I Have Hands, So Why Can't I Write?

"The Behavioral, Motivational and Social Influences that Impact

African American Males' Writing Assessments in Grade 3"

EDLD Dissertation

Stephanie A. Duckett

University of Maryland Eastern Shore

Education Leadership Program

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Research Advisory Committee

Dr. Kimetta Hairston, Chair
Dr. Derry Stufft, Research Design
Dr. Patricia Jamison
Dr. Patricia Goslee
Dr. Michael Nugent

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify what behavioral, motivational, and social implications affected the writing of African American males in third grade. The participants in this study were five African American males in third grade at an urban/suburban public school in Maryland. The data collections of this phenomenological study comprised of surveys, classroom and home observations, and journal writings. From the data collected and analyzed four themes were identified. These themes were: (a) students' academic achievement, (b) student' intimate connection to the writing, (c) varied levels of parental involvement, and (d) insufficient and inadequate resources to properly educate the students. Educators, parents, stakeholders, and policymakers may use the outcomes from this study to further engage African American males in the writing process.

These themes confirmed the theoretical schemes in this study. Behavioral, motivational, and social implications impacted the writing process of African American males in third grade. Interviewing and coaching within the school climate, as well as conducting home visits revealed that these African American males struggled with the writing process. Also, it was shown that if African American males in third grade were not in an environment that promoted individuality, provided positive praise, and delivered intimate connections to the assignments through behavioral, motivational, and social exploration, their chance of widening the achievement gap between them and their Caucasian peers was increased.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Micah E. Duckett. You are a fantastic person. I could not have prayed for a better son. You are my greatest joy and the best thing in my entire life. Having you has been the utmost delight that I could experience. You have taught me the true meaning of unconditional love, and for that I want to thank you. You continue to show me that being your mom is a special job that few experience. I am so proud to be your mother. You continue to dream big, for dreams do come true. Make sure you put God first in everything you do, and you will grow to be an exceptional man. I love you with every fiber with which a mother could love a son.

that encouraged and inspired me to finish. Last to my editor, Donna Stufft, I am a firm believer

God sends you the people you need right when you need them. I am happy to call you my friend.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

The sense of touch is how the learning process begins. It starts at birth with the touch of a mother's hands rubbing against her child's skin to let him know he is loved. As children grow, they use their hands to understand the touching mechanisms of the world. Piaget's (1963) cognitive stages of development indicated that schemas are the center bases of the sensory motor stage. Schemas, such as feeling their own skin, putting their fingers in their mouths, and touching things outside of their own skin, let children understand the world. These schemas continue as their hands become the focal point of learning (Colunga, n.d.). This is especially true for boys.

Boys learn how to use their hands in a variety of ways. It begins with touching things that could harm, help, or make them feel good. However, as they mature, young males start to understand just how valuable their hands are. As boys begin to grow, they learn that their hands help them catch, throw, hit, build, and fix things. Usually, it is their mothers who teach them that their hands are to be treasured and should be kept clean. A boy's hands play a significant role in his life, and one important function of his hands is that they are a pathway to his learning.

As boys prepare for school, most parents teach them how to form letters and spell their names; however, some boys don't learn these concepts until they are in school. Working with their peers, they learn the most from pre-school experiences with other students (Davis, 2003). While in school, boys begin to discover from other students how their hands are the keys to unlocking the mysteries of the world. They observe their

classmates drawing, writing, and using their hands to climb and play. As they observe

other students using their hands for discovery, they begin to understand that these same

things can be done in order to learn.

Background of the Problem

Many boys never understand that the power of their hands can lead them to

become critical thinkers and excellent communicators. These boys see writing as a

mandated task they must accomplish on standardized tests (Haddix, 2010). This makes

the physical task of writing feel mundane to them. Writing becomes a chore that must be

performed in order to achieve a certain outcome. This is why the writing process is a

difficult concept for some African American boys to grasp (Haddix, 2010). In addition,

some African American males do not have anyone to motivate them (Harris, 2011;

Noguera, 2003; Tatum, 2005). Since motivation is a key factor in how boys progress in

their writing through grades PK-3, motivation and family support may be links to

improving writing assessments for African American males.

Not all African American boys see writing as a methodical task. Some enjoy the

power of creating writing that tells stories. Also, not all Black males come from low-

income single-family homes; they are born into a variety of lifestyle situations. Some

African American males have strong academic careers and go on to be life-long learners

and productive citizens; however, there are a substantial number of Black boys who face

difficulties and hardships. The most significant hardship is that African American males

have one of the highest dropout rates among all nationalities in the United States

(Blanchett, 2010). Their individual challenges affect how they view society and

education and cause many problems as they try to progress through school. It is these

influences that cause them to feel as though education is a forced institution, which they must attend in order to learn the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics (Noguera, 2003). It is the combinations of motivation, family dynamics, and school climate that impacts how African American boys view writing in education.

The achievement gap in America's public schools is defined as the disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students; especially groups of students defined by race/ethnicity, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status (Reardon, 2011). The most studied achievement gap is that of African American versus Caucasian students. Studies that uncovered this particular achievement gap began in the early 1960's right after desegregation (Reichardt, 2001). Educators started studying reading and mathematics tests to examine how African American and Caucasian students were achieving academically on the same standardized instruments. These tests were aimed at determining if all students were making the same gains in the same academic areas (Reichardt, 2001). However, the process did not begin until Black and White students were educated together. That is when educators noticed a substantial difference in scores. Caucasian students scored significantly higher than African American students on the same academic tests (Reichardt, 2001). In 2009 these trends continued. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results showed that, over time, African American and Hispanic students have made great strides in improving performance in reading and mathematics; however, a breach still separates them from their White peers (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011).

Educators and researchers have long recognized the importance of mastering reading and writing by the end of third grade (Hernandez, 2011; Reardon, 2011). One

study showed that if students have fallen behind by grade three they are likely to stay

behind the remainder of their educational careers, and some will drop out of high school

without earning high school diplomas (Hernandez, 2011). Due to these factors, many

school districts have implemented early childhood education programs to help students to

function on grade level in reading and writing. However, if a student faces more than one

adversity factor, such as living in a single-parent household or living in poverty, he still

has a significant chance of not graduating from high school. This is known as *double*

jeopardy (Hernandez, 2011). On the other hand, if students are receiving the basic needs

of development, they tend to prosper throughout the educational process. This concept is

known as *Motivational Theory*. Maslow (Huitt, 2007) believed that people have five

motivational factors that impact their lives, which include: basic needs, safety needs,

belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualizations (Chapman, 2010).

These key motivational factors impact African American boys' progress in writing from

pre-kindergarten to the third grade.

Motivation Theory (Tatum, 2005) may explain the reason that African American

boys lack the basic skills in education. This theory is described as the forces that initiate,

guide, and maintain goal-oriented behaviors (Tatum, 2005). Abraham Maslow began

studying what motivates human behavior in 1945. Through his study he developed five

stages of motivation, which give insight into what motivates a person to achieve

(Maslow, 1946). In order for a person to advance to the next level of motivation, the

previous stage must first be achieved. Maslow believed that people have certain needs,

which are unchanging and genetic in origin (Cherry, 2010). In order for African

American boys to achieve academic success, educators must consider their needs and hierarchical order (Cherry, 2010).

Understanding why African American males struggle with writing is an important issue that needs to be addressed in the field of Education Leadership. Education leaders must understand the effects of family dynamics and programs that can assist young African American males in order to facilitate their achievement in writing. These strategies may help Black boys realize that writing is not just for answering questions on standardized tests; that writing can help them be creative and critical thinkers. Writing can open up avenues in academic areas and prepare them to be college and career ready.

Understanding why so many African American boys come to school already lacking the basic skills to write their names, the alphabet, and numbers is puzzling to most educators (Tatum, 2005). However, researching why African American boys struggle from the beginning of their educational careers may give insight into what skills and strategies parents need to employ in order to help their sons be successful throughout the writing process and their academic careers. This study may uncover the necessary skills and strategies African American males need. It will seek to explain why certain skills could lead to higher scores on standardized tests. These skills and strategies may help parents keep their sons on grade level in order for them to graduate with their Caucasian and Asian peers and in turn reduce the achievement gap (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Behavioral, motivational, and social factors have an impact on writing skills and continue to affect the achievement gap. African American males come to school lacking the basic skills to achieve academic success in the early stages of education. Common factors that continue to hinder academic achievement in African American males are the lack of support and strategies necessary to make them academically successful within the school.

Another factor that hinders African American males from becoming academically successful is school dynamics. Many Black boys are being educated in some of the poorest schools in the United States (Noguera, 2014). As a result, even if they come to school already reading and writing, they tend to fall behind their peers in wealthier schools because they are being educated by teachers who are not as highly qualified as their peers' teachers (Tatum, 2010). The combination of school and family dynamics make it difficult for African American boys to achieve academically in the writing process.

Significance of the Study

Reading, mathematics, and science are the crucial components of academic achievement (Prager, 2011). Two of these three academic areas are tested yearly in grades three through eight for accountability as required by the statute, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Science is tested only at certain designated grade levels. Writing is considered a component of reading, yet there is no emphasis or accountability regarding writing. It is not tested separately as an indicator of academic achievement. This is despite the findings of Prager (2011) who stated, " indicators have shown if students are

not writing on grade level by grade four, they risk falling behind for the rest of their academic careers" (p 2).

African American males are the leading group in academic failure. Black male students' test scores are the lowest of all performance groups in reading and mathematics (Singleton, 2009). Research has shown that Black males face many life adversities and that these factors affect how they achieve academically (Harris, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Tatum, 2005). Ellis (2010) wrote: "A significant factor that affects their academic achievement is family dynamics" (p.4). "Boys who grow up in fatherless homes are more likely than those with father-present homes to have trouble establishing appropriate sex roles and gender identities" (p. 4). Another fact that has been consistently associated with the achievement gap is school disengagement by African American males (Carter, 2003).

Studying the academic achievement gap in writing may be an added tool to help lawmakers, parents, and educators understand how writing is an essential module of education. The study may be a resource for creating strategies for parents and teachers to help children understand the fundamentals of writing. This investigation may provide insight into how writing is viewed by Black boys.

Writing is an important skill that is needed to be successful. Students need to be able to demonstrate an ability to write on grade level by the third grade (Reardon, 2011). If they do not, the ramifications are insurmountable. It is important to understand why there is not an emphasis on writing for African American males. Moreover, it is imperative to understand why some of them are not successful critical writers (Haddix, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the many factors that affect African American boys' writing, including motivation, family dynamics, and school environment. Researching when and why African American boys write may provide strategies and techniques to help them gain an understanding of what is needed to be academically successful, which in turn may make them better readers and writers. The majority of the studies being conducted examine third and fourth grade reading skills. There are very few studies that examine what is happening with students' writing. Researching what is happening in grades PK-3 may give insight into what is occurring in the early childhood stages of education. Observing African American boys' writing skills in third grade may give some understanding of what interventions and strategies can be implemented before fourth grade to help them become better writers. Overall, this research may provide descriptors of the many adversities Black boys face in education as well as how to address these issues in order to help them be life-long learners and writers.

Research Questions

- What behavioral, motivational, and social implications affect the writing skills of African American males in an urban school district in Maryland in grade 3?
- What impact does school climate have on African American males' achievement in school and on assessment scores?

Relevance to Education Leadership

This research was conducted to discover strategies that may help African American boys be successful with writing. The results of this study may give African

American parents approaches to help their sons build a solid foundation and be motivated about their writing.

The research may be beneficial to school leadership, because there are few studies regarding the improvement and empowerment of writing skills of African American boys. The examination may enhance understanding of how Black boys can be motivated to participate in writing. This investigation may give parents the tools needed to help their sons understand the power of writing so that they can be academically successful in school.

Theoretical Framework

Learning and succeeding in school require active engagement, regardless of social class, race, and ethnicity (Committee on Increasing High School Student' Engagement and Motivation to Learn: Board on Children, Youth and Families; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; National Research Council, 2003). Students need to know they are valued in the classroom and that what they are learning is relevant to their everyday lives. If these needs are not being met, their academic success is minimal. Therefore, it takes the school community to actively engage in the pupil's school success. In order to educate African American males, educators need to understand what behavioral, motivational, and social implications affect their achievement (Noguera, 2008; Tatum, 2008). Educators need to understand how Black males learn and what influences them to engage in the educational process. This is relevant because many African American males come to school deficient in reading, writing, and mathematics. If their first interaction with their classroom teacher is negative, it may impede their academic success (Noguera, 2008). Hence, that first interaction with the teacher needs to be positive. Teachers are the primary classroom leaders and therefore carry the

responsibility of managing learning in the classroom (Lumsden, 1994). Educators must motivate their students in order to keep them actively engaged in the learning process. Bomia et al. (1997) wrote, "Student motivation concerns students' desire to participate in knowledge-gaining activities, and includes their willingness, need, and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process" (p. 1). Skinner and Belmont (1991) took it a step further, by

> noting that students who are motivated to engage in school select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest. (p. 3)

Black males need positive stimuli in order to engage in the learning process. Therefore, motivational, behavioral, and social implications are the groundwork to educating and helping Black boys become academically successful.

Motivation Theory

Motivation Theory explains the basic needs of African American males that are necessary to be met in order for them to learn and become proficient writers. A.H. Maslow (1943), a motivational theorist, researched the basic needs of people. He wrote,

> In good theory there is no such entity as a need of the stomach or mouth, or a genital need. There is only a need of the individual. It is John Smith who wants food, not John Smith's stomach. Furthermore satisfaction comes to the whole individual and not just a part of him. Food satisfies John Smith's hunger and not his stomach's hunger. (p. 85)

In order to educate African American males, educators must motivate the entire child, not just a part of him.

Behavioral Theory

Another foundation of learning for African American males relates to behavior theory. B.F. Skinner (1948), a behavioral theorist, based his entire behavioral theory on "operant conditioning." This meant that an organism's specific behavior was followed by a consequence, and the nature of the consequence modified the organism's tendency to repeat the behavior in the future (Boeree, 2006). Skinner (1948) identified three types of responses or operant behavior: (a) neutral operants, (b) reinforcers, and (c) punishers. These three types of operants lead to different consequences. Neutral operants neither increase nor decrease the chances of a behavior being repeated; however, reinforcers increase that chance, and punishers decrease that chance (Skinner, 1948). If Black boys receive negative reinforcements in writing they are more likely to abandon the craft and never develop a positive attitude towards the skill. However, if Black boys receive positive reinforcements in writing, they are more likely to have a successful experience with lettering.

Social Development Theory

The implications of social interactions support the final foundation needed for educating African American males. Social Development Theory focused on the cognitive development of people (McLeod, 2007). Vygotsky (1978), a social theorist, stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. Even though Piaget believed that children's development must necessarily precede their learning (McLeod, 2007), Vygotsky (1978) argued, "learning is a necessary and universal aspect

of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological functions" (p. 90). In other words, social learning tends to precede development (McLeod, 2007). Vygotsky believed children learned things socially through the environment before being educated through schooling (McLeod, 2007).

The foundations of motivation, behavior, and social implications are often introduced at birth through a child's parents. If parents give their children encouragement, the child in return is eager to please them. This learned behavior can spill over into the academic world. If African American males are given motivational, behavioral, and social stimuli by a variety of sources within the educational community, they have a better chance of achieving academic success (Estrella, 2007). Also, when Black boys know they are being stimulated to learn, they are more eager to reach their academic goals (Estrella, 2007).

Research Design

Qualitative methods were utilized for this study. The data told a story about the behavioral, motivational, and social factors that influenced the African American males in the study to write. The researcher conducted open-ended surveys, took field notes during observations, and evaluated the journal writings of Black African American students in the third grade (Hernandez, 2011). The results indicated what factors influenced them to write and what factors influenced them not to write (Tatum, 2012).

Phenomena to be Studied

Qualitative research has a variety of approaches. The approaches that are mainly studied are narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case

studies; and these approaches have similarities and differences (Creswell, 2012). This investigation was conducted in the phenomenological approach.

The phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Studying African American boys in the third grade enrolled in the same public school in Maryland allowed the researcher to understand their everyday lives. The pupils were eight to nine years of age and they described what occurrences they had in common. A phenomenological study focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience the same phenomenon (e.g., grief is universally experienced) (Creswell, 2012). The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce the participants' experiences with a phenomenon into a description of the universal essence; a "grasp of the very nature of the thing," (Van Manen, 1990, p.177). This investigation allowed the examiner to view the study through the lens of how behavioral, motivational, and social implications affected African American males writing skills. These samples helped determine what strategies and skills may help influence African American males to write.

Participants in the Study

The participants for this study were five African American boys aged eight to nine years old. They were third graders attending an elementary school in a large metropolitan county in Maryland. Each participant was a product of a single or dual parent family. In order for the students to participate, they had to be struggling readers and writers. All the participants were given pseudonyms and had consent to participate from the parents or guardians.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative researchers rely quite extensively on in-depth interviewing. The researcher conducted a phenomenological study of the students to gather specific data on their writing behaviors. Through this method the research question, "What are the motivational, behavioral, and social factors that impact the writing of African American males in grades PK-3?" was addressed. The students were observed and interviewed in their school environment. This approach allowed the researcher to conduct an extensive interview with the male students on their motivation to write at school. The data was collected in the form of journal and memo samples. Journal samples consisted of the student answering a variety of questions in a journal notebook. Once the students submitted their samples, the data was coded for similarities and differences through themes. This data was also used to understand the impact that school and family dynamics have on African American boys' writing skills.

In order to complete this research on why African American boys have difficulty with writing, 20 students and their parents were given an Attitude Survey Portrait (ASP) questionnaire and Informed Consent Form. This questionnaire evaluated how the students and parents viewed writing. Once the questionnaire was completed, the information was compiled and coded, and a select group of students were chosen according to their answers to questions about their vision of writing. The researcher analyzed the Scholastic Reading Inventory test (SRI) and Prose Constructed Response task (PCR) scores of this group of students in order to choose five students to participate in the study. These students all fit a certain criteria, scoring proficient, basic two, basic

one or at risk on the SRI and PCR. These scores gave insight into how the boys viewed

writing and why they were struggling with the writing process.

Once the students were chosen and parental approval was granted, these students

were interviewed one-on-one to gain an understanding of their opinions of writing and

how writing inside of the classroom affected their academic achievement. This

information was coded to analyze what tendencies were being observed across all of the

students. Once the data was coded, it was recoded to ensure accuracy. These codes

assisted in discerning how the classroom environment supported or obstructed the

participant's ability to engage in the writing process within the classroom.

During the observations, the examiner took copious notes on how the classroom

atmosphere affected each student. The researcher observed what social, behavioral, and

motivational factors influenced the pupils to write or not to write. These outcomes were

coded to evaluate the factors that affect African American boys writing within the

classroom environment.

To conclude, the participants participated in journaling. Through journaling the

students focused on the writing process. They wrote how they felt about journaling and

what motivated them to write or not to write. The boys described what factors influenced

them to take part in the daily writing practice. Each participant journal wrote daily for 30

days. At the end of the 30 days, the journals were coded for similarities and differences.

These codes provided themes about writing inside of the classroom environment.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

The data from the participants' ASP surveys was analyzed to create codes of how

African American boys feel about writing. These codes created themes, which produced

strategies that may motivate African American boys to write. Through these codes and

themes the researcher gained an understanding of behavioral factors that influence their

writing.

The data analysis of this investigation allowed the researcher to tell each

participant's story. This may help other educators to recognize and understand the

behavioral and motivational factors of writing. How the participants were influenced to

write during the early stages of education was examined. This data was analyzed and

examined to ascertain how the participants responded to writing prompts as they related

to family dynamics and school climate.

Assumptions

Ormrod (2010) posited, "Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the

research problem itself could not exist" (p. 62). An assumption in this study was that

African American boys are not motivated to write because of their family dynamics.

Stereotypes often depict African American males who living in single-family households

as living in poverty (Carter, 2003). People assume that many of these parents had bad

experiences with education themselves and this affected their ability to motivate their

children. Due to assumptions such as this, many African American males face

adversities in education, and these factors can affect their motivation and behaviors

regarding education.

School climate affects how students write. This is the age of technology, and

many students are equipped to be technologically competent. They have the latest and

greatest tools of technology; to them, writing with a pen or pencil and paper is the

traditional, old fashioned way of writing. Students are now equipped with a variety of

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devices for writing, such as computers, I Pads, and cell phones, which help them to write in a way that is not considered the standard form of writing (Haddix, 2010).

Another key assumption regarding school climate is the impact teachers have on student writing. Students often see writing as a methodical way of answering questions. They do not see it as a means of increasing vocabulary and reading. Teachers play a role in introducing writing to students in a way that empowers their academics. Instructors need instructional models that help them to promote and support writing in a systematic way. They also need to foster an environment that endorses writing as a learning tool (Brown & Stephens, 1995). These assumptions factor into how African American boys progress through the writing process, as well as how the researcher conceptualized the data in this study.

Limitations

Limitations are likely to reveal how the current research work may improve in future experiments and what caveats should be considered in trying to incorporate new information into the evolving body of scientific evidence (Ioannidis, 2006). Some limitations may be identified when researching how writing is affecting the achievement gap in African American boys in grade three.

One limitation was from the teacher's perspective. When conducting this type of research, the question at the forefront will always be, "Is the teacher doing enough to ensure that the students are on grade level?" Teachers may often wonder if they are doing all they can to ensure that all students in their classrooms are achieving academic success. Ensuring that all students are achieving academic success means prescribing an educational plan that is tailored to each individual student's needs. The process of

teaching students and knowing what motivates them to write and be successful at writing is a two-fold process. For example, one dynamic is understanding what influences children to write, and the other is knowing how much knowledge about writing students are bringing to the classroom. The information from this study may help diagnose and prescribe a method of teaching that can help each student progress through writing at his or her own level of education.

Another limitation was understanding how the achievement gap is viewed. The achievement gap is only as good as the test that is analyzing the assessment itself (Simon, 2011). It questions whether students are learning the same academic skills at the same level as their peers. It is a data driven analysis of how students score academically across racial lines.

Research bias in this study came from the fact that this researcher is the parent of an African American male student and believes that parents should take an active role in their children's education beginning at birth.

Delimitations

Delimitations are those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study (Simon, 2011). Researching why African American males are not motivated to write because of family dynamics and school climate, which in turn affect the achievement gap provided a perspective on education in the 21st century.

Examples of the delimitations in this study were the participants, the region of study, and the research questions. The participants in this study were all African American boys in grade three. They all attended the same school in Maryland. The school demographic was predominantly African American. The research questions that

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drove the investigation were: "What behavioral, motivational, and social implications affect the writing skills of African American males in an urban school district in Maryland in grade three?" and "What impact does school climate have on African American males' achievement in school and on assessment scores?"

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap – Disparity on a number of educational measures between the performances of groups of students, especially groups of students defined by race/ethnicity, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status.

African American – An American of African and especially of Black African descent.

Behavior – The way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others. The way in which an animal or person acts in response to a particular situation or stimulus.

Caucasian - Anthropology of, pertaining to, or characteristic of one of the traditional racial divisions of humankind, marked by fair to dark skin, straight to tightly curled hair, and light to very dark eyes, and originally inhabiting Europe, parts of North Africa, western Asia, and India; no longer in technical use.

Family dynamics – Single female, single male, dual parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, adoptive parent, foster parent, group home, and same sex families.

Hispanic - Of or relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries, especially those of Latin America.

Motivation – The reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way; the general desire or willingness of someone to do something.

Social – Of or relating to society or its organization

School climate – Teachers, administrators, support personal, curriculum, and

resources.

Summary

Writing is a complex task. It is done in a way that requires a student to be well

versed in the English language. In order for a student to write correctly in English, he

must first master how to speak proper English. However, far less attention has been

given to culturally related ways of using English in oral and written forms (Ball, 1992).

This has caused dissention in how we view, educate, and evaluate African American

males throughout the educational process. Davis (2003) wrote,

African American males challenge schools in many ways. Perhaps the single

most important challenge that has garnered recent attention in research reports,

policy, documents, and public commentary has been the increasing disparity in

the educational achievement of African American Males relative to their peers. (p.

517)

Many Black boys struggle to gain an identity inside of education. They don't

know whether being well-educated goes against everything they learn culturally or if it is

the foundation needed to be a successful citizen. With all the challenges some African

American boys face at birth and through their primary years, it's no wonder that they

view school as a place where they have to go, because law requires it. Few Black boys

get to see education as the foundation where they can grow, be stimulated, and be

challenged. Some view it as an institution that demeans and belittles their efforts to gain

knowledge (Tatum, 2005). With so many misfortunes, no wonder most African

American boys struggle with the concept of writing.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Regardless of how children choose to write, whether with a pen, pencil and paper, texting, or typing on a keyboard, the most important idea is that they are scripting words to increase their knowledge. Writing is a vital component to learning, because parents, whether dual or single, want their children to be academically successful. Webster (2011) defines traditional writing as the activity or skill of marking coherent words on paper and composing text. However, in the 21st century writing tools not only include pens and pencils, but also computers and other types of keyboards. In the past, parents put pencils in their children's hands to assist them with learning and writing their ABC's and 123's. In today's classrooms, most children write using technology.

Writing is an intricate component to learning (Ball, 1992; Brown & Stephens, 1995; Hefner, 2004). Most children want to learn and gain knowledge and understanding from all aspects of their lives in order to be successful in school (Harris, 2011). In most subjects this can be achieved if students are motivated; however, the achievement gap indicates that the majority of African American males lack the motivation to write and be effective learners (Harris, 2011). Kirp (2010) stated, "It is hard to overstate the plight of African American boys and young men in our education system today. On every measure of educational attainment, they fare the worst; despite waves of reform, their situation has not changed appreciably in 30 years" (p. 1).

Most Black boys are already below grade level entering kindergarten. It continues to spiral downward in grades thereafter. In the 2008 National Assessment of

Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statics, 2009) – the massive,

federally mandated report card on student performance, measured in grades four, eight

and 12 – the reading and writing scores of African American boys in eighth grade were

barely higher than the scores of White girls in fourth grade (Kirp, 2010). On the National

Education Longitudinal Survey, 54% of 16-year-old African American males scored

below the 20th percentile, compared with 24% of White males and 42% of Hispanic

males (Kirp, 2010). Haddix (2010) stated, "I believe that many boys turn off to writing

because they are asked to write about things that they care little about" (p. 342). This

lack of motivation is a prime indicator of male achievement. Behavioral, motivational,

and social implications affect African American males' writing skills and their ability to

achieve proficiency on standardized testing (Cherry, 2010; Kirp, 2010; Kunjufu, 2011;

Noguera, 2003). Even though laws like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) were created to

address these low performing academic areas and scores, the marks remain stagnated

(Sloan, 2010). In a speech at the National Press Club, Secretary Duncan accused states of

setting the bar too low in order to comply with the regulations of the No Child Left

Behind Act. He believed that states were "dumbing down" the curricula in order for

students to test proficient on standardized testing (Sloan, 2010). Duncan (2009) said,

> When children are told they are 'meeting a state standard', the logical assumption
>
> for that child or for that parent is to think they are on-track to be successful. But
>
> because these standards have been dummied down and lowered so much in so
>
> many places, when a child is 'meeting the state standard' they are in fact barely
>
> able to graduate from high school. And they are absolutely inadequately prepared
>
> to go to a competitive university, let alone graduate. (para. 4)

This literature review addresses how African American males' writing skills affect the achievement gap. The following topics are reviewed: (a) the history of education and its impact on the African American Male; (b) the history of writing; (c) behavioral, motivational, and social implications, to include the family dynamics which affect African American males writing skills; and (d) the methodology used to investigate these theories. The literature review discusses qualitative research methods and data analysis.

History of Education and the African American Male

If practiced daily, writing is a skill that enhances a child's vocabulary (Cason, 1991). Most children have a strong desire to learn and seek out new experiences; however, sometimes their dreams get lost. Gorski (1999) wrote,

An education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their choice of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (para. 7)

History demonstrates that African Americans fought for quality and equity in education. From Brown vs. Board of Education to Goals 2000: Educate America Act, current data in the achievement gap demonstrates how African American males are struggling for equality in education. Black males struggle from birth with some of the concepts of education (Noguera, 2003). They tend to not receive the foundation of education. Researchers have yet to discover the reasoning behind this fact even though

there have been many reforms to education to help the struggling African American male (Harris, 2011; Kunjufu, 2011; Noguera, 2003).

Reading, writing, and mathematics are the foundation of education. Students must master these three components in order to maneuver through schooling. Studies and research have been done to help students master these subjects (Herman, 2009; Hernandez, 2011; Tatum, 2005). Researchers have created skills and strategies to assist students academically (Herman, 2009). These components are essential in order to create life-long learners. They are needed for a student to transition into adulthood; however, if they are not mastered, children often fail to be productive citizens (Ellis, 2010).

Reading and math are the most studied subjects (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). They have been studied since the conception of formal education to understand how they are vital in education. Studies such as Raising Minority Academic Achievement (James, Jurich, & Estes 2001) and Teachers, School, and Academic Achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005) were conducted to compare and contrast how one subject is easily mastered by students over the other subject. There have also been many studies on how different nationalities have mastered these subjects (Herman, 2009). However, very little research has been done on becoming skilled at writing.

Some children are read to at birth. Parents spend hours with their children teaching them the ABC's of reading. They help their children identify the letters, but very little time is spent on mastering the writing process so that they can write the letters (Clark, 2011). Writing seems to be a component of education that very little practice time is spent on outside of the school setting.

Impacts of Education on African American Boys

The most important quality of life indicators, such as education, employment, finances, and housing, suggest that African American males are in deep trouble (Noguera, 2003). African American males lead the nation in homicides, both as victims and perpetrators, in what observers regard as an alarming trend (Noguera, 2008). They have the fastest growing rate of suicide and have the highest probability of dying in the first year of life (Kunjufu, 2011; Noguera, 2003, 2008). Moreover, African American males have the lowest indicators of academic performance, which contributes to the academic achievement gap (Noguera, 2003).

The Implications of the Achievement Gap

The study of the achievement gap began in the early 1960's after segregation (Reichardt, 2001). This study began to determine the disparities in education between Black and White students. Its goal was to define why African Americans were scoring significantly lower than their Caucasian counterparts on the same standardized tests in reading and math (Reichardt, 2001). Researchers wanted to get to the heart of the matter to understand why children being educated in the same facilities with qualified educators had such disparate scores on examinations (Davis, 2003; Harris, 2010; James et al., 2001).

Once segregation was abolished, the Federal Government left it up to the states to educate their students according to state standards. In 1969, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) released its first official study on the achievement gap (Wenglinsky, 2004). The findings were startling, and showed that African Americans were scoring significantly lower than their Caucasian peers. The most concerning result,

however, was that 17-year-old African American students were performing on the same level as 13-year-old Caucasian students (Rudalevige, 2004). From that study, many policies were developed to help raise the expectations of education among all children in America.

President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. This law governed education for over 30 years, and in it was incorporated the "Head Start" program, which was aimed to help economically disadvantaged children by providing them with a precursor to kindergarten (The Social Welfare History Project, 2012). Head start was established so that economically disadvantaged students would come to kindergarten prepared for that grade level and with a foundation of education. It was Lyndon B. Johnson's dream as a teacher for students to be prepared for school. He believed that equal access to education was vital to every child's ability to lead a productive life (The Social Welfare History Project, 2012).

In 1994, President Bill Clinton saw that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was not helping to close the achievement gap, so he created a bill known as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This legislation explicitly addressed the achievement gap. The two legislations were to work closely together to change education from a *seat time* and *quality of courses* perspective to one of *quality of curriculum and instruction* and their *results* (Rudalevige, 2004).

Then in 2002 George W. Bush introduced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. By this time, politicians, lawmakers, teachers, parents, and students were ready for a positive change within education. They believed that education would now

be fully funded with accountability for achievement. From 2002 to 2004, NCLB received praise because student achievement began to rise. Schools across America saw gains like never before in math, reading, and science. Scores were increasing overall through high stakes testing; however, when it came to the achievement gap, the results had a shocking outcome. It showed that the gap was widening between African Americans and Caucasians, Hispanics and Caucasians, and Hispanics and Blacks (Austin, 2009). One of the more interesting results was that Latinos were starting to pass African Americans in reading, math, and science scores (Austin, 2009). According to the NAEP results in 2008, African Americans had made slight gains on high stakes testing since 2004; however, they were still significantly lower than their Caucasian peers despite President Bush's law. Some believed these observed gains on tests reflected an emphasis on teaching students strictly how to take high stakes tests. Conversely, when it came to critical thinking and higher order thinking questions, African American and Latino students were falling further behind on these tests (Austin, 2009). These were all indicators that the achievement gap was widening.

Lawmakers and educators realized the need to create some uniform standards that would help all students, particularly students of color, achieve academically (Sloan, 2010). This was the conception of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The CCSS is coordinated by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to create uniform standards for school children across the country (Common Core Initiative website, 2010). The standards mandate "certain critical types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American

literature, and the writings of Shakespeare," (p. 3) say the NGA and the CCSSO on the CCSS Initiatives website (2010), but states, districts, and schools make the remaining content decisions (Sloan, 2010). These initiatives strive to create a uniform process in reading and mathematics for all students, regardless of the state in which the education is received. These changes created homogeneousness in writing across the states, too. The CCSS for writing says that students must achieve the ability to "write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence (p. 3)." The standards also focus on students' mastery of research, opinion writing, analytical writing, and presentation skills (Sloan, 2010).

No other topic is closer to the heart of African American concerns about equity in K-12 education than the racial achievement gap (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006). Research has proven that if a Black boy does not test on grade level by third grade he has a greater chance of remaining below grade level his entire academic career, dropping out of high school, and facing going to jail (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997). There have been a plethora of studies on why so many African American males have been unsuccessful in public education (Bennett, 2011; Haskins & Rouse, 2005; Hernandez, 2011; Hunt, 2009; Tatum, 2005). The foundation of the majority of their incompetence in schooling is their socio-economic status (Hernandez, 2011). Many African American males face the challenge known as *double jeopardy* (Hernandez, 2011), which means having more than one risk factor when it comes to education (Hernandez, 2011). All of these issues have left many Black male students lacking the basic knowledge to thrive in education, causing them to feel as though they cannot be successful in school. For this reason

studying the achievement gap between African American males and Caucasian males has become a focal point of research in education (Harris, 2011).

Many researchers have studied intently the achievement gap in reading and math (Bennett, 2011; Haskins & Rouse, 2005; Hernandez, 2011; Hunt, 2009; Tatum, 2005). Tatum (2005) wrote a book entitled *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males; Closing the Achievement Gap.* He took a look into why so many Black males cannot read. Tatum wanted to study and understand what they were lacking in education. This study was aimed to prove that the disparities stretched across socio-economic lines and to find out if it was a general fact that Black male students were being "left behind" in the educational system. Tatum (2005) focused on how Black males were lagging in reading inside the achievement gap (p. 15), and he stated that:

Black males will never close the gap because of four barriers: (a) there is no clear strategy to attain this goal, (b) there is no clear definition of the role of literacy instruction for Black males, (c) educators disagree on how to provide effective reading instructions for struggling readers in the primary grades, and (d) educators and policy makers have focused on strategies and skill instructions while constantly ignoring curriculum and forms of pedagogy that will increase reading achievement for Black males. (p. 5)

What this study did not discover was how this affected African American males' abilities to write and whether or not writing proficiently would help close the achievement gap.

Education Reform

Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka, KS (1954) was the landmark case that began desegregation in America's public schools. This case integrated the public school

system (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). It was determined that Black and White students could no longer be considered separate but equal, and thus allowed all students in the United States to be educated in the same facilities by the same qualified educators. However, this landmark case brought to the forefront the disparities in education. It acknowledged that even though Black students were receiving an education, they were not getting the same quality of services as their White or Hispanic counterparts (Brooks, 1997). When desegregation began, many educators noticed that some Black students were not on the same *grade level* as their White counterparts who were in the same *grade*. The most significant gap was between Black and White male students (Brooks, 1997; Davis, 2003; McMillian, 2004).

Segregation was outlawed in 1954; however, official studies of the achievement gap did not begin until the early 1960's (Reichardt, 2001). Educators began by studying students' mathematics and reading scores to examine how Black and White students were achieving academically on the same standardized test. This data showed that even though the children were being educated in the same facilities, African American and Hispanic students were achieving at a slower pace than their White peers. The information did not address whether or not students were receiving the same curriculum or if they were all being taught by highly qualified educators. Most of the data did not directly focus on student achievement inside of the achievement gap.

Student Achievement

Black boys are often seen as rough and tough individuals (Harris & Robinson, 2007). At an early age, they are taught how to climb trees, wrestle, run fast, and catch balls. Black boys are taught these concepts because of how they are seen in society as

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athletic, strong, and having the ability to conquer manual tasks. Many African American boys are not seen as scholarly or having the ability to compete academically, which may be a reason why some parents spend little time with their boys on reading, writing, and mathematics (Harris & Robinson, 2007; Noguera, 2003). Studies have shown that these factors contribute to many Black boys being placed in special education classes and vocational education programs (Fanion, 2010).

Early Childhood Education

It is important that children get the basic needs (reading, writing, and computation) of education. Enrolling children in preschool programs to receive trained help is an excellent start. Research has proven that children who attend a center or preschool program enter school more ready to learn; however, the proportion of children enrolled in a program and the quality of care they receive differs by race and ethnicity (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Early childhood programs introduce children to a variety of experiences. When eager children share a classroom of authentic experiences, the classroom becomes a community of learners (Katz, 2001). Students need these activities and experiences in order to grow academically. The *power of play* understands that while a student plays he is also learning. A shared activity provides meaningful social context for learning. Social interactions provide support in a physical sense as well as a motivational sense. Through talking and communicating with peers, the gaps and flaws in one's thinking become explicit and accessible to correction. "Children's thoughts become sequential and visible to the thinker" (Leong & Bodrova, 1996, p. 110).

These concepts are even more important to African American boys. Black boys are already behind because of the social and family disparities that exist at birth and continue in their lives (Edelman, 2011). Frank Porter spoke at a symposium on the achievement gap and stated, "When Black boys start at the low level they stay at that low level, and the disparity continues" (Edelman, 2011, p. 2). It is important that Black boys have a significant foundation of parental involvement in the early stages of their academic careers. With parental support and the proper foundation in education, Black boys can get off to a good start in education.

Researchers have conducted studies on the impact of education throughout the African American community (Bennett, 2011; Cason, 1991; Harris, 2010; Tatum, 2005). Throughout this research the common denominator is that African American boys struggle with education (Harris, 2010). Many investigations have created strategies to make them successful with reading and math, but little research has been conducted on writing. Examining the impact that writing has on education may provide further information into how researchers can help African American boys be successful in school. The outcomes may provide parents and students with strategies that can be used to assure that academic success.

Right Brain Learner

In America, African Americans make up only 17% of school age children, yet they make up 41% of students in special education (Kunjufu, 2011). Of those students 81% are Black boys and the majority of these boys are being taught by White female teachers (Kunjufu, 2011). The majority of these classrooms are set up for students to be quietly seated in a chair, listening intently to the teacher as she instructs. Are these

classrooms conducive to learning for the African American male? African American males are considered to be right brain learners (Kunjufu, 2011), and as such they need to work on hands-on activities. They prefer to work with manipulatives and art projects rather than to write essays (West, 2010).

Black boys need to be in a high-energy learning environment that motivate Black males to move about, discover, and explore; classrooms that allow for a learning style, which is primary for the visual-picture, oral/auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic African American male (Kunjufu, 2011). These types of classrooms motivate Black boys to learn at their peak, allowing them to actively engage in the learning process, in turn allowing them to progress through the writing process and motivating them to do well in education (Harris & Robinson, 2007). However, the majority of classes that offers that, like physical education, art, and music, have been cut from many schools' curriculums for budget reasons (Kunjufu, 2011).

History of Writing

Before there was writing there were only verbal communication, with cultural norms, rituals, and stories passed on orally from one generation to the next. As language and cultures evolved, so did the need for written communication (Handwriting Development, 2007). The need for a better way to communicate brought about the need for people to create symbols and pictures to visualize the messages they wanted to create. This technique was the creation of writing.

Writing has evolved throughout the years. In the beginning, writings known as pictographs and symbols represented people, places, and things (Handwriting Development, 2007). Now writing has taken on new meaning, from the implementation

of the pen and pencil to typewriters, keyboards, and computers. All these instruments are

vital to helping individuals become successful writer; however, if the fundamentals of

writing are not understood, the art of writing is lost (Ball, 1992).

Reading vs. Writing in the Classroom

Most children learn to read and write at an early age. Reading and writing go

hand-in-hand, and in order to be a good writer one must be a good reader; however, the

emphasis is more on reading (Boud, 2001). Experts say that children must master the art

of reading at an early age to ensure they are successful in education (Graves, 2006;

Tatum, 2005). Children must come to school and be able to identify their ABC's.

However, at this point there is no importance placed on how to write and spell. Early

childhood educators spend an abundance of time on reading, but not a lot of time on

writing (Ball, 1992). Children in early childhood programs spend time coloring, but they

spend little time on spelling and writing (Graves, 2006). Even when parents spend hours

reading to their children, how much time is being spent on actual writing? Do parents

understand the importance of writing? In the 21st century of education, modern

technology is doing most of the writing for school age students. More and more parents

and educators are allowing their children and students to use computers to help them with

writing, and hence, many children are not motivated to write manually (Boud, 2001).

Some parents spend hours reading to their children. Mothers and fathers

understand the importance of their children grasping the concepts of reading at an early

age (Tatum, 2005). Parents take the time to help their children in the areas of phonemic

awareness and comprehension of words (Ellis, 2010). However, in the area of writing,

most parents only focus on the basics. They teach their kids how to spell their names and

to write their addresses and telephone numbers. Not much time is spent on expanding their children's vocabularies, which would in turn enhance their writing skills (Haddix, 2010).

The Perceptions of Writing

Writing is a tedious process of organizing words and phrases to make complete sentences (Ball, 1992). It is a procedure that if practiced can take on life with new meaning, but if one does not get an understanding of the art of writing at an early age, it can seem like a very daunting task. African American boys need to learn to enjoy this skill at an early age so they don't feel that it is just a task that is necessary to complete while in school (Haddix, 2010).

Writing can be a prime indicator of success for some Black boy students (Hefner, 2004). It can gauge how they will succeed in their later years of schooling, because writing is necessary to succeed in college. W.E. B. Dubois wrote these words 100 years ago: "Life in America was infinitely different for Blacks. For all its evils, segregation offered the sobering reality to Blacks that progress occurred when they themselves fought for it" (Hefner, 2004, p. 1). The fundamentals of success for African American males lies in ensuring that a sound education has been obtained. This means mastering the talents of reading and writing (Ball, 1992; Brown & Stephens, 1995).

Writing and African American Males

The use of paper and pen is no longer the "norm" of writing. Writing is now done in a variety of methods: i-Pads, computers, typewriters, and cell phones. These devices allow writing to take on a new meaning (Cason, 1991). However, some of the devices do not require knowledge of grammar and mechanics in order for individuals to

communicate. For many years, a school district in Maryland did not emphasize the

teaching of manuscript writing, grammar, and mechanics in its curriculum. The district

did not provide textbooks or supplemental materials that addressed the teaching of

grammar and writing. For years, many students in grades K-3 were not exposed to the

beginning stages of the writing process (Prince George's County Public Schools System,

2011). This hindered African American boys, because the majority of these students

come to school already below grade level and lacking the ability to understand how to

create stories and essays (Haddix, 2010).

Haddix (2010) conducted a research study with some African American youths at

a community center. She wanted to expose male students to community writing projects

and gain an understanding of their perceptions on writing. Her findings had mixed

reviews. Many students she interviewed for the community projects said

> they did not see themselves as writers. Many Black boys felt that writing for
>
> school is often defined by timed writing tasks for standardized exams or the
>
> demonstration of the conventions of writing, and many of the young people felt
>
> inept at such tasks. (p. 342)

Giving African American boy's alternative tools such as; i-pads and keyboards to

write can help them be successful writers. However, parents and educators must expose

boys to writing. The key is changing the stereotypes and perceptions that plague African

American males (Noguera, 2003) who are far too often seen as underachievers in

education (Tatum, 2005).   The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed

to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent, too dumb, too hard to

control, too streetwise, and too focused on sports (Noguera, 2008).   These are the

perceptions they face throughout their schooling. For these students, being forced to sit and compose writing becomes one more insurmountable challenge.

The Challenges of Writing for African American Males

It is not that Black boys do not want to write; they just are not equipped to write. At an early age their fingers are not adept at writing small letters on a piece of paper, and they usually take a little longer than girls to develop a vocabulary and speaking skills (Kunjufu, 2011). The majority of them do not write unless they are forced (Haddix, 2010). They rarely get to write for pleasure, and often times what they have to write about is required in the curriculum rather than being a topic they enjoy (Kunjufu, 2011).

In order to get Black boys to write, educators need to examine how and what they are teaching. Educators need to tap into what Black boys are interested in writing about instead of what the curriculum requires. Most boys would write more often if they could write about sports, video games, and rap music (Ball, 1992). Educators cannot be afraid to change; they must incorporate the different styles and types of writing in order to motivate boys to participate in writing. It is imperative that instructors meet African American boys' needs by accommodating their learning style (Kunjufu, 2011). They are right brain thinkers and need to be stimulated in a way that allows them to move about and work with manipulatives.

Theoretical Framework of Educating African American Boys

Educators must consider student needs first and how children can obtain them inside of their classrooms. Teachers have to comprehend the diverse cultures in which Black boys are raised (Harris, 2012). Many African American boys are exposed to the "blue collar" way of life. They learn how to use their hands to build, fix, and play with

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things. Many Black boys are taught the "street" way of life. This means they are taught how to survive rather than how education relates to survival (Kunjufu, 2011). These diversities should not be considered a hindrance but rather as experiences which, inside the classroom, expose all students to the upbringings of different cultures. Professor Gadsden (2011) wrote: "Educators must recognize that parents are the first teachers of children" (p. 3). This is essential for some young Black boys, because they are not educated at home in reading, writing, and math but instead in jumping, kicking, catching, and running.

Maslow (Huitt, 2007) found that people have certain needs, which are unchanging and genetic in origin. Maslow stated, "Human motivation is based on people seeking fulfillment and change through personal growth" (p. 2). He defined these needs as the five hierarchical needs of life: (a) biological and physiological, (b) belongingness, (c) safety, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization. These needs have to be met at the beginning stages of life in order for individuals to meet their higher-level growth needs (McLeod, 2007). When Black boys experience the five stages of need, these proficiencies can help shape them behaviorally, motivationally, and socially. The following topics will be addressed: (a) behavioral theories of educating African American boys, (b) motivational theories of educating African American Boys, and (c) the social theories of educating African American boys.

Behavioral Theory of Educating African American Boys

B.F. Skinner, a behavioral theorist, believed that the best way to understand behavior is to look at the causes of an action and its consequences. Skinner's theory stated that behavior which is reinforced tends to be repeated, and behavior which is not

reinforced tends to die out or be extinguished (Skinner, 1953). Skinner coined the term

operant conditioning which means changing of behavior by use of reinforcement which

is given after the desired response (Skinner, 1948). Through this research he was able to

identify three types of responses or operants that can follow behavior (McLeod, 2007).

The three types of response are: (a) neutral operants, (b) reinforcers, and (c) punishers.

Neutral operants are responses from the environment that neither increase nor

decrease the probability of a behavior being repeated (Skinner, 1948, 1953). This means

no matter what the response is from the environment, it has no effect on the behavior

(McLeod, 2007). A neutral operant may have very little effect on how African American

males achieve academically, because the factor does not warrant a particular behavior or

receive a specific stimuli.   The response may not affect how Black boys engage in the

educational process.

Reinforcers are responses from the environment that increase the probability of a

behavior being repeated (Skinner, 1948, 1953). Reinforcers can be either positive or

negative (Skinner, 1953). This is important for children during the early stages of

development. As children learn through playing, they discover what are positive and

negative behaviors. Play, in a developmentally appropriate environment, inspires the

child to relate himself to the environment while making sense of the infinite elements

uniting internal processes with external influences (McNeele, 2007). As children's minds

translate external experiences into personal meaning, they become masters of their

environment (Leong & Bodrova, 1996, p. 125). This is why it is important to allow

children the opportunity for discovery. They need to touch and feel how things around

them work. Kids need discovery experiences in their surroundings to understand how

their world operates. Through these reinforcers children learn which positive and negative behaviors to repeat. When children understand that positive reinforcement strengthens a behavior by providing a consequence an individual finds rewarding, the behavior is likely to be repeated (Skinner, 1953). Then there is the negative reinforcement that can strengthen a behavior too. For example, if one does not do his homework at home, he must complete it during free time after lunch at school. The student will complete the homework to avoid missing free time, thus strengthening the behavior of completing his homework (Skinner, 1953).

The final operant condition is that of the punishers. Punishers are the responses from the environment that decrease the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. Punishment weakens behavior (Skinner, 1953). Like reinforcement, punishment can work either by directly applying an unpleasant stimulus like a shock after a response or by removing a potentially rewarding stimulus, for instance, taking away dessert to punish an undesirable behavior (McLeod, 2007). This type of stimulus can be detrimental to African American boys within education.

Some African American males face a variety of issues even before they begin the educational process (Noguera, 2008; Tatum, 2005), such as poverty and being raised in a fatherless home. The many challenges cause them to be more likely to drop out of school, live in poverty and be involved in violent crimes. Due to these factors many African American boys have a negative outlook on education, feeling that schooling is an institution they are being forced to attend. They feel unequipped and unprepared to meet the daily challenges and rigor that schools require in order to be successful (Fantuzzo, 2009).

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Some African American males feel inadequate when it comes to schooling because of the significant number of punishments they receive as a result of their behavior (Noguera, 2008). Black boys are more likely to be placed in special education programs, suspended from school, and labeled as uninterested in the educational process because they do not participate in education the same as their peers (Harris, 2010). These factors are often related to the fact that some Black boys do not receive early educational interventions (Edelman, 2011; Fanion, 2010). Many of them are engaged in recreational sports and learning to do things with their hands; however, this doesn't mean that they have distaste for education. Instead, this should be seen as a means for how educators can instruct them (Edelman, 2011; Fantuzzo, 2009; Gadsden, 2011). Teachers need to analyze what teaching methods work for African American males and educate them differently. There are a variety of behavioral modifications that can engage Black boys in education (Gadsden, 2011). One principle of educating Black males is comprised of changing the punishers they receive in response to their individual behaviors that educators find unacceptable (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997).

Motivational Theory of Educating African American Boys

Motivation is the force that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behavior (Cherry, 2010). It is what causes us to take action, whether to grab a snack to reduce hunger or enroll in college to earn a degree. Motivation is a trait that if acquired at an early age is the root to being successful in school and going on to become an industrious, prosperous citizen (Cherry, 2010). The forces that lie beneath motivation can be biological, social, emotional, or cognitive in nature (Cherry, 2010). Motivation can be inherited or be a learned behavior (Cherry, 2010); but if it is going to have a full impact

on a child's life, it must be learned early. Motivation, however, is not a taught skill; it builds through experiences. An African American boy needs someone to mentor him in order to develop intrinsic motivation.

Maslow (1943) stated that human motivation is based on people seeking fulfillment and change through personal growth. People are motivated to achieve certain needs, and when one need is fulfilled, that person then seeks to fulfill the next one, and so on (Maslow, 1943). When these basic needs are met, people tend to achieve through motivation.

Analyzing what motivates people to be successful in the early phases of their life can be categorized in five stages of hierarchal need, the five major foundations of motivation (Maslow, 1943, 1954). It is critical to understand that if children master these foundations early, they will be successful throughout their schooling. This is very important for African American males. These stages can help them achieve academic success and become skillful writers. The following levels of motivation are explored in order to understand what ideas can help African American boys be successful: (a) biological and physiological, (b) safety, (c) belongingness, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

The first foundation of motivation is the biological and physiological level (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Every person needs the basic necessities of life such as air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, and sleep. These are needs one has to have filled in order for survival. Air, food, drink, shelter, and warmth are the essential needs required by a baby to sustain life. When a child is first born, the doctor generally places the baby on the mother's chest so the infant can bond with her (Kennell & McGrath, 2005). Skin-to-skin

contact immediately after birth through the end of the first feeding provides a baby with the initial biological and physiological needs of life. Fulfilling this level of human need is essential in helping Black boys learn to write, because they need to bond with their parents who will be their models and guide them to create their belief system. Children need to know that their parents believe in their ability to achieve. This process is the beginning stage in helping youngsters understand the importance of writing. If Black boys can obtain the essentials of motivation at the biological and physiological level, obtaining the higher levels of motivation will be simpler.

The second foundation of motivation is safety (Maslow, 1946, 1954). At this level, individuals receive protection from the elements, security, order, laws, limits, and stability (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Once a child has bonded with the mother from the skin-to-skin contact, the child begins to feel safe. It is important that this level of need is fulfilled in order for infants to feel they are being protected. Studies have shown that if infants are allowed to stay the first hours and days after delivery with the mother this basic need is met (Kennell & McGrath, 2005). Fulfilling this level of need allows Black boys to safely learn the limits of their abilities. For example, they can learn through touch what a pencil feels like, how to hold it, and how to use this instrument effectively. They will be motivated to explore the possibilities of its use.

The third foundation of motivation is belongingness (Maslow, 1943, 1954). This is another bonding stage. People need family, affection, and relationships to encourage and support them. Piaget (1920) indicates that as an infant matures into a child, he/she needs this stage of maturation. At this stage Piaget (Colunga, n.d.) feels that children are intrinsically motivated to learn and do not need rewards from adults to motivate their

learning. Belongingness is a basic need of Maslow, too (Maslow, 1943, 1954).   Gadsden (2011) wrote: "The most important factor in a child's upbringing is whether the child is brought up in a loving, healthy, supportive environment" (p. 3).

The third foundation of motivation marks a critical stage for Black boys. They must feel as though they belong, and that they are wanted and needed by society. Edelman (2011) wrote: "Black boys can have a different ending if society focuses its efforts on education and development. Working together we can explore the challenges facing this population and the opportunities to position young Black boys to realize their potential" (p. 2). When a young Black boy feels that he belongs and is encouraged to be an educational success, he can understand the power of writing.

The fourth foundation of motivation is esteem (Maslow, 1943, 1954). During this stage individuals need self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, and prestige as they begin to gain their independence (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Independence is the stage in which a child starts to learn who he/she is as a person and establishes the precedence of how children will grow into adolescents (McLeod, 2007). At this time motivation plays a big part in life. Black boys need to feel that they have self-worth. In the self-esteem stage a student has to feel like he/she is achieving in all areas of life; home, school, and with friends.

Often in stage four of life, some young Black boys lose their motivation for school. At this time some Black boys discover they are not equipped with the foundations of education. They are made to see their inadequacies in education and realize that they are not writing, reading, and completing math at grade level (Noguera, 2003). Once they discover that they are not competing well with their classmates, their

self-esteem begins to lessen, and they no longer feel as though they can master schooling (Tatum, 2005).

The final stage of motivation is self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954). At this stage people need to obtain personal growth and fulfillment. Maslow (1962) said, "Self-actualization refers to the need for personal growth that is present throughout a person's life. In this stage a person needs to feel new challenges, new experiences, and love of art and nature. This is where people actually start to learn who they are and what motivates them and their behavior" (Chapman, 2010, p. 3).   During this stage, instead of focusing on psychopathology and what goes wrong with people, Maslow (1943) formulated a more positive account of human behavior, which focused on what goes right. Maslow was interested in human potential, and how we fulfill that potential (McLeod, 2007)

The final stage of motivation can be critical to a Black boy's education. When he discovers who he is and how his role fits into society, he can face the new challenges and experiences that are needed to master education (Cherry, 2010). This is a critical stage of development that can enhance how young Black boys feel about writing (Haddix, 2010). At this stage, Black boys can visualize how writing can be a key component to becoming successful within education.

When Africa American boys' parents teach them to be motivated about learning, they need to understand the power of motivation themselves (Tatum, 2008). Parents need to understand that motivation has to be practiced. Motivation is not just a concept needed for boys to be great athletes; it is a concept needed so they can succeed in academics. Recent research discovered that some parents in the African American community do not know how to influence their children regarding education because of their own lack of

education (Harris, 2010). Some parents don't know to motivate their children about

education, because they were not motivated to be successful in school themselves. Many

parents from the African American community are displeased about how they received

their own education (Harris, 2011; Noguera, 2003). An examination of schooling has

shown that in the Black community there has been a serious disconnect. Studies indicate

that African Americans are the least likely to graduate high school, technical school, or

college. They are leaders in the dropout rate, poverty, and crime (Tatum, 2008). There

are also social and behavioral implications of why African American boys are not

achieving.

Social Theory of Educating African American Boys

McLeod (2007) wrote that Vygotsky researched a theory in cognitive

development that stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in the development

of cognition. Even though Vygotsky died before his theories could be completely

developed, he established the Social Development Theory on cognition (McLeod, 2007).

Vygotsky believed no single principle could account for development; that individual

development cannot be understood without reference to the social and cultural context

within which it is embedded (McLeod, 2007). Vygotsky's theory is based on three

themes: (a) an emphasis of culture affecting and shaping cognitive development, (b) an

emphasis of social factors contributing to cognitive development, and (c) an emphasis on

the role of language in cognitive development (McLeod, 2007).

McLeod (2007) wrote: Vygotsky believed that infants are born with basic

materials/abilities for intellectual development. Most children are born with the capacity

to remember, pay attention, perceive what is going on around them, and feel sensations.

These abilities are called Higher Mental Functions (Vygotsky, 1962). These basic functions help infants understand the world going on around them.

One theme within his theory is that of the social influences on cognitive development (McLeod, 2007). Vygotsky (1978) believed that young children are curious and are actively involved in their own learning and the discovery and development of new understanding/schema. They use their eyes, hands, and mouth to discover how things look, feel, and taste.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that the most important learning by the child occurs through social interactions with a skillful tutor. The tutor may model behaviors and/or provide verbal instructions for the child; this is known as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. Through this process the parent or the teacher is the main focus for the child, and the child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (McLeod, 2007).

One of Vygotsky's most important principles of social cognitive development is the Zone of Proximal Development (McLeod, 2007). This concept relates to the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner (Vygotsky, 1978a).

Scholars and researchers commonly understand that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence upon human behavior, including academic performance; this is more prevalent in African American communities. Black males encounter more hardships in education than any other ethnic group (Harris, 2010; Haskins & Rouse, 2005; Tatum 2005). They face a multitude of issues: living in a single parent household, having low socio-economic status, having low birth weight, and having

parents with low educational attainment (Noguera, 2003). With all of these issues, many

Black boys come to school with low expectations and a negative attitude towards

education. They do not possess the knowledge and power to overcome all of these

obstacles; therefore, they are not motivated to become academically successful.

However, if Black boys are mentored on how to interact socially in education,

they too can achieve. For example, if a young boy is given his first jigsaw puzzle he will

perform poorly in attempting to solve the puzzle by himself. If the father sits with him

and describes or demonstrates some basic strategies, such as finding all the corner edge

pieces, and provides a few pieces for the child to put together himself with

encouragement, the next time he tries the puzzle on his own he will be more skillful in

completing the task (Shaffer, 1996).

Vygotsky (1962) believed language plays two critical roles in cognitive

development. Language is the main means by which adults transmit information to

children, and it is a very powerful tool of intellectual adaptation. How children engage in

"talk" is important in their cognitive growth (Vygotsky, 1962). Children need to engage

in conversations whether it's with another child, adults, or with themselves. Vygotsky

(1962) believed private speech, also known as internal speech, is an important factor in a

child's cognitive development. He sees private speech as a means for children to plan

activities and strategies and, in so doing, aid their own development. Language is

therefore an accelerator to thinking and understanding (McLeod, 2007). This is even

more imperative for school age Black boys. They need to have the ability to talk to

themselves about the task they need to complete; the skills to talk themselves through any

assignment. This internal skill is imperative in order for them to accomplish the tedious task of writing.

Understanding the behavioral, motivational, and social implications of education is a critical task in helping Black boys become successful in school. Studies have been conducted to understand what social, behavioral, and motivational implications help African American boys (Ball, 1992; Cason, 1991). Some of these studies have shown that if their parents do not play a pivotal part in their early childhood, many of them struggle throughout their entire lives (Edelman, 2011). This is a key factor when trying to educate them on the importance of writing. If they do not grasp the concept of writing and how it impacts their academic career, they will struggle with all forms of schooling (Cason, 1991).

Summary

The study of the achievement gap is mainly researched through reading (Tatum, 2005). Researchers want to prove that reading is the foundation of education and central to closing the achievement gap (Harris, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Tatum, 2005). However, writing is a significant element to achieving this goal, too (Haddix, 2010). There have been few studies that focus on how writing in the adolescent years can help with the axioms of reading.

Writing is a component of education that is critical to student achievement (Ball, 1992; Brown & Stephens, 1995; Haddix, 2010). Parents need to teach their children how to write at an early age, and understand the importance of their children having that ability before entering school, because students who come to school with the basics of writing tend to have successful academic careers (Haddix, 2010).

Researching how behavior, motivation, and social implications affect writing skills of African American males in grades three provided some understanding into how educators can effectively teach their students and begin to close the achievement gap. These implications may give some insight into how parents, educators, and administrators can begin to develop curriculum and strategies to help students achieve academically through the writing process. However, it's necessary to also acknowledge the social implications of education in the African American community.

Socio-economically disadvantaged children face a variety of issues inside of education. Often they come to school writing, reading, and computing below grade level (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Lawmakers and educators want to fix this trend. To do this, states like Maryland started to implement early childhood programs. These programs were directed towards students living in poverty. Investments in early childhood education programs are vital to the success of our nation's youth. Extensive research has shown that early childhood programs significantly increase a child's chances of avoiding the prison pipeline (Grace, 2007). However, the most important factor affecting a Black male's ability to achieve academic success is parent involvement. Research has shown a clear link between parent involvement and children's success in school (Center on Education Policy, 2012). It is important that parents be active throughout their child's academic career. Even if parents are unable to assist their children with a specific subject area or skill, they can still play a vital role by encouraging students' feelings of competence, control, and a positive attitudes towards academics (Grolnick, Friendly, & Bellas, 2009). When parents are actively engaged, students understand the importance of

academics. Therefore, it is important that parents be active regardless of their own experiences with education. Grolnick et al. (2009) wrote:

> When parents believe in children's competence and have high expectations for them, provide the resources that children need to feel connected to others, and facilitate a sense of autonomy by supporting children's initiations and problem-solving, children's motivation is most likely to thrive. (p. 295)

This is extremely important for Black boys being raised in single-parent homes, because many of them are also low-income homes. Children born into socioeconomically disadvantaged circumstances, particularly single-parent homes, are less likely to benefit from the kinds of parental attention, activities, and resources that stimulate soft skills (McLanahan, 2004); soft skills are most likely to be learned by children in dual parent homes. These skills help children with the power of intrinsic motivation (Center on Education Policy, 2012). With these foundations of achievement, Black males can achieve academic success and become life-long learners with good writing skills.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Qualitative research broadly defined means "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Corbin, 1990, p. 17), but instead, by the kind of research that produces findings derived from real-world settings where the "phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). The purpose of this study is to examine how motivation, behavior, social implications, and family dynamics affect the writing of African American boys' in the third grade. This investigation explored the writing experiences of Black males and how they might be motivated to write at an early.(at an early age?) The study also analyzed the perceptions of African American boys toward the writing processes in their educational experiences.

The results of this study may not be generalized to all African American males because of their socioeconomic background, education of their parents, and school climate. However, it will give insight into some of their thought processes when it comes to writing. This study will provide some basic insight into why Black boys have difficulty understanding, processing, and scripting words (Ball, 1992; Haddix, 2010).

Research Design

This was a two-fold method of research design. The researcher completed an explicit research that left no room for interpretation, describing in detail the facts and results of the study. Stating the facts and results provided strategies and skills that may be used to help Black boys with the foundations of learning to write, and assist parents

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and educators in helping Black boys with their writing skills. However, when using implicit research it leaves the reader with the ability to "infer" the meaning of the study even though the implication may not be hidden. The researcher does not want to leave any possibility for the reader to "assume" that the strategies and skills learned through the research may not help African American boys with the fundamentals of writing.

Qualitative research requires researchers to argue their points about participants from the philosophical nature of the study. It means that methods such as interviews and observations are the primary focus of the study (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher in this study engaged intimately with each of the participants in order to gain an understanding of their writing, the levels on which they wrote, and how they felt about writing. The researcher also interviewed the participants to gauge how often they wrote, what inspired them to write, and what type of writing they engaged in. Investigating writing from this perspective provided insight into why so many African American males fail to become "master" writers. It also shed light on what was occurring with these young Black males at an early stage of the writing process.

Conducting a study of students in third grade from an urban/suburban county in the state of Maryland determined the motivational and behavioral impacts their family dynamics have on their writing. This study also determined how students felt about writing at home and in the school setting.

Participant Selection

The urban/suburban county in the state of Maryland where this study was done had 128 elementary schools and served approximately 60,757 students in grades PK-6. Ninety-seven percent of the students in the county in grades PK-6 were African

American. One urban elementary school in this district educated 409 students in grades PK-6. The school served 174 male and 234 female students. Ninety percent of the students were African American. There were 52 third graders, 28 of whom are males. In 2011, 79.5% of the third graders met annual yearly progress in reading (Prince George's County Public Schools System, 2011).

Third grade is the benchmark grade used for standardized testing.   It is the level that researchers use to determine whether male students are at risk for failure or can succeed and obtain a college degree in America's public schools (Gwynne, 2010; Moats, 2001). Investigators use this grade because the emphasis is on early childhood education. The focus on early intervention is well conceived, given the strong evidence that research-based instruction beginning in kindergarten significantly reduces the number of children who experience reading difficulty (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). It also has an impact on writing skills for African American males (Gwynne, 2010). At this grade level, behavioral, motivational, and social factors influence how Black males write throughout their academic careers (Gwynne, 2010). This is the grade level where standardized testing begins and these results give credence to how Black males progress academically (Hernandez, 2011). Therefore, it is important that third graders are writing proficiently at this time, or they face dire consequences for the remainder of their educational careers (Hernandez, 2011). Selecting students at this grade level helped the researcher understand some of the difficulties and experiences African American males have with writing because this is the grade level where standardized testing begins. Investigating these students gave some clear indications as to why so many students score below grade level in writing.

The participants were selected from an urban elementary school in Maryland. All of the African American male students in grade three were given an interest survey for the parents to fill out in order for them to participate in the study. From the interest survey, five students were selected who shared common factors. Each of the participants: (a) was reading and writing on grade level or below third grade level, (b) had scored basic on quarterly benchmarks, (c) had received a report card grade of "C" or below in writing, and (d) resided in a single or dual family home. This study was submitted to the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Instrumental Review Board (IRB) committee and received approval to proceed (See Appendix 1).

Data Collection Procedures

The instrument that was used to investigate this study was a modified version of the Attitude Survey Portrait which included a: (a) Writing Attitude Survey – Questionnaire, (b) Student Writing Attitude Survey, (c) Writers Profile, and (d) Writing Inventory Grades Three and Four (ASP) (2010). ASP was used as a survey for participants who were currently in grade three in an urban elementary school in Maryland (See Appendix A). Each of the participants was asked questions by the researcher that were part of an open-ended questionnaire to analyze how students fest (feel??) about writing at home and at school. A writer's profile was also used. This questionnaire explored the type of writer each participant was or could become. ASP forms helped each participant set the goals he wanted to reach while participating in the study. Yin (2003) suggested that for qualitative designs, researchers should enact strategies that would help verify the accuracy of data being collected. In this investigation the

researcher used triangulation in order to obtain accurate data. The data came from observations, interviews, and the analysis of journals.

The final ASP survey used with the participants was an open-ended writing inventory questionnaire. This survey helped the students with the process of journal writing. Each participant kept a journal to write in daily to help organize his thoughts about writing. These journals were used to gain an understanding of how the participants were reaching their goals, progressing through their daily writing, and gaining an understanding of writing. The goal was to help them obtain strategies and skills that would enable them to be organized and improve their writing skills.

Interviews (One-on-One)

Qualitative interviews are generally less structured than quantitative interviews. They allow the researcher to ask an initial question. The answer to that question will determine where and how the interview should proceed (Seidman, 2005). Interviews allow the researcher to have personal conversations with the participant, and the researcher can to get to know the participant on a deeper level.

Individually interviewing African American boys regarding their knowledge of writing provided an intimate portrait of each boy's ability to write. Using a standard set of interview questions helped the researcher gain an understanding of how the participants in the study felt about writing, how they wrote, and the grade level of their ability to write (Ball, 1992; Bangert-Drowns, Hurley & Wilkinson, 2004; Haddix, 2010).

Memoing

Memoing is writing down everything that you observe the students doing (Knafl & Howard, 1984). This method allowed the researcher to record ideas and thoughts

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about the study and the students within the two different environments. This provided awareness regarding the environmental influences of the students' behavioral, motivational, and social needs to write. It also provided insight into how students were motivated to write within their school's atmosphere. It allowed the researcher to record any ideas that arose from observations. This type of instrument was used to collect the data, because it allowed the researcher to observe the respondents in their natural element. This design permitted the researcher to examine what motivational, behavioral, and social factors stimulated them to write. This method also allowed the researcher to report the data collected in a phenomenological story.

Journaling

Teaching writing is a difficult and somewhat abstract process (Thompson, 2011). Educators want their students to experience the expression of life through writing. They have their students' (students) journal-write for a variety of reasons. Jenny Moon (1999) identified many purposes for writing journals. Some of the purposes were (a) to deepen the quality of learning in the form of critical thinking or developing a questioning attitude, (b) to enable learners to understand their own learning process, (c) to increase active involvement in learning and personal ownership of learning, (d) to enhance the personal valuing of the self towards self-empowerment, (e) to enhance creativity by making better use of intuitive understanding, (f) to free-up writing and the representation of learning, (g) to provide an alternative "voice" for those not good at expressing themselves, and (h) to foster reflective and creative interaction in a group (Moon, 1999, p.189).

Journal writing is a powerful concept (Thompson, 2011). It can be used to help students express who they are, discover more about the person that exists inside of them, and give them a voice that is often not heard through speech. Journal writing is often used as a learning mechanism to enhance vocabulary. If used often enough in a particular subject, it can broaden the knowledge of a student in that particular subject (Bangert-Drowns, et al., 2004). Therefore, as educators and parents we must encourage boys to write to help them express themselves. Writing can also be a tool to give them an outlet in dealing with their everyday feelings and thoughts. It can be a key component to helping them understand the world in which they live (Haddix, 2010).

Writing, however, is not used as often as it should be across all content areas. It is not taught in everyday lessons because of the complexity of the subject. Some researchers believe that writing is not taught enough because educators are not properly trained in the mechanics, methods, concepts, and strategies of effective writing (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Thompson, 2011). This often leads to students being inadequately prepared in that specific subject. Researching the effects journal writing may have on third grade African American males gave insight into what foundations are needed to create powerful writers.

Coding

For researchers of qualitative methodology, it is imperative to learn to code the study. Coding is created to categorize specific areas of research. A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). A researcher codes to analyze like themes of an

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investigation. Codes give credence to an observed area of research by organizing the

commonalities of the information (Saldana, 2009).

Coding can be a difficult process (Saldana, 2009), because there is no standard or

set way for a researcher to code. Researchers can code by any terminology that helps

them understand the themes of what they are investigating. Studying the writing habits

of third graders allowed the researcher to observe like themes. Each of the participants

completed an ASP survey that qualified their thoughts and feelings about writing. It

captured the dynamics of how each of the participants journal and story-write.

Recoding

Upon completion of the data collection, analyzing the data, and finding the

themes across the journal writing samples, the researcher coded the different patterns of

each student's sample writings.   Once these sample writings were organized into the

different paradigms, the researcher recoded the themes for accurate validity. The concept

of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003).

This concept is not a single, fixed, or universal concept, but "rather a contingent

construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research

methodologies and projects" (Winter, 2000, p. 1). This is a form of recoding to ensure

the validity of the investigator's results. Creswell (2012) wrote that during the process of

interpretation, researchers step back and search for larger meanings of what is going on in

the situations or sites. Recoding of the themes provided the researcher with solid

information on why African American Males struggle with the writing process.

Themes

Theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. It also is one of the most mysterious. Explicit descriptions of theme discovery are described in articles and reports and are often relegated to appendices or footnotes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This survey was a collection of themes which identified the benefits and hardships of writing. Through journaling, the participants created themes that identified how they progressed through the writing process. Behavioral and motivational themes were analyzed to determine what influenced these African American boys to write.

Data Description

The researcher also conducted case studies of the students to collect specific data on their writing behaviors. Through this method the research determined what behavioral, motivational, and social factors impacted the writings of the third grade African American Males in this study. The students were observed in their school environment while using alternative forms of writing such as computers and I Pads. This approach allowed the researcher to conduct a personal interview with each male student regarding his motivation to write at school; however, this research had limitations and biases.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

The data from the participants' ASP surveys was analyzed to create codes of how the African American boys in this study felt about writing. These codes created themes which produced strategies to use to improve and motivate African American boys to

write. Through these codes and themes the participants may gain an understanding of behavioral factors that influenced their writing.

The data analysis of this investigation allowed the researcher to tell each participant's story. It may help other educators to recognize and understand the behavioral and motivational factors of education. How the participants were influenced to write during the early stages of their education was examined. This data was analyzed and examined to ascertain how the participants responded to writing prompts as they related to family dynamics and school climate.

Reliability/Validity

The study of the behavioral, motivational, and social impact of the African American males' writing assessments in grades PK-3 was conducted as qualitative research. This method design required a collection of data over a period of time. The researcher analyzed the participants' cumulative folders, direct reading instruments (DRI), and journal writings to examine and determine their approach to writing. From this analysis, the researcher gained an understanding of which behavioral, motivational and social factors influence African American males to write.

This method required a form of observation. Observation is a basic technique used in almost all-qualitative research as described through data collection in Chapter 4. Each participant was observed in an unobtrusive setting inside the classroom and home environment. The observations allowed the investigator to discover how the boys act in their natural environment. It provided some perceptions into what behavioral, motivational, and social factors influenced these African American boys to engage in the writing process.

The question, "How do family dynamics affect how African American males in grade three are motivated to write?" was considered during the research. The male students were observed within their family dynamics to gain an understanding of how that influenced their writing and whether they were predisposed to writing by their parents. The researcher used open-ended questioning and the observation method to determine how they were motivated to write within their home environment. Through this research method, the researcher examined motivational factors that impact these African American males.

Assumptions

Ormrod (2010) posited, "Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist" (p. 62). The assumption in this study was that African American boys are not motivated to write in large part as a result of their family dynamics. Stereotypes often depict that most African American males who live in single-family households headed by women live in poverty (Carter, 2003). People assume that many of these mothers have had bad experiences with education and that this affected their ability to motivate their children. Due to the assumptions, many African American males face adversities in education, and these factors can affect their motivation and behaviors regarding education.

School climate affects how students write. This is the age of technology, and many students are equipped to be tech-savvy. Pupils have the latest and greatest tools of technology; to them, writing with a pen or pencil and paper is the old fashioned way of writing. Students are now equipped with a variety of devices for writing, such as

computers, I Pads, and cell phones, which help them to write in a way that is not considered the standard form of writing (Haddix, 2010).

Another key "assumption" regarding school climate is the impact of teachers on student writing. Students often see writing as a methodical way of answering questions. They do not see it as a means of increasing vocabulary and reading. Teachers play a role in introducing writing to students in a way that empowers their academics. Instructors need instructional models that help them to promote and support writing in a systematic way. They also need to foster an environment that endorses writing as a learning tool (Brown & Stephens, 1995). These assumptions factored into how the African American boys in this study progressed through the writing process, as well as how the researcher conceptualizes the data.

Limitations

Limitations are likely to reveal how the current research work may improve in future experiments and what caveats should be considered in trying to incorporate new information in the evolving body of scientific evidence (Ioannidis, 2006). Researching how writing affects the achievement gap in African American boys in grades PK-3 had some limitations.

Some of the limitations were from the teacher's perspective. When conducting this type of research, the question at the forefront was, "Is the teacher doing enough to ensure that the students are on grade level?" Teachers may often wonder if they are doing all they can to ensure that all students in their classrooms are achieving academic success. Ensuring that all students are achieving academic success means prescribing an educational plan that is tailored to each individual student's needs. The process of

teaching students and knowing what motivates them to write and be successful at writing is a two-fold process. For example, one dynamic understands what influences children to write and the other knows how much knowledge about writing they are bringing to the classroom. This information helps identify a method or strategy to assist students as they progress through writing at each level of education.

Another limitation lies in how the achievement gap is viewed. The achievement gap is only as good as the test that is analyzing the assessment itself (Simon, 2011). It questions whether students are learning the same academic skills at the same level as their peers. It is a data driven analysis of how students score academically across racial lines. However, this study does not examine how students fair in writing.

Research bias in this study will came from the fact that this researcher is the parent of an African American male student and believes that parents should take an active role in their children's education beginning at birth.

Delimitations

Delimitations are those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study (Simon, 2011). Researching why African American males are not motivated to write because of the behavioral, motivational, and social implications and school climate, which in turn affects the achievement gap, may provide a perspective on education in the 21st century.

The delimitations in this study were the participants, the region of study, and the research questions. The participants in this study were all African American boys in grade three. They all attended the same school in Maryland. The school demographic was predominantly African American.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap – Disparity on a number of educational measures between the performances of groups of students, especially groups of students defined by race/ethnicity, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status.

African American – An American of African, and especially of Black African, descent.

Behavior – The way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others. The way in which an animal or person acts in response to a particular situation or stimulus.

Caucasian - Anthropology of, pertaining to, or characteristic of one of the traditional racial divisions of humankind, marked by fair to dark skin, straight to tightly curled hair, and light to very dark eyes, and originally inhabiting Europe, parts of North Africa, western Asia, and India; no longer in technical use.

Family dynamics – Single female, single male, dual parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, adoptive parent, foster parent, group home, and same sex families.

Hispanic - Of or relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries, especially those of Latin America.

Motivation – The reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way; the general desire or willingness of someone to do something.

School climate – Teachers, administrators, support personal, curriculum, and resources.

Summary

Completing a research study on how African American males in single female parent homes are influenced to write was a multifaceted process. This process included surveying each of the participants to understand how they felt about writing. This questionnaire (specify??ASP??) was the basis of gaining knowledge regarding what behavioral, motivational, and social factors influence African American boys in grade three to write. The process of journal writing at school provided a perception of the types of writing they prefer.

Conducting a qualitative study on the behavioral, motivational, and social impacts of African American males on their desire to write may inspire the researcher to provide strategies to parents that can be implemented at an early age. These strategies may inspire them to write no matter the environmental or other influences that impact their lives. Schemes that can be put in place at an early age may give them the motivation to write and be successful at writing.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand why African American males in third grade public school classrooms struggle with writing. The research was conducted in a third grade classroom in an urban school district in Maryland. This was a phenomenological study that analyzed the participants' lives through the lens of what behavioral, motivational, and social implications impacted their writing skills. The study also examined what influences the school and home climate had on academic achievement; formative and standardized school assessments.

As a result of the new standards of writing under Common Core State Standards (CCSS), writing has taken on a new perspective. Therefore, an increase in rigor has been placed on instructional requirements for educators and students. Students are now required to complete "performance-based tasks" rather than the "comprehension based answers" that were required by NCLB (Common Core Initiative Website, 2010). These new standards of learning have required students to write at a more rigorous level in the early stages of education. Due to the new Common Core State Standards initiatives, this investigation examined what behavioral, motivational, and societal influences would help African American males in third grade to close the achievement gap. The data was analyzed, and it identified strategies necessary in order for third grade boys to perform at proficient or above on school assessments and the new standards of writing, in an effort to decrease the achievement gap between African American males and their Caucasian peers.

Conducting this investigation over a 60-day period, the researcher observed and coached five African American males on the writing process. Through this investigation, it was discovered that there is a significant correlation between the reading and writing process. It was revealed that African American boys in third grade, whether reading on grade level or below grade level, struggle with writing and its processes.

After reading, rereading, coding, and recoding their surveys, formative and standardized tests, homework, and classwork numerous commonalities appeared in the areas of: organization, information, conventions, comprehension, penmanship, inconsistent writing, lack of resources at home and school, instructional programs, and lack of parental involvement. Through these commonalities and investigation, four themes emerged from the data, involving the school and home environment: (a) student academic achievement, (b) students' intimate connection to the writing, (c) varied levels of parental involvement, and (d) insufficient and inadequate resources to properly educate the students in the school and home environment. Through triangulation the following research questions were addressed:

Research Questions:

1. What behavioral, motivational, and social implications affect the writing skills of African American males in grade three attending an urban Maryland school?

2. What impact does school climate have on African American males' achievement in school and on assessment scores?

Student Participants

After receiving IRB approval, approximately 20 African American male third grade students and their parents were given a letter of interest and an informed consent form to be completed. These forms ascertained which students were reading on grade level and below grade level as well as who would be interested in participating in the study. Once the parents and students completed and returned the signed informed consent forms, students were selected based on the criteria of: (a) being an African American male currently enrolled third grade, (b) reading on grade level or below grade level, and c) having scored below grade level on the PCR benchmark test. From the returned forms, SRI, and PCR scores, five students fit the yardsticks and were selected.

Demographics

The following are the demographics of each participant (see Table 1):

Table 1
Student Demographics

	SRI	MUST	PCR	Grade	Age	Household
Student A	650 - OGL	40%	2/6=66%	3rd	9	D
Student B	320 - BGL	10%	0/6=0%	3rd	8	S
Student C	355 - BGL	20%	0/6=0%	3rd/R	9	D
Student D	760 - OGL	70%	1/6=17%	3rd	8	D
Student E	320 - BGL	23%	1/6=17%	3rd	8	D

Key = BGL = Below grade level
     OGL = On grade level
     D = Dual-parent household
     S = Single-parent household
     R = Retained

Findings Themes

Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). It provides a description of what occurrences appear through research and investigation. Themes are a

central element in analyzing data in a qualitative study to identify commonalities. The

process involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and rereading of

the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). It is a form of pattern recognition within the data,

where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane,

2006). The themes identified below had an impact on the behavioral, motivational, and

social implications of third graders' writing ability, which contributed to the achievement

gap of African American males and their Caucasian peers.

Theme 1: Student academic achievement

The classroom environment is designed for instructional activities that will

increase the educational growth of students. It is aimed at ensuring students receive the

optimal standards of learning. The following information identified what behavioral and

motivational implications impact African American males' academic achievement.

Behavioral influences of students

Behavioral influences in the classroom can predetermine the academic

achievement of a student. If a student's behavior is reinforced through positive

interventions, the student stands a greater chance of achieving success (Carter, 2003).

However, if he or she is never encouraged or praised, the likelihood of academic success

is decreased. In the classroom environment the teacher is the key factor in accomplishing

this goal.

To gain some understanding of the participants as writers, the investigator asked

the students a series of questions found within the ASP surveys. The researcher wanted

to understand when they began the writing process. Question 2 of the ASP Writing

Attitude Survey - Questionnaire ask the students; *"When and how did you learn to write?"*

- Student A: "I started learning to write when I was in first grade because when I was in first grade I needed to start learning how to write more better, and writing paragraphs; and then after first-grade, I started writing a lot about a lot of things."

- Student C: "Kind of, do not remember when I learned to write. Think I was four. I learned to write. I don't remember." *"Do you remember how you learned to write?"* "No."

- Student D: "When I was four or five. I first started off with small words like all, it, if, out and side. Then I added more and more letters to it so I can spell words like earth, space, mountain, river and value. When I got older I started to spell words like that." *"Do you remember how you learned to write?"* "No I don't remember how I learned to write."

- Student E: "I think first grade. Learned my ABC's." *"Is there anything else?"* "I started from small words. That's it."

Participants A, C, D, and E remembered distinctively. Students A and E recalled learning to write in first grade. Student's C and D started writing at the age of four. Student E started with his ABC's and Student A began writing words and paragraphs. Student D started off writing small words, then he increased his spelling by adding more letters to creating larger words. However, Student B could not recall when he learned to write. This supported the theory that behavioral factors are key to improving African American males' academics. Behavioral theory indicated that if academics are reinforced

through positive praise the likelihood that achievement will be increased is positive (Haddix, 2010; Harris, 2012; Skinner, 1953).

Another influential question that was significant to behavioral implications was Question 5 of the ASP Writing Attitude Survey - Questionnaire, which asked: *"Why Do you think it is important to be a good writer?"* The students' responses varied in opinion, because some of the participants could not connect it to their academic instruction. The responses were:

- Student C: "I think it is important to be a good writer because when you go to the store and have to sign the pad you have to write. You have to be able to write." *"Is there any other time you have to be a good writer?"* "Yes, you just need to be a good writer all the time."

- Student D: "So if you cannot write and you are in business it would be a problem. Some people write signs, and if they could not write a sign, like a stop sign, then them people would be crashing and it would not be safe for people. People would all be going at the same time. There are still places that do not have signs. You cannot do work like this survey without being a writer. Like homework for kids. Like the warm-up. Would not be able to have the warm-up if we could not write. Also it's important to write because like name tags; it tells people you are a visitor, and people would not know what your name was and people would be asking and asking what yours was."

When replying to this question regarding their feelings for writing, Student C and Student D realized that it was important to be a good writer because of the impact writing had on his daily lives. However, the other participants did not make the connection

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between writing and their academics. This supports Skinner's (1948, 1953) behavioral theory regarding neutral operants. Neutral operants are when the environment neither increases nor decreases the probability that the behavior will be repeated (Skinner, 1948, 1953). The participants did not receive responses from their environment about the writing process. They were never given a clear understanding of how writing ability is vital to being a good student and is critical for academic success.

Understanding how writing impacted their academics was strategic in order for the participants to progress through their education. This was evident when the students collaborated in small group instruction. The participants engaged in a conversation with the investigator and discussed their goals of becoming better writers and improving their academics. The researcher asked: *"What strategies can we use to help us with our writing?"*

- Student C: "You can practice."
- Student B: "You can clarify."

Student B replied with, "You can clarify," and the instructor asked: *"What does that mean, to clarify?"*

- *Student B: "When you work you can figure out."*
- *Student D: "Keep going over it until you get it correct."*
- *Student E: "To write over and over again."*
- *Student A: "I can write for a long, long time and correct it and add more stuff when I finish."*

This was significant in understanding what behavioral forces influenced the participants to write. It was apparent that the students had received different types of

reinforcements when writing. Students B, D, and E were exposed to *reinforcers*. This is the condition whereby receiving positive praise increases the probability of a behavior being repeated (Skinner 1948, 1953). The participants believed that if they continued to work hard at a task, eventually they would get it correct and receive positive reinforcers. These positive reinforcers were likely to increase their motivation to become better writers, supporting Skinner's behavioral learning theory.

Motivational influences of students

Motivation is a combination of the forces that guide a student's behavior (Cherry, 2010). Motivational forces influence a student to engage in activities that will have positive effects. Motivation is mainly acquired at an early stage in a child's life; however, it is a behavior that can be learned. The downside to motivation is that it cannot be taught (Maslow, 1943, 1953). Educators can attempt to inspire students to increase their motivation, but they cannot teach students how to be motivated (Cherry, 2010).

While working to understand what motivates schoolchildren to write, it was essential to get an understanding of how the students in this study felt about themselves as writers. This was essential to knowing what would motivate them to engage in the writing process. Question 8 from the ASP Writing Attitude Survey - Questionnaire inquired: *"How do you feel about yourself as a writer?"* This question was designed to provide insight into the motivational aspects of their writing and how they recognized themselves academically.

- Student A: *"I feel about myself when I am a writer, when I write stuff I might be able to write children books when I get older. I should write*

books so that I can do what I want to write about. I might be able to write

about when I was little."

- *Student D: "I feel like that I am good, but I still need some practice."*

- Student E: *"I kind of feel like, I just think bout like a writer in real life*

  when I grow up.

Next, it was important to analyze the types of writings they engaged in at school. The participants needed to recognize the difference between what motivated them academically at school versus home. Question 3 of the ASP Writing Attitude Survey - Questionnaire asked the students: *"What kinds of things do you write at school?"* The only participant who did not comprehend clearly the type of writing versus the style of writing was Student C, who responded:

- "I write paragraphs, essays, and sentences."

When probed by the investigator: *"Do you write about anything else?"*

He responded:

- "No."

He was uncertain about the differences between the processes of writing versus the categories of writing he engaged in. Students A, B, and D understood the question and were able to quote the kinds of writings they generated at school, responding:

- Student A: "I like to write about school. Right now I am writing about them shutting down the school and making it into a kids' center. I also like to write about my turtle, family, and myself."

- Student B: "I like to write about good things at school."

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- Student D: "What they tell me to. Like once they told me to write about Sir
  Ronnie actions. That's a character in a story. Sometimes you write about things
  in my life. Like when I went to Minnesota and when I went to Disney World.
  Also when I went to France."

Table 2
Writers Profile

	Sometimes	Always	Never	Total
1. I like to make a list of ideas before I write.	3/5=60%		2/5=%	3 out of 5 = Sometimes
2. I like to talk about my ideas with a friend before I write.	5/5=100%			5 out of 5 = Sometimes
3. Drawing a picture helps me get ideas for writing.		3/5=60%	2/5=40%	3 out of 5 = Always
4. I like to write about things I have learned.	3/5=60%	2/5=40%		3 out of 5 = Sometimes
5. I like to write about things that have happened to me.	3/5=60%	1/5=20%	1/5=20%	3 out of 5 = Sometimes
6. I write out my piece quickly from start to finish, and then make changes.	2/5=40%	2/5=40%	1/5=20%	2 out of 5 = Sometimes 2 out of 5 = Always
7. It helps to have someone read what I wrote before I make changes.	3/5=60%	1/5=20%	1/5=20%	3 out of 5 = Sometimes

Table 2
Continued
Writers Profile

	Sometimes	Always	Never	Total
8. My final version might be very different from my first version.	5/5=100%			5 out of 5 = Sometimes
9. I like others to see or hear what I wrote	1/5=20%	3/5=60%	1/5=20%	3 out of 5 = Always
10. I like to know what others think about my writing	3/5=60%	2/5=40%		3 out of 5 = Sometimes

Understanding the kinds of writings the students participated in and their feelings towards writing were important for identifying how they engaged in the writing process. It helped to determine what motivated the participants to write and, when they did write, what strategies and steps they participated in before creating their drafts (see Table 2).

One step all of the students reported engaging in before writing was talking about their ideas with a friend. This strategy motivated them to write about a topic they enjoyed or with which they were familiar. It allowed the students to participate in "accountable talk," which increased the ideas they wrote about (Institute for Learning, 2015). Other strategies that the boys engaged in before writing were making a list and drawing pictures. These strategies encouraged them to create writings that were academically sound. For example, Student B said: "I like to know what people say about my writing, because it makes me feel good." Student A said: "I like for my friends to tell me about my writing, because I like to write. I want to be a writer." Student E said:

here" Sometimes I like for people to tell me what they think." When the students were confident that they had grasped topics and received positive commendations, it motivated them to write academically comprehensive work.

Compiling their feelings toward writing, the kinds of writing samples they completed, and strategies that encouraged them to write, it was important to have the participants create goals that would support them while writing. Question 4 of the Writers Profile from the ASP asked the participants to list three specific goals they would work toward in writing. Before the students scribed their responses, the investigator asked them to think about what they needed to improve and how they would reach their goals. Their goals in writing were as follows (see Appendix B):

- Student A: "(1) I want to be better at puckthuch's in my writeing. 2) Also I want to be beeter at my cursuv. 3) I want to be better at writing storys."

- Student B: "1) I whnt to be beter at sipllng becase i whnt to writ beter. 2) I whnt to be beter cursive. 3) I whnt to be a beter pregath telr."

- Student C: "1) I want to be better at wirteing. 2) I want better at spelling. 3) I want to be better al wirteing paragarh. And cruse."

- Student D: "(1) I want to be a beter writer in spelling. (2) I want to be a beter writer in handwriting. (3) I want to be a beter in writing letters."

- Student E: "(1) I what to have better spelling. (2) I what to be a better at my storys. (3) I what to be better at my reading (no punctuation)."

After writing about their goals, the boys next created a plan of action to achieve them. The students addressed this plan by creating a paragraph to cover each goal. The following responses were in their own words (see Appendix B):

- Student A: "(1) I want to be better at my puncktaewaystions. By pausing and putting the correct puncktaewaystions . Also by writing more senten's and parhagah's. So I canput puncktaewaystions more and that's wie I want to be better at my puncktaewaystions. (2) Also I want to be better at my cursuv. So I wite my name I cursy. Also I print out cursuv paper's and I do them. I write more in cureuv . And thouse are reson's that I want to be better at my cursuv. (3) Also I want to be better at my story's. So I start writing more. Also I star writing more story's. Also I start to write for a long long time. And thath's what I do so I can write better storey's."
- Student B: "(1) I can reaching my goal. Becase i can look in a dictionary, and i can clarify and pacting and practice spelling, and writing. (2) I can reaching my gaal. Becase i can practice writing cursive. (3) I can reaching my goal. Becase i can practice my paragraph at home, and the prok."
- Student C: "(1) I can practice witing frist. (2) I an use a Dictionary to help me or next sound it out (3) I can practive witeing paragraph then (4) I can practive wirte in curse, Last."
- Student D: "(1) I can be beter in spelling by practice, going over the words using a dictionary, Sounding the words out and no distractions. (2) I can be beter in my handwriting by practice, no distractions, writing more store and by watching people. (3) I can be beter in my letter by practice, watching people, no distractions and thinking."
- Student E: "(1) you can get a dictionary to help your spelling. you can practice writeing. you can spell it out. I will soned it out. (2) I can read story's an see

how you do it. I can make my storys. I can write my story's over and over agien.

(3) I can Books Ever day. I can read at school."

After reading, rereading, coding, and recoding the student's paragraphs about how they planned to achieve their goals, several commonalities appeared from their writing: capitalization, comprehension, grammar, punctuation, details, spelling, penmanship, proofreading, and editing. These commonalities led to themes in writing such as; organization, information, conventions, and comprehension. Organization was how the students arranged their paragraphs and sentences. Information pertained to the details they put into their sentences when they were being constructed. Conventions dealt with the grammar and punctuation they used to construct their sentences. Finally, comprehension understands the meaning of the questions they were asked to complete. These themes directly impact how students write for academic success.

The students are insufficient in these areas for a variety of reasons. One specific reason is the students do not practice writing consistently or daily, even though writing is an embedded subject on their report cards. Interviewing the educator who instructs all of the participants in reading and language arts, she gave some vital information as to why the students struggle. The teacher shared her point of view pertaining to this problem: "We don't practice writing consistently because of time. I have so much that has to be taught in reading comprehension, that I rarely get a chance to actually practice the processes of writing with the kids. This is why so many of the students are struggling with writing. Now with Common Core State Standards, I am required to infuse writing with reading every day. It's hard because they have to understand the reading skills first in order to do the writing."

Motivating students to be academically rigorous in writing is a complex task for educators. Motivation is not a taught skill; it is a skill that must come from within (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Students must have the desire to achieve academically. Schoolchildren's motivation is vital for them to be successful. They have to want to achieve success no matter how daunting the task may be. This fits the self-actualization stage of motivation. This stage helps African American boys identify who they are in education. It helps them understand that they have a voice, can face new challenges and experiences in order to master education (Cherry, 2010; Maslow, 1962). However, if motivation is not already embedded in their psyche, trying to ensure they are inspired to write when they have no personal connection to the topic is an overwhelming task. Most students need to feel some type of relationship to what they are writing in order to be academically successful.

Theme 2: Student's intimate connection to writing

Most educators share with their students a connection and purpose for reading when their students are asked to read (Prince George's County Public School System, 2011). The three forms of connections often used are: (a) text-to-world, (b) text-to-text, and c) text-to-self. These three links establish a relationship for the students and why they are reading. The participants explained what kind of material they enjoy reading when they are free to choose their own reading. Responses included:

- Students A, B, D, and E: "When I can get a book about a sport I like reading about that sport or person."

- Student A and B: "The sports I like most to read about is either basketball or football."

- Student C: "I like to read books about fishing, because I enjoy going fishing with

  my father."

However, sometimes instructors do not create that connection for writing. Students need

to know the purpose of their writing.

- Student A: "I like writing about recess. I also like to write about my turtle and

  dog"

- Student D: "I like writing about family, trips, school, friends, and life."

- Student E: "I like to write about Flat Stanley. He is a character in a book I like to

  read."

Students A, D, and E like to write for pleasure. Student D likes writing about personal

things, and Student E likes to connect his writing to what he has read. However, if there

is no connection, especially an intimate correlation, students generally write off topic.

Creating an intimate connection to writing through behavioral, motivational, and social

connections is imperative for students to be proficient or above on this skill.

Behavioral connections to writing for the students

Learning to write is a behavioral trait, which most schoolchildren learn at an

early age (Cason, 1991; Colunga, n.d.; Davis, 2003). Many parents teach their children

how to hold a pencil so they can etch their names. It is important for preschoolers to

have this skill set before they begin school. If they achieve the foundations of writing,

such as writing their forenames and numerals, it is one less skill required of educators to

teach their students. It is a basic fundamental of becoming a writer and closing the

academic achievement gap in writing.

Establishing a personal connection to writing is important for students (Haddix, 2010). Students need to understand that how they write can relate to them personally. Intimate connections are important, so when the students were asked to answer, *"What I like about my writing?"* the participants had a range of answers.

- Student A: "What I like about my writing is that the more I write the better I get. Also that I have better handwriting. I like to read out my writing to other people. Also I like my spelling in my writing.

- Student D: "I like my stories, punctuation marks, spelling and subjects."

- Student E: "I like how I write my stories. I like how I write paragraphs, capitalization, and sentences."

When asked Question 1 from the Writers Profile, *"Is writing important to you? Why or why not?"* all of the students said that writing was important to them. However, their answers regarding why it was important were different.

- Student A: "Yes, because if you want to be a writer or something you already know how."

- Student B: "Yes, because I like to writ important."

- Student C: "Yes because if you don't know how to write you can't work at a store."

- Student D: "Yes because if we can't write the world will be a mess."

- Student E: "Yes, you can write stories."

Ascertaining if writing was important to the participants identified each individual's connection to his writing. It was imperative to discover their intimate

connections to writing. Question 5 from the Writers Profile of ASP asked: *"What do you think is good about your writing?"*   The student responses were:

- Student A: "What I think about my writing is that I like to put a lot of details in my writing."

- Student B: "I am good at drawing pictures."

- Student C: I am good at writing stories because I illustrate them. I am good at stories and drawings."

- Student D: "I am good at writing about my family."

- Student E: "I am good at writing stories."

The participants were able to state what was good about their writing; however, this was connected to what they liked to write the most. Students B, C, and E liked to write stories, while Students B and C liked to write stories and draw pictures.

In order to help students create intimate connections with their writing, it's important to know what they like about their writing. Question 3 of the Writers Profile from the ASP asked the participants to write a paragraph regarding, *"What I like about my writing?"* Their responses were:

- Student A: "What I like adout my writing is that the more I write the better I get. Also that I have better hand Writeing. I like to read out my Writing to other people. Also I like my spelling in my writing."

- Student B: "I like about my writing about is my handwriting. at my penchof wihn marks. at my capitoloazing."

- Student C: "I like my handwriting because i can wirte fast. I like my wirte because i can wirte a paragraph. I like my witeing because i can read it."

- Student D: "I like my stories. I like my pumction marks. I like my spelling. I like my subjects."

- Student E: "I like How Write my storys. I like how I write paragraphs. I like the way how I put Capitalization on the frist sentence. I like the way how I write my sentence."

The responses to this question identified several codes visible in the student's previous writing samples. The students struggled with capitalization, grammar, details, spelling, editing, and proofreading. The participants found it difficult to write details about their writing and continued to struggle with spelling. However, it identified what they felt was good about their writing. The participants were able to demonstrate what they felt were (to them) the solid facts of how they wrote.

Table 3
I like to write – Question 2

Answers	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E
Quickly	✓		✓		
With noise around					
Anytime	✓	✓			✓
Anyplace	✓			✓	
With a pencil or pen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slowly		✓	✓	✓	✓
In a quiet place	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
At a special time			✓		✓
In a special place	✓				✓
On a computer					

Question 2 of the Writers Profile of the ASP survey was the final question that established an intimate connection between the students and their writing (see Table 3). The students were asked to complete the statement, *"I like to write,"* by checking the answer that best applied to *how* they like to write. Their responses indicated that all of the students enjoyed using a pen or pencil and a quiet place to compose their writing.

However, none of the students preferred using a computer to create their writings (see Table 3). When probed about why they do not like to write on a computer the answers varied:

- Student A: "The only time I am on the computer is when I am doing 'First in Math.' I do not write my stories on the computer; just on paper."

- Student B: "I complete most of my work at the babysitter's house, and she do not have a computer I can type on."

- Student D: I like to write my stories. I have just never typed a story on the computer at school or at home."

Four of the five schoolboys liked to write slowly. However, the places where they prefer to write differed. Two of the five participants favored writing in a special place at a special time. Conversely, none of the students liked to write with noise.

Having an intimate connection to writing allows students to write about topics they enjoy (Haddix, 2010). B.F. Skinner (1948) established his behavioral theory on the "operant condition." The operant condition determined that if specific behaviors were given precise consequences relating to the behavior, it modified whether or not that behavior would be repeated (Boeree, 2006). If African American males have an intimate connection to what they are writing, it is likely they will be motivated to repeat this behavior; hence, helping to decrease the academic achievement gap between African American males and their Caucasian peers.

Motivational connections to writing for the students

Motivation is the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular manner (Webster, 2011). Motivation is what inspires us to do things. It is often an

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internal mechanism that encourages people to become successful. If motivation is not required at an early age, it is difficult to teach, learn, or acquire later (Cherry, 2010; Maslow, 1943, 1954). Learning what motivates African American boys to write can be a difficult task, especially in the early years of education. Many males in early childhood education and elementary schools are beginning to learn the fundamentals of writing. Establishing what motivates them to write is not an easy undertaking.

When interviewing the students regarding what motivated them to write, several questions from the ASP addressed this perspective. The first question was; *"What type of writing is your most favorite and why?"* Student responses were:

- Student A: "My most is movies. I like to write about that because I have lot of things to write about."

- Student B: "I like writing cartons because it is fun."

- Student C: "I like to write cartoons because cartoons are funny."

- Student D: "Spelling because it is hard to think of sentences."

- Student E: "My favorite is cartoons because it's funny."

After identifying what they liked to write the most, it was important to discover what they liked least. The next question asked, "*What type of writing is your least favorite and why?"* Their responses were*:

- Student A: "I like to write summaries the least because it takes a very, very long time."

- Student B: "I don't like writing sentences the least because I have to write too much."

- Student C: "Writing stories is my least favorite."

- Student D: "Sentences because it is hard to think of sentences."

- Student E: "Tests is the least favorite because it's hard and some are not."

First, the males pinpointed the kinds of writing they enjoyed, making a personal connection to their writing. Students B, C, and E liked cartoons, and Student A liked to write about movies. However, Student D did not identify a form of writing; he identified a process. Then when they discussed with the interviewer what they did not like, all of the participants but one identified processes. Student C was the only one to identify a style of writing. This was significant because he was the only participant who could identify between a particular style and a specific process of writing.

Another question from the ASP Survey that can be classified as to what motivated them to write was, "*How do you feel about writing?*" This question connected to motivation because it established what they felt when they wrote. Research has shown that when students have a personal connection to writing, they are likely to engage in the writing process (Haddix, 2010; Tatum, 2010). Their answers varied from feelings of positive or negative, to positive at times, and negative at times.

- Student A: "To me I feel writing is about what you suppose to do and what you want to do. You can write things that you want to write about. You can do what you think you can do and you can write what you want to write. It makes me feel like you can do what you want to do when you want to do it.*" "When Ms. Dunlap has you write how does it make you feel?"* "It makes me feel like I can write more stuff. Then I can write more ideas if I want to do it. You can write more things when you write what your suppose to write. More things you write you can do what you write."

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- Student C: "I feel kind of, I feel like I'm slow because my handwriting." *"What is it about your handwriting that makes you feel slow?"* "I write big, kind of." *"Big how?"* "I think it was because my other teacher at the other school, the one I had in pre-K, she was putting it (pencil) in my wrong hand. She was putting it in my right hand and I was left-handed." *"Do you write left-handed?"* "Yes, I write left-handed."

- Student D: "Good." *"Anything else?"* "Sometimes it feels a little hard and sometimes it feels easy. When they talking about not that compliment stuff, its not that hard. Sometimes when they talk about some stuff it is hard for me." *"What is hard for you?"* "I am not sure."

- Student E: "Kind of nervous and my hand feels, it hurts." *"What makes you nervous about writing?"* "Because I think I am going to get it wrong."

Table 4
Tortoise and His Friends Narrative Fantasy Essay

Codes	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Total
Capitalization	✓		✓	✓		3
Comprehension	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Grammar	✓	✓	✓			3
Punctuation	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Details	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Spelling	✓		✓	✓		3
Letter Spacing		✓	✓	✓		3
Word Spacing	✓		✓	✓		3
Penmanship	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Proofreading	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
Editing	✓	✓	✓	✓		4
No Answer						
No Work					✓	
Total	10	8	11	10		39

Student E did not complete the assignment

These questions provided an intimate connection to what motivated the males to write. Their answers showed that unless the males had a relationship to their writing samples their work contained a plethora of errors (see Table 4). For example when the participants had to write a fantasy essay about two stories they read, they could not write it correctly.

- Student A: "Mrs. Duckett, I don't know to use this worksheet to write my essay."

- Student D: "I don't understand either."

The participants could not write their essays, because they could not make any connection to either the essay directions or the story. They struggled with connecting the two stories and writing an essay about them that required inferences and text evidence, because they had no background knowledge of fantasy stories. However, when the students could make an intimate connection to the topic, they wrote incredible stories (see Table 5).

Table 5
If I Were a Gift – Essay

Codes	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Total
Capitalization						0
Comprehension						0
Grammar						0
Punctuation						0
Details		✓			✓	2
Spelling						0
Letter Spacing			✓			1
Word Spacing			✓			1
Penmanship	✓		✓			2
Proofreading						0
Editing						0
No Answer						
No Work						
Total	1	1	3	0	1	6

The students were given an essay assignment entitled, *If I Were a Gift*. In this essay they were asked to tell: If you were a gift (a) what would you be, (b) why would you be that gift, and (c) who would you give the gift to. The participants had to answer these questions on a graphic organizer first, and then write their essays from the worksheet. The students were able to create beautiful essays with minimal errors, because they felt an intimate connection to the story, which was about Christmas and presents (see Table 5).

- Student A: "I would be a bike for my little brother. He needs one because he broke his."

- Student B: "Mrs. Duckett, I would be a coat because I don't want anyone to be cold in the winter."

- Student C: "I would be a boat because my father's boat is broke and we like to fish together."

- Student D: "I would be canned food because I don't want anyone to go hungry during the holidays."

- Student E: "I would be money so I could give it to the poor so they can buy clothes, shoes, and food."

The student's answers to the essay show an intimate connection. The students know what it feels like to get presents for Christmas, and they want to give them to people to make them feel better.

Social connections to writing for students

Peer learning essentially refers to students learning with and from each other as fellow learners; without any implied authority to any individual. It is based on the tenet

that "students learn a great deal by explaining their ideas to others and by participating in activities in which they can learn from their peers" (Boud, 2001a). As long as educators allow an environment in which peer interaction is essential, students can learn more from each other than they do from the educator (Gwee, 2003). Vygotsky (1978) believed that social interaction was vital to a child's developmental processes.

When interviewing the students regarding their social interactions in the classroom environment, it was amazing to get a glimpse of their feelings and thought processes through sharing their writing samples.

Question 6 from the ASP survey asked the students, "*How do you feel when you are asked to share your writing with others?"* The student replies ranged from nervous and shy to excited. The student responses were:

- Student A: "I feel surprised because most of the time I share a lot of my writings with my family and the school. When I was in the first grade, I was shy and scared to write and share my papers because I was shy. I am not shy anymore because I have been sharing my stuff now, and I am not afraid of what I wrote, so I share a lot of my stuff now.

- Student B: "I feel good and nervous because it makes me scared, and I don't know why I am nervous."

- Student C: "I feel good showing people what I have wrote."

- Student D: "I feel good showing people what I have wrote."

- Student E: "Sometimes I feel nervous, and sometimes I just speak or speak slowly or, well, that's it. I feel nervous, because I never.. because, it's just hard.

Because everybody s looking at you and sometimes I am shy because I forgot what I just read."

Generally the students enjoy sharing their writings with others. Even though they are nervous about sharing, they still engage in the social aspect of allowing their peers to view their work. After analyzing how they feel when they have to share, it was also important to explore how they feel when others share their writings with them. Question 7 from the ASP asked the students, "*How do you feel when others share their writing with you?"*

- Student A: "I feel like they did a good job also because they share and I share too. We all share. It is not fair if one-person shares and they all do not share.

- Student B: "Good, that is it."

- Student C: "I feel, I feel kind of, I think it is, I kind of feel what they are saying. If someone is saying my life is horrible because my parents never pack me any candy or nothing else, it makes me feel kind of sad about what they are sharing in their writing."

- Student D: "I feel good because I like to hear what they have wrote. Also, I feel excited like when we were writing to the board of education they are about to close our school. One of these days we are going to share it with our classmates."

- Student E: "Sometimes I listen and sometimes I really do not know what they are talking about, and I try to share with them my story, too."

Social interactions of students are imperative for academic growth. In peer learning, students will construct their own meaning and understanding of what they need to learn. Essentially, students will be involved in searching for, collecting, analyzing,

evaluating, integrating, and applying information to complete an assignment or solve a problem. Thus, students will engage themselves intellectually, emotionally, and socially in constructive conversation and learn by talking and questioning each other's views and reaching consensus or dissent (Boud, 2001). This is evident in the student responses. They wanted to engage in the social aspects of school because it increased learning.

Behavioral, motivational, and social connections to writing are essential in order for African American males to write proficiently. Establishing intimate connections to writing provides opportunities for students to write skillfully. It is imperative to have purposes for writing in order to ascertain behavioral, motivational, and social influences. If students understand the subjects they are writing about, it is likely they will write satisfactorily. When students know that their writing will be perceived as well done by the educator and their peers, they are likely to repeat the behavior, be motivated to write, and engage in peer learning. These behavioral, motivational, and social implications to achieve may help decrease the achievement gap between African American males and their Caucasian peers. However, if they do not understand the topic or cannot make a connection to themselves personally, they will continue to write poorly. This is why parental involvement is central to encouraging a student to perform in the school and home environment.

Theme 3: Various levels of parental involvement

Parental involvement can be perceived in a variety of ways. Parents can be active in their child's education by participating in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), being a parent volunteer, engaging in reading with the student, and analyzing their children's homework to ensure that they are on grade-level in all subject areas. However, if a parent

or guardian is not an active participant in the child's educational life, that child is more likely to face adversities in school (Center on Education Policy, 2012; Schumacher, 2008). Establishing behavioral and motivational inferences in education are key factors to ensuring that African American males progress within the educational process, thereby decreasing the achievement gap.

Behavioral levels of parental involvement

Parental involvement is one the biggest factors that contribute to a student's academic success (Center on Education Policy, 2012). However, parental involvement comes in various levels. Some parents are extremely active with their student's academics while others participate minimally (Center on Education Policy, 2012; Schumacher, 2008). These behaviors have an impact on a student's life.

Through interviewing the students at home and conducting a home visit, which included an interview with the parents and students, it was discovered that the parents had diverse levels of involvement in their child's education, and these levels of involvement were different from student to student. Three of the five students' parents engaged in a home visit and interview. All three of the parents played a role in being involved. Student A's mother was the active parent.

- Student A's mother: "I normally check his homework. His father is generally at work when we get home so I have to go over his work with him.

Student B does his homework at day-care, however, when he gets home his mother works with him.

- Student B's mother: "I am a single-parent so I have to help all three of my kids with their work. It is time consuming because they all have so much to do.

Student D sometimes goes to the neighbor's house to wait for his parents to come home. However, as soon as he gets home he completes his homework and goes over the information with his father.

- Student D's father: "I always check his work. He doesn't read what he writes and I find errors all the time. I tell him all the time he needs to slow down."

Students A, B, and D's parents established routines for completing homework daily. However, the level of accuracy differs. Student D's father was actively involved in his writing and reads everything he writes for correctness. If his punctuation, grammar, or spellings are incorrect, he makes changes on the paper and Student D has to redo the work. He works with him to ensure he understands the importance of writing properly.

- "You did a good job on your sentences. However, you have to be careful with your spelling and grammar errors. I tell you all the time use your dictionary to help you."

This is different from Student A and B's parents' involvement in their writing.

- Student A's mother: "You can write better, but I won't press you because you have so much other homework to get done."

This is inconsistent parental involvement. It may hinder Student A from helping to close the achievement gap in writing, because Common Core will require him to be precise with his writing. Student B's mother showed inconsistencies as well. Student B completes his homework at day-care, so she checks to make sure it was done. She does not check for accuracy.

- Student B's mother: "Generally he does his homework at day-care. I just check to make sure it is done."

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The parents have established a routine for ensuring that the homework is complete. However, only one of the three is ensuring that the writings are accurate. The investigator further interviewed the parents to get a consensus of why the levels of involvement varied.

- Student A's mother: "He has so much to complete. Some days he is sitting at the table doing homework until nine or ten o'clock at night. I just want to make sure he is getting it all done."

- Student B's mother: "I have three children to go over homework with. Plus I am in school myself. It is hard trying to keep up with all of them and all the work they have to complete."

- Student D's father: "I check his work. I make him rewrite the stuff he gets wrong. He doesn't like it, but it has to be done in order for him to get better. I keep telling him if he takes his time he can catch these errors himself."

Creating routines for completing work at home is critical for the student's progress. When students know their work will be checked, it ensures that they are responsible for completing the activity. However, the issue is exactness. If there is no set routine for ensuring that their work is done correctly, more often students will write any answer just to make sure they are finished. This is considered a neutral operant. Skinner (1948, 1953) indicated that if there is no response from the environment it neither increases nor decreases the probability that the behavior will be repeated. Students need parents to take an active role in how well the work is completed. Establishing this behavior increases the chances of the academic achievement gap being

decreased. It also provides motivation for the students to do their writing accurately, because they know their parents will be examining it.

Motivational levels of parental involvement

Maslow (1943) stated that human motivation is based on people seeking fulfillment and change through personal growth. Students need personal motivation in order to be academically sound. It's a trait that has to be developed before formal schooling. It is imperative for African American males to establish self-motivation because they face the most adversities in formal education (Kunjufu, 2011; Noguera, 2003). Before they begin schooling they should be successful at the biological, physiological, and safety stages of motivation.   These stages create the bonds children have with their parents.

African American male students and their parents or guardians must work together to ensure that the fundamentals of education are established. It's imperative that boys come to school already reading and writing. This has to be customary in their homes to ensure that they are not below grade level when they begin school.

The research on parental involvement began by interviewing the students. The investigator wanted to understand if the students participated in the writing process in the home. Question 4 of the Writing Attitude Survey of ASP survey asked; "*What kinds of writing do you do at home?"*

- Student A: "At home, most of the stuff I write about at home when I do what I am supposed to do and I get rewarded. I have an allowance and I am supposed to do it and my father tells me to do it because I have a lot of chores. I write about me getting rewards. I write about what is happening at school. I write about what I

do at recess and specials and I write about my grades. I like to write about my allowance."

- Student B: "I write about characters and toys."

- Student C: "I write some, what I write, sentences and I write stories and draw pictures about stories.

- Student D: "I write about my family, about my ancestor and all the people that came before me. My mom and dad would help me and tell me all about them people."

- Student E: "I write about my summer and sometimes I write about a book. That is it."

At home the boys are motivated to write because they get to write about things they enjoy. This was evident from Question 7 of the student writing attitude survey of the ASP. This question related to the statement: *"It's fun to write things at home."* Three of the five boys said sometimes, one said he liked writing at home a lot and the final participant said he liked writing at home a whole lot. This showed that at home, the majority of the time, the boys are free to write about anything. They are not confined to write about topics that have been chosen for them.

- Student A: *"I write all the time at home. I like to write stories about the stuff I do with my little brother."*

- *Student D: "I like to write letters."*

Another inquiry asked the participants; *"Where do you use writing the most?"* Startling two of the five students said at home.

- Student A: *"I use writing at home because when I'm at home I have more things to write about."*

- Student B: *"I do my writing at home."*

This is motivational behavior because the participants are not writing school assignments they are writing about topics they relish.   However, when it is required for them to write at home about assigned topics, the outcomes were dissimilar.

The participants were assigned journal writings to complete at home in order to gauge how the parents interact with their sons. It was important for the participants to journal write because this process allowed them to get their thoughts down on paper, while enhancing their writing skills and giving them an outlet to express their thoughts and ideas without being graded or critiqued.

The students were assigned journal writing in a composition book and student response journals worksheets. The journal writing books were to get sample writings of the participant's daily activities, thoughts, and feelings. The student response journals were to engage the participants in reading after which they summarized what they read.

The participants were to write their daily activities, feelings, and thoughts over a two-week time frame. All the participants' journal wrote except Student E. He did not complete his journal entries or turn in a journal to the investigator. When questioned about why he did not participate in the journal writings he responded:

- Student E: *"I kept forgetting to write."* (see Table 1)

The investigator contacted Student E's parents via email, letters, and the telephone (leaving messages), but the researcher received no response from either parent. Student's A, B, C, and D completed some of the journal writings. They all were inconsistent

regarding the days they wrote and the details they gave in their writings. The reasons given for not completing the journals daily were:

- Student A: *"I keep forgetting to write what I do each day. I just don't remember."*

- Student B, C and D: *"I keep forgetting to take my journal home every night."*

The home journal writings proved that the students were not fully engaged in writing daily. When they did take the opportunity to journal write it came with minimal results. When discussing with the students why they did not take it seriously and complete their writings daily their responses varied.

- Student E: *"I don't know where my journal is. I have lost it. I think I left it at daycare."*

- Student A: *"I do the same thing every day so I keep forgetting I am supposed to write."*

- Student B: "*I don't know what to write about."*

Recognizing that daily journal entries were a daunting task for the participants, the investigator decided to give the boys reading response journals. The desired effect of providing these worksheets was to allow the students to read with their parents and then summarize their readings. The students were given ten journals to complete in ten days.

Three of the five participants completed reading response journals. Student B completed six and Students C and D completed all ten.

- Student A: "I read every night. I just forget to do the journals." *"Did you read with your parents?"* "Yes*." "Did your parents make you complete the summaries?"* "No."

- Student E: *"I have too much homework to do." "Don't you have to read every night anyway?" "Yes." "Why don't you summarize the reading you do every night?" "I don't know, I keep forgetting."*

Students C and D read daily; however, what they read differed. Student C read the same book four of the ten nights. He recorded journal responses, but he did not answer every question, and some of the answers he gave were incomplete.

- *"Student C did you read to your parents each night?" "No." "Did anyone help you complete the worksheets?" "No."*

Student D read a different book each night and answered all of the questions.

- *"Student D, did you read with your parents?" "Yes." "Did they help you answer the questions?" "Yes, they helped me with some of the answers, but most of it I wrote myself."*

Student B completed six of his worksheets and answered all of the questions on each sheet.

- *"Student B, did you read with your parents?" "No, I read at daycare." "Did anyone help you with your answers?" "No."*

Rereading and recoding their responses showed that all of the students struggled with comprehension of the questions. Question 6 asked: *"If you haven't finished reading the book, what do you think will happen next? If you finished reading the book, what do you think will happen if the author decided to write another part to this story? If you need more space, use the back of this paper."* Student C had no responses. Student D responded, but his answers were limited or they did not answer the question. Example:

- *"Harry will feel better."*

- "The children will adopt the puppy."

- "The enemies will try to look for another hiding place."

- "The farmer will harvest the crops."

Student B responses:

- "I would read it again then I would write about it."

- "Then I would read it again then I would write it again."

Student B wrote, *"Then I would read it again then I would write it again,"* on five of his six worksheets. Even though the students did read, and some read to their parents, the level of involvement with the summaries was wide-ranging. Students B and C completed the sheets on their own. Student D received assistance, but it was marginal.

Encouraging parents to participate in writing with their children can be a difficult task. Most parents have to work to provide for their children. The amount of time they can engage in school activities is limited. However, if they are active participants, it is a rewarding experience for the students. This was evident with the African American male participants in this study. When parents were active, student achievement was optimal. When Student D's parent analyzed his work for accuracy, his work was returned to school with minimal errors. It also helped him understand the assignments he was completing. This was also evident on school tests.

Table 6
Spelling Test

Test	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Average
Test 1	80%	100%	73%	100%	100%	90%
Test 2	100%	53%	93%	100%	93%	88%
Test 3	100%	33%	100%	100%	33%	73%

Table 6 Continued
Spelling Test

Test 4	47%	71%	100%	67%	100%	77%
Test 5	79%	21%	86%	93%	86%	73%
Average	81%	56%	90%	92%	82%	80%

Weekly the educator gives the students 14 words to study. The students write the words in alphabetical order, define them, write a sentence using each word, and use five of the words in a story. Table 6 indicates how the students performed on their spelling assessments. The students overall averages were 80 percent. Student C and D had the highest percent. Student D is reading on grade level. Conversely Student C reads below grade level and was retained in first grade. Their attitudes toward preparing for the test were similar. The student's perceptions were:

- Student D: *"My mother makes me define and put my words in alphabetical order the same day. Then she helps me practice spelling my words."*

- Student C: *"I practice spelling my words with my mother when we are riding in the car."*

The other participants did not indicate how they study for their spelling test. However, when they were asked Question 6 from the Writers Profile of ASP survey; *"What improvements would you like to make in your writing?"* three of the five participants said their spelling.

- Student B: *"I would like to improve my spelling."*

- Student D: *"My spelling."*

- Student E: *I will like to improve my spelling and test."*

In order for the participants to improve in this area, it requires assistance from their home environments. There is no built in time in the school environment to study so the participants have to study at home. If no parental support is available to help them to improve, the percentage of failure for the test is higher (see Table 6). The data (see Table 6) indicates that Student B is receiving the least amount of assistance to improve. However, he is one of the participants that wanted to improve his spelling. He is motivated and has a strong desire to learn, according to his interviews. However, the data indicates the support to help him improve is nominal.

The proverb, *"It takes a village to raise a child,"* is an accurate statement. Motivation in the home environment is a factor for student achievement (Davis-Kean, 2005). The educational achievement of students for whom stimulation in the home environment is inconsistent or absent beginning at birth is minimal. This is emphasized the most in African American males (Kunjufu, 2011; McMillian, 2004; Noguera, 2003, 2008, 2014; Tatum, 2012). African American males need stimulation in order to grow, and it should start with the biological and physiological needs of life. African American males have to bond with their parents or guardians in order to be motivated. Motivation is significant in order for academic success. The home environment is the foundation for ensuring African American males are educated (Center of Education Policy, 2012; Harris, 2010; Kennell & McGrath, 2005; Kunjufu, 2011; Noguera, 2003).

Theme 4: Insufficient and/or inadequate resources available in the school and home environment

According to Thomas Sobol (2000), the New York Commissioner of Education:

When students receive limited or out of date instructional materials, or no

instructional materials at all, the students learn a different lesson: that society

doesn't care enough about whether they learn to provide them books. Kids

respond to this lesson in different ways, but very often I have seen them feel

alienated and/or discouraged and/or hostile and/or apathetic. (p. 8)

School environment

Public education in America faces many challenges. The greatest hurdles that

continue to plague public education are insufficient and inadequate resources available in

schools and the home environment (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). These resources can be

categorized in three areas pertaining to the school environment: (a) material resources –

money, (b) access to innovative technology, and (c) professional development of the

educators. The categories plaguing the home environment are resources and

understanding of the current curriculum. These deficiencies can sometimes be inflexible.

However, in order to improve public education resolutions and remedies must be found.

Material resources

The academic achievements of African American males in an urban public school

in Maryland are impacted by several issues that affect school climate. The category that

influences academic achievement the most is material resources. Many county school

systems in Maryland generate portions of their funding through property taxes. When the

housing market crumbled, so did funding for those counties' educational resources;

resources like innovative technology, copy and writing paper, pencils and current

textbooks (Tate & Krughoff, 2003).

Through an investigation of the school in Maryland attended by the students in

this study, it was discovered it lacked supplies to properly educate the students; basic

supplies that some schools provide. This is a Title I school, and some of the students attend classes without the materials necessary for learning. The teacher who educates the study participants explained:

- "Sometimes I have to buy supplies for my students. Sometimes they don't have school supplies. I always buy journals, paper, pencils, and erasers. They may have one or two journals, but they need one for every subject. Sometimes they don't have the materials, and they can't learn without them. So I just buy the stuff and give it to them."

While observing the class, a student in the study did not have his composition book.

- Teacher: "Student E where is your journal?"

- Student E: "I don't know. I can't find it.

- Teacher: "You lost your book again?"

- Student E: "Yes."

- Teacher: "Well you will have to use paper because I have already given you two books."

Interviewing the teacher it was discovered that she had given him two journals previously, because he did not have enough for all subjects.

Another resource limitation, which hinders student academic achievement, is a restriction on copy supplies and a limit on the number of copies a teacher can make each quarter. At the elementary school level, the teacher often needs to make copies for each student to write on. Having the students write their own worksheets cuts into instructional time and practices. Interviewing the teacher about the drawbacks, she discussed her concerns.

- Teacher: "Sometimes I don't have enough paper to make copies for both classes I teach for the entire quarter. Sometimes I have to make the students copy worksheets because they can't write on them. I end up spending time making sure they copied the worksheet correctly before I can teach them how to do it. It would be nice if we could have consumable books instead of having to make copies all together. This way I wouldn't have to make copies. The students could write in the books and keep them."

Another resource this school sometimes lacks is grade-level instructional materials - textbooks. There are no up-to-date grammar books to instruct the students on the processes of writing and trying to teach third graders the methods of writing require textbooks that provide examples.

- Teacher: "Common Core writing is complex. Teaching these kids who are already behind in writing how to write is difficult. Most of the students don't know sentence structure. I need to start at the basics like the kinds of sentences, subjects and verbs, in order to teach them grammar correctly. But I don't have the proper books at a third grade level. I have plenty of reading books and supplemental reading books, but no grammar textbooks. So, I end up relying on worksheets. Then I run out of paper. Sometimes I am just stuck, so I do the best I can with what I got."

This instructor continued to educate the students despite the daily obstacles of being in a Title I school. She incorporated all the resources she had available to ensure the students were receiving the optimal education even though her supplemental resources were minimal.

Innovative technology

According to Dr. Gerald Zahorchak (2009), the Secretary of Education in Pennsylvania: "School buildings affect the quality of education, and they play a critical role in a community's development and quality of life,"

Renovating or building a new school facility is a challenging task. School districts have to decide if neighborhood schools are worth renovating and saving in order to maintain the health and welfare of the community (Zahorchak, 2009). However, new facilities provide the structure and resources to have innovative technology already established. It's a daunting task, but it is one that has to be considered diplomatically for all the stakeholders.

The facility that the researcher investigated is facing this challenge. Innovative technology has a major impact on academic achievement (Jackson et al., 2008). If schools are not equipped to meet the requirements of the latest upgrades, technology works inefficiently. This public school was built in the 1980's as a neighborhood school. It has never been renovated, but there have been structural changes such as roof replacement; replacement of doors, windows, and paneling in classrooms; and the infusion of wires for technology and communication (Prince George's County Public Schools System, 2011). However, updating an old building with up-to-date equipment is difficult.

At the beginning of the school year information was received that this building was on the list of schools to be closed. This news created anxiety in the administration, teachers, staff, and students. The students wrote letters to the board of education requesting that their building not be closed. The student's hand wrote the letters. In this

day and age of technology, the letters could have been received instantly and in a more professional manner had there been enough computers available for the students to use to create their letters.

The study participants' classroom had five computers for 16 students. The students had to take turns working on the computers. Time is limited and each student cannot work on the computer daily. In addition, there is insufficient Internet access. These computers are older models and must be plugged into the Internet for adequate access; they do not have wireless capability, which is inconvenient. This is an old building, and the services are not sufficient. Sometimes the Internet goes down and connectivity is lost. These computers are not equipped with current writing software that could teach them and allow them to write comprehensibly, which is yet another hindrance.

Finally, the majority of the students lack proficiency in the use of technology and keyboarding. The school has a computer lab; however, the students only visit this lab for 30 minutes once a week. The researcher discussed some of the pitfalls of the program with the students' classroom teacher:

- Researcher: *"What do you see as the biggest limitation for the students using technology?"*

- Teacher: "The students have not been taught the use of technology and keyboarding. They know how to play games and go to the different websites. However, using software, writing letters, researching, and the simple use of the keyboard are difficult for them. I have to turn the computer on for them. I have to put the password in for them. I have to show them how to go to a website.

Trying to get them to use the computer without any help is hard. Then so many of them don't know how to type; so they spend so much time trying to find the correct keys. It's hard. I spend a lot of time helping them on the computer and getting to the right websites. It takes away so much instructional time."

- Researcher*: "What about when they go to the computer lab? What do they do in there?"*

- Teacher: "When they go to the computer lab they usually work on First in Math or Study Island. These programs help them with reading and math. However, they do not address writing. Plus they only have computer time once a week for 30 minutes. That isn't enough time to learn computer technology. And if the Internet goes down during their time, they miss out for the week."

In the 21st Century of innovative technology it is important that every child have sufficient access to technology. With the infusion of the CCSS and the new standardized testing, innovative and sufficient technology is a necessity (Common Core Initiative Website, 2010). If African American males in urban school settings who are already below grade level in writing are not provided the necessary technology to increase rigor, they stand a greater chance of the achievement gap widening between them and their Caucasian peers (Jackson et al., 2008).

Professional development of educator

Professional development is essential for educators. When teachers are properly instructed on the curriculum they teach, the students stand a greater chance of improving in that subject (Mizell, 2010). Research has shown that when teachers become masters in a specific subject, the students stand a better chance of grasping that subject. It is vital

that teachers receive proper professional development in their curriculums before unveiling it to their students (Mizell, 2010).

Through observations of the participants' classroom environment and interviewing their instructor, it was discovered that this teacher had taught second-grade the majority of her career. This was her first encounter in the third grade and she had to learn the skills and new requirements of the Common Core State Standards at this level. It was evident the educator had some difficulties teaching the writing process at a third grade level (see Table 4). The new requirements ask students to complete a complex writing sample; however, the educator did not fully understand the skills needed to complete this task (see Table 4). The teacher reflected:

- "I didn't know I would be teaching third grade this year. The principal didn't have a third grade teacher, so I volunteered to move so she wouldn't have to find another teacher. This is my first year, and I have to learn Common Core Standards for writing in third-grade. These standards are more rigorous than second-grade. I have to learn while I am teaching. There is a gap between second and third grade. The students didn't do as much writing in second grade as they have to do in third grade. Plus, I have to teach them the foundations of writing and all the skills. It's a lot. Sometimes too much; especially for those who didn't get a lot of writing in second grade."

Providing adequate professional development for instructors to properly educate their students is key to student achievement. When educators master the subjects they instruct student achievement can be obtained by the majority of the students encountered (Mizell, 2010). Even though this educator was highly qualified, she still lacked some of

the instructional practices necessary to properly instruct her students, which included the participants in this study. Learning the new Common Core State Standards for third grade writing while at the same time instructing the students put restraints on the amount of instruction the students received, hindering progress in decreasing the achievement gap in writing between African American males and their Caucasian peers.

Home environment

Mary McCloud-Bethune stated (Gruwell, 2007), "The whole world opened up for me when I learned to read" (p. 554).

Alexander, Entwisle and Bendinger (1994) suggested that the parents' abilities to form accurate beliefs and expectations regarding their children's performance are essential in structuring the home and educational environment so that they can excel in post schooling endeavors. Literature on achievement consistently has shown that parent education is important in predicting children's achievement (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, & Duncan, 1994). That is important, because parents and guardians are the first educators for most children. Research on parenting has shown that the level of parent education is related to the social climate in the home (Klebanov et al., 1994). When the home environment is conducive to learning, the outcomes for children are astounding.

Through conducting home visits on three of the five students, commonalities in their settings were found. These commonalities were (a) resources available to complete the homework and (b) parental understanding of the current curriculum. These factors were strategic in the academic achievement of the participants.

The resources available had an influence on achievement. In all three homes, the students did not have a quiet place to complete their homework. When interviewing the

students in their home setting the investigator asked the participants, *"Where do you do your homework?"*

- Student A and D: "I do my homework at the kitchen table."

- Student B: "I do my homework at day-care. *"Does the babysitter check your work?* "No, my mother checks it when I get home."

In two of the three homes there were no dictionaries. The researcher asked the participants, *"Do you use a dictionary when you complete your homework?"*

- Students A: "I don't have a dictionary."

- Investigator: *"How do you spell your words?"*

- Student A: "My mother helps me."

- Student B: "No, she (day-care provider) doesn't have a dictionary.*" "Do you have a dictionary here (home)?"* "No."

Conversely Student D has a dictionary which he uses it to complete his homework (see Tables 5 & 6).

Another resource that factored into the participants' lack of success in writing was limited access to computers. Interviewing each of the students in their home environment revealed that all three participants had computers; however, they did not use computers to complete their homework in writing. Interviewing the participants in their home setting the investigator inquired, *"Do you have a computer that you can use to complete your writing assignments?"*

- Student A: "I don't use the computer for writing. I use it to do First in Math when Mrs. Dunlap gives us math homework.

- Student B: "I do my homework at the babysitters. She doesn't have a computer I can use." *"What about when you get home?"* "I don't use it at home."

- Student C: "I use my father's computer to do First in Math. I don't use it any other time."

Working with the students in their homes, each of the participants had to rewrite their work multiple times because of the numerous errors. If the participants had accessibility to computers to complete their writing it might cut down on the amount of time spent rewriting their work as well as their parents' time spent correcting errors.

The final resource contributing to the lack of academic achievement of the participants was the parents' understanding of the current curriculum. Common Core State Standards have changed the complexity of how educators teach their students. Students now have to learn through a rigorous curriculum that is different from when most of their parents were educated. Current curriculum requires students to research and write at early stages in education (Common Core Initiative Website, 2010). Students are spending more time completing homework, and some parents are not up-to-date on how to complete these laborious and complex lessons, which hinders them from helping their children. This was evident during home visits with Student A and Student B. The parents did not understand the intricacy of the writing assignments.

- Student A's parent: "Sometimes his work is hard. These new stories they have to write are different from the ones I had to write. I have never written a narrative fantasy essay. What happened to stories and letters? These kids have to write so much more than I ever had to write. He is doing homework half the night. Sometimes it's just too much."

- Student B's parent: "They have so much work to do. I don't always have time to check his work to make sure it is right. I just check it to make sure it's done. Then sometimes I don't understand what they are doing, and I am in school. This new writing requires a lot. Plus I have two other kids' work I have to check. It's a lot for third grade."

Student D's parents do not always understand the lessons, but they check his work consistently. His father checks his work to ensure it is done correctly and also checks it for spelling, grammar, and sentence structure (see Tables 5 & 6).

- Student D's parent: "I check his work for grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. If it is wrong I make him redo it. I don't always understand the kinds of writing, but I do know sentence structure and grammar. I can help him with that."

Common Core State Standards are rigorous and require parents to understand the new writing standards and the different styles of writing. The styles of writing are different from when most parents were learning to write in school. Taking a more active role in ensuring the students understand the writing process often requires the parents to research the standards themselves. The parents of African American males will have to take a more active role in learning the new writing processes in order for their boys to close the achievement gap in writing.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the data examined through this investigation. After conducting this study over a 60-day period and having participants complete an ASP survey, journal writings, and classroom observations in an

urban/suburban public school in Maryland, it was discovered that students struggled with organization, information, conventions, comprehension, and penmanship. The participants struggled with these skills in the school and home environment. The research led to the following four themes, (a) student academic achievement, (b) students intimate connection to the writing, (c) varied levels of parental involvement, and (d) inadequate and insufficient resources in the home and school environment.

These themes confirmed the theoretical schemes in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4. Behavioral, motivational, and social implications impact the writing process of African American males in third grade. Interviewing and coaching within the school climate and while conducting home visits revealed that African American males struggle with the writing process. Also, if African American males in third grade are not in an environment that promotes individuality, provides positive praise, and delivers intimate connections to the assignments through behavioral, motivational and social exploration it increases the chances of widening the achievement gap between them and their Caucasian peers.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

Many African American boys never understand that writing can lead them to become critical thinkers and excellent communicators. They perceive the physical task of writing as a mundane chore necessary to complete certain required tasks, such as standardized tests (Haddix, 2010), not as an important skill that is needed to be successful in school and in life. Students need to be able to demonstrate an ability to write on grade level by the third grade (Reardon, 2011). If they do not, the ramifications are insurmountable. For this reason it is imperative to learn why some African American boys are not successful critical writers (Haddix, 2010), to understand how family dynamics play a role in African American boys' writing, and discover what factors influence Black boys to experience success in writing.

This phenomenological study analyzed what effect behavioral, motivational, and social implications had on the writing skills of African American males in third grade. It also discovered the influences the school environment had on their academic success and how that impacted the achievement gap between African American males and their Caucasian peers.

This chapter explores the results of the study, including the significant themes that emerged through open-ended surveys, note taking during classroom observations, and the evaluation of the writings of five African American boys in the third grade. The themes and conceptual framework of Chapter 2 addressed the following research questions:

1) What behavioral, motivational, and social implications affect the writing skills of African American Males in an urban school in Maryland in grade 3?

2) What impact does school climate have on African American males' achievement in school and on assessment scores?

Summary of the Study

This phenomenological study was conducted through the naturalistic inquiry approach; the researcher observed the participants in their natural habitat without any manipulation. The data was collected through surveys, classroom and home observations, and journal writings. The participants in this study were five Black males in the third grade, ranging in age from eight to nine. All the participants were educated in the same classroom and by the same educator, in an urban/suburban public elementary school in Maryland. The data was collected, analyzed, and coded, and through the analysis of the data themes were created which addressed the research questions and theoretical framework: (a) student academic achievement (b) the students' intimate connection to writing, and (c) level of parental involvement. In Chapter 5 these themes will be clarified and synthesized in relationship to the research questions.

Research Question One: What behavioral, motivational, and social implications affect the writing skills of African American Males in an urban school in Maryland in grade 3?

The behavioral implications of academic achievement, intimate connections for students, and levels of parental involvement

B.F. Skinner (1953) believed that behavior is a learned process. Through this process he identified three types of responses to behavior: neutral operants, reinforcers

and punishers. He understood that if a behavior is reinforced positively, that behavior is likely to be repeated. However, if the behavior is given consequences the likelihood of that behavior being repeated is marginal. This investigation supported his theory. The participants participated in a variety of coaching methods and several behaviors were identified through the following themes.

Theme 1: Student academic achievement

The behavioral aspects of writing focus on what behaviors are learned and reinforced in order to be a proficient writer. When students are instructed on the correct skills needed to be a proficient writer the behavior is more likely to be repeated (Haddix, 2010; Tatum 2012). However, if they do not receive any formal standards of writing, there are consequences. This was evident in several of the participants writing samples. The first writing sample analyzed for by the researcher for evidence of this was the formative writing assessment. This assessment (see Table 1) illustrates the participants' outcomes on their standardized school test. Students A and D were reading on grade level; however, they scored in the same range as the participants who were reading below grade level. Table 1 data also illustrates that the students were not formally skilled to construct writing answers to meet the rigors of Common Core State Standards. Evidence of another behavioral factor that impacted the participant's achievement was the question from the ASP that asked, *"When did you learn to write?"* Three of the five participants responded *"At school."* Two of the participants could not remember when they began to write. Two of the participants indicated they did not learn to write until first grade. For African American males learning to write this late in their childhood is detrimental (Gwynne, 2010), because writing is a practiced skill that requires time. If there was no

time and effort focused on writing before formal schooling, African American boys face being behind their peers for their entire academic career; they also face contributing to the achievement gap between themselves and their Caucasian peers (Harris, 2011; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). The data showed that the participants in this study were already contributing to the academic achievement gap because they were below-grade level in writing in third grade. Research has proven that in order to experience academic success students need to start school already writing (Gwynne, 2010). This is especially crucial for African American males, because many of them are being schooled in under-performing schools (Noguera, 2003, 2008, 2014). As a result of Gwynne's (2010) research, it can be said that these students in a Title I school contributed to the academic achievement gap before they even started their formal education. Their lack of instruction on the skills needed to write before starting school, which led to their poor writing ability in third grade, supported the behavioral theory of academic achievement.

Theme 2: Students' intimate connection to writing

Educating students in the 21st century is an elaborate process. Students require different forms of instructional practices in order to be considered proficient learners. The days of rote learning are obsolete, and teachers can no longer subscribe to the drill and repeat method of education; they must consider the students' learning styles and background in order to ensure they are receiving optimal instruction. However, one of the most important forms of instruction is that of making intimate connections to the work for students (Haddix, 2010).

Students need to be stimulated throughout the learning process. Stimulation often keeps their attention on the task set before them. When students have an intimate

connection to what they are learning they increase their academic achievement. Students need to feel that what they are learning is important and useful, and that it connects to their every lives. This is essential when instructing African American males in all aspects of the writing process.

Most African American males are below grade level in education. They are reading, writing, and computing well below their peers. Often this occurs because they are being educated in subpar schools and being taught things that are not important to them (Noguera, 2003, 2008; Tatum, 2005). They have to read and write about information that has no significant value in their lives. However, when students are given the option to do assignments that are related to information they value, their work often takes on new meaning. When African American males are given assignments on sports and music they take pride in what they are learning (Haddix, 2010). This data supported the behavioral theory through the importance of students having an intimate connection to their writing. That connection was evident when the students were assigned the essay about their school being closed. The participants understood clearly how closing their school would impact them personally and academically. Their feelings created a personal connection to their writing sample, *If I Were a Gift.* The boys were able to imagine the effect they could have on the lives of others who were important to them. In both cases, the students were eager to write and wrote to the best of their ability, because of their intimate connection to the assignment.

The participants in this study were surveyed about the types of writing they like to complete. When the students were asked, *"What do you like to write about?"* they had a variety of answers.

- Student A: "I like writing about recess. I also like to write about my turtle and dog."

- Student D: "I like writing about family, trips, school, friends and life."

- Student E: "I like to write about Flat Stanley. He is a character in a book I like to read."

The participants enjoyed writing about these things because they were personal. The boys felt a connection to these subjects and were free to express their ideas and feelings about them in their own words. These kinds of writings didn't require them to pretend that they understood the topic. They could just express their feelings in their own words. Writing on topics they enjoyed gave the participants an intimate connection to the subjects and allowed them to express who they were through their writings.

Theme 3: Level of parental involvement

The final theme relating to behavioral factors that affect the writing skills of African American males is the level of involvement of the parents or guardians. Parents and guardians are the first educators of children (Gadsden, 2011). Parents must establish the guidelines of how children will learn to write. This was somewhat evident in the home visits.

Student D's father always checks his writing and his mother worked with him on his spelling. Student D's father spent time ensuring that he understood the fundamentals of proper sentence structure. Student D's father made corrections on his work and illustrated for him the proper ways of composing sentences. It showed when Student D completed his narrative fantasy and *If I Were a Gift* essays. Even though Student D did not have full comprehension of the narrative fantasy essay, he had proper sentence

structure. On his *If I Were a Gift* essay he received a perfect score. His sentence structure, grammar and comprehension of the essay were done proficiently. It was also proven from the scores of his spelling. Student D had the highest percentages on his spelling test (see Table 6). Student D talked about how his mother quizzed him nightly on his spelling words in preparation for his test. However, in the other home visits established rituals and routines were not manifested.

Student A and B's parental involvement varied. Student A's mother was involved to an extent and she worked with him during homework time. She established the routine of having him at the table completing his work and checking it when he finished. She did not always check his work for accuracy; she just ensured it was done.

- Student A's mother: *"I am not going to press you because you have so much work to do. But you know you can do better."*

It showed in his *"Narrative Fantasy"* essay. He received a poor score on that assignment because of comprehension, grammar, and spelling. He did not understand that particular assignment, and she could not assist him because she too did not know the elements of a fantasy narrative. Table 6 also indicates Student A and his mother do not have established routines for studying his spelling. He ranged as high as a 100 percent to as low as a 47 percent on his test. He did not specify how he studied and during the home visit he did not study any of his words.

Student B completed the majority of his work at day-care. His provider did not review any of his work with him; she left that routine to his parents. Student B's mother did the evaluations of his work. Often she would check his work to ensure it was done, but she did not check his work for accuracy. During the home visit Student B was

writing a letter to Santa Claus. His letter had a plethora of errors ranging from sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation to comprehension and capitalization. The majority of these errors could have been corrected if his work had been reviewed for accuracy. Because there was no routine for studying, he also did poorly on the majority of his spelling tests. His scores ranged from 21% to 10% and were the lowest of the five participants. This hindered him from helping to close the achievement gap.

- Student B's mother: "I have three kids work to check and I am in school myself."

Parental involvement is crucial for student achievement (Center on Education Policy, 2012). When parents take an active role students have a greater chance of achieving academic success. However, when parents do not take an active role or establish rituals and routines to help their children be success, students risk becoming academic failures (Center on Education Policy, 2012). This investigation supported the behavioral theory as it related to parental involvement, because the students whose parents actively participated in their child's academics by working with them and encouraging them, produced better writing examples (see Tables 5 and 6). It was also supported through the investigator's observations in the students' homes. One of the participant's parents not only checked his work for completion but also checked it for accuracy. This participant's parents helped him study for tests and ensured he wrote his assignments with minimal errors (see tables 5 and 6). This also supports Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, because this student's parents had taken on a mentoring role in their son's education.

Behavioral implications in education must be established for children at the early stages of their lives. When practices are created before children begin formal schooling,

these behaviors are easier to maintain. However, if there are no customs established

before school begins they are hard to create and maintain once a child begins school.

Children emulate what they see. Research has shown this is more evident in African

American males (Kunjufu, 2011). When educators and parents create high expectations

students often create the same behaviors for themselves. African American males want

to be successful in education. They do not want fail and be the leading contributors of

the academic achievement gap (Harris, 2011). The participants in this investigation

exhibited these behaviors. They did not want to be performing below grade level in their

writing. They wanted to display the behaviors needed in order to be proficient writers

(see Table 5).

The motivational implications of academic achievement, intimate connections for students, and levels of parental involvement

Motivation is the force that achieves a particular behavior. It is often described as

what actions occur through a specific performance (Cherry, 2010). Motivation is a

behavior that cannot be taught. However, it can be learned through life experiences. The

likelihood of it being achieved in the later stages in life is nominal. Often motivation is

learned from observing parents or guardians. When children examine the specific

accomplishments of their parents they often want to emulate what they see. That is why

it is important that children have positive role models in order to obtain positive academic

achievement.

Theme 1: Student academic achievement

Motivation is one of the strongest indicators of academic success (Bomia et al.,

1997). The benefit of motivation was observed during this study. Once the students

understood what behaviors to exhibit when they wrote, they were more interested in writing. As they realized that they could improve their writing with practice, they were motivated to write more. Table 5 indicates how continued practice improved their writing. The participants gained motivation to write through consistent praise; and their grades increased with each essay.

Theme 2: Students' intimate connection to writing

If African American males have an intimate connection to what they are writing, it is likely they will be motivated to write. Making that connection may be achieved if teachers allow students to write about the things they enjoy, since then, the behavior is more than likely to be repeated (Skinner, 1948). When the investigator asked the students; *"what do you think is good about your writing?"* The participants had a variety of answers. However, Students C, D and E enjoyed writing stories. Student D liked writing about his family, and Student C liked writing his stories with illustrations. This indicated that when the students had a personal connection to their writing, it had more meaning and resulted in more proficient writing.

Some of the participants lacked the motivation to be successful with writing because they felt like writing was a task they had to do in school. One of the participants said, "Writing is about what you suppose to do and what you want to do." He felt like when he writes it's because he was being told to write. Another participant lacked the motivation to write because of his handwriting. He stated, "I feel like I'm slow because of my writing." When questioned further he stated, "I feel slow because my handwriting is big." He had these feelings because no one worked with him or motivated him to write better, and he explained that his first writing instructor had tried to make him write with

his right hand when he was actually a left-handed writer. This made his early attempts at writing difficult and unsuccessful, and as a result he lost confidence in his ability to write (see Appendix B). This information supported Vygotsky's (1978) belief that a child's most important learning occurs through social interactions with a skillful tutor. In this case, the *lack* of an early teacher's skill in recognizing the student's predominant hand had a detrimental effect on his success in writing, which in turn put his future academic success at risk.

Theme 3: Level of parental involvement

Another reason some of the participants were not motivated was revealed in their home visits. Visiting two of the participant's home it was discovered they did not have any routines for their writing. Example Student D his father worked with him consistently on the methods of writing. He helped him construct sentences while his mother helped with spelling. Student A his parent worked with him, however, she did not help him during the visit with his grammar. This was also apparent in Student B's home as well. Student B completed his homework at day-care so his parent just checked his work for completion. This supports the theory of how African American males need motivational forces that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behavior (Cherry, 2010). When the participants understood that their work was being examined for accuracy, they were more than likely to put more effort into completing it correctly (see Table 5). However, when there were no routines or praise for accuracy and studying, some of the participants did poorly on their assignments and tests (see Table 6).

Motivation sometimes requires an intimate connection. Parents and guardians have to initiate this connection at birth. Children need to receive the first three

foundations of motivation from their caregivers beginning at birth. When these needs are met, children realize they are important and can achieve (Kennell & McGrath, 2005). The participants have different levels of the first three foundations of motivation. However, not all of them have received a concrete foundation. It was apparent in the levels of participation throughout the study. Two of the participants decline to have a home visit. This delimitation prevented the researcher from getting an accurate account of how the parents participate in the educational attainment of the participants. The other three home visits motivation was present. However, two participants were the lower level of motivation. Student B was not as motivated with writing because he did not receive constructed critiques about his writing. His mother did not help him edit his paper for accuracy. Student A's level of motivation was more prevalent. His mother read his information and made corrections; however, her corrections and praise were minimal. This was noteworthy because it showed that the more the participants believed their success was important to their parents the more they participated in the assignments. In addition, greater parental involvement resulted in more accurately completed assignments.

Motivation is a key concept in academic achievement. It is important that motivation begin in the home. African American males need to come to school proud of themselves and understanding that education is the key to being successful (Kunjufu, 2011). In turn, the school environment needs to praise and motivate them to be academically sound. When African American males feel they belong and are secure in their environment, the chances of academic achievement increase. The more they are motivated to learn the greater the chances they will help to decrease the achievement gap

between themselves and their Caucasian peers (Noguera, 2003, 2014; Tatum, 2005). This is important because the participants in this investigation wanted to achieve academic success. They wanted to be better writers. This was evident, because their final assignments in the study were impeccable (see Table 5).

The social implications of academic achievement, intimate connections for students, and levels of parental involvement

Vygotsky (1978) considered that there was no single principle that accounted for development of an individual; however, he believed that social interactions shaped adolescents the most and that social factors contributed to the cognitive development of children (McLeod, 2007). This is especially accurate in the school environment. When students are being social they learn what is happening throughout their environment. This is especially important when educating African American males and instructing them on how social interactions can shape who they become.

Students often learn through social interaction with their peers. When they are able to discuss the daily lesson being taught they sometimes learn a different method of achieving success. This form of communication is essential for academic achievement. Students often need more innovative ways of learning, such as working together cooperatively (Boud, 2001). Social interactions are necessary for academic achievement. Students need to be allowed to communicate using accountable talk and cooperative learning with their peers to ensure they are receiving a clear understanding of the curriculum, which they are studying.

Theme 1: Student academic achievement

The school environment is a social arena. The primary reason students attend school is for academic achievement; however, it is also imperative for social growth. A student's vocabulary often increases from verbal interactions with their peers (Gwee, 2003). Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that students need to learn and discover through interactive exchanges. He believed that the best model for student achievement was through dialogue with their peers. The participants in the study revealed this concept.

The participants were asked, *"How do you feel when you are asked to share your writing with others?"* Four of the participants were excited to share their writings. Student A stated it helped him overcome his shyness. Students B, C, and D said it made them feel good. The follow-up question asked, *"How do you feel when others share their writings with you?"* Students A, B and D felt good about sharing. Student A indicated that it wasn't fair if one shared and the other did not. This was an example of how social interactions can build confidence, supporting Vygotsky's research. When students work together they tend to help each other achieve. This is also known as the *Zone of Proximal Development* concept, which explains that children achieve more through guidance and encouragement from a partner than they do independently (Vygotsky, 1978). Peer learning is essential to student achievement (Boud, 2001), which in turn can help decrease the achievement gap (Carter, 2003). This is important because often the only peer interaction African American males have within education is at school. Providing the opportunity for them to engage in cooperative learning increases their knowledge. This occurred within the study through the investigator's observations. When the students were allowed to work together and discuss a particular skill being taught, they

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learned different methods of how to complete the assignments. Allowing the participants to interact socially with assignments increased their knowledge about the tasks, and it provided them the opportunity to work together socially.

Theme 2: Students' intimate connection to writing

Creating an intimate connection to writing requires the educator to think outside of the normal standards of academic rigor. Teachers must plan intricate ways they can connect the content to the student to make it personal. Educators must know the students' learning styles in order to help them make an intimate connection to the work they are doing. When this is accomplished students feel a heightened sense of self-worth, because the teacher planned the lesson to fit each individual student's needs. Creating an intimate connection to writing that allows the students to work together cooperatively versus teacher led instruction requires planning, but if done properly it can promote self-esteem in the students that encounter this form of instruction (Boud, 2001).

Peer interactions allow students to work together to understand each other's thought processes. This can provide students with a different way of focusing and accomplishing a school-based task. Evidence of this was seen when the investigator asked the students, *"How do you feel when you are asked to share your writing with others, and how do you feel when others share their writing with you?"* This task helped Student A overcome being shy.

- Student A: *"When I was in first grade, I was shy and scared to write and share my papers because I was shy. I am not shy anymore, because I have been sharing my stuff now.*

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Student's B, C and D said it made them feel good to share, and that they liked sharing because they liked to listen to what other people have written.

- Student D: *"I feel good because I like to hear what they have wrote."*

Student E was the only student who had mixed feelings. He felt nervous about sharing, because everybody was looking at him. Conversely, when someone shares with him he really does not pay attention (see Table 1).

Creating an intimate connection to the writing is important. Research has shown that "teacher centered" classrooms are becoming obsolete, because they do not promote student-learning styles (Boud, 2001). However, allowing students to establish an intimate connection through peer interaction can create a more "student-centered" classroom. When students are allowed to collaborate with each other to discuss the topics it can remove barriers in learning. It also allows the students to interact and learn each other's thought processes regarding a particular topic. They discussed the topic and gained ideas from each other regarding what to write about (see Table 5). This was supported in this investigation when the students were allowed to work together to write.

Research Question 2: What impact does school climate have on African American males' achievement in school and on assessment scores?

The National School Climate Council (2007) defined school climates as "norms, values, and expectations that support people's feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe" (p.4). School climate is a product of the inter-personal relationships among students, families, teachers, support staff, and administrators. Positive school climate is fostered through a shared vision of respect and engagement across the educational system. Emphasis is also placed on the collective sense of safety and care

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created by the school's physical environment (Gruenert, 2008). Researching the impact of the school environment on the achievement of the students in this study, the investigator wanted to unveil if the school environment facilitated or obstructed the African American male ability to achieve. The data related to research question two produced one theme: insufficient and inadequate resources available to properly educate the students in the school and home environment.

This school is an urban/suburban elementary school in Maryland, housing students in grades pre-k through fifth grade. Investigating the impacts this facility had on student achievement it was discovered that three areas affected achievement: material resources, innovative technology, and professional development. These areas were key to understanding why the participants were writing below grade level and how the environment increased the achievement gap between the participants and their peers.

Materials

This school lacked many resources that most schools have. The most significant resource that impeded progress in writing was a lack of materials that instructed on the writing process. The participants in this study were eager third graders who had a thirst for knowledge. They wanted to be better students, they had a strong desire to learn, and they liked to create stories and illustrations. However, the participants faced adversities from the school environment.

Three of the five participants read below grade level and one was behind a grade level; however, all of the participants wrote below-grade level. This research discovered that the school did not have the proper material to help them become proficient writers. Often when they wrote essays and stories they wrote in journals without any

supplemental materials. The students did not have textbooks or consumable books to help them engage in writing. They had to learn to write from worksheets or through examples from the teacher. This impeded their progress because textbooks provide examples of the writing process. Consumable books would allow them to write on worksheets that would provide examples of the writing process. These materials are essential, because students need a point of reference when trying to complete work at home. Often the students would take writing samples home but would forget how to do the work, because they did not have an example. Some parents weren't able to help, because they were never introduced to that particular style of writing. The opportunity to use proper learning material would help these students progress with the foundations of writing.

Innovative technology

The school facility is essential to learning. A positive school climate is recognized as an important target for school reform and improving behavioral, academic, and mental health outcomes for students (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro, & Guffy, 2012). Specifically, schools with positive climates tend to have less student discipline problems (Cohen & Geier, 2010) and aggressive and violent behavior (Gregory et al., 2010), and fewer out-of-school suspensions (Lee, 2007).   When the environment is conducive to learning academics soar (Eccles et al., 1993). However, this facility was on the list of schools to close for the 2015-2016 school year. This upset the students, teachers, staff, and administration.

Student D: "If they close our school we won't have a school to go to!"

Student B: "Why do they have to close our school?"

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Student E: "If they close our school what happens to us? Why can't the daycare find some place to go?"

This facility has Internet connection; however, it does not have up-to-date technology.   The participants' classroom has only five computers for 16 students. In addition, the computers do not have any software that supports writing. This impacts academic achievement, because educating the 21st Century student takes innovative measures. The participants need state-of-the-art technology to help them learn the significance of writing. Basically, computer-assisted instruction allows teachers to spend more time with individual students who are having difficulties. Meanwhile, other students in the class can work through their lessons at their own pace. This improves classroom efficiency and allows for one-on-one attention in larger classrooms (Concordia Online, 2013).   The educator in the classroom expressed her thoughts about the technology:

- "There are only five computers for 16 students. Everyone doesn't get a chance to work on the computer every day. I usually put my intervention students on the computer to practice math and reading. There isn't anything on the computer to help them with writing."

CCSS require schools to be computer literate. The new assessments require students to *type* essays on the computers. If schools do not have the technology and software to meet these mandates the students will continue to fall below proficiency. The participants' school does not have the technology to meet their needs. This will further increase the academic achievement gap between the African American males in this study and their Caucasian peers.

Professional development

Professional development provides the opportunity for educators to better develop their craft. Educators require professional development because ongoing research creates and improves methods to help students learn (Institute for Learning, 2015; Mizell, 2010). The educator who instructed the students in this study did not get the proper professional development for her students this school year. Interviewing her, the instructor indicated:

- "I moved to third-grade because they did not have a teacher. I normally teach second-grade but our principal did not have a third-grade teacher. I volunteered to move to third-grade so she wouldn't have to find another teacher or have the students begin the year with a substitute. So this is my first year with third grade. I am learning some of their skills while I am teaching them."

This impacted the student's achievement, because the instructor had not mastered the skills of third grade. Mizell (2010) found that although one may be a highly qualified educator, lack of proper professional development regarding the grade level being instructed might impact the amount of information the students receive. For this reason it is imperative that educators receive professional development on the grade level they instruct before and during their interactions with the students.

Professional development has an impact on student achievement. Educators have to master the subjects they teach in order for students to receive optimal information. Teachers have to be properly trained on the newest information that relates to that subject in order for students to be skilled in that subject in order to decrease the academic achievement gap between African American males and their Caucasian peers.

Implications for Teachers and Educational Leaders

Based on the observations, surveys, and journal writings of the participants, the following recommendations were developed for teachers who instruct or plan to instruct African American males in third grade.

- Before applying for a teaching position in a particular school, thoroughly research information available regarding the school, its students, and the neighborhood to ensure you can serve the students and community to the best of your ability.

- Understand the learning styles of African American males.

- Be knowledgeable of how to teach the writing process in grades pre-k through third grade.

- Create a classroom that is "student centered" versus a "teacher centered" environment.

- Create plans that produce connections to learning for African American males.

- Understand and be knowledgeable about the behavioral, motivational, and social implications of educating African American males.

- Involve all stakeholders in educating African American males (parents, administration, and community partners).

Recommendations for Future Studies

Themes from this study indicated the importance of further studying the implications of how the writing process affects the academic achievement gap. The following are recommendations for future research:

- Conduct this study in pre-k or kindergarten to understand the foundations of writing and the levels of writing at this grade level.

- Research is needed to indicate at what age students should start writing more complex words and sentences.

- Research the impact of writing in pre-k and how it impacts all other grade levels.

- Conduct this same study with African American females.

- Research parental involvement in teaching children to write before they enter formal school to understand what role parents play in the writing process.

- Research how educators are implementing CCSS of writing and how they are laterally planning the content of writing.

- Study the impact and effects of using textbooks and supplemental materials to teach writing in the early stages of education.

- Investigate how technology can affect teaching of the writing process for all students.

- Investigate techniques for teaching writing in the 21st century classroom.

Conclusion

The academic achievement gap between African American males and their Caucasian counterparts is valid (is common) in America's schools. There is a gap in math and reading and a significant gap in writing that is rooted in the early years of a Black male's life. They need to start school already knowing the basics of how to write if they are to do well in school; but most do not have this foundation. This is important because research has shown that if a Black boy is not writing on grade level by the end of third grade it is likely he will lag behind academically for the entirety of his educational

career (Prager, 2011). This study revealed that there are behavioral, motivational, and social implications that affect students' learning of the processes of writing, especially for Black African American males; but if ==motivation stimuli==???? which is aimed at meeting their unique needs is received through a variety of sources within their educational community, students have a better chance of achieving success in school.

The school environment was also shown to have an effect on learning the writing process. A lack of classroom resources, innovative technology, and professional development for the teachers of African American boys all contributed to student difficulties in writing, and thereby widened the academic achievement gap.

In conclusion, based on writing samples, school test, quizzes, formal and standardized assessments, and an investigation of the school environment, ==it was discovered that writing contributed to the academic achievement gap that existed between the African American male participants and their Caucasian peers in a formal classroom setting in third grade.== ????? I did not see any data related to Caucasian peers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

Institutional Review Board

Hazel Hall, Suite 1062	VOICE:	(410) 651-6262
Princess Anne, Maryland 21853-1299	FAX:	(410) 651-6736

Date: November 8, 2012

To: Dr. Kimetta Hairston, Educational Leadership Program

From: Clayton Faubion, Ph.D., Co-Chair, UMES IRB

RE: UMES #2013-002 — "I Have Hands, So Why Can't I Write?": "The Motivational
         Influences That Impact African American Males Writing Assessment in PK-3

71.

I am writing to confirm that UMES Protocol #2013-002 mentioned above has been reviewed and approved by the UMES Institutional Review Board. Your protocol was deemed EXPEDITED and did not require full IRB committee review. Please be advised that any and all information recorded in your study must be kept confidential.

This application has UMES IRB approval until November 7, 2013. As the principal investigator for UMES, you are expected to maintain consistent communication with the UMES IRB (i.e. annual update, changes to protocol). Finally, no changes to the study protocol can be made without prior approval by the UMES IRB..

If there are any questions regarding this study, please contact me at 410-651-6379 or cwfaubion@umes.edu. Thank you.

Appendix B

Study Approval from Prince George's County Public Schools

Kola K. Sunmonu, Ph.D.
Director, Dept. of Research & Evaluation

October 15, 2014

Stephanie Duckett-Johnson
21 Harry S. Truman Drive,
Apt. 12 Largo, MD 20774

Dear Mrs. Duckett-Johnson,

The review of your application to conduct the study entitled *"I have Hands, so Why Can't I Write—The Behavioral Motivational and Social Influence that Impact African American Males' Writing Assessment in Grade 3"* has been completed. Based on the examination, I am pleased to inform you that the Department of Research & Evaluation has granted conditional authorization for you to proceed with your study. This conditional approval is granted with the understanding that you will consult with the school principal to ensure that the least instructionally intrusive time is identified for all research activities that involve students.

Authorization for this research extends through the 2014-2015 school year only. If you are not able to complete your data collection during this period, you must submit a written request for an extension. We reserve the right to withdraw approval at any time or decline to extend the approval if the implementation of your study adversely impacts any of the school district's activities.

Please secure written approval of the principal of Kenmore Elementary School on the enclosed Principal Permission to Conduct Research Study form. The original signed copy of the form should be forwarded to my attention and a copy given to the principal. Regarding the Parent/Guardian Consent, please be aware that only approved copies (stamped 'APPROVED') can be distributed to your target subjects. Be aware that only students for whom you have Parent/Guardian Consent may participate in your study. Should you revise this form, the revised form must be approved by this office before being distributed.

It is important that the procedure detailed in your proposal and related documents submitted be followed while conducting your study. Should you change the procedure, the revised procedure must be approved by this office before being implemented. Similarly, any revised documents must be approved by this office before being used in the study.

An abstract and one copy of the final report should be forwarded to the Department of Research & Evaluation within one month of successful defense of your dissertation. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at 301-780-6807 or by email, kolawole.sunmonu@pgcps.org. I wish you success in your study.

Sincerely,

Kola. K. Sunmonu, Ph.D.

Director, Department of Research & Evaluation

KKS:kks

Enclosures

cc: Lisa D. Price, PMP, CGPM, BSP, Executive Director

Appendix C

Informed Consent Letter

destroyed. Each research participant will receive notification by means of email or a mailed notice that his original documents have been destroyed.

Finally, this study has no potential for physical, emotional and/or psychological risks. Although your child will be asked several questions, there is no right or wrong answer, because he will be asked to express how he thinks writing impacts his educational progress. Your child's identity and identifying information will be kept confidential. Participation is also voluntary, and your child may withdraw at any time during any phase of this study by emailing me at saduckett@umes.edu.

Release of Archival Data: Confidentiality is very important throughout this process. To maintain confidentiality, pseudo names will be used. Also, the information collected from this study will be locked and stored in a file cabinet that only **I,** as the researcher, will have access to. Upon completion of the three-year storage period, all journals and writing samples will be permanently destroyed. Each research participant will receive notification by means of email or a mailed notice that his original documents have been destroyed.

I grant permission to Prince George's County Schools (PGCPS) to release the data itemized below to the researchers at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) for use in the qualitative research design entitled "I have Hands, So Why Can't I Write? The Motivational Influences that Impact African American Males Writing Assessment in Grade PK-3. I affirm that the data will be used sorely for this research study.

- *Data l(SRI scores) and 2 (Prose Constructed Response) for Fall 2014*

- *Participation in the research study during SY2014-2015 school year*

Risk: There are no physical risks to this study; however, there are some limitations. The limitations the students may encounter are; a) Students will receive additional work that other students in the class won't receive, **b)** Students may become anxious about answering the questions on the assessments and trying to answer each one correctly, c) Students may become stressed from answering questions and may not want to participate, d) Students may lose some instructional time while working one-on-one with the investigator.

Benefits: As the parent of the said minor, I understand that this study is not designed to help my child, but that the investigators hope to learn more about writing and the achievement gap. As the parent, **I** understand that my child will not receive any compensation for participating in this research study. A potential benefit may be that by helping students become better writers in turn

AP ROVED

ExHitiL, oni

JUN 30 2015

r - cPS-IRB **OFFICE**

Parents Initial _____