this study suggests implications for school leaders, teacher educators and educational researchers. The implications are discussed below.

School Leaders

Create positions of leaderships for exemplary Black teachers within the school. Black educators' voices have been marginalized from education reform movements large and small for quite some time (Delpit, 2012; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Siddle-Walker, 2000). Consequently, there has been a long history of reform efforts directed at teachers that lack an expansive vision of education that includes cultural influences (Ladson-Billings, 2005). School leaders who have the accomplished African American educators on staff should create a school culture in which the knowledge and values these teachers can be critically explored by the entire

staff. Other educators should be able to learn from Black educators in "real time"

through careful observation and more importantly, open dialogue about teacher

practice. Additionally, as school leaders, Black educators should be able to use their

culture-centered knowledge and perspectives to shape school-wide policies and

practices.

        Form positive alliances with African American community action groups.

Securing high quality education for Black children and promoting educational excellence

are two foundational parts of an African American demand for social justice and human

freedom (Anderson & Kharem, 2010; Franklin, 1984). This educational agenda spans

the growing intergroup diversity within the African American community and functions as

a part of a commonly held philosophy of African American community advancement

(Perry, 2003). The far-reaching spread of this agenda is evident upon observation of

and interaction with Black civil society. Many African American-founded social and

community organizations cite education as a primary focal point and employ action

plans that align well with the standards of educational excellence (academic and

cultural) embedded in many African American communities.

        School leaders should make a concerted effort to form alliances with such

organizations under a shared goal of improving African American educational

achievement. These alliances should be structured in ways that promote shared

decision-making and a healthy distribution of power. This means that school leaders

must recognize community knowledge as relevant, legitimate this knowledge by

learning from community members, and be willing to negotiate the terms school-wide

initiatives so that they represent community interests and meet federal, state, and

district demands. The benefits of this kind of partnership are significant and could possibly include: 1) a rekindled sense of connectedness (Foster, 1993) between school and community, 2) new, innovative approaches to forming parent partnerships and increasing academic achievement, 3) a view of the school as an ally in Black education rather than something Blacks must endure in order to be successful, and 4) a movement away from exclusive, top down, school administration towards democratic and egalitarian ways of schooling children.

Teacher Educators

Re-define culture as a fundamental element of the teaching and learning process. Here actions speak louder than words. Teacher educators should make the cultural context of education visible throughout the curriculum. More importantly, careful explanation of the powerful connections between the cultural context teaching and learning should be included in meaningful ways. The cultural context referenced here emphasizes the social, historical, political and economic factors that taken together offer a more comprehensive explication of the conscious and sub-conscious pedagogical processes of good teachers.

In addition, teacher educators should re-think how they name pedagogical excellence for African American students. This kind of teaching is predicated on emancipatory, culturally relevant perspectives. Naming pedagogical excellence in ways that emphasize these critical, cultural and liberatory foundations could help teachers pose their own questions about the necessity, value and utility of teaching African American children in the ways specified in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 and in the related bodies of literature. Finally, it is imperative that teachers understand that they are not necessarily bringing culture into the their teaching as much as they are restructuring the

existing culture of their teaching towards the emancipatory and democratic principles

upon which education was first designed by formerly enslaved African in the American

South (Anderson, 1988). Therefore, teacher educators must work with students to

unearth the existing culture embedded in schools. This includes analysis of the shifts in

this culture over time, the differences between the prevailing orientation towards

educating children in Western society and other civilizations and the impact of these

cultural contexts on the education of groups of students.

**Emphasize a range of educational theories, philosophies, and ways of

thinking about education and teaching.** Cultural groups have designed and

implemented educational programs for their children for centuries. The perspectives

that guided these efforts have endured over time and are alive and well in many

communities today (Gordon, 1990; Perry, 2003). Understanding these culturally

specific explanatory theories can help teacher educators dislodge the dominance of

orthodox paradigms in preparation programs that perpetuate racism and inequity. Along

the same lines, providing these "alternatives" can augment the ways that different

cultural groups, particularly African Americans make sense of education and

achievement for African American children. Teacher educators and students can locate

the cultural epistemologies and theoretical frameworks of African American people in

the academic and literary work as well as in creative genres of music, dance, and art

produced by African American people. This emphasis can also help teachers recognize

the "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1995) embedded in communities related to

the education of its children. Many teacher educators assign projects designed to help

students develop an awareness of individual students' knowledge streams. Yet, for

teachers to understand the totality of Afrocentric educational perspectives, they must

see the collective imprint on groups of people. Therefore, these assignments should be

expanded to include the specialized knowledge whole communities possess and how

these communities have transformed this knowledge into powerful pedagogical

practices.

Take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of African American

education. In order to completely understand the issues involved in the educative

experiences of African American children, educators (teacher educators and classroom

teachers) must develop a robust knowledge of African American culture and

experiences. Building this knowledge base demands that we begin to collaborate

outside our respective education departments. Collaborating with Black Studies,

African American Studies, and Ethnic Studies departments can support teacher

educators in expanding their cultural knowledge and in building a culture-centered

curriculum designed to promote academic and cultural excellence in education. Working

with departments of sociology and anthropology can also support teacher educators in

reconstructing a curriculum in teacher education that honors the sociological and

cultural influences on education and schooling experiences.

To be sure, while some teacher educators address culture and diversity in the

curriculum, many of their approaches further cement negative assumptions and

perceptions about ethnic groups given the fragmented way culture is approached in

coursework and field experiences. Working across disciplines will most certainly

represent a critical departure from orthodox teacher preparation paradigms rooted in the

psychological and biological sciences (Gordon, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2004). With this

expansive knowledge base, teacher educators can offer culturally specific explanations and frameworks to prospective and practicing teachers that can support their professional development in ways that recognize and build on the strength in African American communities.

Explicitly emphasize the political aspects of the schooling process in ways that expand the purpose and function of education to include moral and ethical imperatives. Schooling in the United States is inherently political. This is evident upon examination of American systems of formal schooling dating back to the origins of European colonization of the Americas in which religious missionaries sought to "civilize" indigenous communities through schooling. This constitutes one aspect of the politics of education predicated on colonialism and subordination of the "other". These political motives were the driving forces behind the suppression of African American education prior to Reconstruction, the explicit racial segregation of schools in the South during the early part of the 20th century and the current movement of educational privatization, high stakes accountability and standardization. Just as powerful though, there are other aspects of educational politics that have assisted indigenous and historically oppressed groups in reclaiming their humanity, asserting their right to citizenship and promoting excellence in education.

Many African American leaders (of whom a great many were educators) embraced the political element of education from a position of democracy and social justice for all. Such a position helped these early Black educators make connections between their professional positions and the larger social totality that created a sense of agency and action within them. Additionally, viewing their work as teachers in a political

sense enabled them to combine different educational agendas into a single expansive vision of education that included freedom and equity, as well as economic and occupational prosperity. In light of this, we must ask, "What might an embrace of the political, in terms of democracy and justice do for prospective educators today?" In order for teachers, novice and experienced, to become social change agents, they must first make connections between education, schooling and politics, and the implications these links hold for racial and cultural groups. Teacher educators and their students should examine the ways different groups have approached the political in education which will help mitigate the tendency to "de-politicize" education, but rather cling to the politics inherent in education in socially just ways.

Expand the curricular focus beyond the needs of White, female teachers. Aside from approaches designed to recruit more students of color into teacher education programs, there has been little effort to support the professional needs of African American teachers. A dangerous assumption lingers which suggests that Black teachers will automatically be successful in predominantly Black schools regardless of the kind of preparation they receive (Cook, 2013). This has left novice and experienced African American teachers to invent and reconstruct pedagogy on their own terms, which often contradicts what is expected in their preparation programs. Meeting the professional development needs of African American teachers means examining the cultural and historical perspectives embedded in dominant African American epistemological themes throughout the teacher education program. It also includes critical emphasis on the ways race shapes the life and educational experiences of all people. Finally, it means de-centering whiteness as the standard for understanding and

analyzing the pedagogical excellence. These methods are not suggestive of a separate

curriculum for Black teachers because all teachers would benefit from this more

emancipatory approach to teacher education. However, they do emphasize the

symbiotic relationship between meeting the needs of prospective Black teachers and

improving teacher education in ways that benefit teachers of all ethnicities.

Educational Researchers

Make explicit use of culture-focused empirical models and theoretical

frameworks to guide research approaches. All researchers, like all teachers, use a

"cultural eye" to direct their professional activities (Irvine, 2003; Lather, 1986). This is

hardly troublesome, but becomes problematic when researchers fail to recognize the

influence of culture on inquiry. It is important to acknowledge that culture is a critical

component of the conscious and subconscious self and become manifest in research

(Irvine, 2003). However, the cultural impress on research need not be construed as a

hindrance to good research, but rather should be viewed as a promising way to use

research productively in improving outcomes for African American and other cultural

groups. That is, researchers, particularly those interested in African American

educational experiences, should find ways for culture to work as a transformative

element in social science inquiry process. This undoubtedly means researchers will

need to situate cultural theoretical and epistemic frameworks as inquiry guideposts and

do so boldly. This culturalist stance can help researchers to recognize the liberatory

potential of culture as opposed to perpetuating the dominant designation of culture as

the source of educational failure for African Americans. On a more practical note, using

culturally specific research tools can support the educational community in better

understanding the situated pedagogy of exceptional teachers of African American children (Irvine, 2003).

Take a collaborative approach to African American educational studies.
There should be more authentic collaboration between teachers, students, community and researchers. As Irvine (2003) notes, "Researching with the "cultural eye" will produce research questions that are jointly constructed by researchers, teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, and parents who employ new and improved methodologies, collect data in different places, and establish maintain collegial research relationships (p. 35). The relationships we create through these collaborative efforts should be established in ways that blur the boundaries between researcher and researched. Meaning making should occur through a process of negotiation predicated on mutuality and reciprocity. This kind of inquiry atmosphere reflects a "moral activist" role (Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005). In this role researchers descend from the ivory tower and collaborate in the spaces where "ordinary" people make sense of their experiences and develop strategies to improve their own social condition. Research no longer benefits the researcher exclusively, but is purposed for noticeable improvement in the lives of those involved in the study. In short, community-centered studies of African American education can support efforts to research for community and cultural well being.

Conclusion

This dissertation began with an urgent declaration of the challenges and issues involved in African American education today. Yet it ends with a calming sense of one possible approach teachers and teacher educators can take to help end the crisis in Black education. This study contributes to the knowledge base that examines how

educators facilitate the academic and social growth of African American children. The findings of the study demonstrated that some teachers who are successful with African American students possess a culture-centered view of their pedagogy and vision of education for their students. The framework of pedagogical excellence that emerged from the findings of this study offer critical insight for the continual restructuring and refinement of teacher education that supports the achievement of children of African descent in American classrooms.

APPENDIX A
INVITATION TO COMMUNITY GROUPS

ATTENTION: ALL AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS OF CHILDREN GRADES K-12

You are needed! I am interested in talking with you to understand your views on what "good" teaching for your child means. Understanding your perspectives is important if we are to help African American children be successful in schools today! I am hosting a conversation about this topic right here at * * and your presence and participation is strongly needed.

Who should participate?
African American parents of school-aged children (grades K-12). This also includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster parents, etc… Basically any African American male or female who is taking care of an African American school-aged child.

Where will it take place? * *

When will it be? Thursday: March 7, 2013

How long will it last? 6:00pm – 7:15pm

What will I be asked to do? Share your thoughts and opinions about what you believe equates to "good" teaching for your child.

_____
_____
REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED!!!
Please RSVP by using the sign-up sheet

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Briefly, tell us your name and the ages and grades of your children
1. What are some of the educational goals you have for your child?

You mentioned _____ as one of the goals, why is this important for African American children specifically?
What do you think your child needs to be successful in school?
you mentioned _____, why is that important for your child?
What else is important your child to have as part of their education?
how do you think teachers help or should help in obtaining those goals?

Now, let's talk about this idea of "good" teaching. What does it take for a teacher to be considered good when teaching your child? Let's do this as like a round robin. Go around the room and everyone say a describing word or phrase that helps to capture what you mean by good. Stopping for clarification. What do you mean by that? Give me an example of that?

Collective definition "Good teaching for our children means…."

Okay, now let's think of some qualities of good teachers of successful African American kids?
Again, can we do this as like a round robin? Stopping for clarification—what do you mean by that? Give me an example of that?

Collective definition "Educators who are good teachers of our children are…"

What do good teachers do or say with your child?
Why do you think they say these things?
Is this important for Black children? Why?

How does a good teacher interact with you as the parent/caregiver and your child?
Why do you think they act this way?
Do African American children need this? Why?

How can you tell that your child has a good teacher?
What happens when your child doesn't have a good teacher?

Use the note card to write down the names of teachers who you would characterize as a good teacher for your child. Write their name and the school they taught at—also write the grade they taught your child.

APPENDIX C
LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear Teacher,

Congratulations! You have been nominated by parents in the Gainesville community as an outstanding teacher of African American children.

How did this happen?
 I conducted a series focus group interviews with parents of African American school children in the Gainesville area, and I asked them to identify teachers, who, in their opinion, have or had previously been a good teacher for their children.

So now what?
Please attend a congratulatory lunch buffet at Ruby's restaurant on **Wednesday, March 27, 2013 from 1:30pm – 3:30pm.** Ruby's is located at t 308 NW 5th Ave, Gainesville, FL 32601. Children and spouses are welcome to attend!

At this lunch you will be celebrated for your work with African American school children. You will also be presented with an opportunity to share your knowledge and perspectives about your work with African American children with myself, other teachers, and more importantly, the teaching and learning community. Attending lunch does not obligate you to participate in this project, but it will provide a much need opportunity for you to be recognized for the work you do. Participation in the project provides an opportunity for you to share your experiences and voice your thoughts on achieving educational excellence for African American children.

Please RSVP to Melanie M. Acosta at 352-682-3945 or acos1460@ufl.edu by Tuesday, March 26. 2013. Additionally, please call or email Melanie M. Acosta with any questions you may have about this event.

Thanks for the work you do and I look forward to lunch on **Wednesday, March 27th at 1:30.**

Sincerely,
Melanie M. Acosta, Ph.D. Candidate, UF College of Education

APPENDIX D
SAMPLE RESEARCH MEETING AGENDA

**Agendas sent to co-researchers via email

Hey everybody,

Just sending out a reminder about our meeting tomorrow afternoon (4/19) at 4:45pm at Ruby's. So much has been on my mind since our last conversation! Here's what I've been wondering about and hoping we can do:

- Checking in

- Housekeeping business: select a time keeper, a note taker, and a regulator

- Revisit list generated from first meeting: section on "what teachers need to know about teaching African American kids"

- Reflections on list:add things, change things, modify things

- Making sense and organizing what we've shared with each other: Data analysis

- What are we thinking about our teaching of African American children now? What else do we want to explore? How might we go about studying this?

- Housekeeping business select next 2 meeting days/times Maybe May 3rd, May 9th, May 10th?

Feel free to add anything that you would like to talk about on the list See you all tomorrow!!

VISUAL FRAMING ANALYSIS TOOL

Why do we teach the way we do? What are the cultural influences on our teaching?

Cultural Values:	**Cultural Knowledge:**
Shaped by our shared ancestry—passed down throughout the generations -Depending on one another for survival -Helping each other out -Being connected with people -Inclusive love -Working things out together -Determination -Holistic education is key—focus on the whole child -Openness -Extended family -Respect for all people -No boundaries between individuals	Shaped by our experiences as Black people in America. Also shaped by our Black community experiences -Racism still exists -We haven't made it yet -We are still perceived to be inferior -We have to adapt to different situations for survival—making do. -Our communities lost something when integration happened -We have to prove ourselves as teachers—our students have to prove themselves too Education is a means of success and survival for Black people -Our struggles as a people are valid -We come from a legacy of kings and queens—we don't begin with slavery -Not everything you read in a book or learn in a class is the best way to do things

Should one come before the other? Do they function together or separately when we teach? What else is missing? How can we show or describe the relationship between the two?

These elements are with us always—but in what ways do we draw on this foundation when we teach? Are these the foundations of our teaching? How do these elements inform our teaching? Examples…

APPENDIX F
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS CHART

Frames	Domains	AA Epistemology (interpretive lenses)	Themes
Instructional practices	Characteristics of no excuses teaching. Ways cultural knowledge influences our instructional practices. Kinds of goals we have for Black children. Reasons some teachers are unsuccessful with Black children	Political power Service Self-determination/ self-help	-Doin' better through education (article 1) -There are no excuses (article 1) -Serving the community through teaching (article 1)
What doesn't work with African American students	Why some teachers are unsuccessful with Black children Reasons we are frustrated with other teachers & administrators-(how they position us) Reasons why we are frustrated-(perceptions of Black children and families)	Political power Self-determination	-Factor contributing to urgency—rejection of western conceptions of Blackness (article 2)
Personal experiences (teacher)	Reasons why we are frustrated-(perceptions of Black children and families) Ways to describe our cultural knowledge Kinds of goals we have for Black children Characteristics of no excuses teaching	Self-determination Political power Nationalism	-There are no excuses (article 1) -Purpose for urgency (article 2)
What works with African American students	Characteristics of no excuses teaching Ways cultural knowledge influences our instructional practices. Kinds of goals we have for Black children.	Self-determination/ self help Political power Economic autonomy Service Nationalism	-Doin' better through education (article 1) -There are no excuses (article 1) -Serving the community through teaching (article 1)
Cultural knowledge	Kinds of goals we have for Black children. Ways to describe our cultural knowledge. Ways our cultural knowledge influences our instructional practices. Ways cultural knowledge influences our school	Political power Self-determination/ self help Economic autonomy Nationalism	-Doin' better through education (article 1) -There are no excuses (article 1) -Factor contributing to urgency— challenging miseducation (article 2)

	interactions-students		-Factor contributing to urgency—rejection of western concept (article 2) -Purpose for urgency (article 2)
Cultural values	Ways to describe cultural values. Reasons why some White teachers may teach the way we do. Ways cultural values influence interactions-students Ways cultural values influence our school interactions-colleagues	Service Nationalism Self-determination/ self-help	-Serving the community through teaching (article 1) -There are no excuses (article 1)
Professional dispositions	Characteristics of no excuses teaching Reasons why we are frustrated- (perceptions of Black children and families)	Political power Nationalism Self-determination/ self-help	-Factor contributing to urgency—rejection of western conception of Blackness (article 2) -Purpose for urgency (article 2)

What works with African American students

T1/Pg2/Ln30
J: Well, humm..in comparison with other schools I think the teachers at T* do a very good job because they don't have this notion that you're that kid—you're poor or your mom can't do this—they're concerned about their students, they know what's going on at home with their kids and they don't let that influence how they teach them. They teach them what they need to know and how they need to know it in a loving manner, almost—I mean we have a couple of teachers out there who I'm like—yall should have been black because yall get right down there with them kids
M: Really?
A: Humm
J: Yes, just get right with them—when it comes to the kids they do what they need to do. Especially with African American kids -not every school—and I don't want you to think this about T* because I work there-but when I got there—I immediately saw the difference in teachers. Where teachers genuinely cared for their students and teachers genuinely wanted to do everything in their power for kids to be successful—you know doing those things are extra and above for kids that they don't have to do.

T1/Pg7/Ln8
G: I always correct with love, because you know my thing is that I'm not trying to make them feel bad but I want them to know that what they did was not proper and you shouldn't have done that M: what would you say? H: You would give them a hug or pat them on the back…A: see I'm the mean one cause I don't….G: I mean I would correct them—I would say okay now—what did you just do—and they know. M: so you'd just stop them right there and have them think about it? G: I mean even when we're walkin down the hall ill stop and stand there and they will {mimics how the kids will correct themselves] A: and that goes to show that they know what to do but if no one has shown them, no one expects them to do it, they aren't going to do it. G: I mean even the older kids that I taught that are now in the 4th and 5th grade, when they see me—they automatically know, Ms. L* don't play that. A: that is the expectation we have for them-you can try that over there but sweetheart do not bring that over here. They don't try that nonsense. It's what they expect, and that's why we know that –that's how you know that they know exactly what they are supposed to do H: that's right.

Professional Dispositions

Pg2/Ln6
A: Making a kid feel loved-how is that work? This is not work. That should be who you are as a teacher, as a person. Compliment them—you know—these are things that I did everyday with my kids—they knew that as soon as they walked in the door from the first day when we had our little meeting and I said this is who I am and who are you.

This is what I expect so-a few of these things might be things you have to work a little harder at—like conducting workshops for parents

A: Right, right—that's overtime, aftertime—that's where I'm coming from the aftertime

J: Uhmm but how we deal with children on a daily basis—this is what we should be doing. If this part is work then you shouldn't be a teacher.

T3/Pg1/Ln1
H: you walk in with authority. Confidence J: they have authority just on the basis that they are the adult in the class [M: makes noise as if to question this]. H: you walk in with confidence—they walk in saying I hope I can do this, I hope I can do this. You walk in sayin—I know I can do this. J: that ticks me off because they make it seem like I'm doing something different. They make it seem like I'm doing something that they can't do.

T3/Pg2/Ln32
J: My internships were in these classrooms with—all white teachers all doing their things I watched and see how they interact with the children, but... M: and what did you see? J: No connection M: Or what did you take away from it? J: that they had this level of …H: they felt this sort of superiority A: yeah, yeah... M: tell me more about this connection. A: no connection because you're the child and I'm the teacher H: there's this thing this line and you child can't go across this line—this is my space. I can't go into a classroom and act like I'm better than you because I'm their teacher you know.

T3/Pg7/Ln11
H: And you know what else I tell them is the judge is not gonna care that your dad left your family when you were a baby and mom was on crack or that your dad was in jail—so you can use that excuse if you want to but the judge isn't gonna take it and I'm not gonna take it either-that's what I tell my high school kids—that's what I tell the elementary kids too quite frankly.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Aldridge, D.P. (2009). African American educators and the Black intellectual tradition. In L.C. Tillman (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of African American Education* (pp. 23-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Alston, J. (2004). The many faces of American schooling: Effective schools research and border crossing in the 21st century. *American Secondary Education*, *32*(2), 79-93.

Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South 1860-1935.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Anderson, N. S. & Kharem, H. (2009). *Education as freedom: African American educational thought and activism.* New York: Lexington Books.

Arcia, E. (2006). Achievement and enrollment status of suspended students: Outcomes in a large, multicultural school district. *Education and Urban Society*, *38(3)*, 359–369.

Aud, S., Hussar, W., Plenty, M., Snyder, T., Bianco, K., Fox, M., Drake, L. (2010). *The condition of education 2010* (NCES 2010-028). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Banks, J. A. (2000). The social construction of difference and the quest for educational equality. In R. S. Brandt (Ed.), *Education in the new century* (yearbook, pp. 21-45). Arlington, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Banks, J. A. (2006). Approaches to multicultural curriculum reform. In J.A. Banks (Ed.) *Race, culture, and education: The selected works of James A. Banks* (pp. 242 - 263). New York: Routledge.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (1999). A movement against and beyond boundaries: Politically relevant teaching among African American teachers. *Teachers College Record, 100*(4), 702-723.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2002). A womanist experience of caring: Understanding the pedagogy of exemplary Black women teachers. *The Urban Review, 34*(1), 71-86.

Bell, D. (1992). Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism. New York: Basic Books.

Bell, J. (2001). High performing, high poverty schools. *Leadership, 31*(1), 8-11.

Bishop, R. (1997). Interviewing as collaborative storying. *Education Research and Perspectives, 24*(1), 28-47.

Bishop, R. (2003). Changing power relations in education: Kaupapa Maori messages for 'mainstream' education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Comparative Education, 39(2)*, 221- 238.

Bishop, R. (2005). Freeing ourselves from neocolonial domination in research: A Kaupapa Maori approach to creating knowledge. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd. ed., pp. 109-138). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Blaire, C., Amatea, E., West-Olatunji, C., Wright, A. (2012). Examining the relational processes of a highly successful teacher of African American children. *Urban Education*, *61*(3), 55-68.

Blanchett, W. J. (2006). Disproportionate Representation of African Americans in Special Education: Acknowledging the Role of White Privilege and Racism. *Educational Researcher*, *35*(6), 24-28.

Bondy, E., Mayne, D., Langly, L., Williamson, P. (2005) From F to A in 180 days. *Educational Leadership, 62*, 1-5.

Bondy, E., Ross, D.D. (2008). The teacher as warm demander. *Educational Leadership*, *66*(1), 54-58.

Bondy, E., Ross, D., Hambacher, E., Acosta, M. (2013). Becoming warm demanders: Perspectives and practices of first-year teachers. *Urban Education*, *48*(3), 420-450.

Bonila-Silva, E. (2009). Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America (3rd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Boykin, W. A., Franklin, A. J., Yates, J. F. (1979). *Research directions of Black psychologists.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Boykin, W.A., Nougera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Bridges, D., & McGee, S. (2011). Collaborative inquiry: Reciprocity and authenticity. In J. Higgs, A. Titchen, D. Horsfall, & D. Bridges (Eds.), *Creative spaces for qualitative researching: Living research* (pp. 213-222). Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Brophy, J. (1981). Teacher praise: A functional analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 51*(1), 5-32.

Brophy, J. Good, T. J. (1986). Teacher behavior and student achievement. In M. C. Witrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (3rd ed., 328-375). New York: Macmillan.

Carroll, K. K. (2008). Africana studies and research methodology: Revisiting the centrality of the Afrikan worldview. *The Journal of Pan African Studies, 2(*2), 4-27.

Carruthers, J. (1994). Black intellectuals and the crisis in Black education. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), *Too much schooling, too little education: A paradox of Black life in white societies* (pp. 37-55). Trenton, NJ: African World Press.

Case, K.I. (1997). African American othermothering in the urban elementary school. The *Urban Review*, *29*(1), 25-39.

Clark, S. P. (1964). Literacy and liberation. *Freedomways*, *4*, 113-124.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). *Walking the road: Race, diversity, and social justice in teacher education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Cochran-Smith, M., Fries, K. (2011). Teacher education for diversity: Policy and politics. In A. F. Ball & C. A. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (pp. 339–362). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Cook, D. A. (2013). An engaged dialogue: Reflections on preparing African American teachers for diverse classrooms. *Multicultural Perspectives*, *15*(1), 46-51.

Cooper, P. M. (2002). Does race matter? A comparison of effective Black and White teachers of African American students. In J. J. Irvine (Ed.), In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally specific classroom practices (pp. 47-63). New York: Palgrave.

Cooper, P.M. (2003). Effective white teachers of black children. *Journal of Teacher Education, 54*(5), 413-427.

Counts, G. (1932). *Dare the school to build a new social order*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Corbett, A. (2006). *How public schools fail black boys: And what their parents must do*. USA. Revial One Publishing.

Creed, L. Masser, M. (1977). The greatest love of all [Recorded by Whitney Houston]. On *Whitney Houston* [Album]. New York: Arista Records. (1986).

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York: New Press.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications.

Davis, J. E., & Jordan, W. J. (1994). The effects of school context, structure, and experiences on African American males in middle and high schools. *Journal of Negro Education, 63*, 570–587.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2005). New Standard and old inequalities: School reform and the education of African American students. In J.E. King (Ed.), *Black Education: A transformative research and action agenda in black education for the new century* (pp. 197-223). New York: Sage Publications

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future. NY: Teacher's College Press.

Delpit, L. D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review, 8*(3), 280-298

Delpit, L. (2005). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom* (2nd ed.). New York: New Press.

Delpit, L. (2012). *"Multiplication is for white people": Raising expectations for other people's children.* New York: New Press.

Denzin, N. K. (2001). The seventh moment: Qualitative inquiry and the practices of a more radical consumer research. *The Journal of Consumer Research, 28*(2), 324-330.

Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd. ed., pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dillard, C. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13(6),* 661-681.

Dixson, A. (2003). Let's do this! Black women teacher's politics and pedagogy. *Urban Education, 38*(2), 217-235.

Dubois, W. E. B. (1904). The Atlanta conferences. *Voice of the Negro*, 1, 85-89.

Dubois, W.E.B. (1930). Education and Work. In H. Aptheker (Ed.), W.E.B. Dubois: *The education of Black people ten critiques 1906-1960* (pp. 85-110). New York: Monthly Review Press.

Dubois, W. E. B. (1935). Does the Negro need separate schools? *The Journal of Negro Education, 4*(3), 328-335.

Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for urban poor. Educational Leadership, 37(1), 15-24.

Elderman, M. W. (2011). Forward. in S.D. Horsford (Ed.), *Learning in a burning house: Educational inequality, ideology, and (dis) integration* (pp*. ix-xi).* New York: Teachers College Press.

Emancipatory Education Research (2012). Retrieved from http://education.ufl.edu/emancipatory-educational-research/about-eer/

Ford, A. C., Sassi, K. (2013). Authority in cross-racial teaching and learning (Re)considering the transferability of warm demander approaches. *Urban Education,* Advanced publication, doi: 10.1177/0042085912464790

Foster, M. (1993). Educating for competence in community and culture: Exploring the views of exemplary African American teachers. *Urban Education, 27*, 370-394.

Foster, M. (1994). Effective black teachers: A literature review. In E.R. Hollins, J.E. King. & W.C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations*: *Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 225-242). New York: SUNY Press.

Foster, M. (1997). *Black teachers on teaching*. New York: The New Press.

Foster, M. (2004). The power to know one thing is never the power to know all things: Methodological notes on two studies of Black American teachers. In G. Ladson-Billings & D. Gillborn (Eds.), The Routledge Falmer Reader in Multicultural Education (pp. 252- 265). New York: Routledge Falmer.

Franklin, V.P. (1984). *Black self-determination: A cultural history of the faith of the fathers.* Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company.

Freeman, K. (2005). Black populations globally: The costs of the underutilization of Blacks in education. In J.E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century* (pp.135-158). New York: Routledge.

Freeman, K., Carnoy, M., Findlay, H., Joiner, B., Magyari, Beck, I. (1999). Economic development and the utilization of human potential: Bridging the gap between higher education, economics, and culture. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, Department of Leadership and Organizations.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice* (2nd ed.) New York: Teachers College Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures.* New York: Basic Books.

Giroux, H. (1980). Critical theory and rationality in citizenship education. *Curriculum Inquiry, 10*(4), 329-366.

Gordon, B. (1982). Toward a theory of knowledge acquisition for Black children. *Journal of Education*, *64(1),* 90-108.

Gordon, B. (1985). Towards the emancipatory in citizenship education: The case of African-American cultural knowledge. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *7*(4), 1-23.

Gordon, B. (1990). The necessity of African-American epistemology in educational theory and practice. *Journal of Education, 172*(3), 88-106.

Gordon, B. (1993). African American cultural knowledge and liberatory education: Dilemmas, problems, and potentials in a postmodern American society. *Urban Education, 27*(4), 448-470.

Gordon, B. (1994). African American cultural knowledge and liberatory education: Dilemmas, problems and potentials in a postmodern American society. M.J. Shujaa (Ed.), *Too much schooling, too little education. A paradox of black life in White societies* (pp. 57-78). Trenton: African World Press.

Gordon, B. (1997). Curriculum policy and African American cultural knowledge: Challenges and possibilities for the year 2000 and beyond. *Educational Policy, 11*(2), 227-242.

Grant, C., Gibson, M. (2011). Diversity and teacher education: A historical perspective on research and policy. In A.F. Ball & C.A. Tyson (Eds.), Studying diversity in teacher education (pp. 19 - 62). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Gregory, A., Skiba, R., & Noguera, P. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin. Educational Researcher, 39(1), 59-68.

Grbich, C. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 191 - 215). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gwaltney, J. (1980). *Drylongso: a self-portrait of Black America*. New York: Random House.

Hale-Benson, J. (1986). *Black children: Their culture, roots, and learning styles*. Baltimore, MD: Brigham Young University Press.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in educational settings.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hayes, K. (2007). Through the nominations of principals: Effective teachers of African American students share limitations of high-stakes testing. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*, 2157-2167.

Heron, J., Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm', *Qualitative Inquiry, 3*(3), 274-294.

Hill, D., King, J. E. (2005). Glossary of terms. In J. E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformation research and action agenda for the new century* (pp. 367-369). New York: Routledge.

Hilliard, A. G. (1995). *Teacher education from an African American perspective.* Paper presented at the conference on Defining the Knowledge Base for Urban Teacher Education. Atlanta, GA.

Hilliard, A. G. (2000). Excellence in education versus high stakes standardized testing. *Journal of Teacher Education, 51*(4), 293-304.

Hilliard, A. G. (2003). No mystery: Closing the achievement gap between Africans and excellence. In T. Perry, C. Steele, & A. Hilliard (Eds.), *Young, gifted, and black: Promoting high achievement among African American students* (pp.131-165). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Hill-Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Hollins, E. R. (1982). The Marva Collins story revisited: Implications for regular classroom instruction. *Journal of Teacher Education, 33*(2), 37-40.

Hollins, E. R. (1994). Benchmarks in meeting the challenges of effective schooling for African American youngsters. In E. Hollins, J. King, & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base* (pp. 129-142). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hollins, E. R., King, J. E., Hayman, W. C. (1994). *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base.* New York: State University of New York.

Holstein, J. A., Gubrium, J. F. (2005). Interpretive practice and social action. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed., pp. 483-505). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Horsford, S. (2011). *Learning in a burning house: Educational inequality, ideology, and (dis) integration.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Howard, T. (2001). Powerful pedagogy for African American students: A case of four teachers. *Urban Education, 36*(2), 179-202.

Howard, T. (2002). Hearing footsteps in the dark: African American students' descriptions of effective teachers. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 7(4),* 425-444.

Howard, T. C., Aldeman, G. R. (2007). Teacher capacity for diverse learners: What do teachers need to know? In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, J.D. McIntyre, & K.E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring questions in changing contexts.* (3rd ed., pp.157-174) New York: Routledge.

Hyland, N. E., & Meacham, S. (2004). Community-centered teacher education: A paradigm for socially just education transformation. In J. L. Kincheloe, A. Bursztyn, & S. Steinberg (Eds.), *Teaching teachers: Building a quality school of urban education* (pp. 113-134). New York: Peter Lang.

Irvine, J. J. (1989). Beyond role models: An examination of cultural influences on the pedagogical perspectives of black teachers. *Peabody Journal of Education, 66*(4), 51-63.

Irvine, J. J. (1990). *Black students and school failure: Policies, practices, and prescriptions.* New York: Greenwood Press.

Irvine, J. J. (2002). *In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally-specific classroom practices.* New York: Palgrave.

Irvine, J. J. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Irvine, J. J. & Fraser, J. (1998). "Warm demanders": Do national certification standards leave room for the culturally responsive pedagogy of African American teachers? *Education Week, 17*(35), 56.

Jeffries, R. (1997). *Performance traditions among African American teachers*. Bethesda, MD: Austin & Winfield Publishers.

Johnson, K. A. (2009). On classical versus vocational training: The educational ideas of Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs. In N. S. Anderson & H. Kharem (Eds.), *Education and freedom: African American educational thought and activism (*pp. 47-68). New York: Lexington Books.

Kaestle, C. E. (1983). Pillars of the republic: Common schools and American society, 1780-1860. New York: Hill and Wang.

King, J. E. (1991a). Unfinished business: Black student alienation and black teachers' emancipatory pedagogy. In M. Foster (Ed), *Readings on Equal Education: Qualitative Investigations into Schools and Schooling* (pp. 245-271). New York: AMS Press.

King, J. E. (1991b). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *Journal of Negro Education, 60(2),* 133-146.

King, J. E. (1994). The purpose of schooling for African American children. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King, & W. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base* (pp. pp. 25-44). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

King, J. E. (1995). Culture-centered knowledge: Black studies, curriculum transformation, and social action. In J. Banks & C. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 265- 290). New York: Macmillan.

King, J. E. (2005). *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century*. New York: Routledge.

King, J. E. (2008). Critical and qualitative research in teacher education: A blues epistemology, a reason for knowing for cultural well-being. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman Nemser & J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring issues in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 1094-1135). Mahweh, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, Publishers.

Kleinfield, J. (1975). Effective teachers of Eskimo and Indian students. *School Review, 83*, 301–344.

Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2010). Validity, responsibility, and aporia. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16(8),* 603-610.

Koro-Ljungberg, M., Yendol-Hoppey, D., Smith, J. J., Hayes, S. B. (2009). (E)pistemological awareness, instantiation of methods, and uninformed methodological ambiguity in qualitative research projects. *Educational Researcher, 38*(9), 687-699.

Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America.* New York: Crown.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1991). Returning to the source: Implications for educating teachers of black students. In M. Foster (Ed), *Readings on Equal Education: Qualitative Investigations into Schools and Schooling (pp.72-94)*. New York: AMS Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994/2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). "But that's just good teaching!" The case of culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice, 34*(3), 159-165.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Towards a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Research in Education, 24*, 211-247.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Sage Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 257-277). Thousand Oaks, CA:

Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). Forward. In J.E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century* (pp. xiii-xvii). New York: Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). It's not the culture of poverty; It's the poverty of culture in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 55*(2), 112-123.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2011). "Who you callin' nappy head?" A critical race look at the construction of Black women. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 12*(1), 87-99.

Ladson-Billings, G., Donner, J. (2005). The moral activist role of critical race theory scholarship. N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 279-301). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ladson-Billings, G., Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. Teachers College Record, 97(1), 47-68.

Ladson-Billings, G., Henry, A. (1990). Blurring the borders: Voices of African liberatory pedagogy in the United States and Canada. *Journal of Education, 172(*2), 72-88.

Ladson-Billings, G., Tate, W. F. (2006). *Education research in the public interest: Social justice, action, and policy*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place. *Interchange, 17*(4), 63-84.

Laurie, M. D. (1986). The Union Academy: A Freedmen's Bureau School in Gainesville, Florida. *The Florida Historical Quarterly, 65*(2), 163-174.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lee, C. D. (1993). *Signifying as a scaffold for literary interpretation: The pedagogical implications of an African American discourse genre* (Research Report Series). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Lee, C. D. (1995). A culturally based cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching African-American high school students' skills in literary interpretation. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*, 608-631.

Lee, C. D. (2005). The state of knowledge about the education of African Americans. In J.E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century* (pp.45-71). New York: Routledge.

Lipman, P. (1996). The missing voice of culturally relevant teachers in school restructuring. *The Urban Review, 28*(1), 41-62.

Lomotey, K. (1992). Independent black institutions: African-centered education models. *The Journal of Negro Education, 61*(4), 455-462.

Love, A., Kruger, A. C. (2005). Teacher beliefs and student achievement in urban schools serving African American students. *The Journal of Educational Research, 99(1)*, pp.87-98.

Meier, K. J., Stewart, J., England, R. E. (1989). Race, class, and education. The politics of discrimination. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Milner, H. R. (2003). Reflection, racial competence, and critical pedagogy: How do we prepare preservice teachers to pose tough questions? *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 6*(2), 193-208.

Milner, H. R. (2006). The promise of Black teachers' success with Black students. *Educational Foundations 20*(3-4), 89-104.

Milner, H. R. (2009). Preparing teachers of African American students in urban schools. In L.C. Tillman (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of African American Education* (pp. 269-288). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milner, H. R. (2012). Developing culturally relevant classrooms for urban African American students. In J.L. Moore & C.W. Lewis (Eds.), *Urban school contexts for African American students: Crisis and prospects for improvement* (pp. 143-160). New York: Peter Lang Publishers.

Mitchell, A. (1998). African American teachers: Unique roles and universal lessons. *Education and Urban Society*, *31*(1), 104-122.

Mirza, H. S. (2004). Black women in education: A collective movement for social change. In G. L. Billings & D. Gillborn (Eds.), The Routledge Falmer Reader in Multicultural Education (pp. 201-208). New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

Moll, L., Gonzalez, N. (1995). Funds of knowledge for teaching: using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice, 31*(2), 132-141.

Murrell, P. C. Jr. (2002). African-centered pedagogy. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Myrdal, G. (1994). *An American dilemma. The Negro problem and modern democracy.* New York: Harper Brothers.

National Alliance of Black School Educators, Inc. (1984). *Saving the African American child: Report of the task force on Black Academic and Cultural Excellence.* Washington, DC. Author.

Noblit, G. W. (1993). Power and caring. *American Educational Research Journal*, *30*(1), 23-38.

Noddings, N. (1984). Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The Challenge to Care in Schools.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2002). Educating moral people: A caring alternative to character education. Williston, TX: Teachers College Press,

Orr, E. (1987). *Twice as less.* Ontario, Canada: Penguin Books.

Patton, M. S. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Perry, T. (2003). Up from the parched earth: Toward a theory of African-American achievement. In T. Perry, C. Steele, & A. G. Hilliard III (Eds.), *Young, gifted and Black: Promoting high achievement among African- American students* (pp. 1-108). Boston: Beacon.

Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. G. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African American students*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Philips, T. (2011). Moving beyond our progressive lenses: Recognizing and building on the strengths of teachers of color. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62*(4), 356-366

Porter, A. (1986). From research on teaching to staff development: A difficult step. *Elementary School Journal, 87*(2), 159-164.

Porter, A., Brophy, J. (1988, May). Synthesis of research on good teaching: Insights from the work of the Institute for research on teaching. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,* pp. 74-85.

Richards, S. & Lemelle, S. J. (2005). Pedagogy, politics, and power: Antinomies of the black radical tradition. In W. Watkins (Ed.), *Black protest thought and education* (pp. 5-32). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Roberts, M. A. (2010). Toward a theory of culturally relevant critical teacher care: African American teachers' definitions and perceptions of care for African American students. *Journal of Moral Education, 39*(4), 449-467.

Roberts, M. A., Irvine, J. J. (2009). African American teachers' caring behaviors: The difference makes a difference. In L. C. Tillman (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of African American education* (pp. 141-152). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ross, D. D., Bondy, E., Gallingane, C., Hambacher, E. (2008). Promoting academic engagement through insistence: Becoming a warm demander. Childhood Education, 84(3), 142-146

Russell-Brown, K. (2006). While visions of deviance danced in their heads. In D. D. Troutt (Ed.)*, Black intellectuals explore the meaning of Hurricane Katrina (*111-123). New York: New Press.

Scheurich, J. J. (1998). Highly successful and loving, public elementary schools populated mainly by low-ses children of color: Core beliefs and cultural characteristics. *Urban Education, 33(4)*, 451-491.

Shujaa, M. (1994). *Too much schooling, too little education.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Skiba, R. J., Michael, R., Nardo, A., & Peterson, R. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *The Urban Review, 34*(4), 317-342.

Siddle-Walker, V. (2013). Ninth Annual Brown Lecture in Education Research: Black educators as educational advocates in the decades before Brown v. Board of Education. *Educational Researcher, 42(4),* 207-222.

Siddle-Walker, V. (2012). *Original Intent: Black educators in an elusive quest for justice.* Lecture presented at the Ninth Annual Brown Lecture in Education Research, Washington, D.C.

Siddle-Walker, V. (2000). Valued segregated schools for African American children in the South, 1935-1969: A review of common themes and characteristics. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(3), 253-285.

Siddle Walker, V. (1996). *Their highest potential: An African American school community in the segregated south.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Siddle-Walker, V. (1993). Interpersonal caring in the "good" segregated schooling of African American children: Evidence from the case of Caswell County Training School. *The Urban Review,* 25(1), 63-77.

Siddle-Walker, V., Snary, J. R. (2004). *Racing moral formation: African American perspectives on care and justice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Siddle-Walker, V., & Tompkins, R. H. (2005). Caring in the past: The case of a southern segregated African American school. In V. Siddle-Walker & J. R. Snarey (Eds.), *Racing moral formation: African American perspectives on care and justice* (pp.77-92). New York: Teachers College Press.

Sleeter, C.E. (2012). Sleeter, C. E. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Urban Education, 47*(3), 562-584.

Sleeter, C.E. (2008). Preparing white teachers for diverse students. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, J.D. McIntyre, & K.E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 559-582). New York: Routledge.

Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples.* London: Zed Books.

Smith, L. T. (2000). Kaupapa Maori research. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaming indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 225-247). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Stanford, G.C. (1997). Successful pedagogy in urban schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 2*(2), 107-119.

Tate, W. F. (1996). Urban schools and mathematical reform: Implementing new standards. *Urban Education, 30*(4), 379-521.

Thompson, A. (2004). Caring and colortalk: Childhood innocence in White and Black. In V. Siddle-Walker & J. R. Snarey (Eds.), *Racing moral formation: African American perspectives on care and justice* (pp. 23-37). New York: Teachers College Press.

Tillman, L.C. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: An African American perspective. *Educational Researcher, 31*(9), 3-12.

Tillman, L. C. (2006). Researching and writing from an African American perspective: Reflective notes on three studies. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 19(3), 265-287.

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 409-427.

Tyack, D. (1974). *The one best system*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tyson, C. A. (2003). Research, race, and an epistemology of emancipation. In G. R. Lopez & L. Parker (Eds.), *Interrogating racism in qualitative research methodology* (pp. 19-28). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Tyack, D. (2007). *Seeking common ground: Public schools in a diverse society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

United States Department of Education. (2012). Office for Civil Rights data collection: Discipline. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Villegas, A. M., Davis, D. E. (2007). Preparing teachers of color to confront racial/ethnic disparities in educational outcomes. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, J. D. McIntyre, & K. E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp.583-605). New York: Routledge.

Ware, F. (2002). Black teachers' perceptions of their professional roles and practices. In J.J. Irvine (Ed.), *In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally specific classroom practices* (pp.33-45). New York: Palgrave.

Ware, F. (2006). Warm demander pedagogy: Culturally responsive teaching that supports a culture of achievement for African American students. *Urban Education, 41*(4), 427-456.

Watkins, W. (1996). Reclaiming visions of quality schooling: The legacy of early 20th century Black intellectuals. In M. Shujaa (Ed.), *Beyond Segregation: The politics of quality in African American schooling* (pp. 5-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Weber, G. (1971). *Inner-city children can be taught to read: Four successful schools.* Washington, DC: Council for Basic Education.

Week, Education. (2008, June 5). *Diplomas Count.* Editorial Projects in Education.

West-Olatunji, C. (2005). Incidents in the lives of Harriet Jacobs's children-A reader's theatre: Disseminating the outcomes of research on the Black experience in the academy. In J.E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century* (pp. 329-340). New York: Routledge.

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Woods, C. (1998). *Development arrested: The blues and plantation power in the Mississippi Delta*. London: Verso.

Woodson, C.G. (1933). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers.

Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the colonitality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, its overrepresentation-An argument. *The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257-35.

Wynter, S. (2005). Race and our biocentric belief system: An interview with Sylvia Wynter. In J.E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century* (pp. 361-366). New York: Routledge.

Zeichner, K. (2001). Embracing complexity and community in research on multicultural teacher education. In A. F. Ball & C. A. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (pp. 329-338). Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield Publishers.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melanie Acosta was born in Gainesville, Florida in 1980. She began her education at a public, neighborhood school about a mile from her childhood home in Alachua. After her family moved to Gainesville in 1988, Melanie attended Metcalfe Elementary School, Howard Bishop Middle School, and Eastside High School. In addition to these formal school settings, Gainesville was the place where Melanie participated in an African American cultural program sponsored by the Center of Excellence during the summer of her fourth, fifth, and sixth grade academic year. It was here that Melanie was first expose to the rich cultural history of African American people and developed her own relevant Black identity. These cultural learning experiences piqued Melanie's interest in African American Studies and her determination of succeed. Melanie graduated from Eastside High in June of 1998.

In the summer of 1998, Melanie began college, attending The University of Florida in Gainesville. Here she majored in public relations with a minor in business administration, Though she had always wanted to teach children, Melanie graduated with a bachelor's degree in public relations in 2002, In the same year, Melanie relocated to Jacksonville, Florida with her husband and two small children. Here, Melanie was a stay-at-home mother until 2005, when Winn Dixie Corporate as an associate director of corporate brand development hired her. Realizing after one year that her life served a different purpose, Melanie left Winn Dixie, completed the necessary requirements for Florida teacher certification, and was hired as a fifth grade teacher. Her first school was a large K-6th grade facility serving predominantly White, affluent boys and girls. Here she noticed the subpar treatment of the few African American students who attended the school. She also began to look at teachers and administrators differently in terms of

their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about teaching Black children, children who were poor, and children with learning difficulties.

After one year at Patterson, Melanie and her family relocated back to Gainesville, where she specifically sought a teaching job at her alma mater, Metcalfe Elementary. She was hired there as a second grade teacher in January of 2006. The demographics of Metcalfe had changed since she was a student there. No longer serving a mix of Black and White students of middle socioeconomic status, Metcalfe was now described as a predominantly Black, high poverty elementary school. Melanie worked at Metcalfe for five more years, where she taught fifth graders and third graders and was nominated for Teacher of the Year in October 2006. It was here, though, that Melanie realized that to be a master teacher, she needed to learn more about teaching. While continuing to work as a full-time teacher, Melanie enrolled in the master's program in the Department of Special Education at The University of Florida in May 2008 and graduate with a master's degree in special education in December 2010. While teaching, she continued to note the substandard treatment of Black students as well as teacher's perceptions of student ability. She also she also realized the power and influence teachers had in shaping educational outcomes for African American learners. Both realizations served as the catalyst for Melanie to leave Metcalfe in 2010 and enroll in the doctoral program at The University of Florida.

As a doctoral student at UF, Melanie was involved in a multitude of projects, including teaching a culturally responsive teaching methods course for graduate level pre-service elementary teachers, teaching a literacy-focused practicum course for graduate level pre-service teachers, working as the program director for an afterschool

literacy tutoring and engagement program serving low-income African American students, and assisting in the development of an early literacy curriculum designed to help first graders executive functioning systems. Melanie also became active in several professional organizations such as the American Educational Research Association, and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Florida Association of Teacher Educators, and has been a presenter at each of these organization's conferences.

Melanie would like to continue working in the areas of African American Studies and teacher education. She would also like to continue her work with pre-service and in-service teachers in demonstrating pedagogical excellence in teaching African American students