“BEING TRUE”: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MALE STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN A CULTURALLY RELEVANT LITERATURE-BASED READING CURRICULUM

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College and Graduate School
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by
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December 2014
The purpose of this holistic case study was to investigate what happens when African American adolescent males participate in a curriculum that is culturally relevant utilizing culturally relevant literature. In addition, it explores the literacy behaviors of the participants that experience this type of curriculum while also examining the participants’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature featured within the curriculum.

The participants in this study were eight eighth-grade African American male students enrolled in an urban public middle school. Multiple data were collected: participant observations, participant and teacher interviews, reflection journal, and a culturally relevant book analysis completed by the participants. The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data and results were confirmed through member checking.

The role of books and the role of space and discourse were the two overarching themes that emerged from the analysis. Results revealed that the students displayed multiple literacy behaviors and valued specific characteristics of the culturally relevant literature. Additional categories and subcategories of the findings are also presented to give a more complete picture of the results from this study.
Key words: culturally relevant curriculum, culturally relevant literature, adolescent African American males, book club, reading
To my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My dissertation would not have been possible if not for the influence of my students during my teaching tenure in Southwest Florida. My students were continuous models of perseverance, laughter, and inquiry. Their smiling faces became the reason I continued planning lessons late into the night, buying more and more books for our classroom library that I couldn’t always afford, and attending professional development seminars with the goal of becoming a better teacher for my students. To all of you, I thank you for allowing me to be your teacher.

I would like to thank my committee, Dr. William Bintz, Dr. Lori Wilfong, and Dr. Vilma Seeberg for their professional knowledge, dedication, and commitment to excellence to guide me through my doctoral journey. The devotion and passion that Dr. Bintz displayed towards not only the research process but also sharing books and authors with kids was truly a motivating force throughout this entire process. I thank you for the time you spent talking with me and sharing your perspective.

I would also like to express my love and thanks to my husband, Scott. Your patience, support, and understanding make me a stronger person every day. Thank you for making be a better person; it is an honor to be your wife. Ava and Isaac, I cannot express how I felt when I wasn’t able to read you a book at bedtime and give you a kiss because I was traveling back and forth to Kent State late at night. You both are the light of my life and I am truly blessed to be your mother.

Mom, you are truly the most wonderful mother a daughter can have. You have taught me the value of kindness and caring for others. I want to thank you for listening to
me in my times of need and staying by my side when no one else was there. Thank you for being proud of me. Dad, I want to thank you for teaching me to persevere and continue to drive forward at all costs. One piece of advice that you gave me when I was still in high school was, “Beth, make sure that you can take care of yourself. Get an education; no one can take that away from you.” I have never forgotten your words of wisdom and continue to live them every day.

Lisa, our journey together has been more than amazing from driving hours and hours through rain and snow to just sitting down and talking about our ideas. You are a source of inspiration for me and I value our friendship like no other. Thank you for listening and helping me move forward when I was ready to give up. You are a true friend.

Lastly, I want to thank Kathy Redmond. I have thought about you often over the past five years and have reflected on your teaching and leadership decisions that I didn’t understand at the time. You were light-years ahead of me on your thought process towards teaching and literacy. Thank you for making me think even when it was uncomfortable.
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CHAPTER I:

defining the study

Having insufficient skills and strategies to comprehend texts embarrasses the hell out of adolescents. Skills and strategies are important, and there are plenty of books filled with them, but they are not enough. I am addressing the other part of the literacy development equation—the context of the texts boys are asked to read in school and how these texts are mediated and discussed. African American males may reject what they are asked to read because the material doesn’t focus on their development in the context of their life and experiences. (Tatum, 2009, p. 31)

Introduction

My first several years teaching in a primarily African American elementary school were disastrous. I asked myself over and over, “Why don’t my students ‘get’ what I am teaching?” and “Why don’t they respond like I do to the books we are reading in class?” I chose books for the classroom library that I enjoyed without taking my students’ interests, culture, and experiences into consideration. Our classroom library consisted of books like My Great Aunt Arizona (Houston, 1992), When I Was Young in the Mountains (Rylant, 1982), Harriet, You’ll Drive Me Wild! (Fox, 2000), Officer Buckle and Gloria (Rathmann, 1995), and What You Know First (MacLachlan, 1995). I loved these books because of their rural settings, connections to nature and animals, and
independent characters. While I considered all of these quality pieces of literature with interesting characters and sophisticated storylines, the majority of my students looked bored when I read them aloud and often had a difficult time participating in class discussions. Little did I realize that my students could not identify with the characters or what was happening from page to page.

My students didn’t “get” me or the books I enjoyed because I didn’t “get” them. Several years later, after much frustration, I began to understand that my students and I came from two different cultures; I was a White female with a middle class background, while my students were African American and came from a working class environment. Sadly, this situation happens all too often in urban schools. I was implementing a curriculum that was irrelevant. In short, my teaching focus was on me and not my students. I was unknowingly adding to the long list of African American students, especially males, who decline to participate in school because they cannot see themselves in the curriculum provided.

Many middle school teachers may be able to identify with my teaching frustrations because they have had difficulty engaging African American boys in their current curriculum. These instructors may have asked themselves, “Why won’t they read their assignments?” or “Why do they look bored?” In addition, many scholars have indicated the need to provide culturally relevant curriculum and experiences, and culturally relevant pedagogy to improve the achievement gap (Gay, 2000/2010; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2006; Lynch, 2006;
Thompson, 2004; Webster, 2002) in place of the current traditional curriculum that historically does not acknowledge people of color.

The lack of achievement and progression for African American male students has unfortunately become acceptable educational practices in America (Jenkins, 2006). This lack of progress is demonstrated in literacy rates among Black men. As reported by Jenkins (2006), in the U.S. Census of 1900, 57% of Black males were illiterate. One hundred years later, the illiteracy rate among Black men persists at a high level of 44%. Shockingly, it has taken the nation 100 years to increase the literacy rate by only 13%. Although numerous curricular, programmatic, and systemic interventions have been implemented, with the most recent White House Initiative on Educational Excellent for African Americans (Carney, 2012) and the Presidential Memorandum establishing the My Brother’s Keeper Task Force (Carney, 2014), the Black male achievement gap continues to be problematic nationwide. While some positive changes were noted particularly in the early 1970’s, the achievement gap has widened in the past ten years (Johnson & Viadero, 2000).

Looking at past reading reform efforts reveals a number have attempted to close the achievement gap in reading between majority and minority groups. To combat this overwhelming problem, many schools and school districts throughout the country have initiated school reforms based on “back to basics” and standards based curriculum that focus on memorization of information and test preparation without considering the background and community of the students they are teaching. These reform efforts include, but are not limited to, phonics instruction (Erhi, 2000), the use of “best
practices” (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993), and evidenced-based instruction (NCLB, 2001). All of these examples focus on instruction but none attempt to create a relevant reading curriculum based on African American male students.

Background of the Problem: Cultural Mismatch between African Americans and Schools

Unfortunately, a cultural mismatch often occurs when African American students do not see themselves in the curriculum provided by schools and have frequent experiences in which their cultural behavior is not accepted (Irvine-Jordan, 1991). Several studies have indicated that school achievement and motivation improves significantly when protocols and procedures of teaching are synchronized with the cognitive abilities, physical and verbal style, ethnic frames of reference, and African-centered principles of African American children (Albury, 1992; Boykin, 1978, 1982, 1994; Gay, 2000/2010; Howard, 1998; Krater, Zeni & Cason, 1994; Tatum, 2000; Tuck & Boykin, 1989).

Research suggests that African American children often have a distinctive manner of learning and engaging that is characterized by physical and verbal expressive learning styles, and highly physical interactions with their environment (Gay, 2000/2010; Hale-Benson, 1982; Neal, 2001; Thompson, 2004). This is not often recognized by many educators teaching African American students and usually ignored within the implemented curriculum. African American students often bring unique learning patterns to the classroom which includes cultural traditions, language, behaviors, style, dress,

Because of the differences in cultural behavior, African American children frequently experience "cultural discontinuity in schools; particularly schools in which the majority, or Eurocentric persons, control, administer, and teach" (Irvine-Jordan, 1991, p. 15). Cultural discontinuity can produce a lack of interest in schooling along with educational disengagement and discontent (Irvine-Jordan, et al., 2000). This discontinuity has been evidenced by a well-documented academic achievement gap which has repeatedly shown that African American children are lagging behind in all academic areas (D'Amico, 2001; Haycock, 2001), especially African American males who continue to perform lower than their peers throughout the country on almost every academic indicator (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010). The need for experiences and curriculum that mirror their home life, community, and African-centered principles are often neglected in educational settings where the majority of African American students are taught by White females.

**Disconnect Between Teacher and Student**

Given that there are significant changes in the racial, ethnic, and language groups that make up the nation's population, it is imperative that educators respond to the diversity within the student population. According to Sowell and Oakley (2002), most White children attend a school that is over 78% white; however, the average Black child attends a school that is over 57% Black. In contrast, the teaching force is made up of 84%
white teachers who will be charged with teaching African American students with whom they have often had few experiences (NCES, 2003).

Research has begun unveiling the detriment of cultural differences between the teacher and the Black student (Graybill, 1997; Parsons, 2005; & Siegal, 1999). Because many teachers often fail to acknowledge the validity of any culture other than the dominant culture (Sleeter, 2004; White, 1973), there continues to be a negative impact on African American students because of their cultural differences. The language used by teachers often denotes a negative conception of the students. These children were labeled "underprivileged, culturally deprived, culturally disadvantaged, and culturally handicapped" (White, 1973, p. 309). The message became: those who were different than the dominant cultural norm were inferior. The notion of cultural inferiority was extended to children's speech patterns, to their vocabulary, and to the ways in which they adjusted to school. A whole way of life stood condemned as inadequate (Heath, 1983/2005 & White, 1973).

It is possible that cultural differences cause misconceptions on the part of teachers that African American boys are misbehaving when they are acting in line with their understood culture (Smith, 2002). This was also documented in a monumental nine year ethnographic study (Heath, 1983/2005) of two communities, only several miles apart, in the rural Piedmont Carolinas. The two communities were “Trackton,” a Black working-class community whose members used to farm but now work in the textile mills, and “Roadville,” a White working-class community who members also worked in the mills. Heath recorded and interpreted the language learning habits and literacy behaviors of the
children in the two communities, specifically looking at the effects of the home and community environment of the young children who lived there. Heath found that the culture of the African American Trackton students had a considerable disconnect with the school’s culture. Heath noted one teacher explaining, “We knew that their (African American students) spoken language was different, but we always assumed these differences were from ignorance and the lack of education” (p. 271), where in fact, the school did not value Trackton’s culture of language while implementing teaching methods more conducive to the linguistic behaviors of Roadville or White students. Unfortunately, teachers expected the Trackton students to adhere to the White dominant school culture, speak according to the “school’s culture” and deemed anything less to be disruptive and disobedient and considered these students unaware from the lack of education.

Along the same lines, Heath also discovered the pattern that Black students were marginalized in the school setting because of the difference in language socialization. She found that the language expectations of the school were different from the values and expectations of the Trackton community. She argues that the “place of language in the cultural life of each social group is interdependent with the habits and values of behaviors shared among members of that group” (p. 10). Good storytellers are valued in the Trackton community, so fictionalization in stories (“talking junk”) is allowed and even encouraged. Children are talked to in Trackton, while being taught to be creative storytellers who can relate what they are saying to an ongoing conversation. This style of storytelling dialogue is linguistically sophisticated, however, not valued in traditional
school settings. Like in Heath’s research, many teachers perceive cultural differences as deficits instead of embracing diversity.

Heath (1983/2005) concluded her study with a call for action for a cultural bridging of the school, home, and community. She maintained that, “unless the boundaries between classrooms and communities can be broken, and the flow of cultural patterns between them encouraged, the schools will continue to legitimate and produce communities of townspeople who control and limit the potential progress of other communities and who themselves remain untouched by other values and ways of life” (p. 369). Schools are often lacking a cultural connectedness with surrounding communities at the expense of students with diverse backgrounds. African American male students who have the opportunity to engage in a curriculum that embraces their cultural patterns drive my research questions.

**Research Questions**

There has been national concern regarding the African American male reading achievement gap and the limited improvements in solving this concerning issue. According to many standardized assessments, African American adolescent male students fail to advance in literacy development, particularly the ones who attend schools in urban communities. In recent years, one of the responses to this dilemma has been the implementation of culturally relevant instruction (CRI) within urban middle school classrooms. While the research and implementation of CRI has drawn much needed attention to this neglected group of students, many African American scholars have called for culturally relevant curricular interventions as a path toward increasing
achievement and school connectedness for African American children (Asante, 1992; Banks, 2001; Giddings, 2001; Hale, 2001; & Ladson-Billings, 1995). A culturally relevant curriculum (CRC) has the potential to create a connection in which African American male students can be validated and their voices heard. In other words, culturally relevant instruction is important but insufficient in isolation as it must be integrated with a culturally relevant curriculum.

Curriculum that is culturally relevant capitalizes on students’ cultural backgrounds rather than attempting to override or negate them. By taking aspects of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 1995), which is defined as “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames or reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000/2010, p. 31), into consideration when designing a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum (CRLBRC) that incorporates culturally relevant literature for African American males in a book club setting may provide a space that is responsive to their ways of knowing and learning.

The purpose of this holistic case study was to investigate what happens when African American adolescent males participate in a curriculum that is culturally relevant utilizing culturally relevant. In addition, it explored the literacy behaviors of African American adolescent male students as they experienced a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum. It also examined the student’s perceptions of the culturally relevant literature that was featured within the culturally relevant curriculum. The research questions were designed to guide the study:
1. What happens when African American adolescent male students participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?

2. What literacy behaviors do African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?

3. What are the African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature within the culturally relevant curriculum?

The first question, “What happens when African American adolescent male students participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?” intended to examine what occurs when students participate in a culturally relevant reading curriculum specifically designed for African American adolescent male students. I was interested in how students take part in and become involved in a culturally relevant reading curriculum. I wondered if they would read the assigned pages from the texts and what type of language they would use to discuss the books. Would they feel that this context was a safe space and that their voices were heard within this curriculum? What kinds of discussions would they have about the books? Would they teach me about their culture?

The second question, “What literacy behaviors do African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?” intended to explore the literacy behaviors that African American males display when participating in a curriculum that is centered on their life experiences and backgrounds. More specifically, I wanted to see how students take risks, make
predictions, express their personal reactions and connections with the literature, and engage in group discussions.

The third question, “What are the African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature within the culturally relevant curriculum?” intended to investigate how students regard the literature that was read during our book club groups. I was interested in the students’ perceptions of the literature’s authenticity, realistic portrayal of the characters, connection to the characters’ experiences, and culturally conscious ideology. Were students able to see themselves, their families, and community members in the literature?

**Theoretical Perspective**

The study was based on my understanding of how a student’s culture and ethnicity are the foundations of learning through social interactions. The following section explains how sociocultural theory serves as the foundation of this study and functions as my frame of reference for developing the culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum.

**Sociocultural Theory**

Culturally responsive teaching is based on the idea that culture is central to student learning. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), “it is an approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18). Gay (2002) concurs that culturally responsive teaching uses “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106).
Gay’s sociocultural approach to teaching, based on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, provides instructional scaffolding that encourages students to learn by building on the experiences, knowledge, and skills they bring to the classroom.

Sociocultural theory is founded on the notion that knowledge is constructed in social settings, wherein groups construct knowledge for one another, creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings (Vygotsky, 1978). When one is immersed within a culture of this sort, one is learning about how to be a part of that culture on different levels.

Sociocultural theory explains the relationship between learning and development through social sources of individual development, including language and social interactions, as well as familial values and practices. According to Vygotsky (1978), students view themselves and their surroundings through the sociocultural perspectives of their own experiences. This approach to sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of cultural forces in shaping one’s development.

Sociocultural theory also emphasizes the advantages of discussion, which is highly valued in many African American communities. Group discussion affords students the chance to exercise self-regulation, self-determination, and a desire to persevere with assignments or activities (Matsumara, Slater, & Crosson, 2008), while building on African American learning patterns of a social/oral emphasis (Willis, 1989). In addition, dialogue increases student enthusiasm, collaborative skills, and the ability to problem solve (Dyson, 2004; Matsumara, et al., 2008). Increasing students’ opportunity to talk provides a space where students’ voices are heard and increases their ability to
sustain their thinking, expand their reasoning skills, and to dispute their opinions persuasively and respectfully (Reznitskaya, et al., 2007).

**Application to the Study**

This study is based on the notion that the traditional reading curriculum taught in schools is historically oppressive as this type of curriculum is viewed as “normal” and tends to ignore the experiences and skills that diverse students bring to the classroom. A culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum attempts to disrupt this common literature practice as it embraces student differences and acknowledges race and personal experiences by highlighting literature that reinforces and validates students’ lived experiences.

Complementing sociocultural theory, a book club setting which serves as the context for the study, acknowledges the value of open discourse in group discussion. The advantages of group talk are built into the CRLBRC as it uses a small group book club setting to provide a space where student voices can be heard and also respects the cultural forces that shape each student’s development. This research study recognizes a gap in the literature by investigating what happens when a group of adolescent African American male students participate in a curriculum that concedes oppression and is built with their cultural experiences in mind.

**Need for Research**

Current research is replete with reasons why educational disparities exist from low teacher expectations (Kunjufu, 2002, 2005, 2011) and low parental involvement (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997) to various cultural and environmental factors (Noguera,
2003), unequal schooling (Kozol, 2005), underprepared teachers (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Zeichner, 2003), and lack of financial support (Blanchett, 2005). While many advocate for culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2000/2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 1995), Tatum (2005) submits that the current deficits that exist in the academic achievement of African American males are evidence that the traditional curriculum taught has failed over the years. Kunjufu (2005) also claims that schools, which historically retain middle class White teachers, employ a curriculum that is not responsive to diverse cultures of African American students and ultimately suppresses the voices of these students.

In searching for literature on culturally relevant curriculum, there was little research found exploring the curriculum of adolescent African American males. The literature about African American students is rich with research about relevant pedagogy, language, urban teaching, and multicultural education to name a few, but the literature falls short of providing insight on how students take part in and become involved in a culturally relevant reading curriculum and how teachers create it.

**Significance of the Study**

It is important to note here that not every African American adolescent male student is identical in their academic strengths or needs or is underachieving in reading. However, due to the overwhelming increasing achievement gap between African American male students and students from non-minority groups, and the need for culturally relevant-based reading curriculum, this study has the potential to play an important role in understanding what happens when African American adolescent male
students engage in a reading curriculum centered on their ways of knowing, what literacy behaviors African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum, and African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature within the culturally relevant curriculum.

A culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum may have the potential to increase school motivation and school connectedness as they are interesting, familiar, and validating. Although the design of this study was solely developed to answer my three research questions, this study may provide middle school literacy educators with an understanding of how this population of students experience a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum, what literacy behaviors they engage in, and how they perceive culturally relevant literature. My goal is to provide a culturally relevant curricular model that may be of particular benefit for teachers of African American males in the intermediate grades as they work to create a reading curriculum that might effectively engage students in the reading process.

**Definition of Terms**

*African American male:* A male member of a racial/ethnic group also referred to as Black, and historically referred to as Negro and Colored. In this paper, the terms African American males and Black males are used interchangeably.

*Book/Literature/Texts:* In literary theory, the terms: book, literature, and text all vary in meaning. However, for this study, all three are used interchangeably and are recognized as any written or printed work.
Culture: Culture consists of the ideals, traditions, social relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people who are bound together by a common history, location, language, social class, and/or religion. Culture includes tangibles such as foods, holidays, and clothes, but also less tangibles, such as communication styles, attitudes, beliefs, and personal relationships. These features of culture are not easy to identify, but doing so is necessary if we want to understand how student learning may be affected (Nieto, 2000).

Culturally relevant: A term inspired by the work of several African American scholars, that refers to teaching to the diverse needs of students through the use of cultural artifacts, language, ethnic referents, and cognitive and linguistically contexts familiar to children of color (Gay, 2000/2010; Irvine-Jordan, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Curriculum: I refer to Short and Burke’s (1991) definition of curriculum:

A curriculum is a prediction concerning how people learn, what people should be learning, and the contexts that will support that learning. It is an organizational device intended to put the answers to those predictions into operation and to establish a context for future decisions. A curriculum is a reflection of the curriculum makers’ learning theories and their best current understanding of the process that define various fields of study. (p. 33)
Short and Burke (1991) provide further detail by explaining four process components of developing curriculum which are referred to frequently throughout this study. An illustration of the cycle is also presented in chapter three.

**Intuitive curriculum**: Using past experiences and current sets of understanding to make curricular decisions on “what feels right and comfortable to us” (Short & Burke, p. 33).

**Paper curriculum**: Since designing curriculum is such a complicated progression, this stage of the curricular process provides the opportunity to preserve our intuitive curriculum by documenting our ideas on paper.

**Enacted curriculum**: Composed of the “actual learning engagements” (Short & Burke, p. 33) that take place as the teacher and students participate in the paper curriculum.

**Envisioned curriculum**: Usually a “disequilibrium” (Short & Burke, p. 33) occurs during the enacted curriculum which signals the need to make curricular adjustments. These adjustments lead to a prospective new curriculum.

**Culturally relevant curriculum (CRC)**: Culturally relevant curriculum is “based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (Gay, 2002, p. 107) and creates a connection between home and school cultures that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1992).
**Culturally relevant literature (CRL):** For the purpose of this study, CRL is defined as a piece of text that is authentic, realistic, and upholds a culturally conscious ideology and message (Gray, 2009; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; McNair, 2010, Yoon, Simpson, & Haag, 2010).

**Literacy/literate/reading behaviors:** Heath and Mangiola’s (1991) define literate behaviors as students going beyond what the text says while often integrating how it relates to their own life and cultural experiences. In addition, when students connect one text to another, make predictions based on texts, express personal reactions to texts, and take risks with reading and writing (Colvin & Schlosser, 1998), they engage in literate behaviors.

**Case study:** While case study is often referred to as an analysis of a person or event (Thomas, 2011), for the purpose of this study, case study is defined as “an analytic focus on an individual event, activity, episode, or other specific phenomenon…” (Schram, 2006, p. 106) and as a “specific, a complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2).

**Students/Participants:** Since I played the role of researcher and teacher during this study, I refer to the eight African American adolescent male students who participated in this study as participants and students interchangeably.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this case study was to examine what happens when African American adolescent males’ participate in a curriculum that is culturally relevant utilizing culturally relevant literature while also exploring the literacy behaviors of African
American adolescent male students who experience a culturally relevant reading curriculum. In addition, students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature featured within the culturally relevant curriculum are investigated.

The goal of this research was to provide a space for student voice, provide an opportunity for students to teach the teacher (me) about their culture and their cultural differences, and expose students to a curriculum where they are able to see themselves, their family and community members, and experiences similar to their own lives while providing them with the opportunity to possibly connect with the literature that they read.

This study was designed to develop an “envisioned” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 34) culturally relevant literature-based reading curricular model for African American adolescent male students by learning about who they are and their culture through interviews and book club discussions. I wanted to collectively examine the nuances of what happens when African American adolescent males’ participate in a culturally relevant curriculum, explore the literacy behaviors of African American adolescent male students who experience a culturally relevant reading curriculum, and examine their perceptions of the culturally relevant literature featured within this curriculum to formulate a curricular model for educators to develop their own culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum.

The upcoming chapter reviews research related to the central tenets of this study. I will discuss the historical challenges of reading achievement of African American male students. Following this discussion, research on culturally relevant curriculum and
culturally relevant literature will be articulated. The purpose of the next chapter is to build a case for the role my study will have in filling gaps that exist in the research.
CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The primary purposes of this study were to investigate what happens when African American adolescent males’ participate in a curriculum that is culturally relevant utilizing culturally relevant literature, to explore the literacy behaviors of these students that experience the culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum, and to examine the student’s perceptions of the culturally relevant literature. This literature review is organized to provide an overview of how this study is positioned within past and current conceptions of African American male students as the plight of the African American male is the result of the decades of institutional and societal oppression. I also examine the components of a culturally relevant curriculum and the lack of empirical research, as well as the themes of culturally relevant literature which I utilized to choose the culturally relevant text selection within the CRLBRC.

Historical Challenges of Reading Achievement of African American Males

When examining the poor academic achievement of many African American male students in reading today, it is important to remember the legacy of slavery in order to understand how this academic achievement gap between White and African American students began and why it still exists.

According to Woodson (1933), during the quest of European countries to take control of other territories, the control of Africa by European countries caused the fall of
the African male in terms of power, family, pride, and self-worth. This takeover resulted in domination, anger, and resentment due to the destruction of the family and of the family tribal unit. Woodson also notes that the same treatment was sustained during the establishment of the United States of America.

During and after the abolition movement in the North and South, the Jim Crow laws in the United States had an enormous effect on the state of mind of the African American male who was told by his oppressors that he had no self-worth and that his race had not made any significant achievements. From the post slavery era through the Civil Rights period, African American males were extradited into a class system separated by education, skin color, and connections to people in power within and outside of their culture. The educational effects of the Jim Crow laws contributed to not only the difference in the rate of literacy improvements, but to the overall lack of academic success among African American students. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2002) argue that the reading achievement of African American males can be directly correlated with potential wages lost. They also note that there is a connection between the educational performance of African American male students and the hardships they have had to endure in society. According to Brookover and Erickson (1969), this history of environmental and cultural factors have influenced the way in which African American male students have come to perceive schooling. Woodson (1933) believed that the past environmental and cultural factors led to a psychological revolt on the part of African American males in an attempt to renew their self-identity and erase their memories of racial inferiority.
Today in the United States, the legacy of environmental and cultural factors related to slavery still have a strong influence on African American males raised in socially isolated, economically depressed urban areas (Carnoy, 1994; Jenkins, 2006; Kirkland, 2013; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Pretto, 2005). For example, a study by Jackson (1998) on the development of children whose mothers used drugs examined the children residing in impoverished and drug infested neighborhoods and economic backgrounds. This study found that the children demonstrated no greater evidence in long-term negative effects. In other words, the harmful effects of living within the impoverished inner city environment outweighed the damage inflicted by early exposure to drugs.

In addition, according to Harry, Klinger, and Moore (2000), poor children often have a variety of sight disorders. These untreated vision problems are often inaccurately diagnosed as reading problems and consequently, large numbers of these students are placed in remedial and special education programs. According to Fashola (2005), those children likely to be placed in such programs are African American, male, and poor. As a result of inappropriate placement in special education and remedial programs, Fashola explains that African American male students often adopt behaviors that make them complicit in their own failure. Tatum (2005) also notes that these African American teenagers try to solve their problems through the lyrics of music, gang affiliation, and other negative methods in order to disassociate themselves from the current curriculum content in the public schools.
According to Tatum (2005), African American males reject literacy because of its inability to connect to the day-to-day life of the community where they live. Hall and Piazza (2008) explain that African American boys have a greater chance of experiencing cultural conflict with school text and may perceive literacy activities as feminine and not appropriate or irrelevant; therefore, teachers play an important role in developing new reading habits and ways of thinking. Tatum (2005) also argues that literacy instruction must address the academic, cultural, emotional, and social needs of African American male students because they feel that they have been robbed due to racially coded expectations of society that are destined to humiliate them in the long run.

In terms of the need for personal growth in the historical context of the African American male’s existence, Kunjufu (2005) believes that African American males have not acquired the necessary help to move beyond the realms of the lower stages of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. For example, according to Kuykendall (2004), 80% of ethnic or racial minority children have a positive self-image when they enter school; however, by the fifth grade, only 20% have positive self-images. By the time students reach their senior year, only 5% have positive self-images. In support of Maslow’s basic foundational needs, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2007) reported that when basic needs are met, there is a greater chance to stimulate more task oriented motivation because individuals feel free to tackle challenging tasks with occasional failures. Kuykendall (2004) surmises that children who are without significant opportunities to accomplish tasks are often frustrated with a lack of school success. Therefore, Kuykendall argues that students are more likely to seek accomplishments
outside of school and that most opportunities for African American youth are through illegal or unacceptable behavior which contributes only to destroying or deliberating the academic self-image of at-risk students.

Guthrie, Macrae, and Klauda (2007) note that when teachers connect classroom lessons to real life outside of the classroom, students report that the lessons seem purposeful and interesting. Ladson-Billings (2006) stated that student engagement with the interpretation of text is likely rooted in how students think they need to read and respond to texts to be successful in school. Students were more likely to search for correct answers in texts or look for implicit messages because they internalize such behaviors as the correct way to engage with text in school. In understanding the components of student engagement and academic achievement, a study was conducted by Lepper, Corpus, and Lyengar (2005) on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students in Grades 3-8. The study found that the higher the extrinsic motivation, the lower the academic performance. In another study, Otis, Grouzer, and Pelletier (2005) report that students’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation also decreases gradually as students moved through Grades 8 to 10.

Tatum (2005) also suggested that the framework for embracing cultural, social, and emotional development should include the following concepts: (a) structure curriculum so that it is empowering to students, (b) re-conceptualize the role of literacy instruction for African American male students, and (c) use a culturally responsive approach to literacy teaching. Tatum also believed that in relation to improving
curriculum for cultural relevance, people generally have no desire to upset the existing curricula of schools.

**Culturally Relevant Curriculum**

There are strong correlations between improved academic achievement, culturally relevant teaching, and African American student engagement documented in the literature (Au & Kawakami, 1985; Baratz, 1986; Beauboeuf, 1992; Dilg, 1999; Gay, 2000/2010; Garcia & Dominguez, 1997; Hale, 2001; Hale-Benson, 1982; Irvine-Jordan, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Lipman, 1995; Murrell, 2001, 2002; Pasteur & Toldson, 1982; Thompson, 2004; Tatum, 2005; Webster, 2002). It appears that there is a great deal of information about the foundations of culturally relevant pedagogy and how to implement culturally relevant teaching, but there is limited peer-reviewed research on the how students experience a culturally relevant curriculum (Klump, 2005).

Many African American students, especially males, do not connect with the traditional curriculum used in the majority of classrooms today. Ladson-Billings (1992, 1994, 1995) and Geneva Gay (2000/2010) proposed a curriculum based on culturally relevant teaching. Ladson-Billings documented several teachers who did not just change their instructional strategies, but changed their entire curriculum to support the existence of “an African connection and consciousness and uses it as a basis for understanding how the schooling experience could and should be liberatory for African American students” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 320).

Culturally relevant curriculum is “based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of
students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are
learned more easily and thoroughly” (Gay, 2002). The idea of a culturally relevant
curriculum has grown out of multicultural education, but strives to go beyond symbolic
actions. Culturally relevant curriculum creates a bridge between home and school
cultures that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically
(Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Although there is no universally accepted
definition of culturally relevant curriculum, there are foundational aspects that have been
identified through the research of several scholars:

- CRC aligns collaboratively with racial identity components which define the
  behavior of the African American child (Tatum, 1997).
- CRC is realistic, child-centered, and connected to the child's real life. It
  utilizes materials from the child's culture and history to illuminate principles
  and concepts (Martinez & Ortiz de Montellano, 1983; Chisholm, Laquer,
  Hale, Sheorey, & McConville, 1991; Dickerson, 1993; Chion-Kenney, 1994).
- CRC helps form critical thinking skills (Hilliard, 1992).
- CRC often incorporates strategies that utilize cooperative learning and whole
  language instruction, include self-esteem building, and recognizes multiple
  intelligences and diverse learning styles (AAHE, 1994).
- CRC engages, empowers, and values students’ cultural sophistication (Gay,
- CRC is a responsive approach and respects students’ backgrounds and
  knowledge (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1992).
According to Banks and Banks (1995), a culturally relevant curriculum addresses issues of impoverishment and social injustice as well as activities that engage students in their pedagogical schoolwork. This curriculum develops critical reflection so that students can be engaged in a truly authentic democracy. Banks and Banks (1995) stated that this aspect of a culturally relevant curriculum fosters student responsibility for the good of the whole and prepares them to be global citizens.

In reviewing the literature, there appears to be a gap in the literature given the absence of qualitative or quantitative research studies that examines what happens when African American male students participate in a culturally relevant curriculum. Appendix A identifies the research, conceptual, and practitioner based literature related to culturally relevant curriculum found conducting this literature review. I utilized several search engines for this review including: Academic Research Complete, Education Full Text, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Urban Studies, SocINDEX, Middle Search Plus, and Professional Development Collection. I used the following terms with the corresponding number of results:

- Culturally relevant curriculum (147 results)
- Culturally responsive curriculum (33 results)
- Culturally appropriate curriculum (21 results)
- African centered curriculum (10 results)
- Pluralistic curriculum (15 results)

I eliminated results highlighting any books, teacher education and professional development articles, child welfare and child healthcare articles, articles with teachers
responding to CRC, higher education articles (unless the participants were African American), and nursing education articles. I was left with 32 articles to review (see Appendix A) with only one empirical study exploring how African American students participated in a culturally relevant curriculum.

**Empirical Study on Culturally Relevant Curriculum**

Only one study documented African American students’ responses and how students participated when immersed in this type of curriculum (Gibson, 2006), however, it takes place in a physical education curriculum. In this dissertation study, the researcher initiated a relevant curricular module to understand African American student responses and connection to a relevant physical education curriculum (Gibson, 2006).

Gibson (2006) created an innovative culturally relevant curriculum utilizing the African American tradition of *stepping*, a form of dancing, clapping and keeping time to a specific beat, in an existing physical education class. Two groups of students participated, one in a regular physical education class, and one in a physical education program using a relevant stepping curriculum. Gibson utilized White pre-service teachers to teach the stepping curriculum to understand a non-Black teacher's abilities to teach a culturally relevant and familiar physical education unit for African American students. Gibson desired to understand if African American children would respond to a non-Black teacher's use of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy.

A foundation was initially set for the pre-service teachers to help them incorporate and understand culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum. The pre-service teachers were given evaluations assessing their feelings about administering the stepping
curriculum. Many of the pre-service teachers were unfamiliar with the concept of stepping, and many had anxiety about attempting to teach the module. Gibson questioned the use of White pre-service teachers in a uniquely African American activity. However, he concluded that given the diversity of today's school population, White teachers must know and exhibit culturally relevant pedagogy, and must infuse culturally relevant curriculum in all instructional areas.

Gibson's qualitative study yielded impressive results, in that student participation increased in the stepping curriculum, while student boredom and resistance to physical education decreased. Students desired to begin a step team at the end of the study. The pre-service teachers who were initially skeptical and worried about their abilities to keep time with the music, demonstrated dance steps and incorporated the stepping routine with reduced anxiety. The pre-service teachers also found that when African American students are engaged in something that is interesting and normative, and when they witness teacher support and interest in their lives, they, in turn, teach the teacher about their culture and their differences.

While this study plays an important role in understanding what happens when teachers implement a culturally relevant curriculum in a physical education setting with African American students, research is needed to contribute to the field that examines what happens when African American adolescent males’ participate in a curriculum that is culturally relevant utilizing culturally relevant literature.
Culturally Relevant Literature

Black men do not loathe reading; they loathe the incredible sacrifice required when reading for school. They loathe the texts working as a uniform outfit not necessarily stitched to fit them, but forged in fabrics of socialization that reshape them into something that feels strangely irregular. (Kirkland, 2011, p. 206)

Culturally relevant literature, also referred to as culturally conscious, culturally appropriate, or culturally specific, provides students with opportunities to engage with authentic books about their own experiences. Goodman (1982) discussed the connections between culture and literacy in a study that used what were termed “culturally relevant” stories. She explains, “The more a reader’s own life experiences are relevant to the experiences expressed in a text, the greater the predictability and the easier it will be to comprehend” (p. 303).

To be considered a culturally relevant piece of text, it needs to be authentic, realistic, and maintain a culturally conscious meaning and ideology (Gray, 2009; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; McNair, 2010, Yoon et al., 2010). By sharing texts with students that embody characteristics of themselves, their families and community members, and experiences comparable to their own lives will possibly give them the opportunity to personally relate with the texts that they read.

In reviewing the literature pertaining to culturally relevant literature, several overarching themes arose, authenticity of the text, realistic portrayal of characters, events,
and storyline, and a culturally conscious ideology, all of which are explained in the following section.

**Authenticity**

Culturally relevant texts utilized within the classroom setting should be authentic (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Inglebret, Jones, & Pavel, 2008; McNair, 2010; Yoon et al., 2010) meaning the text should feature true information, correct representation of the culture’s use of language, and have familiar experiences within the plot. All culturally relevant texts may not possess all of these components, however the more authentic a piece of literature is, the greater likelihood the students will choose to read it (Gay, 2000; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001).

Authentic information relates to accurate words and illustrations or pictures (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Inglebret et al., 2008). For realistic and historical fiction genres, the words and images that endure the culture they are portraying. In addition, historical fiction texts should depict authentic time frames, dates, and settings for the past event they represent.

“Authentic language usage” refers to the accurate representation of a particular culture’s dialect (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). The language that is employed throughout the text should not only adhere to the language patterns of that particular culture, but also include accurate dialogue among the characters. For example, a piece of literature that includes African American culture should have a familiar use of Black English vernacular, which might include the use of double negatives or dropping the final sounds on some words as they are not customary in standard formal English (McNair,
Another essential aspect to take under consideration when identifying authentic language used in a text, is if the student will be able to recognize it and respond to it according to the intended purpose of the author (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001).

Authentic common experiences portrayed in a text should be written according to the context of that culture (McNair, 2010). McNair emphasizes that if the basis of a story is the everyday experience of survival, then it should be delivered from the perspective of an African American to assert cultural uniqueness in order to be considered a culturally relevant African American text. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) found that “when African American children encounter literature that offers accurate messages about them, their culture, and their roles in society they have enhanced opportunities to reflect upon themselves as people and their own development” (p. 818) as literate individuals.

Realistic

Teachers should utilize culturally relevant literature that is realistic (Gray, 2009; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). This includes literature that involves real life illustrations or pictures and contains relatable plots in order to provide students of that particular culture the opportunity to connect with real life and/or realistic characters. Book covers should be accurate and also be realistic by reflecting the student’s reality. The culture should be characterized through the physical features and color of the individual characters, as well as the setting’s physical appearance. The events the characters encounter should be ones that possibly will occur or have actually occurred to someone in real life and be naturally incorporated into the literature. It is also essential
that the author depicts events in the texts that remain accurate to that culture’s experiences within the nation’s mainstream society.

Gray (2009) determined that, “the connection readers felt or thought they would feel to the main character” (p. 476) was the most crucial element when students were choosing books. The realistic characters within the literature should allow for students to make connections with their own lives (Harris, 1997; Gray, 2009). The characters in the culturally relevant literature should be depicted in an affirmative light. The race, gender, and personal characteristics of the characters are significant. For example, if the main character’s race or gender can be switched with scarcely any change to the story, then their culture is not legitimized (Harris, 1997). Sims (1982) criticizes the picture book, *Snowy Day*, by Ezra Jack Keats (1962/2011), as all cultural attributes were disregarded besides the color of the characters’ skin color. The characters should be able to identify themselves within the portrayed culture as well as participate in and exhibit the ideologies of that particular culture.

**Culturally Conscious Ideology**

Culturally relevant literature employed within the classroom should express culturally conscious ideologies (Harris, 1997; Inglebret et al., 2008; McNair, 2010; Yoon et al., 2010). To do this, culturally relevant texts ought to contain conclusions that hold true to the culture they are representing. This type of literature needs to be cognizant of each culture’s values and traditions without inferring or explicitly maintaining examples of assimilation (Yoon et al., 2010). Many culturally relevant texts might not have these ideological components within them. However, the more the piece of text is conscious of
the culture it is representing, the greater likelihood the students will have a positive response (Gay, 2000; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001).

The culturally conscious ideologies maintained by the characters should essentially hold true to the culture until the end of the text (Inglebret et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2010). The main characters might possibly recognize and acknowledge the reality that their culture has many likenesses and discrepancies with the mainstream culture. Having said this, the characters should continue to preserve their primary culture at the book’s conclusion, even if the characters accept the reality that they need to learn about the dominant culture, thus also allowing the student to substantiate their personal cultural identity (Inglebret et al., 2008).

Often times, texts that portray characters as assenting to the dominant culture as their own also neglect to point out that the supporting characters rarely take a vested interest in the main characters’ personal culture (Yoon et al., 2010). Culturally relevant texts should not undertake the principles of mainstream culture through the messages they convey as “It is through literature that students learn those values prized by our society” (Yoon et al., 2010, p. 115). The message culturally relevant literature conveys should instead ensure the identity of the main character and pride for their culture.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show the dilemma of the African American male is the result of long standing institutional and societal persecution. I explored research related to the central tenets of this study, including approaches to culturally relevant curriculum and literature. While participation in a culturally relevant curriculum within the context of open discussions with African American male students is virtually
non-existent, this present study was been designed to further explore what happens when this population of students participate in a relevant curriculum.

In the next chapter, I discuss the development of the culturally relevant literature-based reading paper curriculum that was enacted during the study, an overview and timeline for the study, and the study’s design and data collection procedures. I continue with data analysis procedures and finish with addressing trustworthiness issues.
CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section outlines the development of the culturally relevant reading paper curriculum that was developed and implemented during the study which includes providing a space for student voice, how texts were selected, the book club format, the use of student reflection journals, and possible tensions are considered. The second section provides an overview and timeline for the study addressed in four phases, while the third section explains the rationale for implementing a holistic case study design and data collection procedures. Data analysis procedures are discussed in the fourth section. Finally, the fifth section addresses concerns relating to the trustworthiness of the study.

Designing a Culturally Relevant Reading Curriculum

*Any educational or training system that ignores the history or perspective of its learners or does not attempt to adjust its teaching practices to benefit all its learners is contributing to inequality of opportunity.* (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 26)

My responsibility as an educator and researcher in developing a culturally-relevant curriculum made me extremely cautious. I wanted to build on what students know by incorporating students' cultural knowledge that addresses relationships inside and outside of the classroom. While not assuming the proposed curriculum design is
transformative, I wanted to provide a curriculum where students have some voice and ownership in the design and content. The creation of curriculum by both the teacher and the students has often been referred to as “negotiating the curriculum” (Boomer, 1982). A negotiated curriculum does not mean educators abandon the responsibility of curriculum, nor does it mean giving students “free range” to make decisions. Rather, “curriculum negotiation involves giving students a voice in the choice and development of learning opportunities: both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of curriculum” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 171).

Because authoring curriculum is such a complex process, Figure 1 is a visual representation of the curriculum development cycle as described by Short and Burke (1991). I interpreted this cycle as cyclical in nature and therefore applied this notion to the following visual representation.
Utilizing the suggestions of Short and Burke (1991), I created a relevant reading curriculum based on my past experiences as a teacher in an urban school and current understandings that I outlined in the first two chapters. Burke & Short (1991) refer to this as the “intuitive” curriculum as I made decisions on what “felt right and comfortable” to me (p. 33). Through these experiences and understandings, I developed a “paper” curriculum (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 33), detailed below, which serves to preserve my thoughts so I could actively apply, reflect, and adjust the processes as they were implemented during this research study. Therefore, I explain the paper curriculum in the future tense as I was planning the curriculum for future use. I then “enacted” (p. 33) the curriculum as the students and I participated in the learning experiences detailed in the
paper curriculum. I describe and explain the enacted curriculum in the following chapter. My goal was to create an “envisioned” (p. 34) culturally relevant literature-based curricular model reflective of the students’ voices and experiences based on the data collected through my data sources which I detail in chapter five.

**The Paper Curriculum**

I adapted Short and Burke’s (1991) collaborative curriculum model which considers students’ voice within a curriculum in order to create a visual representation of the paper curriculum designed for this study (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Visual Representation of the Paper Curriculum. Students bring their own interests, experiences, and understandings to the process. Students and teacher work together to negotiate the curriculum.](image)

The paper curriculum illustration depicted in above embraces who the students are outside of the classroom. The student and the teacher negotiate curricular components,
such as what texts are read, how the book club sessions operate, and also considers student voice through individual student reflection journals. To provide further clarification, each of these components is discussed in the following section.

**Providing a Space for Student Voice**

After completing my historical analysis during the fall 2012 semester on the education of African Americans, I am more cognizant of the overwhelming need for African American children to have a voice and the historical lack of it in the past. Gilyard (1991) writes,

> Amid this cacophony of voices… oddly enough, conspicuously absent are the voices of the students themselves. I am not speaking about the street stories or the recorded snatches of conversation that typically have provided some researcher with his or her data, but the articulate opinion of those African American students who face the task of public school language education. (p. 10)

Nieto (1994) makes the recommendation for more students’ perspectives in their classrooms by claiming that “student voices sometimes reveal the great challenges and even the deep pain young people feel when schools are unresponsive, cold places” (p. 420). Furthermore, she states that “those who spend the most time in schools and classrooms are often given the least opportunity to talk . . . students have important lessons to teach educators and we need to begin to listen to them more carefully” (p. 420). Giroux (1988) also surmises that students’ perspectives on their learning environments furnish two valuable perspectives that students offer: (1) insight into central components of the teaching and learning process and (2) “an important starting
point for enabling those who have been silenced or marginalized by the schools . . . to reclaim the authorship of their own lives” (p. 63).

I hoped that the void created by the traditional lack of voice for African American students in American classrooms would hopefully be revealed in our book club meetings. Literature discussion groups, such as book clubs, give “voice to each child’s cultural proclivities and to the bewildering kaleidoscope of dialects and discourses” (Creighton, 1997, p. 439) and instill self-respect, self-empowerment, and school literacy skills.

The opportunity to participate in interactive reading discussion sessions may be the key in inviting marginalized students to express their individuality through validation of their ethnic heritage and cultural experiences (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Additionally, text discussions are particularly beneficial to African American students because they capitalize on the strong oral tradition that is an important component of the African American culture (Gates, 1988; Lee, 1993).

Sociocultural theory assisted in understanding that learning is a social practice and acknowledges the learning styles that many African American children bring to the educational table which supports the oral tradition of African American communities. As mentioned previously, sociocultural theory also highlights the advantages of discussion and builds on the idea that group discussion acknowledges the value of discourse and allows students to simplify and transfer their knowledge of classroom learning and builds a solid foundation for communicating ideas verbally (Reznitskaya, Anderson, & Kuo, 2007). Discussing books in a book club setting gives students the space to freely discuss their individual interpretations and construct alternative meanings based on others’
opinions furthering their personal transactions with the text giving students voice. Our group discussions would hopefully provide me with the opportunity to learn about each student and their culture to help inform the “envisioned” culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum model.

**Book Clubs**

A major component to the curricular design is the book club context. Books clubs, also referred to as literature circles, or inquiry circles (Harvey & Daniel, 2009) in elementary, middle, and high school settings have become a popular way to engage students in meaningful discourse and enhance overall reading comprehension (Almasi, 1995; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Faust, Cockrill, Hancock, & Issersteadt, 2005; Sweigart, 1991).

During book clubs, small groups of students gather together on a regular basis to discuss a piece of literature in depth. Usually, students’ discussions are guided by what they have read prior to participating in the book club using their questions, thoughts, comments, connections and predictions that arise as they read the book. Students become risk takers, critical thinking skills are developed, and students learn to consider other points of view (Latendresse, 2004; Long & Gove, 2003; Sandmann & Gruhler, 2007). When talking about books, students have the opportunity to practice and develop their literacy skills and learn to understand themselves, others, and the world around them (Galda, 1998; Purves, 1993). Studies of various student populations have shown that all children, when given the opportunity and appropriate guidance and support, are capable of participating in meaningful conversations about texts where they construct the
meaning of what they are reading, make connections between the text and their own experiences, and evaluate the text and their understanding of it (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 1997; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Paley, 1997).

Daniels (2002) suggests several key guidelines for incorporating book clubs, or literature circles in classrooms that would guide our book club meetings:

- Students choose their own reading materials.
- Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading.
- Discussion topics come from the students.
- Students use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion.
- Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books and therefore personal connections and open-ended questions are encouraged.
- A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room (p. 18)

Each book club session would adhere to the following format and is discussed in more detail following Table 1:
Table 1

*Book Club Format*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>Review of discussion from previous book club meeting/Address concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Book discussion facilitated by students on a rotating basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Written reflection in reflection journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Share and discuss reflections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The book club meetings will be held twice per week as this was the time allotted to me by the principal of the school. This will also provide students with ample time to read their assignment and think about what they read in-between our book club sessions. Each session will last for 30-40 minutes as limited by the school site’s daily class schedule, and will follow a similar format outlined in Table 1. The first five to ten minutes will be devoted to reviewing the discussion from the previous book club meeting. This will offer students time to voice their concerns about the book’s complexity, confusing ideas, or other matters that the students feel need to be addressed. The following twenty minutes will be dedicated to whole group discussion focused on the current text students are reading. Hopefully, this time frame will provide students with the opportunity to talk about their books in genuine ways. As Pianta and Belsky (2007) found that American fifth graders were spending 91 percent of their school day either
listening to the teacher talk or working alone, I did not want to rush their conversations they deemed important and worthy of spending time to discuss.

Each student will be responsible for reading the specific number of pages determined by the participants as a group. The group will negotiate, with each other and me, what pages will be required reading for the following session. Offering students the space to negotiate this requirement demonstrates the importance and consideration of their current class workloads, athletic activities, family commitments, and community events. For example, students might want to read 30 pages in preparation for one book club, but decide to only read 20 pages the following time because they need to prepare for a large school assignment, athletic event, and so on. I will also complete the same reading tasks as the students in order to demonstrate my investment and engagement in the book club. Reading the same assignments as the students will also help me understand what the students discuss about the texts.

The book club featuring culturally relevant texts will be initially facilitated by the researcher as to initially model this process for the students. However, members will have the opportunity to facilitate or co-facilitate the book club each week with the researcher or another group member. This means they will be responsible for providing a quick overview of the last book club meeting and provide a minimum of four to five talking points for the group to discuss. During the last ten minutes of the meeting, students will complete a five minute reflection in their reflection journal, written in a free format, or answer specific questions posed by the researcher and then share what they wrote with the group. Their written reflection responses will not only inform the study’s research
questions, but also provide a space for students to voice their opinions to help enlighten the enacted curriculum.

**Culturally Relevant Text Selection**

Based on Vygotsky’s notions of sociocultural theory, readers interpret texts while continuously using their social and cultural contexts. This idea comes into play when choosing texts for African American males. Understanding their social and cultural contexts such as ethnicity, race, gender, and socio-economic status aids in determining what literature might be relevant. Literacy instruction from the sociocultural perspective should include teaching students to read the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Using texts that are relevant to students’ lives, their families, their cultures, and their cultural histories allows them to make connections between their in and out of school literacies (Larson & Marsh, 2005) in an attempt to generate a bridge between students’ home and school lives.

Because I am a White female and cannot justify collecting a sample of culturally relevant books for African American middle school males alone, I utilized several resources to make purposeful text selections. I employed the help of two fellow African American male doctoral students who are currently public school teachers. Both emailed me with suggestions of book titles and additional websites detailing quality African American texts with a wide array of genres and readability levels. They based their choices on what they have personally read and what their children and students have read and are reading. I developed the proposed book list (see Appendix B) using the resources provided to me by these two helpful individuals. In addition, I referred to a cultural
relevance rubric (NCTE/IRA, 2006) (see Appendix C) to aid in the text selection. However, while I attempted to use this predetermined rubric to aid me in the book options, I noticed several important components were missing based on the literature review I conducted identifying the important themes of culturally relevant literature. Because of this, I created a cultural relevance guide for selecting literature-based on the culture the book is representing (see Appendix D). While I cannot confirm or deny whether the proposed texts are culturally relevant to participants, I utilized my created cultural relevance guide and my understanding of culturally relevant literature detailed in the literature review to guide me with the text selections.

Ultimately, the participants will choose what books they want to read and in what order they would prefer to read them. I plan to ask the students’ language arts teacher, Mrs. Murray (pseudonyms are used throughout the entire document) to provide me with each student’s current reading level. I want to make sure the texts that the students decide to read can be comprehended and do not lead to reading frustration. Using this information I will continue to narrow the selection of culturally relevant texts by referring to my initial list of literature (see Appendix B) and then compare the list with the students’ reading levels.

After I reduce their text selection, I will conduct a brief “book talk” (Kittle, 2013, p. 59) on each book to provide students with a short synopsis to think about while they consider their selections. The students will then have the opportunity to peruse through the books and choose their first four choices. They will record their selections and I will tally the student choices and purchase the books that acquire the most votes.
Developing Book Club Guidelines

In an attempt to provide an environment where participants can voice their opinions during discussions, we will collaborate and decide on book club guidelines as a group. In pairs, students will take a few minutes to brainstorm ideas about what guidelines are essential for talking about books in a group setting. Students can discuss the behaviors that they believe are necessary in order to help the group succeed, giving them another area of control within this curriculum.

I will provide them with several ideas to consider to guide their thinking:

1. What should our book clubs look like?
2. What should our book clubs sound like?
3. How should we treat each other during our book club?

After each pair is confident of their choices, we will agree on discussion guidelines that will be posted on chart paper during the entire study. Of course, I will not know what guidelines the students will create, but an example of common guidelines is:

1. Overlapping speech is acceptable when you can still understand the whole conversation. It is not acceptable when the overlapping speech makes it hard to follow what is said.
2. Listen carefully to what your group members say, and then respond.
3. Keep your conversations on-topic. If you do wander off, it is the group’s responsibility to get back on task.
4. Have respect for your fellow group members and their ideas.
5. Your discussion should all “connect” together.
6. If you notice that any of your group members are not participating, make an effort to include them. Possibly direct a question to that person who had not spoken for a while. (adapted from Raphael, Pardo, Higfield, & McMahon, 1997)

The guidelines and behaviors that result from students’ decisions will be featured in the enacted curriculum.

**Reflection Journals**

In order to promote student voice, reflection journals will be provided to each participant with 100 sheets of lined paper in each. The journal will be utilized after each book club discussion to serve as a safe space for reflection. Students will complete a five minute reflection in their reflection journal, written or symbolic, to answer the questions I specifically designed to answer all three of my research questions. The reflection journals are also detailed further later in this chapter along with the student reflection questions.

**Possible Tensions Considered**

With any research study, possible complications may arise that prohibit the continuation of the study. I would like to address several possible dilemmas that might arise, such as students not reading their assigned book pages, students not reading the book because its level of difficulty, and lack of attendance.

Students will be held accountable as part of a larger group, and it is everyone’s task to ensure that each member of the group is successful during our book club sessions. If there is a problem with a student not reading their weekly assignments, an optional buddy system will be instated if the participants choose to do so. For example, if one student is forgetting to read, another student (of his choice) will have the responsibility of
“checking-up” on that student. This could involve reminding the participant in the hallway or after school. If this pattern continues to occur, the researcher will have a one-on-one discussion with the student relating to motivation, book preferences, etc. in order to determine the next appropriate step. When students are held accountable as part of a larger group, and it is everyone’s task to ensure that each member of the group is successful, is an additional component of a culturally relevant curriculum as it encourages a community of learners and responds to the students’ need for a sense of belonging (Gay, 2000/2010).

Even though the proposed book list of culturally relevant texts (Appendix A) is primarily comprised of books one to three years below their current grade level to help ensure readability, some participants might continue to have difficulty reading the selected books. Once a student demonstrates difficulty or frustration with the book, I will have a one-on-one private conversation with the participant, which will be documented in my field notes, to discuss several options in order for them to continue to participate in the study. The majority of the books listed have an available audio version. The student will have the option of listening to the book while reading along on a MP3 player that will I provide. If the book does not have an audio version, I will audio record myself reading the book aloud and provide this version to the student on an MP3 player. Gay (2000/2010) notes that offering resources and personal assistance to help ensure student success. My goal is for the students to be prepared for each book club session and I need to take steps to ensure their successful participation.
Chronic absenteeism in public school is most prevalent among low-income students (Balfanz & Bymes, 2012). Because the participants are attending a school with a 99% Free and Reduced Lunch rate (ProPublica, 2013), I am concerned with the lack of school attendance which will lead to the lack of participation in the study. However, studies suggest that schools who want to increase daily attendance are more likely to succeed if they reach out and work with parents in specific ways to address this problem. Families are now being recognized as an important influence on student attendance and an important resource for decreasing truancy and chronic absenteeism (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Weinberg & Weinberg, 1992). Using this information to combat this possible problem, I intend to contact the parents/guardians of the participant who is chronically absent in a non-confrontational manner. We can hopefully determine a solution to the absenteeism through collaboration with the parent/guardian, participant, and me.

Next, an overview of the current study is presented in four phases. A study timeline and a data collection timeline are also included to clarify the steps taken to conduct the study. Data analysis procedures are discussed as well as concerns relating to the trustworthiness of the study.

**Overview of the Study**

The case study was conducted over a period of approximately 17 weeks with the participants, eight eighth grade African American male students from an urban middle school, usually meeting two times each week for 30-40 minutes, each in a book club format featuring a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum. The first three
weeks were dedicated to classroom observations and interviewing students and their language arts teacher. Our book club met for a total of 12 weeks in order for the participants to read at least five books throughout the duration of the study. This time was needed to not only build rapport with the participants, but to also obtain a better understanding of their perspectives. The final student interviews were conducted during the final two weeks of the study. The participants were enrolled in a language arts class in an urban middle school. Students were pulled out of their language arts class in order to participate in the book club.

Four distinct phases are outlined below in Table 2 that illustrates the study’s timeline, while Table 3 clarifies the timeline of when the data was collected. A description of the four phases follows.

Table 2

Study Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant selection</td>
<td>Begin book club sessions twice per week</td>
<td>Conduct book club sessions twice per week</td>
<td>Ending student interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial student interviews</td>
<td>Build rapport with students</td>
<td>Collect reflection journals three times</td>
<td>Culturally relevant book analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interviews</td>
<td>Book introductions and selections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish book club guidelines as a group</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Data Collection Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Student Interviews</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Teacher Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Journals</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Recorded Book Club Sessions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Book Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase One

Participant selection occurred during the first phase of the study by explaining the purpose of the study to all African American males enrolled in an eighth grade language arts class at a local urban middle school. There were initially six students who wished to participate in the study who returned their signed consent form as well as an audio consent form documenting that they agreed to participate. Several weeks into the study, two more students joined our group because they wanted to “get out a class, too” (Kareem, Initial Interview, November 11, 2013). One was a new student to the school and the other asked if he could still join even though he turned his consent forms in late.

My initial intention was to attempt to build rapport with students by assisting them in small groups with class work during their Language Arts class time for the first several weeks of the study. However, the current classroom structure in place did not allow for this type of interaction. Most classroom work was completed independently, so I did not have the opportunity to speak with the students informally. I visited their classroom two times per week during the first three weeks of the study to document my observations of students in the classroom. I also began conducting semi-structured interviews with the students at this time.

Phase Two

The second phase of the study consisted of continuing the semi-structured interviews with each participant addressing their experiences with reading and their current thoughts about reading. I also conducted a semi-structured interview with the students’ teacher at this time.
The students’ language arts teacher, Mrs. Murray, provided me with each student’s current reading level to help aid in the book selection presented to the participants to help hinder reading frustration during the study. I continued to narrow the culturally relevant text selection by referring to my initial list of literature (see Appendix A) and then compared the list with the students’ reading levels. I did not want the students to reach their frustration level and give up on reading the texts.

After I reduced their text selection into two groups: nine picture books and 12 novels, I conducted a brief “book talk” (Kittle, p. 59, 2013) on each book. The students then had the opportunity to peruse through both sets of books and choose their first four choices in each group. They recorded their selections on two ballots (see Appendix E and F), one for the picture books and one for the novels. I then tallied the student choices and bought the books that acquired the most votes. The picture books with the most votes were: 12 Rounds of Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali (Smith, 2007) and Testing the Ice (Robinson, 2009). The novels selected were: Yummy (Geri, 2010), Bang!, (Flake, 2005), Shooter (Myers, 2004), and You Don’t Even Know Me: Stories and Poems about Boys (Flake, 2010).

**Phase Three**

The third phase included the book club meetings twice per week for 30-40 minutes each session. Our meetings occurred during the last period of the school day, but outside of the regular classroom, usually in an empty classroom. Students had the opportunity to jot down their thoughts, in words or simple drawings, relating to the book club discussion for five minutes at the end of each session in their reflection journals.
This would help provide insight into the students’ curriculum preferences throughout the study.

**Phase Four**

The fourth and final phase included conducting semi-structured individual interviews with the participants. Students were asked about their experiences in the study as a whole, while also revisiting several ideas that were expressed in their initial interviews and throughout the book club meetings. They also completed a culturally relevant book analysis on the books we read.

**Case Study Design**

The research paradigm used for this research study is qualitative in nature. I chose a qualitative paradigm over the quantitative paradigm because the intent of this study was to examine human behavior in a naturalistic setting, such as a book club, in order to examine what happens when African American adolescent males’ participate in a CRLBRC, to explore the literacy behaviors of African American adolescent male students who experience this curriculum, and examine the student’s perceptions of the culturally relevant literature that is featured within the CRLBRC. Qualitative research often brings more clarity to a study, due to the extensive fieldwork which is involved in collecting and analyzing the data. Merriam (1998) also noted that qualitative research also produces a more richly descriptive product which is designed to answer the complex research questions of a case study. I used the holistic case study approach to investigate the following research questions.
1. What happens when African American adolescent male students participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?

2. What literacy behaviors do African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?

3. What are the African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature within the culturally relevant curriculum?

The case study approach is defined by Schram (2006) as “an analytic focus on an individual event, activity, episode, or other specific phenomenon…” (p. 106) and by Stake (1995) as a “specific, a complex, functioning thing” (p. 2). My study fits inside both definitions well as a book club is a “bounded system” and individual activity (Smith, 1978, as cited in Stake, 1995, p. 2). The book club, the holistic case, featuring culturally relevant texts is the phenomenon under examination which has specified boundaries. This holistic bounded system is a single entity identified by the following qualities: in terms of time (book club will be held twice a week for twelve weeks), in terms of space (book club will be held in a specific place, an empty classroom), and in terms of components (eight participants).

In a qualitative case study, the researcher seeks greater understanding of the case (Stake, 1995) and tends to answer questions that begin with “how” and/or “why” (Yin, 2002, p. 9) and are targeted to a limited number of events or conditions and their interrelationships. Yin (2002) also acknowledged that “what” questions could pertain to case studies. My research questions examined what happens when African American
males participate in a culturally relevant curriculum in a small book club setting. A case study approach is appropriate to answer my research questions because it “is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

I chose a single holistic case study design instead of a multi-case design because the questions I am asking are “relatively noncomparative, seeking to understand its object more than to understand how it differs from others” (Stake, 1995, p. 47). I want to understand how a group of African American male students participate in a book club setting as an entire unit, in comparison to analyzing each individual student’s participation. To reinforce this notion Yin (2002) states, “The holistic design is advantageous when no logical subunits can be identified” (p. 55) as in an embedded case study design.

Another consideration that Merriam (1998) poses is that a case study can be defined by three special features: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic that will help guide my study. Particularistic means that the case study focuses on a particular situation, event, or program (Merriam, 1998). My case study has a unique design because I wanted to know what will happen with a group of specific participants in a specific bounded system. Descriptive means that the end product is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). I intend to obtain data from a wide variety of sources including student and teacher interviews, student reflection journals, transcripts of each book club session, culturally relevant book analysis, and my researcher’s journal. This provided me with information from a variety of viewpoints to
inform my data analysis. Heuristic implies that the case study illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. I intend to extend the reader’s experience about how students respond and participate in a CRLBRC because there is a lack of empirical research exploring how students respond to a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum and this study might have the ability to inform teachers’ curricular decisions when instructing African American male students.

**Research Context**

**School site.** Educational case study researchers are interested in how actors in education experience their surroundings. The site was chosen by analyzing what general questions I was asking and where these questions could possibly be answered. Also, a holistic case study design is dependent on its context (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the context of the study was purposefully chosen. The site, an urban middle school in northwest Pennsylvania, fit well as a research site because of my research interest in adolescents and its population of primarily African American students.

The research school site, part of a larger city district with 12,100 students and 1,100 teachers, is located in Northwest Pennsylvania. The school reports enrolling 540 students in grades six through eight with 55 teachers on staff. On average, 34 percent of students in Pennsylvania are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, whereas 99 percent of the students at this school site are eligible (ProPublica, 2013). At the district level, 75 percent of students are eligible. The current student demographics are: 47% African American; 31% White; 13% Hispanic; and 6% Asian (ProPublica, 2013).
**School site reading curriculum.** The language arts curriculum at the school site seemed to focus on students completing work independently (field notes, October 15, 2013). I wanted to observe the participants in their usual classroom environment to help in understanding what curriculum they were currently experiencing and how they participated in that curriculum. Mrs. Murray, the student’s language arts teacher, also mentioned that the school’s district office dictates the curriculum taught in each school with little room left for teacher input (field notes, October 15, 2013). During my initial observations during the first three weeks of the study, I observed the language arts teacher conduct a read aloud for the first five to ten minutes of class, she then asked several direct questions to the students at the end of the read aloud session. The book that was read aloud during the time of my observations was *Summer of the Monkeys* (Rawls, 1998), originally published in 1976 and takes place in Oklahoma during the late 18th century. Usually, the students then completed some type of language arts work from their *McDougal Littell Language Network: Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics* textbook and workbook after a short lesson was taught.

**Gaining access.** I contacted the school districts’ assistant superintendent in November of 2012 to discuss conducting research in one of the district’s middle schools because of the represented student population. The assistant superintendent agreed to this idea and scheduled an appointment for me with the school district’s curriculum director to determine possible school sites.

During this meeting, the curriculum director suggested a school site and advised me to contact the building principal. I emailed him immediately and met with him two
weeks later. I explained my research goals and answered all the questions he posed. He suggested I meet with the school’s leadership team, consisting of the schools’ grade level lead teachers, guidance counselors, and assistant principals to formally propose my idea. Approximately one month later, I met with the 15 members of the school’s leadership team. I supplied each person with a folder consisting of my background information relating to teaching and education, an outline of my proposed study, and a list of possible books we might read during our book club sessions. I explained the goals of my study and answered all questions the team members posed.

The following day I was contacted by the school principal explaining that the leadership team agreed to allow me to conduct my study at their school site. He also mentioned the team would prefer for me to solicit participants from a specific eighth grade language arts class since this teacher agreed to help with the study.

**Participants.** I took several aspects into consideration when selecting participants for the study. First, I thought of incorporating male students from all races at the school site in an effort to not exclude students. I thought that African American males and students from other races might provide an insightful environment where all students could interact. However, after reading a published dissertation (Oslick, 2011) with a similar participant population who participated in a literature circle context, I reconsidered including only African American males. Oslick explains that her pilot study consisted of African American boys and White boys in one literature group setting, but the African American boys tended to be quiet and not participate in the discussions. When Oslick inquired into why they were so quiet, one student replied that he “just didn’t
have as much to say as ‘em’” (p. 68). Oslick consulted an African American male education scholar, Bernard Oliver, for advice and he recommended homogeneous grouping to ensure responses from each participant.

Although I initially thought recruiting African American middle school male participants for the study might be problematic because of some students’ dislike of reading, a total of eight students returned their consent forms. I solicited participants from the designated language arts classroom after observing the class for two weeks by providing students with an explanation of the proposed book club, explaining how much time would be required, and showing them the selection of anticipated books.

**Data Sources and Data Collection**

I considered Creswell’s (2007) statement explaining that a case study is one in which “the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73) when determining my data sources and duration. Data collection began on October 7, 2013, and lasted until February 6, 2014, for a total of 17 weeks. Data collection methods include participant observations, student semi-structured interviews, participant reflection journals, cultural relevant book analysis completed by the participants, and a teacher semi-structured interview. The table below (see Table 4) is an overview of what collected data informed my research questions.
### Table 4

**What Data Informed Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Collected to Inform Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in how students take part in and become involved in a culturally relevant reading curriculum. I wonder if they will read the assigned pages from the texts and what type of language they will use? Do they feel that this context is a safe space and that their voices are heard within this curriculum? What kinds of discussions will they have? Will they teach me about their culture?</td>
<td>What happens when African American adolescent male students participate in a reading curriculum centered on their ways of knowing?</td>
<td>Students, book club sessions</td>
<td>Interviews, reflection journals, transcribed book club sessions, participant observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore what literacy behaviors African American adolescent male students engage in (e.g. risk taking, making predictions, express personal reactions and connections, engage in group discussions, develop a sense of personal agency) when participating in a culturally relevant reading curriculum.</td>
<td>What literacy behaviors do African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a culturally relevant reading curriculum?</td>
<td>Students, book club sessions</td>
<td>Interviews, reflection journals, transcribed book club sessions, participant observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in the students’ perceptions of the literature’s authenticity, realistic portrayal of the characters, connection to the characters’ experiences, and culturally conscious ideology.</td>
<td>What are the African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature within the culturally relevant curriculum?</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Interviews, reflection journals, transcribed book club sessions, participant observations, culturally relevant book analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Participant observation.** I conducted the book club featuring culturally relevant texts for the first two weeks to model the procedures for this portion of the book club. The book club met twice a week for a period of twelve weeks. Each session lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. Students were expected to read a certain number of pages that was decided on by the book club members. The books were also chosen by the participants. A voice recorder was used to record all conversation during each book club in order to remain connected to my data. The first seven book club sessions were personally transcribed shortly after each session. However, the remaining book club sessions were transcribed by a professional transcription service.

**Participant interviews.** Qualitative interviews are unique kinds of conversations that are used by researchers to explore informants’ experiences and interpretations (Mishler, 1986; Spradly, 1979, as cited in Hatch, 2002). In order to understand the participants’ current curricular and reading experiences, individual initial interviews were conducted during week three and four of the study. Ending interviews were held several days after the book club ended. These were utilized to explore each participant’s curricular experiences regarding what happened when they participated in the CRLBRC, the literacy behaviors they engaged in, and their perceptions of the culturally relevant text after the book club was held. Each participant was excused from their language arts class in order to participate in the interview process. Interviews were conducted in the school’s empty auditorium and lasted between five and 21 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and personally transcribed within 48 hours. The interviews were semi-
structured (Hatch, 2002) in that there was a set of predetermined questions, but there was room for the informants to digress if necessary.

The purpose of conducting the initial interviews with participants was to gain an understanding of how the participants currently experienced school and the curriculum. While these questions did not directly inform my research questions (see Appendix G), I wanted to gain an understanding of each participant’s current school and reading experiences. This also provided me with an opportunity to build rapport with each student. The ending participant interviews were also in a semi-structured format that were guided by predetermined questions to inform my three research questions.

**Teacher interview.** I interviewed the participants’ language arts teacher at the beginning of the study. These questions (see Appendix H) were not directly related to my research questions because the purpose of the interview was to acquire baseline data about each participant. I wanted to learn about her perceptions of the participants’ school and reading experiences to gather a more complete profile of each participant.

**Reflection journal.** A reflection journal was provided for each book club participant in the form of a composition notebook to provide “a direct path into the insights of participants” (Hatch, 2002, p. 141). Students had the opportunity to sketch, write in a free format, or answer specific questions posed by the researcher. Participants had the opportunity to share their reflections before the close of each book club. I collected their reflection journals three times within the ten week duration (after the second week, sixth week, and at the end of the study) to have their journals photocopied.
in order to guide the direction of data collection. All journals were given back to the participants to keep.

**Research journal/field notes.** Hatch (2002) explains that utilizing an individual research journal provides “a place where researchers can openly reflect on what is happening during the research experience and how they feel about it” (p. 88). This type of data collection also served as a form of data analysis. The research journal was essential for my study because I had the opportunity to write direct observations down during our book club meetings. I documented how many pages each student read and if they were present for the book club discussion. I reflected on the book club sessions directly after each meeting to document my personal and honest thinking about the accounts that just happened. My research journal also served as a place to write my “researcher identity memos” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 27) that assisted me in examining my experiences, goals, biases, feelings, and assumptions I experienced before, during, and after the study. I also utilized my research journal to record my fieldnotes on observations of participants, interviews, and book club meetings. Bogdan and Biklin (2003) explain that fieldnotes are central to participant observation as an important supplement to other data collection methods. The journal provided me with a space to reflect on how these ideas and events influenced and informed my research process.

**Culturally relevant book analysis.** In order to gain insight into how the participants perceived the selected culturally relevant literature, I asked each student to complete a culturally relevant book analysis on each of the six books we read during the study using a culturally relevant book analysis template (see Appendix J). Each student
received a copy of the culturally relevant book analysis template and the books that they were analyzing. Students were asked to refer to the book and answer the following question and support statement listed on the template: What did you like about the book? Please give an example from the book with the page number.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Merriam (1998) advises that “data analysis is done in conjunction with data collection” (p. 181). I was consistently engaged in the data analysis process through rereading my research journal while also recording my thoughts and questions, listening to and transcribing book club session audio recordings, and reading the participants’ reflection journals as the study progressed. Hatch (2002) suggests beginning converting raw field notes into research protocols soon after leaving the field. I began typing my field notes and the students’ reflection journals in order to prepare for formal data analysis. Also, continuously reviewing the data provided me with the opportunity to fill in the details that I did not record the first time. As this process continued, I began noticing data and developing ideas about categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2005). To help clarify the data analysis timeframe, a timeline is provided (see Table 5).
To prepare for my formal data analysis, I transcribed the first seven book club session recordings while a professional transcription service transcribed the following ten sessions. I transcribed each participant’s and the teacher’s exact responses from the audio recorder for each interview. I also typed my field notes, student reflection journal responses, and the students’ culturally relevant book analysis.

Merriam mentions that “case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). As I analyzed the data, I kept in mind that in a holistic case study design, “the orientation stays away from cause and effect explanation and toward personal interpretation, qualitative inquiry is distinguished by its emphasis on holistic treatment of phenomena” (Stake, 1995, p. 43) in order to keep...
my analysis focused on the case as a whole and not subunits as described by Yin (2014) as a typical problem in holistic case study analysis.

To manage my data, I uploaded all book club audio recording transcriptions, ending student interviews (initial interviews and the teacher interview were used for student biographical sketches), student reflection journals, and culturally relevant book analysis completed by each student into HyperRESEARCH (2013). I then analyzed each piece of data by initialized descriptive coding in the margins of the transcribed data, uploaded into HyperRESEARCH, in order to begin organizing chunks of raw data. Descriptive coding was used in order to initially retrieve and organize the chunks of raw data as I looked for frequencies within the case (Stake, 1995). As I began the coding process, I noticed there were two drastically different types of engagements, students spoke independently of each other or they collaborated in a group response. Therefore, I coded all pieces of data using two strategies. First, I coded for individual participants responses, then coded for group responses. For example, if one participant stated his opinion, I coded that response individually. However, if two or more students engaged in a discussion, I coded the discussion as a group response.

The coding from each book club session, ending student interviews, student reflection journals, field notes, and culturally relevant book analysis were manually compared (without using HyperRESEARCH) in order to determine the major themes, categories and subcategories, as I refined my thinking to better address my research questions. I continuously went back-and-fourth through all the collected data to compare the initial coding and began to determine the major themes and categories by analyzing
emerging patterns and relationships. According to Merriam (1998), this technique is known as the constant comparative method of data analysis. Coded data were assembled and reassembled to develop preliminary themes and categories to compare the data within and amongst categories (Maxwell, 1996). I followed the guidelines (Merriam, 1998) detailed below to determine the efficacy of the categories that I derived:

- Categories should reflect the purpose of the research. The categories are the answers to the research questions.
- Categories should be exhaustive. I should be able to place all data that I decide is important or relevant to the study in a category.
- Categories should be mutually exclusive in order for a particular unit of data to fit into only one category.
- Categories should be sensitizing. The naming of the category should be as specific as possible to what is in the data.
- Categories should be conceptually congruent meaning that the same level of abstraction should characterize all categories at the same level (p. 184).

I spent a substantial amount of time reflecting and considering emerging patterns, themes, and categories. Even when I recognized themes, categories, and subcategories, I was open to continuous review of my thinking and reflections. Because categories should reflect the purpose of the research, I labeled the categories and subcategories according to the research question they answered (Merriam, 1998, p. 183).
Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study is essential in ensuring thorough and rigorous analysis. The researcher has ethical obligation to minimize misunderstandings (Stake, 1995). Since I approached my interpretive analysis from a constructivist point-of-view, I conducted member checking to help ensure trustworthiness in this study (Hatch, 2005). Being a White woman from a middle class and racially homogeneous background, I was concerned with the disconnect that would likely occur with my interpretations of the collected data regarding African American males reading and discussing culturally relevant literature. I met with the six remaining participants on March 27, 2014 to conduct a member check. In preparation to meet with the participants, I recorded my final categories, subcategories, and codes that support the subcategories. I then changed each into a statement so the participants could either agree or disagree with the statement. I passed out highlighters and a copy of the statements to each participant. We sat in a circle as I read each statement aloud. The students then either highlighted the statement if they agreed, or left it alone if they disagreed with the statement. The students asked questions about any confusion they had as I read each statement. If two or more members disagreed with a statement, I deleted it from my findings in order to preserve their voice in the data analysis process.

In an attempt to heighten trustworthiness in my research, I stated my prejudices, biases, and preconceived notions towards my research study in an attempt to be reflexive. As I mentioned previously, I taught in an urban school for many years and personally
experienced student disengagement with literature that does not represent their culture. This experience has made a significant impact on the way I understand students’ reading interests. For this reason, I was transparent with my bias and understood how it influenced my interpretation of data.

**Audit Trail**

An audit trail in qualitative research consists of a thorough collection of documentation regarding all aspects of the research (Given, 2008). Since my research design was a qualitative holistic case study, the design had the possibility to change and emerge through the process of data collection and analysis (Given, 2008). Therefore, I recorded my research process in order to later provide justification for my results. Rodgers and Cowles (1993) suggest several documentation methods that I employed. I recorded my fieldnotes in my research journal during interviews and book club sessions to include descriptions of the setting, descriptions of nonverbal behaviors, and other occurrences. I also included documentation such as research concerns and methodical decisions made throughout the study as well as analytic documentation of my thought process in sorting, categorizing, and comparing data (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

**Member Checking**

Since I approached my research design and analysis from a constructivist perspective, it was important to include member checks to help ensure data validity (Hatch, 2002). I met with the six remaining participants, since two students exited the study early, on March 27, 2014, to conduct a member check in order provide an opportunity for participants to give feedback on my interpretations. In preparation to
meet with the participants, I recorded my final categories, subcategories, and codes that support the subcategories. As I stated previously in this chapter, I changed each into a statement to provide a simpler format for the participants to consider as they could either agree or disagree with the statement. I passed out highlighters and a copy of the statements to each participant. Sitting in a circle in an empty classroom where our book clubs discussions took place, I read each statement aloud. The students then either highlighted the statement if they agreed, or left it alone if they disagreed with the statement. At the end of the analysis, I asked the students to write, or explain to me verbally, anything else that I should consider that I might have not included on the list of statements. If two or more members disagreed with a statement, I removed it from my findings in order to preserve their voice in the data analysis process.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations regarding the context of the study. First, race and gender could influence the data collected. The interviews and book club discussions could be affected by ethnic and gender differences between the participants and me. There is also an inclination for researchers to ask questions of their participants to get certain answers. As a participant observer, I was cognizant of this practice and tried to restrict my questions to those based on the text and clarifying questions regarding participant responses.

My second concern was my personal bias, preconceived notions and assumptions that I hold. I have ten years of experience teaching in urban schools with primarily African American students. I also detailed a meaningful experience I had explaining my
understanding of how African American students need to connect with what they are
being taught. In order to prevent my bias from seeping into the data analysis, I
implemented a research journal in order to document and reflect on my perspectives,
interpretations, and overall conclusions.

Finally, this research study was limited to 17 weeks with a total of eight students
participating. As such, these findings were not generalizable to other populations of
adolescent African American male students as the participants represented a largely
working class population. Their experiences may not have been reflective of other
African American male youths from other socioeconomic backgrounds.

Ethics

Qualitative researchers in the field of education have special ethical
responsibilities when the participants are students (Hatch, 2002). Great care was taken
when I explained what their participation would entail. Consent procedures were in place
with the requirement of the parent or guardian consent and the participant’s consent.
Although these students and their parents/guardians have consented to participating, I
reminded them that their participation was voluntary and that they could exit the study
without any negative consequences.

My goal was to honor privacy of all the participants by protecting their
anonymity. This was done by using pseudonyms in verbal and written reporting. I took
care to not relate specific information about the participants to teachers, other students,
colleagues, etc. To aid in ensuring privacy, I am keeping all of the collected data on a
USB drive stored in a locked file cabinet in my office.
I faced several ethical decisions throughout the study where I had to involve the proper school personnel. First, during our book club discussion, one student stated that he wanted to kill himself (book club transcript, November 11, 2013). Immediately after the meeting, I spoke about the concern with the student’s language arts teacher, Mrs. Murray. She then called the one of the school’s counselors in order for me to explain what the student had stated. The counselor then called for the student on the school wide intercom system. She proceeded to meet with him while I left her office for confidentiality reasons. The second incident occurred on November 20, 2013. Another student explained that he had been sleeping in his grandmother’s car for several nights because his stepfather had “kicked” him out of the house and the student had nowhere to sleep (book club transcript, November 20, 2013). Again, immediately following our book club meeting, I spoke with the student’s language arts teacher about this particular student. She explained she knew of an agency to contact about the problem. When I returned two days later, Mrs. Murray informed me that the student’s home situation was referred to the agency and they were in the process of investigating the situation.

Summary

The lack of cultural acceptance and understanding of the unique ethnic characteristics of African American male students within educational systems has resulted in cultural discontinuity and disconnect. A culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum was designed to attempt to connect African American male students to their unique cultural traditions. This study was designed to develop an “envisioned” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 34) culturally relevant reading curriculum model for African
American adolescent male students. The research was conducted at one middle school in an urban school district in the state of Pennsylvania with eight African American male students. Multiple sources of evidence were used to ensure the quality of the data, including student and teacher interviews, field notes, participant observations and audio recordings of each book club session, a culturally relevant book analysis, and participant reflection journals. Data analysis was conducted using the specific analytic techniques of descriptive coding and category construction. The research questions were used as a framework to guide the analysis and interpretation of the data.
CHAPTER IV:

FINDINGS

There were three purposes of this holistic case study. The first was to examine what happens when African American adolescent males’ participate in a curriculum that is culturally relevant utilizing culturally relevant literature. The second was to explore the literacy behaviors of these students that experience the culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum. Finally the third purpose was to examine the student’s perceptions of the culturally relevant literature. This chapter has four goals. The first goal is to present the data set and analysis, while the second is to introduce the participants of the study. I continue with presenting the curriculum that was enacted with the students based on the paper curriculum that I implemented. Finally, I present my findings based on my collected data analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Creswell (2014) suggests a researcher spend a “prolonged time” (p. 202) in order to develop and thorough understanding of the phenomenon. He explains that the more experience a researcher has with the participants, the more accurate the findings. Taking this into consideration, I spent 17 weeks at the research site for a total of 1,945 minutes (see Table 6) entering the field on October 7, 2013 and exiting the field on February 6, 2014. Mrs. Murray and I agreed that I would conduct the majority of the book clubs sessions on Mondays and Thursdays. The participants and I held a total of 17 book club
sessions. However, we had to adjust this schedule several times because of student assemblies and early release days. I returned to conduct a member check with six of the participants on March 27, 2014 for a total of 70 minutes.

Table 6

*Duration in the Field*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Days in the Field</th>
<th>Number of Minutes in the Field (Hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>420 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, 2013</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>625 (10.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 2013</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>320 (5.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 2014</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>460 (7.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February, 2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50 (.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2014 (member check)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>70 (1.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1,945 (32.42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I spent my time in the field in several ways and I developed a routine as the study progressed. I usually entered the school site 15 to 20 minutes before classes changed to set up the audio recorder and arrange the students’ chairs, reflection journals, and pens near where the students sat for easy access. I then read over my field notes from the previous book club meeting in my research journal and wrote notations and questions to possibly pose to the participants for the upcoming book club discussion to help inform my research questions. When the bell rang for students to change classes, I walked down the hall to Mrs. Murray’s classroom with my researcher notebook. As the students were changing classes, the participants would often greet me as I walked down the hall and
entered the classroom. I sat in a specific spot each day near the door to the classroom, which was the most unobtrusive spot I could find while still being able to observe the students.

Mrs. Murray was considerate of my time with the participants. She would often read only a few pages, about ten to 15 minutes, from the read aloud text in order for me to spend a substantial amount of time with the students for our book club discussions. During the read aloud time, I observed the entire class, but focused on the eight participants’ actions during this time. I often noted who was actively listening, whispering to another student, reading another book, or sleeping. This information also helped me develop the participant’s biographical sketches on how they participated in the current language arts curriculum. After Mrs. Murray had completed her read aloud, she dismissed the participants and we walked to the empty classroom to conduct our book club meetings which lasted from 35 to 49 minutes. After the conclusion of each book club session, I collected the student reflection journals and pens, dismissed the students, and then returned to my research journal to document my thoughts and reactions to the session.

Table 7 represents the total data collected throughout the study for analysis which includes my typed participant observations (including my field notes in my research journal), ending student interview transcripts, book club audio recording transcripts, culturally relevant book analysis completed by the students (typed in the template format), and the typed student reflection journals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Number of Pages (typed, double spaced)</th>
<th>Number of Audio Recorded Minutes (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Journal with Field Notes and Participant Observations</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Ending Interviews</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Club Transcripts</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Book Analysis (typed in template format)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Reflection Journals (typed from their journals)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(from 8 participant journals)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I stated in chapter three, I was consistently engaged in the data analysis process through rereading my research journal while also recording my thoughts and questions, listening to and transcribing book club session audio recordings, and reading the participants’ reflection journals as the study progressed. I began initialized coding on each book club session, ending student interviews, student reflection journals, field notes, and culturally relevant book analysis using HyperRESEARCH software. I then manually compared codes and re-compared codes across all collected data in order to determine the major themes, categories, and subcategories, as I refined my thinking to better address my research questions. I began to notice commonalities of group and individual responses. I continuously went back-and-forth through the data to evaluate the initial coding and began to determine the major themes, categories, and subcategories by
analyzing emerging patterns and relationships. Table 8 represents my data analysis process.

Table 8

*Data Collected by Month*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Group Line-by-Line Coding</th>
<th>Individual Line-by-Line Coding</th>
<th>Preliminary Patterns/Themes</th>
<th>Preliminary Categories</th>
<th>Final Themes</th>
<th>Final Categories</th>
<th>Final Sub-categories (within the categories)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I present my findings later in the chapter by providing examples from the collected data to support each theme, category, and subcategory that best represents the overall data set (Hatch, 2005).

**Additional Data Considered**

To participate in a book club discussion, the participants needed to be present for the session. In Table 9, I present the participants’ attendance rate and percentage. I calculated the percentages based on how many sessions each individual student was able to attend. For example, Kareem joined our book club several weeks late. Therefore, I divided his total number of sessions present by the number of sessions he could possibly attend, which was 13 days instead of the original 17 sessions.
Table 9

*Book Club Attendance and Percentages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Days Present</th>
<th>Percentage Present</th>
<th>Percentage Total of Student Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>16/17</td>
<td>94.11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>12/12</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deshawn</td>
<td>17/17</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devante</td>
<td>15/17</td>
<td>88.24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareem</td>
<td>8/13</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin</td>
<td>15/17</td>
<td>88.24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamar</td>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>64.71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett</td>
<td>17/17</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on information presented in the table above, the average percentage of attendance of our book club sessions was 87.12%. I decided to evaluate this data because I was interested in the group as a whole unit.

At the beginning of each book club session, we developed the routine of stating how many pages we read to prepare for each session. I kept a record of this information in my research journal (see Figure 3) as it outlines the dates, the books, and required pages according to each participant. I created four categories to document their reading participation: (a) student read more than the required pages, (b) student read the required pages, (c) student read less than the required pages, and (d) student did not read. I also
noted special circumstances, such if the student was absent or if they just received the book because of an absence and did not have the opportunity to read the pages.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Date</th>
<th>Book and Required Reading</th>
<th>Isaac</th>
<th>Donald</th>
<th>Deshawn</th>
<th>Devante</th>
<th>Kareem</th>
<th>Edwin</th>
<th>Jamar</th>
<th>Garrett</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.31.13</td>
<td>First Book Club Meeting</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>@</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>€</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.04.13</td>
<td><em>12 Rounds of Glory</em>; page 30</td>
<td>p. 30 +</td>
<td>@</td>
<td>p. 30 +</td>
<td>€</td>
<td>p. 23</td>
<td>First Day</td>
<td>p. 30 +</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.08.13</td>
<td><em>12 Rounds of Glory</em>; page 50</td>
<td>p. 50</td>
<td>@</td>
<td>p. 50 +</td>
<td>€</td>
<td>p. 33</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.11.13</td>
<td><em>12 Rounds of Glory</em>; page 65</td>
<td>p. 62</td>
<td>@</td>
<td>p. 60</td>
<td>€</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 80</td>
<td>p. 40</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.18.13</td>
<td><em>Yummy</em>; page 30</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>First Day</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>Received Book</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.20.13</td>
<td><em>Yummy</em>; page 94 (finish book)</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.05.13</td>
<td><em>Bang!</em>; page 42</td>
<td>p. 21</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>p. 211</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>p. 182</td>
<td>p. 86</td>
<td>p. 25</td>
<td>p. 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.06.14</td>
<td><em>Bang!</em>; page 298 (finish book)</td>
<td>p. 298</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 298</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 298</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 298</td>
<td>p. 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(same session)</td>
<td><em>Shooter!</em>; page 40</td>
<td>p. 67</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>p. 37</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>p. 50</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 50</td>
<td>Received Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.09.14</td>
<td><em>Shooter</em>; page 65</td>
<td>p. 65</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 45</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 40</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 63</td>
<td>p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(same session)</td>
<td><em>Testing the Ice</em>; page 38 (finish book)</td>
<td>p. 38</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 38</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Received Book</td>
<td>p. 38</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Pages Read</td>
<td>Page Numbers Required</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Page Numbers Required</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Page Numbers Required</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Page Numbers Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.13.14</td>
<td><em>You Don’t Even Know Me</em>; page 45</td>
<td></td>
<td>p. 64</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>p. 25</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 50</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.21.14</td>
<td><em>You Don’t Even Know Me</em>; page 70</td>
<td>p. 95</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 43</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.23.14</td>
<td><em>You Don’t Even Know Me</em>; page 115</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 55</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 90</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 115</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>p. 142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.27.14</td>
<td><em>You Don’t Even Know Me</em>; page 191 (finish book)</td>
<td>p. 185</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td></td>
<td>p. 112</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>p. 191</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>p. 191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** Student Reading Participation Documentation. Symbol representation:

- ↑ - Student read more than the required page numbers.
- + - Student read the required page numbers.
- ↓ - Student read less than the required page numbers.
- ─ - Student did not read.
- ● - Absent for book club meeting.
- @ - Donald did not join book club until November 18, 2013.
Using the information from Figure 3, the average percentage of reading participation in each of the four categories was calculated: students read more than the required pages, less than the required pages, if the student did not read, and if they read the required pages numbers. The calculated reading participation for each student is listed below in Table 10. To find this information, the number of times each student fulfilled a particular category was divided with the number of times they had a required reading assignment. For example, Donald read more than the required number of pages for five out of the 14 reading assignments. Therefore, his average rate for reading more than the requirement was 35.71%.

Table 10

*Participant Reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Participation</th>
<th>Isaac</th>
<th>Donald</th>
<th>Deshawn</th>
<th>Devante</th>
<th>Kareem</th>
<th>Edwin</th>
<th>Jamar</th>
<th>Garrett</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than Required</td>
<td>35.29%</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Amount</td>
<td>41.18%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than Required</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>38.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Read</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, because I was interested in how students participated in the culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum as an entire unit, I averaged the percentages for each of the four categories represented in the following table (see Table 11).
After I present each participant biographical sketch and the enacted curriculum, I
detail my findings through two predominant themes: role of books and role of space and
discourse. I chose to present my findings thematically, in lieu of presenting them by
question, because of the overarching nature of the research questions. I found that many
of my findings had the potential to answer two or more questions, therefore, I present
them holistically to provide the reader with a more complete picture.

The Participants

Each of the eight participants demonstrated similarities and differences, alike,
with regards to their literacy interests, educational background, and home environment.
In this section, short biographical sketches of each of the participants are provided to
enhance the readers’ understandings about the students’ responses. The overall general
characteristics of the participants are presented (Table 12), and then continue with
detailing their age, special education status, how they currently experience school, and
their view of themselves as a reader based on the compilation of my personal field notes,
initial and final student interviews, teacher interview, and book club session transcripts.

### Table 11

**Average Reading Percentages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More than Required</th>
<th>Required Amount</th>
<th>Less than Required</th>
<th>Did Not Read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Percentage</td>
<td>31.94%</td>
<td>29.96%</td>
<td>34.15%</td>
<td>3.96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My purpose was to introduce the participants here to provide a transparent context for our interactions which will be described later in this chapter.

Table 12

*Characteristics of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 years old</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Retentions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One grade level</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two grade levels</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Reading Level (based on STAR test reported by teacher)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Siblings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adults (living with)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother, Step-father</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Attendance (characterized by the teacher)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Great attendance”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Often tardy”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Periodic absences”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Often absent”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free Lunch Eligibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receives Special Education Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Isaac

Isaac is 13 years old and has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for Learning Support in his Language Arts class. When the study began, I hesitated in asking Isaac to participate in our book club. Mrs. DiTullio mentioned that he had been missing a lot of school and I was concerned whether he would be present for our meetings (Field Notes, October 23, 2013). When I sat down and explained the study to Isaac, I asked him why he had been missing school. He stated his grandmother died one month ago and she usually took care of his two younger siblings. His mother entered the hospital to deliver her baby and she had no one to watch the two younger siblings, so this ended up being Isaac’s responsibility while she was in the hospital for over a week. After hearing his answer, I was embarrassed by my stereotypical assumption that he chose not to attend school (Field Notes, October 25, 2013).

Mrs. Murray indicated that Isaac seemed bored with school. “I don’t think it’s a place he looks forward to coming. His attendance is poor and he’s suspended a lot. Today I walked over and tried to wake him up when we were doing the read aloud” (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013). Isaac also explained his lack of enthusiasm for school during his initial interview:

Researcher: What’s one thing you would change about your classes?

Isaac: Probably nothing.

Researcher: So, tell me about how you are involved in class?

Isaac: You raise your hand to answer the questions that you know. Then you be quiet.
Researcher: So, do you think you have a voice about what is being taught in class?

Isaac: No

Researcher: Why?

Isaac: Because they don’t really ask us things, they really just teach us.

Researcher: How do you feel about that?

Isaac: Fine, it’s less work for me. (Isaac, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013)

Mrs. Murray also mentioned that his biggest weakness is his lack of motivation. When asked about how he participates in class, she responded with “Pretty much he doesn’t. He doesn’t participate” but also concluded the interview with “I think there is potential there (in Isaac)” (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013).

Although Isaac seemed disengaged in class, he explained that he does like to read and views reading as important even though he views himself as a “basic reader because when I mess up on words I just skip it” (Isaac, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013). He values reading and acknowledged that he learns worthwhile information when he reads. However, he indicated that he rarely reads for pleasure and rarely reads out of school during his personal time. This might be because of the Accelerated Reader (AR) restrictions placed on his personal reading choices because Mrs. Murray also indicated that he has not taken any AR tests this school year. During our initial interview, I asked:

Researcher: How do you pick out a book that you want to read?
Isaac: First, I look at the title, and then picture walk through it, scan I to see how it is, then I check the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) of it. If it’s around mine, then I take it.

Researcher: What do you do if the ZPD isn’t around yours?

Isaac: I don’t read it because what’s the point if you can’t take an AR test on it?

Later in the interview, I continued with the question:

Researcher: If you could change one thing about reading in school what would it be?

Isaac: I would change the points on the book…like point five [.5]. Like if it’s just a point five you gotta read a lot of books to get up to your goal.

Researcher: Do you wish there were points or no points on books?

Isaac: No points. (Isaac, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013)

Donald

Donald is 14 years old and has an IEP for Learning Support in his Language Arts class. He was recently removed from a full-time learning support classroom to regular education classrooms. Donald joined the study after the group had already met for five book club sessions. While most of the participants acknowledged that they initially joined the study so they did not have to attend class several days a week, I asked him why he wanted to participate, when at first he was not interested, and he replied, “Because it has all boys in the group, that's real” (Donald, Ending Interview, January, 30, 2014).
Donald’s Language Arts teacher, Mrs. DiTullio, indicated that he seems to enjoy school, but that she does not know him as well as the other students because he was recently placed in regular education classes. He currently plays on the school’s eighth grade basketball team and often made basketball references during our group discussions.

When interviewing Donald after he had joined the study, he explained that he thought he was an average reader and likes to read, but rarely reads for personal pleasure. He stated, “Man, I don’t got the time [for reading]” (Donald, Initial Interview, November 14, 2013). It is also important to note that Mrs. Murray explained that she did not think Donald read for pleasure and that she rarely saw him read during their daily independent reading time; however, he had borrowed and read the book, *Yummy*, from another participant in order to be ready for his first meeting with our book club that was currently in progress.

**Deshawn**

Deshawn is 13 years old and has an IEP for Learning Support in his Language Arts class. Deshawn seems to like school. Mrs. Murray stated, “I think Deshawn typically enjoys it. I see that he has a lot of potential. When he participates, he usually does very well” (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013). I also noted Deshawn’s active classroom participation during two of my initial classroom observations (Field Notes, October 15, 2013 and October 23, 2013). Mrs. Murray also stated that, “Deshawn participates in class quite a bit. It varies somewhat, but most of the time he’s pretty good and if I’m having trouble getting a right answer, he’s one of the two that I’ll usually go to (to get the correct answer). Even if he doesn’t have the right answer, he’s close, he’s at
least in the ball park and he knows what we’re talking about” (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013). In spite of Deshawn’s willingness to participate in class, when I conducted Deshawn’s initial interview, he frequently answered my questions with stating, “I don’t know” or one word answers (Field Notes, October 28, 2013) while his interview lasted less than five minutes. His hesitation to fully participate in the interview might indicate that he prefers to know who he is interacting with to fully partake in an activity.

Deshawn specified that he is a good reader, but does not read during his free time. However, he was the only student I interviewed who was currently reading a book. He explained that his book was about how a family escapes slavery and lives with an Indian tribe and that he likes to read what he is curious about. When I asked Deshawn what he would change about reading in school, he stated, “There’s not enough reading in school…yeah probably” (Initial Interview, October 28, 2013).

Devante

Devante is 13 years old and has an IEP for Learning Support in his Language Arts class. During one of my classroom observations, I noticed how much Devante smiled at other students and the teacher. I also noted that I “don’t often see this (smiling) from middle-schoolers sitting in class” (Field Notes, October 7, 2013). His teacher also stated, I think Devante, he usually seems happy, seems to enjoy it (school). He seems to be pretty happy go lucky. He also probably is not reaching his potential. He has more ability than what I think I’m seeing most of the time but I think he tries but its sporadic. I think he does enjoy school, I think he enjoys the socialization, he’s respectful. (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013)
Devante likes to read and characterizes himself as a “very good reader” (Devante, Initial Interview, October 28, 2013). He stated that he reads for pleasure during his free time. I asked him,

Researcher: What are your favorite things to do out of school?
Devante: Read, spend time with my brothers, and go to the YMCA.

Researcher: How much do you read on your own, not for a school assignment?
Devante: Sometimes I read just because I want to read. It depends on the book. On the type of book. If it’s a good book, I’ll just read it through the whole class and they’ll take it away from me—I want to read it the whole class.

Researcher: Do you wish there was more reading in school?
Devante: Yeah, a little bit more. I want to read every period. (Devante, Initial Interview, October 28, 2013).

Interestingly enough, when I asked Devante what he was currently reading, he stated, “it’s the end of the semester, so I don’t have a book to read” (Devante, Initial Interview, October 28, 2013). When asked to clarify, he explained that each student in his class is required to earn so many points by reading a book and then taking an Accelerated Reader test on it. Since he met his Accelerated Reader goal, he felt he did not need to read any more books for the semester.

Edwin

Edwin is 14 years old and has an IEP for Learning Support in his Language Arts class. Smaller in stature, compared to the other participants, he is often teased in school.
I noted this several times in my classroom observations and Mrs. Murray confirmed my suspicion by stating,

The other kids do pick on him quite a bit. I don’t understand how kids can be so cruel but he’s just a little more active. It’s hard to explain, but he’s obviously different, but he’s very sweet. I guess his voice is kind of unique too, the way he talks. (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013)

During Edwin’s initial interview, I asked him if he liked coming to school. He stated,

Edwin: Probably not.
Researcher: Why?
Edwin: I don’t really know because I say something somebody always making fun of me. When I be missing things (in class) they make fun of you. (Edwin, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013)

Mrs. Murray also mentioned that Edwin is motivated and is interested in many things and he tries hard to please his teachers (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013).

Edwin views himself as a good reader and explained that he gets excited when he reads something that he likes. When asked if he read on his own, he stated,

I read at home, but sometimes my little cousin drives me crazy, he plays too much and he gets on my nerves. He’s a little bad. Sometimes I like to read in the kitchen cause it’s a better place because he’s not annoying you. (Edwin, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013)
The issue of not having a space to read at home came up several times during our book club sessions. He often explained that he did not have his required pages read because it was not quiet where he lived.

**Jamar**

Jamar is 15 years old. He was the only student who participated in the study that does not have an IEP; however, he was retained twice. Mrs. Murray explained that Jamar is often absent because of suspensions for fighting with other students and being disrespectful to teachers. She continued with,

> I don’t think he enjoys it (school). He’s usually pretty quiet and he does have a tendency to get into trouble. He doesn’t seem really happy, but then every once in a while he’ll smile. He seems to usually keep to himself. Frequently, he’ll put his head down. He rarely participates. (Teacher Interview, October 25, 2013)

Jamar also explained he does not enjoy school by stating, “Naw, it’s not for me” (Jamar, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013).

During Jamar’s initial interview, he disclosed that he does not read on his own time. I asked him if he liked to read and he replied, “I do, but I don’t do it (read)” (Jamar, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013). Also, Jamar had to exit the study early because he was permanently expelled from school for fighting.

**Garrett**

Garrett is 13 years old and has an IEP for Learning Support in his Language Arts class. Mrs. Murray explained that he usually seems happy in school and content to be there. She revealed that,
Lately he seems to be a little more social than he had been at the beginning the year. A little more goofing around. I don’t know if it’s just who he’s hanging around with or where I’ve moved his seat (in class) or what, but he tends to get off task a little more recently. But he’s also respectful. I’ve never had any issues with disrespect from him or anything and I’ve never observed him being disrespectful to his peers. (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013).

Garrett also told me that he likes what he is learning in school and enjoys his classes (Garrett, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013).

Garrett explained that he does like to read and reads during his personal time but only “When I’m bored” (Initial Interview, October 25, 2013). He also explained that he does not get excited about reading by asking, “What’s to get excited about?” (Garrett, Initial Interview, October 25, 2013). He revealed that he enjoys books about adventure, history, and action.

**Kareem**

Kareem is 13 years old and has an IEP for Learning Support in his Language Arts class. Kareem was the second student to join the study late because he had recently started attending school at the research site. Mrs. Murray explained,

He’s newer so I don’t know him as well. He does not participate too much but he’s usually not disruptive either. He just kind of sits there, but I’m really not sure what his ability is at this point because he’s relatively new and he’s pretty quiet. (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013).
She continued explaining that Kareem’s biggest weakness is his lack of motivation, “He doesn’t seem to put much effort into very much. He’ll just sit there and not do his work quite a bit” (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013).

Kareem views himself as an average reader, but does not read on his own (Kareem, Initial Interview, November 11, 2013). Mrs. Murray confirmed, “I’ve never seen him read in class” (Teacher Interview, November 20, 2013). I asked him what he was currently reading during his initial interview and he stated, “Nothin’” (Kareem, Initial Interview, November 11, 2013). However, I continued by asking,

Researcher: Do you remember me saying that you will be expected to read if you participate in our book discussions? Is this alright with you…are you still interested?

Kareem: Yeah, I’ll try it out. (Kareem, Initial Interview, November 11, 2013).

Kareem also had to exit the study early because he was arrested for his alleged involvement with a recent local shooting.

**Introduction to the Enacted Curriculum**

In Chapter three, I detailed the paper curriculum that I designed based on Vygotsky’s (1978) notions of sociocultural theory of how readers interpret texts while continuously using their social and cultural contexts. I wanted the values and culture of the participants to be considered equally and represented in the curriculum. I considered that sociocultural theory emphasizes the advantages of conversation and builds on the
idea that group discussion acknowledges the worth of discourse (Reznitskaya, Anderson, & Kuo, 2007).

Informed by the work of Short and Burke (1991), I created a relevant literature-based reading curriculum founded in my past experiences and current understandings that are outlined in chapter one and two. Through these experiences and understandings, I developed a paper curriculum, detailed in chapter three, which serves to preserve my thoughts so I could actively reflect, modify, and employ the processes as they were implemented during this study. After discussing the role of reflection, the upcoming section details the curriculum that was enacted throughout the study and also provides a visual representation of what the students and I experienced.

**Role of Reflection in the Enacted Curriculum**

Even though I created the paper curriculum with adolescent African American males in mind, I did not know these students academically or personally. As the study proceeded, many changes were made to the developed paper curriculum based on student input and my reflective process to create the enacted curriculum. I considered Short and Burke’s (1991) statement,

> As we borrow other points of view, we discover that we can mentally stand both inside and outside of an event at the same time. We suddenly realize that we can look at that even from both our own perspective and that of someone else. The realization that we can be in two places at once forms the basis for reflection (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 21)
In other words, my intention was to consider the students’ point-of-view of the curriculum by reflecting in my research journal, envisioning their perspective, and continuously asking myself, “How are they reacting to this?” and “What would they [the participants] prefer?” I also engaged in “kidwatching” (Goodman, 1978) as I observed the participants during our book club meetings as an ongoing evaluation of how they participated within the curriculum. As a White woman, I cannot claim to know or fully understand the point-of-view of an African American male student. However, I actively considered the students’ reflection journal responses that they completed at the end of our book club sessions to gain a deeper understanding of their viewpoint. I also directly asked the students questions about their thoughts on what we were accomplishing throughout the study in an effort to accurately represent the participants’ voices throughout the enacted curriculum.

**The Enacted Curriculum**

The enacted curriculum presented below outlines the “actual learning engagements” that diverged from the original paper curriculum described in chapter three (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 33). The events described are from my personal perspective based my field notes and book club transcriptions. My intention was to walk the reader through the triumphs and difficulties of enacting the proposed paper curriculum with eight African American male eighth grade students, as we often modified what was originally planned within the curriculum. I wanted to be as transparent as possible to show how I reacted to various episodes, where I often had to make quick decisions on how to react or proceed while considering student voice. Short and Burke (1991) warn
that “tensions arise out of unfulfilled needs” (p. 33). Fortunately, this imbalance “signals a needed adjustment to our paper curriculum and leads to an envisionment of a potential new curriculum” (p. 33), which I present in chapter five.

**Providing a Space for Student Voice**

While providing a space for student voice might sound simple in theory, I initially struggled with the implementation. I became discouraged during the first book club session because the group was loud and often off-topic. I could not hear, or understand, what students were talking about. I quickly realized my preconceived ideas about how conversation should take place in school would prohibit the students’ pattern of discourse. After the book club session, I recorded my frustrations in my field notes. I returned to my notes later that day and wrote:

> I kept shushing them for being loud. I shushed them again. As I am sitting here, I realize that they weren’t doing anything bad or saying anything that was inappropriate or offensive. They were just loud and I had a hard time hearing them to understand what they were saying. I shushed them because we were in a classroom, and I have preconceived notions of what talking in a classroom should look like. So, I shushed them instead of listening to them or joining in on their conversation. I was silencing them and didn’t even realize it. (Field Notes, October 31, 2013)

However, I also had to take into consideration that in order for students to have a voice during our sessions, I needed to not only listen to their voice, but also hear it.
Recognizing and acknowledging the cultural significance of African American males being “loud” (Kirkland, 2013), I took the matter up with the participants at the following book club session with the purpose of establishing a balance. At the beginning of each session, I would ask if there were any questions or concerns about the club or what they were reading. I took this time to share my above notes with the students. They did not have a response. Continuing, I apologized for my actions, but explained that we were still in a school, where I was a guest, and we needed to follow the school’s expectations. I also articulated that I wanted to know and understand what they were saying and I could not accomplish this if we continued with the same voice level. Again, they did not have a response. Then, Garrett said, “Just let us know (when we are too loud).” I persisted, “How should I do that?” Garrett continued, “Just tell us.” Noting that they were struggling with this question, I suggested that instead of “shushing” them when their voice level increased, I would say “Watch the noise level” (Book Club, November 4, 2013). The group nodded their heads in agreement (Field Notes, November 4, 2013).

Although, the noise level of our conversations often increased throughout the book club sessions, I referred back to what we agreed upon by saying “Watch the noise level” and usually students brought their voices down. Some participants even began using this phrase independently, without prompting, during our discussions when they noticed an increase in the sound level. While listening to the audio recordings of our book club sessions, I noticed I became comfortable with a higher noise level without being aware of this change during our meetings, possibly because I was becoming more
familiar with their discourse patterns (Field Notes, December 10, 2013). We established
equilibrium where we could discuss our books in a way that was respectful to all
involved.

**Culturally Relevant Text Selection**

As stated in the literature review, culturally relevant books should be an authentic
piece of text that is realistic and upholds a culturally conscious ideology and meaning
(Gray, 2009; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; McNair, 2010, Yoon et al., 2010). To
meet this standard, the participants chose the texts we read during the study using two
ballots I created (see Appendices E and F), one for picture books and one for novels. I
presented each book to the participants, showing the cover and providing a short synopsis
of each book so the participants could make a more informed decision when making their
selections. The books were then passed around for the participants to peruse in order to
complete their ballot. The texts selected by the initial six participants were: *12 Rounds of
Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali* (Smith, 2007), *Testing the Ice* (Robinson, 2009),
*Yummy* (Geri, 2010), *Bang!* (Flake, 2005), *Shooter* (Myers, 2004), and *You Don’t Even
Know Me: Stories and Poems about Boys* (Flake, 2010). Tables 13 and 14 present the
total number of votes each book received. The texts selected by the students played an
important role in the curriculum; therefore a summary of each book selected by the
students is presented in Table 15.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture Book Titles</th>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael’s Golden Rules</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers of the Knight</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Jabe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wee Winnie Witch’s Skinny</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve Rounds of Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Nation’s Hope: The Story of Boxing Legend Joe Louis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing the Ice: A True Story about Jackie Robinson</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hewitt Anderson’s Great Big Life</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amiri and Odette: A Love Story</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many Thousands Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14

*Results from Culturally Relevant Literature Ballot: Novels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture Book Titles</th>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yummy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooter</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhere in the Darkness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Goodbye?</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locomotion</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyborg</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Strong Right Arm</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Sons</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Don’t Even Know Me</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 15

**Summary of Texts Selected by Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Title, Author, Year</th>
<th>Text Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>12 Rounds of Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali</em> (Smith, 2007)</td>
<td>Written by Muhammad Ali’s son, this book is about Ali’s boxing career and the struggles Ali encountered throughout his life as a Black man. Each section, written in a poetic format, details each “round” of his battles from his life beginning with his birth in Kentucky to his battle with Parkinson’s Disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yummy</em> (Geri, 2010)</td>
<td>In this nonfiction graphic novel set in 1994 in a neighborhood of Chicago's South Side, a 14-year-old girl named Shavon Dean was killed by a stray bullet during a gang shooting. The book details how her killer, 11 year old Robert “Yummy” Sandifer, runs from the police for three days and is eventually killed by his own gang. The story is told through the eyes of Roger, a fictional classmate of Yummy’s, who grapples with the unanswerable questions behind Yummy's situation, with the “whys and hows” of a failed justice system, a crime-riddled neighborhood, and a neglected community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bang!</em> (Flake, 2005)</td>
<td>The main character, 13 year old Mann, is struggling with the recent death of his six-year-old brother who was killed on their family’s front porch during a drive-by shooting. His father decides to” toughen him up” so he will not be a victim of the streets like his deceased younger brother by leaving Mann and his best friend, Kee-Lee, at a campsite miles away from home, with only a gun. His father hopes that the struggle return back home will make men out of both of them. However, Mann decides to abandon his family and decides he no longer needs them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Testing the Ice</em> (Robinson, 2009)</td>
<td>This picture book is an exploration of how Jackie Robinson overcame his personal fear of swimming in open water in order to be a good parent to his daughter and her friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shooter</em> (Myers, 2004)</td>
<td>The story is about a high-school senior, Len, who shoots a star football player and injures several others in the schoolyard, then commits suicide. Cameron, Len’s best friend and one of the few African Americans who attend this suburban school, is interviewed at length by a therapist, a sheriff, and a threat-prevention specialist. The story unfolds as Cameron is interviewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>You Don’t Even Know Me: Stories and Poems about Boys</em> (Flake, 2010)</td>
<td>Told in individual free-verse poems and short stories, African American teen boys address love between sons and father figures, homelessness, the fear of dying, neighborhood violence, and girlfriends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the process did not vary considerably from the described paper curriculum, it is interesting to note that I was struck by how excited the students were to look through and select the books they were going to read, especially since they did not know me at this point in the study. I acknowledged the occurrence in my field notes:

Their reactions to the books I picked to show them surprised me! I actually expected them to just flip through the books and vote. They were pretty excited – even with the picture books, which I was hesitant about. They passed them around and talked about how they’ve seen this book before or heard someone talk about that book. A couple of them even started “campaigning” for certain books, saying things like: “pick this one, pick this one” and “make sure you look at that one.” I was encouraged by their response. (Field Notes, October 18, 2013)

There could have been many reasons for their initial excitement, but the group’s enthusiasm for these texts did not diminish as they began to participate in the book club.

**Book Clubs**

The context for the enacted curriculum was a book club format where we met twice a week in an empty classroom for 30-40 minutes to discuss the books chosen by the students. While the format was purposely selected to hopefully provide a space for open dialogue, there were difficulties along the way, such as building rapport with the students.

**Rapport.** As the book club sessions began, I felt there was a disconnect between the students and myself. All the participants were in many of the same classes together and were personal friends who had attended the same elementary and middle school. I did not have previous connection with the school site and my initial intention of
developing rapport with the students during my classroom observations was not possible. Even though I personally interviewed each student before we began our regular meetings, I felt like the “other” in this setting. While I recognized that I was an outsider in this context, I wanted to gain an insider’s perspective as a researcher. I deliberated over this dilemma for several days trying to develop a strategy with would promote rapport with the students.

I began implementing “Getting to Know You Statements” during the third book club session (see Appendix J). I chose statements for students to respond to that were common and nonthreatening such as: “My favorite food is...because...”, “In my spare time, I like to....because...”, and “The best thing in my life right now is...because...”. Cutting all the statements into strips of paper, I placed them into an envelope to bring to our third book club meeting. I began the session by explaining my concern of how I did not know them, pulled out a statement from the envelope, and completed the first statement. Then, I asked each student to complete the same statement and we followed this routine at the beginning of most book club sessions. The students were hesitant at first. Several students mentioned that it felt like a “therapy session” (Field Notes, November 11, 2013), but the routine caught on as students debated about whose turn it was pick the statement out of the envelope and reminded me about the statements if I forgot.

Discussing our statements proved to be an avenue for voicing personal concerns. I had to report two of these conversations to Mrs. Murray and the guidance counselor because of student safety concerns, which they immediately tended to. The first occurred
when Edwin stated that he wanted to commit suicide (Book Club, November 11, 2013) and the second occurred when Isaac explained that he had to live in his grandmother’s car because his stepfather would not let him in their house (November 20, 2013). Even though the initial purpose of our “Getting to Know You” statements was to provide an opportunity for the students and me to get to know each other, the statements also aided in creating a space for students to talk about their personal dilemmas they were currently experiencing.

**Talking about books.** Another problem I did not take into consideration when designing the paper curriculum was the difficulty students would have talking about what they had read. I noticed a pattern during the initial interviews when I asked the question, “Do you talk about the books you read with others?” Every student answered in the negative (Initial Interviews, October, 25 & 28, 2013; November, 11 & 14, 2013).

I introduced and modeled several strategies with the group throughout the study to encourage conversations about the books we were reading. Some strategies were embraced, meaning students continued to use them throughout the study, while others were abandoned. While the scope of the study does not allow a detailed explanation of the five strategies or why the students did or did not implement them, I provided an outline of each strategy in Table 16.
Table 16

*Strategies Embraced or Abandoned by the Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Embraced</th>
<th>Abandoned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underlining as We Read</td>
<td>Underline what is important, interesting, and/or confusing parts when reading.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticky Notes</td>
<td>Writing thoughts and/or questions down while we read.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venn Diagram</td>
<td>Comparing and contrasting story elements.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalking Sentences</td>
<td>Circle one phrase, sentence, or paragraph that “follows you around” after you read it.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning the Character</td>
<td>Students ask themselves: If I could ask the character one question right now, what would it be?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After I demonstrated a strategy, I required everyone to “try it out” for the next book club meeting. However, after the initial requirement, I did not compel students to use the approach; but encouraged them to continue using the strategy if they thought it was helpful during our meetings.

**Developing book club guidelines.** At the beginning of our first book club session, we developed guidelines as stated in the paper curriculum. The students struggled with creating guidelines, probably because they were not familiar with a group discussion format. The student developed guidelines were: 1) Respect others, 2) Read your book so we can talk about it, 3) Don’t make fun of anyone in the group. After the
students left the classroom, I noted the students displayed a “so what?” attitude to the activity (Field Notes, October 31, 2013). Even though this was a collaborative effort, neither the students nor I referred to these guidelines again, possibly because the participants created something they did not have experience with and therefore did not understand how it applied. As I explain in further detail later in this chapter, through listening to the students and reading about their concerns in their reflection journal, we began to solve concerns and frustrations as a group in place of referring to the developed guidelines.

**Consequences for not reading.** While the students and I negotiated the reading assignment for the next book club meeting at the conclusion of every session, there were no consequences placed on the students if they did not read the assignment in its entirety. After answering our “Getting to Know You Statements”, the students would state how far they read in the assigned book. The first instance of a student not reading occurred during the fifth book club meeting. As I went around the group, asking what each student read, Deshawn stated:

Deshawn: I had a major headache when I went to read, so I didn’t get it done.

Researcher: So you didn’t read anything?

Deshawn: No

Researcher: Are you okay? You usually read.

Deshawn: *(raising his voice)* Okay, man, I usually always read! It’s my first time not reading!
Researcher: Deshawn, I’m not mad or anything…. It’s okay. I was just concerned because you usually read. I’m just reminding you that you’ve got to read. You’re okay. (Book Club, November 14, 2013)

The lack of consequences for not reading their assignment was uncomfortable for students at first as I demonstrate in my conversation with Deshawn. The students were responsible for their own reading as I wanted the participants to read only if they desired to read.

Addressing behavior concerns. Although challenging at first, student behavior that disrupted our conversations became less of an occurrence in our book club meetings as the study progressed. There was no “honeymoon period” where many students often exhibit their best behavior during the first several days of school to make a positive impression.

While I cannot recall any of the students ever demonstrating disrespect towards me, nor I towards them, they often bantered back and forth, playfully teasing one another. I struggled with these interactions at first, but ultimately decided to resist interfering with this type of talk and just listen. The students seemed to be comfortable with these interactions and I only interrupted the behavior if it interfered with our purpose of discussing the books. In an effort to disclose how the students treated each other (and me) and how I reacted, I describe two distinct events that directly relate to student behavior and interactions.

While we were walking down the hall to conduct our third book club session, unbeknownst to me, Edwin called Isaac a “racist.” As we entered the classroom, Isaac
shouted back at Edwin, and then refused to talk or participate. I attempted to confer with Isaac and Edwin about the event, but Isaac put his head down and would not speak.

Edwin attempted to apologize:

Edwin: Isaac—

Edwin: (to me) I want to tell him something.

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Edwin: Isaac—Isaac. (Isaac would not answer)

Devante: Yeah, but ya’ll don’t know Isaac [meaning me]. When Isaac get mad, he don’t speak.

Researcher: Oh.

Devante: He don’t want to be bothered. (Book Club, November 11, 2012)

I made the decision to move on with the book club session, but Isaac remained silent the entire session. The other participants ignored Isaac’s silence during our book discussion as if they were “used to it” (Field Notes, November 11, 2012). After the students were dismissed back to their classroom, I asked Isaac to stay so I could speak with him. While I was sitting and Isaac was standing, I stated:

Researcher: Isaac, I know you don’t know me at all and you probably don’t want to talk with me right now, but Edwin tried to say he was sorry. I don’t know what happened out in the hall.

(pause, no response)

Researcher: From what Devante said, I don’t think you’re going to talk to me and I’m not going to sit here and try to make you talk to me. I
don’t know what is going to happen with you and Edwin over this—I hope you listen to his apology. I do want to tell you that I hope you decide to keep reading and stay in our group.

(pause)

Researcher: Do you want to tell me anything?

(pause, no response)

Researcher: Okay, I hope I see you on Thursday. (Book Club, November 11, 2012)

Isaac left the classroom without saying a word, but returned for the following session later that week as if nothing happened. I asked Edwin if Isaac had talked to him. Edwin said that he did not and continued with “I’m not thinkin’ about it” (Field Notes, November 14, 2013).

As I indicated in Edwin’s biographical sketch, he was often teased by the other participants, especially Deshawn and Donald. The taunting often occurred in the students’ language arts classroom during my observations, walking from the students’ classroom to the classroom where we conducted our meetings, but infrequently during our book club sessions, possibly because there was rarely any downtime. However, five weeks into our book club meetings, Edwin confronted Deshawn and Donald during the first few minutes of our session.

Edwin: (shouting) I don’t want it. I'm sick and tired of you all when you talkin about me.

Researcher: Edwin, Edwin…lower…lower your voice. What’s wrong?
Edwin: (shouting) Hey every freaking single day all you want to talk about me like I've got something. I'm edgy. I'm stupid. I need it to stop! It's not right.

(pause)

Edwin: (shouting) They only talk about me every single day when I come to school.

Researcher: Alright…but you need to stop yelling…

Deshawn: No, I ain't talking about you, dude.

Edwin: (talking now) You edgy. You calling me a drunk. You don’t know nothin. You aren’t clean.

Deshawn: No, we ain't talking about you dude. No, I ain't talking about you.

Edwin: Man, you gotta stop. It ain't funny.

Donald: Everybody talking about you.

Researcher: Okay…

Edwin: (shouting again) I don’t care!

Kareem: (to Deshawn and Donald) He told you, he said he don’t care though.

Researcher: Okay, so we need to stop and talk about this. I want our group to be a place where everyone feels comfortable and safe…

Deshawn: Ain’t nobody…ain’t nobody’s gang, no one got no knife or nobody got no gun.

(group laughter)
Researcher: I’m talking about being emotionally safe.

Deshawn: I’m safe, I’m very safe.

Donald: He [Edwin] just want attention

Edwin: I don’t need attention.

Deshawn: You just want attention.

Edwin: Don’t look at me… You all making me…

Researcher: Gentlemen, gentlemen, maybe we should go back to class.

Group: No!

(pause)

Researcher: Alright, we’ll keep going, but Edwin, Donald, and Deshawn need to talk with me before you go back to class. This can’t happen again. (Book Club, December 4, 2013)

After the session ended, Edwin, Donald, and Deshawn stayed behind. We talked, but Donald and Deshawn barely spoke during the short conversation. Feeling helpless and thinking this was part of a larger problem, I walked to Mrs. Murray’s classroom after the dismissal bell rang and explained what had just happened. Mrs. Murray informed me that this has happened before and that she would speak to Deshawn and Donald. Later that week, Mrs. Murray emailed me letting me know that she spoke with Deshawn and Donald’s basketball coach about the incident:

I had a talk with Mr. Rylant today and he said he’ll talk with the boys (Donald and Deshawn). If things don’t change he wants us to let him know. (Email Communication, December 6, 2013)
The following week, our group met on December 9, 2013. I made a notation in my research journal after our meeting that “Donald and Deshawn didn’t bother Edwin today. They must enjoy coming to our meetings, love playing basketball, or really want to get out of class—maybe all three” (Field Notes, December 9, 2013).

The next book club session was held on December 12, 2013. As I was walking with the group down the hall, I walked up to Donald and Deshawn and thanked them for their changed behavior towards Edwin. Neither of them responded at first, then Deshawn asked me, “Yeah..., but I wanna ask you...did anybody talk to Edwin?” Deshawn’s question humbled me. I noted, “Clearly, no matter how well I get to know them, I will never truly know what is happening to them in or out of school” (Field Notes, December 12, 2013).

**Reflection journals.** I posed journal reflection questions to the students at the end of almost every book club meeting to gain insight on their thoughts about the curriculum and the books we were reading. Students had the opportunity to respond in a sketch or a free-write format.

After several book club sessions, I wanted to drop the reflection notebooks as a data source. As I read through their responses, I noted that the participants were not writing as much as I expected and they did not want to share their answers with the rest of the group. I explained my concern to one of my dissertation committee members and she suggested that I continue as planned. Later, I realized I was more concerned about the journals as a data source as compared to a space for student voice: “I think they’re having trouble with these (reflection journals) for a couple of reasons—I don’t think
they’re used to being asked about their opinion and I don’t think they like to write. I also noticed they tend to shut their notebooks as soon as they’re done, like they don’t want anyone to see it. They might not want others to see or read their writing” (Field Notes, November 18, 2013). Even though I thought they were not writing “enough,” the reflection journals provided insight and led to several changes that were made in the curriculum, which I detail later in this chapter.

**Visual Representation of the Enacted Curriculum**

Referring to Short and Burke’s (1991) statement, “School is a place where the learning which occurs in the present can act to give new life and vitality to the past and to create new possibilities and plans for the future” (p. 9), accurately portrays what happened when enacting the paper curriculum with eight African American male eighth grade students. I created a visual representation of the process that the students and I experienced shown in Figure 4.
Many visual depictions of curricular models do not portray the continuous tensions that occur when a curriculum is enacted, especially those that consider students’ perspective. Therefore, I subtitled the enacted curriculum with the phrase, bumps along the road, to represent the trials and triumphs experienced through the teacher’s and students’ continuous reflection and negotiation throughout our time together. Curriculum construction that involves the teacher and the students has been termed “negotiating the curriculum” (Boomer, 1982). The idea of a negotiated curriculum does not imply completely handing over curriculum construction by educators, nor does it mean giving students full access to make decisions. Rather, “curriculum negotiation involves giving students a voice in the choice and development of learning opportunities: both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of curriculum” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 171). The findings, which are based on data collected within the enacted curriculum, are presented next.

Figure 4. Visual Representation of the Enacted Curriculum. Illustration is a representation of the enacted curriculum which contained bumps along the road. The students and teacher are in a state of continuous reflection and negotiation through employing student voice and action.
Findings

The purpose of this holistic case study was to examine what happens when eight African American adolescent males’ who attend an urban middle school participate in a curriculum that is culturally relevant utilizing culturally relevant literature. The study was conducted over a period of approximately 17 weeks with the participants, eight African American male eighth grade students from a local urban middle school, meeting approximately two times each week for 30-40 minutes, each in a book club format featuring a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum. The first three weeks were dedicated to classroom observations and interviewing students and their language arts teacher. Our book club met for a total of 12 weeks, while final student interviews were conducted during the final two weeks of the study.

My findings represent an analysis of data collected throughout the study as detailed in chapter three. I also detailed my member checking protocol that I conducted with six of the participants on March 27, 2014. I recorded my final themes, categories, subcategories, and codes that supported the subcategories and changed each into a statement that the students could highlight to show their agreement or leave it alone to document their disagreement with the proposed statement. To be considered a finding, four of the six participants had to agree with the statement as this represented the majority of the participants in this holistic case study. For example, if more than two of the six remaining book club members disagreed with a statement I provided, I removed it from my findings in order to preserve their voice in the data analysis process. I present my findings below to the following research questions:
1. What happens when African American adolescent male students participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?

2. What literacy behaviors do African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?

3. What are the African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature within the culturally relevant curriculum?

As I previously stated, the two overarching themes are presented as the role of books and the role of space and discourse. I chose to use the term, role, because I found that culturally relevant literature and space and discourse were the specific components that assumed a major function within the enacted curricular design.

The findings are presented in a comprehensive manner through themes, rather than question-by-question. For clarification, Table 17 provides an outline of the themes and categories included within each theme, along with what specific research question it answers. Following the table, an explanation is provided for each theme and the relevant categories and subcategories that comprise each theme and support my findings with specific student and/or group examples. As the findings are explained, long segments of dialogue that occurred during our book club meetings are frequently presented. Instead of summarizing their discussions, I wanted to present clear evidence to support my findings, and also present the students’ authentic conversations in an attempt to establish their voice throughout the study.
Table 17

*Correlated Themes and Categories to Answered Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Categories</th>
<th>Research Question #1: What happens when African American adolescent male students participate in a CRLBRC?</th>
<th>Research Question #2: What literacy behaviors do African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a CRLBRC?</th>
<th>Research Question #3: What are the African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature in a CRLBRC?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Role of Books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Engaged Within and Beyond the Texts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Students Were Intrinsically Motivated to Read</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Students Valued Specific Characteristics of the Culturally Relevant Literature</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Role of Space and Discourse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Gradually Building a Community of Trust</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Space for Individual and Group Student Voice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Students as Knowledge Creators</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Role of Books**

The role that the culturally relevant texts played within the enacted curriculum was an important driving force within the study. During one of our last meetings together, the group of students were asked to “Tell me some of the things that you enjoyed about our meetings. What mattered to you?” (Book Club, January 21, 2014). The group’s response was:

Isaac: The books.  
Donald: Yeah, the books.  
Devante: Our readings.  
Researcher: So hold on. Books, so the books you chose?  
Deshawn: Yeah, they were good ones. (Book Club, January 21, 2014)

Students voted on 21 books with two individual ballots, one for picture books and one for novels, to choose what books we would read to discuss during our book club meetings. The texts selected by the students were: *12 Rounds of Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali* (Smith, 2007), *Testing the Ice* (Robinson, 2009), *Yummy* (Geri, 2010), *Bang!* (Flake, 2005), *Shooter* (Myers, 2004), and *You Don’t Even Know Me: Stories and Poems about Boys* (Flake, 2010). A summary of the selected titles are previously displayed in Table 15, since many of the findings specifically relate to the texts read by the students.

Students demonstrated various literacy behaviors as we continued to meet for our book club discussions. One of these literacy behaviors was directly engaging within and beyond with the books when they read during their own personal reading time and when discussing the books during the club meetings.
Engaged within the text. For the purpose of this study, the literacy behavior “engaged within the text” is operationally defined as being directly involved with the book. More specifically, the students used the text in a purposeful way, silently or verbally, to make meaning before, during, or after reading. As previously mentioned, the participants had a difficult time talking about books at the beginning of the study. However, they did embrace underlining specific phrases, sentences, or sections of the text that they found important, interesting, or confusing.

Underlining. As mentioned in the enacted curriculum, the strategy of engaging within the text was modeled for students by underlining what I wanted to discuss for our group sessions in an effort to promote talk within our group. While several other strategies were modeled that many of the students continued to use, students began consistently underlining when they read in order to become involved in the group’s conversation. During our discussions, students often specifically stated what they underlined. For example, Isaac, who was initially resistant to talking during our book club stated:

Isaac: Here, I underlined this part. Yummy, he had no way to go.

Researcher: Was that important to you?

Isaac: Yeah. And in life, there is no right turn. It's always something that's going to bump you on your way and take you two steps back.

(Field Notes, December 5, 2013).

Donald often participated in the literacy behavior of underlining. During his ending interview he was asked:
Researcher: Did you do any underlining in the books that we talked about?
Donald: Yup.
Researcher: How did you decide what to underline?
Donald: The most important thing in a book, I underlined. I knew what I was going to talk about. I read and be like, "Yeah, underline this here, talk about this."
Researcher: Did you ever talk about the things you underlined?
Donald: Yup.
Researcher: Good. You think you'll keep underlining in books?
Donald: Yeah, sometimes cause we’re not supposed to write in books here.

(Donald, Ending Interview, January 30, 2014)

These two examples show how Isaac and Donald engaged in the text by becoming actively involved with the literature to promote further discussion. Although this literacy behavior was not authentically generated by the students, but introduced and modeled, they incorporated the modeled strategy in order to actively participate in and support the conversation.

Engaged beyond the text. Students were also engaged beyond the text, meaning participants pushed their thinking past the passive role of reading into a new level of understanding. The students demonstrated they were engaged beyond the text by exhibiting empathy towards the character’s circumstances and by asking questions to promote further discussion. These literacy behaviors were often demonstrated through
students making connections with the texts they were reading, such as when they empathized with a character.

**Empathy through connections.** Throughout our book club discussions, the students would often empathize with what the character was experiencing. Students demonstrated an understanding and awareness of the character’s feelings and thoughts by connecting with the character and often posing possible alternatives to the character’s actions during our discussions. One instance of this literacy behavior occurred when discussing the book, *Yummy*. At this point in the book Yummy, the main character of the graphic novel, was on the run from the police after he accidentally shot and killed a 14 year old girl.

- Javon: Do you think Yummy can change?
- Deshawn: Yeah
- Donald: Dang, that’s a good question!
- Kareem: He’s dead, he can’t change.
- Donald: If he would of just went with his grandma and not them [gang members], cause at the end he [Yummy] was crying and all scared.
- Isaac: He never would have shot that girl, he would have been okay.
- Donald: I know, he wanted to go home – that he wanted to change.
- Isaac: For real, for real, he would have been alright, but he grew up with it. That’s why he started sayin’ he was scared. Everybody knew he shot her.
- Researcher: Oh, because he shot this sweet girl and not another gang member?
Devante: She was only 14, and he was only 11, and she wanted to be a hair designer.

Researcher: That’s a good point. Do you think he could change?

Devante: He tried to reach out.

Isaac: Because he … he tried, he tried.

Researcher: Is there something…

Devante: Well, in one half he was bad and the other half he was nice, sweet and respectful.

Deshawn: Yeah, he had that teddy bear too.

Isaac: He died with his teddy bear.

Edwin: He was real.

Devante: He never had a present.

Donald: Ever, from his mom or dad.

Deshawn: Or his dad.

Researcher: Do you think he was two different people?

Group: Yeah, yes.

Isaac: I think he was a Gemini, he was born in May just like me. Cause I got two sides. Quiet and funny but if you make me mad, this is what’s going to happen. *(laughs)* You’ve seen me mad before.

Researcher: That’s a good point

*(group laughs)*

Researcher: Devante, you said you had another question you wanted to ask us.
Devante: Let me find it…do you think if he had parents in his life, this would happen?
Group: No, no
Isaac: He might have turned out different.
Devante: If he would have had both his mom and dad.
Donald: If he was still with his grandma he would have been alright.
Researcher: Why?
Donald: Cause grandmas love you no matter what.
Researcher: You don’t think it mattered about the mom and dad?
Donald: No, his grandma would be okay.
Researcher: Well, look at what his mom and dad did to Yummy.
Group: Beat him, burned him.
Edwin: Cut him.
Donald: In the book it said when he was three, he had scars from his mom.
Researcher: You know…I was also really surprised that he loved animals because usually when a kid is abused like that, burned or hit, many times they end up abusing animals because they were abused.
Deshawn: Just like Michael Myers?
Edwin: Maybe like him.
Donald: On my dad’s side…I got a cousin who was abused.
Researcher: What’s he like now?
Donald: He’s alright, not by my dad, but by other people…he was hurt bad.
Students used their background knowledge to empathize with what the character experienced and presented possible alternative choices the character could have made. For example, Donald mentions, “If he [Yummy] would of just went with his grandma and not them [gang members] cause at the end he [Yummy] was crying and all scared.” Donald offered the option of Yummy going with his grandmother instead of waiting for his gang members, who eventually kill Yummy, to pick him up. Later in the conversation Donald added, “Cause grandmas love you no matter what” demonstrating that he possibly has or had a grandmother who demonstrated these qualities and would have provided Yummy with a feasible alternative. Here, Donald’s engagement was initiated and sustained by his personal connections to the text.

Isaac also empathizes with the character’s actions by explaining, “I think he was a Gemini, he was born in May just like me. Cause I got two sides. Quiet and funny but if you make me mad, this is what’s going to happen. (laughs) You’ve seen me mad before.” Here, Isaac demonstrated an understanding of the character’s actions by comparing himself with the character to possibly commiserate with the choices made by the character.

**Asking questions.** During our discussions, the students often posed questions to the other book club members which furthered discussion and encouraged students to stay engaged in the conversation. Students valued asking and answering questions as explained by Donald, “Answering questions and like when people are asking questions, it got us talking” (Final Interview, January 30, 2014).
While some of the questions were higher level and thought provoking, the majority of the questions posed by students were low-level as many were simple recall-related questions and often stemmed from their confusion about what they read. However, the lower level questions that the students presented frequently promoted higher level thinking, which led to a rich discussion. The nature of the questions and the discussion that followed allowed the students to share what they knew and expand their knowledge through the discussion.

For example, Deshawn asked a question about the word faith as it is used in the book, *12 Rounds of Glory*. Muhammad Ali was drafted to serve in the Army during the Vietnam War in 1966. He requested deferment from serving, citing that his recently converted “Islamic” religious beliefs prohibited him from fighting in the war. The students did not understand the term Islamic and asked me to explain. After stating what I understood about Islam, Deshawn continued with a question about the confusing term:

Deshawn: I got a question about that too. Page 74 at the bottom.

Researcher: At the bottom of page 74? Why don’t you read that part aloud to us? Make sure you listen to this please, it’s very powerful.

Deshawn: (Reads the passage)

>You stepped up to voice
>What most could not say
>Because the light of Islam
>Guided your way
>And strengthened your conviction
>As you took a stand,
>Putting your faith
>Into Allah’s hands.
>But what is faith?
>How is it defined?
Is it love...
Is it trust...
In a spirit so divine? (Smith, 2007, p. 74)

Researcher: Thank you for sharing. Okay good! Deshawn did a good job of reading this. So, what’s your question?

Deshawn: Right there, what’s faith?

Researcher: So, you don’t know what it means?

Deshawn: Yeah, like what does it mean?

Isaac: It’s just god’s will.

Deshawn: True.

Kareem: Isn’t it being true?

Researcher: Truthful or true to god?

Kareem: No, being true.

Researcher: Maybe.

Devante: You know Jermaine in our lunch period? He’s…I asked him where he lived and he pointed right like this, like straight up.

Researcher: Oh really!

Devante: I know him because he goes to my uncle’s church.

Researcher: Isaac, what do you think, what is faith?

Isaac: I don’t know.

Researcher: Well, are you a faithful person? Or a religious person?

Garrett: I am a little bit.

Researcher: How do you know?
Garrett: umm…

Edwin: How long have you been in a relationship with him [god]?

Garrett: Five years

Edwin: Faith is a type of spiritualness. It’s something that you believe in.

Researcher: Something that you believe in?

Edwin: Yeah, like I believe in you, like I believe that you can do it or something like that, you know how I do it….you do this and be good.

Researcher: So, why was religion and faith so important to Muhammad Ali?

Devante: Because he came from…ummm…he came so far, he was…wasn’t he a slave?

Deshawn: No, his grandmother was.

Devante: Yeah, his grandmother was a slave, and he did so much. He didn’t go to the war to fight for his country, but he ended up going to jail.

Garrett: Because they called him the wrong name.

Devante: Yeah, they called him the wrong name, and ahh…and ended up losing his title and he got it back and towards the end of the story, he fell in love.

Researcher: I meant he was thrown in jail because of his faith, right?

Group: Um, yeah

Researcher: Would you be thrown in jail for something like that? Like your faith?
Devante: Yeah.
Isaac: No.
Kareem: Ummmm...I don’t know?
Deshawn: I would. You wouldn’t?
Researcher: I probably would, but I’m not sure. I’m not a real…like I believe in god, but I don’t go to church every week.
Deshawn: I go once a month. What about you?
Isaac: Yeah, me too, once a month.
Devante: Yeah, but isn’t there more than one god?
Researcher: I think it depends on what you believe in.
Isaac: Hold on…listen… it depends how you die. If you die for your sins then you go to H E double hockey sticks.

(group laughs)
Researcher: Thank you for not saying the word…I appreciate it.
Isaac: But, if you pray and let god forgive you for your sins, that you have caused, you will go to heaven, right?

(group starts clapping and laughing)
Deshawn: I really don’t believe in, what’s it called?…hell…I really don’t think it’s real.
Researcher: So, does your whole church think that or just you? I’m just asking out of curiosity because some churches don’t believe in a hell.
Deshawn: They believe in it, I just don’t believe in it.
Garrett: I don’t believe in it either.
Devante: It says it in the Bible though…fiery pit.
Isaac: Yeah, that’s what they talk about.
Researcher: But remember, we can all have our own opinions.
Isaac: Well, it does say fiery pit but how can you know?
Researcher: But from what I understand a person wrote the bible, not god.
Deshawn: That’s why I don’t believe in hell. (Book Club, November 11, 2013)

Interestingly enough, this discussion demonstrates how an initial low-level question developed into a higher level thinking engagement between the book club members while also generating additional questions. Even though the discussion did veer away from the text, each member was invested in answering the questions raised and having his voice heard. Providing a space that encouraged questioning intensified the students’ involvement in the discussion and also gave them control over what was discussed.

**Students were intrinsically motivated to read.** Although the concept of reading motivation is somewhat vague, complex, and difficult to measure (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007), intrinsic motivation is characterized as reading for enjoyment and reading as a pleasurable activity (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007). While students can be motivated in multiple ways and the level of motivation can vary (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002), participants in this study were intrinsically motivated to read by reading their reading assignments, reading more than they did before, and demonstrating an interest in reading additional culturally relevant books.
Students read. Students were reading for the sake of reading possibly because they were able to choose what they wanted to read or possibly because they were able to identify with the selected books. While the students and I negotiated the reading assignment for the next book club meeting at the conclusion of every session, there were no consequences placed on the students if they did not read the assignment in its entirety. However, the students read their mutually negotiated reading assignments and often read more than what was required.

As previously detailed in Table 10, students read more than the required amount of reading 31.94% of the time, students read the required reading 29.96% of the time, students read less than what was required 34.15% of the time, and did not read at all 3.96% of the time. While the previous percentages indicate that students read at least some of their required reading 96.05% of the time, students indicated they increased their overall amount of reading throughout the study when compared to their previous reading habits.

Isaac explained why he decided to participate in the literacy behavior of reading to prepare for our book club sessions,

Researcher: When I looked through here and I was noticing if you read or you didn’t read the whole time, usually you read what you were supposed to read. Why did you read even though it wasn’t for a grade or –?

Isaac: That’s just respectful. We got about three days to read to the pages, but if when we come here we like we didn’t even read the
Having the opportunity to talk about the text at our club meetings had a noteworthy impact on Isaac to keep reading and to continue participating in the group.

**Students read more than they did before.** Several instances were documented that showed my surprise at how much the students were reading, such as, “They are reading! Will they keep this up?” (Field Notes, November 20, 2013). This was one of my original concerns when developing the paper curriculum in chapter three.

The students also expressed this change over the course of the study: “I read more. I make sure I read all of it. I see more of the story. I don’t want to stop” (Isaac, Reflection Journal, December 9, 2013); “I’m reading these books and I didn’t read before” (Kareem, Reflection Journal, December 19, 2013); and “I like rereading the books too. I’m starting to read a lot more books” (Final Interview, January 20, 2014).

Devante also discussed his increase in reading:

**Researcher:** Did you find yourself doing anything differently when you read these books?

**Devante:** Actually, I read more.

**Researcher:** Why do you think that?

**Devante:** Because first I thought the book wasn’t going to be interesting, so I was in like Yummy and Bang. I read the first couple pages and so I thought it could be a good book. So, I would just start reading the rest of it. So, I want them all.
Researcher: As it got better, you wanted to read it more?

Devante: Mm-hmm. (affirmative)

Researcher: Has this changed how much you read on your own now?

Devante: Yes.

Researcher: Why do you think that?

Devante: Because the books that we read, a lot of us in there [the books], it was about people, their life, how their life is and how it went on and what their parents did and did not do. (Final Interview, February 3, 2014)

Students revealed that they increased the amount of personal reading when they read the selected books to participate in our book club discussions.

Books promoting books. Students displayed an interest in wanting to read more CRL. After the book club group read *Yummy and Bang!*, the students began asking me for additional books to read that are “Black books” (Deshawn, Book Club, December 9, 2013) where African American males were featured as the main character. I cautiously mentioned that I would bring several to our next book club meeting, but these would need to be additional readings. Meaning the students were still required to read the books we initially agreed upon. Unfortunately, I forgot to bring the additional culturally relevant books to our next meeting and the students inquired again about the possibility (Field Notes, December 12, 2013).

Several additional books were gathered for the students’ to peruse after the following meeting on December 19, 2013: *A Strong Right Arm* (Green, 2002),
Muhammad Ali: The King of the Ring (Helfand, 2011), Day of Tears (Lester, 2005), The Silence of our Friends (Long & Demonakos, 2012), and Somewhere in the Darkness (Myers, 1992). Deshawn, Edwin, Donald, and Devante each chose an additional book to read, while Isaac explained that Deshawn picked the book he wanted to read, so he would read the book when Deshawn was finished (Field Notes, December 19, 2013). After the students returned from their two week holiday break, Deshawn and Donald returned their books to me and asked for additional books. When these two students were asked why they wanted to read more books, Deshawn explained, “I don’t want to read no White books no more. I don’t. I think Black books is way more interesting” while Donald nodded his head in agreement (Book Club and Field Notes, January 6, 2014).

One student, Devante, mentioned to me that he looked for more “Black books” in the school’s library, but to no avail. He stated, “they [the library] only have books about Asians and White people, nothing about us” (Book Club, December 12, 2013). In addition, Donald voiced his opinion again about wanting to read more “Black books.” Donald was asked if he found himself doing anything differently when he read our books. He replied:

Donald: Thinking differently.
Researcher: Okay, how?
Donald: Because, when I used to read books, I used to think they, like, boring. I ain’t even want to read them, but you start bringing me good books, like Bang! and Yummy, and I read them, like, yeah, I want to read more of these books like this.
Researcher: Good. And when you say, “books like this.” What do you mean by that?

Donald: Like Yummy.

Researcher: So, books with Black characters or books you can relate to?

Donald: Yeah, both. (Final Interview, January 30, 2014)

Donald wanted to read more “Black books” because he found the books we were reading relatable. Once the students discovered and read our books, they wanted to keep reading more of them.

Students valued specific characteristics within the text. While the design of the study permitted ample opportunities for students to express their perspectives on the culturally relevant books they read, they often had difficulty expressing what specific textual components they valued. Common responses from students were “It’s interesting” or “I just wanted to keep reading it” (Field Notes, October 31 & November 11, 2013). At this point the students were describing an overall connectedness to the text, such as, “I connect with these. I read these books. I’m into the book” (Jamar, Reflection Journal, November 14, 2013); “I liked that it related to me” (Kareem, Reflection Journal, November 18, 2013); and “We’re reading books about my culture” (Devante, Reflection Journal, November 20, 2013). However, as the study progressed, students were able to provide more insight into what they did and did not appreciate about the books, possibly because they were provided with continuous access to experience these types of texts.

Characters. The characters in the books mattered. More specifically, the character’s race, age, and personal characteristics were important to the students. All of
the students, at one point in the study, commented on the importance of the character being Black or African American. For example, Isaac stated, “I like it [Bang!] cuz the story is about a Black kid” (Book Club, December 12, 2013), while Garrett explained, “I like it. It’s about a famous Black person named Muhammad” (Reflection Journal, October 31, 2013). While race was a noteworthy feature, the students also respected the character’s personal characteristics.

Many of the students indicated they appreciated strong African American male characters who hold true to their convictions. This was especially prominent in the nonfiction texts, such as 12 Rounds of Glory featuring Muhammad Ali and Testing the Ice detailing an important event Jackie Robinson’s life. Kareem wrote the comment, I think that it is a great book and I think it’s really taught us a lot about how everything is not just there for you, you have to earn it and work for it. Mohammad Ali is a great person and he was a little bit cocky. He stayed true to his religion and he was a champion. I know what it feels like to be at the top and lose it all. (Reflection Journal, November 14, 2013)

In addition, Deshawn disclosed, “He [Muhammad Ali] did not let people get to his head and make him mad (Research Journal, January 21, 2014) and Isaac stated, “He [Jackie Robinson] didn’t let people talk him out of it. He did what he wanted to do” (Culturally Relevant Book Analysis, February 3, 2014). These comments indicate the students’ appreciation of the Black male character’s ability to persevere and commit to their beliefs.
The character’s age was also important to the students. Donald explained that he liked *Bang!* because “The dude is our age” while Deshawn chimed in with, “He’s about 14, so I come from him” (Book Club, January 9, 2014). Isaac mentioned that he liked *12 Rounds of Glory* because “He’s a young Black man that wants to change the world” (Reflection Journal, November 11, 2013). Also, the students explained they liked the book *You Don’t Even Know Me* because “It’s about a whole bunch of kids our age” (Book Club, January 21, 2014). In addition, Devante explained,

Yummy and Bang, they was around the same age and I’m around the same age with them, so I understand a little bit what they’re talking about and where they’re coming from (Final Interview, February 3, 2014).

The students recognized that the characters were of a similar age and identified this characteristic as important to them.

**The “real world”**. As mentioned before, the students struggled with identifying specific components of the texts that they valued. However, one characteristic that the students appreciated seemed to dominate their explanations, “It talks about the real world” (Donald, Reflection Journal, November 20, 2013). They articulated that the books represent the “real world” that they live in. For example, Deshawn expressed, “It [*Bang!*] tells how they in the book is how we live out in the world” (Reflection Journal, December 12, 2013). Kareem adds, “The book we are reading [*Yummy*] actually fits my life story and these books I actually enjoy” (Reflection Journal, November 20, 2013). Isaac also revealed, “The book we are reading [*You Don’t Even Know Me*] is connecting with the real world and what happened in it. It’s the struggle. It’s how my life is”
(Reflection Journal, January 21, 2014). The students valued how their lives were authentically represented in the books provided.

**Uncomfortable topic.** While the students valued several specific characteristics featured within the culturally relevant literature, the students also identified one specific component that they did not appreciate. The students were usually interested in discussing what they read, however after we discussed *Shooter* for the first time, the following notation was made:

> We talked about *Shooter* today and it was like pulling teeth—I haven’t had this experience yet, usually they all want to talk about what we’ve read. They wanted to talk about things happening in their neighborhood. (Field Notes, January 6, 2014)

Interestingly enough, several days before our group met, I recorded the following as I read to page 40 in *Shooter* to prepare for our upcoming book club:

> I’m not sure this book [*Shooter*] is really relevant or reflective of what they experience every day. Possible reasons: it’s not based in the inner city (suburbs), the setting is in a therapy session—might not relate to this or know what it’s like, more of a high school setting than a middle school setting. I can’t wait to see what they think (Field Notes, January 3, 2014).

After our book club discussion on *Shooter*, I struggled for the second meeting in a row, students were asked if they wanted to vote on whether we should keep reading *Shooter* or not. The group decided to vote and unanimously voted the book out of our book club. Students were asked to provide feedback on why they did not enjoy this book.
Deshawn replied, “I thought that Shooter was going to be interesting, but it wasn’t” (Book Club, January 9, 2014). The students overwhelmingly indicated that they did not want to keep reading Shooter because, “I don’t like the parts where they kept saying he was gay. I don’t like that” (Isaac, Book Club, January 9, 2014). Students also indicated this perspective again when completing their Culturally Relevant Book Analysis, Edwin explained, “I didn’t like gay people talk” and Donald added “I didn’t like this book. It talked about gay people” (Culturally Relevant Book Analysis, February 3, 2014). Reading and discussing a book with a potential homosexual character was uncomfortable for students. This may be linked to the common assumption that African Americans are significantly less tolerant of homosexuality when compared to Whites (Lemelle & Battle, 2004). Lemelle and Battle (2004) also found that “Black masculinity explains the gendered differences and negative attitudes within the African American community toward gay men” (p. 40). Therefore, it is possible that the participants, who indicated they appreciated strong Black male characters in their books, felt emasculated when reading Shooter.

**Role of Space and Discourse**

Space and discourse played an imperative role within the enacted curriculum. In order for meaningful discourse to take place, a space was needed to foster trust and respect with all group members, including myself. The term “space” is defined as a student-centered place where students have the opportunity to cultivate open dialogue to discuss topics that are meaningful to them without the fear of repercussions, such as
being silenced when discussing a topic that is meaningful, but considered taboo in a traditional curriculum.

**Gradually building a community of trust and respect.** Creating a space where the students felt comfortable to discuss their preferred topics about the books was important. Students wanted a “teacher” they could trust and respect, but also valued the respectful actions of the group members.

**Importance of trust.** Cultivating a community where the group members trusted each other took time. They were hesitant to share personal information with me that might “get them in trouble” (Field Notes, November 14, 2013). The conversation with Isaac demonstrates importance of gradually building trust in order to create a space where students felt they could openly talk about their opinions:

Researcher: So, Isaac, when I looked back through the notes I had on you and I started listening to some of the recordings from our book clubs, I noticed at the beginning, you weren't participating as much, you weren't saying as much, and sometimes you didn't read, but as we went on, you started reading every time and you started saying more. So what do you think that was?

Isaac: I just got used to you.

Researcher: So what do you mean by that?

Isaac: I was shy at first. I didn’t know if you would snitch on us.

Researcher: And you didn’t think you could say some things?

Isaac: Yeah.
Researcher: Why?

Isaac: Cause that’s what teachers do. (Final Interview, February 2, 2014)

Other students confirmed Isaac’s opinion of building trust in our group. During one of our last meetings together, the group was asked to “Tell me some of the things that you enjoyed about our meetings. What mattered to you?” (Book Club, January 21, 2014).

Donald: You mattered.

Researcher: Really? You think I mattered?

Donald: Yeah.

Deshawn: Yeah.

Devante: Yes.

Garrett: You were fun actually.

Researcher: Okay thanks.

Donald: You really was.

Deshawn: Because you ain’t snitching.

Donald: We can talk to you.

Garrett: Yeah we can talk to you, anyway.

Deshawn: Well I can talk to you.

Researcher: Okay.

Deshawn: You’re – to us you’re, –to us you’re like our friend, not a teacher.

Donald: I feel a group hug going on.

(group laughter)
Deshawn: Yeah like a teacher. You’re like a teacher sized friend that who we can talk to and you’ll listen and understand us.

Researcher: So you think I understand you more?

Group: Yes.

Deshawn: Yes.

Researcher: Did you think I tried to understand you?

Group: Yes.

Donald: Teachers they try to understand you for a whole second then they –

Devante: Like they will rat you out.

Donald: They go to the office like the next day – you’re really good at not tellin’ anything. (Book Club, January 21, 2014)

Here the group appreciated that they could trust me to not “rat” them out about the topics they discussed. A relationship was established between the participants and me that was considered respectful and trustworthy by the participants. This type of relationship helped facilitate a space where they could talk openly about topics and ideas that were meaningful to them. However, it is important to mention that I did report two of our book club discussions to Mrs. Murray and the guidance counselor because of student safety concerns, which were previously explained in the enacted curriculum. Even though the group members knew I addressed these two concerns with the appropriate school personnel, they still considered me trustworthy.

**Importance of respect.** Students also valued the respect demonstrated by other participants and me. The students voiced their opinion in regards to respecting each other
through getting along and listening to each other. Statements such as, “We are getting along with each other. I was happy that we didn’t argue” (Garrett, Reflection Journal, November 18, 2013), “They was listening to what I was saying and we was telling how we was really feeling and telling people how to solve their problems (Deshawn, Reflection Journal, November 8, 2013), and “I liked it because we bonded and told each other’s stories” (Devante, Reflection Journal, December 12, 2013) reveal the importance of respectful behaviors exhibited by members in our book clubs.

The students also valued the respect I demonstrated towards them. For example, at the start of one of our book club meetings, a student pulled out the statement, “The best thing about school right now is…because…” to answer for our “Getting to Know You” statements.

Researcher: Okay, Devante. You’re next, what do you like the best?
Devante: Can I tell what I don’t like.
Researcher: Sure, that’s fine.
Deshawn: The teachers.
Donald: Yeah, me too.
Researcher: Really? Because why?
Devante: They think they can disrespect anyone – I’m not talking about you.
Researcher: Oh that was –.
Deshawn: Why do teachers think like they can like respect off the – like right automatically?
Researcher: Don’t you have to earn respect?
Group:  Yeah.

Garrett:  Yes.

Deshawn:  They got to earn respect first.

Researcher:  I –

Devante:  Like you know, if you say – if you want respect you got to give it but it’s not like I can give it to them. They just take it to another Level like Mr. Stanton. Making like they –.

Researcher:  Okay, let’s not say names.

Kareem:  Like that they –.

Deshawn:  Let me come to that classroom and…

Researcher:  Hold on, hold on. Okay, am I respectful to you?

Group:  Yes.

Donald:  Yes. I would love to have a teacher like that.

Isaac:  Yes.

Researcher:  Because do I –


Researcher:  Okay, but do I respect you?

Group:  Yeah.

Donald:  Yes. You respect us.

Donald:  You talk – you talk nicely.

Researcher:  But, I am a teacher.

Devante:  Yeah, but you talk nicely, like Garrett said. (Book Club,
December 19, 2013

Students expressed that they welcomed the respectful behavior of “talking nicely.” The respectful relationship that the group members engaged in established a space that was not only appreciated and embraced by the students, but also facilitated open and honest conversations where students had the opportunity for their individual and group voices to be heard.

Respect was also valued between group members. At the end of one of our meetings, students were asked what we needed to improve upon for our next meeting. Devante was the first to respond:

Devante: Respect.

Researcher: Why? What do you mean?

Devante: We showed respect. I had respect…but we need to show more, too.

Researcher: To each other or to me?

Devante: No, to each other. If one person’s talking, then another person starts talking. Then we all start talking.

Researcher: Do you think we should do something about this during our next meeting?

Group: Yeah, yes.

Researcher: Well, like what? What should we do to show more respect?

Deshawn: Don’t interrupt.

Researcher: How should we do that?
This notion was also voiced by additional members of the group as they made comments in their reflection journals stating, “Stop interruptions and respect more” (Kareem, December 5, 2013), and “We need to be more respectful to others and the person who is talking” (Jamar, December 5, 2013). While addressing interruptions was one of the curricular decisions made by the group is detailed later in this section, the students wanted a space where their voice was respected and heard by all group members, not just the researcher.

**Space for individual and group student voice.** Our book club meetings supplied a space where individual and group voices were heard, not only in providing curriculum input, but also for providing a space for “being true” and oppositional anecdotes with traditionally unconventional topics. Members were periodically asked if they thought their voice was being heard during our discussions. While they initially thought “being heard” meant the audio level of their voices, I reframed the term and explained it as “group members are listening to you” (Field Notes, December 9, 2013). Isaac appreciated this aspect by claiming, “Yeah, you give everybody a chance to talk if they got to talk, instead of just moving on” (Book Club, January 6, 2014). Providing a space that encouraged open discussion for students was perceived by students as an opportunity for “being true.”

**“Being true”**. The students referred to the term “being true” multiple times throughout of discussions. One instance occurred when I asked the students to reflect in their journals about what surprised them about our book club meetings. The following
discussion highlights where “being true” was first mentioned by Isaac as he was asked to explain the phrase.

Isaac: I’m gonna write… I’ll write being true.

Researcher: What?

Isaac: Being true.

Researcher: I don’t know who that is.

Isaac: How don’t you all know who being true is?

Researcher: I’m not following you. What it is? I thought you said Ben Trill.

(group laughter)

Donald: It’s not a dude.

Researcher: Oh okay. Ben what?

Isaac: No, being true.

Researcher: What does that mean?

Isaac: I’ll say it’s like – it’s like I being real but…

Deshawn: I don’t know how to explain…

Donald: I got it on my shirt too.

Researcher: Yeah, but can you help me? I don’t know what that means.

Isaac: Sometimes…It’s like a baseball bat or a basketball and it’s a soccer ball or game or you got somethin’ awesome and there is somethin’ nice, but then it’s really just a basketball.

Researcher: So, it’s like you think you have something great, but it’s really not that great?
Isaac: Yeah, but it’s who you are too. (Book Club, December 5, 2013)

Based on this conversation, “being true” means being able to act in a natural, unforced manner. Students did not have to invest their energy in defending who they are or trying to act in a contrived way, but rather used their life experiences to build on conversation in a way that seemed organic to them.

**Oppositional anecdotes with taboo topics.** Oppositional anecdotes were articulated by all members of the book club. The term, oppositional anecdote, is employed here to illustrate the type of dialogue the students regularly engaged in during our book club discussions and might typically be deemed taboo in regular classrooms. Students often shared a short account of a particular incident or event that they personally experienced. These narratives were frequently short biographical accounts that were interesting in nature and connected with a particular aspect of the book we were reading. Their oppositional anecdotes frequently challenged the accepted narrative of a traditional curriculum by raising additional points of view that are often silenced or ignored.

While the topics of the anecdotes were regularly taboo and might be prohibited or considered unmentionable in a classroom, the topics were in no way vulgar or disrespectful, but focused on lived experiences that reinforced and further explained the subject of discussion. The anecdotes were typically about an instance or event in the book that they connected with and wanted to elaborate. Other members of the group would join in and reinforce the topic of discussion by adding their own oppositional anecdotes. For example, during one book club session, the students were discussing
Bang! where the main character, Mann, was almost arrested when he was walking down the street. Kareem identified with Mann’s experience:

Kareem: I was about to get arrested for having Fruities in my pocket.

Researcher: Why?

Kareem: Because they seen me put the bag in my pocket.

Researcher: And they thought it was…?

Kareem: And they thought it was marijuana or drugs or something.

Researcher: I have a question. If I was walking down where you were, and I put Fruities in my pocket ...

Kareem: No.

Researcher: Would they, would they come up and say anything to me?

Group: No.

Researcher: Why, go ahead. Why?

Isaac: Because of your skin color.

Kareem: Like they don't know that you're the type that does that.

Donald: If you know what I'm saying it's how Black females dress out here.

Isaac: Yes.

Researcher: Do you think if it was a Black female they would still stop her?

Group: Mm-hm (affirmative).

Researcher: Do you think if it was a White male?

Group: Yes, they probably will.

Donald: Yes, they probably would.
Researcher: It's the way you're dressed?

Kareem: If they are dressed like Black people, then you will get arrested, yes.

Group: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay, that's interesting.

Kareem: If you look educated, then they don't... they're not going to stop you.

Isaac: You know like people with glasses, they're not going stop you.

Donald: For real.

Deshawn: It was dark as ever, and they was like about six of us and...It was like... and they was trying to say we was robbing cars, and we were just coming through the walk. We had duffle bags on, and they thought we was robbing people cars, and that was like wild though. They didn't find nothing and we was made and everything.

Researcher: Wait, so they stopped you?

Deshawn: Yes, it was like five or six of us.

Researcher: Were you all Black?

Deshawn: It was like one White boy but he's dark skinned, and he look way dark right now.

Researcher: So the cops stopped you, what did they say to you?

Deshawn: They thought we was robbing people's cars.
Kareem: They was like, what's your name? They had searched (in their computer) like, if we had been in juvenile before.

Devante: Actually, they can’t... if you're under arrest, they can't do nothing. If you're not under arrest.

Isaac: The first thing is they want your name, your number and your ...

Donald: They didn't ask for my number. I got stopped about a month ago.

Researcher: Wait, you've been stopped by the police too?

Donald: Mm-hm and I wasn’t doing nothing wrong it was curfew, curfew ... curfew. The first time I was so scared. I was just ... I heard gunshots, I heard gunshots. And I know he thought like I came from out of a party. I walked out, and a police fleet. They was like state police cars and I walked across the street, and I came back over across the street, and they just pulled up on me, a couple of us. We both put our hands on our head and just assumed the position.

Deshawn: Wait was it Dunsmore?

Researcher: Is this, is that the cop?

Donald: Yes, just ignorant.

Researcher: Wait, you actually know of one cop who does this?

Group: Yes.

Jamar: Yes, his name is Dunsmore... yes.

Group: Everybody knows his name.
Isaac: If you run for a long time, he going to catch you and when he catches you, he's going to ...that's just what happens.

Donald: He's slamming you. (Book Club, December 12, 2013)

This oppositional anecdote told by the group served as not only an opportunity for me to learn from their encounters, but also as a means for students to share their relevant experiences that contradict the customary understandings typically embodied in schools. The discussion Donald, Kareem, Isaac, Devante, Jamar, and Deshawn engaged in detailed their personal experiences with racial profiling by the local police force. This anecdote conflicts with the common dialogue typically represented in schools where the police force is portrayed as helpful and trustworthy. However, this does not accurately characterize the participants’ reality or experience with law enforcement. Contrary to what the participants described, my experience with law enforcement had been positive, however, their oppositional anecdotes helped me understand what the character, Mann, was experiencing in terms of police brutality and racial profiling, which is often considered a taboo topic and not openly discussed in many classrooms.

The students also recognized the space which provided an opportunity to discuss relevant and important topics. Several students wrote in their reflection journals, “I liked how we was talking about the cops harp to get the blacks. That’s what happens.” (Donald, December 12, 2013) and “I do not like cops. I did like that we was talking about the truth and how bad cops are” (Deshawn, December 12, 2013). Although police brutality was discussed here, students also engaged in meaningful oppositional anecdotes about other typically prohibited topics, such as race, racial inequalities, discrimination,
and violence. Our book club conversations became a space where the students’ perspectives were an asset when talking about the book and not a hindrance as it supplied a point-of-view that might have not been previously welcomed or considered in their language arts classroom.

**Space for “talking out” the texts.** Even though the students used our book club meetings as a space for sharing their personal experiences and discussing taboo topics, the students utilized this space to “talk out” the text. During these engagements students would often collaboratively discuss the complexities of an issue presented in the book which led to an enhanced understanding through discussion. They listened to each other in a cooperative manner and shared various opinions of the characters and/or events for others to consider. As an example, the group began discussing the decisions Yummy was making while he was running from the police. I shared a phrase that I underlined and voiced a comment I had written in the margins.

Researcher: So, he’s running from the cops. Why do you think I wrote that it seems like he can't win at this point?

Isaac: Because he never got away with it, and then he got caught.

Researcher: Maybe.

Donald: You know because his childhood is crazy.

Researcher: So, I mean that's a lot of things stacked against him, right? His mother is not there.

Donald: His dad ain't there. His dad is in jail for drugs.

Deshawn: He seemed good if people would really ...
Kareem: He said that grandma was letting him stay.

Researcher: Yes, his grandma is ... but remember she was like ...

Devante: His grandma was beating him.

Donald: His grandma was beating him?

Kareem: No, it was his mom.

Deshawn: Oh ya, his mom.

Researcher: They had like 20 kids in his grandma’s house at any time.

Devante: But someone didn't know that he did ... it was so much kids that didn't keep count so they didn't know who left and who came back.

Deshawn: One, two, three ....

Devante: So he would leave for like three or four days, and maybe a week.

Researcher: Mm-hm.

Devante: And then come back.

Researcher: Two of you said that your mothers are so important to you, that you couldn't live without them. But he didn't have any type... he doesn't even know what a mother is. Does he really know what a mom is?

Devante: See, he ain’t got nobody.

Group: No. Nope.

Researcher: Because his mom beat him, burned him.

Deshawn: What about his dad? What about his dad?

Donald: It says here that his dad is in jail.
Devante: The only person that he really loves in this book, is his grandma.

Researcher: Mm-hm. Why?

Devante: Because she the one who provides him with clothes, food, and basically somewhere to sleep.

Researcher: So what do you think, to be a successful person up to age 11, what do you think you need in your life, to be successful?

Devante: A home.

Deshawn: A guardian.

Researcher: A home, some type of guardian, right? What else?

Deshawn: A stable home.

Researcher: A stable home. Somebody to actually buy you food.

Group: Right.

Researcher: What about ...?

Donald: He had to get his own food.

Researcher: He had to get his own food didn't he? He had to steal it. So do you ... when I was reading this and it said he was stealing food…but he doesn't have any food. So was what he was doing really wrong?

Group: No. Not really.

Researcher: He was just trying to survive, why do you think ...?

Kareem: I ain't going to front, I used to steal.
Researcher: Why?
Kareem: I needed to eat. As I look back on my life, I think it was wrong.
Researcher: So you think you should have gotten food another way. Like go to a church or ...?
Kareem: It was all wrong.
Researcher: So, is what Yummy doing wrong?
Deshawn: Yeah, but he had to do it.
Group: Yeah.
Isaac: Sometimes you just got to do what you got to do.
Researcher: Why?
Deshawn: He got to survive.
Kareem: Yeah, but it still wrong. (Book Club, November 20, 2013)

This conversation is important for two reasons. First, students clarified the misunderstandings about who “beat” Yummy, his mother or his grandmother and where Yummy’s father was during these events as a collaborative group. Secondly, the students continued to engage in the conversation to evaluate Yummy’s decision to steal food. Kareem determined that stealing food is “wrong” based on his personal experiences, while others believed Yummy’s actions were justified because of his will to survive. Students were making informed comments based on their prior knowledge of the situation while “talking out” the problem through collaborative conversation.

**Students as knowledge creators within the enacted curriculum.** Students served as creators of knowledge within the space of our book club sessions. While
students are traditionally passive receivers of curriculum, the group members actively made many curricular decisions, as well as managerial decisions, usually in a purposeful manner. These curricular and managerial decisions consisted of: dealing with interruptions, reading out loud during our sessions, facilitating our meetings, negotiating the readings, and teaching the researcher about their culture.

**Dealing with interruptions.** As mentioned previously, the students valued respect between book club members, and interpreted interruptions as a lack of respect. Even though students recognized interruptions as something that needed to be “fixed”, they struggled knowing what actions to take to make this a reality within the context of our book club. Based on the conversation and reflection journal comments initially referenced in the “Importance of Respect” subcategory, I posed a remedy to the students’ concern of too many interruptions through the following conversation at the beginning of our meeting:

Researcher: Okay. The last time we met I asked you to write in your reflection journals about what you think needs to be changed about our book club meetings. I read through them and four of you said that you wish people would stop interrupting. I thought about this a little bit and I want you to think about how African Americans talk to each other and how White people talk to each other. *Note: As I am talking I drew Figure 5 on the chalkboard.*

*(group laughter)*
Donald: It’s all cool.

Researcher: No, that’s not what I mean. *(group laughter)* When African-American – this is African-American culture usually.

Here’s how the story goes (referring to drawing on board).

Isaac: We go like “Hey what’s up, and we’re good.”

Researcher: Right, exactly. It’s back and forth isn’t it? You guys talk back and forth back and forth. When White people tell a story the first person tells it and the other person listens to the whole thing and THEN the other person responds. But you guys go back and forth back and forth right?

Edwin: Yeah.

Group: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay so I want you to think about when you sit in a classroom which…

*Figure 5. Illustration of Discourse Patterns. Visual representation of how typical discourse patterns of different cultures often vary. Gay (2010) refers to these interactions as participatory-interactive discourse (African American) and passive-receptive discourse (White).*
Donald: Oh my god that one. (points to the “White” conversation)
Researcher: …conversation do you have?
Group: The other one. (points to the “White” conversation)
Researcher: This one?
Group: Yeah.
Researcher: When you sit in a classroom what happens?
Group: We get in trouble.
Researcher: You’re in trouble. So are classrooms set up – I want you to think about this, are class rooms set up for African-American culture?
(pause, no response)
Researcher: Or White culture?
Edwin: I would go with White. Because….
Isaac: Because the youth, the African-American culture, we communicate more.
Researcher: Alright, but what’s happening in class?
Edwin: They [the teachers] talk a little, we answer, they talk a little, we answer.
Researcher: So school is set up for what culture?
Group: White, White people like Andrew.
Researcher: Okay. So my point of this here is that you are getting frustrated because you are talking back and forth back and
forth right with what you are used to doing when you’re talking.

Donald: I’m used to that. (points to “African American” conversation)

Researcher: Right.

Donald: In class they keep on telling us stop talking.

Isaac: We’re not used to that.

Donald: Yeah.

Researcher: So, that’s why I think everybody is getting frustrated with each other because you’re used to talking one way, but in order for you to hear what everybody’s saying, you might have to start talking like that…or there might need to be some combination of the two pictures. How should we do that?

Deshawn: No idea.

Researcher: Well, I was thinking of something that I thought you might want to try out, since everyone seems frustrated with interruptions lately, but none of that is really anyone’s fault. Like I showed you on the board. I was thinking about a tally chart to show how many times we interrupt each other and we try to improve the number each meeting we have.

Kareem: What?
Researcher: So, if someone interrupts you while you’re talking, I’ll just make a tally mark on the board here. Each time that happens, I’ll mark another tally and we’ll add them up each time and try to improve. This way, you might become more aware of when you’re interrupting someone.

Deshawn: So what if the tally marks go up [in number]?

Researcher: Nothing, you’re not in trouble or anything… it just means we need to keep working at it. Do you want to try it out?

Group: Yes, yeah. (Book Club, December 9, 2013)

Based on the group’s realization of their frustration with interruptions, the expectation regarding discourse was modified. Students now expected everyone to listen to each other and avoid interjections in order for every group member to be heard. Independently and as a group, they acknowledge the value of being able to listen to others and to talk without interruptions and therefore thought a change needed to be made. While some interruptions continued to occur, students began to “regulate” the tally marks on their own. For example, if one student interrupted another, the first student would simply say “tally” and a tally would be marked on the board without stopping the flow of the discussion. The word, tally, became a type of unobtrusive signifier to the person interrupting to stop, while keeping the momentum of the conversation going.

Students as facilitators. The initial intention of students as facilitators, as outlined in chapter three, was to provide each student with an opportunity to lead our discussions. The students were uncomfortable with this arrangement and voiced their
feelings during the third book club meeting. Devante asked, “Why can’t we all just do it at the same time?” (Book Club, November 8, 2013). Garrett also stated his concern, “Yeah, I don’t like how one person’s got to do it” (Book Club, November 8, 2013). Taking their concerns into consideration, I asked, “What would you like to do then? I shouldn’t be the one who leads every time; this is your book club” (Book Club, November 8, 2013). For an alternative, students suggested that everyone facilitates every time we have a book club. The group decided that each member would come to every meeting with something they wanted to talk about. This process seemed “unnatural” at first as students would say “your turn” after they were finished. However, they gradually developed a more organic rhythm with every group member chiming in with their questions or comments without hesitation.

**Reading out loud.** Another suggestion made by students was to read out loud during our meetings. Garrett and Donald initiated this decision by writing in their reflection journals that, “We should read out loud more” and “We should read out load or in a circle in our group” (Research Journal, December 5, 2013). Based on their feedback, the option was posed to students and they responded positively (Field Notes, January 6, 2014). When a student referred to specific part in the book during our conversations, they had the option to read it aloud or ask me to read for them. Initially, students hesitated to read out loud, but gradually became more comfortable with the process. Donald mentioned that he was, “Not afraid to read aloud, because I was before” (Final Interview, January 30, 2014). In addition students revealed that reading out loud in our group became a more comfortable act. Deshawn explained, “It didn’t matter if I messed
up [reading out loud] cause no one made fun of me” (Final Interview, January 21, 2014), while Isaac added, “I actually liked it [reading out loud]. I didn’t even want to do it at first, but I got better” (Final Interview, February 3, 2014).

Teaching the researcher about African American male culture. Throughout the book club sessions, the students explained many aspects of African American male culture for me. I often asked students to explain something during their conversations if I was not familiar. Initially, the students were annoyed with my questioning as Deshawn asked me, “Why do you ask us so many questions about us?” (Book Club, November 20, 2013). I responded with, “Sometimes I have no idea what you’re talking about and I get confused, so I want you to explain it to me so I can understand.” I continued, “Remember, I told you that I’m a White girl who grew up around cows…I have no idea what you’re talking about sometimes, but I want to know” (Book Club, November 20, 2013). This response satisfied their curiosity and encouraged them to often ask me “Do you know what that means?” if they thought I might be confused about a statement someone made. They wanted me to understand as my questioning also made them feel valued. The following conversation highlights a section of Bang! where I begin reading aloud for another student and become confused about a sentence.

   Researcher: It was pitch black out, but off the road just a little, I saw camp fires and lanterns hanging from campers. I brushed wood off my clothes and out of my hair. Wiped blood off my face and felt around for bumps and bites I got all over me. Then I headed for the light walking slow, dipping low like the men around my way
always do. Wait, what does he mean there—dipping low like the men around my way always do?

Isaac: Dunking. Dunking and going. (dips his head down)

Donald: Yeah.

Edwin: Dodge.

Donald: Dodge.

Researcher: Dodge?

Donald: Like dodge ball.

Edwin: Like duck.

Researcher: It’s because of why?

Isaac: That’s what we do.

Deshawn: Cause we [African American males] get shot at.

Researcher: Really?

Isaac: It’s just what we do. (Book Club, December 12, 2013)

In this discussion, students explained the term “dipping” as it relates to their lives and culture. They provided me with important information to help me gain a deeper understanding of why the character acted like he did. Here, the students’ knowledge played a valuable role in helping me realize the true meaning of the author’s words.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings for a holistic case study featuring eight African American male eighth grade students who participated in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum. The findings reveal that students were engaged
within the text to help further discussion through underlining specific statements or chunks of text they planned to discuss during our meetings. Students were also engaged beyond the text as demonstrated by empathy through connections and asking questions during further discussion.

Data analysis also revealed that students were intrinsically motivated to read their books as they read their assignments and often read more than what was required. The students read more than they did before while participating in a relevant curriculum as students began requesting additional culturally relevant books to read on their own free time. Specific characteristics of the culturally relevant books were preferred by students. The character’s age, race, and personal characteristics played an important role as well as the book representing the “real world” they live in.

Moreover, building a community that considered and demonstrated trust and respect was valued by the participants. They thought the book club meetings were a space for “being true” and articulated oppositional anecdotes that often featured taboo topics that are not traditionally welcomed in a traditional classrooms. Students collaboratively engaged in “talking out” the events in the texts to discuss confusion or a problem posed by the character. In addition, the students actively participated in adjusting the curriculum to better fit their needs as they dealt with interruptions, facilitated book club sessions as a group, decided to read out loud during sessions, and taught the researcher about certain aspects of African American male culture.
The next chapter discusses these findings and presents possible implications for middle school literacy educators. Along with this, the study’s limitations and potential for future research are also presented.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study provide an examination of what happens when eight African American adolescent male students participate in a culturally relevant reading curriculum that incorporates culturally relevant literature. There is a gap in the literature in understanding how students take part and become involved in a culturally relevant curriculum and how they perceive culturally relevant literature. Therefore, this study identifies what happens when African American male students participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum thus providing insight on how students partake and become involved in a curriculum that considers their lived experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the data by explaining how the findings confirm, extend, or challenge existing bodies of research. Implications from the findings are also provided for middle school literacy educators who engage in curriculum design. This chapter presents an overview of the study, and then a discussion of the findings framed in two large overarching themes: role of books and role of space and discourse. I continue with providing an “envisioned” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 34) culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum model to explain the study’s implications. Finally, I present the study’s limitations and finish with suggestions for future research.
Overview of the Study

This qualitative holistic case study was conducted at an urban middle school over a period of 17 weeks for a total of 1,945 minutes (32.42 hours) in the field. Eight African American eighth grade students participated in an enacted curriculum within a book club context that featured culturally relevant literature chosen by the participants. This study was carried out to explore answers to the following questions:

1. What happens when African American adolescent male students participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?
2. What literacy behaviors do African American adolescent male students engage in when they participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum?
3. What are the African American adolescent male students’ perceptions of the culturally relevant literature within the culturally relevant curriculum?

In order to answer the research questions, I collected data from multiple sources. These sources were my researcher’s journal, ending student interviews, book club audio recordings, culturally relevant book analysis completed by the students, and participant reflection journals.

I utilized the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to analyze collected data. Coded datum were assembled and reassembled to develop preliminary themes and categories to compare the data within and amongst categories (Maxwell, 1996). Through the analysis, categories and subcategories were developed to further define the two overarching themes of: role of books and role of space and discourse. Discussion of
these findings is presented through the two themes with corresponding categories as well as the implications based on my findings.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Role of Books**

*When kids fall in love with any book, we offer a thankful prayer to the reading gods and just let them read.* (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p. 91)

The culturally relevant texts chosen by the participants were a critical component to the enacted curriculum. As previously stated, the participants explained that the books were an important element in the successful continuation of our book clubs. Without these culturally relevant texts, the participants would have been less engaged in the discussions as I documented that it was like “pulling teeth” (Field Notes, January 6, 2014) when we discussed the book *Shooter*. The participants voted this text out of our curriculum and we moved forward engaging in two more books to discuss in our book club, *Testing the Ice* and *You Don’t Even Know Me*.

**Reading engagement.** An engaged reader is one who is intrinsically motivated to read, reads frequently, and often talks with others about what they are reading (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). From this viewpoint, reading engagement can be thought of in terms of how often African American males read and what level of involvement they put forth while reading. The findings of this study suggest that the eight African American male participants were engaged in the reading process by underlining specific sentences and phrases during their personal reading time in order to promote discussion as well as making connections and asking questions during our book club meetings to facilitate
sustained group discussion. The participants also showed a level of intrinsic motivation by reading their assigned pages, reading more than they did before, and displaying an interest in wanting to read more culturally relevant literature. While no professional literature was found confirming this finding with an African American adolescent male population, this notion was posited by Tatum (2006) explaining that African American male students are likely to be more engaged with texts when the texts are culturally relevant, that is, they reflect their lived experiences and realities.

In addition, as noted in the participants biographical sketches, many of them mentioned that they liked to read but didn’t. When the participants were provided with the opportunity to read these pieces of culturally relevant texts, they were intrinsically motivated to read, read more than before, and showed interest in wanting to read additional CRL. It is conceivable, that if instead, the students were provided with culturally neutral texts, they would not have had the same types of reading experiences or displayed the same types of reading behaviors, such as sharing oppositional anecdotes or engaging in sustained conversation about the books.

These findings indicate that the types of books the participants read, culturally relevant texts, were important in engaging students in the personal reading process and should be considered an integral part of a reading curriculum. The participants were able to identify with the characters and the characters’ experiences in order to become engaged in their personal reading and group discussions. While current research indicates that students are more likely to engage in texts that reflect their social and cultural experiences than texts that do not (Protacio, 2012), in many classrooms, African
American males are not given opportunities to read books that reflect their culture and lived experiences, such as the participants in this study. Since there is a connection between reading engagement and reading achievement (Logan & Johnston, 2009), the lack of access to culturally relevant literature might be a contributing factor to the overall lack of reading success for African American male students.

**Students valued specific characteristics of CRL.** As explained in the preceding chapter, the participants struggled with identifying specific appealing aspects of the culturally relevant literature. I documented in my field notes how the participants often provided general statements as feedback, such as “It’s interesting” or “I just wanted to keep reading it” (Field Notes, October 31 & November 11, 2013). Their struggle to identify specific appealing characteristics of the literature might be because they were rarely asked these types of questions before. They might not have been asked to voice their opinion or even think their opinion was valuable within their reading curriculum and therefore, at a loss when asked to voice their judgment.

However, as the study progressed, the participants identified four specific characteristics that they valued in the culturally relevant literature we read: the age, race, and personal characteristics of the characters and the representation of the “real world.” While several resources suggest what African American male students (Tatum 2006, 2009) and elementary African American students (Gray, 2009; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; McNair, 2010) should value in selecting culturally relevant texts, these findings voice what specific characteristics the African American male participants appreciated.
The participants valued strong, young African American male characters who engaged in “real world” experiences similar their lives. However, several of the books chosen and enjoyed by the students did not contain every one of these characteristics. For example, while the participants indicated that they valued young characters, the book, *Testing the Ice*, featured Jackie Robinson as a middle aged man. Nonetheless, they still enjoyed the text. Another example is from the book, *Bang!*. The main character, Mann, is a middle school student who is horrified by his brother’s death. In contrast to the strong characters that the participants recognized as being valued, Mann demonstrates many weaknesses throughout the book and identifies as an artist, who are often stereotypically identified as isolated and eccentric. Keeping this in mind, books deemed culturally relevant by the participants do not need to include all four isolated criteria for the book to be embraced. As stated in the review of the literature, culturally relevant texts may not have all of these authentic components within them, however the more authentic the text is, the greater possibility the students will choose to read it (Gay, 2000; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001) is confirmed in this study. Yet, the four criteria that the participants acknowledged: the age, race, and personal characteristics of the characters and the representation of the “real world” should be taken into consideration when suggesting or purchasing books for African American adolescent male students.

The majority of the professional literature details what characterizes a culturally relevant character, such as race, gender, believable personality traits, characters that grow naturally, and characters that are represented in an affirmative light. However, Tatum (2009) surmised that African American males want to read books that have strong
enabling characters. While this study does not suggest that one characteristic is more important than the other, Tatum’s notion coincides with the findings from this study in that the participants appreciated strong African American male characters that hold true to their convictions.

Based on these findings, the student reading the text should be the one to determine whether a text is culturally relevant or not. It is important to note here that African American males are not homogeneous. All students, no matter from what racial, ethnic, or religious background, bring separate strengths, interests and life experiences to the classroom. Because of this, it would be presumptuous of us as educators to boldly state what texts are culturally relevant for students of any culture. Aronson (2003) also concurs that “If we look closely at any culture we will see all kinds of conflicting and mixed values, all sorts of opinions, and many different points of view” (p. 79). In addition, Mo and Shen (2003) also make the statement that in picture books,

Some cultural facts and practices may be realistically reflected in the story but may not be considered authentic because members of the culture do not agree with each other on interpretation of their values. Moreover, within a culture, different values are constantly in conflict. New values, beliefs, and attitudes are fighting to take hold, while old ones, though dying, are still valid for a minority.

(p. 201)

For example, I initially predicted that Shooter (Myers, 2004) was a book that promoted cultural relevance. However, once the participants began reading Shooter, they expressed their dislike for the text as Jamar stated, “I did not like it. It wasn’t like us” (Book Club,
January 9, 2014). As educators, we need to listen to the opinions of our students. If I would have mandated that everyone in our book club was still required to read *Shooter* in its entirety, there would have been resistance. The participants might have stopped reading and therefore would not be able to engage in meaningful conversations during the book club meetings. Because I listened to their voices and respectfully considered their opinions, our book club progressed, but with another book of their choosing. Therefore, using the guidelines provided by other researchers and the findings from this study, we can begin to suggest culturally relevant texts to students, but ultimately, the power to determine the cultural relevant of a piece of literature is ultimately in the hands of the students.

**Role of Space and Discourse**

Space and discourse were also critical components of the enacted curriculum. The participants appreciated the small group context built on trust and respect as one participant mentioned that our group was “Comfortable, yeah, comfortable” (Edwin, Ending Interview, January 31, 2014) and another stated “We can say anything. Nothing is right or wrong” (Donald, Ending Interview, January 30, 2014). In this context, the participants had the opportunity to “be true” in their conversations and provide invaluable insight into the curriculum through voicing their opinion.

**Gradually building a community of trust and respect.**

*She was a “nice” teacher, he would later admit, but for some reason she never learned to know him. His sense of his teacher’s ignorance of him, of the often neglected story of Black boys that she along with his other teachers managed,*
must have pointed to a flaw in their preparation. Although teachers saw young Black men every day at his high school, Derrick understood at that very moment that they barely knew them. (Kirkland, 2013, p. 19)

The statement above was quoted from a study by Kirkland (2013) who researched the literacies of several African American male high school students. One of the participants of his study recognized the “teacher’s ignorance of him” (p. 19). In other words, the teacher did not take the opportunity or make the effort to develop a trusting and respectful rapport with her African American male students. Kirkland (2013) later noted that if the teacher wanted to help this African American male high school student, she must first commit to “seeing, hearing, and respecting what the student had to say” (p. 20).

Respect and trust were established as essential by the participants in order to have an open book club discussion where the participants felt they were “being true.” The participants wanted a teacher who they could trust not to “snitch” on them. This was interpreted as not reporting the taboo topics they discussed to others. While many teachers may report or talk about events or occurrences that their students discuss, as they may be considered taboo, I only reported incidents that might be harmful to themselves or others, keeping their personal oppositional anecdotes private if it did not pose a threat. Through this, the participants began to consider me trustworthy.

The participants also thought I was respectful because I attempted to develop a rapport with each of them. They mentioned that I was “like a teacher sized friend that who we can talk to and you’ll listen and understand us” (Deshawn, Book Club, January
21, 2014). As they were first annoyed with my many questions, the participants later appreciated that I was attempting to listen and understand who they are and their experiences. Making an effort to establish a relationship was noticed and eventually welcomed by the participants.

Many scholars have argued the importance of positive teacher-student relationships (Frymier & Houser, 2000; West, 1994). The finding of building a community of trust and respect is an important contribution to a large body of professional research (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Cambourne, 2000; Dobransky & Frymier, 2004; Forsyth, 2008; Holdaway, 1979; Routman, 2005; Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). For example, trust between teacher and student was a significant positive predictor of the differences in student achievement (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). Ladson-Billings (2000) also found that trust between teachers and students was one of the most important components of schools that successfully taught African American students. Howard (2006) explains,

We must know our students well, both for the purpose of building relationships that work, and also for the purpose of designing curriculum and pedagogical strategies that are responsive to, and honoring of, our students’ actual lived experiences. There is no work more complete, and there is no work more important, than this. (p. 132)

In addition, Howard’s (2001) work suggests that students of the underrepresented population are more likely to perform better when they believe that teachers and administrators are aware of their needs and are involved in building a relationship with
them that acknowledges their personal and cultural experiences. Therefore, in order to create a curriculum that fits the needs of African American male students, educators need to focus on developing relationships built on trust and respect.

**Space for individual and group student voice.** The participants utilized our book clubs as a space for “being true” and sharing oppositional anecdotes that often circulated around taboo topics. Because African American male students are frequently taught by middle-class White females, taboo topics are often seen as inappropriate for classroom discussion and therefore regularly neglecting what is truly happening in students’ daily lives. Unsurprisingly, nontraditional topics of discussion can be awkward and feel uncomfortable for many educators. However Kefele (2009) suggests,

> Because many African American male students identify with violent and illegal behavior, teachers need to be acutely familiar with the frequency and context of these events in the community. By developing a broader sense or awareness of the events to be able to address and/or counteract these harmful aspects. But they cannot be ignored or considered taboo—this is their life and teachers must take that into consideration when developing a curriculum for this population. (p. 18)

In addition, Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) state “Minority perspectives in the form of narratives, testimonies, or storytelling challenge the dominant group’s accepted truths” (p. 5) as this type of talk might be uncomfortable for educators to consider as the stories might contradict their current perceived beliefs as “history is always told from the perspective of the dominant group” (p. 5). What might be perceived as taboo by the teacher is perceived as normal by this student population which further
silences their lived experiences. For instance, the participants engaged in a conversation based on the book, *Bang!*, where the main character, Mann, was stopped by law enforcement. The participants continued by discussing their personal discriminatory encounters with the local police force. Many educators might have found this topic unsuitable for classroom discussion; however, the participants were simply connecting their lived experiences with Mann’s. These events were important to the participants and silencing their oppositional anecdotes would have been disrespectful as their stories would have been perceived as insignificant.

African American male students need a space within the curriculum where their oppositional anecdotes are embraced and built upon in an attempt to genuinely understand their experiences. If teachers continue to ignore this “forbidden” discourse, a continued alienation will exist further driving a wedge between teacher and student connectedness. The current power structure within our educational system in the United States is reflective of the power structure of American society which leaves little room to value other cultures that are not conceptually White. Because of this, teachers must recognize this inequality while providing a space for African American male students to express their thinking about what they are reading in order to feasibly expect the same type of reading success as their White counterparts. If educators continue to silence the connected experiences of African American male students, little change will come to a population that continues to struggle with reading performance in a historically oppressive system.
“Talking out the text” with peers in a small group context. During our book club sessions, students would often collaboratively discuss complicated issues presented in the book which led to a heightened understanding of the text through group discussion. Constructing meaning through engagement with a text and by collaborating with others to justify points of view and elaborate on meaning has also been confirmed (Helper, 1982; Hickman, 1981; Short, 1986). However, this finding might shed more light on the power of African American male students discussing books in a small group format.

In this study, eight African American males engaged with texts in a socially constructed environment to share their learning and build on one another’s knowledge. As all of the participants stated in their initial interviews that they did not have experience talking about the books they had read, they still took part in the book club discussions. The longevity and purposefulness of the discussions might have occurred because of the small group format. The participants talked out the text, asked questions, and shared personal oppositional anecdotes during our meetings not only because they enjoyed the books, but they also appreciated the small group format. For example, at the end of one of our book club sessions, I asked the students if they had any suggestions to improve the book club.

Donald: I like our group just the way it is.
Researcher: Why?
Donald: Well, I know everyone and we can really talk about anything in here knowing nobody going to tell them.
Researcher: Do you think our group should be bigger?
Group: No!

Researcher: Oh! Okay. Why?

Isaac: Then we won’t talk as much with more people.

Researcher: Why do you think that?

Isaac: Everybody else be talkin. (Book Club, January 13, 2014)

This conversation shows the value students placed on discussing books in the context of a small group of their peers rather than a large group, whole class discussion which is often the traditional approach in middle school classrooms.

**Students as knowledge creators within the enacted curriculum.** Results from this study indicate that the participants served as creators of knowledge within the space of our book club sessions. While students usually play a passive role within the curriculum and the classroom, the participants negotiated purposeful curricular and managerial choices within the enacted curriculum, such as dealing with interruptions, reading out loud during our sessions, facilitating our meetings, negotiating the readings, and teaching the researcher about their culture.

During the initial weeks of the study, the participants seemed uncomfortable with providing input regarding curricular decisions and were resistant at first, possibly because they did not know how to answer the questions or they did not understand what was being asked. For that reason, the participants were possibly victims of differend, which is a conflict between two or more parties that occurs when a concept, such as curriculum, has conflicting meanings for two groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as often the oppressed group does not have the language to express what poses a conflict to the
dominant group (Duncan, 2006). This is what happened here as the participants did not have the language conducive to explain their opinion of what they prefer in the curriculum. To combat this problem, Delpit (1995) suggests that educators need to teach students the “codes” (p. 45) needed to participate fully in mainstream America, which includes our school system. Delpit explains that teachers “need to help students establish their own voices, and to coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society” (p. 46). Because of this, we need to create innovative ways to help students express themselves to be part of the decision making process so they are able to actively provide input to help their teachers conceptualize a culturally relevant curriculum.

As the study continued, I was persistent with asking the students questions and often reworded my original questions or broke the question down into several smaller questions. For example, I broke apart the question: “How can we improve our book club?” into more manageable and relatable questions: “What didn’t go well today?”; “What were you frustrated with?” and “Do you think we can fix it? How?” As time progressed, the participants began considering these questions and making statements in their reflection journals while also verbally voicing their opinion on what needed to be modified. While students were unfamiliar with voicing their curricular opinions, I persevered in attempting to gain their input as Tatum (2006) confirms that being successful teachers of African American male students begins by inviting their voices into the process. If I would have made the decision to stop asking for their point-of-view, their voice would have been lost. The curriculum would have been enacted based solely
on my understandings, when in actuality; they are the ones experiencing these curricular
decisions. Their voices helped guide the curricular and managerial choices that were
made within the enacted curriculum to help ensure meaningful experiences specifically
for themselves. They knew what “needed to be fixed” as I simply gave them the
opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions within the curriculum.

The notion that students enjoy having a voice in their curriculum is well
supported in educational research. These findings concur with research that found
increasing student voice led to improved student learning, especially when their voice
was linked to changing curriculum and instruction (Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter,
2000). Hollins and Spence (1990) found that students put forth additional effort and
performed better for those educators who gave them the opportunity to voice their own
feelings and ideas when completing academic activities in the classroom.

While there is research supporting the benefits of student voice in curriculum
design, there is little to support the voice of African American male students. The
findings from this study suggest that the participants were uncomfortable and did not
“know how” to give curricular input at first. However, after I reworded my initial
questions focused on curricular input, students felt more comfortable voicing their
opinions in regards to curricular considerations. They began to address curricular and
managerial problems they felt were hindering our book discussions and addressed a
common, often intimidating act, of reading out loud. This finding, as well as the others,
was considered when developing the envisioned curricular model.
Implications

The voices of children...have been missing from the whole discussion.

(Kozol, 1991, p. 5)

The findings from this study generate implications relevant to teaching and developing curriculum for African American adolescent male students in an urban setting. This section offers specific implications pertaining to the implementation of the envisioned culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum model. These implications are not only relevant for middle school literacy educators working with African American adolescent male students, but certain elements may prove useful to any educator of a diverse population of students. Having said this, the findings from the study are situated within a group of eight adolescent African American male students as I often refer to them specifically when discussing the implications.

Envisioned Curriculum Model

Burke and Short (1991) share that, “A curriculum always operates in the present by interpreting the past and predicting the future” (p. 33). Developing the envisioned culturally relevant literature-based curriculum model presented below was a complicated process as there were multiple stages based on continuous reflection by me and the participants. As previously explained, I created the paper curriculum where I used my (then) current understanding of reading instruction, curriculum, theory, and African American male students. In a sense, I was making predictions about how the students would engage and participate in the curriculum. Next, the participants and I enacted the
paper curriculum. During this step in the process, I was confirming, revising, or completely changing my curricular decisions as informed by my reflections, “kidwatching” (Goodman, 1978), and participant input. Finally, an envisioned culturally relevant literature-based curriculum model was constructed based on the findings from this study.

Curriculum models help educators to transparently map out the use of specific teaching and learning approaches. Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) suggest that although curriculum models are valuable, they often neglect the human aspect such as the individual attitudes and values involved in curriculum making. Curriculum models should provide a perspective and not a prescribed recipe. Therefore the envisioned culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum model displayed and explained below should be used by middle school literacy educators as a support to make thoughtful decisions about how to develop a paper curriculum based on the culture and lived experiences of their students. Educators should embrace this process as an opportunity to continuously update their understanding of their curriculum with their current students as well as prepare for their future learners. Figure 6 represents an envisioned curriculum based on the findings from this study.
Foundation.

You got to know me. (Isaac, Ending Interview, February 3, 2014)

The foundation of the curricular model presented above is built on the students’ culture and lived experiences. Burke and Short (1991) state,

The knowledge and understanding that students already have about life come from the social and cultural communities in which they live and learn both inside and outside of school. These understandings form the platform upon which they
currently stand and from which they will launch themselves into the future. (p. 35)

In order to build a curriculum based on students’ culture and lived experiences, an educator must take the time to develop a rapport with each individual student. Students should be given a chance to verbally share their experiences and thoughts and the teacher should be taking note of these discussions to better understand their students as the curriculum should be connected to these experiences.

Developing rapport with students can be done in a variety of ways. I used “Getting to Know You” statements to provide an opportunity for the students and me to get to know each other. Teachers could also frequently utilize individual questionnaires or develop quick activities where several students share something about themselves at the beginning of class period. Whatever strategy is employed to learn about the students, it should also incorporate a component of the teacher sharing their own culture and personal experiences so there is mutual sharing between students and teacher.

Effective teachers of diverse student populations must go beyond reading instruction and learn who they and their students really are. Educators should take advantage of this rapport to not only modify and build on their current curriculum, but to also aid in their attempt to provide students with culturally relevant literature. If teachers know about their students, the greater likelihood they will select or suggest books that are relevant and meaningful to their students.
Teacher and students.

*Why do you keep asking us what we think about all this?* (Devante, Book Club, November 18, 2013)

The teacher and students need to be engaged in continuous reflection and negotiation as the curriculum is enacted. As curriculum is often developed by experts outside the classroom to “cover” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 4) specific topics, students are not considered and often feel disconnected from classroom curricula. While programmed curriculum is helpful and should serve as a source for consideration and reflection, curriculum development should be a shared process of teachers and students working together inside the classroom.

Student and teacher reflection can take place in a variety of ways and should be viewed as an invitation to generate student voice. I used a researcher’s journal and the students wrote their thoughts in their individual reflection journals. However, brief partner or small group talks were the partners or groups verbally share their thoughts with the entire class could provide useful feedback. Students could also write short reflections on a sticky note that could be either shared as a class or personally given to the teacher if privacy is need. Whatever method of reflection is utilized, taking the time to reflect allows both the teacher’s and the student’s voices to be heard in developing a successful curriculum that encourages student engagement.

The teacher and students are featured at the center of the envisioned curricular to represent that both, working together, are the driving force of the curriculum and propels it forward or backwards through reflection and negotiation as indicated by the
double arrows. Dewey (1938) surmises that “Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (p. 38). Based on how the teacher and students collaboratively negotiate the curriculum determines whether a curricular component needs to be revisited and revised, or whether to move ahead with the current results.

For example, a teacher and students might decide that in order to promote informal public written discussion in their classroom, they would use a walking notebook, a notebook where one student writes their initial thoughts about a book then gives it to another student the next day to do the same. After several days of implementation, the teacher might ask the students about their thoughts on the assignment thus far. Based on the students’ reactions and reflections, the teacher and the students can either decide to continue with the assignment as it stands, or discuss an alternative method that would lead to a similar outcome. Here, the students’ voices are heard and considered in order to successfully negotiate their curriculum.

As I mentioned previously in this chapter, this study suggests that the participants were uncomfortable and did not “know how” to provide curricular input when asked. In order to have a shared voice in the curriculum, students must know how to communicate their thinking so that the teacher and other students understand their intended meaning. I also explained that educators need to create new strategies to help students express themselves to be part of the decision making process. As Delpit (1995) suggests, this is providing students with “additional codes of power” (p. 40). If we teach students what a
curriculum is, how it works, and the essential vocabulary of the process, we are providing students with the tools to purposefully change and engage in their classroom experiences.

**Dynamic in nature.** Curriculum should be continuously evolving through modification and revision as it is dynamic in nature. The word dynamic is characterized by continuous change as every school, every class, and every student is different. The strengths, experiences, and perspectives that students bring to school are ever changing and so should be the curriculum.

Throughout this study, I described the intuitive, paper, and enacted curriculum as they were continuously evolving. Based on the information gathered and reflected upon by the students and me, an envisioned curriculum model was developed. However, this is not the culmination of the process. An educator should use this model as basis for her or his own intuitive curriculum, and then develop a paper curriculum to enact in the classroom. As the curriculum is enacted where the teacher and students will experience “bumps along the way”, teachers use their personal and student reflections to evaluate these experienced tensions to make informed collaborative decisions about how to progress or revisit a specific component. Working through this process will facilitate the development of their envisioned curriculum that may inform the next unit of study or as the underpinnings for the next school year. This approach embraces continuous improvement and allows for reflection to enable a clear understanding of the past and present to plan for a better future. With every experience and mistake we make, we become more informed creators of curriculum (Burke & Short, 1991).
Culturally relevant literature.

_The books were just interesting to me, so I just kept on reading._ (Garrett, Ending Interview, January 31, 2014)

When referring to the envisioned curriculum model mentioned previously, it is important to note the three outside gears: culturally relevant literacy, space, and discourse. All three of these components are essential to a culturally relevant literature-based curriculum model since all three are interconnected as the model cannot exist if one component is removed.

Many curricular reading models do not include the role of texts in literacy curriculum development as specific texts and text characteristics should inform this process. Since students should be reading in a reading curriculum, books need to be carefully considered based on the topic of instruction. However, many teachers stop there and lose many potential opportunities to engage their students in the reading process. The proposed envisioned culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum model proposes texts with the following characteristics for African American adolescent male students: similar age, race, gender, and personal characteristics of characters and represents the “real world” while remaining cognizant of topics that are considered culturally uncomfortable.

Many educators might not be comfortable with selecting CRL for their students as I found that the only one capable of determining text relevance is the student reading the book. Nevertheless, this should not deter teachers from choosing books that the students might deem culturally relevant as Husband (2013) warns,
The degree to which a particular text is socially and culturally consistent with the experiences of the African American boys in a classroom is usually not a top priority when teachers make text selections. Hence, many African American boys often find themselves disinterested and less motivated to read in the classroom than other students. Again, because there is a direct relationship among reading engagement, reading frequency, and reading performance outcomes, this lack of interest and engagement often translates into lower achievement outcomes for African American boys. (p. 13)

As educators, we must ask our students about their preference of criteria, just as I did, when ordering books. Literacy educators should encourage student voice by providing students with catalogs and book club orders to obtain their opinions before books are ordered, and allow them to select books for the classroom and school libraries. Educators also need to spend time reading and becoming familiar with these books as the participants usually held me accountable for my reading and often asked if I read the required reading.

While asking for student input is important when choosing culturally relevant literature, teachers often do not have the opportunity to consult with their students on book selections. New books are typically ordered during the summer months when school is not in session or at the end of the school year when the teacher will have new classes with new students the following fall. As I noted in the review of the literature in chapter two, I utilized several useful resources when selecting and purchasing books for the participants. While all of the items referenced were helpful, there was not one
convenient resource to help literacy educators make more informed literature selections. A comprehensive rubric is provided below (Figure 7) as a curricular tool to aid literacy educators in selecting culturally relevant literature for their students. This rubric builds upon the previously mentioned and recently discovered resources (Fox & Short, 2003; Glasgow & Rice, 2007; Henderson & May, 2005; Sims, 1982; Wilfong, 2007) and also includes components based on the findings of this study. While the study was focused on African American adolescent male students, this rubric might also be helpful for teachers of students from other cultures when selecting literature that has the potential to be culturally relevant.

The rubric has three essential elements to consider, authenticity, accuracy, and cultural consciousness when assessing a book’s criteria for cultural relevance. This rubric follows a similar structure developed by Wilfong (2007) created to aid teachers in assessing multicultural young adult literature. Next to the criteria listed are questions for students to possibly consider if given the opportunity aid in the book selection process. Since the participants in the study had a difficult time explaining what they preferred about a particular book, I provided guiding questions to help the student assess books for cultural relevance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Student Self-Questions</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>0-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language &amp; Dialect</strong></td>
<td>Do the characters in the text communicate like me, my friends, and my family?</td>
<td>• Accurate usage and representation of language conventions and dialect.</td>
<td>• Some accurate usage and representation of language conventions and dialect.</td>
<td>• Inaccurate usage and representation of language conventions and dialect.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Well-crafted language that is appropriate to the culture portrayed.</td>
<td>• Some well-crafted language that is appropriate to the culture portrayed.</td>
<td>• Language used is not appropriate to the culture portrayed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Accurate dialogue between characters should also adhere to the language patterns of the culture.</td>
<td>• Some accurate dialogue between characters should also adhere to the language patterns of the culture.</td>
<td>• Dialogue between characters is inaccurate and does not adhere to the language patterns of the culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characterization</strong></td>
<td>Do the characters in the text look and act like me?</td>
<td>• Characters are represented in an affirmative light.</td>
<td>• Characters are usually represented in an affirmative light.</td>
<td>• Characters are not represented in an affirmative light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Main character is very close to the age of the reader.</td>
<td>• Main character is somewhat close to the age of the reader.</td>
<td>• Main character is not close to the age of the reader.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Race, gender, and personal characteristics are significant to the story.</td>
<td>• Race, gender, and personal characteristics are somewhat important to the story.</td>
<td>• Race, gender, and personal characteristics are not important to the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Characters are believable, grow naturally, and show depth.</td>
<td>• Characters are usually believable, grow naturally, and show depth.</td>
<td>• Characters are unbelievable, do not grow naturally, and show little depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illustrations &amp; Pictures</strong></td>
<td>Do the characters and places in the text look like the people and places I know?</td>
<td>• The culture is accurately characterized through the physical features and color of the individual characters.</td>
<td>• The culture is somewhat accurately characterized through the physical features and color of the individual characters.</td>
<td>• The culture is not accurately characterized through the physical features and color of the individual characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Accurate representation of time frames, dates, and settings for the historical event they signify.</td>
<td>• Somewhat accurate representation of time frames, dates, and settings for the historical event they signify.</td>
<td>• Inaccurate representation of time frames, dates, and settings for the historical event they signify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Book cover is accurate and realistic by reflecting reality.</td>
<td>• Book cover is somewhat accurate and realistic by reflecting reality.</td>
<td>• Book cover is not accurate or realistic and does not reflect reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>Have I lived near or visited places just like those in the story?</td>
<td>• The culture is accurately characterized by the location’s physical appearance.</td>
<td>• The culture is usually characterized by the location’s physical appearance.</td>
<td>• The culture is not characterized by the location’s physical appearance.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Setting is natural in relation to the content and characters of the book.</td>
<td>• Setting is usually natural in relation to the content and characters of the book.</td>
<td>• Setting is unnatural in relation to the content and characters of the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Have I had or know of relationships like the one in the story?</td>
<td>• Relationships between characters are typical of that culture.</td>
<td>• Relationships between characters are somewhat typical of that culture.</td>
<td>• Relationships between characters are not typical of that culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences</strong></td>
<td>Have I had experiences like the one(s) described in the story?</td>
<td>• Experienced events represent the “real world” and could possibly happen or have actually happened to someone in real life and are naturally incorporated into the literature.</td>
<td>• Some of the experienced events represent the “real world” and could possibly happen or have actually happened to someone in real life and are naturally incorporated into the literature.</td>
<td>• Few or none of the experienced events represent the “real world” and not could possibly happen or have actually happened to someone in real life and are not naturally incorporated into the literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message &amp; Conclusions</td>
<td>Conclusions hold true to the culture they are representing.</td>
<td>Conclusions may hold true to the culture they are representing.</td>
<td>Conclusions do not hold true to the culture they are representing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Characters still retain their primary culture at the conclusion.</td>
<td>• Characters may retain their primary culture at the conclusion.</td>
<td>• Characters do not retain their primary culture at the conclusion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The message conveyed ensures the identity of the main character and pride for their culture.</td>
<td>• The message conveyed might ensure the identity of the main character and pride for their culture.</td>
<td>• The message conveyed does nothing to ensure the identity of the main character and pride for their culture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. Rubric for Assessing Cultural Authenticity, Accuracy, and Consciousness in Literature*
The participants in the study had a difficult time locating culturally relevant literature in their school’s library. The students explained that they attempted to find more “Black books” to read on their own, but could not locate any as Devante stated, “they [the library] only have books about Asians and White people, nothing about us” (Book Club, December 12, 2013). Unfortunately, Devante is not alone as the majority of African American male students do not have access to texts that are consistent with their reading interests (Tatum, 2006) and therefore literacy educators need to make culturally relevant literature available to the students they have in their classrooms. Often the leading obstacle to selecting and purchasing books aimed at strengthening the reading engagement of African American adolescent males is the resistance by school boards, administration, teachers, and parents who do not understand why particular books have to be specifically selected for this population. As Tatum (2009) explains, “The literacy development of the collective cannot be addressed without addressing the literacy development of the individual” (p. 61), we cannot ignore the importance of providing relevant books for African American male students. As such, teachers should not fear or circumvent these types of texts, but rather welcome the possible benefits of engagement with culturally relevant literature. Thus, not only literacy educators, but school administrators as well, need to advocate for the purchase of texts that respond to the needs of many African American males.

Space and discourse.

I can say anything I want to. There’s no right, no wrong. (Donald, Final Interview, January 30, 2014)
The space where the curriculum is enacted and the discourse that occurs in this space should be embraced and often is not within our nation’s schools. The classroom is where curriculum development should take place, rather than at the district or national level. The teacher and the students are the ultimate enactors and receivers of the curriculum, so why should this be a sacred process be determined by a person or group of people who possibly have never stepped foot inside the teacher and students’ classroom? A culturally relevant curriculum does not have the ability to exist if we do not begin to rethink where the curriculum development process takes place. We should grant this power to the teacher and students as they are the only curriculum actors who can fully realize cultural relevance within their curriculum.

Referring back to the envisioned curriculum model described above, includes the component of a small group context where the participants felt they were able to talk openly and appreciated being heard as Garret stated, “I could talk about anything in there” (Ending Interview, January 31, 2014) and Edwin added, “I was with my friends and it was easier to say what you wanted to say instead of a big class.” (Ending Interview, February 3, 2014). However, many classrooms, especially in urban settings, have large class sizes upwards of thirty or more students. While I had the privilege to conduct the study in an isolated context that was separate from the entire class, the curricular suggestion of utilizing small groups with this population of students can still be applied in larger, diverse group settings.

The foundational component of the book club structure is small group size and had been proven successful in a multitude of school settings, student populations, and
grade levels (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Polleck, 2010). Because of this, teachers may want to consider implementing book clubs, not only for their African American male students, but all students. Teachers can provide opportunities for shared reading experiences that are similar to aspects of small book clubs. Classes could be broken into four or five collaborative groups where students could read and discuss a common type of text, but the selections provided for the students would be geared towards their own culture. These groups could be divided by race and gender; however, the teacher would need to clearly explain this decision to the students while mentioning that their groups will continue to change throughout the year. If students have common readings, mini-lessons could be designed to meet curricular requirements, such as understanding theme, figurative language, and plot organization.

As I previously explained, there were many “bumps in the road” while conducting our book club discussions. Teachers may have to scaffold this process by conducting whole class mini-lessons and specifically model on how to successfully participate in a book club session, such as how to talk about a book, how to respectfully disagree with another’s opinion, how to listen to one another, and so on. Executing a new curricular element, such as book clubs, might be frustrating and uncomfortable at first. However, applying student reflective feedback and continuously revising and negotiating curricular components will help with the often awkward transition.

**Limitations**

I acknowledge the limited scope of this study as the focus was only on a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum and limited to one urban middle school.
setting. One limitation may be my involvement in the book club discussions as it may have influenced participants’ responses. I addressed this by attempting to be conscientious of my biases and excluding my personal opinions on the topic we were discussing. As mentioned in chapter three, I relied upon my researcher’s journal and memos to help distinguish my personal biases.

Eight African American eighth grade students began the study and thus meaningful comparisons for all students in this particular setting cannot be made. However, my research hopefully serves only as a starting point for difficult conversations and reassessments of curriculum that is currently employed in schools for all diverse student populations. I also acknowledge that the duration of the research study limits our understanding of the longevity of the participants’ intrinsic motivation to read. While it was beyond the scope of this research, we also do not know how the book club might have improved reading comprehension on standardized tests over time. In addition to the duration of our book club, it is also important to acknowledge that the time our book club sessions took place as the participants missed their regular scheduled language arts class. While every participant indicated during the initial interviews that they wanted to join the study because they could miss class, every participant stated during their ending interviews that they would still participate in the book club if it was held during an alternative time that did not conflict with their class schedule, such as during lunch and before or after school.
Suggestions for Further Research

A narrowed focus on culturally relevant curriculum that has received little attention is curriculum geared towards specific races and genders. In particular, few studies have been conducted in urban public schools that utilize culturally specific approaches to their curriculum where the majority of students are African American.

In this study, I elicited the help of Isaac, Devante, Donald, Deshawn, Edwin, Garrett, Kareem, and Jamar to better understand my research questions. The findings from this study have led me to additional questions. If I were to conduct the same study, I would pay attention to the participants’ preferences to specific genres and formats of culturally relevant texts. For example, the participants may appreciate different characteristics of biographical texts when compared to realistic fiction or graphic novels. Along the same line, more attention needs to be placed on the role of culturally relevant texts in advancing the literacy development of African American adolescent male students as there are many historical examples of the roles that texts played in shaping the lives of African American males in the United States (Holloway, 2006; Tatum, 2009).

Seven of the eight participants of this study currently had IEPs in Language Arts and were all reading below grade level. Unfortunately, educational research shows that students in remedial classes receive reading support in the form of skill enhancement, typically through worksheets where little time is spent in sustained personal reading or discussing what they read (Krashen, 2004). Because of this, further research could be
conducted to understand how the book club model could not only motivate but improve reading skills and fluency of struggling readers.

Additional research considerations could include expanding on the current study by focusing on a culturally relevant curriculum of different populations of students with various needs and challenges. Also, exploring how a culturally relevant reading curriculum may impact school connectedness and academic achievement. Student academic performance over time should be evaluated for any positive or negative effects after the inclusion of culturally relevant curriculum. Finally, another research consideration could be student voice as it is an important component that requires further exploration to understand and incorporate student perceptions of their curricular preferences.

**Conclusion**

I conclude with a lengthy, but purposeful quote from Dewey (2009):

> Since the curriculum is always getting loaded down with purely inherited traditional matter and with subjects which represent mainly the energy of some influential person or group of persons in behalf of something dear to them, it requires constant inspection, criticism, and revision to make sure it is accomplishing its purpose. Then there is always the probability that it represents the values of adults rather than those of children and youth, or those of pupils a generation ago rather than those of present day. (p.250)

Astonishingly enough, John Dewey made this remark in 1916. Still, approximately 100 years later, incorporating student voice to inform the curriculum and teachers engaging in
continuous reflection and curriculum revision are foreign concepts in many of our nation’s schools.

I stated in my opening vignette: “My students didn’t ‘get’ me or the books I enjoyed because I didn’t ‘get’ them”. Reflecting back on my initial statement, I should have included: “…because I never gave them the chance for their voices to be heard.” I challenge educators to embrace their students’ silenced voices to propel their curriculum forward in a collaborative effort to combat the disconnect that African American male students and other marginalized student groups experience daily in their current curriculum.

Hopefully, the envisioned culturally relevant literature-based curriculum model developed from the findings of this study will hopefully provide middle school literacy educators with a vehicle to forge ahead into these unchartered territories with their culturally diverse students as collaborative navigators.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

REVIEW OF LITERATURE PERTAINING TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM
## APPENDIX A

### Review of Literature Pertaining to Culturally Relevant Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year</th>
<th>Setting of the Data Collection</th>
<th>Population And Methodology</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Research, Conceptual, or Practitioner Based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agbo (2001)</td>
<td>Northern New York state school district</td>
<td>8 teachers Qualitative/ Participatory research</td>
<td>Participatory research group of eight teachers established needs for bicultural education for Indian students, the use of Mohawk culture as the arena for curriculum development, development of Mohawk cultural standards, and teacher training in Mohawk culture. Reviews various interpretations of success and failure of American Indian students and discusses changes taking place in an American Indian community as a part of an ongoing need to explore ways and means of making education more meaningful to their students.</td>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banks, Hogue, Timberlake, &amp; Liddle (1996)</td>
<td>Community-based leadership program in a large northeastern city school</td>
<td>64 low-income urban African American students (ages 10-14) Quantitative</td>
<td>Compares the effectiveness for inner-city African American youth of two social skills training (SST) curricula focusing on problem solving, anger management, and conflict resolution. One curriculum was Afrocentric, incorporating discussion of Black history and cultural experiences and emphasizing an Afrocentric value system; the other was culturally relevant but not Afrocentric. Both curricula yielded similar decreases in trait anger and increases in assertiveness and self-control.</td>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, 2003</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>11 students enrolled in one of the five tribally-controlled colleges Qualitative/ Interviews</td>
<td>Eleven American Indian students who transferred from tribal colleges to the University of North Dakota (UND) were interviewed regarding their readiness to attend a 4-year institution. Participants felt tribal college prepared them well for UND and that they had benefitted from remaining close to home and family and from the tribal colleges' support for students, culturally relevant curriculum, and strong sense of community.</td>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfield (1983)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focuses on factors required for the development and use of a CRC for Indian students and importance of curriculum development. Also reports on: developments related to the use of</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>Methodological Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolan, Unger, Johnson, &amp; Valente (2007)</td>
<td>14 middle schools, 1235 sixth graders</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Suggested curriculum; responsibility of the Indian community and the educational community in curriculum development; implementation of the culturally appropriate curriculum; and tips for curriculum development.</td>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collier (2000)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tests the interaction between the method by which leaders and peers are assigned to cooperative groups and the cultural relevance of the curricular materials. This study supports the view that social networks influence behavior and that network-based information along with CRC materials can be used to increase program effectiveness.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis (1998)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Explores the topic of CRC materials by examining the use of African American children's literature as a teaching tool. Provides a rationale, examples of instruction from actual classrooms, and reflections of personal experience from the author's childhood and professional career. Reviews various African American children's books regarding their value in teaching concepts spanning the curriculum.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan-Andrade (2007)</td>
<td>Urban high school, 7 teachers and 15 female students</td>
<td>Qualitative/Constant comparison</td>
<td>Discusses the development of a curriculum that would constitute ideas on race and culture and would connect knowledge to appropriate responsive and responsible action in the classroom.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennis (2006)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Book chapter examines the potential of youth popular culture in creating an engaging and empowering curriculum in schools.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fox (2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two-volume guide presents a framework for developing CRC for American Indian students in the primary grades.</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay (1975)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discusses the factors to consider when organizing and designing a culturally pluralistic curriculum. Details the need for curriculum designs to reflect a real sense of purpose. Also explains multicultural curricula's need to address the many different dimensions of the lives of ethnic group members.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson (2006)</td>
<td>High school located in a southeastern city</td>
<td>100 students (majority African American); 12 physical education teacher candidates; 4 school faculty</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>This research placed teacher candidates into a lab setting consisting of culturally diverse students and asked them to facilitate a culturally relevant pedagogy. Teacher candidates taught one unit of multi-activity games and another of non-traditional African Stepping. Results indicated a need for teacher candidates to understand and present curriculum relevant to school students’ lives. During the stepping unit, teacher candidates indicated less management concerns and focused more on school student learning. School students were motivated to participate and class leaders emerged during the stepping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herman-Davis (2011)</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>14 first- and second-generation Latina immigrants</td>
<td>Qualitative/Action Research</td>
<td>Explores how critical pedagogy, CRC, and student centered instruction impacts student engagement in reading for struggling first- and second-generation Latina immigrants. Findings include the use of student voice in generating themes of interest, student selection of reading material, and supportive and inclusive learning environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillard (1992)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Explains the need for an honest and valid curriculum that represents African Americans. Provides an explanation and definition of a pluralistic curriculum that accepts the fact that some racial groups have endured hundreds of years of misrepresented reality.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogan (2008)</td>
<td>Alaskan village</td>
<td>One Yup’ik middle school student (Nora)</td>
<td>Qualitative/Case study</td>
<td>Explains what happens when a Yup'ik middle schooler (Nora) was taught math using a CRC in 6th grade. Findings indicated a greater opportunity for leadership, ownership of knowledge, collaborative problem solving, conceptual learning, and participation in decolonized,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>School/Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Research/Dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimenez (2009)</td>
<td>Elementary school in Arizona</td>
<td>5 students of Mexican born parents</td>
<td>Qualitative/Action research</td>
<td>Research Dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Author designed a CRC that could be used with English language learners (fifth grade students) to study the responses they might have to that curriculum. The findings show that the children responded positively to the content of the curriculum. Their teachers reported the children gained “voice” in the classroom and an eagerness for learning. The children self-reported they had a greater interest in reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones &amp; Hebert (2012)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discusses the strengths and talents of diverse gifted learners must be supported in culturally responsive middle and high school classrooms. The model proposed by Ford and Harris (1999) for delivering multicultural gifted education offers educators a framework for delivering culturally responsive curriculum is discussed.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judson (2007)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The author reflects on her experiences in and journey through college as an aspiring educator. She began to recognize some holes in her high school learning. She shares her own personal story of her search for truth through culturally inclusive curricula as a model for discovering her own personal ignorance and as a call to action for teachers.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinez &amp; Ortix de Montellano (1983)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Describes a joint project between the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science and the Project for Renewed Incentives in Science and Education in Los Angeles (California) that develops workshops to introduce teachers to culturally relevant materials and specific activities that can be used at different grade levels.</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menchaca (2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Describes a CRC for Hispanic children and presents culturally relevant lessons for health, science, social studies, and language arts.</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterson (1999)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asserts that a CRC that discards stereotypes, celebrates diversity, and is inclusive of all children is both necessary and appropriate in the Head Start classroom. Advises that helping children to appreciate the similarities and differences within their own group and</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Study Type</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plata</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Examines cultural sensitivity as a basis for CRT. It argues that classroom teachers are overwhelmed by the responsibility to educate an increasingly culturally diverse population. Characteristics of culturally sensitive teachers and culturally responsive teaching are outlined with the benefits of providing a CRC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Discusses the implementation of African-centered composition curriculum into the traditional curriculum. Explains the complexity of the implementation of African-centered curriculum due to the complex past and present of African-Americans. The author asserts that an African-centered pedagogy is required in composition to make students realize the talents they already have and to maintain and build on the culture that nurtured them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampson</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mixed Methods</td>
<td>Research Dissertation</td>
<td>Examines the preferences of African American children toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant curriculum, through six-week series of lessons in an American History classroom. The qualitative and quantitative data indicates that African American students prefer culturally relevant lessons in school, and these lessons are relevant to their history and current lives. African American students found the culturally relevant curriculum to be particularly experiential, meaningful, and enjoyable. Students particularly favored lessons in which movement, music, games, field trips, or other experiential activities were included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sealey-Ruiz</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Examines how African American adult female students respond to a CRC. Three themes emerged: language validation, the fostering of positive self and group identity, and self-affirmation or affirmation of goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skinner</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Book chapter that discusses challenges to the perpetuation of American Indian languages and cultures, as well as successful strategies and practices for developing a CRC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Reviews literature on the various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Research Questions/Findings</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maddox (1998)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dimensions of culture to assess the implications for student learning and the development of culturally responsive assessments. Uses data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 to examine the cultural context in which students live as a basis for understanding context effects on academic performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thaman (1993)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Considers the development of a CRC in Pacific Island nations. Discusses the legacies of colonialism in island education and the contrast between alien Western curriculum provided in schools and traditional knowledge transmitted by non-formal means.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thao (2003)</td>
<td>School in northern California</td>
<td>Qualitative/Interviews</td>
<td>Examines how home and school factors affect the education of Mong students in the U.S. who are struggling academically. The findings reveal that Mong students' negative schooling experiences are heightened by the mismatch between the home and school culture, by misconceptions and labeling by parents and teachers, and by issues pertaining to their attempts to assimilate into American society. Findings also show that the Mong students are empowered by a culturally relevant curriculum, and a school environment that values their culture, and that utilizes their parents as resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenze (2004)</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Explores the perceptions of White Ethnic parents regarding their children's need for multietnic education. Findings suggested a desire among the parents surveyed for CRC materials to enhance the educational opportunities of their children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrill (1999)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stresses the need to heighten the dialogue concerning the African Centered Education Movement during the celebration of the Black History Month in the United States in February 1999. Effort to implement an appropriate African-centered curriculum in predominantly Afro-American inner-city schools; Emphasis on teaching the truth concerning the contributions of African people to the development of civilization.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B

LIST OF POSSIBLE CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEXTS FOR
EIGHTH GRADE PARTICIPANT
APPENDIX B

List of Possible Culturally Relevant Texts for Eighth Grade Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title (Eighth Grade)</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Lexile/Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battle of Jericho</td>
<td>Sharon Draper</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook for Boys</td>
<td>Walter Dean Myers</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I, Dred Scott (NF)</td>
<td>Sheila Moses</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legend of Buddy Bush</td>
<td>Sheila Moses</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson the Voice of the Century (NF)</td>
<td>Pam Munoz Ryan</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Beginning (mythology)</td>
<td>Virginia Hamilton</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many Thousands Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom (NF)</td>
<td>Virginia Hamilton</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Journal of Joshua Loper: A Black Cowboy (western)</td>
<td>Walter Dean Myers</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Goodbye? (poetry)</td>
<td>Nikki Grimes</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Don’t Even Know Me: Stories and Poems about Boys (poetry)</td>
<td>Sharon Flake</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>Karen Hesse</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locomotion</td>
<td>Jacqueline Woodson</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>Walter Dean Myers</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockdown</td>
<td>Walter Dean Myers</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Crazy Summer</td>
<td>Rita Williams-Garcia</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue (historical fiction)</td>
<td>Julius Lester</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa (PB)</td>
<td>Nikki Giovanni</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilma Unlimited (PB)</td>
<td>Kathleen Krull</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 titles total
APPENDIX C

CULTURAL RELEVANCE RUBRIC
## APPENDIX C

### Cultural Relevance Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characters</strong></td>
<td>The character(s) in the text are very much like me and my family. The character(s) would fit in well.</td>
<td>The character(s) in the text have some similarities to me and my family; but there are also many differences.</td>
<td>The character(s) in the text are not at all like me and my family. The character(s) would not fit in well at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences</strong></td>
<td>I have had experiences exactly like the one(s) described in this story. The events matched my experiences well.</td>
<td>I have had some experiences like the one(s) described in this story; but I have had different experiences as well.</td>
<td>I have not had experiences like the one(s) described in this story. The events are unlike my own experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place (Setting)</strong></td>
<td>I have lived in or visited places just like those in the story. The setting was familiar to me.</td>
<td>I have lived in or visited places that were similar in some ways to those in the stories; but there were definitely differences.</td>
<td>I have never lived in or visited places just like those in the story. The events took place in a location that was not familiar to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time (Setting)</strong></td>
<td>The events in the text could take place this year. They happen in the present.</td>
<td>Some of the events in the text could take place this year, but others either took past in the past or future.</td>
<td>The events in the text could not take place this year. They either take place at some point in the past or the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Character's Age</strong></td>
<td>The main character(s) in the text are very close to me in age.</td>
<td>Some of the main characters in the text are very close to me in age while others are not.</td>
<td>The main character(s) in the text are not very close in age to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Character's Gender</strong></td>
<td>The main characters in the text are the same gender as I am.</td>
<td>Some of the main characters in the text are the same gender as I am.</td>
<td>The main characters in the text are not the same gender as I am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages</strong></td>
<td>The characters in the text communicate like me and my family. They talk, read, and write like us.</td>
<td>Some of the characters in the text communicate like me and my family. Others do not talk, read, and write like us.</td>
<td>The characters in the text do not communicate like me and my family. They do not talk, read, or write like us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td>I read, view, or listen to texts just like this one very often.</td>
<td>I sometimes read, view, or listen to texts just like this one.</td>
<td>I never read, view, or listen to texts just like this one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX D

CULTURAL RELEVANCE GUIDE FOR SELECTING LITERATURE BASED ON THE CULTURE IT IS REPRESENTING
APPENDIX D

Cultural Relevance Guide for Selecting Literature Based on the Culture it is Representing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authenticity</th>
<th>Realistic</th>
<th>Culturally Conscious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accurate usage and representation of language conventions.</td>
<td>Book cover should be realistic.</td>
<td>Conclusions hold true to the culture they are representing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have common experiences within the plot.</td>
<td>Culture is characterized through physical features and color of individual characters.</td>
<td>Characters still retain their primary culture (continues to maintain their own cultural identity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate illustrations or pictures.</td>
<td>Culture is characterized through the location’s physical appearance.</td>
<td>The message conveyed should ensure the identity of the main character and the pride for their culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate representation of dialect.</td>
<td>Realistic events are experienced (or could possibly happen to someone in real life).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate common experiences.</td>
<td>Characters are represented in an affirmative light.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race, gender, and personal characteristics are significant to the story.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

CULTURALLY RELEVANT BOOK BALLOT: PICTURE BOOKS
APPENDIX E

Culturally Relevant Book Ballot: Picture Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title:</th>
<th>Put a check mark next to your first FOUR book choices:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael’s Golden Rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers of the Knight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Jabe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wee Winnie Witch’s Skinny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Nation’s Hope: The Story of Boxing Legend Joe Louis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing the Ice: A True Story About Jackie Robinson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hewitt Anderson’s Great Big Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many Thousands Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

CULTURALLY RELEVANT BOOK BALLOT: NOVELS
# APPENDIX F

Culturally Relevant Book Ballot: Novels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Put a check mark next to your first FOUR book choices:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yummy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhere in the Darkness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Goodbye?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locomotion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyborg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amiri &amp; Odette</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Strong Right Arm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Sons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Don’t Even Know Me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bang!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of Tears</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

STUDENT SEMI-STRUCTURED INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTION
APPENDIX G

Student Semi-structured Initial Interview Questions

1. What are you learning about in class right now?

2. What kinds of things are you doing in there (activities, readings, etc.)?

3. How do you feel about the things you are learning about? What do you like the most about it? What do you like the least about it?

4. If there was one thing you could change about your class now, what would it be? Why?

5. Describe how you are involved in the class you are taking now?

6. Do you have a voice in what is taught during this class?

7. Are you reading any books (or other reading materials) right now? If so, what are they?

8. How often do you read for personal pleasure (not a class assignment)?

9. When you read, what kinds of things do you look for in a book? Why are those things important to you?

10. Do you talk about the books you read with others?

11. What are your favorite things to do when you are not in school?

12. How do you describe yourself as a reader?

13. If you could change one thing about reading in school, what would it be? Why?
APPENDIX H

TEACHER SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTION
APPENDIX H

Teacher Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. How do you think (student’s name) experiences school?

2. Does (student’s name) read books for personal pleasure? If yes, what books/reading materials?

3. How do they participate in your language arts class?

4. What would you say are (student’s name) strengths as a student?

5. What would you say are (student’s name) weaknesses as a student?

6. Is there anything else I should know about (student’s name)?
APPENDIX I

CULTURALLY RELEVANT BOOK ANALYSIS
## APPENDIX I

### Culturally Relevant Book Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>What did you like about the book?</th>
<th>Please give an example from the book.</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Rounds of Glory</td>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yummy</td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bang</td>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>What did you like about the book?</td>
<td>Please give an example from the book.</td>
<td>Page Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shooter</strong> (If you read it)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Testing the Ice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You Don’t Even Know Me</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX J

GETTING TO KNOW YOU STATEMENT
APPENDIX J

Getting to Know You Statements

Explain what you are interested in. Why?

Describe your family.

My favorite food is…because…

In my future, I would like to be …because

One of my good friends is….We get along well because…

In my spare time, I like to…..because…

I can’t live without…because…

I am good at…because…

The best thing about school right now is…because…

The best thing in my life right now is…because…
APPENDIX K

PARENT/GUARDIAN AND STUDENT CONSENT STATEMENT AND

SIGNATURE PAGE
APPENDIX K

Parent/Guardian & Student Consent Statement and Signature Page

Please sign and detach the second sheet so you may keep this information in your records. Thank you!

Parent/Guardian & Student Consent Statement and Signature

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and grant permission for my child to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Child’s Name (please print) ____________________________________________________

Please check one:

_____ I AGREE to my child’s participation in the study.

_____ I do not agree to my child’s participation in the study.

Parental/Guardian Signature                           Date

Student Signature                                     Date
APPENDIX L

Teacher Consent Statement and Signature Page

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Name (please print) _______________________________________

Please check one:

_____ I AGREE to participate in the study.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the study.

__________________________________
Teacher Signature

__________________________________
Date

How African American Adolescent Male Students Experience a Culturally Relevant Reading Curriculum  Page 4 of 6
APPENDIX M

PARENT/GUARDIAN AND STUDENT AUDIO-RECORDING CONSENT PAGE
APPENDIX M

Parent/Guardian and Student Audio-Recording Consent Page

I agree to be audio-recorded for the research project described above. The researcher may use the audio-recordings for the research and any report or publications that are produced from the research.

I have been told that I have the right to a copy of the audio-recording before it is used. I have decided that:

_______ I DO want a copy of the recording.

Please send the recording via: (check one)

____ e-mail

______________________________
e-mail address

____ U.S. mail

______________________________
street address

______________________________
city, state, zip

_______ I do not want a copy of the recording.

Parental/Guardian Signature    Date

______________________________    ________________________________

Student Signature    Date
APPENDIX N

Teacher Audio-Recording Consent Page

Teacher Audio-Recording Consent

I agree to be audio-recorded for the research project described above. The researcher may use the audio-recordings for the research and any report or publications that are produced from the research.

I have been told that I have the right to a copy of the audio-recording before it is used. I have decided that:

_________ I DO want a copy of the recording.

Please send the recording via: (check one)

_____ e-mail ______________________________

  e-mail address

_____ U.S. mail ______________________________

  street address

                          __________________________
  city, state, zip

_________ I do not want a copy of the recording.

______________________________________  __________________
Teacher Signature                  Date

How African American Adolescent Male Students Experience a Culturally Relevant Reading Curriculum   Page 6 of 6
APPENDIX O

LITERATURE CITED
APPENDIX O

Literature Cited


REFERENCES
REFERENCES


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