

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MULTICULTURAL LITERACY AS A MEANS TO
ENGAGE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN GRADES 5-8

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in honor of my hard-working parents, Tony and Molly Doughtie. They instilled in me, at an early age, the importance of education and to persevere through all of life's challenges.

Also, to my husband, Drae Murray, who is my voice of reason and my biggest cheerleader. You continue to motivate me throughout this thing called life while still making me smile.

Last, but certainly not least, my children. Brett, Bliss, and Nia I wrote this for you all. Dream big! Nothing in life is ever too far out of reach.

ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of six Language Arts teachers of the use of multicultural literacy as a way to engage young African American males in fifth through eighth grade. Emphasis was placed on factors such as the teacher's knowledge on multicultural literacy, as well as teacher practices and beliefs on culturally relevant teaching, and authentic literacy experiences to better meet the literacy needs of young African American males. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews.

Data were triangulated with many techniques including In Vivo coding (Saldana, 2013) and thematic analysis. The themes that emerged through data analysis were lack of time, lack of instructional resources, culturally responsive training needed, and lack of student motivation. Findings revealed that teachers are aware of the importance of multicultural literacy and engagement of young African American males, but the expectations at a local and state level may play a factor into teachers' perceptions of implementing multicultural literacy. Implications for further research include recommendations for culturally responsive training for all teachers and teacher advocacy for multicultural literacy. Future research might investigate student and teacher perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage young African American males in grades 5-8 through a mixed-methods study.

KEY WORDS: Multicultural literacy, Engagement. Young African American males, Grades 5-8.

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I would also like to thank those who took part in this study and made it a reality for me. I appreciate your time, patience and willingness to help.

PREFACE

I hope this study sheds light on how we, as educators, can improve our teaching, especially for our young African American males.

It has been proven that:

- 1) We should build relationships with all of our students, especially our young African American males.
- 2) We should show all of our students that we care about them and have high expectations for them, especially our young African American males.
- 3) We should spend time hand selecting literature for our students that will meet the literacy needs of all of our students and empower them to go forth and be better citizens, especially our young African American males.
- 4) We will continue to be lifelong learners and educate ourselves on culturally responsive practices and engagement strategies, so we can close the achievement gaps in Reading, especially for our young African males.

As I conclude, I want to add that ALL students matter, especially our young African American males.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background to the Proposal

As background to the proposal, I conducted phenomenological research using semi-structured interviews and asked fellow teachers' questions about multicultural literacy for a doctoral class assignment in spring 2018. The research question for that study was: What are teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8?

Only the interview portion of the study was completed for the class assignment. Questions were constructed to elicit answers about teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy, implementation of multicultural literacy practices, reading in the classroom, and professional development provided on multicultural literacy. The interviews were transcribed and coded. I conducted thematic analysis, analyzed the data, and then submitted the information to the professor. I wanted to continue research on this topic because I still had so many unanswered questions about teacher perceptions of multicultural literacy, the reading achievement and engagement of young African American males.

In this research I explored teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy. I asked questions to current teachers in grades 5-8 about implementation of instructional practices, instructional strategies, and culturally responsive teaching in a culturally diverse classroom. I also investigated further to find specific ways to engage young African American males in grades 5-8.

Historical Background

It has been over sixty years since the historical *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling that ended segregation in public schools. Thurgood Marshall, who was in charge of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and chief attorney for the plaintiffs, projected that in five years schools in the United States would be desegregated. He hoped that black children would receive the necessary education to allow them to enter into the workforce and colleges on an equal foundation (Kluger, 2004). In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Marshall to the Supreme Court where he would spend the next 24 years to continue the fight to stop school segregation.

Today it appears things are getting worse instead of improving with this particular issue. The Brown decision was about more than segregation, it also made evident that African American students were denied a meaningful and fair educational opportunity (Rothstein 2014). According to Rothstein (2014), the schools African American children attend today all over the U.S. are mostly segregated because the neighborhoods are segregated. Rothstein (2014) states that education policy is controlled by the housing policy, and it is not possible to desegregate our schools without first desegregating both the prosperous and low-income neighborhoods.

According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau, the makeup of the U.S. K-12 public school student population has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. Students today are more diverse across many categories, including linguistics, culture, geography, and socioeconomics. With diversity comes different learning styles and a variety of instructional practices that will work best for individual students. As minority populations continue to increase across the United States, teachers must receive opportunities for

professional development on how to instruct students from different cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds if they are going to be successful in today's schools (Banks & McGee Banks, 1997; Deady, 2017). By 2042, people of color are expected to be the majority of the population in the United States. Predictions also suggest that by 2040, more than half of the K-12 population in the United States will be linguistically and culturally diverse students who speak a first language (L1) other than English (Macrine, 2010). Therefore, teachers must work with diverse students in order to understand diversity and the different styles of learning, so they will be able to engage their students in the learning process.

Even though the induction of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has allowed for more accountability by warranting that school districts are monitoring the progress and performance of underrepresented groups of children, isolated intervention time, strategies aimed to close the literacy gaps for young African American boys is still proving to be insufficient (Patom, 2007). Perhaps more research must be requested to discover the factors and causes for the gap in literacy achievement as well as how to help these young men receive an equal educational opportunity.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars have well documented the reading achievement gap of young African American males (NCES, 2006; NCES, 2010). Scholars (e.g., Anderson, Howard, & Graham, 2007; Below, Skinner, Fearington, & Sorrell, 2010; Chatterji, 2006; Haddix, 2009; Emdin 2016; Tatum, 2008, 2018) identify multiple explanations on why African American males demonstrate lower reading achievement than other student populations. Although extensive research has revealed below level reading scores for this group, the

gap continues to be present, with minimal gains. In 1994, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, fourth-grade reading scores for African American boys fell behind those of all other groups in the same grade level. Across the country, only 12 % of African American fourth-grade boys are proficient in reading, compared to 38% of Caucasian boys (Gabriel, 2010). Therefore, with the increasing demands of literacy skills in today's world, I believe it would be beneficial for researchers to further explore the teacher's role and what factors attribute to such low reading achievement for these young men.

Hinckley (1995) stated that even after many years of integration in schools, teachers still receive little support in understanding their diverse students whose culture and learning styles are different than their own. Research reveals that a teacher's lack of cultural awareness can lead to a decrease in the achievement of minority students (Morrier, Irving, Dandy, Dmitriyev, & Ukeje, 2007). According to The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt), becoming culturally responsive means one can learn from someone with the same culture or even a different culture. NCCRESt also states there are six characteristics to a culturally responsive pedagogy; 1) students have the same opportunities to reach their full potential; 2) student preparation for competent participation in an increasingly intercultural society; 3) teacher preparation for facilitation of all student's learning; 4) schools take part in ending oppression of all types; 5) education is student-centered and inclusive of their voice and experiences; 6) educators, activists, and others take an active role in reevaluating all educational practices and how they affect students' learning. Educators must take the

lead on knowing their students. We are involved with both the victims and the oppressors.

According to Erickson (1987), culturally responsive pedagogy is a way to instill trust in the classroom that builds bridges between teachers, students, and the community. In addition, other scholars continue to ask for culturally relevant pedagogy as a way to support communication within classrooms and limit cultural conflict (Delpit, 2004; Gay, 2000; Gay 2010; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2002; Lee, 1995; Zygmunt & Clark, 2015).

What multicultural literacy curriculum is present in today's classrooms? Are these young men engaged and motivated to read the literature taught by their teachers? Tatum (2006) was evident in the fact that if African American males do not have access to relevant and authentic texts, some may withdraw from reading entirely. In keeping with this evidence, it is possible during early childhood or elementary reading activities, young African American males are disengaged because they are not being exposed to culturally relevant texts. Logan & Johnston, (2009) take it a step further by stating there is a direct link between reading engagement and reading achievement and textual selection can be deemed as a possible factor behind reading underachievement in African American boys. For instance, Smith's (1995) case study shows that African American students prefer to read culturally relevant texts which increases their interests in reading.

Multicultural literature can help students develop an awareness of their environment by exploring current cultural and societal issues. When students have the opportunity to experience the feelings and emotions of others through literature, they are encouraged to gain insight about the world we live in (Monobe & Son, 2014). Concepts in multicultural literacy allow students to build confidence and understanding of their

environment, which can lead to an improvement in student learning (Agosto, 2007). This study centers on teacher's knowledge of multicultural literacy and their attitudes and beliefs of multicultural literacy in order to improve literacy rates in fifth through eighth grade African American males.

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical frameworks, social cultural theory, critical literacy theory and critical race theory, informed this investigation of teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the factors of social, cultural, and historical responsibilities in the human experience (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Vygotsky (1978) stated that sociocultural theory describes learning as a social process and can stem from intelligence in culture or society. Davidson (2010) suggested, "children's literacy development is understood by exploring the cultural, social, and historical contexts in which the children have grown. One is obliged to consider how the thinking of a particular group of individuals has directed the children's thinking, how the children understand who they are in relation to others, and how they interpret the world" (p. 249).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) points out that concentric levels of influence can affect the development of a child. In his early writings, he suggests there are four spheres of influence: the microsystem (immediate influence which can be found at a child's home or classroom); the mesosystem (layer of interactions that transpires between two microsystems such as a child's home life affecting their school environment); the exosystem (does not allow a student to interact within this system); and the macrosystem (explains similarities and consistencies between two systems such as families from a

cultural group showing similar interaction patterns) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). There has also been a comprehensive conceptual rationale stated by Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006) regarding the central social contexts in a child's life interact and have an importance in key outcomes of their lives, such as social and emotional adjustment and school performance and engagement. Bronfenbrenner defends that human development takes place through interactions between an active and evolving human organism and the people in the environment.

Au (1997) states school literacy learning is a social process that is affected by what is going on in the present, as well as what happened in the past. When children learn to read, or struggle to learn to read, they do so in their environment whether it is social, cultural, or historical. Au (1997) believes when a child thrives or struggles in reading it can be connected to their environment.

Critical literacy theory originated when social critical theorists were concerned with social injustice and inequities and described the impact of such inadequate power relationships amongst groups in society (O'Byrne, 2018). One might question situations and feel the need to be reflective in order to better understand the power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships (De Oliveira Andreotti, 2014). Morris (2011) states that critical literacy theory considers the political characteristics of literacy education such as the opportunities that exist to empower young individuals to overcome their oppressions socially as well as the fact that schooling supports discriminations in society. This theory questions the belief that education is a process which is unbiased and is intended to promote development for all children. Teachers who plan for the development of critical literacy encourage students to discuss shared issues and institutions like family, poverty,

education, equity, and equality in order to critique the barriers that serve as standards as well as to demonstrate how these standards are not experienced by all society members. Evans (2010) conducted research on critical literacy using a variety of multicultural picture books to explore student perceptions on diversity. Evans determined that exposure to multicultural literature increased the students' awareness of social and cultural practices as well as the beliefs of other cultures.

Bloome & Talkwalker (1997) suggested there is power and purpose in students' learning and "the teaching of reading is viewed as a social process that can either foster or inhibit the empowerment of the students" (p. 109). Bloome and Talwalker (1997) added that critical literacy theory explores "how reading and writing instruction might help students acquire a critical perspective on how written language is used to promote a particular cultural ideology and how it may inhibit the growth and maintenance of minority languages and cultures" (p. 109). This will allow educators and students an opportunity to read, reflect, and analyze texts through the innovative process by constructing or deconstructing these texts.

Critical race theory emerged in the mid-1970s with Derrick Bell Jr., Alan Freeman, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Mai Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw hoping to spread the word about topics pertaining to education, sociology, ethnic studies and women's studies (Delgado, 1995; Taylor, 1998; Hiraldo, 2010). This theory is a movement to also address topics associated with race, power, and racism. According to Yosso and Solorzano (2007), critical race theory initially formed to focus on civil rights legislation regarding African Americans versus Caucasians. Scholars involved in this movement sought to determine and analyze the

battle of White Supremacy and its oppression of the People of Color (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). However, other racial groups in society allowed for an extension of this theory such as women, Latin Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans.

The use of voice is a way that critical race theory scholars share the experience and realities of the difficulties in culture. This theory departs from mainstream by often utilizing storytelling to analyze the myths, challenges, and insights that make up the common culture about race and that continually portray blacks and other minorities (Delgado, 1995).

Critical race theory is known for gravitating towards educational reform movements, such as multiculturalism, as well as civil rights most treasured legal victories (Ladson-Billings 2010). This theory claims that racial reform has moved at a gradual pace in the United States (Ladson-Billings 2010). Ladson & Billings (2010) also noted that critical race theory concentrates on how race and citizenship intermingle.

According to Tate & Ladson-Billings (2010) there are six boundaries within critical race theory: 1) racial inequity in education is the logical outcome in an achievement system based on competition; 2) examines the role of educational policy and practices in terms of racial inequity and the normative whiteness; 3) rejects the tale about the people of color being inferior to the white people; 4) evaluates the linkage between contemporary inequity in education based on racial oppression in historical patterns; 5) realizes that race interacts with other identity markers such as (gender, class, linguistic, etc.); 6) advocates for purposeful outcomes associated with racial inequity.

Ledesma & Calderon (2014) believe that in K-12 education there are several patterns identified with critical race theory such as: a) curriculum and pedagogy; b)

teaching and learning; c) schooling; and d) policy/finance and community engagement. In an ideal society, every student would have the same access and opportunities to similar curriculum, instruction, funding, and facilities (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In order to make changes regarding our educational system, educators are urged to evaluate the pedagogy, curriculum, teaching and learning, and curriculum through the lens of critical race theory. Also, Ledesma & Calderon (2015) believe that educators need to examine their attitudes they carry into the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore a literacy instructional framework for improving reading outcomes in African American boys in fifth through eighth grade. Emphasis was placed on factors such as the teacher's knowledge on multicultural literacy, as well as teacher practices and beliefs on culturally relevant teaching, and authentic literacy experiences to better meet the literacy needs of young African American males.

This study perhaps provides insight and useful information for the research community, teachers, and curriculum writers for school districts. By using the information obtained from this exploration into teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy, teachers will be able to better design curriculum, and develop lessons to work effectively with racially and ethnically diverse students. It will also allow for teachers to have a better understanding of the many cultures and how their perceptions can affect teaching and learning behaviors.

The Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8?
- 2) What culturally responsive instructional practices do teachers implement to support African American males in grades 5-8?
- 3) How do teachers incorporate authentic literacy experiences to engage African American males in grades 5-8?

Limitations

This study has limitations. This research was conducted in one school district; therefore, the research findings are limited to a specific area where the teachers are located. Another limitation is that I, the researcher, used to be a classroom teacher for nine years in this school district. I am still employed in this district as a secondary instructional coach. The last possible limitation is that I am also the interviewer and my presence might have an influence on some of the teachers' responses. Therefore, I asked open-ended interview questions for teachers to have as much opportunity to include information and reflect on the questions. The teachers might give answers that they think I would want to hear for this study.

Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the assumptions of the study. In Chapter II, I present a literature

review, which includes a discussion of multicultural literacy, culturally responsive teaching, and low socioeconomic status, instructional practices that could improve the level of academic achievement for young African American males, and teachers' perceptions and practices in the classroom that could allow for more engagement from young African American males. Chapter III includes the methodology chosen for this research study. It includes the selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter IV explains the data analysis process while Chapter V discusses the findings of the research study.

CHAPTER II

Brief Review of the Literature

This dissertation examined teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage young African American males in grades 5-8. This study was implemented in one public school district in the Southeast Texas area. The researcher interviewed Language Arts Teachers who teach in grades 5-8. This chapter presents literature on the current status of multicultural literacy, teachers' attitudes and instructional practices, culturally responsive teaching, and the current gap in research. The interconnectedness of these topics reveals the significance of teachers' implementation of multicultural literacy in a Language Arts classroom in grades 5-8.

This review of relevant literature establishes grounds for changing the national pattern toward improving educational decisions. These decisions within school attempt to improve multicultural literacy in classrooms to meet the needs of diverse students, especially the young African American males. Review of influential works has been included throughout this literature review to establish the historical groundwork and impact of integrated multicultural literacy. Additionally, the theoretical framework presents the study's impact to current research that further links best instructional practices for integrating multicultural literacy into literature programs that help diverse students.

Documentation

The strategy used for searching for related research literature consisted of examining resources on multicultural literacy and culturally responsive practices as they

relate to supporting the need for engagement of young African American males. An ongoing appraisal and collection of peer-reviewed journals and professional books using the databases ERIC and EBSCO molded the following documentation of the current research topic. While using the databases, I used the following Boolean phrases: engagement, young African American males, literacy, middle school, language arts, multicultural literacy, and culturally responsive teaching. Targeted emphasis on research of the reading achievement gap of young African American males and the effects of integrating culturally relevant literature as a means to provide culturally responsive pedagogy established the research groundwork.

Background of Literacy in Young African American Males

The 2017 National Assessment of Education Progress found the average reading score for white fourth-grade students was 26 points higher than their African American peers. The achievement gap between the two races (Caucasian and African American) is overwhelming. It is not the entire African American children population who appear to be performing lower than other groups in basic reading; it is the young males. Scholars have documented the reading achievement gap between young African American males and other student groups (NCES, 2006; NCES, 2010). Scholars (e.g., Anderson, Howard, & Graham, 2007; Below, Skinner, Fearington, & Sorrell, 2010; Chatterji, 2006; Haddix, 2009; Tatum, 2008, 2018) identify multiple explanations on why African American males demonstrate lower reading achievement than other student populations. Hinckley (1995) stated that even after integration, teachers still receive little training on how to teach their diverse learners. According to Erickson (1987), culturally responsive pedagogy is a way to foster a system of trust in the classroom that builds relationships

between teachers, students, and the community. In addition, other scholars continue to call for culturally relevant pedagogy as a way to foster communication within classrooms and limit cultural tension (Delpit, 2004; Gay, 2000; Gay 2010; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2002; Lee, 1995; Zygmunt & Clark, 2015). Tatum (2006) was evident in the fact that if African American males do not have access to relevant and authentic texts, some may withdraw from reading entirely. In keeping with this evidence, it is possible during early childhood or elementary reading activities, young African American males are disengaged because they are not being exposed to culturally relevant texts. Logan & Johnston (2009) takes it a step further by stating there is a direct link between reading engagement and reading achievement and textual selection can be deemed as a possible factor behind reading underachievement in African American boys. It is essential that teachers have knowledge in multicultural literature and realize the importance in engaging diverse students, especially young African American males.

Multicultural Literacy

Multicultural literacy allows for knowledge and understanding of interests, experiences, struggles, and influences in society of the many different cultures through literacy. Cai (2002) and Taxel (1992), the NCTE Policy Brief (2007) asserts that “multicultural literacy is seeing, thinking, reading, writing, listening, and discussing in ways that critically confront and bridge social, cultural, and personal differences” (p. 5). Multicultural literacy goes beyond reading about different cultures in literature, but actually engaging the readers and intensifying what is presented in the literature that can connect readers to society. It also allows students to develop multiple perceptions about

their cultures as well as insight and understanding of other cultures (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2011).

Education for multicultural literacy should help students accomplish the skills, attitudes, and commitments needed to become citizens who will work for social justice in their society. A literacy education that focuses on social justice educates both the heart and mind of students while allowing them to become thoughtful, committed, and active citizens in their nation and the world (Banks, 2002). Literacy in the 21st century should include a focus on global issues as well as an action plan in hopes to solve them.

The schools should help students receive multicultural literacy, which will allow them to develop a balance of cultural, national, and global connections and a commitment to act to change the world and make it a better place. If educators teach students to be literate without helping them to develop a commitment to construct a humane world, we will foster a society in which there is a “threat to justice everywhere” (Banks, 2003). Preferably, students will master basic literacy skills and become multiculturally literate so that they encourage a society of multiculturalism (Banks, 2004; Jay, 2003). Jimenez (2003) suggests that building relationships with students is a key part to a student’s academic achievement, highlighting how multicultural literacy could potentially lead to changing society; empowering students by allowing to see themselves as learners. Taylor & Hoehsmann (2011) conducted a research study in Canada where they surveyed 942 secondary students, 10 school boards, and 5 provinces on the issue of multicultural literacy. They found school curriculum was essential to gaining knowledge to combat social and cultural issues.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gay (2010) describes culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). According to Ladson-Billings (2014) the secret behind culturally relevant pedagogy is “the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciate for) culture” (p. 74). Culturally responsive teaching is a term that allows teachers to be responsive to the diversity in the classroom. Its main goal is to “get teachers to connect with students’ cultures, and to help students connect with their cultural and social identities in ways that learning in any subject is more effective and relevant” (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001, 2009, 2014). Such teaching requires that students be seen as “members of extended cultural circles that exist beyond the classroom” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Hammond (2014) feels that culturally responsive teaching is about building the learning capacity of each student and the best way to decide if your teaching is culturally responsive is whether or not your students are learning.

Ladson-Billings (1994, 2014) also notes that culturally relevant teaching must consist of teachers learning about their students’ cultural backgrounds and becoming cognizant of this knowledge when lesson planning. Culturally relevant teachers’ model and exercise appropriate actions that hold value for the cultures of their students, teachers find a way to incorporate meaningful learning of students’ cultures into the curriculum and allow students to critically investigate issues in society. When teachers value and use their students’ personal backgrounds and experiences to drive instructional decisions,

teachers then discover any biased perceptions of their students, revealing a potentially concealed racism in their instructional practices (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

There is power in culturally responsive teaching in the areas of improving academic achievement, allowing for student voice, fostering student engagement, and improving student motivation (Gay, 2010; Hill, 2012). There is an extreme disconnect between what goes on in these young men's lives versus the content taught in the classroom. Culture shapes how children understand life as well as how and what they learn (Kuykendall, 1989). The teacher must then bridge the gap by facilitating learning opportunities.

According to Frey (2018) and the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau, the white population will become a minority in the year 2045. Asians and Hispanics rates will grow respectively, and the projected growth rate for African Americans is 34 percent. Since the number of culturally diverse students is steadily increasing, a need to modify curriculum based on the diverse learners in the classroom is imperative. However, giving teachers the time and permission to customize the instructional content to connect the lessons and to engage their students with life experiences involves educators first making the connections and building relationships with their students (Railton, 2015). Student motivation increases when careful cultural considerations are taken by the teacher when selecting texts, also allowing families to interact with healthy, purposeful reading habits that establish one's unique cultural point of view.

Gay (2010) insists that schools recognize their student population because if not the intellectual abilities of diverse students could go unnoticed. Therefore, culturally

responsive teaching is a way to exhibit the potential for higher learning amongst the diverse students by cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities (Gay 2010).

Instructional Practices

Quality teaching and quality texts are essential in academic success. To enhance the academic success of young African American males, educators need a clear concept of the many areas of literacy instruction, a compassionate interest in contributing to the personal development of young African-American males, and the knowledge of a wide range of texts that can help prepare African-American males to become successful citizens at local, national, and international levels (Tatum 2009). Using culturally relevant instruction and materials might help these young boys in so many areas of life. Some possible ways that culturally relevant teaching can help a young black male is allowing them to find a connection in classroom learning to their real-life activities, connecting students with mentors from the African American community, and also introducing African American male students to potential career paths (Tatum 2003). In a Language Arts classroom, there are many ways to incorporate these ideas such as with oral tradition. A teacher could incorporate storytelling, spoken word, poetry, reader's theater, and song into literacy instruction (Hale, 2001). Using literature circles and book clubs to allow students to respond orally to texts and have conversations with one another about authentic text (Daniels, 2002). Utilizing writing instruction as a way to help students learn standardized English (Delpit, 1998). It is important to understand the lived experiences of African American male youth, and how they respond to experiences (Tatum, 2006, 2009, 2018). Using texts that are stimulating and interesting to African

American youth (Hale, 2001; Tatum 2009, 2018) will engage them and will likely make connections to their own personal lives.

Incorporate current events into literacy instruction (Tatum, 2006) and also informational texts (Duke, 2000) to engage young African American males. Researchers have said to include movement and expressive individualism into literacy instruction such as “alternate quiet with active activities, include hands-on activities, projects, diminish the use of worksheets and skill-and-drill, and present information in a rhythmic way”. In class, include and emphasize cooperation over competition (Tatum, 2006, 2009), utilize small groups (Hale 2001), utilize peer mentors and coaches, (Boykin & Noguera, 2011) and develop a nurturing relationship between yourself and each student as well as between each student and his peers (Hale, 2001). Tatum (2018) suggests five practices that favor African American males in helping them succeed in literacy instruction:

1. Adopt a model of literacy instruction that allows African American males to read and write across multiple genres of literature, one fiction and one non-fiction, during each one-hour lesson. This should take place for struggling and non-struggling readers.
2. Avoid timelines for reading and writing achievement that are based on theory. Reading scores do not define students. Instead, assist and interact with the struggling reader to guide them.
3. Make sure young African American males are having meaningful, purposeful experiences with texts to build confidence in literacy development. Allow a text to become part of a student, long after he reads it.

4. Do not allow others to compromise the literacy development of these young boys, constantly keep asking yourself “what is missing with the proposed literacy approach or model?”
5. Avoid a slow growth model and refrain from celebrations after students meet minimum standards.

It is important for teachers to find ways to help African American male youth see the advantages and necessary tools that literacy has for their lives, their futures, and their communities (Tatum, 2006, 2009, 2018). It is key to incorporate reading and writing into all aspects of the student’s day (Hale, 2001). The power of text presented in class can engage and motivate these young students by enabling texts that encourage and empower young men to take action in their own lives and the lives of others. Examples of enabling texts are texts that allow students to reflect on real world issues, focus on a collective struggle of African Americans that honor and nurture multiple identities (Tatum, 2009). A text that holds power that a young African American male might relate to is the speech by Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have A Dream” where he talks about racism and hopes for equality for all. Today’s emphasis on standards, rigor, and assessments can seem distant from the historical roles of literacy development for African American young men. Most federal, state, district, and school efforts lack a focus on helping these young males strengthen their sense of belonging and embracing reading as a cultural practice in meaningful, purposeful contexts, often ignoring their need to develop intellectually (Tatum, 2009).

Tatum (2006, 2018) believes that African American adolescent males currently have “limited exposure to a quality literacy instruction in school”. Tatum (2006) believes

there should be a meaningful literacy design that should include texts that show a positive life and provide a roadmap that will help students resist negative behaviors in and out of school. Tatum (2006) states that must-read texts have four traits: they are intellectually interesting to students and teachers, they serve as a roadmap and provide apprenticeship, cognitively speaking, they challenge the students, and they help apply strategies and skills of literacy on their own. Therefore, the power of text is crucial to reach these young African American males who need the exposure to texts “which not only contain characters who look, act, and think as they do, but texts which encourage and empower these young men to take action in their own lives and in the lives of others around them” (Tatum, 2009; Emdin, 2016).

Husband (2012) highlights three factors that contribute to the low reading achievement of these young African American males: curriculum, classroom, and school. As far as curriculum, Husband has found that the texts provided in the classrooms are not socially and culturally appropriate for these young males. Therefore, what they are reading in class does not reflect any lived experiences or realities to their own lives. Text selection is crucial in order for these young men to achieve in reading. According to Boone, Rawson, & Vance (2010) introducing struggling African American male readers to texts written by African Americans is not sufficient. Do not simply “dumb down the texts,” but encourage and motivate the students through scaffolding. Scaffolding is merely the process in which the teacher will model a problem and then gradually step back, but still offer support when needed. Also, students should collaborate with one another, especially through difficult texts, to discuss the meaning and relevance of a text (Boone et al. 2010).

Noting a curriculum factor, researchers (Gay, 2000; Kuykendall, 1992; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997; Tatum, 2018) determined that African American males' benefit from active, high stimulating activities rather than just sitting in their desk listening to the teacher lecture. Webb-Johnson (2002) believes African American males respond better in classrooms that allow for movement, interaction, and energy. Some teachers are not teaching reading as a means to understand the world around them, and do not build on those connections from the text (Tatum, 2006).

When it comes to school factors, African American males lose a lot of educational time because they are out of the classroom for suspension at disproportionate rates (Brown, 2005; Kunjufu, 1982). This time spent out of the classroom has a major effect on academic achievement, especially in reading achievement (Mendez & Knoff, 2002). Perhaps there is such a negative stereotype when it comes to the reading achievement of young African American males, that causes teachers to lower their expectations for these students causing them to fall behind in reading achievement (Irving & Hudley, 2005; Kunjufu, 1989; Noguera, 2003).

Kirkland & Jackson (2009) completed an ethnographic study to examine the critical literacy practices of the young men of My Brother's Keeper program. They found that with their participants (group of 11-14-year-olds) they showed coolness through their texts. The texts they produced were symbolic and offered a story of who these young men aspired to be in life. The findings describe how gender, pop culture, and race is a way to disclose dialogue as well as style to show their coolness and black manhood.

Teacher Perceptions and Practices

According to Goings, Smith, Harris, Wilson, Lancaster (2015) the most significant factors in student engagement and ultimately their achievement are teacher perceptions and practices. It is crucial for educators to believe that every African American male has the potential to be great in society. Educators must be willing to have conversations with these young men and build connections with them (Goings et al. 2015). Building relationships and making connections with all students is an essential piece in the process of teaching and learning.

Teachers and staff who work alongside African American males in the classroom may lack the appropriate skills to work with them effectively, leaving them misguided and facing mental, social, and emotional challenges (Anthony, Krissonia, & Herrington, 2007; Sen, 2006). Currently, teachers of different cultural and racial backgrounds are educating young African American males (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Strayhorn (2008) discovered in his research that teachers have lower expectations for the academic success of young African American males. Even the assets available in our current education system—enhanced teacher effectiveness, advanced pedagogical practices for teaching African American males, and highly qualified educators—do not seem to keep a large number of African American males in school through graduation. Teacher effectiveness can without a doubt influence student performance (Bell, 2009, 2010, Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Effective teachers are educated in ways to implement different learning styles of diverse students by implementing instructional strategies to allow all students a fair learning opportunity

(Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Bell, & Little, 2008). Teacher effectiveness indicates the ability of teachers to promote student growth (Goe et al. 2008).

Explaining the definition of teacher effectiveness is important. Five characteristics effective teachers share are: (a) high expectations for all students; (b) contributions to positive academic and social outcomes; (c) use of diverse resources; (d) contributions to the academic development in classrooms; and (e) collaboration with others (Goe et al., 2008). An effective teacher “engages all students in the learning process with the aim of positively influencing student growth and academic performance” (Bell, 2009, 2010; Goe et al.2008; Rothon, Arephin, Klineberg, Cattell, & Stansfeld, 2010). Therefore, teacher effectiveness assumes an educator can teach all children without discriminating based on culture or bias (Bell, 2010). Most education advocates agree that an effective teacher accounts for student learning (Goe et al. 2008). According to Emdin (2016) the teachers must acknowledge the baggage that students may carry to school and realize how this can affect student achievement.

Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted an ethnographic study of the beliefs and practices of eight teachers whom principals, colleagues, and parents rated as highly effective teachers of African American children. The teachers gave students numerous opportunities to learn cooperatively, made few assumptions about students’ prior knowledge, and worked to develop critical thinking skills. They also viewed teaching as an art, believed that all students can succeed, they felt part of the community, and viewed teaching as a way to give back to the community. The teachers believed that knowledge is reciprocal and shared between students and teachers. The importance of recognizing students’ race, culture, and ethnicity was at the center of the teachers’ pedagogy. Ladson-

Billings referred to those common beliefs as culturally relevant because the teachers could “see color and could see culture” (p. 30; see also Gay, 2000).

Low Socioeconomic Status

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) in 2018, 43% of children live in low-income families in the United States. These statistics cannot adequately represent poverty’s negative impact on parental involvement. The socioeconomic status of children and their families has a deep impact on a child’s education, even in a country that encourages equal educational opportunity and fair and just treatment for all citizens (Lynch, 2018). Funding to low-income Title I schools has decreased since 2010, and some states have recently reduced funding for Pre-K education (Lynch, 2018). According to Lynch (2018), children living in poverty encounter limited experiences in this world such as the money to afford extracurricular activities or field trips that expand their knowledge.

The Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Report: (Pirani, 2018) states the following: a) African American males growing up in wealthy families were more likely than their white peers to live in poverty as adults; b) Twenty-one percent of African American males raised at the very bottom were incarcerated; c) African American men raised in the top 1 percent were as likely to be incarcerated as white men raised in households earning about \$36,000 a year; d) The worst places for poor white children are most likely better than the best places for poor black children; and e) African Americans made up about 35 percent of all children raised in the bottom 1 percent.

The 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study followed a group of students from the time they were high school sophomores through the remainder of their high school careers, and into their postsecondary education. They examined the reading and mathematics standardized test scores of students in the 10th grade during the 2001-02 school year. Data in the form of surveys were collected from students, parents, teachers, librarians, and school administrators to gather information about students' school experiences and activities. The study revealed the primary predictor of test scores was the socioeconomic status of the family (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

These young males must also deal with negative stereotypes in and out of school, and a lack of positive role models in the community. Therefore, most of the students are living in high-risk neighborhoods and experience problems related with low socioeconomic status. Goings et al. (2015) believes there are more African American male role models needed. Our culture seems open to change, especially with a former Black president, who promotes the value of reading and education. President Obama wrote to Parade Magazine about the role of fathers and stated, "I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence - both in my life and in the lives of others," (p.1; Jacobs, 2009). President Obama stated when a man leaves or abandons his responsibility as a father no government can fill his position, so we must do everything possible to provide a safe, learning environment for our youth (Jacobs, 2009). These mentorship opportunities can allow these young men to gain positive relationships with people of good character in their pursuit of education and lifelong success. Goings et al. (2015) states that it takes a village to raise a child and community members can assist in helping these young men.

Summary

Educators and policymakers might question how policy, teaching practices, and research will benefit and advance the literacy development of students no matter if they are rich or poor. Literacy development needs to reach all students, including African American male adolescents. Gay (2013) and Protacio (2012) note the relationship between student achievement and one's self-identified culture.

Perhaps teachers might foster culturally responsive teaching and practice explicit and implicit literary choices to allow for all students an opportunity for engagement (Farnia & Geva, 2013). There is a strong connection between students' attitudes toward reading and the ways in which they engage in reading activities in and out of school. Students with positive attitudes toward reading will engage in reading more often and with less resistance than students who have negative attitudes toward reading (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004). A lack of research exists in that teachers are unable to identify with students, and therefore are not taking into account who is in their classroom. Hence, selecting literature that is not purposeful which offers little engagement to the students. To date, little has been documented related to reading underachievement in African American boys in early childhood and early elementary contexts specifically.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Aim of the Study

The aim of this phenomenological study was to focus on teachers' perceptions on multicultural literacy, as well as teacher practices and beliefs on culturally relevant teaching to better meet the literacy needs of adolescent African American males in grades 5-8. The intent of this study was to establish how Language Arts teachers could better assist in raising the achievement gap in reading of young African American males. This chapter presents the methodological framework that was used in this study.

As stated previously in Chapter 1, the goal of this qualitative research study was to understand a phenomenon: public school Language Arts teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a way to engage African American males in grades 5-8. For this study, an interpretive phenomenological research design was implemented. Research questions were framed broadly and openly, and the goal of this research will not be to test a predetermined hypothesis (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8?
- 2) What culturally responsive instructional practices do teachers implement to support African American males in grades 5-8?
- 3) How do teachers incorporate authentic literacy experiences to engage African American males in grades 5-8?

Sampling Design

This study utilized a qualitative method, specifically a phenomenological research study. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Patton (2002) believes that purposeful sampling is most effective in cases that are information rich. Therefore, selective individuals were recruited to participate in this study.

Careful attention was considered for the selection of the participants in this research study. To provide richness in perspective and hold true meaning to the context of the study, the participants were sought because of their varied experience level in public school teaching in general as well as their specific competency teaching ELA in grades 5-8.

Setting and population

The study took place in a public-school district in the Southeast Texas area. The school district has four elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, and one high school. In the community it is predominantly white (68%), low socioeconomic status with a median household income of \$32,715 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

These public-school teachers have at least five to fifteen years of teaching experience and are current Language Arts teacher in grades 5-8. I invited potential participants to take part in a survey and questionnaire by attending their grade level planning period.

Research Design

I used interpretive phenomenological research as the qualitative design for this study. Smith & Osborn (2007) stated that the focus of interpretive phenomenological

research is “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 53). Therefore, this research design of interpretive phenomenological research is most appropriate for exploring public school teachers’ understandings and perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8.

Data Collection Process

Interpretive phenomenological research studies typically will use small sample sizes and will require a flexible data collection instrument (Smith & Osborn, 2007). According to Smith and Osborn (2007), there are a number of ways to collect adequate data for interpretive phenomenological research, such as semi-structured interviews, surveys, and personal experiences. The participants filled out a survey and questionnaire on multicultural literacy and engagement of young African American males. After this, I analyzed the surveys and questionnaires to discover which participants met the criteria based on teaching experience. Then, I used semi-structured interviews as a tool to collect data because it allowed me the opportunity to converse with the participants face to face. While communicating with the participants, I was able to modify the initial questions based on the participants’ responses. It allowed me, as the researcher, to probe further questions when interesting and important areas originated (Smith & Osborn, 2007). I also kept a reflexive journal to explore my own thoughts about teachers’ perceptions of multicultural literacy (Janesick, 2004).

Interviews

Creswell (2009) stated that interviews are an exchange between a researcher and participant(s) where the researcher can ask general and open-ended questions which will

then lead to the transcription of the data for analysis. This connection built between the researcher and his or her participants will help the interviewer play a dynamic part in the research process. This will allow those involved in the research process to experience self-revelations or true confessions about the participant(s) life experiences (Roulston, 2010).

The interviews were semi-structured in that there was a set of questions, but the interviews were guided based on the responses of the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). A researcher who is able to conduct semi-structured interviews will (a) attempt to establish rapport with the participants, (b) consider grouping the questions in a particular order based on importance, c) be freer to ask on the spot questions based on responses to other questions asked and (d) follow the participant's lead concerning their interests or concerns (Smith and Osborn, 2007). Therefore, Smith and Osborn (2007) suggested that participants might feel more comfortable interviewing in a familiar setting. So, I allowed my participants to select a location that best fit their needs. The interview with each participant was an opportunity to build rapport and trust and also a chance for me to grasp a deeper understanding of their knowledge and perceptions on multicultural literacy. Before the interview though, the selected participants filled out a survey (Appendix A), and answered a questionnaire (Appendix B), which allowed me to probe questions based on their initial responses. I conducted, recorded, and transcribed all the interviews myself. Interviews were recorded on my cell phone and then directly loaded onto my personal laptop where I transcribed them onto a word document. Audio and transcription files were stored in an encrypted and password protected file on my personal laptop which is kept in my home office.

Researcher reflexive journal

Reflective journal writing informed me of pertinent information and ideas through the data analysis process. I was able to see the value of this reflective writing process as it helped guide me in understanding ideas or concepts pertaining to this study. I was able to fully grasp personal experiences, knowledges of others, as well as different ways of looking at the world. Janesick (2004) stated the importance of the researcher reflexive journal is about understanding the self and the researcher as a research instrument. The reflexive journal was also used as a data set to accompany other techniques, and also another opportunity for triangulation of data (Janesick, 2004). My goal was to write in my reflexive journal during each step of the research process.

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, I obtained approval for the study from Sam Houston State University's Institutional Review Board as well as the consent from the school district that participated in this study. I provided confidentiality and privacy to my participants by storing data securely within encrypted programs as well as using self-selected pseudonyms for the participants. I recruited the participants during their content planning time. Once I gathered the information from the survey and questionnaire, and discovered who met the criteria, I asked for consent from the participants. Then, interviews were scheduled.

Following Creswell's (2009) steps of data analysis, I organized the data into file folders on my personal laptop. Then, I transcribed the interviews. During the process of transcribing the interviews, I repetitively listened to the recorded interviews and read the transcriptions many times. This allowed me to plunge myself into the data, get an idea of

the interviews as a whole, and think about shared patterns. Next, I made note of certain dialogue from the transcriptions. After that, I recorded a list of key patterns that arose from the transcriptions. To take it a step further, I connected the patterns to each of the research questions. These discoveries were then used to answer each of the research questions. Finally, all discoveries were compared in order to check uniformity across a variety of sources.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established when research findings closely mirrored the meanings as described by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was my hope as the researcher that those involved in the study would not only find it trustworthy, but also meaningful in context. The triangulation of the data, in addition to the member checking, supported the process of establishing trustworthiness in this study. I, the researcher, conducted member checks to check for understanding of this phenomenon by utilizing techniques such as paraphrasing or summarization for clarification.

Researcher bias

I, as the researcher, served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2002). Due to this, there might be a chance that my preconceived ideas could impact or influence either mine or the participants' actions during data collection and the stages of analysis, therefore influencing the study's result (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). To separate from this bias, I conducted member checks with my participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to make sure I did not influence my beliefs onto the participants.

Confirmation bias

To exclude confirmation bias, the process in which a researcher might analyze and interpret new data with predetermined beliefs about the research topic, (Greenwald et al., 1986; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) I spent time reflecting in my journal. This process reduced confirmation bias (Janesick, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

It is imperative that I mention my own experiences as a previous middle school and high school Language Arts teacher. In conducting an interpretive phenomenological study, I was sensitive to the biases that I brought to my research study. Smith and Osborn (2007) noted that interpretive phenomenological research involves “detailed examination of the participant’s life-world,” (p. 53).

At the beginning of this study, I had just left the classroom after 9 years as a public-school Language Arts teacher in grades ranging from fifth grade to High School English I-IV. As a child I loved to read and excelled in academics and always knew I wanted to help others to be successful. As a classroom teacher, I started to question the literature I was teaching and how I was teaching it. So, after a few years, I stepped out of my comfort zone and started teaching literature that was relatable to all children. In public school classrooms diversity exists, and I found that most students did not like to read, therefore connections were not taking place while reading. I wanted to encourage reading but had to find ways to make it interesting to the students, so they could foster a love for reading. I noticed early on that young African American males performed lower in Reading compared to the other races. I became interested in this phenomenon and

wanted to look at all aspects to find a way to support these students and help them receive the most effective literacy instruction. I wanted to explore what is currently going on in the classrooms regarding literacy instruction while also learning about the perceptions of teachers on this issue.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) suggested the researcher leave behind an audit trail during their research study. I, the researcher, left an audit trail documenting every step of the research process, including reflective journal entries, interviews, member checks, and data analysis. As stated earlier in this chapter, due to the respect of confidentiality, the participants have alias names.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological research is when participants are making sense of their own world and the researcher is making sense of their world. Smith, Flowers, and Larking (2009) encouraged for investigative process to be smooth, connected, and multi-directional. This type of analysis involves intense reading and re-reading, initial noting of relationships, processes, places, values, events, developing themes, and searching for connections. Smith and Osborn (2007) explained that there is not a required methodology for carrying out an interpretive phenomenological research study. The research findings in interpretive phenomenological studies are not discussed in seclusion, but rather discussed in comparison to the current literature. To understand multicultural literacy and the teachers' perceptions and understandings of this type of literacy, I chose thematic analysis to explore the patterns and classify the themes and their relationships.

Coding procedures

Using Saldana's (2009) coding handbook for qualitative data as well as Smith and Osborn's (2007) suggestions for interpretive phenomenological research analysis, I began coding transcriptions by reading and rereading each transcript and documenting what was meaningful and interesting. I then started grouping and arranging these documentations together. I used QDA Miner lite 1.2 (Provalis Research, 2013) for organizing and analyzing the data. Data was then entered, and I coded the 1) participant interviews and questionnaires, 2) debriefing notes from interviews, 3) researcher reflexivity journals. As previously mentioned, thematic analysis was the data analysis method used.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be used for many research questions and epistemologies. It is a method that allows the researcher to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes found within the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A detailed and comprehensive thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun & Clarke (2006) and King (2004) stated that thematic analysis is a useful method for exploring the perceptions of different research participants.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was used for this study such as the sampling framework, the research design, and the data collection process via an interpretive phenomenological study to explore the teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy. I outlined the course of study including data collection, specifically semi-

structured interviews, debriefing interviews, and reflexive journaling. I concluded by describing the data analysis method used which was thematic analysis.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research design and methodology procedures. In this chapter, the findings from the qualitative data analysis are presented. This phenomenological research study was designed to explore the perceptions of six Language Arts teachers' grades five through eight in order to grasp how multicultural literacy was implemented in the classroom as a means to engage young African American males in grades 5-8. Participants disclosed information about their experience in the classroom pertaining to multicultural literacy and engagement of African American males and were given a chance to have a voice. In Chapter IV, I detailed the procedures I followed during the process of data collection and analysis of the findings that emerged from six secondary teachers' semi-structured interviews.

The initial contact was made when I introduced myself to the grade 5-8 Language Arts teachers at each of their planning period (professional learning community). Teachers were encouraged to fill out the demographic survey and the questionnaire that rated their perception of their own effectiveness of implementing multicultural literacy in their classroom as well as the engagement of African American males. For those interested in participating in the study, I disseminated a Sam Houston State University Instructional Review Board (IRB) approved recruitment document detailing the research study. I gave the Participation Invitation Letter (Appendix C) and Letter of Consent (Appendix D) to all of the Language Arts teachers attending the planning time on that specific day. I instructed the Language Arts teachers that I would leave the locked

collection box in the PLC room on each campus for one week. I exited the room after the instructions were given. After a week had passed, I collected the collection box from each campus and started examining the survey and questionnaires inside the box.

The survey (Appendix A) asked five questions regarding the teacher's demographic information as well as information about their teaching experience. It asked for the gender and race of the teacher and the number of years teaching overall and in this particular district. The survey ended with a question for the teacher to specify which subject areas he/she has taught.

I received responses from 19 participants for the survey and questionnaire. Of the 19 participants, 3 were male, and 16 were female. Regarding race, 14 participants identified themselves as White, Non-Hispanic, 3 identified themselves as Black, Non-Hispanic, 1 reported to be Hispanic, and 1 reported to be Bi-racial/Multi-Racial. Regarding teaching experience, 11 out of the 19 participants had 5 or more years of teaching experience. All 19 participants are currently teaching Reading/Language Arts.

On the back of the survey, was the questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire was set up as a Likert scale. The teachers had to rate themselves in four areas: knowledge of multicultural literacy, meeting the literacy needs of all of their students, implementation of multicultural literacy in their classroom, and ensuring engagement of African American male students in their classroom. Of the 19 participants, only 4 strongly felt they were knowledgeable on multicultural literacy, 12 participants agreed that they had knowledge about multicultural literacy, while 3 were undecided. As far as meeting the literacy needs of all the diverse students in the classroom, only 4 participants

strongly agreed with that statement, while 7 participants agreed with that statement, 3 participants disagreed, and 5 participants were undecided.

When it comes to implementing multicultural literacy in the classroom, 2 participants strongly agreed that they are currently implemental multicultural literacy in their classroom regarding instructional practices, instructional strategies, and the appropriate literature being taught. Furthermore, 14 participants agreed they are implementing multicultural literacy in their classroom, while 3 participants felt undecided. For the last statement regarding engagement of all students in the classroom, 5 participants strongly agreed, while 13 participants ensured engagement for all students and 1 participant was undecided. The results from the questionnaire are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Language Arts Teachers Grades 5-8 (N=19)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am knowledgeable on multicultural literacy.	21%	63%	16%		
I meet the literacy needs of all my students in regard to the different cultures of students.	21%	37%	26%	16%	
I implement multicultural literacy in my classroom. (instructional practices, instructional strategies, literature taught, etc.)	10%	74%	16%		
I ensure engagement for all students, especially the young African American males in my classroom.	26%	69%	5%		

The criteria for this research study was a minimum of five to fifteen years teaching experience and he or she had to be a current Language Arts teacher in grades 5-8 in this Southeast Texas school district. Six participants consented to proceed further with the study and participated in semi-structured interviews. These participants were Language Arts teachers (5 females and 1 male) of students in grades 5-8. Pseudonyms were used in place of the participants' real names to maintain confidentiality and to protect their identities (See Appendix E).

Background information

Of the six participants in this study, four reported to be Caucasian (75%). One participant reported they were of Hispanic ethnicity (17%). The remaining participant reported to be African American (17%). For comparison, the state of Texas demographic representation was as follows (TEA PEIMS, 2019): Female educators made up 76.22% of teacher population compared to the male educators which only made up 23.78% of the teacher population. Out of the entire teacher population, 59.08% were Caucasian, 27.13% were Hispanic, 10.36% were African American, 1.59% were Asian, 0.36% were Pacific Islander, and 0.35% were Native American/Alaskan Indian.

Two participants obtained their teacher certification through a university undergraduate program. Four participants obtained their teaching certificates through an Alternative Teacher Certification program. For comparison, in 2018 in the state of Texas more teachers of all races and ethnicities obtained alternative certificates than university undergraduate certificates (TEA PEIMS, 2019). Three of the six participants reported to have continued past their undergraduate degree, with two holding a master's degree. Two

of the participants were brand new to the district this school year, while four of the participants had previously taught in this school district.

This Southeast Texas public school district is a Title I district. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Title I means it is a district that receives a federally funded assistance program for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. Murphy & Daniel noted on the Texas Tribune (2019), there are approximately 9,000 students in the school district. The students consist of 38% Caucasian, 34% Hispanic, 22% African American, 3% Two or more races, 1% Asian, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.1% Pacific Islander. The average teacher to student ratio is 22 to 1. 77% of the teachers are Caucasian, 11% are Hispanic, and 9% are African American. 57% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. 52% of the students are considered to be at risk while 11% of the students speak limited English.

Interview Protocol

The four-question interview protocol was conducted through semi-structured interviews with six Language Arts teachers. Four of the participants were interviewed face-to face, while two of the participants were interviewed over the phone. During the semi-structured interviews, the following open-ended questions were asked:

- Tell me your thoughts on multicultural literacy.
- How do you implement multicultural literacy in your classroom?
- How do you meet the literacy needs of all of your students in regard to the different cultures of students?
- How do you engage students of different cultural backgrounds when teaching reading?

The six participants knew the open-ended interviews were being audiotaped with my cell phone. I also informed the participants that all recordings will be kept confidential in an encrypted file on my personal laptop with a secure password in my home office. I was able to listen to the recordings of the interviews and transcribe the interviews. I used Creswell (2013) six step process for data analysis protocol to receive attainable results in this phenomenological study. The six step process includes a) Step 1-prepare and organize data for data analysis, b) Step 2-examine all the data, c) Step 3-code the data, d) Step 4- after coding, use this process to determine the themes to analyze, e) Step 5-representation of the themes, and f) Step 6-interpret the findings. In analyzing and interpreting my qualitative data, I used this six- step process in examining the themes based on participants' transcriptions from the semi-structured interviews (Creswell 2013, Saldana 2012). This data source was designed to explore the following three research questions:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8?
- 2) What culturally responsive instructional practices do teachers implement to support African American males in grades 5-8?
- 3) How do teachers incorporate authentic literacy experiences to engage African American males in grades 5-8?

After analyzing the data using In Vivo coding, the following four themes emerged from this research study: (a) lack of planning time, (b) lack of instructional resources, (c) culturally responsive training needed for teachers, and (d) lack of motivation by the students. Emergent themes are repetitive throughout the data process (Saldana, 2012).

While coding I was able to outline four overarching themes for my study. Table 2 provides a visual of the emergent themes, and their definitions, and significant participant statements.

Table 2

Description of Emergent Themes

Theme	Description	Participants' statements
Lack of Time	time to plan with colleagues	<p>"I do not have time to find text for all my diverse students."</p> <p>"I have to find literature outside my working hours."</p> <p>"I need to take time out of my schedule and pull literature for the coming months."</p> <p>"I spend so much time outside of school working."</p> <p>"Time is a factor. We have to make sure we would have time to add the literature to our curriculum when planning."</p>
Lack of Instructional Resources	materials used to provide literacy instruction to students	<p>"I think our district just hasn't provided the necessary resources."</p> <p>"I wish the curriculum had more texts integrated into it. It is mid-year and we just got to a story about a</p>

Hispanic/Latin
American family.”

“I think it would be nice to see more books that are purchased that are specific to our diverse group of students.”

“Our curriculum only highlights certain demographics in the literature presented.”

“I have to seek out the material myself.”

“I do think we need to bring more African American literature, so that a lot of our students can connect with the text.”

Teacher training on
Culturally Responsive
Teaching needed

training for teachers who
teach a diverse group of
students

“I find it hard to connect with my students.”

“I was not trained to work with diverse students in the school districts or in my undergraduate program.”

“No, I haven’t been trained. I think school districts need to. We, as teachers, need to be more aware and more open to a multicultural environment in our classroom.”

Lack of Student motivation

a love for reading
is missing

“No, they do not enjoy reading.”

“No, not necessarily. I think they would have become interested in reading if they were pushed at a younger age.”

“If a text is put in front of them about a topic they are not interested in, forget it. They will clock out.”

“These students are not the types of students that enjoy reading. I think it’s because they haven’t had the opportunity to read texts that they enjoy or texts they would like to read.”

“I have to encourage my students and motivate them in order for them to read in my class.”

“I can’t teach a kid to read if they don’t want to read.”

Emergent Theme 1: Lack of planning time

This public-school district implements professional learning communities where content area teachers are able to meet between 140-160 minutes as a team per week. Dufour and Eaker (2009) believe that educators can seek to create more effective schools by transforming them into professional learning communities. The characteristics of professional learning communities are a) shared mission, vision, and values, b) collective inquiry, c) collaborative teams, d) action orientation and experimentation, e) continuous improvement, and f) results orientation (Dufour & Eaker, 2009). So, having time set aside for teachers to plan collaboratively makes up part of this model.

The teachers, during their professional learning block, are able to collaborate with their instructional coach and peers to plan lessons that include whole group instruction, small group instruction, intervention and extension activities. The standardized test and the data ultimately drive the literacy instruction. Teachers responded with feeling pressured to obtain passing results for their students. Their classrooms are extremely diverse with not only special education students, 504 students (whose disabilities or impairments are covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act according to Texas Education Agency), students with social and emotional difficulties, but also students of different races, cultures, and gender. Cindy, a participant, stated:

“When we pull texts to teach our standards it comes from our newly adopted curriculum that our district spent a lot of money on. We don’t necessarily have time to find and pull texts from other resources because we have so many other issues going on. We follow our scope and sequence and our curriculum provided by the district. Now, I’m not saying that our district wouldn’t allow us to find other texts appropriate for all students, but when planning we are also having to consider so many other things such as our students’ learning abilities and also their learning disabilities.

Their planning time also consists of district professional development during these 140-160 minutes per week. Teachers mentioned that during this time they have been educated on instructing dyslexia students, special education students, and bilingual students. The teachers also have a 10-day learning cycle that they follow and are allotted about 60 minutes a week to plan lessons. The remaining time is spent disaggregating data on common formative assessments and summative assessments. Common formative

assessments are short assessments inside a unit to assess where the students currently are, and summative assessments are longer assessments at the end of each unit. By disaggregating data with their team, the teachers are able to find the strengths of the students according to the standards assessed and also target concerns where the students are struggling based on assessed standards. So, planning time has different pieces that must be addressed with team members. Another participant, Amy, noted:

“Yes, time is a factor. With a newly adopted curriculum we are not familiar to the texts that are included in each of the units. We have not had a chance to pre-read a lot of them until a few days before the lesson, so have we done a great job on making sure our literature meets the needs of all of our students: probably not. A lot of us teachers spend time after the school day at home grading papers, contacting parents, and spending time with our loved ones.”

Josie, a participant, also added:

“When it comes to pulling literature that we teach to our students it is based off the standard we are going to teach to our students. Of course, we would love to pull texts that meet the needs of all of our diverse students, but time is our enemy. I do realize that a lot of my students do live in a bubble and hardly leave our small little town, so I am cognizant about the literature I teach to my students.”

The teachers have mentioned that time is not on their side when it comes to selecting multicultural literature for their diverse classrooms. Most said that they are doing the best they can with the planning time allotted for them. They admitted that their students need to experience multicultural literature in their classroom and moving forward they will be more cognizant.

Carrie, a participant, hesitantly stated:

“To seek out literature and instructional materials for the students I am serving, it is going to cost me my time and my money.”

Emergent Theme 2: Lack of Instructional Resources

Quality teaching and quality texts are essential in any child’s academic success. Tatum (2009) believes that educators should have a clear perception on all aspects of literacy instruction including the importance of text selection for young African American males to better prepare them for society. As previously stated, teachers do not feel that they have a lot of time to choose multicultural texts that most or all of their students can relate to. When asked about instructional resources during the semi-structured interviews, I received similar responses.

Mary, a participant, stated:

“I think with our newly adopted curriculum, we have added a lot of additional multicultural literacy pieces because we now have English Language Learners texts included. I think we are missing African American culture texts in our curriculum. That is over half of the make-up of our classroom. They need to be able to read stories about themselves and find those real-world connections within the text.”

Whitney Oakley, a former Assistant Superintendent, stated that high-quality grade-level instruction is the pathway to equity in closing racial gaps (2018). She also added that we owe it to all stakeholders to make sure the instructional resources are present.

Carrie, a participant, responded aggravatedly:

“All of the instructional resources that I have received from the district do not meet the literacy needs of my students. My students are at least three grade levels behind. I do not have the appropriate materials that match my students’ instructional level. The resources are on grade level, and most of my students cannot read on the fifth-grade level. This worries me. So, I spend a lot of my time and my own money finding texts and activities that will allow them to progress this school year. I do not want them to regress, so I am constantly assessing my students and monitoring their progress.”

I asked Josie, a participant, about the process of pulling literature to teach in her class and this is what she stated:

“As a collaborative team, we usually look at the standard and the genre of the unit study. Then we look at the texts within our curriculum and explore which text would appeal best to our students. We like to teach texts so that the students are able to view the outside world.”

Gary, a participant, noted:

“In regard to curriculum I make it work. Sometimes that may mean I have to pull resources to tell the students more about the author or the historical event taking place during that time period to allow the students to have background knowledge on the topic of the text.”

Most of the participants agreed that they are lacking the appropriate instructional resources that meet the needs of their students in the classroom. Some participants are having to fund these resources with their own money and/or expand on the resources that have been given to them to make them more relatable to their students.

Amy, a participant, added:

“Well, I wish the curriculum had more texts integrated into it. We just now (mid-year) got to a story that included a Hispanic/Latin American family. It was neat to see the students engaged. I wish there were more texts about African Americans as well.”

Emergent Theme 3: Culturally Responsive training needed

Culturally responsive teaching is a term that allows teachers to be sensitive and responsive to the cultures of their students. Its main goal is to “get teachers to connect with students’ cultures, and to help students connect with their cultural and social identities in ways that learning in any subject is more effective and relevant” (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001, 2009, 2014, Emdin 2012). Hammond (2014) believes that culturally responsive teaching is about building the learning capacity of each individual student and the easiest way to judge if your teaching is culturally responsive is whether your students are learning. Of the six participants, only two said that they had been trained on culturally responsive teaching. Both teachers mentioned that they received this training in their pre-service teaching program. They did not receive any training from a school district on this topic.

Cindy, a participant, quickly stated:

“I don’t feel that with this group of students that I’ve been able to hone in on their needs because of the social divide. I am an older white woman and many of them are coming from a single parent home. I find it hard to connect with them. I have found that if I mention an artist, like Lizzo, my students are surprised that I know

this pop culture artist and get excited and engaged. I have a socially/economically diverse group of students as well. It's really hard.”

Emdin (2016) believes that there should be a renewed focus on teacher preparation and all teachers, no matter if they are black or white, should learn strategies and practices in order to become a culturally responsive teacher. Emdin feels strongly that these teacher preparation programs need to take a closer look at how teachers are being trained to teach young minority men and realize that no student can successfully learn in an environment where they are not cared for (2016).

Mary, a participant, responded:

“Even though I am a Latino woman, I would like to have training on reaching all students of different cultural backgrounds. I feel that I am properly trained in supporting our English Language Learner students, but the majority of my students are African American, so finding ways to help them learn or get them engaged would be great. I do try to connect with my students individually and find out where they come from because I feel like they have more struggles to deal with in their home or community.”

There is a thrilling disconnect between what goes on in these young men's lives versus the actual content being taught in the classroom. Culture shapes how children understand life as well as how and what they learn (Kuykendall, 1989).

Gary, a participant, stated:

“As a black male teacher, most of my African American male students see me as stern and strict. I find myself wanting more from them and not allowing any

excuses. The world is tough enough, and they have to be given high expectations from an early age. When I teach literature, I am teaching history too.”

However, giving teachers the necessary time and permission to tailor the instructional content to connect the lessons and to engage their students with life experiences involves educators to make the connections first and build relationships with their students (Railton, 2015). Carrie, a participant, is proud of the relationships she has built with her students, no matter their ethnicity, race, gender, and/or culture. She stated:

“I focus first on building relationships with my students. My goal is to make those connections with my students in the first fifteen days of school. This school year it took me about forty-five days, but I didn’t care because I knew this was crucial in order for us to have a successful school year. After they knew I cared for them they worked well for me. I am able to build relationships with my students. I am extremely nurturing and caring. They know they can come to me with not only help on an assignment, but with any issues life brings their way. I have one student who is homeless and always comes to school hungry. Sometimes he comes to school angry. I know why he is angry; he is hungry and has had little sleep from the previous night. I communicate with him in a manner to show him I care and will help him. He works for me in my class and respects me. We have truly built a great bond with one another.”

Noddings (2005) stated that “We must understand that a school, like a family, is a multipurpose institution” (p. 63) and that our schools cannot accomplish academic goals without making sure we attend to the needs of our students by showing that we care about

them. Noddings (2005) goes even further to state that caring teachers listen and respond differently to their students.

Gonzalez (2018) believes that students and educators can learn from one another because we all bring varied experiences and how we utilize them in instruction is up to the educators. Gonzalez feels it is crucial to build relationships with students and ask them questions about their experiences, their family, and history (2018).

Josie, a participant, compassionately stated:

“In my class, I hope my students are able to make connections with the literature over a favorite character or experience in the text. I try my best to find different texts for students of different cultural backgrounds to relate to. I believe reading a variety of texts allows my students to see the outside world and not just the town we live in.”

Gonzalez (2018) warns educators that culturally responsive teaching is not just about one day celebrating one’s culture, but daily practices that bring students’ cultures into instruction.

Emergent Theme 4: Lack of student motivation

Effective teachers find ways to implement different learning styles for their diverse students by implementing instructional strategies to offer all African American males a fair academic experience (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Bell, & Little, 2008). Amy, a participant, responded about the engagement of her students in reading by stating:

“Most of my students are engaged in class and I try to choose literature that will fit all of our students and there are times when it might not fit every single

student. But they will get a chance to see/read a text that they can relate to. Using a variety of texts allows the students to see the outside world and not just the town we live in. I have found that I have to introduce the text in an exciting and engaging way for them to get interested in the text. Most of my students do not enjoy reading. I think it is because they haven't found a text or series that they enjoy. Even showing video clips about the text drives their imagination and they want to learn more."

Therefore, the power of text is important in reaching these young African American males and they need the exposure to texts "which not only contain characters who look, act, and think as they do, but texts which encourage and empower these young men to take action in their own lives and in the lives of others around them" (Tatum 2009; Emdin 2016). Cindy, a participant, feels:

"Only a handful of my students like to read. These are the students that are reading at a higher level than the other students. I feel that the other students could find themselves engaged in a text if it was something of interest to them. If not, forget it, they will clock out."

Researchers (Gay, 2000; Kuykendall, 1992; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997; Tatum, 2018) determined that African American males' benefit from active, high stimulating activities rather than just sitting in their desk listening to the teacher lecture. Webb-Johnson (2002) has found that African American males respond better in classrooms with hands on activities that require movement, interaction, and energy.

Also, students should collaborate with one another, especially through difficult texts, to discuss the meaning and relevance of a text (Boone et al. 2010). According to

McGee & Richgels (1996), teacher read alouds are a great way to promote a deeper understanding of the text for children. Mary, a participant, feels strongly that read-alouds and cooperative learning has helped to engage the students in the text, by stating:

“I do not necessarily think my students like to read. I think if they were pushed at a younger age, things would be different. I incorporate a lot of read-alouds in class to engage my students. I try to add drama and suspense or comedy to my introduction of the text to get them interested in a text. I also like to have discussions about the text whole group to allow the students to dig deeper about what they read. I also find that this helps the struggling readers as well to comprehend what is going on in the text.”

Using literature circles and book clubs that allow students to respond orally to texts and have conversations with one another about an authentic text are great ways to engage the students in responding and understanding the text. (Daniels, 2002). Cindy, a participant, also touches on this same topic and mentions:

“I try and find 15-20 minutes of class time a few times a week to incorporate small group literature circles. This allows for the students to read together, support each other, and be able to talk about the text. I am even looking forward to hosting book clubs during the school day, so that anyone can attend.”

Emdin (2012) believes that schools must be willing to access the world through different approaches of teaching and learning that are unique to black males in order to address the low achievement of black males. Emdin also added that students have to want to be academically successful (2012).

Gary, a participant, responded:

“I have to encourage and motivate my students to read. I have to present the information in a variety of ways. The students love TikTok, and Flipgrid. They will answer questions about a text using these programs and always appear engaged and interested in the assignment.”

Engagement and motivation go hand in hand. Both are crucial in order for students to become better readers. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) suggest that providing students a choice will increase their effort and commitment to reading. Carrie, a participant, in this study likes to offer a wide variety of literature to her students in her classroom library. She feels that just one book can impact a child’s life forever.

Carrie, a participant, added:

“I teach Reading in a Title I district. Most of my students do not have a book at home. That is one of the biggest struggles I have found. So, at the beginning of the school year I stocked my bookshelves. I allowed my students to take my books home. Yes, I have to keep it filled throughout the year. But, it puts a book in the hand of a child who didn’t have one. I can’t teach a student to read if they don’t want to read. So, finding a book that interests them starts that fire.”

Summary

In Chapter IV, I described the findings of this phenomenological study. This study was conducted to understand secondary Language Arts teachers’ perceptions of multicultural literacy and the means of engagement of African American males in grades 5-8. I applied Creswell’s (2013) six-step qualitative process for maximum results and I used In Vivo coding to focus on fulfilling the participants’ point of view (Saldana, 2012), I was able to identify and interpret several themes provided from the participants

thorough responses in their individual interviews. Four total themes emerged from this analysis: (a) planning time, (b) instructional resources, (c) culturally responsive training, and (d) lack of student motivation. These emergent themes were crucial to understanding these secondary Language Arts teachers' experiences and perceptions.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

The presentation of this phenomenological study and the analysis of the data collected were reported in the previous chapters. Chapter V contains a summary of the purpose and findings of the study. The major findings, which have been explained will give further insight of multicultural literacy and engagement of African American males in a grade 5-8 public school classroom based on the teachers' perceptions. This chapter also contains implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore a literacy instructional framework for improving reading outcomes in African American males in fifth through eighth grade specifically. Emphasis was placed on factors such as the teacher's knowledge on multicultural literacy, as well as teacher practices and beliefs on culturally relevant teaching, and authentic literacy experiences to better meet the literacy needs of young African American males.

This study provides insightful and useful information for the research community, teachers, and curriculum writers for school districts. By using this information obtained from this exploration into teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy, teachers will be able to better design curriculum and develop lessons to work successfully with racially and ethnically diverse students. It will also allow for teachers to have a better understanding of the many cultures and how their perceptions can affect teaching and learning behaviors.

Six Language Arts teachers teaching grades 5-8 at the same public-school district in Southeast Texas were interviewed using open-ended questions that focused on the following three research questions:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8?
- 2) What culturally responsive instructional practices do teachers implement to support African American males in grades 5-8?
- 3) How do teachers incorporate authentic literacy experiences to engage African American males in grades 5-8?

Discussion of Findings

Four major themes emerged from the data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the six participants which were: 1) lack of time, 2) lack of instructional resources, 3) culturally responsive training needed, 4) lack of student motivation. The participants shared the factors affecting multicultural literacy and engagement of African American males in their classrooms.

Furthermore, it is imperative to continue listening and learning about what is currently taking place around our world. We, as educators, can make a difference. Every child deserves a fair and equal opportunity to an education no matter the color of their skin. I feel it is imperative that multicultural literacy should be in the hands of all children, especially young African American males. Banks (2002) believes that through multicultural literature educators can focus on social justice and educating both the heart and mind of our students while also showing them how to be thoughtful and committed citizens.

Tatum (2006) noted how important the role of text plays in the literacy development of young African American males. Tatum (2006) goes on further to add that it would be beneficial when selecting a text that a teacher chooses a piece of literature that shines a positive light on the trajectories of African American males. Hammond (2014) believes that culturally responsive teaching is an effective framework for student engagement. Therefore, selecting texts that students can connect with and learn from will most likely allow them to be engaged and motivated to read the literature. Teachers have many tasks at hand but setting aside time before the school year starts to hand select the literature that will be taught to incoming students might alleviate some of the stress.

Additionally, Logan & Johnston (2009) revealed there is a direct link between reading engagement and reading achievement. We, as educators, can come to a conclusion that if our young African American males are low performing in Reading, then there's a chance they are not engaged or connected to the literature being taught in their classroom.

This study shines light on the issue that young African American males are consistently low performing students in Reading. This study provides insight and further recommendations on how we can move forward and face this issue in today's classrooms.

Research Question I

What culturally responsive instructional practices do teachers implement to support African American males?

One of the emergent themes for this study emerged from this research question which was the need for culturally responsive training. Only two participants received preparation on culturally responsive teaching, so most of the participants did not have a

fluid answer for this question. Most of the participants did not know how to incorporate these instructional practices because they had not been trained.

All participants acknowledged that their classrooms were filled with diverse students. Only two participants revealed that they have great rapport with their students and spend time building relationships and getting to know their students. This is a crucial culturally responsive practice to incorporate in each lesson.

One participant, Carrie, added that when it comes to building relationships with her students, she starts from the first day of school. She believes that the relationship aspect between a teacher and student is imperative, especially in high poverty areas. She feels that if students like you then they will be engaged and listen to you. Another participant, Mary, noted that she tries to connect with her students individually and find out where they come from because she feels like these students have a lot going on at home or in their community.

There is an extreme disconnect between what goes on in these young men's lives versus the content taught in the classroom. Culture shapes how children understand life as well as how and what they learn (Kuykendall, 1989). It was evident in my study that teachers had to bridge the gap and facilitate the learning opportunities, while also keeping in mind how important it was for the students to make connections to the text based on their own lived experiences.

Some possible ways that culturally relevant teaching can help a young black male is allowing them to find a connection in classroom learning to their real-life activities, connecting students with mentors from the African American community, and also introducing African American male students to potential career paths (Tatum 2003). All

participants agreed that they do realize the importance of bringing in diverse literature into their Language Arts classroom. The participants, grades 5-8 Language Arts teachers, did mention that their district had just recently adopted a new curriculum and felt obligated to use the resources provided by their school district. Most of the participants felt that the new curriculum did not provide enough literature for making real world connections for the African American students. They agreed that these students do not see themselves portrayed in the literature.

Research Question 2

What are the teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage African American males?

An emergent theme arose from this research question given the fact that the participants struggle with engaging young African American males in grades 5-8. The participants noted that there is a lack of student motivation which is an emergent theme in this study. One participant, Cindy, honestly stated that she “doesn’t feel that with this group of students that she’s been able to hone in on her students’ needs as an older white woman”. She went on to add that “I find it hard to connect with them, unless I mention a current artist in pop culture”.

Another participant, Josie, explained that most of her students are engaged in her lessons because she takes her time with a text by modeling and analyzing the text with her students. She also adds that she tries to bring in literature that is relatable to all of her students, especially the young African American males. Boone, Rawson, & Vance (2010) believes that scaffolding can help these young men, but educators should not simply “dumb down the texts,” but encourage and motivate the students through scaffolding.

All six participants noted that most of their students do not like to read and in order to get their students to read, they need to be encouraged and motivated by their teacher. Josie, a participant, added that “these students are not the types of students that enjoy reading and I think it’s because they haven’t had the opportunity to read texts that they enjoy or texts they would like to read.” She goes on further to say that she encourages her students to read by showing video clips to introduce a text to drive their imagination and motivate the students to read the text.

Mary, a participant, stated that she includes a lot of teacher read alouds in her class to engage her students, especially the young African American males in her classroom. She also added that she encourages collaborative conversations and class discussions about the text including the conflicts, characters, and message presented. Cindy, a participant, feels strongly that if you put a text in front of her students that is not of their liking, her students will clock out. However, all participants recognize the importance of text selection for all students. The participants realized moving forward, they will do a better job in selecting the text to meet the literacy needs of all of their students. Therefore, the power of text is crucial to reach these young African American males and they need the exposure to texts “which not only contain characters who look, act, and think as they do, but texts which encourage and empower these young men to take action in their own lives and in the lives of others around them” (Tatum 2009; Emdin, 2016).

The participants also mentioned that time is a factor in implementing multicultural literacy in the classroom which is another emergent theme in this study. The participants felt pressured to follow the newly adopted curriculum and teach to the

essential standards which students will be tested on at the end of the year's standardized test. The participants mentioned that a lot of their planning time on campus is spent disaggregating data and monitoring students' progress on the essential standards that need to be taught by the spring. The participants wished they had time to pull diverse literature but will focus on this moving forward.

Research Question 3

How do teachers incorporate authentic literacy experiences to engage African American males?

The participants shared that they use a balanced literacy framework in their Language Arts classroom. According to Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill (2005), balanced literacy is " ... a philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievements are developed through instruction and support in multiple environments in which teachers use various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control" (p. 272). The balanced literacy framework allows for the students to work independently on their current levels in reading and writing with teacher guidance.

Carrie, a participant, mentioned that choice is a huge factor when it comes to reading for her students. She allows them to select their independent reading novels from her classroom library. She added, "I stock my bookshelves with books I have purchased with my personal money. I allow my students to take the books home. Yes, I have to keep it filled throughout the school year, but it puts a book in the hand of a child who didn't have one." She then proceeds by stating, "So, finding a book that the child is interested in, it starts that fire and ignites them".

Shared reading is a part of the balanced literacy framework. Shared reading is reading a text in a whole group setting. Mary, a participant, mentioned that at times there can be a lack of engagement from all students, especially her African American male students, so she will elect to do a read aloud of the text. She added, “I want my students to be engaged in a text, so at times I might have to share the text with the class in the format of a teacher read aloud. I emphasize the dramatic parts and love seeing their eyes light up when I read. I even try and take it a step further and engage in collaborative discussions as a class to allow the students to make meaning of the text”.

Josie, a participant, recognized that for the most part, “I always read the text first to my students, then they will follow with a close reading of the text to form deeper meanings of the text. I have found that it works for my students and engages them in the text.” According to McKenzie (2002), the U.S. Department of Education finds the balanced literacy approach to have the highest potential for students to become successful readers.

When asked about student engagement in Amy’s classroom, she responded, “My students are engaged in the texts presented in class, especially the young African American males, when I make real-life connections to the text or allow them to share their own experiences or connections based on the text. I find that this allows the students to become more interested in the text and motivated to finish the text when they can relate it to their own life story”.

The one major defeat the participants mentioned, regarding the newly adopted curriculum, was the lack of literature for the African American students. All but one participant realized they will have to make changes and incorporate more diverse

literature to meet the needs of all of their students. Furthermore, this is the final emergent theme from this study, lack of instructional resources.

Threats to internal validity

Researcher bias. The bias of the researcher can present a threat to internal validity during data collection and data analysis. Thus, it is imperative that researchers recognize their biases, but remain as objective as possible while interviewing, taking detailed field notes, and making inferences based on that data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). So, I used the following to eliminate as many threats as possible: a) member checking in the form of summarizing and paraphrasing for clarification, b) triangulation of data (interviews and notes from reflexive journal) and c) audio and video recordings of the interviews. It was crucial that I not show any bias as I collected, analyzed, and translated the data.

Face validity. The threat of face validity may be regarded as a failure to recruit adequate participants, a failure to carry out too few interviews, or a failure to spend ample time observing participants (Lather, 1986). I only secured six participants for this study. Additionally, I utilized member checking which means I asked the participants to summarize and paraphrase what they had stated in their interviews. Next, after each interview I added debriefing notes into my reflexive journal.

Reactivity. A practical threat to trustworthiness is reactivity which is a threat that is based on participant reaction to the research process itself. In other words, a participant may behave in a different manner because they are involved in the research process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). To regulate reactivity, my data collection contained

interviews with each participant. The use of triangulation of data also helped to minimize reactivity through thematic analysis.

Implications for Educators

I did not locate any research where teacher perceptions of multicultural literacy were investigated. Although there has been a lot of research on the underachievement in reading of young African American males (Tatum, 2018; Emdin, 2016; Husband, 2012). I feel it is in the best interest of the students to learn from a culturally responsive educator. I believe that culturally responsive practices should be taught in university programs and/or alternative certification programs. Also, there needs to be a designated time for a follow up training within the school district during the time allotted for professional development.

I feel it also evident that educators could benefit from a professional development on student motivation and reading engagement. Teachers need to learn strategies on how to motivate and engage their students to read the literature and complete the tasks associated with the text.

Additionally, teachers need to understand the importance of utilizing multicultural literature in today's classrooms. Most of our classrooms are filled with diverse students and that is why it is imperative to select multicultural literature to allow for our students to appreciate and value one's culture. Additionally, all Language Arts teachers need to be familiar with multicultural literature available for their students; an online library of resources could be created for the Language Arts teachers in the campus and/or district.

Also, aside from the multicultural literacy resources, educators could benefit from reading scholarly articles and practitioner journals for online learning and resources

through professional educator organizations such as International Literacy Association (ILA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Furthermore, stakeholders should keep in mind the pressures that educators endure especially when it comes to standardized testing and meeting reading expectations. Teachers still need to continue best practices in instruction and reading. Educators must fine tune these best practices in teaching reading by joining professional educator organizations and attending professional conferences. Stakeholders and administrators should be involved in the reading process and observe the students in the classroom during their Language Arts block. Allowing the educators time to pre-plan for the upcoming school year and hand select literature might alleviate stress from the educators.

Recommendations for further research

Future researchers could take on a study of teacher perceptions of multicultural literacy and consider the inclusion of student perceptions of multicultural literacy. In fact, studying student perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage young African American males in grades 5-8 could yield some pivotal themes for current multicultural literacy and engagement of young African American male researchers. In addition, interviewing students about the literature presented in their Language Arts class combined with ways to engage the students would be an important component to add to a future study. Furthermore, a focus group of educators and students might be added to the study for triangulation reasons.

Evans (2010) conducted research on critical literacy using multicultural picture books. She explored student perception on diversity and learned that by being exposed to these texts the students were made more aware of the different cultural backgrounds. I

believe that for future research, it would be beneficial to explore student and teacher perceptions of multicultural literacy. I believe it could be eye opening for both age groups.

I would possibly allow for more data sets for further research. Additionally, have the educators keep an inventory of the literature used over a period of time in their classroom as well as the instructional practices used to engage the young African American males. Moreover, include the researcher to observe some of the lessons exhibiting these instructional practices in the classroom and include students in the semi-structured interview protocol.

Reflecting on the interviews with the participants, I wish the following questions would have been discussed with the participants pertaining to this study:

- 1.) How prepared were you to teach your students of different cultural backgrounds?
- 2.) Why do you think teachers are not as well-informed about multicultural literacy?
- 3.) Did you take a children's literature course at your university or through your alternative certification program?

Perhaps, for further research, these questions could assist in gaining insight into teachers' educational backgrounds that prepared them to teach diverse students.

Conclusion

Multiple factors play a role into the teacher decision making of the use of multicultural literature texts in the classroom. Undeniably, teachers have to figure out ways to engage their diverse students, especially the young African American males. Culturally responsive teaching is proven to be an effective framework for student engagement and should be considered when working with diverse students (Hammond

2014). It is without question, that sometimes the state and local expectations of student achievement may affect teacher perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage young African American males. Tatum (2006) insists that the missing piece on effectively educating young African American males is the role of text in literacy development. Moving forward, Language Arts teachers should consider identifying and utilizing texts that shine a positive light on the trajectories of African American males in their classrooms (Tatum 2006).

Summary

In my study, I investigated six Language Arts teachers in grades 5-8 in the same public-school district in regard to multicultural literacy as a means to engage young African American males. I did not find any studies conducted where these experiences from the teachers had been explored. The review of literature includes literature relevant to cultural and educational experiences that have been researched regarding engagement and multicultural literacy in the classroom. A qualitative, phenomenological case study methodology was implemented, with phenomenological themes emerging from the six participants' interviews. To strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the study, researcher reflexivity, member-checking and debriefing strategies were implemented. A step-by-step qualitative data collection and analysis process was utilized. This study provided implications, recommendations, and suggestions yielded to fellow educators and district and campus administrators.

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APPENDIX A

Survey

Your participation and honest feedback are critical to my study. To ensure confidentiality of your responses, all statements will be kept private with no names used in the report. Thank you for your participation.

Demographics: Please circle the appropriate number or fill in where required.

1. What is your Gender?

- Female
- Male

2. What is your Race/Ethnicity?

- Black, Non Hispanic
- Hispanic / Latino American
- White, Non Hispanic
- Biracial/ Multi- racial (Belonging to more than one racial group)
- Other (please specify)_____

3. Please indicate the total number of years teaching with this school district:

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 4 years
- 5 years or more

4. Please indicate the total number of years teaching experience:

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 4 years
- 5 years or more

5. Please indicate the subjects you have taught:

- Reading/Language Arts
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Other: _____

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

Your participation and honest feedback are critical to my study. To ensure confidentiality of your responses, all statements will be kept private with no names used in the report. Thank you for your participation.

1. How do you meet the literacy needs of all of your students in regard to the different cultures of students?
2. Tell me your thoughts about multicultural literacy.
3. How do you implement multicultural literacy in your classroom?
(*instructional practices, instructional strategies, literature taught, etc.*)
4. How do you ensure engagement for all students, especially the young African American males in your classroom?

APPENDIX C

Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Ashley Murray. I am a doctoral student at Sam Houston State University's Literacy Program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Literacy as a means to engage African American males in grades 5-8. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Nancy Votteler. Dr. Votteler can be reached at (936) 294-1135 or via email at nkvotteler@shsu.edu.

The study involves initially completing a survey and questionnaire to find out which teachers meet the criteria. Participants that meet the criteria will be asked to complete one or two semi-structured interviews. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

The study is completely anonymous; therefore, it does not require you to provide your name or any other identifying information. If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter below. Your participation in the research will be of great importance to assist in learning about teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as well as how teachers are engaging young African American males in their classroom.

Thank you for your time and participation. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact Mrs. Sharla Miles in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (936) 294-4875 or via email at sharla_miles@shsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Ashley Murray, Doctoral Student, Sam Houston State University

Appendix D

Letter of Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study about teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy as a means to engage young African American males in grades 5-8. The researcher is inviting current Language Arts teachers who teach grades 5-8. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by researcher, Ashley Murray, who is a doctoral student at Sam Houston State University. This research study is under the supervision of Dr. Nancy Votteler. Dr. Votteler can be reached at (936) 294-1135 or via email at nkvotteler@shsu.edu.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy and learn about instructional practices used to engage young African American males in the classroom.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- You will be asked to complete a brief demographic survey that includes five questions that will take approximately one minute to complete.
- You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that includes 4 questions that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.
- You will be asked to participate in one or two semi-structured interviews. Each interview should take about 30 minutes to complete.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: This study is completely voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one associated with this study will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. Additionally, this study is completely anonymous, no one will know if you did nor did not participate. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The benefits of the study include voicing your thoughts and concerns regarding multicultural literacy in your classroom and ways to engage young African American males in the classroom.

Payment: This study is completely voluntary; there will be no reimbursement or payment for time.

Privacy: Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Interview data will be kept secured by password protection and data encryption and will remain confidential. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years,

as required by the university. **Contacts and Questions:** If you have questions now or at a later time, you may contact the researcher, Ashley Murray, via stdaxd14@shsu.edu or if you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact Mrs. Sharla Miles in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (936) 294-4875 or via email at sharla_miles@shsu.edu. You can ask any questions you have before you begin the survey and questionnaire. Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I will continue and complete the survey and questionnaire if I agree with these terms.

APPENDIX E

TABLE 3: Participants

Table 3

Language Arts Teachers Grades 5-8 (N=6)

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender	Race	Years of Teaching Experience	Certification Program
Carrie	Female	Caucasian	5-7 years	Alt. Certification
Mary	Female	Hispanic	5-7 years	Alt. Certification
Josie	Female	Caucasian	5-7 years	University
Gary	Male	African Amer.	13-15 years	Alt. Certification
Cindy	Female	Caucasian	8-10 years	University
Amy	Female	Caucasian	5-7 years	Alt. Certification

VITA

Ashley Murray, M.L.A.

Education

Sam Houston State University Doctoral Student in Literacy	2016
Southern Methodist University Master's in Liberal Arts	2004
The University of Texas at Austin Bachelor's in Government	2002

Academic Positions

Instructional Coach Huntsville Intermediate, Huntsville ISD	2018-present
Language Arts Teacher Huntsville Intermediate, Huntsville ISD	2013-2018
High School English Teacher Huntsville High School, Huntsville ISD	2011-2013
High School English Teacher Heritage Champions Academy, Responsive Education	2007-2009

Honors

Team Excellence in Professional Learning Learning Forward	2019
Outstanding Student in Doctoral Literacy Program Sam Houston State University	2018
Educator of the Month Huntsville ISD	2018

Professional Presentations

Gerber, H., Murray, A., Maynard, C., Panozzo, M., Gates, J., Rice, R., Stowkes, F., B. Muse., (2018, November). "*On being a literacy education doctoral student in the digital age: Phenomenological exploration of contemporary doctoral education*". Roundtable presentation in the National Council of Teachers of English, Houston, TX.

Professional Membership and Affiliation

International Literacy Association
National Council of Teachers of English
Learning Forward Texas