Intertextuality, Multiliteracies, and a Double-Edged Sword: Urban Adolescent African American Males’ Perceptions of Enabling Texts, Pedagogies, and Contexts

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Yolanda M. Triplett-Stewart, M.A.

Graduate Program in Educational Policy and Leadership

The Ohio State University

2015

Dissertation Committee:

Rick Voithofer, Ph.D., Advisor

Mollie Blackburn, Ph.D.

James L. Moore, III, Ph.D.
Abstract

In this multi-case study, nine adolescent (high, medium, and lower academically performing) African American males at a single-gender urban middle school participated in semi-structured interviews using Photo Elicitation methods (Prosser, 2011) to reflect on their experiences with Enabling texts, activities, and contexts. Enabling Texts (Tatum, 2008) move beyond a solely cognitive focus—such as skill and strategy development—to include a social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic focus. Considering a socio-cognitive perspective allowed for the exploration of both the cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of literacy, without limiting the analysis to one or the other. Data sources included: a) portfolio and school record artifacts, b) individual semi-structured interviews, and c) biographical survey data. Data collection and analysis were comprised of portfolio and school data completed during the 2010-2011 school year, as well as multiple and sequential interviews and survey data collected during the spring of 2013. Three African American males for each subgroup: high, medium and lower academically performing, were selected based on their availability to participate in the study, interest, and percentage point growth from previous year’s standardized testing data. Due to the study’s emphasis on gaining a deeper understanding of the student’s experience, this study integrates the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology with the more coherent and systematic, yet reflexive data analysis steps of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT): initial, focused, and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006).
Overall, findings suggest urban adolescent African American males perceptions of contexts, texts, and pedagogies differed based on their achievement levels, however there were several similarities across all cases, which students found to be *Enabling*. By focusing on the students’ perception of their literacy experiences with various texts, pedagogies, and contexts, the author makes the similarities and differences between high, medium, and lower performing students more visible. Implications for key stakeholders (principals, teacher educators, educators, parents, and students) emphasize the importance of gaining a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between adolescents’ literacies and the experiences that shape them.
Dedication

For My Fab Five:

My loves, my life, my legacy—

May the principles established in you,

guide your life of service and commitment
to work that extends beyond your convenience and comfort zone.
Acknowledgements

As a mother of five, I have always been deeply fascinated by the notion of “motherhood,” particularly the full range of emotions and skills required of the position. There are certainly the joyous times, the painful times, the times of sacrifice, the sleepless nights, the love, the questions, the pride, the disdain, the vulnerability, the right and wrong interpretations, the fatigue, but ultimately the constant quest to strengthen the bond of the relationship. In doing so I have become keenly aware of the tremendous support (physical, cognitive, financial, spiritual and emotional) it takes to nurture a child. Many times throughout working on this degree I would metaphorically joke with my family about having to go spend some time with my sixth child. Whenever I reflect on my educational journey, as it is with my biological children, I thank God for blessing and amazing me with support from family, friends, mentors, colleagues and professors who unselfishly assisted me in raising my sixth child.

I would like to thank my mother (Daphne Triplett), father (Douglass Swann), and grandmother (Yvonne Hunter Turner Swann Coleman) for affirming my gifts at an early age and establishing sound principles for which to lead my life. In my formative years, you never gave me enough time to focus on all that we did not have as a family, rather you allowed love to overshadow the difficult times. I am also indebted to my childhood friend, turned husband, Geoff Stewart. You have been the “house band” holding everything together throughout this whole process. I could never imagine even attempting such a feat without a man of your strength, patience, understanding, character, integrity
and I’ll add in strength again! Also thanks for the countless hours of reading and helping me think through the messy parts of several drafts. For my Fab Five, you rock! Each of you had your own special way of helping me, without complaint, when I needed you most. Thank you for being so fabulous.

I am also thankful for my family who continued to ask the question all doctoral students love, “When will you be finished?” Thank you for always believing in me. Ty, Daryll and Bryan being raised with you was a precious and unique blessing. Daryll, I appreciate the multiple ways you have supported me through this program, but most impactful was having the opportunity to observe how you navigated the peaks and troughs throughout your life. I’d also like to thank my in-laws, Mom (Iva Stewart) and dad (Harley Stewart), you made sure the kids did not miss a beat. To my brother and sister-in-law (Mike and Monica Stewart), you made sure the kids stayed active in sports, took them to and from practice, and too many other events to list here. Thank you for helping us parent.

I have a special group of sister-friends I must thank for our years of friendship, countless hours of time spent in laughter, crying, development, silence, and just being. My earliest role model, Dr. Talya Greathouse and the rest of the ladies from our youth group at Calvary Tremont, you are my inspiration! Crystal Bryant, DeWanda Turner, Natasha Blackshear, Tiffani Balashange, Tasha Jones and Monnette Glason for keeping me grounded throughout this process. I love you. My spiritual family has also consistently provided me another incredible layer of support. A very special thanks to my Christ Memorial, United Faith, and Equip U Church Families, especially my time spent with Destined for Success and The Company of Women— thank you for always speaking
life! Dr. Lonnel Johnson and Victoria Dunn, thank you for your patient feedback throughout various phases. Johari Mitchell, Ruth McNeil, Chiquita Toure, Breena Means, thanks for always being a sounding board for my ideas and your resourcefulness.

This journey would have been impossible without a committed team of people to question, critique, challenge and support my developing ideas at different phases. My dissertation committee utilized their collective body of expertise to push my work to the next level. Dr. Moore, I appreciate your insight regarding my methodology chapter. Those early meetings helped shape and add substance to my study design. In addition to being on my committee, your other work as Associate Provost and Director of the Todd Anthony National Resource Center on African American Males helped create unusually important venues for me to connect with others who share similar research interests, as well as create uninterrupted space to write and receive feedback from colleagues. Dr. Blackburn, thank you for your critical stance, which lead to several rich discussions that encouraged me to rethink my ideas. Those discussions, especially the earlier ones, were so important because I needed to hear myself think. Thank you for providing such opportunities, as well as the written feedback on several drafts of my document. Dr. Voithofer, as an advisor, I could not have asked for a more perfect match. From our first meeting you understood my desire to fully embrace this process and then you continuously assisted me in developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions to prepare myself. Cup O’ Joe now has a new meaning for me. This is the place where you helped me bring my research and writing into focus. I am thankful you helped me imagine the end of this journey, while keeping my efforts in the present. Mostly, thank you for revitalizing my desire to finish and restoring my faith. Taken together, my committee
ushed me into a space where I could critically evaluate my work and consider my next steps. I am also thankful for their transparency and allowing me to gain insight on how to balance my academic and personal life.

I also had colleagues, other professors and organizations that have been instrumental in my progression through this program. So many thanks to my professors, colleagues, visionaries and planning team at The Ohio State University Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) for providing funding and the Dissertation Bootcamps, specifically Dr. Valarie Lee, Dr. James Moore, and Dr. Robert Bennett. Also Ron Parker and Dr. Marjorie Shavers, thank you for providing an incredible amount of timely and critical feedback on my writing during Bootcamp and beyond. Our time together pushed me over the ledge, thank you is simply not enough. I am also indebted to our College of Education and Human Ecology (EHE) and our generous funders for awarding several merit scholarships on my behalf. Without the financial support provided by ODI and EHE, I am not certain program completion would have been possible. Also, a special thanks to the entire Tawi Family Village, particularly Elders Kelsey for your encouragement and supporting my community-based work along the way.

I would also like to thank the following individuals and professors for your words of wisdom, content expertise, feedback on my earlier work, or assistantship experiences that significantly shaped my work: Rochelle Gymph, John Kier, Denise Harmon, Renee Kelley, Deb Zablodil, Dr. Beverly Gordon, Dr. Pat Enciso, Dr. Bob Hite, Dr. Dorinda Gallant, Dr. Elaine Richardson, Dr. Adrienne Dixon, Dr. Belinda Gimbert, Dr. Ian Wilkinson, Dr. Bob Ransom, Dr. T.K. Daniel, Robin Holland, Dr. Melissa Wilson, Dr.
Cynthia Tyson, Dr. Stacey Brinkley, Mark Allen and my Otterbein family. None of my accomplishments would have been possible without you.

Lastly, and certainly not least, I have had the unique privilege of working in a public school district where there has been an overwhelming amount of support for the type of work I love to do. There are a group of district and building level teachers and administrators who I call my “team of mentors” because they carve out space for me to be creative, they critique my practice, encourage me to continue asking the big questions about urban education, as well as provide resources, guidance and wisdom which has been invaluable throughout this process. I must also mention my Best Teammate Ever (BTE) for her solid commitment to advancing all we learned about educating boys. BTE, our successes in the classroom can only be considered in light of our commitment to our end goals, intense level of collaboration, honest critique of each other’s work and desire to support each other along the way. Thank you for teaching me more lessons than you know. Finally my students, particularly the boys who trusted me with their voices, thank you for investing in and valuing our relationship.

Whatever part you played, I tried to express my gratitude, but inevitably I did not name others who also played critical roles at some point. These omissions are only due to the limited space I have here. All of your contributions have not only sustained me throughout this process, but taught me to value and embrace the importance of engaging in scholarship, service, and teaching as a tool to reach beyond the status quo. Thanks again for helping me mother my sixth child. Working with each of you has been my greatest gift.
Vita

July 1972……………………………Born – Columbus, Ohio

May 1994……………………………B.S., Medical Technology, Howard University, Washington, DC.

1994-1998…………………………..Biological Technologist, Merck & Co., Inc., West Point, PA.

1998-1999…………………………...Chemist, Abbott Laboratories, Ross Division, Columbus, Ohio


2001-2006………………………….Middle School Science and English Language Arts Teacher, Columbus, Ohio.

2006-2009…………………………...Full-time Graduate Studies, Educational Policy and Leadership, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

2009-2012………………………….Middle School Science and English Language Arts Teacher, Columbus, Ohio.

2012-present………………………...Various district and building-level leadership positions related to literacy

Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Education: Policy and Leadership

Minor Fields: Adolescent Literacies, Sociocultural Foundations, Teacher Education
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ........................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v
Vita ........................................................................................................................................ x
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. xi
List of Tables ...................................................................................................................... xviii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................... xix

Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1
  Background ....................................................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................... 7
  Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 7
  Research Question ......................................................................................................... 8
  Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 9
  Limitations ...................................................................................................................... 9
  Definition of Terms ....................................................................................................... 11
  Dissertation Structure ................................................................................................. 12
  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 2: Literature Review ........................................................................................... 14
  Introduction .................................................................................................................... 14
Adolescent literacy................................................................. 16
Trends in teaching: vocabulary and comprehension.................. 17
Impact on motivation and engagement................................... 19
Use of technology.................................................................... 20
Identity and interests............................................................... 21
Ethnicity and language............................................................. 28
Educational outcomes.............................................................. 33
Reader conclusion.................................................................... 35
Context...................................................................................... 36
Urban schools............................................................................ 36
Urban principals......................................................................... 40
Liberatory consciousness......................................................... 41
Pluralistic insight...................................................................... 43
Reflexive practice...................................................................... 44
Urban teachers........................................................................... 45
Conceptions of self and others.................................................. 47
Conceptions of social relations................................................... 50
Conceptions of knowledge.......................................................... 56
Context conclusion................................................................... 61
Texts......................................................................................... 63
Informational............................................................................. 66
Literary...................................................................................... 69
Non-print.................................................................................... 73
Images, music, and graphs to create understanding and meaning .................. 174

Documentaries to appreciate, critique, and transcend .................................. 182

Novels and online text as a lifeline to explore self and others ......................... 189

Discussion ........................................................................................................ 197

Chapter 6: Pedagogy Findings ......................................................................... 205

Enabling Pedagogies: A Multiliteracies Approach ........................................ 205

Multiliteracies in the science classroom ......................................................... 206

Modified reciprocal teaching as situated practice ......................................... 206

Interactive Cornell note taking as overt instruction ....................................... 214

Combined Cornell note taking and reciprocal teaching as critical framing ....... 220

Collaborative online inquiry as transformed practice ................................... 221

Multiliteracies in the English language arts classroom .................................. 223

Raw writing as situated practice ................................................................. 224

Scaffolded learning as overt instruction ....................................................... 226

Socratic seminar as critical framing ............................................................ 229

Poetry slam as transformed practice ......................................................... 231

Discussion ........................................................................................................ 233

Chapter 7: Conclusion .................................................................................... 250

Significance and New Learning ....................................................................... 255

Implications and Recommendations ............................................................. 261

Limitations and Future Research .................................................................... 265

References ....................................................................................................... 268

Appendix A: Biographical Survey ................................................................. 297
| Appendix B: Semi Structured Interview Questions | .......................................................... | 299 |
| Appendix C: Context Findings                      | .................................................................. | 303 |
| Appendix D: Text Findings                         | .................................................................. | 304 |
| Appendix E: Pedagogies Findings                   | .................................................................. | 306 |
| Appendix F: Cornell Notes                         | .................................................................. | 308 |
| Appendix G: Raw Writing                           | .................................................................. | 311 |
| Appendix H: Description of Enabling Context       | .................................................................. | 321 |
| Appendix I: Description of Enabling Texts         | .................................................................. | 323 |
| Appendix J: Description of Enabling Pedagogies    | .................................................................. | 325 |
| Appendix K: Intersections of Theories, Definitions, Frameworks | .......................................................... | 328 |
| Appendix L: English Language Arts Images           | .................................................................. | 329 |
| Appendix M: Relationship of Factors for High, Medium, and Lower-Performing African American Males | .................................................................. | 331 |
List of Tables

Table 1. Readers ............................................................................................................. 138

Table 2. Standard Assessment Data for Reading and Science ................................. 139
List of Figures

Figure 1. Adolescent Literacy Framework ......................................................... 16
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Boyz n Search of Their Solar System

Our boyz are short-fused in their short-changed Hood.

Yo, Gang-bangs reign where playgrounds grandly stood.

Shooters drive by: Teen-dreams dive for covers.

Nightmares stroke them like they were old lovers.

L.A. Haiti Kemet Kingston—blues-groove:


A swarm of conflict plagues their short-fused Hood.

Where Walking/death is forced to knock on Wood.

But Boyz must bond with Brothersblack, unbind

Their minds too roughly w/rapped in wondrous noise.

Though Black and short-fused in the fatal line.

Their Soular System gives them ancient poise.

Eugene B. Redmond

Like several of the poems in Feelings and Angelou’s (1993) Soul Looks Back In Wonder, Eugene Redmond’s presents the insider’s view—accounting for the complexities, cruelty, yet distinct cultural symbols associated with the lives of African American males. While the poem is meant to portray present-day happenings, it takes the
time to reach back in history to remind the reader of its subject’s ancestral origins. It precedes the Civil Rights Movement, which is credited with stirring national attention and bringing inequitable practices to the forefront with regard to our educational institutions, particularly in K-12 settings. For many today, this struggle continues as a close examination of issues related to access, equity, and achievement are explored.

The field of adolescent literacy has a substantial body of research that confirms how little attention public education in the US has paid to advance the literacies of African Americans. According to national statistics, there has been a consistent and in some cases increasing gap of reading achievement between African American students and other subgroups (Jacobs, 2008; NCES, 2007, 2009, 2011). NAEP (2007) data show a 26-point gap between African American students and their White counterparts, scaled scores were 244 and 270 respectively. White males (265) scored higher than African American males (238), leaving a 28-point gap. White females (275) scored higher than African American females (250), resulting in a 26-point gap. According to NAEP (2011), only 34 percent of the 8th graders scored at or above proficiency in reading. Comparatively, 38% of the White 8th graders scored at or above proficient, while only 14% of 8th grade African American students scored at or above proficiency in reading. For African Americans the scaled score was 249, while their White counterparts scored 274, resulting in a 25-point gap. Although reading scores for 8th graders were higher in 2011 and 2009 when compared to 2007, there is still a persistent 25-point gap between African Americans and Whites. The most recent reading assessment data from NAEP (2008) reveal African American males scored lowest of all subgroups.
Further, it is estimated that 8 million adolescents in America, grades 4-12, read far below grade level (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007) which means they are not able to understand and learn from text printed at their grade level (Kamil et al., 2008). Research shows middle school is the time when texts get more complex thus students need more support (RAND, 2002) and the likelihood that students will “check out” of learning is greater because their in-school and out-of-school identities clash.

Defining what it means to be literate in the 21st century is a daunting task for researchers, teachers, and policymakers. With the advent of social networking sites, advanced mobile devices, tablets, electronic white boards, open source software, Learning Management Systems (LMS) and web conferencing platforms, knowledge creation and sharing are no longer bound to print media. Statistics show the average American child between the ages of 8-18 uses significantly more major media sources than he or she did five years ago (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). However, some scholars report students in high-poverty schools are using technology in ways that do not necessarily transfer to academic success (Moje, 2009). Moje (2009) noted the qualitative differences in media use when comparing low income youth to youth in more affluent communities. She explained how low income students understood how to tape a video of themselves partying and posting it to YouTube, but failed to employ multi-media strategies to explain abstract concepts associated with academic tasks.

Additionally, while it is the common belief that all young people are “plugged in” to technology, there are still persistent barriers to accessing technology in some low-socioeconomic communities (Moje, 2009). This digital divide may further marginalize some populations if efforts are underdeveloped to incorporate technological skills into
academic content standards and subsequently create assessment tools to evaluate their meaningful application in society. Similarly, research has shown that there exists an instructional divide in the types of practices present especially in urban classrooms across the United States. Opportunities for collaboration, knowledge construction, and peer-to-peer communication appear to be limited. In environments with high rates of poverty instruction is often reduced to low-level work (e.g. completing worksheets) that will not advance students’ 21st century learning skills such as critical thinking, peer-peer communication, collaboration, and creativity to name a few (Anyon, 1980; Emdin, 2010; Gee, 2000).

As outlined by several reform efforts and Standard Boards, teachers are expected to incorporate more rigorous learning experiences and assessment practices by considering a) 21st century learning skills students will need (Lemke, Couglin, Thadani & Martin, 2003; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Zucker, 2008), b) the urgency and crisis related to adolescent literacy (IRA, 2002; NIL, 2007; RAND, 2002), c) disciplinary-specific goals (e.g. American Association for the Advancement of Science [AAAS], 1993; National Research Council [NRC], 1996; Science College Board Standards for College Success [SCBSCS], 2009), and d) culturally relevant strategies (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2002, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ochoa, 2007) for diverse learners.

For example, disciplinary literacy examines how students read to understand informational material in subjects like math, science, history and English—subjects that have been found to encompass markedly different processes than reading narrative texts. In fact, many adolescents can read, or rather decode words, with high accuracy, but they experience great difficulty trying to make sense of the intended meaning in expository
text because the material is so selective. For some students reading a discipline-specific text is like reading a foreign language—full of new vocabulary and difficult to understand material due to the various nuances of content, text structure, vocabulary, style, tone, word choice, purpose, and intended audience, which places them at a greater disadvantage (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Complicating the issue, the National Science Education Standards (NSES) insists that the “science for all” mantra penetrate K-12 settings, National Research Council (1996), AAAS (1993), Science Standards for College Success (SSCS) (2009) all emphasize building scientific inquiry skills as a mechanism to promote a scientific literacy, yet offers very little concerning how to achieve such success for traditionally under-served populations.

In other subjects, like ELA and Social Studies, research has shown the merits of using discussion-based and sociocultural approaches in teaching, thus granting students the opportunity to explore social networks, identities, relationships, self-improvement and self-expression factors (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Hinchman & Moje, 1998; Moje, 1996, 2009; Palinscar & Brown, 1985). However, the field appears to be unclear about how to use the sociocultural approaches from ELA courses to benefit students in other courses.

Linguists of African American Language (AAL) have also noted that from its origin AAL was rooted in understanding language as a form of survival (Baugh & Smitherman, 2007). For students of African descent learning science, the “linguistic oppression and social dislocation” (p. 115), has been paramount as they have not been granted the authority to use the power of their own rule-based language with systematic varieties (Richardson, 2006; Rickford & Rickford, 2000), especially since classroom
discussion (whole class or peer-peer) has traditionally been scant in urban classrooms (Anyon, 1980). Brown (2005) is clear to note how focusing on sociocultural dimensions, particularly using vernacularized forms of speaking can benefit the speaker and listener because “the speaker [will] select modes of talk that will provide the listener with the best opportunity for understanding” (p. 213) which may be critical for comprehending complex text.

Still other theorists and researchers (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009) have pointed to the cultural mismatch many African American students face in school, and in particular with the subject of science (Brown, 2005). Scholars (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Jacobs, 2008) have noted the significance of creating more equitable forms of instruction for traditionally marginalized students, as well as the necessity to interrogate narrow definitions of literacy, especially with African American males (Kinloch, 2010; Kirkland, 2010; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). Taken together, the factors contributing to low reading achievement levels have consisted of family and community background (Edwards, 1992; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995), teacher quality (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Shulman, 1987), intelligence (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), early language development (Craig, Conner, & Washington, 2003), “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004), stereotype threat (Steele & Claude 2003), opportunity gaps (Anyon, 1980; Kozol, 1991), and homework and parent expectations (Flowers & Flowers, 2008) to name a few. Conversely, Hilliard’s (2003) work suggests there are, and have always been “gap closers”—educators, schools, and districts who demonstrate the capacity to move typically lower-performing African American students from the lower quartile by standardized testing measures into the top quartile. In his
seminal work: *No Mystery—Closing the Achievement Gap* (2003) Hilliard documents several such cases, but acknowledges these examples are understudied and all but invisible in educational research. He questions, “Where are the examples of high achievement with typically low-performing students (p. 143)?” Hilliard admonishes the educational community to explicate the processes involved that account for such a radical departure from predicted performance.

**Statement of the Problem**

Very little research has examined the different types of outcomes various subgroups of urban adolescent African Americans males can produce given *Enabling Texts* (Tatum, 2008), pedagogies, contexts and how these students perceived their literacy experiences. *Enabling Texts* (Tatum, 2008) provide students with the opportunity to a) develop practice with traditional, school-based forms of literacy (i.e. cognitive skill and strategy instruction), and also b) privilege non-traditional forms of meaningful and relevant literacy that may have social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic implications for students’ daily lives beyond the school day. In this study, text is broadly defined to include both print and non-print media.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to extend the research that focuses on the interplay of factors that affect reading achievement for African American students by examining the perceptions of high, medium, and low performing adolescent male literacies in an urban context. Using the student’s perspective to examine the interactions between texts, pedagogies, and contexts will provide a more in depth understanding of the interplay between adolescents’ literacies and the factors that shape them.
Research Question

The research question used to guide this study is as follows:

How do the perceptions of urban adolescent African American males’ experiences with Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts differ based on their academic achievement levels?

A descriptive, multi-case study was used to explore the literacy practices and perceptions of three subgroups of urban adolescent African American males. Participants in this study were comprised of nine, eighth grade, urban African American males attending a single-gender school. Three males, in each subgroup (high-medium and lower performing), comprised each case for the stratified purposeful sample. This sampling was selected because a) African American males are not a homogenous group (low-performers) as often times suggested in the literature (e.g. “African-American male literacy crisis”) and b) rarely is the relationship of school achievement juxtaposed against the range of outcomes examined in new literacy studies (Moje, 2009).

Data were collected and analyzed through interpretation and constant comparative analysis in an effort to present findings that will unearth the contextualized nature of learning with Enabling Texts, pedagogies and contexts across the three subgroups. Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was used to illuminate participants’ beliefs, purposes, actions, and the reasons for their actions, and inactions from their perspectives (Morse et al., 2009) instead of forcing them into a preconceived theoretical perspective. The following data were collected: a) portfolio and school record artifacts, b) individual semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2005), and c) biographical survey data. During the interviews, Photo Elicitation methods (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 2002; Smith &
Woodward, 1999) were used to broaden the conceptions and depth of the conversations, to facilitate recall of information, and assist participants in discussing various artifacts.

**Significance of the Study**

More new literacy research that addresses achievement and outcomes (what it enables students to do) needs to be examined in order to influence policies that shape access to new media, texts and instruction (Moje, 2009). Educators can better understand and develop curricular materials, instructional practices, and contextual factors that minimize academic challenges for traditionally under-served populations. Teacher educators can create learning opportunities to support such developments. Principals can better understand how school-based contextual factors help support the teaching and learning processes that lead to increased levels of reading. Parents need resources and strategies to support the demands associated with the learning process, as well as understanding the importance of students being able to read increasingly complex texts across the grade bands. Students who traditionally do not describe their leaning experiences gain the agency to do so. Further, increasing reading achievement for African American males can result in positive life outcomes as they enter adulthood.

**Limitations**

In qualitative inquiry, “the researcher is the instrument of the study and the center of the analytic process” and therefore must guard against bringing personal bias and theoretical dispositions into the study (Patton, 1990, p. 460). Phenomenology, a key element in this study, asserts the meaning of phenomena can best be understood through the descriptions and experiences of the participants being studied, thus providing agency and voice to oftentimes “silenced” populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Similarly, the
task of the constructivist grounded theorist is to unearth participants’ beliefs, purposes, actions, and the reasons for their actions, and inactions from their perspectives (Morse et al., 2009) instead of forcing them into a preconceived theoretical perspective. When examining a phenomenon, preconceived expectations and theories should be suppressed as not to guide the data collection process or interfere with the researcher being fully absorbed in the phenomena (Creswell, 1994).

However, in the present study, as is consistent with constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006), it would be inaccurate to suggest I was completely separate and objective from all that had been studied and learned about qualitative research, adolescent literacy, African American students and student achievement, particularly with males or sociocultural and cognitive theories prior to and during data collection given my role as a graduate student and teacher within the school district where this study took place for eleven years. Although using CGT methodology ensured the data had to “earn its way” into the construct of the analysis, both phenomenology and socio-cognitive perspectives (Purcell-Gates, 2012; Rogoff, 2003) were assumed going into the study. Consistent with phenomenological studies, I made every attempt to accurately present the ideas and materials in a manner that was consistent with the thoughts and ideas of the study participants themselves, rather than my own thoughts and ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). I employed strategies using the four criteria for qualitative trustworthiness as suggested in the literature (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Also the current study primarily focused on student perception data from nine urban adolescent African American males at varying levels of achievement attending a single-gender middle school. I intentionally privileged student voice in the
current study. In doing so, interview data from parents, teachers, and administrators were not collected.

**Definition of Terms**

1. Phenomenological study: A type of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to identify similarities in the perceptions of several individuals regarding a particular phenomenon.
2. Readers: Term used interchangeably in chapter 4 to reference the conceptual framework and the participants in this study.
3. African American/black: Terms used interchangeably to reference people of African descent.
4. Euro American/European American/Caucasian/white: Terms used interchangeably to reference people of European descent.
5. High performing: Student’s academic performance level, scored “advanced” or “accelerated” on the standardized assessment. Students in this subgroup can apply their understanding of various techniques to determine the meaning of unknown words and effectively use reading strategies to convey a complete understanding of literary and informational texts.
6. Medium performing: Student’s academic performance level, scored “proficient” on the standardized assessment. Students in this subgroup have a fundamental understanding of various techniques to determine the meaning of unknown words and typically use reading strategies to convey and overall understanding of literary and informational texts.
7. Lower performing: Student’s academic performance level, scored “basic” or “limited” on the standardized assessment. Students in this subgroup can generally apply, may struggle, or be unable to perform simple reading tasks. Students may be able to demonstrate some or very little understanding of literary and informational texts.
8. Adolescents: Youth in grades 4-12, usually between the ages of 11-18 (Moje, Young, Readance, & Moore, 2000).
9. Adolescent literacy/literacies: Terms used interchangeably to describe the cognitive practices that are socially situated and constructed and encompass all forms of literacy that take place with this particular age group across various academic disciplines in school (mathematical literacy, scientific literacy, historical literacy [often referred to as disciplinary literacy], computer literacy, visual literacy, graphic literacy, oral literacy—sometimes focusing on explicit comprehension instruction in disciplinary courses, as well as the more traditional forms of literacy that take place in English courses).
10. Achievement: While I use traditional standardized testing data to form the cases for this study, I also define achievement more broadly in chapters four through six to include affective outcomes, as well as the various adolescent literacies students are able to construct throughout the school day.

11. Enabling texts: Texts that provide students with the opportunity to a) develop practice with traditional, school-based forms of literacy (i.e. cognitive skill and strategy instruction), and also b) privilege non-traditional forms of meaningful and relevant literacy that may have social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic implications for students’ daily lives beyond the school day. Enabling texts (Tatum 2008) include the following features:
   a. They contribute to a healthy psyche.
   b. They focus on a collective struggle.
   c. They provide a road map for being, doing, and acting.
   d. They provide modern awareness of the real world. (p. 165)

12. Text: Text is broadly defined to include both print and non-print media in any discipline.

13. Enabling pedagogy/activities: Terms used interchangeably to note the specific processes and purposes used to engage learners with text. Also includes the features mentioned in Tatum (2008).

14. Enabling context: Narrowly defined to include the relationships, interactions, and programming constructed between principals, teachers, and students in an urban school setting. Also includes the features mentioned in Tatum (2008).

**Dissertation Structure**

This study is presented in seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides the rationale and purpose for the study and the research question. Chapter 2 reviews the research and theories related to African American males and other factors that impact their literacies. Chapter 3 details the design and methods used to frame and analyze the study. It also includes a description of the participants, instrumentation, and the approach taken to limit researcher bias. In Chapters 4 through 6, a detailed analysis of the themes and subthemes are presented followed by a discussion of the findings as they relate to the research question. Specifically, Chapter 4 describes the students’ perceptions of various school-based contextual factors. Chapter 5 describes their perceptions of various texts related to
their science and English Language course, while chapter 6 delves into their perceptions of the pedagogies used to mediate learning with the texts previously described in Chapter 5. In Chapter 7, a summary identifying the significance of new information unearthed through the study findings is discussed. The implications these findings have for parents, principals, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers, as well as the limitations in this study, and possible lines of inquiry for future research is also shared.

**Summary**

As was previously mentioned, Chapter 1 provided the rationale for conducting this study by providing a brief summary of the literature related to the adolescent literacies of African American males. The purpose and significance of the study was presented, along with the research question, limitations and definitions to clarify terms that may have multiple meanings across contexts. The literature suggests there are several factors, both barriers and bridges, which affect the achievement of African American students. The purpose of this study is to extend the research that focuses on the interplay of those factors, as more new literacy research that addresses achievement and outcomes needs to be examined in order to benefit multiple stakeholders. In the next chapter, a review of the relevant research associated with African American males and other factors that impact their literacies is identified. Using the Adolescent Literacy Framework (RAND, 2002; Sweet & Snow, 2003), the chapter is organized into the following categories: reader, context, texts and pedagogies.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To gain a deeper understanding of the topic and better contextualize the current study, a review of the literature is necessary. RAND Reading Study Group (RAND, 2002; Sweet & Snow, 2003) was created by the US Department of Education in 1999 to establish a research agenda to deal with the most pressing problems related to literacy. The group decided to focus on reading comprehension due to the: a) increased demands for text complexity as students advance through school, b) international rankings of discipline-specific content when compared to students in other countries, c) increasing diversity and persistent achievement gaps between students of different demographic backgrounds, c) sparse attention dedicated to assisting teachers develop the skills they need to support students’ reading comprehension and content learning through reading, and d) policies and programs (although adopted) yielding inconsistent data because they are either not grounded on empirical evidence or are poorly evaluated. In doing so, RAND proffered a conceptual framework for reading comprehension, which consists of four elements: the reader, text, and activity (Figure 1). The authors go on to explain that these elements should not be considered in isolation, but in relation to the other and inside of a larger school context. In the report, reader factors include motivation, interest, cognitive capabilities, linguistic knowledge, and knowledge of specific comprehension strategies. Text factors include text complexity, structure and representation, while the factors related to the activity involves three dimensions: purpose, process, and
consequences. In the present study, I use the word pedagogy and activity interchangeably to suggest the specific processes and purposes used to engage students with text. Context may consist of factors such as the economic resources of the school, school culture, and the students’ likelihood to reach successful outcomes.

In this chapter I use the aforementioned conceptual framework to synthesize the literature for the reader, context, text and pedagogy. The studies included in this review were selected based on the following criteria: 1) current empirical data published in a peer-reviewed journal 2) contributed to the extant knowledge base for urban adolescent African American males and achievement, or the study was considered 3) a landmark, classical or historical piece related to the topic. I used recommendations from faculty who are considered experts in their respective fields of study, as well as the ERIC database to review research on different combinations of the following terms: urban, adolescent, African American/Black, male, literacy, literacies, achievement, science, scientific, text, pedagogy, multiliteracies, culturally relevant pedagogy, and comprehension instruction. At times, the reference lists of the articles that were most relevant to the research topic were photocopied and compared against the major themes and findings that arose throughout the current study. In some cases, authors whose work was referenced frequently and generally accepted as authoritative in the adolescent literacy and science research communities further narrowed the search. In the first section, I synthesize seven major research reports from widely recognized educational organizations that focus on literacy. I then describe various factors that relate to African American males as readers. In the second section, I discuss the literature related to urban school contexts for this subgroup. In the third section, I focus on texts (informational, literary, and non-print). I
conclude the chapter by describing studies related activities/pedagogies that support adolescent literacy development.

According to RAND (2003), readers are diverse and have different factors (e.g. motivation, interest, cognitive capabilities, linguistic knowledge, and knowledge of specific comprehension strategies) that impact how and what they learn. Adolescence is a unique time in a person’s development, as is their development with literacy, identity, interests, ethnicity, language, and educational outcomes.

**Adolescent literacy.** Adolescent literacy has a growing body of research that has caught national attention in light of the estimated 8 million American students in grades 4-12 that read far below grade level (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Several organizations
(Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Kamil et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; National Reading Panel (NRP), 2000; RAND, 2002; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003) have received funding to explore this complex topic in greater detail. The main purpose of these major research reports from widely recognized educational organizations is to expand what the field of adolescent literacy already knows and make recommendations for what needs to happen next related to literacy. The majority of the studies in the reports are based on either experimental or quasi-experimental data. Although, comprehension instruction can and should start early, most of the studies focused on grades 4-12. Three major themes were evident across the studies: a) trends in teaching vocabulary and comprehension, b) impact on motivation and engagement, and c) use of technology.

**Trends in teaching: vocabulary and comprehension.** The seven studies reached consensus on several topics, mainly that vocabulary and comprehension instruction is not only necessary, but imperative for student success. The National Institute for Literacy (NIL) (2007) identified nine key literacy components, two of which met the criteria for being included in this section, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Studies showed content area text may be more technical and abstract increasing the difficulty for readers who are already struggling to grasp the major concepts and therefore should explicitly be taught the material. Also, of the fifty studies from 1979-2004, the National Reading Panel (2000) found vocabulary instruction led to gains in comprehension.

RAND (2002) hypothesized that many lower-performing middle and high school students do not comprehend content area texts because they lack the knowledge, skills and dispositions to do so. The researchers explain how lower-performing students may
have been exposed to a different curriculum altogether, when compared to students who are more proficient at reading. Even still, three findings, supported by substantial research in the other reports, were presented to offset these negative effects: a) provide students with a repertoire of strategies that promote comprehension monitoring, b) explicitly teach comprehension strategies to increase learner outcomes and c) connect comprehension strategy instruction to the context of the subject matter.

There was tremendous overlap in the strategies studied across the reports. For example the NRP (2000) suggested seven strategies for text comprehension: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organizers, question answering, question generation, story structure and summarization. Similarly, the NIL (2007) posed six strategies: generate questions, answer questions, monitor comprehension, summarize text, use text structures and graphic and semantic organizers. In Biancarosa & Snow (2006), the categories of strategies were heavily supported by the context in which they were being taught and discussion-based. For example, the first category of strategies included direct, explicit comprehension instruction and cites Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1985) and Reading Apprenticeship (Greenleaf et al., 2001) as effective models, both of which include questioning, clarifying, predicting, and summarizing. The second category identifies effective instructional principles embedded in content like the Strategic Instruction Model, while the third category offers a text-based collaborative learning opportunity (Questioning the Author). Also, of notable significance should be the extensive checklists (Kamil et al., 2008) for carrying out the comprehension instruction recommendations that was absent in earlier reports.
While there is no one best strategy for teaching vocabulary and comprehension instruction, there is considerable agreement that students should receive multiple strategies, including repeated and varied exposure to words they do not know, as well as pre-teaching activities to introduce those unknown words early, thereby providing students with the opportunity to acquire the vocabulary necessary for increased comprehension. According to the studies in this review, students would not benefit from implementing the same comprehension strategies across disciplines. A more meaningful approach would be to look more closely at which strategies are most effective given a particular content area. It was widely understood that the active participation of the students mattered most as teachers scaffolded student understanding by explaining and modeling, offering guided practice, and gradually releasing the learner to independent practice.

**Impact on motivation and engagement.** Virtually all reports held some sort of recommendation for motivating students. Motivation may be thought of in terms of students having a purpose for reading, interest in the content or self-efficacy as a reader. While often used synonymously with the term engagement, motivation and engagement are different. In these reports engagement refers to a) the use of cognitive strategies, b) presence of intrinsic motivation to read c) use of background knowledge to make meaning of the text and d) discussing meanings and interpretations of text (RAND, 2002). Using this construct, motivation becomes a part of engagement, but not a direct equal. Research has shown that increases in student engagement leads to increases in student achievement (NRP, 2000). When students are taught how to use cognitive strategies like the ones for content-area literacy, their motivation may be increased.
Another important factor illuminated through these studies was that motivation must be encouraged for students to *read to learn*, especially with adolescent learners who are at a unique stage of development (Van Hoose, 2001) in which they begin to question their goals and purposes for education. Furthermore, their in-school learning experiences related to motivation may not mirror their out-of-school experiences (surfing the net, reading magazines, e-mail, texting etc.), especially when the in-school landscape focuses on grading and standardized tests to make placement, retention, promotion and graduation decisions (NIL, 2007). Motivation towards educational goals for this group of students is widely accepted as waning in American culture. Careful attention should be placed on this domain to support student success. Teachers can impact student motivation by a) setting clear, authentic and personally meaningful goals, expectations and purposes for class activities, b) getting students to see their individual improvement over time and c) allow student choice and rich discussion.

*Use of technology.* Another important finding by RAND (2002), citing the research by Freebody & Anderson conducted in 1983, was that using computers for vocabulary instruction was more effective than using traditional texts. While studies in the NIL (2007) agreed computer technology can be useful as a supplement to classroom instruction, Kamil et al. (2008) reviewed a national study (45 schools, 118 teachers and 2,655 students) which suggested the computer software products yielded statistically insignificant results in terms of reading achievement. Although adolescent literacy focuses on a particular age group, adolescence is a broad group as there are many cultures embedded that can be distinguished based on one’s identity, interests, ethnicity, language, and educational outcomes.
Again, the most obvious limitation to these studies is they lack variety in terms of sources. A national literacy advocacy group funded all of the reports with substantial funding, oftentimes from the federal government. The majority of the studies cited by the NRP were conducted on elementary students. Further analysis may reveal to what degree the instructional needs were the same versus solely limited to a specific grade band. A good portion of the reports limited their studies to experimental and quasi-experimental methods and did not identify demographic data, which made it difficult to determine if the populations were representative of students in urban schools who serve diverse populations of students, many who have low socio-economic status and speak languages other than Standard English. As a result, the question could be raised as to how closely these recommendations should be followed. However, a significant number of studies that focused on lower-performing students were included in the reports. Studies such as these that identify the grade band, context, and demographic data would be helpful in determining if these recommendations are generalizable to diverse populations given the unique nature of their identity and interests.

**Identity and interests.** Adolescence generally carries a negative connotation. Typically this stage of development focuses on individuals aged 12-18 and is often characterized by young people who are viewed as “troubled” with raging hormones, and rash behaviors including being irresponsible, impulsive, obstinate, action-ready—all of which may interfere with learning and position adolescents against the adults responsible for their development (Moje, 2000; Moje, Dillon, & Obrien, 2000). While literacy programs for elementary-aged children appear to be prominent and well-documented (Moje et al., 2000), little attention and funding has been paid to the literacy processes and
practices in this age group, which further reinforces the negative notions commonly associated with adolescents and the subsequent fear many adults face while working with them.

Moje, Overby, Tysvar, and Morris (2008) posit a different view of adolescent identity citing this time period as one of growing independence (e.g. changing classes, teachers, disciplinary divisions) and their advancing levels of cognitive development (e.g. changes in narrative or story-based based texts to increased exposure to expository or informational texts). Similarly, Moje (2002a) discusses adolescence as a time of “becoming” where “identity kits” (Gee, 2001) are being tried on and formed. Moje notes identities are not a stable, unitary construct and that instead any one person may construct many different identities as they move through different contexts (p. 108). This may pose a developmental mismatch with the contexts of secondary schools and homes where adults often strive to control the movements, thoughts, and interactions of adolescents (p. 113).

According to Valle (1997), culture is a complex social system comprised of roles, language, customs, assumptions, norms, experiences, values, as well as ways of communicating and interacting. Consequently, it is difficult to assume any individual belongs to any one particular culture. However, Ogbu (2004) explains African Americans have a distinct collective identity that is historically, socially, politically, and economically rooted in a common experience marked by periods of enslavement, mistreatment, and discrimination which subsequently creates and maintains two sets of factors: status problems and minority response to the status problems. He defines status problems as external forces that are the African American’s collective problems.
(involuntary incorporation into society, instrumental discrimination, social subordination, expressive mistreatment) because the problems become difficult to solve given the current majority-minority relations. Whereas, African American’s response to the status problems is more internal in that at times they may work to create a new sense of self, opposing the expected views of the dominant group in an effort to escape membership in the subordinate group. Therefore Ogbu asserts, these factors leave African Americans with a continuum of strategies for how to cope with the tensions between conforming to the expectations of the dominant group and maintaining one’s pre-existing values, language, norms, and customs. The continuum of coping strategies consists of: assimilation, accommodation, ambivalence, resistance, and encapsulation.

Other scholars (Brown, 2004; Cross, 1991; Du Bois, 1989; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kirkland, 2011; Oggu, 2004; Steel, 2003) have examined a number of explanations related to how the identities of marginalized populations impact achievement. Ogbu (2004) clarified his original study Fordham and Ogbu (1986) by suggesting ‘the burden of “acting White”’ does contribute to African American student’s school performance in multiple and complex ways, but clarifies it should not be misinterpreted to suggest African American students do not desire or even attempt to excel academically in spite of the coping strategies (Stinson, 2011). In Ogbu’s view, students avoid certain attitudes and behaviors to escape the psychological and social sanctions from their peer group, but these actions do not lessen their aspirations for school success. He draws on historical accounts and community experiences to detail how the coping strategies are played out in the lives of African Americans. Similarly, in The Souls of Black Folks, Du Bois (1989) refers to African Americans as having a double-consciousness, struggling to be American
and African American at the same time. He describes this state as “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled stirrings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 3). Perry’s (2003) example highlights this definition by sharing the response of an informant from Lois Benjamin’s study focusing on the racism and double-consciousness felt by African American professionals:

It presents a divided loyalty of wanting to belong, to love one’s country, and wanting to be proud of it, but always being somewhat a stranger about one’s own experience here. It forces Blacks to choose between [being] Black or American and being forced to choose is destroying part of one’s self. (p. 81)

Steele (2003) describes stereotype threat as the fear of being observed or acting in such a way to confirm a negative stereotype. Although he provided examples of how everyone is subjected to such thoughts, largely the work of he and his colleagues demonstrated how African Americans underperformed on exams when they were perceived as intellectually inferior. In one of his studies with African American participants, he noted how when students felt trust, they performed high. Conversely “when they didn’t feel trust, no amount of self-confidence helped” (p. 107). Kirkland and Jackson (2009) draw on the work of Cromer to explain how poverty, educational neglect, as well as other systems of discrimination may justify four reasons African American males adopt a state of coolness:

1. As a strategy for navigating their world
2. As a system to establish their own manhood
3. As a source of resilience
4. As a form of aggression, strength, and power (p. 281)
The authors provided a review of the literature identifying “cool pose” (as cited by Majors & Billson, 1993) as “a ‘ritualized’ expression of masculinity that involves speech, style, and physical emotional posturing” (p. 280). Although at times cool pose is associated with negative or rebellious attitudes and behaviors in African American males, the authors push past dichotomous meanings of good or bad to position the definition to mean a “unique performative act, an attitude, comportment, or way of being characterized through verbal presentation and style” (p. 280) making note of how “coolness” was used as a resource to help African American males identify with their literacy practices. In this regard, Gee’s (2001) theory of Discourse (with a capital “D”) is particularly helpful in explaining the interrelated nature between language, learning, identity, and context. Gee discussed how an individual’s social relations and their “identity kits” or “forms of life” shift across contexts and activities. In his view, Discourses integrate particular ways of talking, listening, writing, reading, but expands to also integrate acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and feeling (and using various objects, symbols, images, tools, and technologies) to create a subculture or social network within the larger society (p. 719).

In Cross’ (1991) Negrescence theory, he hypothesized racial identity evolves through a series of five stages, each becoming more accepting of one’s blackness: Pre-encounter (anti-Black, pro-White), Encounter (desire to align to Black identity), Immersion (pro-Black, anti-White), Internalization (recognition that both have strength and weaknesses, attitude of respect towards Whites and their differences, increased sense of pride and security in his or her race and identity, Internalization-commitment (changes are reflected by social activism). Similarly, Brown (2004) proposed students transition
through four phases of Discursive Identity Development to cope with the intrapersonal conflict African American students face in the science classroom: Opposition (avoid using science discourse), Maintenance (some attempts to use science discourse but transitions to non-science talk), Incorporation (in spite of struggle, consistently made attempts to use science discourse, some short term mastery), and Proficiency (extensive use of science discourse in everyday classroom practices). As suggested in the aforementioned theories, identities are fluid, multidimensional constructs that have the ability to support or negate one’s sense of self. Not surprisingly then, a prevailing theme throughout the literature (Jocson, 2006; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Tatum, 2008; Tatum & Gue, 2010; Kinloch, 2010) related to adolescents and African American males is that literacy and identity are inextricably linked and there needs to be more work done to align instructional practices to the theories that support these practices.

For example, Jocson (2006) notes how a study participant, Antonio, developed his confidence as a poet by his out of school, self-selected literacy activities (researching various concepts to inform the depth of his poetry writing). Antonio’s membership in a community-based poetry program helped shape his literate identity by writing profusely, memorizing lengthy poems, and practicing his delivery almost daily (p. 249). Kirkland (2009) also discusses how African American students used social media to create other identities to gain agency in order to negotiate and defy the social inequities evident in their daily lives. Kinloch (2010) captures the literacies of two African American males while also illustrating how certain populations have been silenced (no access) to certain forms of literacy and how these practices are irrelevant to their personal lives (Haddix, 2009; Tatum, 2005; Tatum, 2009). By showing how new literacies can be used to
challenge the implicit messages students receive throughout their school day related to literacy, Kinloch’s work repositions and reclaims the types of educational experiences that will benefit more than just the majority. She troubles traditional forms of literacy by positioning the students’ culture at the center of their educational experience, thereby granting them agency (Tatum, 2005) and practice with learning how to create, imagine, critique, research and produce something from nothing.

Comparatively, Moje et al., (2000) also discussed how literacy plays a significant role in the development of adolescent individual and social identities. In Moje (1996), the science teacher made abstract concepts concrete, but also showed an interest in and an overt awareness of the students’ lives outside of school. The teacher in the study believed the students level of confidence increased because of their ability to learn science. The students reported having a positive attitude about science and taking higher level science courses.

While each of the studies provides a lucid and important description of the links between literacy and identity, the studies are intentionally qualitative to examine nuanced phenomena not available in large-scale studies, which typically confirm a meta-narrative of “failure” for African American males. These authors demonstrate an array of positive literacy outcomes for African American males. It is important to create a counter-narrative to offset the litany of negative issues related to African American males. As cited in Noguera (2003), on every negative list (e.g. homicide, suicide, arrests, convictions, incarceration, suspension, expulsions, absence from advanced placement and honors classes, least likely to be hired, most likely to be unemployed) African American males are at the top and on every positive list they are nowhere to be found.
In addition to learning about how the identities of African American males help shape their educational outcomes, their interests are also closely associated. As supported by several identity theories (e.g. cool pose, stereotype threat), African American males may not express an interest in reading, especially in cases where they do not readily identify with the characters, events, or information in the texts. The literature comparing the reading attitudes of males and females has been clear to note regardless of socio-economic status or grade level, females have a more positive attitude towards reading than males, which is critical to the attitude-achievement relationship (Petscher, 2010). The author reviews studies related to factors shaping reading attitudes such as instruction, cognitive skills, student motivation and attention, concluding a student’s “negative attitudes [towards reading] may be the single greatest predictor of future reading” (p. 336). Learning how African American male students perceive their literacy experiences is important to improve their attitudes, thus achievement towards reading. Their attitudes may also be impacted by the unique ways in which their ethnicity and language is constructed throughout the school day.

**Ethnicity and language.** In Kirkland’s (2010), *English(es) in Urban Contexts: Politics, Pluralism, and Possibilities*, he uses data from two original research studies, one involving six young Black men practicing literacy from 2003-2006 and the other of urban youth in online social communities, to explore how urban youth use language(s) for social, cultural, and political purposes. In his opening paragraph he references “the spoken souls of the crowded, colored earth, the distinguishable dialects and silences” to metaphorically remind readers of Rickford and Rickford’s (2000) seminal research titled “Spoken Soul.” Kirkland discusses hybridity as a sort of linguistic pluralism that should
be “fully appreciated” (p. 293), practiced and performed. As his title suggests, he does not subscribe to English being a monolithic language, but one that is “pluralistic, dynamic, hybrid, and fluid” (p. 296), also having the tendency to swell, shift and transform in various contexts. Kirkland’s definition is consistent with Gee (1996) who defines discourse (with a lower case “d”) to mean the linguistic variations of a language that make sense to and are used by a particular community of people. For example one of Kirkland’s study participants, Maya, reports not knowing “besos” was a Spanish word. She used the word because she had heard it used in various contexts and adopted its use in her online interaction with her peers. Maya continued to explain how she needs the power of both English and African American English (AAE) to describe herself and her situation.

Several researchers (Baugh & Smitherman, 2007; LeMoine & Hollie, 2007; Rickford & Rickford, 2000;) have established AAE as a distinct rule-based language. Most language scholars agree it is important for African American students to be bilingual meaning they have full command of AAE and Standard English, thus knowing when and how to skillfully apply both in various contexts. For example, students need to learn the more privileged forms of Standard English in order to tackle the demands of academic reading and writing at the secondary level. Brown (2006) offers a theoretical framework for assisting students in negotiating their linguistic demands as they learn academic writing in secondary classrooms. He proposes using the fluencies and language strengths the students already have as a scaffold to learn academic writing. The major points of his argument demonstrate use of Bourdieu’s markets (micro, meso and macro) to explain the interrelated nature of the space students occupy while participating in
various language practices. In doing so, he uses Bourdieu’s markets to build a framework for analyzing how African-American students may be involved in different contexts which may at times conflict or integrate their home language practices. He states the three main markets students learn to negotiate are: a) macro-markets (national, political and economic power), b) meso-markets (institutional, governed by bureaucracy) and c) micro-markets, (location of face-face linguistic exchange of closely related individuals).

Brown does not suggest these markets are distinct entities that are stagnant in nature; instead he explains how more explicit instruction needs to address the relationship between language and power and how to successfully use a student’s home language as a scaffold (meeting them where they are) to help them learn more formal styles of English for a particular audience. In his article, he examined how students code-switched, based upon which market or markets, in some cases, they were negotiating. Similarly, the discourse analysis of 30 urban, African American students studied in Godley, Carpenter, and Werner (2007) revealed students were much more apt to use AAE in their micro-markets (outside of school or when talking to peers) and their meso-markets, (or slightly forced macro-market language) when being corrected by their teacher for not speaking proper English in school.

While the recommendation to provide explicit instruction to scaffold students’ learning of more privileged forms of English is supported in literature, there are several barriers to the process. Brown (2006) concluded process pedagogies dominate secondary classrooms, making it difficult to scaffold a student’s home language. Godley et al. (2007) suggested the state standards, assessment and curriculum materials are monolithic and only recognized one standard and correct way to use language, omitting the language
skills most frequently used by particular audiences. In particular, the authors note how the assessments are fact-based requiring extensive use of recall strategies to demonstrate knowledge. These barriers may not benefit students whose home language is not Standard English. Study results did not significantly improve students’ understanding of standard forms of grammar and conventions. Ultimately, these barriers may complicate teacher-student interactions as students begin to push back and challenge their language use in the classroom (Godley et al., 2007).

Further, Irvine (2002) demonstrated how the assessment of acquired knowledge is closely related to issues of culture. She discussed the importance of language, particularly related to the language of assessment as equitable versus equal. Hilliard (2002) supported this notion explaining how standardized tests are rooted in and dependent upon language. Several researchers have documented the need for equitable evaluation practices that do not marginalize ethnically diverse students, teachers, and districts. The testing language (Irvine, 2002) needs revision, the myths about learning and ability and the way we “see” them in various contexts is complicated and skewed (Nuthall, 2005). Nuthall (2005) contends that such knowledge is “determined initially by the students’ interests, motivations, and understanding of the purposes of the test” (p. 912) and offers the following illustration:

…imagine a classroom on a very warm afternoon. A student (let’s call her Amy) distractedly watches a teacher she doesn’t like hand out printed tests and say something about how important these tests are. When the teacher tells the students to begin, Amy answers a few easy questions at the beginning. But as the room gets warmer, her clothes get stickier, and the questions get harder, she wonders why the hell she needs to do this. She starts doodling patterns down the side of the answer sheet as the thought crosses her mind that no one she knows gives a damn about what she does on the test. She sucks her water bottle, doodles a few more
faces on the answer sheet to keep boredom at bay, and waits for the test to be over and for real life to begin again.

Consequently, the validity of such measures, especially as predictors for school effectiveness becomes questionable, if not absurd. Again, the need for motivational support and deciphering academic language is made evident.

Adolescent language use impacts participation and identity development in the classroom. Drawing on the research of Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Brown (2006) discusses how African American students display oppositional forms of resistance to traditional education because they do not want to be seen as “acting white.” He juxtaposes this with the claims of Harpalani (2002) and several other scholars who contend that historically African-American students have not been oppositional, nor are they now, suggesting their lack of participation in school may be due to other factors.

Similarly, Flowers (2006) posits a range of explanations for low test scores, which is often attributed to students’ low motivation or expectations of failure. Flowers suggests socioeconomic status, per-student expenditures, language development and the curriculum, all have a part to play in the perception of African-American students identity with low standardized test scores. In the Godley et al. (2007) article, the discourse analysis of several students explained the extreme frustration some African-American students face as they attempt to tackle standardizing their home language. As noted by several scholars, ethnicity and language contributes to a range of outcomes for African American students. The strength in these studies is the explanations regarding how users of AAE negotiate different contexts and the recommendations for working with these students. While there are many and at times conflicting explanations for African
American students low test scores, the root is trust—in relationships with individuals like teachers or in systems like schools and the policies that guide them. Also, as in many quantitative studies measuring the achievement of African American students, traditional forms of assessments are used in these settings, which have not, since this inquiry began, shown a benefit to the literacy development of this subgroup.

**Educational outcomes.** For generations, during slavery (Anderson, 1988), the Civil Rights Movement (Perry et al., 2003) and even now (Ladson-Billings, 2009), the role of literacy and who has access to it has been a major source of contention in America. The stories of historical figures (Anderson, 1988, p. 16–17) like Thomas J. Jones and Louisa Gause make clear the life threatening sacrifices of learning to read during a period when being literate as a slave was illegal because it was not consistent with the ideals and status of what it meant to be a “slave.” Generally, learning to read was considered “stealing.” Still Jones, Gause and many others thought “learning [to read] could point me the way to freedom, influence and secure happiness” (p. 16). The effects of educational outcomes (Gay, 2000) can be further examined by considering this phenomenon in today’s context:

…reading abilities strongly influence performance in other academic tasks and subjects…math and science (especially advanced-level courses) have high stakes and high status attached to them. They are considered the “gateways” to academic development and career opportunities beyond K-12 schooling for those students who have access to and high levels of performance in them. (p. 130)

While literacy researchers know there are multiple factors that affect achievement outcomes for African American students, negative results still persist and continue to confirm a meta-narrative of “failure” for African American males. For example, there has been a consistent and in some cases increasing gap of reading achievement between
African American students and other subgroups (Jacobs, 2008; NCES, 2007, 2009, 2011). NAEP (2007) data show a 26-point gap between African American students and their White counterparts. According to NAEP (2011), 38% of the White 8th graders scored at or above proficient, while only 14% of 8th grade African American students scored at or above proficiency in reading. For African Americans the scaled score was 249, while their White counterparts scored 274, resulting in a 25-point gap. Although reading scores for 8th graders were higher in 2011 and 2009 when compared to 2007, there is still a persistent 25-point gap between African Americans and Whites. Recent reading trend assessment data from NAEP (2008) reveal African American males scored lowest of all subgroups. Even given the rich historical legacy (Tatum & Mohammad, 2012) and mounting research framing and offering solutions to issues associated with these trends, not much progress has been made towards advancing African American males performance on standardized reading assessments. To this end the authors assert traditional forms of literacy (independently reading and comprehending print material to perform well on standardized tests) and reading as a social practice can be complementary if the wide range of literacies African American males already exhibit are acknowledged and encouraged by engaging them with a wide range of texts for multiple purposes (p. 436).

The distinction and acknowledgement here is an important one as Moje (2009) suggested more work needs to be done to demonstrate how innovative and new literacy practices affect a range of outcomes for students, including standardized testing data. In most qualitative studies this information is not present, quite possibly because standardized test scores are not usually a focus in qualitative studies. Still Tatum and
Mohammad (2012) make these points to call attention to the literacy development of African American males across all contexts and for a variety of purposes, including standardized assessments, given the current state and consequences of accountability structures.

**Reader conclusion.** African American male readers are multifaceted and complex human beings with distinct and collective identities that are influenced by historical, political, economical, and social forces and therefore should not be simplified to a homogenous group even though they have unique experiences that bind them. Although educational researchers have put forth a counter-narrative of excellence, it is currently being overshadowed by a meta-narrative of failure for all African American males. More work needs to be done to determine how different groups of African American males become interested, motivated, and engaged in the learning process and thus clarify the subsequent range of outcomes, including standardized test scores, that may be produced. Scholars Delpit (1998) and Sizemore (see Bradley, 1996) wrote about the “rules of power” indicating that students should know the codes for success. This is especially important with standardized tests, so that tests are not used as a tool to further sort already marginalized students. Many qualitative studies focus on a broad range of academic achievements, which are necessary and important. However, very few mention being able to improve comprehension in content area courses as measured by standardized test scores (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). In a society that places a high premium on numbers, accountability, teacher evaluations, and now pay increases, Moje, Tatum, Mohammad, and certainly others are rightly pushing the field to consider how
such information could lead to non-traditional instructional practices breaching the walls of policy, and skepticism, and gaining better entry into more classrooms.

**Context**

As previously mentioned, the issues facing African American students, particularly males, are multifaceted, complex, persist throughout the educational pipeline, and will take the concerted efforts of multiple stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, researchers, principals, teachers, parents) to address the problems (Jackson & Moore, 2006). In addition to authoritative parenting and positive racial socialization, the authors recommended the recruitment and retention of African American male teachers in urban schools to be a key approach in improving the educational outcomes of African American male students. Other studies also focused on factors that are essential for successful preparation, teaching, and leading in diverse settings. The context of school plays a key role in determining the practices that take place throughout the day. Context may be thought of in terms of, but not limited to, social class, school culture, school leadership such as principals and teachers, as well peer influence.

**Urban schools.** Schools that are characteristically urban have large numbers of students of color, low standardized text scores, high drop out rates, high poverty, violence surrounding the school, and low resources (Lee, 1995). According to NCES (2010), 17% of the school age population is African American, 34% of those students live in poverty, the highest of any subgroup, therefore the educational, social, and emotional needs of African American students are disproportionately higher than students attending schools in other contexts (Lewis & Moore, 2008; Noguera, 2003). Stakeholders who are interested in redirecting the failure often times associated with urban schools have made
attempts towards improvement such as all-male academies for African American students (James, 2010; Mitchell, 2011), important reports explaining the phenomenon and outlining recommendation for reversing the negative trends (Lewis & Moore, 2008; National Urban League, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Schott, 2010; Toldson, 2008), special programming to provide students with more Developmental Assets and increased awareness of the actions these students might be taking to contribute to their own demise (Benson, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Tough, 2008). In support, according to the Talent Development Framework (Cole-Henderson, 2000), schools designed to successfully serve low-income African American students should adhere to the following four notions: (a) fortify students where they are vulnerable, both academically and personally, (b) build on students’ personal, adaptive, and cultural assets, (c) assist students in negotiating academic and developmental hurdles, and (d) foster a climate that is personal and caring. Further, Noguera (2003) discussed the research of several scholars and found effective schools share the following commonalities: (a) a clear sense of purpose, (b) core standards within a rigorous curriculum, (c) high expectations, (d) a commitment to educate all students, (e) a safe and orderly learning environment, (f) strong partnerships with parents, and (g) a problem-solving attitude (p. 450).

Although clear commonalities exist across successful schools serving low-income and African American students, research has still shown that pedagogy differs from setting to setting based on socio-economic status. Anyon’s (1980) seminal study comparing the pedagogical practices of urban and suburban schools revealed students in urban setting received more worksheets, step-by-step, finding right versus wrong answers, strict grammar lessons, didactic-type instruction geared for future “working-
class” status. Contrastively, she documented how students in suburban settings were being challenged to critically analyze, create, design, discuss and justify their thinking, ultimately preparing them for the “executive elite” stations in society. A prominent feature that distinguishes the types of schools in her study is that students in the “executive elite” schools are granted permission to use “the intellectually and socially prestigious grammatical, mathematical, and other vocabularies and rules by which elements are arranged” (p. 89). In doing so, Anyon (1980) concludes they are being taught the “hidden curriculum” of power, ownership and control, while urban students are being taught the hidden curriculum of work. Similarly, Gee (2000) posits:

It is certainly one of the deepest sources of inequality in schools that poorer and minority children are often in classrooms where literacy is delivered as if it were some sort of general and stand-alone thing. Indeed, many recent reports in the U.S. have called for just such a stand-alone view of literacy, especially for so-called at-risk children. But these reports [focusing on back to the basics] quickly contradict themselves, caught up by the fact that literacy leads to nothing when it is delivered in a self-contained and general way. Under new capitalism, there will be three kinds of workers: a) symbol analysts, b) enchanted workers, and c) backwater workers…the later being part-time, or on demand to perform low-level service jobs that require brute strength, but little (value adding) knowledge…a pressing issue is how schools are equipping (or sorting) children for these three slots. The proponents of back to the basics claim their pedagogies will equip at-risk children to be enchanted workers, but their pedagogies appear to be excellent devises for the production of backwater workers. (p. 413)

Woods, Kurtz-Costes and Rowley (2005) studied whether young adolescents believed that rich or poor children differed in their academic, sport and music ability. They also examined whether these beliefs differed across age, race, and family income groups. The authors reported that little research has been done that examined students’ beliefs about academic abilities even given the negative stereotypes associated with the intellectual ability of the poor. Findings suggested all students reported the rich were
more academically competent than the poor. More African-Americans in the study believed the rich had a stronger advantage. Students from high-income backgrounds reported poor students were much better at sports. It was suggested the fourth graders held more positive views of the rich in all domains when compared to the sixth and eighth graders because of their limited understanding of global and personal experiences with inequality.

Multiple strategies, programming options, and reports describe the ways several schools have redirected the failure associated with urban schools. Pedagogy and student beliefs about their academic abilities also may contribute to the lack of success many urban schools face. Findings such as these, across multiple contexts, with different groups of students, particularly empirical studies with African American males, appear to be limited in the literature. While many scholars assert that socioeconomic status (SES) can be used as a major factor in determining standardized testing outcomes, Hilliard (2003) highlighted schools comprised of minorities having the lowest SES and were still high performing as measured by standardized test scores. A major part of Hilliard’s work was a call to the field to study master teachers, not to make clones, but to harness the culturally salient strategies and beliefs associated with teaching African American students, regardless of their SES. He acknowledges there are forces (and consequences) that continue to make learning in an urban context difficult, but insists that many teachers, schools and districts have been successful. Hilliard admonished scholars to study those successful principals, teachers, schools, and districts to find out how and why they were able to overcome the obstacles.
Urban principals. Studies focusing on the daily practices of urban principals reveal their profession relies heavily on their ability to deal with multiple factors such as complexity, chaos, and change (Beachum, Denith, McCray, & Boyle, 2008). In doing so, effective school leaders employ specific practices to create environments that support high academic achievement. Crum and Sherman (2008) studied the daily practices of 12 secondary principals in successful schools in Virginia and found several themes describing their practices. The major themes consisted of: developing personnel and facilitating leadership, responsible delegation and empowering the team, recognizing ultimate accountability, communicating and rapport, facilitating instruction, and managing change. While there is no significant direct effect of principal leadership on school effectiveness (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996), there are indirect effects that foster equity throughout the educational program, thus impacting school climate and the type of learning taking place. Strong administrative support from effective principals is a critical factor in urban school contexts and is greatly influenced by a principal’s biography, educational philosophy, and disposition towards establishing relationships (Beachum & McCray, 2010; Johnson, 2007).

Principals who are also culturally responsive leaders work to incorporate the history, values, language, and cultural knowledge of students’ home communities throughout the school curriculum and to develop a critical consciousness among students and staff to challenge the inequities in the larger society (Johnson, 2007). Vega et al., (2012) reviewed several school factors school leaders need to consider such as tracking, discipline, teacher expectations, and school belonging. Taken together, Beachum and McCray (2012) presented a theoretical framework for culturally responsive leadership:
• Liberatory Consciousness (connecting problems of African American students to larger structural inequalities)
• Pluralistic Insight (acknowledges we all have biases, but a responsibility to challenge those notions)
• Reflexive Practice (reflection and action, connected to the larger community of school and society) (p. 237)

Several other scholars present findings that also contribute to this theoretical framework and are discussed below.

**Liberatory consciousness.** Much of the literature related to administrators having a liberatory consciousness hinges on their beliefs. Johnson (2007) reanalyzed data from schools in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) to examine the practices used by principals to establish culturally responsive relationships with diverse students, parents, and community members. Findings from the three case studies of two African American and one White female principals suggested their biographies, educational philosophies, and dispositions influenced their practices and interactions. The author discussed how culturally responsive school leaders believe in supporting the academic achievement of all students, as well as affirming students’ home culture, empowering parents, and acting as a social activist to advocate for change in the community. Conversely, Khalifa (2010) described traditional school leaders as individuals who did not validate, or accommodate the social and cultural capital of diverse student populations, which oftentimes led to negative outcomes for students and their families.
The researchers in Towns, Cole-Henderson, and Serpell (2001) studied four high performing schools to determine the practices and characteristics that led to their success. Although they found the schools differed in size, organizational structure, and financial resources, they also found students, parents, principals, and teachers held a common vision and performed well beyond ordinary expectations to reach student success. In essence, they “overdetermined success” because they believed if students were provided the resources and services in the areas where they were most vulnerable, then they could overcome the academic, personal, and social barriers to learning. For example, principals did not believe that barriers to learning would ultimately impede students’ success at school. Instead they built integrated and comprehensive systems of support to offset the negative effects of the barriers while maintaining a sense energy, creativity and high expectations. Principals also provided extensive time for job-embedded professional development for their staff. The schools in this study focused on the themes of the Talent Development Model (TDM) (Towns et al., 2001): focusing on assets, transitional support, constructivist and activist learning, preparation for the 21st Century, schools as community, as well as meaningful and connected learning experiences (p. 11).

Other researchers have studied creative school programming built around a common set of beliefs. The African American Immersion School model (Leake & Leake, 1993) described the practices of two schools focusing on the needs of African American males. In doing so, the authors outline a framework for the total leaning environment designed to fit the distinct needs and draw upon the strengths of African American students, including gender-specific topics where students would not feel uncomfortable discussing certain topics such as sex-role messages, effective strategies for
communicating with the opposite sex, rites of passage activities based on African and African American adulthood. Noguera (1996) also described the components involved in transforming an underachieving Black urban school to a successful school over a four-year period involving improved daily attendance, graduation rates, and more students attending college. The principal worked to change the school environment by offering new courses that were relevant to the students, hiring new staff, and focusing on community and school support. Creative instructional programs consisted of establishing all-male academies without further marginalizing students by reinforcing negative images and stereotypes, mentoring, and rites of passage activities. The author describes four recommendations for how the needs of African American males can be met:

1. Find ways to affirm the race and culture of the students
2. Find practical ways to address the specific changes these students faced growing up in impoverished urban communities
3. Recruit staff capable of and committed to serving the students’ myriad needs
4. Develop curriculum relevant to their goals and aspirations

These practices stem from the belief that:

the needs of Black males can best be served through efforts specifically targeted at them, even if those efforts require isolating Black males in order to apply the intervention. In their view, separation from other ethnic groups and females in particular is necessary in order to maximize the benefits of the intervention. (p. 222)

*Pluralistic insight.* This tenet of culturally responsive school leaders acknowledges the bias that all individuals carry, but also the responsibility to challenge, critique and change those hidden biases. As previously discussed (Johnson, 2007) considered principals’ experiences living and working in high poverty communities to
determine their influence and approach with families. “Joe” Principal (Khalifa, 2010) accommodated students by having an in-depth knowledge of their culture (language, music, dress, behaviors, family structures). Students were not removed or punished for behaviors associated with their culture, which led to a shift in their attitudes towards learning, and ultimately school success. The principal frequently performed home visits to meet and at times have dinner with families, which garnered more trust and respect when he had to assert correction or advice. Also, Hallinger and Heck (1996) found principal gender matters when it comes to the amount of attention paid to the school curriculum. The author asserts female principals have a bias because they assume a more active role with curriculum, possibly due to their prior teaching experiences. Other administrators have a bias towards standardized testing mandates and other forms of accountability, therefore they developed strategic work around solutions to better meet the needs of their students (Dunbar & McNeal, 2012; Moore chapter; White-Smith & White, 2009).

**Reflexive practice.** Principals who have a reflexive practice are reflective and action-oriented. They also see their role as distinctly connected the broader goals of community and society. The principal in Kahlifa (2012) established his role as a leader within the community who was highly visible and would advocate for the community on issues that were pressing and relevant to them leading to more positive educational identities for the students. In (White-Smith & White, 2009), the principals utilized external community resources to strengthen their programs, but also focused on building alliances across school and community. With reflexive practice, being able to build trust and support with students, families, and staff is also critical. Several studies highlighted
the importance of familial-like relationships between principals and students (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, 2010; Khalifa, 2012). Principals supported their teachers and worked to foster positive relationships and retention by providing consistent time for teacher collaboration around academic topics, daily class visits, and decision-making that did not overwhelm their schedules or distract from their primary purpose of educating students (Andrade, Buff, Terry, Erano & Paolino, 2009; Crum & Sherman, 2008; White-Smith & Smith, 2009).

Although indirectly, principals play a key role in advancing student achievement in urban schools. Existing studies show principals who have a liberatory consciousness, pluralistic insight, and reflexive practice are successful working with African American males, as well as other populations who have not traditionally performed well in school. These principals have different biographies, but stem from a set of beliefs that if students are provided adequate resources and services, then they can overcome academic, personal, and social barriers to learning. Principals of successful urban schools acknowledge and draw on the strengths students bring from home and have the trust of families and surrounding community. Creative school programming structures such as all-male academies, African American Immersion Schools, as well as external community resources to support the regular school program have been effective in some urban settings, yet very few studies (Khalifa, 2010) document how students perceive their experiences with culturally relevant principals.

**Urban teachers.** Successful teachers who are preparing for or already work in urban settings have certain beliefs, ideas, and practices that make their work effective. Milner (2010) explained the importance of preservice teachers having the opportunity to
build a repertoire of knowledge, beliefs, and skills to successful navigate the demands of teaching in diverse settings, as well as establishing a foundation for continued learning and improvement throughout the developmental phases of teaching. He posed the question, “What are some relevant conceptions that every teacher education program should include in its curriculum regarding diversity studies?” He concluded there are specific explanations, teacher assertions, and instructional consequences that should be explored and critiqued. He termed these necessary components to the teacher education curriculum *Conceptual Repertoires of Diversity*, which included such topics as color blindness, cultural conflicts, myth of meritocracy, deficit conceptions, and (low) expectations. Skerret (2010) agreed, as she examined how her biography influenced her teaching experiences in a particular school context. She argues that self-knowledge is essential for teachers’ successful socialization and retention in urban settings. She offers recommendations for restructuring teachers’ preparation and socialization to include critical self-reflection on teaching and learning by reflecting on how biography shapes the teaching experience in a given school context.

A study of practicing urban teachers (Esposito, Davis, & Swain, 2012) examined their perceptions of the intersection of school reform models (SRM) and culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) with respect to culturally and linguistically diverse students. Three findings emerged: (1) Teachers used CRP to empower urban students (conceptions of social relations); (2) Teachers’ beliefs that SRMs hurt African American students more than help them (conceptions of self and others); (3) Teachers’ adaptations of SRMs with culturally relevant practices (conceptions of knowledge). In her seminal study of eight exemplary teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) definition for
culturally relevant pedagogy asserts teaching should help students to be academically successful, culturally competent, and socio-politically critical. Studies related to teaching African American students in urban settings fell into Ladson-Billings’ (2000) theoretical framework associated with culturally relevant teaching: (a) conceptions of self and others, (b) conceptions of classroom social relations, and (c) conceptions of knowledge.

Conceptions of self and others. Shared ethnicity is not the only factor at play in determining how teachers conceive their work and the beliefs they hold about the students they teach. According to Thomas and Stevenson (2009), gender matters as well, although it receives very little attention throughout the school day. In their review of the literature on the gender inequities in education, they explain the disproportionate gender and racial gaps in classroom opportunity structures and school discipline procedures that place urban low-income African American males at risk of academic failure. They cite the research of several scholars who suggest, “across grade levels, teachers tend to have lower expectations for the abilities and performance of African American students; they provide them with fewer opportunities for exposure to science and mathematics role models; and they offer them less encouragement toward enrollment in advanced courses” (p. 162).

While the ethnicity and gender of students appear to be important constructs in how students are perceived by their teachers, Foster (1993) discussed how having shared cultural and social norms could affect the educational outcomes of ethnic minorities. She cites the work of Gay (1998) who found no difference between the ways black and white teachers interacted with black students, therefore promoting a need for teachers who are proficient in community norms. These findings are consistent with the work of Ladson
Billings’ study (1995) of eight successful teachers of African American students. Although all the teachers in her study were female, five were African American and three were White. Foster further explained how successful teachers must be able to communicate with students in culturally familiar ways, while possessing an in-depth understanding of the current as well as historic social, economic, and political relationships of the larger community (Goldston & Nichols, 2009). Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2000) describes culturally relevant teachers’ conceptions of self and others as teachers who: (a) believed all students were capable of academic success, (b) saw their pedagogy as art—unpredictable, always in the process of becoming, (c) saw themselves as members of the community, (d) saw teaching as a way to give back to the community, and (e) believed in a Freirean notion of "teaching as mining" (Friere, 1974, p. 76) or pulling knowledge out.

Research has shown that teacher’s beliefs, past experiences, and background impact student learning (Hilliard, 2002). In a single case study of a successful African American male mathematics teacher teaching in an urban setting (Johnsnon, Nyameke, Chazan, & Rosenthal, 2013), the author describe how the teacher leverages his cultural and familial experiences to address behaviors that may thwart their success in his class and in life. Through the use of speeches, the teacher is able infuse important life lessons into his academic content to ensure student success. The authors drew on pre-Brown v. Board of Education schooling practices where African American teachers, often sharing living space within the same home or community as their students, already had a connection with their African American, and because the schools were segregated, they routinely taught relevant life lessons about surviving life as an African American during
segregation. Brown (2011) also examined the different ways teachers used their past experiences to shape their practices working with African American male students. His study of five African American male teachers discussed how various concepts, ideas, mottos, scriptures, and philosophes directly shaped how they conceived their role as teachers. The teachers shared how their lived experiences presented them with ample sources from which to connect with students such as Christianity, Black fraternities, the military, martial arts, and hip-hop culture. The teachers viewed these sources as valuable knowledge in determining their beliefs and the manner in which they approach teaching. Foster’s (1993) study of 18 exemplary African American teachers stressed how differences in a teachers’ background can be an important factor in how they conceive the purpose and function of education. In her view, a teachers’ knowledge of community norms and having an in-depth understanding of the way the community is positioned in the larger society makes an important distinction between teachers who are successful and unsuccessful with African American students. She used the example of African American values in church to make her point, citing how in church plays everyone gets to participate, even if students participate in small ways, they are still expected to contribute. There are also choral readings and poetry is often recited. During service, African American preachers teach their lessons in an entertaining way as a strategy to keep the audience engaged, often employing the use of figurative language, modifying grammatical structures, stretching out vowel sounds, or altering their meter and tempo (p. 384). She contends understanding these community norms and values are vital to shaping teachers’ beliefs and have important implications for the classroom.
These teacher exemplars should not negate the societal structures that make this type of work almost unbearable. Societal structures such as tracking/segregation, poverty (Goldston & Nichols, 2009), single-parent families, children being raised by their grandparents, pessimistic views related to teaching ethnically diverse students in the media and elsewhere (Bulman, 2002; Palmer & Marimba, 2011), drugs, alcohol and the rest of the litany all compete for prominence in shaping the way teachers form beliefs about students. Still, evaluation research has shown “that extraordinarily high achievement gains can be made, in a relatively brief period, by relatively simple approaches, in spite of typical challenges, for the lowest-income students, regardless of race” (Hilliard, 2003). In making such claims, Hilliard goes on to explain several other studies and their impact on academic achievement.

**Conceptions of social relations.** Proactive strategies that are culturally relevant, communicate clear expectations for success and encourage positive social interactions (teacher-student and student-student) are most desirable urban settings. Classroom procedures that allow students to actively and confidently participate in their learning will have some evidence of order and predictability. These routines need not be rigid, squelching out any spontaneity, but need to be well-established and understood by the students. Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts “the message that the classroom is a place where teachers and students engage in serious work [must be] communicated clearly to everyone” (p. 135). She provides examples of how some students intentionally set out to disrupt lessons of teachers they view as incompetent, and by default “learn not to learn.” She maintains that such actions can be addressed without interrupting teaching. Since teaching, and thus classroom management is highly contextualized and situational it
requires more than a set of rules to establish a community of learners. It requires a belief, understanding, value of and commitment to the students in the class. This should be a “mutual accommodation” (Villegas, 1991, p. 12) where students and teachers adapt their actions to best meet the common goals of the class. The “structures” for such engagement rests on the relationships (student-teacher and student-student), persistence and the academic tasks of the learning community. Generally speaking, successful teachers focus their energies on academic and school-related tasks (Monroe & Obidah, 2004) instead of controlling student behavior and movements. The latter tends to align itself when the right beliefs, expectations and commitments are already in place.

Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts, teachers who are culturally relevant conceive the social relations in their classrooms in a particular way because they: (a) maintain fluid student-teacher relationships, (b) demonstrate a connectedness with all of the students, (c) develop a community of learners, and (d) encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another. She went on to describe how one of the teachers in her study positioned the African American males in her class as academic leaders which in turn gave them the opportunity to be seen by their peers as smart and “cool” since their cultural identities and styles (i.e. language, dress, interactions) were also valued, encouraged, and affirmed. Much of the research related to the social relations between students and teachers rely on trust, which is of key importance in learning. McDermott (1977) explains:

‘…trusting relations,’ a critical subset of the working agreements people use to make sense of each other. In the classroom, these issues translate into how the teacher and children can understand each other’s behavior as directed to the best interest of what they are trying to do together and how they can hold each other accountable for any breach of the formulated...
consensus. It is important that the reader not take ‘trusting relations’ in the ordinary sense, which implies that trust is the property of a person’s personality. The developmental literature is filled with references to a child’s acquisition of ‘basic trust’ as if it becomes a property of the child to be used in all situations...trust is a quality of the relations among people, as a product of the work they do to achieve a shared focus...takes constant effort for two or more people to achieve trusting relations, and the slightest lag in that work can demand extensive remedial efforts...In other words, trusting relations are framed by the contexts in which people are asked to relate, and where trusting relations occur, learning is a possibility. Where trusting relations are not possible, learning can only result from solitary effort. (p. 109)

Several researchers described how African American students did not feel supported by their teachers. Graham and Erwin (2011), discussed how high-achieving African American high school males perceived their teachers and the teaching profession negatively, although they shared they would enter into the profession if financial incentives were made available to them. They thought schools were oppressive and the act of teaching relied on conforming to the status quo which many African American males would experience difficulty. Other studies (DeCuir-Gunby, Taliaferro, & Greenfield, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Weinstein, Madison, & Kuklinski, 1995) have highlighted the difficulty involved in overcoming obstacles teaching students who have been placed “at risk” and suggested African American students, more so than others, are more sensitive to teacher support. Teachers also demonstrate support by the interactions they are able to create with building a community of learners by fostering peer support and validation (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2010) and “peer mattering” (Tucker, Dixon & Griddine, 2010) which can be detrimental to student success because “peer groups play a powerful role in shaping identity as the desire to be accepted and “fit in” is paramount for most adolescents” (Noguera, 2003, p. 444). Without teacher support, some students may
become ostracized by their peers and be forced to the fringes of academic and social interactions.

As noted in Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant teachers may express their support in different ways, but their attitudes and beliefs determine how they respond to students, ultimately impacting students’ academic success (Johnson et al., 2013; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Interpersonal mattering (Tucker, Dixon & Griddine, 2010) and emotional connectedness (Cholewa, Amatea, West-Olatunji, & Wright, 2012) were two themes that appeared across the literature. Tucker et al. (2010) suggested extensive school support, clear and high expectations from key adults, and protection and nurturing at school as key factors that impact the achievement of urban African American males. The authors provide a description of one teacher as a “school mom” to better illustrate the point. Cholewa et al. (2012) examined the processes one culturally responsive teacher used with her African American students. Findings suggested the teacher connected within three dimensions: (a) teacher-student, (b) teacher-whole class, (c) teacher transparency and joining. A theoretical framework was used to explain the three major facets of teacher–student relationship development. These three facets were:

1. Emotional connectedness [a. creating teacher-student connections—attending to students, reengaging individual students, believing in individual students, ensuring student success, b. creating teacher-class connections—defining class community, attending to class, believing in the class, ensure the class’s success, using knowledge and culture, c. being transparent and joining—voicing thought processes, sharing imperfections, being playful],
2. Facilitating conditions of relationship building, and

Caring and belonging at school is important to student engagement and their
academic success (Howard, 2010; Peterson, Bennett & Sherman, 1991; Wiggan, 2008). Successful teachers of African American students focused on identity development and creating a space of belonging for students (Peterson et al., 1991), while the high achieving African American students in Wiggan (2008) touted caring teachers, teamwork, and self-direction as contributing factors to their academic success. In a study of 17 African American students (ten boys, seven girls), Howard (2010) found positive effects on student effort and engagement with teachers who were deemed as culturally relevant. These teachers demonstrated caring bonds and attitudes with their students and maintained community-family like classrooms. These findings were similar to the teacher in Moje (1996), who created a community-like classroom, and used those relationships to motivate students to engage in literacy activities. In turn, the students sensed care and responded favorably to the literacy strategies taught by the teacher.

All culturally relevant teachers are intrinsically linked by one thread—caring. Still, different groups of students perceive care in different ways. A study of 825 sixth graders (Tosolt, 2009) were categorized by three subroups: autonomous minority (Whites), voluntary minorities (Asians, Hispanics), and involuntary minorities (Blacks). The researcher found students viewed caring differently based on communication patterns such as interpersonal caring, academic caring, and fairness caring. Comparisons of fourteen of the seventeen behaviors between the autonomous and involuntary minorities revealed significantly different results such as telling jokes, working in groups, grades and return papers, and says name correctly. Several researchers (Kleinfeld, 1975; Vasquez, 1988; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Monroe & Obidah 2004; Bondy & Ross, 2008) use the term “warm demanders” to describe teachers that are strong, authoritative and
firm, yet demonstrate compassion, love and respect. While different teachers are sure to have different styles of delivery, it is important to note the interpretation for caring associated with teaching ethnically diverse students proffered by Gay (2002):

Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it...This is a very different conception of caring than the often-cited notion of “gentle nurturing and altruistic concern,” which can lead to benign neglect under the guise of letting students of color make their own way and move at their own pace. (p. 109)

For most educators, the “pacing issue” is a sore subject that has been further exasperated by No Child Left Behind since 2001. Since all learning is contextual, culturally relevant educators organize learning around meaningful, engaging, transformative, problem-solving concepts that embrace the cultural capital students bring from home. To do otherwise is to succumb to the banking model (Freire 1997) which involves teaching that is void of cultural relevance, creativity, socio-political consciousness or emancipatory thinking.

Research suggests that some students from ethnically diverse backgrounds equate care with teachers who are persistent about their academic success and behavior. Storz & Nestor (2008) use student voice to elaborate:

...he always stays on our tail and he never lets us slack up because say we’re slacking in doing our homework. He’ll get on us and call our house or he’ll give us a little tap on the head like, ‘Come on, you got to do better.’ He gives is like speeches and he tells us stories from his life. He makes us feel confident because he teaches us what we need to know. (83)

Irvine (2002) believes teaching and caring are the same. She discusses the difficulty may successful African-American teachers have getting nationally board certified because of the varying definitions of care supported by “naïve
classroom observers and evaluators” (p. 43). According to her research, caring does not mean letting students “slide by” and more importantly students do not necessarily interpret caring as being nice and friendly. In Irvine’s chapter on caring she provides a quote from a K-12 student in her study involving a class where everyone failed a test:

The word passed quickly that Mrs. Washington was “P-Oed.” When we walked into her class Mrs. Washington said, “Well I guess you heard that you have ticked me off.” One student tried to explain and she told him to be quiet. Mrs. Washington ordered one student to open the windows because it was “getting ready to get hot in here.” And then on the spot Mrs. Washington made up a rap about self-esteem, confidence, and hard work. We were clapping and laughing (and still scared) but Mrs. Washington had made her point. (p. 42)

Once students believe their teachers (rather it is true or not) do not care about their success, they become unmotivated to participate in the expected classroom social interactions, which is likely to lead to disruptive behaviors and less learning.

**Conceptions of knowledge.** As previously discussed developing meaningful social interactions and effective instruction are closely linked to each other. Effective instruction supports students’ academic success. It should extend beyond getting through a lesson to reaching short and long-term academic goals while infusing culturally relevant practices. Students are less motivated to learn material that they perceive as having nothing to do with them and are likely to disengage from the learning process because of content. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), culturally relevant teachers: (a) do not view knowledge as static, but rather through a constructive lens in that it is shared, recycled, and constructed, (b) view all learning and knowledge critically, (c) are passionate about learning and knowledge, (d) scaffold learning opportunities to create
links between known and unknown content, and (e) use multiple forms of assessments to
demonstrate excellence. Similarly effective teachers *multiculturize* (Gay, 2002), use
power pedagogy (Gay, 2000), use a cultural eye (Irvine, 2002) and socio-political
constructs (Ladson-Billings, 2009) to teach their curriculum. When teachers create their
units of study using the aforementioned conceptions, they also gain the opportunity to
help students think critically about themselves and their world.

For example, Adkins (2012) argues culturally responsive English instruction uses
students’ backgrounds and knowledge as a tool to facilitate learning, rather than viewing
students through a deficit lens. In this regard learning becomes meaningful and relevant
for students, consequently setting them up to excel academically. According to Adkins
(2012), culturally responsive English instruction should closely consider the curriculum
and instruction by integrating student voice and experiences, building classroom
community, and providing feedback and assessment opportunities. DeCuir-Gunby et al.,
(2010) support a “pedagogy of achievement” which urban educators found cultivated a
genuine sense of ownership and critical consciousness as students actively participated in
various community service projects. Theorists of culturally relevant teaching would agree
that texts, questions, activities and assessments should be culturally congruent and
support a deeper understanding of self and the broader social, political and economic
forces driving the functions of schooling. Similarly, Haberman (1991) juxtaposes the
pedagogy of poverty against good teaching. A few of the attributes he lists that identifies
with “good teaching” involve focusing on issues that are pertinent, pressing, relevant,
help to explain difference, and apply to ideals of fairness, equity, justice, and other big
ideas instead of isolated facts. While it is understood that some facts need to be taught
and reinforced to help students master the “foreign language” required by standardized
tests, culturally relevant teachers have been successful in negotiating and adapting reform
mandates in the best interest of their students (Esposito et al., 2012; Vega et al., 2012).

Further, teachers who understand critical pedagogy understand the curriculum is
more than an objective course of study, but positions and prepares students for a certain
form of life (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Critical pedagogy engages students in exploring
themes of “racism, historical atrocities, powerlessness and hegemony” (Gay, 2002, p.
108). Palmer & Maramba (2011) suggest teachers should counter the negative images
African American males are bombarded with through the hidden curriculum of media by
using their classrooms to: promote positive images of African American men by
decorating their walls, assign readings that speak to their experience (Tatum, 2011),
invite young Black professional men to speak to students not just about their educational
feats and their current position, but also about their stories of perseverance and the
obstacles they had to overcome. Additionally, the authors suggest, teachers must move
beyond attending the passive “informational” sessions into examining their own racial
biases and develop strategies and resources to deal with such issues in their belief
systems.

Successful forms of pedagogy that have the ability to positively impact African
American students is important because in a study of high achieving African American
students, Wiggan (2008) found students compared a disengaging pedagogy to an
engaging pedagogy and identified the latter as most influential in contributing to their
success. Studies show successful teachers of “at risk” students have several
commonalities such as coaching strategies, high expectations, and a central theme that
runs throughout their classrooms (Peterson et al., 1991). In a study of nine African American male teachers Brown (2009) explored how these teachers worked with African American male students to perform a particular and distinctive type of pedagogy described as complex and multifaceted. The study highlights how these teachers’ in depth understanding of their students social and educational needs helped frame their pedagogical performances with regard to their facial expressions, speech, emotions, and social activities.

Culturally relevant teachers are aware of the materials and strategies to “hook” students into learning. While there is no single bag of tricks—how lessons are introduced, the perceived purposes for learning the content and its long term currency in the real world are all important factors for students. For example, Ladson-Billings (2009) depicts two types of literacy teachers: a proponent of whole-language and a traditionalist—both were viewed as efficacious. While Howard and Terry (2011) agree the field has been very successful in describing and theorizing the affective needs of culturally relevant pedagogy, they also acknowledge the need to press towards including rigor as part of the construct. Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani (2003) proffered the Cultural Modeling Framework, which presents a framework for designing instruction that integrates students’ culture, identity, language practices, and everyday funds of knowledge into various disciplines. In Lee (2008), six classes of average level seniors from two urban high schools concluded signifying and the students’ prior social knowledge was effectively used as a scaffold to teaching skills in literary interpretation. Tatum (2011) also discusses the “rigor gap” by calling on educators not to only focus on providing tools and models (reading gap), improving the human condition (relationship gap), interacting
with students (response gap), but to also rescue the significance of teaching by considering the “rigor gap”—quality instructional support, text, context, assessment, and technology.

Teachers have a powerful and direct impact on student achievement that is influenced by the way they conceive themselves and others, the way they conceive social relationships in their classrooms, as well as the way they conceive knowledge. Culturally relevant teachers believe all students are capable of learning, and can be of any race, but often share cultural and social norms with the students they teach. One important distinction is culturally relevant teachers have a background that has shaped their views on how the community they teach in is positioned in the larger society. Culturally relevant teachers also foster meaningful social relationships in their settings. Both student-student and student-teacher relationships are fluid and relate a sense of trust and collaboration. Although in many settings African American students do not feel supported and have “learned not to learn,” culturally relevant teachers have learned to disrupt such notions through various constructs of care, protection, and extensive school support. Culturally relevant teachers view knowledge more broadly than just “getting through” a lesson or a mere recollection of facts. Pedagogies that integrate student voice, takes into account their culture, language practices, identity, and helps them develop a deeper sense of self while taking note of the social, political, and economic forces driving society are viewed as valuable. Knowledge that is organized around a central theme, pertinent, pressing, relevant to the real world, and has the potential to disrupt the hidden curriculum of failure is the norm for culturally relevant teachers. Depth and knowledge application is viewed more favorably than simple content coverage. Although several
studies describe the practices of teachers who have been successful with African American students, more studies are needed to addresses the perspectives African American males in urban settings experience across multiple disciplines. Rarely do studies take into account how different subgroups of African American males perceive their experiences with teachers.

**Context conclusion.** In this section, the literature consistently supports the notion that context also plays a critical role impacting the adolescent literacy development of students (Sweet & Snow, 2003). With a focus on African American students in urban settings, this corpus of literature explained how schools are important sites of change as they work to neutralize the increased educational, social, and emotional needs of African American students. Several differences were noted between urban and suburban schools such as, low-income African American students perceived wealthy students were more academically competent and had a stronger advantage, while they perceived themselves as being better at sports. Differences between funding structures, available resources, and the pedagogies employed across school contexts were also evident, although there was a clear common set of characteristics distinguishing schools who had been successful serving low-income African American students. The implications of these findings suggest that African-American youth are expected to overcome social class and race stereotypes about academic ability that may cause them to hold negative beliefs about their school performance. Stereotypes such as these, may lead African-American students to disengage or underperform in school so as not to confirm the negative stereotypes associated with academic ability. While these and many other obstacles exist, some
schools, principals, teachers have been successful in assisting traditionally low-performing, low SES African-American students to achieve excellence.

The common themes across the literature in the context section for principals and teachers were: (a) beliefs, past experiences, and educational philosophies impact everything related to teaching and learning, including the expectations set for students, the experiences created for them to learn, the pedagogies used to foster learning, as well as conceptions about their family and culture, (b) forging genuine relationships with students and parents is essential to all interactions and instructional goals, and (c) maintaining an “over and beyond” activist mentality to ensure the success of all students. Many African American students, particularly males, do not feel supported at school, and thorough descriptions were provided to justify such claims, very few of the studies systematically examined how teachers or principals beliefs varied with different subgroups of African American students. Also, most of the studies illustrated the complexities of teaching and learning in urban settings, and the primary subjects were African American students, very few of the studies examined student perception, and far less the perception of African American males and different subgroups of African American males. Studies that examine how different subgroups of urban adolescent African American males perceive the contextual factors related to their schooling experience may need further examination and dissemination.

While the main focus of this study is school context, it would be incorrect to assume those are the only contextual factors impacting achievement for African American students. The Search Institute has developed a comprehensive, student-centered, framework to analyze what all stakeholders (parents, students, congregations,
colleges, businesses, teachers, schools, principals, policy makers and youth serving organizations) can do to build the developmental assets (Benson, 2006) necessary to ensure students are academically successful and ultimately thrive in society. Studies in Michigan and California show developmental assets were positively related to scores on standardized achievement tests (p. 89). As a result, schools, principals, and teachers should not solely shoulder the weight of this issue, yet each sector must carefully consider how to meaningfully engage the topic so that all groups of students benefit.

**Texts**

Currently, there is a strong emphasis on informational text in K-12 settings (ACT, 2006). Maloch and Bomer (2013) conducted a review of the literature explaining the different definitions associated with informational texts. Although non-fiction and fiction are two broad and very general categories associated with reading, there are several genres and text types that encompass these categories. The authors suggest informational texts are but one text type within the non-fiction category. Other non-fiction genres include, but are not limited to, concept books, procedural texts, biographies, non-fiction narratives, reference materials, and literary non-fiction. Informational texts are different from other non-fiction texts in at least two important ways: purpose and features. Literacy researchers Duke and Bennett-Armistead define informational texts as:

> text written with the primary purpose of conveying information about the natural and social world (typically from someone presumed to be more knowledgeable on the subject to someone presumed to be less so) and having particular text features to accomplish this purpose (2003, p. 14).

According to Duke and Bennett-Armistead (2003) the expository text features found in “typical” informational texts include:
presentation and repetition of a topic or theme; descriptions of attributes and characteristic events; comparative/contrastive and classificatory structures; technical vocabulary; realistic illustrations or photographs; labels and captions; navigational aids such as indexes, page numbers, and headings; and various graphical devices such as diagrams, tables, and charts. Many of these are not found in other types of nonfiction. (p. 17)

Maloch and Bomer (2013) suggest informational texts including both narrative and expository structures may be referred to as “atypical” informational texts or hybrid texts to avoid confusion (p. 208).

NAEP (2009) and Common Core State Standards (NGA, 2010) both support a reading framework that provides an increasing focus on informational texts as students advance through the grades: Grade 4 (Literary-50%, Informational-50%), Grade 8 (Literary-45%, Informational-55%) and Grade 12 (Literary-30%, Informational-70%). The overarching goal of this framework is to better prepare students to meet the literacy challenges they face as they advance through the grades, prepare for life and post-secondary options. Students become more exposed to informational texts, sometimes with little practice for tackling its complexity as they progress through school. Further many out-of-school reading experiences, especially as students progress into adulthood, involve their ability to independently comprehend non-fiction text, including informational, on their jobs, in their homes, communities, and society at-large. Conley (2008) noted the link between workplace demands and literacy skills, which shed light on the national shift from a manufacturing base to an information-technology base (also see RAND, 2002). The latter requires more complex literacy skills opposed to fragmented, often isolated pieces of knowledge. High-level literacy skills are often associated with the likelihood that adults “will hold a full-time job, vote in national elections, participate in
community organizations, volunteer in their neighborhoods, and spend time helping their children with their homework” (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007, p. 5).

According to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Model Content Framework, complex text is typified by a combination of longer sentences, a higher proportion of less-frequently used words, and a greater number and variety of words with multiple meanings. The CCSS discuss how the complexity of texts students are expected to read is significantly below what is required to be successful beyond high school. For example, high school textbooks have declined in all subject areas over several decades. The average lengths of sentences in K-8 textbooks and vocabulary demands have declined as well (see NGA, 2010 Appendix A). Researchers Hayes, Wolfer, and Wolfe (1996) conducted a study comparing the level of text complexity with schoolbooks published pre and post World War II (WWII). They found the average literature text required in a 12th grade English class (post WWII) had significantly less text complexity than the average middle school text published before WWII. Meanwhile, the complexity of college and career texts has remained steady or increased, while the complexity of K-12 texts have decreased, resulting in a huge gap (approximately 350 Lexiles) (Williamson, 2006 as cited in NGA, 2010). While we know the complexity of what students can read is the greatest predictor of success in college, too many students are reading at a low level. Less than 50% of graduates can read sufficiently complex texts. Only half of the juniors and seniors taking the entrance exams were prepared to handle the rigor of reading assignments associated in the content areas of math, history, science and English (ACT, 2006). Taken together, informational (e.g.
expository, hybrid, other non-fiction types) and literary, both of which include non-print
texts may lead to an array of instructional possibilities in the 21st Century classroom.

**Informational.** Historically, much “baggage” has evolved around the terms
content area and secondary reading that alters how we view the types of generative
learning taking place. The idea that students *read to learn* dates back to 1937 when
William Gray chaired the National Committee on Reading and initiated the phrase “every
teacher a teacher of reading”. The *read to learn* mantra regained attention during the 70’s
with the publication of Hal Herbert’s seminal work, *Teaching Reading in the Content
Areas*, emerging from the field of cognitive psychology (Moje, Young, et al., 2000, p.
402). Given the historical and more recent conceptualizations of multiple literacies, the
field appears to agree that *adolescent literacy* can encompass both literary texts
(primarily found in English courses) and expository texts (primarily found in
disciplinary-specific or content area courses e.g. science) and might best be referred to as
adolescent literacies, which reinforces the plurality of its nature and suggests the unique
and complex dimensions of *all* reading and writing (broadly defined) that youth in grades
4-12 participate in daily (Moje et al., 2000).

While the focus on cognitive dimensions of reading have assisted some groups of
students in becoming more proficient readers in disciplinary courses (Riddel, 2001), there
is mounting assessment data that suggest more may need to happen to narrow the
achievement gap of adolescents, particularly with African American students (Carnegie
Council, 2010; Tatum, 2008). It has been reported that Black and Hispanic students
demonstrated the largest gains in reading achievement in NAEP history between 1999
and 2004 and, while not at the same rate, their scores continued to rise in the 2004 and
2008 which has caused a narrowing of the achievement gap. Still Blacks and Hispanics have a 26 and 21 point gap respectively in comparison to their White counterparts (Carnegie Council, 2010).

For African-American students in science, the picture is even more grim. Parsons, Travis, & Simpson (2005) used three data sources to discern the inequities and inequalities related to African-Americans in science: National Assessment of Education Panel (NAEP, 2000), National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2002), and The National Science Foundation (NSF, 1999). Findings from NAEP revealed 36, 40 and 31-point differences between fourth, eight and twelfth-grade Euro-American and African-American students’ test scores respectively. NCES showed on average Euro-American students received more associate degrees (78% to 7%), bachelor’s degrees (74% to 7%) and master’s degrees (62% to 20%), and doctoral degrees (48% to 1%). The data she used from NSF reported Euro-Americans, when compared to African-Americans, held the majority of science and engineering related occupations (82% to 3.4%), life science occupations (83% to 2%) and physical science positions (85% to 3%).

Tate (2001) draws on the opportunity-to-learn literature to position urban student’s access to learning science as a civil right. He contends three factors are important to consider for assisting traditionally underserved populations in receiving high quality science instruction: time (reading, writing, and math is the focus), quality (certifications, professional development), and technology integration (resource allocation). He discussed the complexities involved even when time is not a factor, suggesting teachers and administrators do not have the tools to teach the high-level skills that support quality teaching in the science classroom. In his article he is referring to their
implementation of innovations and technology, but the same could be true for teachers and administrators who lack the pedagogical and content knowledge to foster high-level comprehension instruction using informational text. As noted by Armbruster (1992), three issues prevalent in science education related to literacy involve the de-emphasis of reading, teacher preparation, and the sources of science reading. The author goes on to explain the ongoing epistemological debate that exists between science educators: teach the facts of science (products) usually associated with textbook reading or teach the nature of science (process) usually associated with “hands on,” student-centered inquiry approaches.

Post-Sputnik an inquiry-based approach to learning science emerged to help facilitate doing collaboration, explanation, and problem-solving. However, Armbrester (2001) argued the same processes are involved in reading text material. While there are some who primarily believe that doing science is better than reading science because students are more engaged (Donahue et al., 2000), motivating and engaging students to read informational science text is important because it is important to help students realize the goals of becoming scientifically literate citizens. Motivating and engaging students to read informational text like science also has the capacity to build a student’s background knowledge with material that is the cornerstone for academic success at school (Brozo & Flynt, 2008). The authors offer six principles which are very similar to the strategies discussed in the previous section regarding motivating adolescent learners in content area classrooms: a) elevate self-efficacy, b) engender interest in new learning, c) connect outside with inside school literacies, d) make interesting text available, e) expand choices and options, and f) structure collaboration for motivation. Science
educators who are proponents of incorporating literacy suggest a balanced instructional approach that also includes “hands-on” inquiry-based lessons so students are able to apply their learning or develop questions for further inquiry. As noted by Tate, the issue of balance quickly becomes complicated given the time constraints and content focus in most urban settings. When teachers are limited on time, decisions are made that usually do not encompass both literacy-focused and hands-on approaches.

**Literary.** In other content areas besides the hard sciences (e.g. English and History), discussion-based approaches have been researched to explicate the merit of its use in teaching. According to Louise Rosenblatt, *Reader Response* (Bessler, 2007) acknowledges that “readers bring their individual personalities, their memories of past events, their present concerns, their particular physical condition, and all of their personhood to the reading of a text” (p. 78). In this way meaning is derived, not solely from the text itself, but from the interaction of the reader with the text. Readers interact with and discuss texts in many ways. Individuals may a) use an interpretive lens to make sense of text (Reader Response), b) examine the “strategies, devices, and techniques authors use to elicit a particular reaction or interpretation of a text” (Bessler, 2007, p. 76) (Rhetorical Criticism), or c) become intrigued by exploring certain devices the authors use to position male-female relationships in texts (Feminist Criticism) (Wright, 2008), or d) challenge established historical and current racialized ideologies pertaining to African Americans (Bressler, 2007). The common thread between these literary theories is they allow students to assume a more critical instead of passive approach to their discussions. In doing so they are able to “question the dominant power structures of received social and cultural roles and illuminate how these structures have been sustained…”
(Beickelman, 2008, p. 90). While several literary theories have been well defined, many schools continue to focus on decontextualized, non-critical approaches such as characterization, plot, setting, and literary devices etcetera. Tatum (2005) draws on literature that suggests boys need texts that relate to their immediate interests and needs, texts that produce the “flow” experience and are comprised of four elements:

1. There is a feeling of control.
2. The activities provide an appropriate level of challenge.
3. Clear goals and feedback are included.
4. The focus is on the immediate.

Haddix (2009) highlighted research that shows African-American males are disproportionately placed in special education classes, while also maintaining the highest suspension, expulsion, drop out, unemployment, and juvenile incarceration rates. She concludes the field has effectively defined the “African-American Male Crisis,” but has done little to construct effective strategies to offset the negative ideations associated with these phenomena. Similarly, Tatum (2008) points out how research related to African-American males is scant, but does show how standardized assessments have failed to advance the literacy development of African-American males and the majority of the studies focused on this subgroup positions them as “at-risk” or in crisis mode. He further asserts most of the studies ignore their gendered and racial identities as their academic outcomes are continuously compared to other students without these characteristics. He recommends the educational community begin to look closer at the root causes of the high drop out, incarceration and unemployment rates that have become so closely
associated with African American males. Additionally, Tatum (2005) suggests educators need to be “gender aware” and place an emphasis on texts that promote masculinity by:

1. Using male-oriented texts with male characters (as opposed to more female-oriented texts).
2. Using texts that will engage boys emotionally with the characters (relevant issues that also honor their identity).
3. Exposing boys to nonfiction that involves new learning.
4. Using texts that legitimize the male experience and support boys’ view of themselves. (p. 11)

Tatum (2008) theorizes an instructional and professional development model that guides how literacy might be used as a tool to assist these young men in responding to their immediate contexts. His model metaphorically uses human anatomy to explain the three parts: the head (theory), the body (instructional practices), and the legs (professional development). Theoretically, Tatum purports there should be a focus on defining literacy instruction in present-day contexts that are empowering and culturally responsive. The instructional practices should be research-based reading practices, while the professional development needs to focus on job-embedded teacher professional development and preparation. Tatum notes that most school reform efforts focus on instructional practices (body) without much consideration for theory (head). By using enabling texts, Tatum concludes African American males will find their literacy practices more meaningful and significant. Tatum defines enabling texts as texts that may involve cognitive factors like strategy and skill development, but also embrace social, cultural, political, spiritual and economic factors. After his analysis of textual lineages (Tatum, 2008) or diagram of texts
that individuals found meaningful and significant, Tatum concludes there are four main characteristics of texts that define meaning and significance for African American males:

1. They contribute to a healthy psyche.
2. They focus on a collective struggle.
3. They provide a road map for being, doing, and acting.
4. They provide modern awareness of the real world. (p. 165)

He draws on his own textual lineage to provide a few examples of enabling texts: Dick Gregory’s *Nigger, an Autobiography*, Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery*, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Claude McKay’s *America* and Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

Tatum also used a ten-month qualitative study of a 16-year-old African American male (pseudonym Quincy) to better learn about how texts affected the way the student perceived himself. Quincy was considered “at risk” in that he had been retained three times because he could not pass the minimum standardized reading score to be promoted to high school. While Tatum provides a comprehensive list of the texts used in the study in Table 3 (p. 169), some of the selections included David and Jackson’s *Yo, Little Brother* (book), Shakur’s *Life through My Eyes* (poem), Bill Cosby’s *Address to the NAACP on the Fiftieth Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education* (speech) and James Baldwin’s *Letter to My Nephew* (excerpt) from *The Fire Next Time*. In the end, Quincy was not able to complete the study because his mother kicked him out the house causing him to have to go live with his father. However, Tatum discusses several themes that emerged through his analysis all of which, in some way, supported his definition of enabling. For instance, while reflecting on experience reading *Yo, Little Brother* he
describes a situation where his friend’s father was driving a group of young African American males dressed in suits to an event. Quincy was part of the group and recalled being forced out of their vehicle for a search. When questioned about the reason for the search, the officer told the father he was being searched for DWB. At the time, a year prior to the study, Quincy did not know the acronym meant Driving While Black, but shared how his reading the text added clarity and meaning to a phenomenon he experienced in his personal life.

Many of the texts that are considered literary in nature, fall into a classification of literary non-fiction, which CCSS (2010) defines as “personal essays, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts (including digital sources written for a broader audience)” (p. 57). To my knowledge, the texts referenced by Tatum are primarily print-based, but consideration should also be given to non-print text as well.

**Non-print.** The term intertextuality, informed by literary theory (Alfaro, 1996) and introduced by French linguist, Julia Kristeva, emphasizes that a single text does not stand alone and have meaning (Kristeva, 2000), but rather meaning is socially constructed through the juxtaposition of multiple texts and text types (Bloome & Egan-Roberston, 1993; Kirkland, 2011). In this view, texts are not limited to print, but may also include interactive websites, electronic mediated texts (Alvermann, 2008; Hagood, 2009; Lanshear & Knobel, 2006; Voithofer, 2006), gesture, drama, film, or “any sign that communicates meaning” (Hartman, 1995). The current research on multiple literacies coalesces across four main categories: a) the critical/transformative stance that focuses on social, political and economic positioning, b) the *disciplinary/academic* literacies stance
that focuses on the literacies across various academic disciplines in school (mathematical literacy, scientific literacy, historical literacy [often referred to as content area or disciplinary literacy] computer literacy, visual literacy, graphic literacy, oral literacy), c) the convergence of in-school and out-of-school literacies and d) the integration of technology. New Literacies, often times used interchangeably with the term multiple literacies, has been described by Luke, (2000) as “providing opportunities for student innovation and creativity…guiding students through a repertoire of operational and critical skills (p. 435).” Hagood (2009) suggested New Literacies entails “evolving social practices that coalesce new digital tools along with the old symbolic tools to achieve key motivating purposes for engagement in the literacy practice” (p. 62).

The New Literacies perspective (Lankshear & Knoebel, 2006) is generally concerned with the design, redesign, critique and broadening definitions of text. New Literacies emphasizes the importance that literacy and learning are not neutral enterprises, but rather socially constructed across spaces with specific intentions and ideologies. As many scholars have noted, (Alvermann, Hinchman, Morre, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Gee, 1990; Freire, 1997; Street, 1995) critical media literacy mainly deals with increasing agency, redefining textual positioning and constructing knowledge of everyday life by critiquing one’s social, economic and political positioning (Hagood, 2009, p. 25). New Literacies has several intersections with social constructivism focusing on the close examination of social, political, racist and economic forces as a tool to redefine the status quo. New Literacies filter their research using pedagogical components of design (New London Group, 1996), which are outlined in Hagood (2009). They include: 1) situated practice (which draws on relevant texts of users’ lives), 2) overt
instruction (which forms metalanguage for understanding text uses), 3) critical framing (which develops understandings of text meanings by context and purpose) and 4) transformative practice (which values remixing and reframing designs to make new uses and meanings of texts. (p. 3)

New literacies seeks to “conceptualize literacy as socially situated and culturally constructed…including both print and non-print texts that acknowledges the vast literacy competencies in adolescents’ literacy repertoires” (p. 91). Similarly, Street (1995) discussed how the school-centric position ignores social background and privileges the impact of curriculum, pedagogy, and schooling, while Kaestle (1985) focused on one’s individual perspectives “in a world of ideas” noting schools (and therefore their literary practices) are producers of universal knowledge versus action oriented, personal, common sense knowledge (p. 18). He goes on to suggest that literacy is discriminatory in two ways, with regard to access and with regard to content. Schools can be forces of liberating or constraining power and ultimately used as instruments of conformity or creativity (p. 35). Alvermann et al. (1996) defines literacy as more than school literacy and suggests one form of literacy (academic literacy) should not overshadow the other multiple forms of literacy (computer visual, graphic and scientific literacies) nor that different texts and social contexts (reading for whom, with what purpose) require different skills (p. 4).

Kirkland’s (2009) second wave theory of pedagogy suggests in-school and out-of-school practices “are not at odds, but can fold together, complexly forming a unique third space that defies structural binarism” (p. 11). He fractures traditional notions of literacy practice by exposing the countless instructional possibilities available to students whose
languages, values, and knowledge have been marginalized. Two salient themes that appear across his work are that: a) spaces are not distinct entities with rules governed by the status quo and b) hybrid forms of instruction are more equitable practices since they provide more agency to marginalized populations. In Jocson (2006), Kirkland (2009), and Kirkland (2010), the authors provide lucid descriptions of English instruction and research in the 21st century. While in some literature the term “21st century” is unclear, these authors purport the definition as the myriad of opportunities available when researchers and teachers blend out of school and in school literacy practices.

Jocson (2006) describes hybridity as the mixing of styles, places and cultural forms to create something new. More specifically, her research underscores the intersection of mixing music genres and poetry. Through Jocson’s (2006) insider role as a participant-observer in a long-standing, collaborative university-school partnership, she describes the literary practices of one adolescent African American male to explore the role literacy plays in urban youth of color and how this information can be used to inform the type of instruction that happens inside the classroom. She chronicles his movement and participation in the school-based partnership to the more community-based out-of-school poetry community, suggesting the former in developing his confidence, agency, and skill as a poet and writer as he mixes musical genres like Bob Dylan with hip hop to express himself poetically.

Jocson (2006) contends that schools should embrace the literacies students bring from home because students can began to re-examine their roles as learners. They, and particularly Antonio, gained more agency in their learning process due to the emphasis on political empowerment and explicitly being taught to notice societal injustices (p. 245).
Consequently, the poems students generated and the subsequent peer-to-peer feedback became meaningful and engaging practices because they were “active participants and allies to each other in their learning” (p. 247).

While Jocson (2006) explored the possibility of mixing space, cultural and musical forms, Kirkland (2009) argued for a similar ideology by “describing the pedagogical space in the digital moment” (p. 8). Kirkland questions the definition of space, the purpose it serves in the lives of urban youth and how English Language Arts teachers and researchers might begin to re-imagine their practices in light of this new digital dimension. In his research he examines the multiple ways social networking sites (Facebook and SecondLife) influence urban youths’ literacy practices. To bring more clarity to his suggested framework for engaging these new digital literacy practices, Kirkland proffers a heuristic to define official, unofficial, third and extra spaces (p. 11) where he describes official space as the formal, in-school, mainstream setting where standard English is spoken and unofficial space as informal space where nonstandard languages are often spoken in out-of-school settings. While he acknowledges the distinct ways digital literacy practices are fostered and developed in formal and informal settings, he then proposes third space would encompass both official and unofficial settings. In doing so he explains, “They [digital literacy practices] are neither fixed nor singular, neither central nor marginal, neither official nor unofficial nor even ‘third’” (p. 14). He scoffs at the idea of limiting these practices to distinct in-school versus out-of-school entities that can only be researched and taught using traditional means. He writes that “the binary becomes problematic…because a great deal of what happens in-school is
born beyond it…what gets enacted out-of-school results from what happens inside it” (p. 10).

According to his findings both of his study participants, Raymond and Aja, developed a more keen sense of their agency as learners and individuals. Aja, the Black, female participant noted being able to multi-task by staying connected with her other female friends on Facebook, completing homework online and participating in an after-school program. Being in three spaces at once allowed her the necessary support to be successful emotionally and academically. Similarly Raymond, the male participant recounts how he used “new technologies to escape the inequities and social penalties of daily life” (p. 16). He developed another iDentity (Raymona—rich, female and popular) that was the complete opposite of his real identity (poor, male, and recluse) in an effort to cope with his situation. Raymond, spending about seven hours a day online, states “…I don’t have to be myself because my life sucks…I can be more like myself because I don’t have to front about stuff” (p. 17). Both Raymond and Aja used their digital literacy practices to gain the agency they needed to negotiate and defy the social inequities present in their daily lives.

**Texts conclusion.** The studies in this section supported the identity development literature in multiple ways. First, by documenting the unique experiences of African American male students with certain types of texts, and then discussing the varied and multiple affective outcomes resulting from the identities shaping the experience. Also, the studies took into account the pressing factors that can impede learning in urban contexts, all of which helped to further clarify the conceptual framework (RAND, 2002) for the present study.
While the literature is clear that readers, especially students who struggle, need explicit comprehension instruction with informational text (e.g. science texts), very few studies describe demographic and contextual data so researchers understand how those practices may work to serve different groups of students. The lack of emphasis devoted to science education, coupled with the ongoing epistemological debates regarding “reading” versus “doing” science have left educators with the option of choosing one or the other, but rarely balancing the two due to time constraints. Gaining a better understanding of the texts and processes used in attempting to balance science instruction in urban settings might add to the literature by discussing the complications and advantages to such practices. While there are many affective and educationally meaningful benefits to empowering students with print and non-print texts across all genres, many of the studies provide a deep and critical analysis of one or two participants to fully explain such phenomena. It is still unclear how different subgroups of African American males experience these texts in the classroom and their perception of those experiences. Texts that speak to the experiences of African American males continue to be an important factor in their literacy development, however Kirkland (2011) warns that even in the face of using texts from the canon (and although he does not specify this, but also other texts perceived to be “boring” by adolescent learners), educators can still employ pedagogies that “offer youth a rich wardrobe of processes that allow vintage texts to fit their socially situated identities” (p. 207). Heretofore, as suggested by the adolescent literacy framework (Figure 1), a review of the literature has been provided for readers, contexts, texts. The last section of the literature review will include pedagogies.
Pedagogies

Given technological advances, globalization, and the increased focus on cultural and social diversity in the field of adolescent literacy, there are various pedagogical frameworks offered to meet the needs of adolescent learners. Further, there appears to be a disproportionate number of African American students who find learning science difficult, therefore studies describing the positive experiences of African American students in the science classroom must also be explored. Studies related to four widely-accepted pedagogical frameworks are discussed in this section: a) pedagogies of multiliteracies, b) discussion-based approaches, c) design and inquiry-based approaches, and, d) comprehension instruction.

**Pedagogy of multiliteracies.** The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) is a framework that includes four interrelated phases: a) *situated practice* (Immersion in experience and the utilization of available discourses, including those from the students’ lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces.), b) *overt instruction* (Systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding. Requires the introduction of explicit mealanguages, which describe and interpret the process and elements of different modes of meaning.), c) *critical framing* (Interpreting the social and cultural context of particular meaning. Involves the students’ standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context.), and d) *transformative practice* (Transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning to work in other contexts or cultural sites) (p. 88). In their framework multiliteracies encompasses both multimodal (various text forms using informational and multimedia technologies) and meaning making processes that are
shaped and reframed by cultural and linguistic diversity, one’s personal experiences, subject-matter, and various disciplinary domains to name a few. The authors propose six Design Elements in the meaning making process that also may interface with written-linguistic text in multimodal composition:

1. Auditory Design Elements (music, sound effects, silence)
2. Spatial Design Elements (organization of objects in a setting)
3. Gestural Design Elements (behavior, facial expression, body posture, feelings/affect)
4. Visual Design Elements (still images, moving images, page or screen layout, color, screen format)
5. Linguistic Design Elements (delivery, grammar, vocabulary)
6. Multimodal Design Elements (combinations of more than one Design Element) (p. 83).

Pedagogy of multiliteracies in science classrooms. Moje (2004), Stevens (2001), and Tan-Calabrese and Barton (2010) examined multiliteracies practices in science classrooms. In Moje (2004), the researcher observed and interviewed 30 seventh and eighth grade science students to examine how the funds of knowledge students bring from home are connected to their academic learning experiences in the science classroom. She contends students already have multiple Discourses (Gee, 2001), which can be used to help them mediate the natural world and critique existing school texts. Moje found students drew on everyday funds of knowledge from multiple out-of-school contexts. She went on to explain “out-of-school” in specific categories instead of merely focusing on the general term: family, community, peer, and pop culture. Informal and
formal peer activities, as well as popular culture were also sources used to integrate out-of-school funds of knowledge with academic texts.

Tan and Calabrese-Barton (2010) also focused on pedagogical strategies to marshal nontraditional funds of knowledge while promoting agency and achievement with racially marginalized and low income students. This study explicitly showed how students and teachers engaged in teaching and learning science for social justice with an ultimate goal of expanding the repertoire of identities students could author in science class. Three “figured worlds” were used to examine how student identities could be reconceptualized: a) figured world of storytelling, b) figured world of being real, and c) figured world of diverse, authentic, science-based participation.

Collaborative learning environments were identified by the manner in which the class was organized into tables set for teams of six to eight students to work on projects. The authors reported increased and deeper levels of engagement that might lead to better outcomes for marginalized populations. In the “figured world of being real” section, the authors describe the pedagogical practices that honor the discourses and practices students bring from home or cultural literacy sources. Embedded in the dialogue presented through the transcript was evidence of the community-based knowledge and experiences of the students. Their interactions, ways of being, and speaking with each other all showcased the everydayness of their lives while unpacking the core content of their science class (i.e. the effects of smoking and peer pressure on the respiratory system). Similarly, Varales, Becker, Luster & Wenzel (2002), explored the interplay between youth, social class and science genres. Students demonstrated the multiple ways they understood the material through rap songs, plays and the use of AAL in discussing
science concepts. Findings suggested students were able to gain personal and social empowerment as teachers drew on their cultural funds of knowledge to guide instruction.

Learning science as content knowledge was demonstrated by teaching students about cells, skin anatomy and the respiratory system (Tan et al., 2010). With regards to addressing learning science as a discourse, Mr. M (the white teacher in this study) had word walls related to unit content. Also, in the “figured world of storytelling,” the teacher and his students used storytelling to “gain access” to particular class concepts (p. 45) like skin anatomy. Transcripts revealed student talk showing how they were able to usher in their personal experiences into the whole class science discussion. Students contributed their understanding of Michael Jackson’s melanin issues into the learning environment. The teacher was able to blend science content (cells unit) and pop culture, then draw on another student’s story (her friend has skin cancer and can’t be in the sun) to reinforce the science content of skin anatomy.

While the other two studies primarily focused on the multiple funds of knowledge students bring into the classroom, Stevens (2001) primarily centered her study on pop culture. As a middle school literacy specialist she worked collaboratively to plan and co-teach three units of study across three disciplines: science, English Language Arts, and social studies. In the section where she describes how she and another teacher designed an eighth grade physical science lesson using movie clips to teach the laws of motion, students reported being motivated by the exploration and observation involved in the activity. They incorporated clips from Jumanji (Joe Johnston, Director, 1995), and two separate clips from Raiders of the Lost Ark (Steven Speilberg, Director, 1981). Students were asked to select a clip, determine if the clip was consistent with the laws of
motion, and write their conclusions. In the study several students referenced their textbooks to confirm or disprove their conclusions, then shared their findings with the class.

Studies in this section contributed to the literature by documenting the gestural (behavior, facial expression, body posture, feelings/affect) and linguistic (delivery, vocabulary, sharing personal experiences etc.) design elements students employed to enact science in classrooms. While all of the studies focused on two elements associated with the pedagogies of multiliteracies, situated practice and critical framing, only Moje (2004) and Tan et al. (2010) detailed how the science practices led to transformed practices beyond the school day. None of the studies discussed how students learn to grapple with science textbook through overt instruction, however Stevens (2001) mentioned the use of textbooks to assist students in confirming their conclusions. The next section reviews literature related to the same concepts, but in English Language Arts classrooms.

**Pedagogy of multiliteracies in English language arts classroom.** In a seventh grade English Language Arts classroom, Stevens (2001) presented another unit of study using songs, movies, and literature from the lives of students to examine the topic of themes. She addressed the difficulty associated with students selecting “risky” lyrics, and the challenge students experienced connecting their themes to other texts. Across each unit presented, increased student engagement and discussion related to academic tasks were found. Teachers also mentioned the amount of time required to implement the lessons as a challenge. In another study focusing on multiliteracies, Zammit (2008) examined a pedagogical framework aimed to empower students from non-mainstreamed
backgrounds. Teacher’s identity and technological challenges faced by students were important themes that came across in the study. While findings suggested increased engagement in the student learning process due to the revised discourse patterns between students and teachers required new forms of pedagogy, what counted as knowledge and assessing different modes of representation posed new challenges and possibilities for the field.

Several researchers have illustrated the various ways multiliteracies get taken up in the ELA classroom: out-of-school (Stevens, 2001), multimodal (Zammit, 2008), religious (Skerrett, 2014), and visual (Rosewell & Kendrick, 2013), all of which centered around incorporating students home and community-resources into the curriculum. Skerrett (2014) observed students’ Christian religious literacies in a ninth grade secular ELA classroom. Findings suggested the enactment of religious literacies used in the classroom invoked human empathy and the opportunity for students to sort through tensions, and connect their religious literacies with academic literacies. Her work stresses teachers need not impose their religious beliefs or any other particular religious framework, but rather explicitly invite them to enact the religious literacies they bring from home into the classroom as a way for students to co-construct meaning. Rosewell and Kendrick (2013), a study of all male adolescent learners, emphasized a similar finding in that using visuals to teach literacy, although not a widely accepted practice, can especially assist male learners in co-constructing meaning due to their heightened appreciation for using visuals. Male learners used photographs and images to construct various narratives. Five teacher recommendations were provided for integrating multimodal pedagogies in the classroom:
1. Use visuals in literacy teaching, especially visuals that are a part of everyday life, such as digital media, popular culture, and cultural artifacts.

2. Find out about your students’ hidden literacies by taking a regular literacy audit, which is a questionnaire about their interests, valued texts, and the like.

3. Have students describe modes and visual effects in images.

4. Use sticky notes and ask students to comment on and offer interpretations and oppositional readings of visuals.

5. Ask students to compose, design, and produce visual assignments instead of written assignments. (p. 598)

All together these studies demonstrate how family, community, peers, and pop culture provide important, meaningful, relevant, and motivating resources for students to connect the literacies they use outside of school to better understand various academic texts. These findings support the situated practices described in the Pedagogies of Muliliteracies. Drawing on the gestural and linguistic design elements, students used their home language, demonstrated agency, autonomy, and empathy, as well as made connections to the real world and worked to resolve tensions. Additionally, students reported being motivated and engaged in the learning process. Using the multiliteracies framework, traditional student-teacher roles (e.g. discourse patterns) and traditional school-based tasks (e.g. writing narrative papers) were different.

Many of these studies also spend a great deal of time focusing on how to situate practices of diverse groups by using funds of knowledge, however much less attention is given to the transformed practices produced by students—how students are using the information they learned in a different context. Although the authors discuss
multiliteracies in different ways, many of the studies cite assessment as problematic and offer limited amounts of information regarding how to overcome such obstacles. Also, a query through the Academic Search Complete database revealed 68 abstracts using the descriptor “multiliteracies urban adolescents African American males,” of which only seven of the studies appeared in peer-reviewed journals and originated in science or English Language Arts classrooms. Of the seven studies, each also focused on urban and/or adolescent students, but only one study (Skerrett, 2014) mentioned two African American students as focal participants, one of which was a male.

Although very few multiliteracies studies in science classrooms included African American students, there are other science studies that do not use the multiliteracies terminology, but they focus on African American student participants. Two common pedagogical approaches that encompass these studies consist of discourse-based and design/inquiry-based approaches. In the next section a review of the literature on discourse-based approaches to science instruction is provided, followed by design and inquiry-based approaches.

**Discourse-based approaches in science classrooms.** As previously discussed in the text section, discourse-based approaches to instruction in English and Social Studies courses occur more readily than in courses like science. However, researchers who explore science talk agree discourse is an important part of the learning process (Gallas, 1995; Lemke, 1989; Roth, 1996) and that in-school and out-of-school communication patterns need not be in conflict with one another (Brown, 2004, 2006; Brown & Ryoo, 2008; Emdin, 2010). Still Dillon, O’Brien, Moje, & Stewart (1994) found teachers’
philosophies of teaching science and their beliefs about how students learn influenced their use of literacy practices during lessons.

Lee and Fradd (1998) described and compared science knowledge, science vocabulary and cognitive strategy use among four diverse groups of elementary students. Eight teachers and thirty-two students (four diverse groups of fourth graders): a) English speaking, b) African-American (English and Black Vernacular English), c) Hispanic (English and Spanish), and d) Haitian (English and Haitian) were selected to participate based on narrative retelling scores. Findings showed the teachers code-switched to the language students brought with them from home when students could not grasp scientific vocabulary using mainstream English (Brown & Sprang, 2008). Prior knowledge experiences, discourse patterns, and cognitive strategy use between the groups appeared to be different as well. Gee (1990) defined “literacy” as mastery of, or fluent control over, a secondary Discourse thereby suggesting the word literacy should always be plural which would grant agency to the multiple forms literacy expressed in this study. The students in this study reported positive feelings regarding teaching and engaging in science activities. Less proficient students demonstrated gains in new science content knowledge. The teacher’s role in this study was most pronounced by their ability to encourage students to communicate in linguistically and culturally congruent ways in an effort to increase their language development. The teachers also used language (code-switching) and interactional patterns styles that were familiar to the students to help facilitate the language development process.

Gee and Clinton (2000), proffered a case study of one, 4th grade African-American girl after she conducted a series of hands-on experiments with light she was
able to use the artifact from her experiment to discuss her learning. Similar to Seiler et al. (2001), the female participant used an artifact to explain complex scientific phenomena. Again, the study focus was whether some non-mainstream children learned less “science content” than better-prepared children. Discussions of “narrativizing” versus “descriptive/expository talk” (p. 132), switching speech genres, and student frustration level were all thought to contribute to a less stable learning environment when the teacher misinterprets student’s understanding of concepts instead of considering their talk as being deeply engaged in academic talk and thinking.

Seiler and Elmesky (2007) illustrated the collaborative environments, cultural literacy resources, and personal empowerment students gained while learning to participate in a high school biology class. The students’ language was used to authenticate the manner in which African-American students communicate to make their expressions more lucid for each other. As students deconstruct their understanding of themselves in their science classroom. Also, examination of the transcript in Seiler and Gonsalves (2010) reveals the students’ cultural literacy resources or African-American Language (AAL) (Rickford & Rickford, 2000) being used to help them communicate about their lab dissection.

Similarly, in Seiler, Tobin, and Sokolic (2001), almost all of the students were African-American who had not been successful in high school as evidenced by their displacement from other teams within the school, low attendance rates or disciplinary transfer rates from other schools within the district. The focus of the study was to examine the students’ primary discourse usage and the discourses of science and technology. Similar to the findings in Lee and Fradd (1995), Seiler et al. (2001) also
found a prevalent use of analogies and nonverbal communication with Keisha, a female participant from the study, as did (Seiler, 2001) in a critical ethnography of eight African American males. During the interview the authors make note of how Keisha was able to recreate much of the knowledge she learned through the in-class inquiry activity as a result of interacting with an artifact (the race car she built) and her primary discourse. The authors suggest without the artifact, Keisha may not have been able to reconstruct as much of the knowledge she gained in as much detail.

Brown (2005) conducted an insightful review of the literature on African-American students and science education that fell into three main categories: a) collaborative learning environments, b) pedagogical interventions and c) cultural literacy resources. Similarly, other scholars (Aikenhead, 1996; Calabrese-Barton & Upadhyay, 2010; Lee and Fradd, 1998) have discussed salient themes that are important for teaching science to African-American students: a) learning science as content knowledge, b) learning the norms and discourse of school science, c) learning multiple ways of knowing and practicing science, d) learning critical activism and citizenship, and e) learning personal, social and economic empowerment. The difficulty students have when attempting to negotiate science discourse is supported in literature (Brown, 2004, 2006). Both studies discussed how the student’s home language may inhibit them from appropriating scientific discourse and may lead to issues of identity. Brown (2004) proposed students transition through four phases of Discursive Identity Development: Opposition, Maintenance, Incorporation, and Proficiency. He goes on to suggest teachers use a Directed Discourse Approach to Science Instruction (DDASI) involving four phases: (a) pre-assessment instruction (finding out what students know), (b) content
construction (introducing them to concepts in general terms without the scientifically language, (c) introduction of discourse with explicit rules for language (vocabulary and language acquisition instruction), and (d) scaffolding opportunities for discourse (time to demonstrate their understanding of the newly acquired discourse through oral and written form). A common theme that ran across all studies was that curriculum supports are often times inadequate to support a dialogic community (Alozie, Moje, & Krajcik, 2010).

**Design and inquiry-based approaches in science classrooms.** While the merits of using discourse-based approaches to teach science to African American students is well documented, design and inquiry-based approaches are important as well. During a three-year study by Grier et al. (2008), a major instructional decision involved students creating artifacts to demonstrate their understanding, which helped students promote personal and social empowerment. Mehalik et al. (2008) discussed how students were able to follow their own ideas, designs and thinking to construct electrical units granting them more classroom agency. The student-designed medication devise could be considered critical activism since its primary goal was to assist the elderly with their health. Both study environments were described as collaborative given how peer-to-peer discussions were used to gather feedback for possible revisions to the design process Mehalik et al. (2008) and teachers providing a venue for routine discussion and feedback (Grier et al., 2008).

Learning science as practice was displayed by three types of learning technologies (Grier et al., 2008), which were embedded into each curriculum to broaden the types of research students, could conduct and data they could collect and represent in multiple formats. In the design study (Mehalik et al., 2008), “science practices” were discussed in
terms of the thought processes necessary to practice science, not the technology. For example, the seven stages of the design process consisted of: a) describe current situation, b) identify needs, c) develop criteria, d) generate alternatives, e) choose an alternative, f) create prototype/test, and g) reflect and evaluate. Throughout this process, scaffolding was used to guide students in deeper understanding and the decision making process. Analytical thinking (breaking ideas into smaller parts to better understand their relationship to the whole), synthesis thinking (connecting new designs to subsystems to evaluate how they might work in tandem) and science content thinking (specific electronic and mechanical components) are all critical features embedded in the design process. Students learned the discourse of science “by observing and learning the language, behavior, and framing of events the way the members of a cultural group do” (p. 72).

Mehalik et al. (2008) noted the main difference between scripted inquiry and design-based curricula is the students’ choice to follow their own ideas (designs) and thinking. In the design-based curriculum teachers are discouraged from explaining science concepts before students had the opportunity to offer competing explanations for the phenomena they were observing and testing. Still both pedagogical interventions (Grier et al., 2008; Mehalik et al., 2008) promoted achievement for African-American students. Findings in Grier et al. (2008) showed students who completed one or more units significantly outperformed (14% improvement the first year and 13% the next) their DPS peers on both sections (content and process skills) as measured by their state standardized science scores. Gender differences were significant as well. In the first year, boys scored 17 points below the girls. However, in the second year the passing rates
between boys and girls showed no significant difference as the relative gains for boys was significantly higher. Pre-post test findings (Mehalik et al., 2008) showed the design group (16% gain) outscored the inquiry group (7% gain). African-Americans scored eight times higher than the African-Americans in the inquiry group, while Non-African Americans scored almost twice the gains of the inquiry group. While male students in the design group significantly outscored the males in the inquiry group, no differences between male and females were noted between the two groups.

Another study identifying pedagogical interventions that promoted achievement for African American students was a teacher-developed intervention (Thandani, Cook, Wise, & Blakey, 2010), which used sensor arrays to collect real-time weather data (learning science as practice), which then facilitated the teaching of middle school concepts such as photosynthesis, transpiration and natural selection (learning science as content knowledge). Students were guided to construct a scientific question, then make observations and analyze and graph authentic data sets to make hypotheses.

School 1 showed more evidence of teacher-directed instruction than the control classrooms at Schools 2 and 3. Intervention classrooms showed more evidence of inquiry-type learning when compared to control classrooms. For example, a qualitative analysis of a lesson at School 1 revealed students making predictions about the water content of leaves while using the microscope to test their hypotheses. In another example at School 2, the intervention students used photos of a local mountain range to identify patterns, those observations and inferences were then used to form questions and hypothesize concerning plant life in the mountain ranges, whereas in the control class, students completed an “Observation and Inference” worksheet to determine if the
statements and corresponding cartoon pictures were observations or inferences. Intervention students made significantly higher gains than the control students at Schools 1 and 2 serving more low-income and minority students, while School 3 showed no statistical gains between the intervention and control groups.

Collaborative learning environments were depicted as important. The inquiry based class (Thandani et al., 2010) consisted of student-driven talk, questions, discussion, reasoning and defense of answers related to the location of certain leaf parts. In Thandani et al. (2010), cultural literacy resources were introduced as students were able to use their own language, “on the top, porque [because] it’s more, it’s greener” (p. 29), to explain their reasoning for the different phenomena they were observing. Thandani et al. (2010) noted how repositioning students as knowledge producers instead of passive learners promoted personal and social empowerment. To illustrate the differences between the schools in carrying out this repositioning, the authors discussed how at School 1, during the lesson introduction the teacher told students they were going to be “pretend” scientists (disempowering), unlike at School 3 where the teacher expressed students were going to be “doing real science” and using the technologies that are currently used in the science field (empowering).

These studies document several intersections with the multiliteracies framework (Appendix K) drawing on students’ cultural literacy resources to situate practice, providing pedagogical intervention as overt instruction, and creating collaborative learning environments for critically framing discussions and identity development. The field would gain more insight, if these studies included more detail regarding the transformed practices African American students were able to produce as a result of this
type of instruction. For example, in Mehalik (2008) students designed a medication
device to assist the elderly with their health. Still, these studies demonstrate how African
American students’ home language can be used as an important cultural literacy resource
to assist students in mediating scientific discourse and content. Collaborative learning
environments that acknowledged and supported the different discourse patterns and
identities developed in science classrooms was equally as salient.

Further, recognizing African American students need pedagogical interventions
that meet their distinct needs was viewed as critical given the differences in their prior
knowledge and experiences when compared to Mono-English speaking students. More
studies that describe pedagogical interventions that allow urban adolescent African
American males to use their cultural literacy resources in collaborative science
environments would make a positive contribution to the field of adolescent literacy.
These studies show there are a variety of pedagogical interventions that have been
effective for African American students, but very few studies detail what students are
reading to learn scientific concepts or the corresponding pedagogies to assist them in
doing so. The next section of the literature review will discuss pedagogies that involve
comprehension instruction.

**Comprehension instruction.** In other science studies, various forms of
comprehension instruction have been thoroughly explored and documented in literature,
but rarely include African American students as focal participants: strategy instruction
(Guthrie, Anderson, Alao, & Rinehart, 1999; Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007; Guthrie
et al., 2006; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Romance & Vitale, 1992; Romance & Vitale,
2001), argumentation (Baker et al., 2009; Chin & Osborne, 2010; Chin & Osborne, 2006;
Students who struggle, particularly African American males, may benefit from a blend of theoretical frameworks and pedagogies, such as comprehension instruction. In *Apprenticing Adolescent Learners* (Greenleaf et al., 2001) the researchers proffer another alternative to low-level types of instruction that is generally characteristic of remedial reading. This is a descriptive study of 30 urban 8th grade students over a 12-month period. Three content area teachers were used to implement the strategies in their respective classes, an Academic Literacy Course required of all entering 9th graders. Four domains were used as a framework during the course: a) social (socio-political, economic, culture and power), b) personal (identity, awareness, purpose, agency), c) cognitive (reciprocal teaching, discussion and other strategies to support comprehension instruction) and d) knowledge (cultural capital students bring to text to increase their social and personal goals). In this study the assets and experiences of the students and the content area teachers were incorporated into the curriculum. A major focus was to introduce students to how to use their cultural knowledge and experiences to build bridges in understanding the language and literacy practices valued and measured in school and in society (p. 81). Students in this study gained two years of reading growth as measured by standardized testing measures. In addition, they increased the number of strategies they could use to handle the rigor required in academic reading and they also gained more confidence and agency as readers and thinkers.
Reciprocal teaching was the instructional strategy used in Greenleaf et al. (2001). It aided students in focusing and monitoring their reading in order to comprehend text better. Teachers modeled four strategies (predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing), helped students develop their use of the strategies through guided practice, then gradually released them to use the strategies independently in small group discussions with their peers.

Of the five studies and one literature review (Lysynchuk, Pressley, & Vye, 1990; Marks, Pressley, Coley et al., 1993; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Palinscar, Brown & Martin, 1987; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Taylor & Frye, 1992) associated with Reciprocal Teaching (RT), with the exception of one study, all were experimental. Of notable significance was the distinction between how RT was implemented in the classroom. Only the original study implemented RT during the discussion, the others introduced the four skills prior to the discussion. Marks et al. (1993) described the modifications veteran teachers made to RT because of their difficulty implementing the strategy. Noting one researcher’s findings that the clarification and prediction strategies were difficult to implement because of students’ background knowledge with history is limited. The author goes on to explain how the social studies text itself limits these processes from taking place because of its chronological structure. Students in both the treatment and control groups demonstrated the ability to generate questions, however the students in the treatment groups tended to outperform the control group on various measures of comprehension. In terms of critical thinking, Palincsar and Brown’s (1984) original study analyzed the quality of student dialogue noting the switch from using exact phrases from the text to doing more paraphrasing of complex concepts (p. 135). Since the
analysis involves different subjects across time, the increase in the quality of the
discussions may be due to student interest or background knowledge instead of the actual
treatment itself.

The other studies made no mention of critical thinking nor did they analyze the
discussion of the students across the sessions, although two mentioned transcribing the
interactions that took place during the discussions. Each study made mention of the
students being more engaged, motivated and/or participating in RT, yet none described
what these interactions looked like or quantified them in their respective settings. One
study, Marks et al. (1993) mentioned one teacher who gave participation points based on
the number of interactions in which the student participated. Also, one in this study
concluded she would use RT rather or not it yielded positive outcomes for their students’
level of comprehension because she perceived it increased their enthusiasm, motivation
and thinking skills for reading. Other teachers reported students’ attitudes towards
reading improving, promotion of interpretive skills and high-level student-generated
discussions taking place. No instruments to measure engagement and motivation were
used throughout the studies.

Cornell note-taking (Pauk, 1974) is another strategy used to bolster students
comprehension levels. It is a systematic process for taking notes during reading, viewing
or listening activities. Students then analyze their notes to form questions and summarize
the main ideas presented from the material. While the benefits of notetaking has recently
been thoroughly documented in literature (Konrad, Joseph, & Eveleigh, 2009; Reynolds
& Perrin, 2009), it empirical evidence that references this particular type of note-taking is
limited. The aforementioned studies discuss the benefits of note-taking with regards to
expository text and self-monitoring capabilities while documenting the increase in academic performance across different age groups.

Comprehension instruction has been effective in helping adolescents, particularly students who struggle with the literacies valued by schools. By strategically modeling and scaffolding explicit instruction students are taught how to focus and monitor their reading and engage in rich discussions using expository texts like science as well as other text types. While more recent approaches to comprehension instruction are dialogic in nature and have moved away from mechanical teaching approaches, they now encompass using disciplinary-rich content like science in conjunction with the strategies to activate background knowledge, question, search for information, summarize, and organize information graphically (Wilkinson & Son, 2011). The studies presented in this section discussed how some teachers modified older strategies like RT to become more suitable to the needs of their students and the demands of the discipline. As with the other pedagogies, very few of studies related to comprehension instruction pushed students into activist roles by having them apply their learning in a different context beyond the scope of the classroom.

**Pedagogies conclusion.** Overall, the pedagogies section revealed there are many pedagogical frameworks, oftentimes blended with multiple theories, which support the literacy development of adolescent learners. In fact, many of the theories, frameworks, definitions, and themes pertaining to successfully teaching African American students intersect with the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies framework (Appendix K), yet very few multiliteracies studies published in peer-reviewed journals taking place in school settings include African American students, particularly males, as focal students. One study
(Emert, 2013) involving 70 refugee boys from Africa and Asia took place during a five-week summer program and leveraged a multiliteracies approach. Across all studies, evidence of transformed practice appeared to be limited in that students’ use of what they learned and how that learning was applied in a different context may need more attention in future studies. Another gap in the literature appears to be the dearth of studies explaining how African American students are reading to learn science given the focus on informational texts, the complexity of the text’s structure, and low standardized test scores. The field of adolescent literacy knows which pedagogies are effective, but little is known regarding how different groups and subgroups of students experience those pedagogies, as well as how students perceive their learning experience with them.

**Conclusion**

Taken together, lucid conceptual frameworks (RAND, 2002; Sweet & Snow, 2003) have been established for exploring the topic of adolescent literacy. By examining different factors related to the reader, context, text and pedagogy, we know that many of the concepts coalesce around Tatum’s (2005) definition of Enabling (Appendix K). We also know this review of the literature revealed studies that clarified findings, theories, themes, and concepts related to urban adolescent African American males.

First, we know African American male readers are multifaceted and complex human beings with distinct and collective identities that are influenced by historical, political, economical, and social forces and therefore should not be simplified to a homogenous group even though they have unique experiences that bind them. We know educational researchers have put forth a counter-narrative of excellence, but it is currently being overshadowed by a meta-narrative of failure for all African American males. More
work needs to be done to determine how different groups of African American males become interested, motivated, and engaged in the learning process and thus clarify the subsequent range of outcomes, including standardized test scores, that may be produced. Many qualitative studies focus on a broad range of academic achievements, which are necessary and important. However, very few mention being able to improve comprehension in content area courses as measured by standardized test scores (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). We do not know the range of outcomes various subgroups of urban adolescent African American males are able to produce given Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts.

Next, the literature consistently supports the notion that context also plays a critical role impacting the adolescent literacy development of students (Sweet & Snow, 2003). With a focus on African American students in urban settings, this literature explained how schools are important sites of change as they work to neutralize the increased educational, social, and emotional needs of African American students. We know there are several obstacles that make it difficult for urban schools to achieve at high levels. We know many African American students, particularly males do not feel supported at school. We also know there is a clear common set of characteristics distinguishing schools that have been successful serving low-income African American students. Very few of the studies systematically examined how teachers or principals beliefs varied with different subgroups of African American students. Also, very few of the studies examined the perceptions of students, and far less the perception of African American males and different subgroups of African American males. Studies that examine how different subgroups of urban adolescent African American males perceive
the contextual factors related to their schooling experience may need further examination and dissemination.

The studies related to text supported the identity development literature by documenting the unique experiences of African American male students with certain types of texts, and then discussing the varied and multiple affective outcomes resulting from the identities shaping the experience. While the literature is clear that readers, especially students who struggle, need explicit comprehension instruction with informational text (e.g., science texts), very few studies describe demographic and contextual data so researchers understand how those practices may work to serve different groups of students. We know there are many affective and educationally meaningful benefits to empowering students with print and non-print texts across all genres, and many of the studies provide a deep and critical analysis of one or two participants to fully explain such phenomena. It is still unclear how different subgroups of urban African American males experience informational, literary, and non-print texts in the classroom and their perceptions of those experiences.

Finally, the literature related to pedagogies revealed there are many pedagogical frameworks, oftentimes blended with multiple theories, which support the literacy development of adolescent learners. In fact, many of the theories, frameworks, definitions, and themes pertaining to successfully teaching African American students intersect with the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies framework (Appendix K), yet very few multiliteracies studies published in peer-reviewed journals taking place in school settings include African American students, particularly males, as focal students. Across all studies, evidence of transformed practice appeared to be limited in that students’ use of
what they learned and how that learning was applied in a different context may need more attention in future studies. Another gap in the literature appears to be the dearth of studies explaining how African American students are reading to learn science. The field of adolescent literacy knows which pedagogies are effective, but little is known regarding how different groups and subgroups of students experience those pedagogies, as well as how students perceive their learning experience with them.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors that impact achievement for urban adolescent African American males. Data for this study were collected using biographical surveys, semi-structured interviews and examining artifacts from which qualitative case studies were written. A multiple case, sometimes referred to as a cross-case or collective case study analysis (Barone, 2004; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1989; Patton, 1980; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994) was used to capture the unique variations which were helpful in explaining how participants’ experiences differed among an “individual, program, organization, or community” (Patton, 1990, p. 99). Case studies may be defined by the researcher’s ability to explore a single phenomenon (or “case”) bound by time and collecting detailed information by using a variety of data sources (Barone, 2004; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1980; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994). Similarly, Barone (2004) elaborated on the strength of using collective study analysis because of the researchers ability to explore numerous cases of the same phenomenon, which provides the reader a more in-depth understanding and compelling argument regarding the study’s significance.

There are four general characteristics of case study design proffered by Merriam (1988): 1) It must be particularistic meaning situated on a particular situation, program, event or person (This study is particularistic in that it focuses on the perceptions of high, medium, and lower performing urban adolescent, African American males’ perceptions of texts, pedagogies, and context.); 2) It must be descriptive meaning the researcher
provides a “thick” description (Geertz, 1967) of the phenomenon (By triangulating multiple data sources, chapters four-six provide “thick” descriptions of how the participants perceived their experience.); 3) It must provide some heuristic to deepen the reader’s understanding (The Adolescent Literacy Framework provides a heuristic for this study in that it led me to ask questions about the cases and their relationships to each other.); 4) It must be inductive in that the data are driving the understandings that are unfolding and emerging from the study and not the other way around. During the final stages of coding, constant comparative analysis involved grouping answers to common questions, then analyzing the different perspectives on central issues, thus creating themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and patterns from the data rather than imposing the themes on the data (Patton, 1990). Moje (2008) discussed how each code during this stage may be compared to other codes, looking for overlap, points of convergence or divergence, and outright contradictions. In this study the codes were used to compare incidents that were applicable to each category with the thought of integrating categories and their properties together (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the present study, three cases of (high, medium, and lower performing) adolescent African-American males offered a unique opportunity to provide insight into their perceptions of the multiple factors that impact their achievement. Barone (2004) referred to this unique comparative method as using multiple lenses to explore the same topic. Due to the study’s emphasis on gaining a deeper understanding of the student’s experience, this study integrates the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology with the more coherent and systematic, yet reflexive data analysis steps of Constructivist
Grounded Theory (CGT): initial, focused, and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). As such, the research question used to guide this study was:

How do the perceptions of urban adolescent African-American males’ experiences with Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts differ based on their achievement levels?

**Theoretical Considerations**

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, the researcher should enter the field with as few predetermined ideas or theories as possible (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Phenomenology asserts the meaning of phenomena can best be understood through the descriptions and experiences of the participants being studied, thus providing agency and voice to oftentimes “silenced” populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Similarly, the task of the constructivist grounded theorist is to unearth participants’ beliefs, purposes, actions, and the reasons for their actions, and inactions from their perspectives (Morse et al., 2009) instead of forcing them into a preconceived theoretical perspective.

Consequently, the theoretical frameworks for the present study were not formalized a priori. When examining a phenomenon, preconceived expectations and theories should be suppressed as not to guide the data collection process or interfere with the researcher being fully absorbed in the phenomena (Cresswell, 1994). However, in the present study, as is consistent with CGT, it would be inaccurate to suggest I was completely separate and objective from all that had been studied and learned about qualitative research, adolescent literacy, African American students and student achievement or sociocultural and cognitive theories prior to and during data collection. Although my prior knowledge was not used to shape the interactions with the study participants, as the data still had to
“earn its way” into the construct of the analysis, both phenomenology and socio-cognitive perspectives (Rogoff, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2012) were assumed going into the study.

Purcell-Gates (2012) asserts a new paradigm of literacy research design, methods, and presentation is necessary. She admonishes literacy theorists to consider that all instances of reading reflect both a) mental processing and skill application and b) the contexts within which they occur. She goes on to suggest that one is not independent of the other and that no human activity, including cognition, occurs outside of a socio-cultural context. In her view, and that of others (Rogoff, 2003), the theoretical underpinnings of reading research are still divisive and moving into the 21st century will need a more unitary socio-cognitive framework to reflect both cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions. Since reading is such a dynamic process, multiple learning theories (critical, cultural, cognitive and constructivist) should be considered throughout data analysis to reflect how individuals learn and process information. Instead of considering the theories as binaries, effort should be made to discuss how they might coalesce to better support the changing and integrated nature of learning in the 21st century.

While the integration of phenomenology and the more unitary socio-cognitive framework became the general theoretical model for making sense of the data and examining how the data gathered might match or contrast with multiple theories: critical (Woodson, 1933; Gee, 1990; Street, 1995; Freire, 1997), cultural (Blumer; 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ochoa, 2003), cognitive (Piaget, 1963), and constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). Theories of intertextuality and multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) emerged to provide more specificity and assist
in creating better explanatory power during the latent stages of data analysis for the text and pedagogy sections respectively.

The term intertextuality, informed by literary theory (Alfaro, 1996) and introduced by French linguist, Julia Kristeva, emphasizes that a single text does not stand alone and have meaning (Kristeva, 2000), but rather meaning is socially constructed through the juxtaposition of multiple texts and text types (Bloome & Egan-Roberston, 1993; Kirkland, 2011). In this view, texts are not limited to print, but may also include interactive websites, electronic mediated texts (Lanshear & Knobel, 2006; Voithofer, 2006; Alvermann, 2008; Hagood, 2009), gesture, drama, film, or “any sign that communicates meaning” (Hartman, 1992).

The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) is a framework that includes four interrelated phases: a) situated practice (Immersion in experience and the utilization of available discourses, including those from the students’ lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces.), b) overt instruction (Systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding. Requires the introduction of explicit mealanguages, which describe and interpret the process and elements of different modes of meaning.), c) critical framing (Interpreting the social and cultural context of particular meaning. Involves the students’ standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context.), and d) transformative practice (Transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning to work in other contexts or cultural sites) (p. 88).

Population
A major thrust at the Boys School is to ensure students are “inspired to learn and motivated to excel.” Students are referred to as “scholars” as they endeavor to live out the school’s Core Values: ARISE—Accountability, Respect, Integrity, Service-Minded and Excellence. This urban school district (servicing 52,851 students in 119 schools) has a student mobility rate of 19.7% and 77.3% of the students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. The racial/ethnic makeup of the district is broken down into the following categories: African American (60.0%), Caucasian (27.2%), Hispanic (6.1%), Asian (1.9%), Multiracial (4.5%), Asian (1.9%) and American Indian/Native Alaskan (0.2%). Within the district, 17.2% of the students are provided with special education services, 17.7 have been identified as Gifted and Talented by state standards, and 6.4% of the students receive English as a Second Language (ESL) services. According to the district’s website students attending this district speak 89 other languages than English at home.

The Boys School, established in 2010 as an all-male middle school, initially servicing 6th graders (with the intent to add one grade per year) has the following school demographics: 86% African-American, 9% Caucasian, 3% Latino and 2% Multiracial. Almost 80% of the students receive free and reduced meals. In 2010, the 6th graders were organized into two teams, referred to as Team A and Team B in this study. Each team consisted of approximately 60 students divided among three teachers. I taught all of Team A English Language Arts and once section of Life Science. Thirty-five percent of the students on Team A were at or above proficiency in reading, additionally 60%, 58%, 56%, 48% scored below proficiency in vocabulary, process skills, informational and literary text respectively. For reading, 85.5 % of the students needed to pass the state-
wide standardized assessment (proficient or better) in order to meet Annual Yearly Progress requirements set forth by the state.

Selection Process

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I worked with the school’s administrator to recruit students from the inaugural class of students on Team A. All participants were informed of their voluntary participation in the study. Three African American males for each subgroup high (scoring advanced or accelerated on the state standardized test), medium (scoring proficient on the state standardized test) and lower (scoring basic or limited on the state standardized test) were selected based on their availability to participate in the study, growth from the previous year’s standardized testing data, and interest. Each student was sent home with: a) a letter introducing the researcher, b) informed consent paperwork explaining the purpose of the study and relevant details, as well as c) a biographical survey (see Appendix A). Students were asked to return the information to the school office in a sealed envelope. Data collection consisted of at least four sessions for each participant: the biographical survey followed by three consecutive interviews, approximately one week apart. After interested students returned their information, I arranged times with the boys to administer the biographical survey and learn more about their schedules to plan the interview sessions. I shared with parents I may need to schedule more sessions, but we would start with three. Parents agreed to transport students to and from various interview sites and were provided a $ gas card for doing so. Throughout the duration of the study students were reminded of their choice to leave the study, at no consequence, as well as their ability to not answer any question they did not feel comfortable answering for any reason. These instructions were
delivered both orally and in writing through the consent forms required by IRB. The 
research study timeline consisted of the following:

- Winter 2012-Spring 2013: Proposal and IRB Approval
- Spring 2013-Summer 2013: Data Collection
- Spring 2013-Summer 2014: Data Analysis
- Spring 2014-Spring 2015: Dissertation Writing

**Participants**

According to Patton (1990) the main goal of case study research is to capture
“information-rich” data from which individuals “can learn a great deal about matters of
importance” (p. 181). Consequently, the sample for this study was drawn using *stratified
purposeful sampling* which:

…combine(s) a typical case sampling strategy with others, essentially taking a 
stratified purposeful sample of above average, average, and below average 
cases…The purpose of a stratified purposive sample is to capture major variations 
rather than to identify a common core, although the latter may also emerge in the 
analysis. Each of the strata would constitute a fairly homogeneous sample. (p. 
174)

Three adolescent African-American males from Team A, in each subgroup (high-
medium and lower performing), comprised each case for the stratified purposeful 
sampling. This sampling was selected because a) African American males are not a 
homogenous group (low-performers) as is often suggested in the literature (e.g. “African-
American male literacy crisis”) and b) rarely is the relationship of school achievement 
juxtaposed against the range of outcomes examined in new literacy studies (Moje, 2009).
Patton also stated, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative research” (p. 184).
He asserted researchers should be more concerned with depth over breadth and the sample size is highly contingent upon:

…what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. (p. 184)

As such, all nine of the study participants were eighth graders (formerly from Team A during their sixth grade year) at the Boys School. Participants were required to submit year-end portfolios as a culminating activity of their inaugural year at the Boys School. While participants completed these requirements at varying degrees, a checklist of suggested artifacts were given to prompt student submission as well as assist them in selecting artifacts they found meaningful.

**Participant Cases**

Three urban adolescent African American males from Team A, in each subgroup (high, medium and lower performing) (Tables 1 and 2), comprise each case for this study. All nine of the study participants are eighth graders (formerly from Team A during their sixth grade year at the Boys School). In terms of age, the medium-performing students are the youngest. All students are transported to and from school by the bus. The high-performing students and one lower-performing student (Jordan) have a longer transport, an hour or more, compared to medium-performing students’ ride less than an hour, and the other two lower-performing students (LeQuan and Ray), travel less than 30 minutes. The Boys’ school accepts lottery applications from students throughout the district and provides transportation for all of its students regardless of if they live in the neighborhood where the school is located.
Average current grade point averages are 3.4, 2.7, and 2.4 with one student in the lower group reporting “I don’t know” for high, medium and lower performing students respectively. While none of the students currently have an “A” in English Language Arts (ELA), the high group is more aware of their current grades in ELA and Science. The medium group is somewhat aware, while the majority of the lower group reported, “I don’t know.” There is equal division regarding favorite subject for the high group reporting, “I like them all” compared to the medium group who preferred science, and the lower group preferring math.

Regarding extracurricular activities, participation in sports is a commonality across all groups with the high group having more variety and activities compared to the medium and lower groups. For hobbies, the high group listed more participation in the arts and recreational activities (i.e. singing, dancing, and sports), the medium group listed more recreational and social (i.e. sports, hanging out with friends), and the lower group also listed more recreational and social activities (i.e. sports and talking to girls). An analysis of transcript and biographical survey data was conducted to illustrate the following key characteristics across each case: a) family background and career goals, b) decision to attend a single-gender school, and c) reading interests and standardized assessment results. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the differences across each case.

**High.**

**Family background and career goals.** Males in this case viewed the purpose of education as a tool to get further in life. Fathers appeared to be critically engaged in providing educational support in the high group. Participants reported living in two-
parent, double-income homes with the exception of one participant whose father lives at a separate residence. The majority of the participants in this subgroup have 5-7 siblings ranging in ages from pre-kindergarten to adult.

*I get home at around 4:00 and from 4-6 or 6:30, something like that, I’m doing work, studying:* All parents had high expectations for their sons. Shawn discussed how being offered greater levels of responsibility made him aware of the high expectations. Jaylen recalled a conversation with his parents not being satisfied with mediocre performance.

Amari (H) commented:

“I’m on punishment right now because my mom wants me to focus hard on my grades, cause she says they’re good-well they’re not bad, but they’re not good. They could be better. So I go upstairs in my room and I either take notes or right now I’m working on Mr. S’s-he has an essay that we have to do on this movie called Amistad and I’m on the computer right now doing it.

All of the boys in the high group attend church regularly. Shawn and Amari spend approximately four to five hours a week studying, while Jaylen spends almost thirteen hours a week. All of the boys have clearly defined after school routines. Shawn discussed how he takes a break before doing his homework, Amari does chores and picks up his sister from the bus stop before getting to his studies, and Jaylen gets his homework done before doing anything else. Jaylen and Amari mention only watching TV if they have time during the week. Becoming a professional athlete was the primary career goal in this group. Students had “fallback” plans in the event their initial plans could not be met with success. Some alternative plans consisted of becoming a lawyer, doctor, athletic director, singer, dancer, or gym teacher.
**Decision to attend single-gender school.** Initially, the participants in this group did not want to attend a single-gender male school. Elementary school administrators were actively engaged in the decision-making process by notifying parents of the school’s opening and programming for boys. The administrator and teacher from the Boys School generated high interest from the participants during elementary school visits, as did the Middle School Fair. Looking professional, distancing from females and the opportunity to meet new people were common reasons to attend the Boys School in this group.

**Reading interests and standardized assessments.** Overall, the high group had positive responses regarding their reading interests. Comparing their 5th grade standardized test scores to their 6th grade scores, the majority of the students in this subgroup moved from “proficient” to “accelerated”. The average point increase was 13. Students improved in comprehending informational text. During their 8th grade year, the majority of the students scored “proficient” in reading and science. The weakest score appeared to occur within the Earth and Space Science strand during their 7th grade year. Shawn was assigned to my class for two years of instruction (6th grade and 7th grade) in English Language Arts and Science. During his 8th grade year, Shaun scored “accelerated” in both reading and science.

**Medium.**

**Family background and career goals.** Males in this case also viewed the purpose of education as a tool to get further in life. Extended family provided another source of support for education in this subgroup. Two participants in this group live in female-headed, single-income homes. One participant lives in a two-parent, double-income
The majority of the participants in this subgroup have 5-7 siblings ranging in ages from elementary to adult, with no pre-kindergarten aged children.

I study every time I know there’s an important event tomorrow. That’s the only time I study. Students in the middle group perceived their parent’s had high expectations for their academic performance. Although their responses were brief, oftentimes one-word answers, in the reader’s section students discussed how the majority of their support for their education came from home. Edward and JC attend church regularly. Overall, the level of intensity and frequency for studying was less when compared to the high group. Clarence and Edward study approximately five hours a week and JC for ninety minutes. Clarence participates in an after-school tutoring program, Edward picks up his sister after school, relaxes then starts his homework at 6:00 PM, and if JC has homework he substitutes doing homework instead of playing basketball right after school.

Edward (M) stated:

But my mom says like from the time we get out until like 6:00 we can do whatever, but then, after that is work and when you get done with your work, you can continue what you’re doing unless it’s time for bed.

JC (M) said:

I go home and my friends’ come over to my house cause I’ve got a basketball court. Then after I play basketball or whatever, I just watch TV or play a game. I go bed at like 9-9:30.

The primary career goals in the medium subgroup consisted of science related professions, such as becoming a scientists or a doctor. One student mentioned being interested in pursuing basketball as a career and developing a “fallback” plan as a business owner.
**Decision to attend single-gender school.** Elementary school administrators were a critical factor introducing single-gender schools to students. Participants in this group did not appear to be averse to attending. The majority of the participants mentioned having positive interactions with the administrator and teacher from the Boys School during the elementary school visits. Primary reasons for attending ranged from being able to focus on work without distractions, better preparation for high school, college and beyond, and the opportunity to have caring teachers.

**Reading interests and standardized assessments.** Students in the medium group recorded mostly neutral responses to their reading interests. All students in this subgroup advanced from “limited” to “proficient” during their 6th grade year. The average point increase was 54, with one student increasing by 63 points. Students showed improvement in all strands, but uniformly in Reading Process Skills. During their 8th grade year, all students scored “proficient” in reading, but only one scored “proficient” in science. The others did not pass the standardized science test. The two weakest scores appeared to occur within Earth & Space Science and Scientific Inquiry Skills.

**Family background and career goals.** Males in this case viewed being educated as being successful in life and able to provide financial support for their family. While support from family was evident in this group, the role teachers played in supporting this groups’ education was mentioned more often. One participant in this group lives in a single-parent home. The other two participants live in two-parent homes, but the mother is the only working adult living in both homes. The majority of the participants in this subgroup have 2-4 primarily adult-age siblings.
I’ll wait until somewhere near dark and then I’ll just study all night. Students perceived their parents held high expectations for their academic success. The majority of the students mentioned being compared to an older sibling as a motivational tool.

Ray (L) commented:

Hers—they’re high but she wants me to be like my sister. I guess, she get like 3.8 but I get like 2.5 and 2.0’s but I guess. But she’s thinking I want to go to a different high school but I think the high school that I’m going to now is all right for me.

Jordan (L) recalled:

My dad talks about it a lot…He always says he wants me to go somewhere and not be like my brother and sister, cause they didn’t finish high school. Well, my sister’s going back, but my brother didn’t.

None of the students in the lower group attend church regularly. Ray studies for 90 minutes a week, LeQuan for five hours, and Jordan did not specify a time. All of the boys in this group participated in homework activities if they had something due, but would wait until just before bed to begin their studies.

Jordan (L) recalled:

I’ve never been much of a study person. If I do, I’ll try to study the night before. If it’s important then I’ll study for it, but if it’s something I think I already know, I really don’t study for it.

All students in this subgroup related becoming professional athletes as their major career interests. LeQuan stated he would not need an alternative plan because he was confident in his ability to make it to the league. Jordan and Ray suggested alternate careers as becoming a chef or an engineer, respectively.

**Decision to attend single-gender school.** Participants in this group were primarily influenced by the positive interactions during the school visits to their elementary school.
There appeared to be general resistance to attending the school at first, yet participants still shared the school application with their parents.

**Reading interests and standardized assessments.** Negative responses were recorded most frequently for the lower performing group. All students in this subgroup advanced from “limited” to “basic” during their 6th grade year. The average point increase was 41. Students improved in comprehending Literary Text, but none showed improvement with Reading Process Skills or comprehending Informational Text. During their 8th grade year, the majority of the students also scored “basic” in reading and science.

**Similarities and differences across cases.**

*Family background.* As previously discussed, with the exception of one medium-performing student, all of the participants had a low socioeconomic background. At least one participant in each subgroup reported not knowing their parent’s place of employment. The high and lower groups primarily have more access to two-parent homes, but in the lower group the mothers are the primary breadwinners. All of the single-parent homes are led by mothers, two in the medium group and one each in the high and lower groups. Participants in the lower group have fewer siblings, mostly adult-aged, than the other two subgroups.

*Purpose and support for education.* Students presented varied purposes for wanting to become educated. All groups viewed the purpose of education as a tool to get farther in life. The high and medium cases, appeared to focus their responses externally and in comparison to others. The medium and lower cases addressed immediate needs (shelter and financial) in their responses. Overwhelmingly, mothers played the most
active roles in providing support for education. Older siblings and extended family were mentioned across all groups as well. In the high and medium cases, fathers were active participants in supporting their son’s educational goals. In the lower group, teachers played the most active role of support. This section also describes the *high* expectations and the degree of clearly *set* and established routines that took place in students’ home lives. All participants perceived their parents had high expectations for their academic performance. Different techniques were used to motivate the high students from the lower students. Being given more responsibility and punishment was used for the high group, and comparison to older siblings was used in the lower group.

The major differences consisted of the routines established at home. All of the high, and the majority of the medium-performing students attended church on a regular basis, while none in the lower group did. Students in the high group studied and followed a set routine rather they had homework or not. Their studies took place shortly after coming home from school, while students in the lower group would primarily study just before going to bed and only if they had an assignment due. Similar to students in the high group, the medium group studied and followed a set routine, except JC would only study if he had a specific assignment due.

*Decision to attend a single-gender school.* Identity development appeared to be a major impetus leading to their decision to attend. Participants were drawn to being associated with success, leadership, and being the first class to matriculate through the school. The high and low groups reported: a) being positively influenced by the school’s uniform and gave heavy consideration to the benefits of wearing them, in spite of the discomfort, b) networking with other mothers to enroll their sons in the school, and c)
initial resistance to attending a single-gender boys school because no girls would be in attendance. Mothers appeared to be the final decision makers regarding enrollment. Overall the students in the middle group suggested they held joint-decision making regarding enrollment, while participants in the high and lower groups did not perceive they had a choice. One student in the high group did report joint decision-making. Across the high and middle subgroups, elementary administrators played a prominent role in introducing students and parents to the Boys School. Participants in the lower group made no mention of interacting with their elementary administrators in this regard. All subgroups mentioned the school visits and Middle School fair as influencing their decision making process.

*Career goals and interests.* The priority goals set by all students were related to performance-related fields (acting, stand-up comedy, singing, dancing, and playing sports). Playing sports professionally was a common theme across all groups with all students having some “fallback” plan, excluding one student in the high group and one student in the low group. Although their parents’ goals for them were not the primary career goals students set for themselves, students in the high were strongly influenced by the goals their parents set for them. Conversely, one student in the medium group did support his mother’s goal of his interest in becoming a doctor. The high and medium groups had one person who preferred to pursue a non-sports related career goal: acting or comedy in the high group and becoming a scientist in the medium group. All non-sports related fields of interest were science related. Parents, teachers and school programming appeared to have the greatest impact of student’s career goals and interests.
**Reading interests.** Consistently positive responses across all groups were recorded for students participating in internet projects with classmates, texting friends in free time (but not emailing), reading newspapers, magazines and novels. The most negative response was reading a book on a rainy Saturday. The lower group had more negative responses to reading interests, but favored talking to friends about texts contrasting the high and medium groups’ neutral interest. The high group favored online activities whereas the medium group was mostly neutral on the topic, and the lower group scoring the majority of the items in this section negatively.

**Standardized assessment outcomes.** From 5th to 6th grade students who passed the reading assessment showed improvement in Reading Process Skills. Additionally, the high group showed improvement with comprehending Informational text above their grade level. The weakest areas for reading appeared to be Reading Process Skills and comprehending Informational text, followed by Vocabulary. The medium and low groups showed the most improvement of the three subgroups. The high and low groups’ 8th grade reading scores mirrored their science scores. Students with higher reading scores appeared to pass the science test more readily. The majority of the students who did not pass the science test also scored “below proficient” in Reading Process Skills which include comprehension strategies. In science, strands Earth and Space and Scientific Inquiry Skills appeared to be the largest challenge.

**Data Collection**

There are multiple methods for collecting data in the field of qualitative research. Barone (2004), Patton (1990), and Yin (1994) all agreed researchers should: a) gather as many forms of information from different perspectives, b) triangulate by collecting
various kinds of data—interviews, program documentation, photographs, recordings, and
c) check with participants to verify the information conveys their understanding of the
topic. Similarly, variants of grounded theory include: a) simultaneous data collection and
analysis, b) emergent theme development through early data analysis, c) synthesizing
social processes within the data, d) inductive approaches to categories development and
processes, e) theoretical sampling to refine categories using comparative processes, and f)
integrating categories into a theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2002). In an effort to
adhere to the guidelines set forth in this body of literature, the following data were
collected: a) portfolio and school record artifacts, b) individual semi-structured
interviews, and c) biographical survey information. The portfolio artifacts for the present
study primarily consist of writing samples, drawings, web-based science inquiry data,
PowerPoint presentations, rubrics and student generated class notes. The school’s
professional learning community materials (video/ audiotapes of student interactions, and
teacher lesson plans/notes) were also used. The Interview Guide was used to collect
multiple and sequential semi-structured interview data, while the biographical survey was
used to collect demographic and reading interest data.

Artifact collection. Each student was required to submit a year-end portfolio of
work collected across the school year to be kept on file at the school and given to each
8th grader upon completion of the program. Participants were required to submit year-
end portfolios as a culminating activity of their inaugural year at the Boys School. While
participants completed these requirements at varying degrees, a checklist of suggested
artifacts were given to prompt student submission as well as assist them in selecting
artifacts they found meaningful. The portfolio artifacts for the present study primarily
consist of writing samples, drawings, web-based science inquiry data, PowerPoint presentations, rubrics and student generated class notes. The artifacts from the portfolio were selected from lesson in which the instructional texts used were based on Tatum’s (2008) definition of Enabling Text: Texts that have the capacity to be used to move beyond a solely cognitive focus—such as skill and strategy development—to include a social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic focus. In this study, this term is broadly defined to include both print and non-print texts, as well as pedagogies and contexts.

Twenty-three texts (Appendix I) and eight pedagogies (Appendix J) from the student portfolio were selected for examination based on Tatum’s definition of enabling (Tatum, 2008). In addition to the year-end portfolio collected across the 2010-2011 school year, the following artifacts from school records were collected, used during the interview and analyzed for triangulation purposes: school’s professional learning community materials (video/audiotapes of student interactions, and teacher lesson plans/notes). The school’s professional learning community (PLC), Exploring Content Area Literacy with Males, was designed to provide space for teachers to explore their practices while working with a new population (single-gender males). Through a four-month blend of online and face-to-face activities, four teachers collaborated with each other to analyze, critique, discuss, and experiment with research-based strategies for literacy-rich instruction in math, science, social studies, and reading. The process culminated in the creation of a series of lessons, which were observed by team colleagues and videotaped for online feedback and refinement. The major goals of the PLC consisted of: a) allow for more student to student interaction during which students explain and justify their reasoning, b) increase connections to the real world and across the
curriculum, c) increase students’ choices in ways to represent concepts and demonstrate their learning, d) improve the usage of formative assessment data, and ultimately achievement in all content areas. Science was the content area all teachers shared and agreed to use as the focus. The standardized assessment data gathered from teacher notes to create formative assessments, students’ Cornell Notes, and video clips of students’ participation in Reciprocal Teaching were gathered from the PLC materials, used during the interview, and analyzed for triangulation purposes.

**Semi-structured interviews.** To begin the analysis of this work, school data were organized into folders by high, medium, and lower performing participants for use in the semi-structured interview process (Seidman, 2005). As is consistent with qualitative research, the interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim (Dey, 1993; Patton, 1990; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Photo- Elicitation methods were used to facilitate recall of information and assist participants in discussing various artifacts. After artifacts were collected and organized to support the Interview Guide (Patton, 1999), semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2005) were scheduled with the nine study participants on the weekends at the Boys School or at a place that was convenient for parents, students and administrators (i.e. local library, church, restaurant). Multiple and sequential interviews (Charmaz, 2002) lasted approximately one hour at a time. The Interview Guide was used as a list of questions that needed to be explored throughout the interview. Its main purpose was to ensure consistency between the questions that were asked to each study participant, thus increasing the chance of analyzing the same material. Special attention was paid to the recommendations in Seidman (2005) regarding using the interview guide carefully as not to manipulate study participants into responding to it by superimposing
the researcher’s views and ideas on the participant. Charmaz (2002), also noted the significance of facilitating multiple and sequential interviews so researchers stay close to the data and have the opportunity to conduct theoretical sampling to fill gaps as questions arise (p. 689). In her opinion the researcher should have “intimate familiarity” (Charmez, 2000, p. 525) with the participants and their settings in order to cast their stories beyond surface meanings into uncovering their values, beliefs and thoughts in light of the way the participants view themselves and their condition. These opinions are also illuminated in her definition of CGT, which was also used to conceptualize this study. She asserts CGT recognizes the researcher creates the data and subsequent analysis through interaction with the study participants. Data alone cannot provide an absolute truth or facts regarding reality. Instead, she argues the reality emerges from an interactive and reflexive process where researchers and participants frame the interactions and assign meaning upon it. She concludes her thought by suggesting the researcher is part of what is being viewed rather than being completely separate from it, as is consistent with objectivist grounded theory (p. 524).

Photo elicitation. During the interviews, Photo Elicitation or what Prosser (2011) referred to as Visual Methodology (Smith & Woodward, 1999; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 2002; Jordan, Adams, Pawley, Radcliff, 2009; Moje, et al., 2008, Hinchman & Moje, 1998) was used in conjunction with the Interview Guide to broaden the conceptions and depth of the conversations without allowing the interview to only “favor the articulate” as is common using traditional interviewing formats (Prosser, 2011, p. 488). Photo elicitation allows participants to use images and other visual artifacts to evoke their memories and illicit feelings and clear thoughts about specific information. In
turn, their descriptions may be more coherent and comprehensive during research interviews. Ultimately, according to Prosser (2011), study participants:

feel less pressured when discussing sensitive topics through intermediary artifacts. Because they do not speak directly about a topic on which they feel vulnerable but work through a material go-between…they are more able to express difficult memories and powerful emotions. (p. 484)

Known photos from the student portfolio and other artifacts that were collected to address the pressures cited by Prosser (2011) consist of:

1. Writing samples from *4 Little Girls* Novel Study (*The Civil Rights Movement in Review: A Compilation of My Thoughts*)
2. video clips from the *4 Little Girls* documentary
3. photos from Pearson’s Life Science textbook
4. Completed *Cornell Notes* and *Reciprocal Teaching* rubrics
5. video clips of student interactions using Cornell Notes and Reciprocal Teaching
6. video clips of student interactions (in school)
7. question prompts, student answers, and diagrams from web-based genetics inquiry project
8. PowerPoint presentation of African American Scientist and Inventor project
9. Students’ research notes and guidelines on African American Scientist and Inventor project
10. Feedback on oral communication rubric for African American Scientist and Inventor project
Data Analysis

Initially, data were be conceptually organized around the Reading Comprehension heuristic (Sweet & Snow, 2003), which is also similar to the Literacy Model Framework (Moje, 2006). In Sweet & Snow (2003), the authors suggested the reader (cognitive, motivational, linguistic differences), text (fiction, nonfiction, electronic, multimedia documents), activity (internal and external purposes, tools to process text, consequences of performing), and socio-cultural context (economic resources, ethnicity, neighborhood, school culture) do not exist in isolation, but rather in relation to each other. While in Moje (2006), three circles overlap to stress the relationship between the reader, text, and context she goes on to categorize the context (school climate, peer groups etcetera) as more closely linked to the reader and text than does Sweet & Snow (2003).

*Initial coding* (Charmaz, 2006) entailed studying fragments of data line by line where I remained open to all possible theoretical and disciplinary assumptions indicated by the data. I created a coding index using HyperResearch Software based on participants’ perception of their experiences with the texts, pedagogies, and context. Secondarily, *focused coding* (Charmaz, 2006) involved selecting the most frequently appearing codes to sort and synthesize in an effort to begin conceptualizing the large amounts of data into broad categories gaining a more in depth understanding within each case. In the *axial coding* phase, constant comparative analysis involved grouping answers to common questions, then analyzing the different perspectives on central issues, thus creating themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and patterns from the data rather than imposing the themes on the data (Patton, 1990). Moje (2008) discussed how each code during this stage may be compared to other codes, looking for overlap, points of convergence or
divergence, and outright contradictions. In this study the codes were used to compare incidents that were applicable to each category with the thought of integrating categories and their properties together (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to do so, the “data bits” were assigned and at times reassigned to different categories depending on how the analysis (Dey, 1993) and interpretation (Blumer, 1970) unfolded. Blumer pointed out that the researcher’s interpretation or “sensitizing concepts, even though they are grounded on sense instead of objective traits, can be formulated and commented (on) (p. 60)”. In the final stages of coding, I considered how the data and categories “clouds or crystallizes” (Charmaz, 2002) extant theoretical perspectives and disciplinary assumptions (“sensitizing concepts”). An interpretive lens was used to analyze the data. Attempts to provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1967) of the findings were used to convey the context, thoughts and intentions of the participants.

**Trustworthiness**

In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with: *credibility* to strengthen the interpretability of the study, *transferability* to compare results across contexts, *dependability* to document the research process sequentially and logically, and *confirmability* to accurately present the ideas and materials in a manner that is consistent with the thoughts and ideas of the study participants themselves, not the thoughts and ideas of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). In an effort to increase the four criterion for qualitative trustworthiness, I employed the following strategies as suggested in the literature (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).
1. **Triangulation.** Triangulation is the process by which multiple sources and methods are used to gather and analyze the data. The purpose is to systematically reduce bias in the interpretation of the data (Patton, 1990). Three main types of triangulation in this study are as follows: *data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodological triangulation.*

   a. **Data Triangulation.** I conducted individual interviews using a stratified purposeful sample from the following sources:
      
      i. high performing adolescent African American males
      ii. medium performing adolescent African American males
      iii. low performing adolescent African American males

   b. **Investigator Triangulation.** I employed various methods to check and cross check developing conceptions.
      
      i. **Peer Debriefing.** I solicited the support of a skilled colleague and one other peer to discuss emerging conceptions and findings. Three formal sessions were documented to discuss coding and theme development. Informal sessions occurred throughout the data analysis and synthesis phases to clarify thoughts, probe any bias, and challenge my presumptions (Lincoln &Guba, 1985).
      
      ii. **Member Checking.** Three sequential interviews were conducted during this study. After each session, interviews were coded and reviewed with participants during the next session. Clarification questions were asked to verify codes, developing themes, and findings throughout the study.

   c. **Methodological Triangulation.** I utilized several methods to gain information.
i. Individual interview data from a stratified purposeful sample

ii. Student biographical questionnaire

iii. School data (class grades, state test scores, attendance records, free/reduced price lunch status, school’s professional learning community materials (video and audiotapes of student interactions)

iv. Literature Review

2. Thick Descriptions. Thick Descriptions involve the intellectual effort put forth by researchers to richly describe the phenomenon being studied. The literature is clear to note how this is an elaborate venture in which the overarching goal is to reduce puzzlement, fully bringing distinction and clarity to otherwise difficult to understand nuances (Geertz, 1967). I made every attempt to avoid “radically thinned descriptions” (p. 16) which lack interpretative force and meaning by finding relationships between the findings and existing theoretical frameworks and definitions. In the present study, chapters 4-6 are used to describe how the participants in this study perceived their experiences with Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts. The theoretical frameworks that help to provide force, meaning, and explanatory power to those descriptions are: intertextuality, pedagogy of multiliteracies, and enabling.

3. Reflexive Journal. The main purpose of the reflexive journal in this study was to aid in keeping a record of introspective thoughts and emerging understandings throughout the study.

4. Audit Trial. An audit trial provides a systematic, logical, traceable and well-documented account of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following components are included in the audit trial for this study:
a. **Raw Data**: audio recordings, school data, written notes on data, biographical questionnaire results;

b. **Data Reduction and Analysis**: written notes on data, summaries, working hypothesis, conceptual understanding;

c. **Data Reconstruction and Synthesis**: themes, definitions, relationships, connections to the literature and integration of concepts, and interpretations of data to the literature;

d. **Process Notes**: methodological notes including procedures, strategies, decisions and rationale, documentation regarding trustworthiness including peer debriefing, member checking;

e. **Intentions and Disposition**: proposal, expectations and predictions);

f. **Instrument Development**: protocols and biographical questionnaires); and

g. **Reflexive Journaling** (i.e. personal beliefs, attitudes, and opinions). After each interview and formal peer debriefing session, I kept a journal as a tool to keep track of my thinking and pose clarifying questions during the next session.

I used the raw data prior to, during, and after interview sessions. Prior to the interview sessions I used the school data to organize the cases and interview materials. I also wrote notes on the data and biographical survey that might inform certain interview questions. During data reduction/analysis and data reconstruction/synthesis, I used constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to build and clarify my conceptual understanding of the data as previously described in detail. I describe the themes and discuss the findings in chapters 4-6. I mainly used my reflexive journaling to keep track of my process notes, therefore these documents became one in the same. The
instruments used in this study were developed based on the Adolescent Literacy Conceptual Framework and the literature review. I documented my dispositions and intentions in my research protocol prior to IRB approval.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

In qualitative inquiry, “the researcher is the instrument of the study and the center of the analytic process” and therefore must guard against bringing personal bias and theoretical dispositions into the study (Patton, 1990, p. 460). As a result, careful attention must be paid to the reflexive journaling process to unmask and make public the personal beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of the researcher. Patton also suggested researchers should fully disclose any personal and professional information that may negatively or positively affect data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The study participants on Team A were my students two years prior to the study taking place, a similar methodology used by other researchers (Brown, 2004, 2006; Seiler, 2001; Seiler et al., 2001). All of the participants were African American males. I am an African American female who has worked in urban education for fourteen years and has an interest in learning more about the policies and practices that promote success for traditionally underperforming students, thus my positioning as a “native” in this study could be perceived as biased. Ladson-Billings (1995) describes her positioning:

I, too, share a concern for situating myself as a researcher—who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have all impact what, how, and why I research. What may make these research revelations more problematic for me is my own membership in a marginalized racial/cultural group…The location of myself as a native can work against me…My work may be perceived as biased or, at the least, skewed, because of my vested interests in the African-American community. (p. 470-471)
She used the work of a Black feminist, Patricia Hill Collins (2000), to theoretically ground her positioning as an African American scholar studying African American communities, while also critiquing it. I also draw on Collins’ four dimensions to further consider my positioning and publicize my beliefs related to the present study:

1. *Lived experiences as a criterion of meaning* (In this study, the participants made knowledge claims by describing their concrete experiences as experts who had lived through an urban schooling experience as African American males in my classroom. Therefore, their lived experiences serve as a criterion for authentic meaning.).

2. *The usage of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims* (Mainly through the use of semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2005), I focused the conversation around a series of questions and sought to make the conversation dialogic in that participants understood their voices, thoughts, and beliefs were considered to be “expert” on the various topics.).

3. *The ethic of caring* (I believe participants viewed me as a trusted former member of their educational community who cared, respected them as individuals, and could empathize with their position as several referred to me as their “school mom” during the interview. Methodologically, I deliberately selected to employ the use of phenomenology to capture their thoughts and photo-elicitation because, according to research, doing so would enhance their ability to explain concepts.).

4. *The ethic of personal accountability* (According to Collins, Black feminist epistemology supposes all inquiry has an ethical slant. Prior to this study, based on my experiences as an educator, mother, wife, sister, colleague, and friend, I
fundamentally believed African American males were not a homogenous group of
students and could express their literacies in multiple ways. What I had not
examined was how different subgroups of students expressed their literacies, nor
how they perceived their literacy experiences. I wanted to untangle the
“sameness” oftentimes associated with African American males.

Limitations

In the present study, as is consistent with constructivist grounded theory (CGT)
(Charmaz, 2006) and explained above, it would be inaccurate to suggest I was completely
separate and objective from all that had been studied and learned about qualitative
research, adolescent literacy, African American students and student achievement,
particularly with males or sociocultural and cognitive theories prior to and during data
collection given my role as a graduate student and teacher within the school district
where this study took place for eleven years. Although using CGT methodology ensured
the data had to “earn its way” into the construct of the analysis, both phenomenology and
socio-cognitive perspectives (Rogoff, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2012) were assumed going
into the study. Consistent with phenomenological studies, I made every attempt to
accurately present the ideas and materials in a manner that was consistent with the
thoughts and ideas of the study participants themselves, rather than my own thoughts and
ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). I employed strategies using the four criteria
for qualitative trustworthiness as suggested in the literature (Guba, 1981; Guba &
Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Even while intentionally trying to
include the thoughts and ideas of the study participants, some gaps were found during the
analysis of the medium and lower-performing students’ data sample in the science

135
pedagogy section. A study that consistently includes medium and lower-performing student data would more fully illuminate their perceptions of science pedagogy.

Also the current study primarily focused on student perception data from nine urban adolescent African American males at varying levels of achievement attending a single-gender middle school. I intentionally privileged student voice in the current study. In doing so, interview data from parents, teachers, and principals were not collected. Therefore, additional studies are necessary to determine the perceptions of parents, teachers, and principals.

While there are several lessons that can be learned from this study, the primary intent of this study was not to generalize the findings, but rather to develop a deeper understanding of how these students perceived their experience and take note of the differences across achievement levels. More work may need to be done to determine how African American males in other contexts (e.g. other single-gender middle schools, suburban schools, mixed-gender schools) perceive their experiences with Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts.

**Summary**

This phenomenological multi-case study involved nine adolescent (high, medium, and lower academically performing) African American males at a single-gender urban middle school who participated in semi-structured interviews using Photo Elicitation methods (Prosser, 2011) to reflect on their experiences with Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts. Three African American males for each subgroup: high, medium and lower academically performing, were selected based on their availability to participate in the study, interest, and percentage point growth from previous year’s standardized testing.
data. Stratified purposeful sampling was used because a) African American males are not a homogenous group (low-performers) as is often suggested in the literature (e.g. “African-American male literacy crisis”) and b) rarely is the relationship of school achievement juxtaposed against the range of outcomes examined in new literacy studies (Moje, 2009). This phenomenological case study offered a unique opportunity to provide insight into the participants’ perceptions of the multiple factors that impact their achievement. Barone (2004) referred to this unique comparative method as using multiple lenses to explore the same topic. Due to the study’s emphasis on gaining a deeper understanding of the student’s experience, this study was able to integrate the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology with the more coherent and systematic, yet reflexive data analysis steps of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT): initial, focused, and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). Data collection and analysis were comprised of portfolio and school data completed during the 2010-2011 school year, as well as multiple and sequential interviews and survey data collected during the spring of 2013.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading Test Scores</th>
<th>Family Background</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Favorite Subjects</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Reading Interests</th>
<th>Career Goals/Interests/Hobbies/Extra Curricular</th>
<th>Regular Church Attendance</th>
<th>Home Routines</th>
<th>Travel To/From School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
<td>64 - 415</td>
<td>S. 408</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Social Studies, easy to understand</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>Actor-comedian, Basketball, video games, City Readers, library volunteer, Service Above Self, band</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Right after school, organized, 5 h</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaylen</td>
<td>64 - 414</td>
<td>S. 435</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Math, can understand numbers in head</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>NFL or lawyer/doctor, Football, cheer, volunteer, music</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Right after school, 12:30 h schedule</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anwar</td>
<td>64 - 439</td>
<td>S. 417</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>None, just like school</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>Professional Athlete or Athletic Director, dancer, singer, or gym teacher, Basketball, dance, rug, exercising</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Right after, pick up sisters, 4 h</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence</td>
<td>64 - 406</td>
<td>S. 343</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Science, interesting</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>NBA or business career, Basketball, football, band</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>After school tutoring, basketball outside, go home, do homework not everyday, 4:5 h</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>64 - 431</td>
<td>S. 330</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Science, hands-on</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>Scientist or NFL, Football, soccer, track, talk on the phone, play games, go outside</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Picks up sister, relax until 6:00, study until bedtime if homework is due X h</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JC</td>
<td>64 - 403</td>
<td>S. 356</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Math, quick to learn</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>Doctor, Basketball games, After School All Stars</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Usually plays basketball unless homework is due, 1:30 h</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>64 - 390</td>
<td>S. 348</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Math, easy</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>Professional athlete, Football, workout, play games</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Wait until dark, then study all night, 1:30 h</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeQuan</td>
<td>64 - 390</td>
<td>S. 352</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Don't have just one</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>Professional Athlete, Track team, play sports, talk to girls</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Track, sleep, eat, study, sleep, 5 h</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>64 - 380</td>
<td>S. 348</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Math, good at it</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>IS ++** + FT ++* BP*</td>
<td>NFL, chef, Football team, basketball at the park</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Social media, basketball, night before bed or the morning of</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Standard Assessment Data for Reading and Science.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic Status (SES)</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>SI</th>
<th>LS</th>
<th>ES</th>
<th>PS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amani</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td>AC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaylen</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td>AC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaun</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td>AC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MED</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JC</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>FP</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeQuan</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Strands:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FL= free lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL= reduced lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP= full price</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP= Reading Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V= Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L= Literary Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I= Informational Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science Strands:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SI = Scientific Inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS = Life Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES = Earth &amp; Space Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS = Physical Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* at grade level
+ above grade level
- below grade level
Chapter 4: Context Findings

The findings for this study are presented across three chapters. Chapters four through six present a summary of the findings from a biographical questionnaire, interview data, portfolio, and school record artifacts. As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to extend the research that focuses on the interplay of factors that affect reading achievement for African American students by examining the perceptions of high, medium and low performing adolescent male literacies in an urban context. The aforementioned Adolescent Literacy conceptual framework (RAND, 2002; Sweet & Snow, 2003) was used to discuss findings for the context in chapter four, then text and pedagogies in chapters five and six respectively.

I wanted to also determine if students perceived the texts, pedagogies, and context as Enabling. Tatum (2008) defines enabling texts as texts that may involve cognitive factors like strategy and skill development, but also embrace social, cultural, political, spiritual and economic factors. He goes on to suggest four main characteristics of texts that define meaning and significance for African American males:

1. They contribute to a healthy psyche.
2. They focus on a collective struggle.
3. They provide a road map for being, doing, and acting.
4. They provide modern awareness of the real world.
The definition and four main characteristics of Enabling texts were extended to also include Enabling pedagogies and Enabling contexts in this study. By focusing on the students’ perception of their literacy experiences with various texts, pedagogies, and contexts, I aimed to make the similarities and differences between high, medium, and lower performing students more visible. In order to achieve this, the following research question was explored:

How do the perceptions of urban adolescent African-American males’ experiences with Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts differ based on their achievement levels?

In chapters 4-6, a brief introduction of each chapter (context, text, and pedagogy) is provided, followed by a thematic analysis of the findings. The themes emerged by comparing open, then axial coded data across the high, medium, and lower performing cases. Direct excerpts from transcripts, portfolio and school artifacts are used to illuminate the themes. At the end of each chapter, the differences in the students’ perceptions across each case are discussed in tandem with how the findings converge and diverge with extant theoretical assumptions and empirical studies. Although examining the differences in high, medium, and lower performing student perceptions was the focus of the study, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions, the common themes that emerged across all cases are presented in each introduction and discussed throughout the following chapters: a) Chapter 4—Enabling Context: The “Value-Added,” b) Chapter 5—Enabling Texts: Intertextuality in Print and Non-print, and c) Chapter 6—Enabling Pedagogies: A Multiliteracies Approach.
Enabling Context: The “Value-Added”

The importance of context for African American students has been underscored in literature for centuries (Anderson, 1988; Anyon; 1997, Apple, 2013; DuBois, 1899; DuBois, 1902; Kozol, 2005; Siddle-Walker, 1993; Spencer, 2006; Woodson, 1968). Further, several scholars discuss the plethora of negative characteristics used to describe urban settings (Milner, 2013; Lewis & Moore, 2008) and the dearth of solutions to offset the issues (Hilliard, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Moore & Lewis, 2012). Comparatively, participants in this study described the multiple ways their context added value to and made a difference in their lives. All students perceived their parents had high expectations for their academic performance. They also viewed their administrator, Mr. O, as relational and supportive of their success. One student, Jordan (L), did not express a connection with his peers. Overall, home routines, student-teacher relationships, and access to intentional socio-emotional support differed across achievement levels. The high, medium, and lower cases are used to discuss four major themes: a) highly relational principal, b) highly relational versus “funny acting” teachers, c) peers as brothers and d) creative school programming as a double-edged sword. The section is concluded with a summary of the differences and discussion of the major findings.

**Highly relational principal.** All groups perceived Mr. O had high expectations for them and was caring (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012; Tucker, Dixon & Griddine, 2010; Beachum & McCray, 2012), but the expectations and care appeared to be expressed differently across groups. The high students received positive reinforcement through personal, frequent one-one conversations, and leadership opportunities, while the medium and lower groups were directed to improve through a balance of individualized
discussion and discipline. The high group seemed to perceive him in a familial role, the middle group viewed him as a helpful and fair, but distant disciplinarian, while the lower group did not view him in a familial role they did feel encouraged by him and thought he was caring, but also strict.

**High.** *I looked at him as a family member...* The males in the high group viewed their relationship with Mr. O positively. These young men saw consistency in their administrator’s expectations for high academic performance and social success. They believed they were school leaders, given special opportunities, and at times singled out for positive reinforcement. There were several references to Mr. O being “like family.”

Jaylen (H) recalled a conversation he had with Mr. O:

> With me, he becoming kind of like my dad now…When I came into 6th grade, expectations for me, especially Mr. O, were really high. I wasn’t used to it. Because it seemed like he talked to me. I’d be in line and he just tells me to step out. I’m like, “Am I in trouble?” He’s like, “How’s your grades?” He asks me questions like how am I doing, how is it going…”

Jaylen continued to describe the conversation by sharing how Mr. O would focus on him, encouraging him to excel beyond the stereotypical images often portrayed through the media. In Jaylen’s view, and that of other high-performing boys, Mr. O took time to informally, but intentionally, allow them to see themselves pursuing professional roles and making a difference in their communities. Shawn referred to Mr. O as being “more than an administrator” because of these conversations, their opportunities for leadership within the school, as well as Mr. O’s visibility in the community.

**Medium.** *We really didn’t talk that much unless I got in trouble, but he helped me too.* The common theme with this group was although they did not talk much with Mr. O,
they believed he was helpful and held high expectations for them. The relationship grew as their behaviors improved.

Clarence (M) recalled:

We really didn’t talk that much unless I got in trouble, but he helped me too. If I got in trouble or if I was going to get suspended or something, he would put me in school suspension, stay in that room in the back office and I do my work in there, get my work from teachers, cause he didn’t want me to fail or anything. So he wanted me to pass.

*Lower. He’s a strict person. I think he wants everything on point.* In this group the students viewed Mr. O as a disciplinarian. Although his expectations were high, the lower performing males viewed them as unrealistic. Students mentioned various conversations used by Mr. O to guide them in the right direction.

LeQuan (L) commented:

Not as strong as it [relationship] used to be. I think they [expectations] got higher by just a little bit cause he thinks I can be better than with the group I hang with.

Jordan’s (L) sentiments:

I think he has high expectations cause he’s always talking to me, always telling me he cares about me, how he wants to see me make it out of high school.

**Highly relational versus “funny acting” teachers.** Students in each group were clear to note the distinction between relational and “funny acting” teachers (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012; Milner, 2012; Nogera, 2003; Tucker et al., 2010; Vega et al., 2012; Wiggan, 2008). The high group cited more positive examples of relational teachers, followed by the medium group, with the lower group stressing the most dissatisfaction. While the lower group appeared to experience a disconnect from the majority of their teachers, they perceived the same high expectations as each of the other groups and at times experienced encouragement from some of their teachers. The lower group was the
only group to acknowledge the role students played in contributing to the negative relationships with teachers. Both the high and medium groups made mention of the positive impact having an all-female staff during the core classes of their sixth grade year had on their educational experience. Of notable significance, across all cases, with the exception of Mrs. Z, all of the other instances of negative student-teacher interactions occurred after their sixth grade year.

**High. Beyond-School Support**—“they actually cared about you and wanted you to learn, so they’d do whatever it takes to get you to that level.” Very strong student-teacher relationships were evident in this group. Students mentioned not wanting to disappoint their teachers, their high expectations, mutual respect, care, honesty, as well as an appreciation for teachers who are confident and connect with them on relevant, real-life issues that may have a personal impact on their lives. The majority of the positive student-teacher relationships also made reference to support beyond the school day. Jaylen (H) recalled (8th grade):

That’s why we always go to him [Mr. A] for help. We always go to him for girls, we always go to him for everything. He always has the answer. Like one time this kid, his shoe was ripped on the side and he didn’t have no shoes, so Mr. A went and bought him some Adidas.

Jaylen and the other described several instances of their highly relational teachers who were helpful in multiple ways. They appreciated their teacher’s confidence and ability to easily relate to them. The boys perceived humor and light bantering favorably. In one instance, Jaylen described how students would intentionally wear the Nike brand to harass Mr. A because he exclusively wears the Adidas brand. He described how Mr. A would pretend to kick students out of class if they did not wear Adidas or if they would
mix brands by wearing Nike socks and Adidas shoes. Students enjoyed “clowning around” with their highly relational teachers because they viewed it as a tool to build relationships. Students in this group also described how their teachers were attentive to activities they were involved in beyond the school day such as attending their games, talking to them about girls, and treating them like they were their own sons. Several of the boys knew about their teachers’ children and drew parallels between the closeness of those relationships. They thought their teachers would do anything to help them excel because they cared. Shawn (H) commented:

The ones with the high expectations didn’t let you fall behind, like they would make you learn the stuff. They wouldn’t just – they actually cared about you and wanted you to learn, so they’d do whatever it takes to get you to that level.

A clear distinction was made between teachers with whom they held strong relationships and those whom they did not have strong relations like Mr. V and Mrs. Z. They viewed the latter as not enjoying their profession; never smiling, having a strict, mean personality, low expectations, disrespectful, and challenging.

Shawn (H) recalled:

I felt the relationship was more than a regular student-teacher, because with a lot of the teachers there, they didn’t just – they paid more attention to everybody as who they were and you could connect with them. The students and teachers at [the Boys School], they connected with each other. By the end of the year they were – I don’t want to say friends, but they were really close, cause we made a lot of connections over the course of the year and became better relationship.

Shawn (H) elaborated:

Because she’s one of those people that you just don’t see smiling sometimes, like you just don’t see her laughing or having a good time. She’s just always the same mean person.
Both Jaylen and Amari reference the negative changes that occurred with Mr. V between 6\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} grades. The changes consisted of confrontations stemming from disrespect to loss of humor and genuine relationship. In contrast, during their sixth grade year, students mentioned having an all-female staff for their core subjects and the impact this had on their educational experience referencing “mother-type” teachers. Jaylen (H) shared his thoughts:

Sixth grade was the most supportive. All you’ve got is mostly females, you, Mrs. C, Ms. L., Ms. T. You’ve got mother-type teachers, plus you guys clown with us. I love that. You guys were always there for us, like every time we needed help, this and that, and me and the girls, Mrs. B always helped me. She used to talk to me about girls.

Amari’s (H) sentiments:

My relationship with you was very good. I kind of looked up to you as a mom at that school because I guess that’s what I like to call you I guess, because you were kind of like my mom at this school.

Students thought Mrs. C was the most caring teacher in the school because she took the time to cheer them up when they were having a difficult day and because she talked to them about girls. While some students described the difficulties they experienced adapting to Mrs. Z’s teaching style, Amari expressed how although he never established a relationship with Mrs. Z, he simply tried to do her work to avoid any confrontations.

Medium. In-School Support—“they would take time from their lunch or something and invite me into the classroom and work on it.” The students reported overall the teachers had high expectations of them as well as positive relationships. Students mentioned teachers helping them with their work during their free time at school as important for their academic success.
Clarence (M) said:

They wanted me to be successful, really successful; high expectations. Just the way you all had me working, like Power Points and all that.

Other medium-performing students described how teachers would work with them during their lunch periods or planning periods to explain concepts they did not grasp in class, allow them time to complete homework, or review missing assignments. More examples of negative relationships were mentioned in this group from all participants when compared to students in the high group. JC was more vocal regarding his discontent, but his comments were illustrative of comments made by others in his group which explained how teachers who were easily frustrated, treated students unfairly, offered whole-class punishment, and yelled frequently were viewed negatively:

Well, Mr. L (8th), I really didn’t like him, cause he got – he’d punish the whole class if one person did something bad and Mrs. C (6th/7th), I liked her cause I like math and she was kind of cool. Mrs. W (7th), I really didn’t like her cause she’s mean to some kids and she gave my flash drive away to somebody and that’s kind of personal. I told her it was mine and she said “I know” and gave it away. So I didn’t like her.

While there was mention of the positive relationships with having an all-female staff, Clarence discussed how some of his teachers were mother-type figures, JC also mentioned his lack of preference for a female teacher based on course content.

Clarence (M) recalled:

I really only had two favorite teachers and that was Mrs. B and you. Both of you all just helped me a lot. I don’t know. It was like both of you could be my mom or something.

JC (M) commented:

Sixth grade I didn’t like some teachers…Yeah, Mrs. C, I liked Mrs. C because she was kind of cool and I like math and science. Mrs. S, I really don’t like reading, so I didn’t like [your] class.
*Lower.* I don’t feel supported by that many teachers. This group perceived the experiences with the majority of their teachers negatively, citing confusing content, lack of support, refusal to participate in extra-curricular activities because of particular teachers who coach the sports, and teachers “acting funny”—a phrase oftentimes used in the African American community to denote a person who is being fake or phony, especially around a certain person or groups of people.

Ray (L) commented:

Some of the teachers, they’re all right. It’s just how they’re teaching you and what they say is confusing.

LeQuan (L) elaborated:

I don’t feel supported by that many teachers. I only feel supported by Mr. A. and Mr. E., cause we had that relationship. Some of the teachers, they just—they saw me getting good grades, so they really didn’t talk to me a lot. They thought I was capable of doing better, so they, I don’t know. They push me more now. They see I hang with the wrong group.

This group acknowledged the role students played in contributing to negative relationships with teachers. Students in the low group discussed how they and their peers did not listen to their teachers at times, associated with the wrong peer groups, and made immature decisions that could become more costly in high school.

**Peers as brothers.** Across all groups positive interactions were described to depict the closeness the boys felt towards each other (Newman & Newman, 2001; Booker, 2007; Chadwell, 2010). In several quotes the boys referred to each other as brothers. The high group was the only group to mention the positive effects of peer modeling. The high and medium groups also referenced examples where they might offer
protection or “take up” for each other. Jordan was the only participant that did not experience the positive or close interactions the other students described.

*High.* It’s like I’m their older brother type of thing. All positive relationships were reported. Many students mentioned knowing other students from other contexts and neighborhoods. Evidence of their closeness was expressed by referring to a familial bond, recognition and tolerance of different maturity levels, offering advice on female relationships, and warnings to each other regarding participation in negative out-of-school behaviors (i.e. gangs, drugs etc.). The idea of separating and going to different high schools was viewed negatively. Students in this group embraced the idea of being peer models.

Jaylen (H) recalls:

It’s like I’m their older brother type of thing…Makes me feel good. I left a mark at this school. Everybody knows me, everybody’s coming to me for help, grade-wise. To be popular, you’ve got to be the bad scary dude, but everybody sees like Jaylen’s popular and Jaylen’s grades are up. Everybody’s going to Jaylen because he’s cool and he’s got the grades. So if he’s cool like that, let me be like that. Ms. L, she asks me to come speak to them and this and that. One time this dude was doing some work and she’s like, “Why are you paying attention lately?” And that’s when, “Because I saw Jaylen’s going on the stage with a 4.0 and I want to get a 4.0.” When she told me that, I’m like wow. I’m doing that to these little kids, that’s pretty cool.

*Medium.* Every single person in the school was my friend. Students in this group related an overall positive experience with their peers. Helping each other to become academically successful demonstrated their positive relationships.

Clarence (M) explained:

Everybody was my friend, everybody, every single person in the school was my friend. They helped me too, all of them. Like work-wise, class-wise. They wanted me to pass with them, cause they wanted me to be right there with them again like in the seventh grade.
Students “taking up for” each other or “having each others’ back” came across several times in this group. JC (M) explains a time when another student “took up” for him, defending him against another group of students who did not validate his capabilities with a particular sport.

**Lower. They’re like brothers to me.** There were mixed views regarding peer relationships in the lower group. Ray and LeQuan felt a strong connection with the other students. Ray (L) stated, “They’re like brothers to me. LeQuan (L) commented, “Oh, yeah, I get along with everybody here.” Conversely, Jordan (L) did not have a sense of belongingness with his peers. Jordan shared, “I think some of them don’t care. Most of them don’t even really pay attention. It’s just like if he makes it, he makes it.”

**Creative school programming as a double-edged sword.** Contemporary culture has borrowed the biblical metaphor “double-edged sword” to dichotomize the benefit and liability, the good and the bad, or the joy and pain of various situations. The majority of the students perceived attending a single-gender school and its programming as beneficial, but also described some liabilities associated with the benefits. Students in the high group were initially negative towards the concept, lower students were mainly positive, although Jordan expressed discontent over attending because of the long bus ride. Medium-performing students initially had mixed views, with JC remaining neutral throughout. Students across subgroups had not experienced special programming tailored to their needs in other school contexts. All subgroups perceived the concepts positively and viewed them as necessary to build trust and teamwork with their peers and develop a
positive male identity (Caton, 2012; Vega et al., 2012; Tucker et al., 2010; Booker, 2007). Regarding the liabilities, students were critical of speakers, as their preference was for athletic events and team competitions associated with Community Development Day (Appendix H). Although Scholar Summit (Appendix H) was viewed as repetitive and inappropriately placed in the school schedule, all subgroups cited significant learning and affirmation from the sessions as a benefit. High and medium subgroups expressed detailed examples of their active participation in sessions, while the lower performing students had difficulty identifying meaningful experiences or exposure to the programming. Lower-performing students had more access to mentoring activities than the other groups, but did not sustain active relationships beyond the first year (Mitchell, 2013).

In this section of the chapter, the double-edged sword theme was expressed by the boys’ perceptions of two topics: a) attending a single-gender school, and b) intentional socio-emotional support. For the first topic, the students shared similar perceptions regarding being referred to as scholars and the absence of girls at their school. They embraced the idea of being referred to as scholars, experienced more achievement than in previous years, but were at times ashamed to let others know they attended a single-gender school. The second topic, detailed their perceptions of several school-wide systems intentionally constructed to support their socio-emotional development (Appendix H) with similar themes noted between high and medium students, while contrasting with the lower students.

**Attending a single gender school.** “I can do my work. I can act like myself, but I don’t tell them what school I go to.” Overwhelmingly, the boys felt privileged to be
called a “scholar” instead of a student. Boys in the high group discussed how it made them feel as if they had “more to own up to” and how they wanted to “prove they could live up to the name” of being a scholar. Shawn explained how being addressed as a scholar made them feel older as if they were preparing for college. Boys in the medium group also embraced being called a “scholar” instead of a student. JC thought it served as a “reminder to be confident” and that he could always be doing better in school. Edward discussed how being called a scholar made him want to keep his grades high, while Clarence thought the name “sounded professional.” Similar to Clarence, Ray thought the name scholar “sounded sophisticated,” while Jordan suggested the name made him feel “good, older, and more mature” compared to being called a student. LeQuan added he also “felt unique instead of being called a normal student.” Shawn’s (H) comment described the sentiments of each group:

You get a big head start on a lot of people. You get ahead faster. The people have higher expectations for you than normal because they never called us students, they always called us scholars. So being a scholar at [The Boys School] made you feel better about school because it was higher – it was college preparatory school, so you were a lot ahead in the game than a lot of other people.

The boys in the high group believed they were free to be themselves without the distraction of girls or “showing off” to get attention, which resulted in earning higher grades. Jaylen (H) explained:

I can do my work. I can act like myself. Like us boys, when there’s a girl around, we’re like – we’ve got to change ourselves and we’ve got to – we start flexing. By flexing, I mean we start acting like we’re cool and this and that to try to impress the girl. But when there’s no girl there, you can be yourself. You can work. I used to think that being smart was bad in front of a girl, but now I’m thinking totally opposite since I’m older now. Now I realize that a guy’s got to be smart in order to get a good girl…At the same time, with no girls it’s pretty good cause you can be yourself, be cool, say what you want to say without offending nobody. It’s good. There’s brothers all around you and you can say what you want to say. Fifth
grade compared to 6th grade, my grades have gone up because there’s no girls at all.

Clarence (M) agreed and mentioned how attending a single-gender school helped him to refocus on school and graduating instead of girls.

It helped me a lot because I used to be focused on girls too much. It’s easier for me to focus on work cause it’s just a single gender school…It’s something that just made me think about my work more than anything else, because work is more important than anything else, graduating and stuff.

Ray (L) focused on the camaraderie he and his peers were able to establish in an all-male setting, while LeQuan (L) mentioned not having females attend the school helped with his discipline issues, “I think it helps me more, cause when I was in elementary I used to get in trouble a lot because of the girls. Yeah, that’s why my mom brought me here.”

Contrastively, JC (M) discussed his lack of concern for attending a school without girls because he sees girls outside of the school context.

Well, some people care but I don’t. I see girls when I go to school and when I come out of school, so technically it really doesn’t matter to me.

They viewed the culture of the school as a learning-focused environment, supportive, a brotherhood of sorts, but not suitable for every male student. Although overall the boys suggested positive perceptions of attending a single-gender school and could explain the benefits, several of the boys mentioned the difficulty adjusting to attending school without girls.

Jaylen (H) commented:

– I didn’t care about girls. I talked to girls but like a fun talk. And in 6th grade, after I went through puberty. Well, I was supposed to go to [another school], but my dad’s like, “You’re going to [the Boys School].” I’m like what is the boys’ part for?” He said, “It’s an all boys school.” I’m like, what? He said, “It’s an all boys school.” I said, “I imagine there’s no girls at the school.” He’s like, “No.” I’m like, “Wow, I didn’t realize this.” I came in 6th grade and I’m looking
around, “There’s a girl right there.” It’s Ms. B and I’m like, “Oh, my God, it’s a teacher.” There’s literally no girls here and I’m like quiet.

Another theme evident in their responses was the shame they felt about attending a single-gender male school and refusal to let others, particularly their female peers, know they attended a single-gender male school. Jaylen’s (H) comments were illustrative of the group’s perceptions:

Let’s say we’re walking in our uniform on the side of the street, it looks like we’re scholars like all smart and brave and this and that. That’s how we dress to how we want to be. It’s like a scholar at [the Boys School], it’s different in a good way, but it has days where it’s bad. Some of us are embarrassed every time a girl says, “Oh, what school do you go to?” We say the school that we’re actually supposed to be going to instead of [the Boys School]. I say [another school], cause I’m not lying, but at the same time I’m not saying the real name. She’s like, “Oh, I never heard of it.” I’m like, “I bet you didn’t.” I’m ashamed, cause, “Oh, you gay or something?” I’m like, “You want to bet?” That’s the first thing that pops into girls’ heads, “Oh, he goes to an all boys school, so he must not like girls. He must like boys.” I’m like, “No, it’s not like that at all.”

The second topic discussed related to creative school-wide programming as a double-edged sword involved the intentional socio-emotional support provided to the boys through Community Development Day, Scholar Summit/Advisory, and Project Mentor.

**Intentional socio-emotional support.** “I haven’t experienced this in other schools before.” Overall, students appreciated the novelty of having special school-wide programming tailored to their needs as boys, and building trust, teamwork, and a positive male identity. They also expressed some frustration with the repetition of the messages conveyed during some of the sessions, as well as the placement of Scholar Summit in the school schedule. Students expressed less appreciation for speakers and a preference for the competitive games during Community Development Day. This section of the chapter
describes the boys’ perceptions of their experiences with the intentional school-wide programming specifically designed to address their socio-emotional needs: Community Development Day, Scholar Summit/Advisory, as well as Project Mentor.

Community Development Day.

High-Medium: “But sometimes we get jumpy and want to play.” Strong identity development, teamwork and trust was built and maintained through Community Development Day (CDD). Students agreed the idea was novel in that they did not have such an experience at other schools they attended.

Shawn (H):

That was like the best day of the school year. It was like not so much a free day, but you know how a school full of boys – Community Development Day is like a day perfect for a school full of boys, because you got sports competitions and you break off into groups and go rotating stations playing games like shooting free throws or the electric fence where you try – everybody had to jump over the net and this one player on our team didn’t and he had to start over.

They appreciated the opportunity to get to know and trust each other, others in the community and the academic and sports competitions between teams (Kings vs. Knights) at their school. Although they mentioned being positively influenced by the speakers, there was clear indifference for community speakers who talk at and do not give students the opportunity to interact with them. Students preferred the physical activity to listening to speakers.

Jaylen (H):

The worst Community Development Day was like the second one, I think. I think somebody came in to talk to us and we were all sitting down in the auditorium like, what is this? Where’s the fun and running at? So that new twist to the Community Development Day was the worst for me.

Amari (H):
I don’t really enjoy speakers, but I know one – sometimes I get influence by them, but I don’t really enjoy them. They have like an hour to talk and then when they finally get on with the activities that we do, the activities are fun cause they really explain what they were saying in the introduction. I guess when speakers come in they just talk, so that’s probably my less favorite Community Development Days.

JC mentioned learning about the history of the first African American professional hockey player as a positive experience, but also critiqued speakers who did not have interactive presentations.

JC (M):

There was a lawyer that was kind of boring. He just talked the whole time and didn’t give us a chance to say anything.

*Lower:* “I quit. I didn’t like doing it. They sent me out. I had to leave.”

Students perceived Community Development Day (CDD) as a positive and necessary experience for boys, relating it to field day activities. Although, students viewed CDD as a positive concept, they expressed very little participation and connectivity to the activities but for different reasons. Ray was not aware CDD was still being facilitated at the school, LeQuann’s behavior prevented him from attending most sessions, and Jordan would quit or get removed because he did not like some of the activities.

Jordan (L):

Because sometimes it wasn’t things I really wanted to do…It was one this year. It was called blow the cup or something like that. You had to take a straw and blow the cup to the end of the table. I was bored. Everybody got a straw and a cup and then as soon as the cup got to the table then the next person goes. There was like two different teams in row one. I quit. I didn’t like doing it. They sent me out. I had to leave.

*Scholar summit and advisory.*
High and Medium: “Made me feel like our school knew how a kid would learn...Helpful information we need, but too much talking.” Scholar Summit and Advisory were viewed as tools to build positive identity development amongst teams within the school. Shawn’s responses typify the appreciation students felt to have time carved from their regular schedules to focus on their socio-emotional needs.

Shawn (H):

She moved the tables on the corners and she had Uno in one corner – I used to always go to Uno. And then like – cause [Marlon] and [Lonnell], they always drew, so then that became one of the tables things, free time to draw and stuff. Advisory was just like time to take your mind off everything else in school.

Shawn (H):

Yeah, because in a school, period, you always need free time to let go. In class your main and only priority is to learn and then once you get into high school and some middle schools, they take away recess and have study hall, so that’s even more time where you can’t interact with other people and you have to do work and stuff. So I think it’s necessary to have some time.

Shawn (H):

It made me feel like our school knew how a kid would learn. It made me feel like our school knew how a kid’s brain would like process the best by having learning and having fun together, but broken up to where you’re still learning a lot, but you’re not like working too hard to where you’re not at your full potential.

Scholar Summit is the time when teams learn their point value, which is both competitive and exciting for the boys. Some viewed Scholar Summit as a break away from the norm to relax and listen to school updates while others viewed it as inappropriately placed in the school schedule and boring because of its repetitive nature.

Jaylen (H):

But it’s like the school is so competitive in everything. Every time we’re in Scholar Summit and our merits come up, you can already tell that everybody’s
focused on a number. Once you realize you’re an elite, everybody starts clapping on their side. We walk around the hallways like – I want to call it a game, but it’s like a fraternity. Our fraternity’s called kings and theirs is called knights.

Jaylen (H):

You can bring it up, but once you bring it up, you’ve got to know you can’t bring it up like seven times. If you bring it up to all of us at once, some get it, some don’t. Whoever doesn’t, you’ve got to talk to them individually, cause the ones that get it are so bored with it, “Okay, we know we’re not supposed to – if they keep doing it, that’s their fault.” You don’t have to waste our time with what they did. You’ve got to talk them out individually. You can tell the one time or twice, but 7-8 times? It’s too much. You’ve got to warn us but, like, 10 warnings? No.

Shawn (H):

Some days it was boring, because it was like right out of the Encore classes, like I had gym, so we were just playing mat ball and we would go in and we had to be quiet and listen to everybody speak. It was meant to explain everything that was going on that day, that week, and then upcoming events and stuff. So for me personally, I’d rather go back in the gym and have fun instead of sit down and listen to that stuff.

Students in the medium group agreed, suggesting they lacked interest in Scholar Summit due to scheduling and repetition, but the students found the sessions to be informative and noted several favorite activities associated with the sessions.

JC (M):

I feel that it’s helpful because it tells us information that we need sometimes. Sometimes it tell us stuff that we already know and sometimes it’s not useful. Like when he tell us – I don’t know, just some stuff that the teachers have already told us.

The memorable and influential speakers and activities mentioned by students consisted of the first African American professional hockey player, Willie O’Ree; millionaire entrepreneur Farrah Gray; Athletic Director, Gene Smith; and performing skits with Advisory groups.

Jaylen (H) remembered:
There’s other things like we just had the first black – African-American hockey player come to our school and talk to us and how he had to go through his teammates – this was like back in the day like in the 1960s type of thing. Why is he black on a national hockey team, this and that. During practice they were actually trying to hit him with a puck and stuff like that, but he didn’t let that stop him. During the game something really bad happened. Somebody took a puck and hit it came – they didn’t have helmets back then – it came and hit his eye, so he was like blind in his right eye and only sees out of his left. He said that’s the boundaries that you’ve got to go through. We’re all listening to this like, wow, the world is crazy and we’re learning all these little things about ourselves and where we came from.

Amari (H):

The most was the millionaire to be honest, because if he can start out with poverty and if you can start out with rocks and be a multi-millionaire, that makes it seem like there’s never a dead-end. You can always find a way to become something, even if you don’t have the materials to be it. Because it’s not like he was born like his father owned the company. The dude was in the hood, living with his grandma, but one day he got creative. I’m like, “If he can do that, why can’t I?”

Edward (M):

An exciting Scholar Summit is when every Advisory had a chance to present their own little skit or rap. It was about anything, but it had to focus on school though.

Lower: It bores me, makes me go to sleep a lot. The lower performing group did not view scholar Summit favorably, but there was mention of the visual display of informational updates and the inclusion of literacy activities. Students mentioned very few positive aspects of Scholar Summit. Ray mentioned how the information being visually displayed using the overhead projector was helpful. LeQuan mentioned falling asleep during Scholar Summit because he thought the sessions might be more interesting if prizes were awarded and the topics more interesting. Jordan mentioned the school’s implementation of a “word of the day,” but expressed disinterest in its participation.
Overall the students thought Scholar Summit involved too much talking and repetition, as they were already familiar with events and activities happening inside the school.

Jordan (L):

Now we get a word of the day. It’ll be like a couple words and then we’ll have to figure out the definitions and then if we don’t figure them out, they’ll just end up telling them. And that’ll be the work of the day then. We’ve got to remember the definition, too. At lunch time we can write it down on the card and it’s like a little drawing thing they’ll win something. Sometimes the teachers talk about it [in class]. I didn’t really pay attention to the word. I never won. I’ll just be sitting.

*Project mentor: low participation.* Only one-third of the students participated in Project Mentor. None of the students in the high group participated in Project Mentor during their sixth grade year. Clarence was the only student in medium performing group to participate during his sixth grade year, however the relationship was not maintained after the first year. Both LeQuan and Jordan participated in Project Mentor, but suggested infrequent participation past the first year.

**Discussion**

In the context section, a brief overview of each section is provided along with a thematic analysis of the differences across the cases. From this analysis four findings were identified.

*Students perceived their administrator as highly relational and had high expectations for their success.* The finding compliments the work of Corprew & Cunningham (2012), suggesting the perception of support from administrators can be helpful in offsetting the exposure to negative youth experiences such as suspensions and expulsions. Given the increasingly high rate African American males receive disciplinary action at school (Noguera, 2003; Moore & Lewis, 2012), administrators play a critical
role in filtering their outcomes. The culture, climate, and disciplinary philosophy of the school are often reflective of the principal’s views (Beachum, 2012). Clarence explained how Mr. O. would allow him to receive assignments from his teachers and work on them in a room in back of the office instead of being officially suspended and sent home (Beachum & McCray, 2010; Johnson, 2007). Shawn mentioned attending the same church as Mr. O suggesting the importance of administrators being active in the community and connected to the students beyond the school day (Beachum & McCray, 2012; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Several of the boys referred to him as a family member indicative of the importance kinship (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and relationships (Beachum & McCray, 2012; Siddle-Walker, 1993; Tucker, Dixon & Griddine, 2010).

Student-teacher relationships differed based on achievement levels. Higher-performing students reported having a stronger connection to their teachers compared to the other two cases. The importance of student-teacher relationships and the subsequent social support and encouragement African American students receive from their teachers is well documented in the literature (Foster, 1997; Gay, 1998; Hilliard, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000; Lee, 2000) and confirmed in this study. All students shared examples of teachers they perceived to be highly relational, able to establish an emotional connectedness (Cholewa et al., 2012) and exhibiting high expectations versus “funny acting” teachers who demonstrated low efficacy (Milner, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Wiggan, 2008; Tucker et al., 2010; Vega et al., 2012).

This study draws contrast to Graham and Erwin (2011) in that high-achieving African American male students did not perceive their teachers negatively, but rather shared several positive experiences of support from their teachers. The students thought
Mr. A’s demonstration of cultural humor (Monroe & Obidah, 2004) was welcoming, as was Mr. D’s cool confidence and ability to easily connect with students. Shawn and several others mentioned the high expectations his teachers had of his academic performance (Kunjufu, 2000; Tatum, 2007). “School moms” (Tucker et al., 2010) typifying “warm demanders” (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Kleinfeld, 1975; Monroe & Obidah 2004; Vasquez, 1988) were mentioned by students in the high and medium groups when describing their female teachers during their sixth grade year, as were familial roles established with their male teachers (Howard, 2010; Irvine, 2002 Moje, 1996; Storz & Nestor, 2008).

The teachers’ knowledge of community norms, being able to relate to students on a personal level based on past experiences, and having talks about the “real world” all came across strongly in the findings (Brown 2011; Foster, 1993; Johnson, Nyameke, Chazan, & Rosenthal, 2013). Students in the high group shared more “beyond the school day” connections to their teachers, while the lower group shared an ultimate lack of trust (McDermott, 1977) and more negative experiences with their teachers, supporting the impact of the student-teacher relationships on academic achievement which cannot be overstated for students who have been placed “at risk” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003; Weinstein, Madison, & Kuklinski, 1995).

*With the exception of Jordan, students perceived their peers as brothers.* The notion of “mattering” at school (Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010) is supported in the present study by the students’ perception of being validated (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2010), fitting in (Noguera, 2003), and having positive relationships with their peers. Similar to Booker (2007), students like Jordan do not perceive themselves as belonging in the
school, thus he makes reference to the alienation he perceived among his peers. Although Jordan did not make mention of any status hierarchy (Newman & Newman, 2001), the common identity of high academic achievement and motivation may have been a challenge for students like Jordan who may feel forced to take on a role or comply with group expectations he does not embrace. In Newman & Newman (2010), these students are often classified as a “loner,” “nobody,” “disengaged” or “outcast”. On the surface, students like Jordan (low performance, high discipline) may be prime candidates for “dropping out” because they were never “loved into” the peer groups of their schools.

Lower-performing students had less access to intentional socio-emotional support (i.e. Community Development Day) when compared to high and medium-performing students, but more access to one-on-one school programming options like mentoring activities, which were not sustained past the first year. Addressing positive male identity, teamwork, social emotional needs, as well as establishing culturally responsive relationships with diverse students, parents, and community members, were deliberately built into the school day (Khalifa, 2010; Leake & Leake, 1993; Noguera, 1996; Towns et al., 2001; White-Smith & White, 2009), however lower-performing students did not appear to benefit from these activities in the same manner as the other two groups. Ray was unaware the activities were still occurring at the school. LeQuan rarely participated due to his behavior and Jordan would quit participating or get sent out. The academic performance of the students appeared to be commensurate with their level of access to the school programming (Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005).

Taken together these finding suggest students believe Enabling Contexts added value to their lives, but the degree to which students had access to an Enabling Context
was directly proportional to their achievement level. In other words, higher performing students had more access to consistent home routines, positive student-teacher relationships, and intentional socio-emotional support. These findings are important because it demonstrates how an *Enabling Context* can be used to offset the traditionally negative characteristics used to describe African American males, particularly in urban settings, which are rehearsed and overemphasized by the media (Bulman, 2002; Palmer & Marimba, 2011). More impactful than the expectation of academic success was the student’s perception of the expectation, which is oftentimes conveyed through relationships (parent, administrator, teacher, and peer), thus stimulating academic interest. Ultimately, in this context, students heard the same message, which reinforced their values and beliefs towards academic interest and high performance. These students did not associate high academic performance with “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), but rather embraced the construct as a natural attribute of their “identity kits” (Gee, 1990) and in-school adult and peer relationships (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, 2010; Khalifa, 2012; Tucker et al., 2010). The next chapter discusses the student’s perceptions of various *Enabling* texts.
Enabling Texts: Intertextuality in Print and Non-Print

The term intertextuality, informed by literary theory (Alfaro, 1996) and introduced by French linguist, Julia Kristeva, emphasizes that a single text does not stand alone and have meaning (Kristeva, 2000), but rather meaning is socially constructed through the juxtaposition of multiple texts and text types (Bloome & Egan-Roberston, 1993; Kirkland, 2011). In this view, texts are not limited to print, but may also include interactive websites, electronic mediated texts (Alvermann, 2008; Hagood, 2009; Lanshear & Knobel, 2006; Voithofer, 2006;), gesture, drama, film, or “any sign that communicates meaning” (Hartman, 1992). In the present study, participants expressed a preference for out-of-school reading activities such as social media, online collaboration, and texting and emailing friends (Conradi et al., 2012; McKenna et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2007). While only one negative response was reported for reading textbooks as part of classroom assignments (Table 1), students reported the absence of textbooks being used in their science classes and how they were used as a form of punishment (Brozo & Flynt, 2008). In their English Language Arts course, students expressed a strong appreciation for visual literacy (Rosewell & Kendrick, 2013) and intertextual relationships, but their responses mainly focused on personal (text-self) connections and critiques that elicited very few connections to other texts (text-text) or events taking place outside their local context (text-world). In this section, I use the high, medium and low
cases to describe the following five themes: a) hybrid reading preferences, b) science textbook as absent, as punishment, but necessary, c) images, music, and graphs to create understanding and meaning, d) documentaries to appreciate, critique, and transcend, and e) novels and online text as a lifeline to explore self and others. The section is concluded with a discussion and summary of the differences across the cases.

**Hybrid reading preference.** “I don’t have a problem reading the textbook, but I would like reading activities with more social media, texting, and collaboration.”

A reading interest survey (Conradi et al., 2012) was used to better understand the reading preferences of the students. Specific questions that aligned to this study were categorized into the following three categories: a) *in-school reading* (IS) consisting of online reading, online research, reading a textbook, using resource materials for research, and collaborating using the internet, b) *free time reading* (FT) consisting of texting and emailing friends, using social media, talking to friends, reading a book, and reading magazines/comic books, and c) receiving a *book for a present* (BP). Students responding five to six were coded as positive, four to three were coded as neutral, and responses of two to one were coded as negative (Table 1).

There were more positive in-school reading preferences in the high group, recording seven positive responses, followed by the medium and lower-performing groups, scoring four and three positive responses respectively. The lower-performing students experienced the most negative responses when compared to the other two groups, citing their in-school experiences less favorably with five responses. The only other negative in-school response was recorded in the high group by Amari and none in the medium group. LeQuan recorded all of the positive responses in the lower group. In
the medium and lower-performing groups, the free time reading experiences were scored more positively than the in-school reading experiences (McKenna et al., 2012), but in the high group they were scored equally. There were no negative responses recorded for using social media, collaborating with peers using the internet, and texting and emailing friends (Gee, 2000; Alverman, 2008; Moje, 2009). Only one negative response was recorded for a) using a resource textbook for research, b) reading comic books/magazines, and c) reading a textbook each recorded by Amari (high), Clarence (medium), and LeQuan (lower) respectively. The lower-performing students recorded mostly negative responses for online reading and research, but mostly positive responses were recorded for talking to friends about something they are reading in class (Brown, 2006, 2008; Brown & Ryoo, 2008; Lee & Fradd, 1998; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Palinscar et al., 1987).

High

Of the five in-school reading subcategories, all of the boys scored positive results for online reading, reading a textbook, and collaborating using the internet. Shawn and Amari were neutral to online research, while Jaylen scored the question positively. Regarding using a resource textbook for research, Shawn and Jaylen scored the question as neutral, while Amari’s response was negative. For free time reading, all of the boys responded positively to texting and emailing friends and using social media. Similarly, all the boys agreed talking to friends and reading a book were positive preferences. Shawn and Amari were neutral to reading magazines and comic books, while Jaylen perceived the activity positively. Shawn and Amari were also neutral to receiving a book for a present, while Jaylen viewed the gesture as a positive experience. Amari’s comment
regarding using resource materials for research in school was the only negative comment associated with reading.

Medium

Of the five in-school reading subcategories, the boys scored uniformly for four of the responses. They all scored neutral responses for online reading, reading a textbook, and using a resource textbook for research, and uniformly positive results for collaborating using the internet. Clarence and Edward were neutral to online research, yet JC scored the category positively. For free time reading, all of the boys responded positively to texting and emailing friends and using social media. Clarence and JC agreed talking to friends about books was positive, while Edward thought the activity was negative. Clarence and Edward were neutral to reading a book, while JC thought reading a book during free time was negative. Edward and JC were also neutral to reading magazines and comic books, and Clarence thought the experience was negative. All of the boys viewed receiving a book for a present differently. Clarence was neutral, Edward was negative, and JC’s response was positive. There were four negative comments associated with reading in this group. None of the negative comments were associated with in-school reading activities.

Lower

Ray and Jordan held similar views regarding their in-school reading preferences. Ray and Jordan scored using resource textbook for research and collaborating using the internet as neutral, while LeQuan scored both categories positively. Ray and Jordan also scored reading a textbook as neutral, while LeQuan scored the category negatively. Ray and Jordan thought online research was a negative experience, yet LeQuan viewed it
positively. Jordan and LeQuan also thought online reading was negative, while Ray was neutral to the idea. Their free time reading preferences had more neutral scores than the other categories. For example, LeQuan and Jordan viewed reading comic books and magazines as neutral, while Ray viewed the activity as positive. Another neutral response came from Ray and Jordan who thought using social media was neutral, however LeQuan viewed the preference positively. Ray and LeQuan found texting and emailing friends as positive practices, while Jordan was neutral to the idea. Ray and Jordan were also held positive views regarding talking to friends about information they read in class, while LeQuan perceived the idea negatively. Ray and Jordan did not appreciate reading a book in their free time, while LeQuan was neutral to the idea. LeQuan and Jordan felt neutral about receiving a book as a present, while Ray viewed such a gift negatively.

**Science textbook as absent, as punishment, but necessary.** “It was just fun. I don’t know. Honestly, I don’t.”

High, medium, and lower performing students experienced limited reading from science textbooks prior to and after sixth grade (Armbruster, 1992). During their eighth grade year, all subgroups made reference to enjoying “hands-on” science activities, but experienced difficulty explaining what they learned from the projects indicating a more balanced approach to teaching science may be necessary (Barman, 1992; Brown, 2006; Emdin, 2010; Lemke, 1989; Moje, 2000, 2006; Newfeld, 2005). Excluding their sixth grade year, all subgroups mentioned science textbooks being used as a form of punishment (Brozo & Flynt, 2008). High and lower performing groups also mentioned how teachers would read the textbook to them instead of having them attempt to read the text independently (Fleming & Billing, 2005). High performing students thought students
needed a mix of “hands on” activities and reading from textbooks, while medium and lower performing students acknowledged enjoyment from viewing videos on scientific content. Clarence implied the videos were confusing to him because he found it difficult to review and reflect on the material, therefore he preferred using the textbook. The majority of lower performing students preferred using the textbook.

Students had very little exposure to reading science from a textbook prior to and after sixth grade. Students provided examples of teachers reading the text to them instead of teaching them how to read the text independently. The following quotes typify responses from all cases:

JC (M):

No, we don’t use the science book at all. He gives us worksheets and stuff. We do projects most of the time, experiments and stuff.

When students did read science from the textbook, students perceived it as a form of punishment and an alternate assignment since they did not “earn” a project.

Jaylen (H):

We only read it as an alternate assignment. We just had bottle rockets and we went outside and we had to shoot water rockets out and we got all wet and stuff, that fun type of thing. But when we’re in trouble, that’s when he says, “Okay, go get your science book and read section this or that.”

Students expressed differences of opinions regarding their preferences for reading informational texts. For example, Shawn explained how students do not prefer reading information from a textbook if the same content can be taught using another method, students would rather the other method. Jaylen agreed he does not like reading a lot, but he can be positively influenced to actively participate in the practice by the activities, types of texts, and the rigor of the assignment given. Even still, students experienced
difficulty explaining scientific concepts after participating in a recent “hands-on limited reading” activity.

Jaylen (H) commented:

No. I mean I have it in my head, there’s just no way to say it. It’s difficult. I think velocity—…it’s velocity divided by distance – it’s either velocity divided by distance and mass. I know he put it in a triangle and he had one letter and it was divided in three and it had two other letters. I think it’s distance times mass divided by velocity equals something. I forget.

Amari (H):

…So it depends on how you made your rocket if it went far or not. I put wings on mine and then I taped my cone around it and it actually went – I don’t know how, but it went very far. It don’t know if it was the material of the bottle rocket. I don’t know. It was just fun. I don’t know. Honestly, I don’t.

Jaylen explained how the class watched a video clip and “read this little packet type of situation” to learn about a scientific concept. While the many of the boys shared their preference for these types of activities, Clarence (M) and Jordan (L) expressed their frustration.

Clarence (M) elaborates:

…cause videos really confuse my mind. You can come back and look at that [pointing to the book], but you can’t go back and look at that [pointing to a computer]. You can, but you can’t, but you really can the book because it’s there and you can read it.

Students perceived the competition and rewards associated with the “hands-on” activity positively, however they also shared some drawbacks. Students were asked to share what scientific concept was learned as part of the recent assignment.

JC (M):

I think it was—I don’t know. We had watched a movie on some people that were making rockets and how they faced challenges on their rockets and stuff like that. But I don’t know what topic it was.
Ray (L):

I like hands-on activities. Like the experiment that we got done doing was bottle rockets and we was using air pressure to push the bottle to go far. I think whoever got farthest got an award. I was the third farthest. I think I was like 21. You remember Matthew, right? He’s the genius. He put two bottles in one and then when they put the pressure in, his went like 30-something.

Overall, students preferred a mix of hands-on and reading from the text. All students could identify a strategy for reading their science textbook. High and medium performing students expressed a preference for using both, but the lower performing students were more inclined towards using the textbook. Shawn’s (H) comments were representative of high and medium performing students:

You can’t just do like one thing, because you need eventually you need the book, because the book has stuff that the projects won’t and the Cornell Notes won’t, and the Cornell Notes will have something that the book and projects won’t. So you have to have some of all of it.

LeQuan (L) shared, “Because it [the book] got me to focus on it more.” He went on to explain, “I think you learn more if you do read it a lot, but in science class now we’re always doing projects and stuff.” Jordan (L) agreed by sharing, “Read it and do the projects, because if you just do the projects, but you don’t have no information, it helps…I prefer it in the book, ‘cause the book has more information.”

Further support for their preference to have a mixture of hands-on and reading came from analyzing their project from the online text in the Life Science Module: Who Inherits Cystic Fibrosis? from the Web-based Inquiry Science Environment site:

www.wise.berkeley.edu.

Jaylen (H):
This format was more fun. You had to think a lot because of the questions. First you had to read, it was like science plus reading at the same time, so you had to read and comprehend what it was saying in order to give a strong answer to any question. So it was more challenging but, at the same time, made you want to do it.

**Images, music, and graphs to create understanding and meaning.** “I mean it’s still happening, but...not in my neighborhood.”

*The Civil Rights Movement in Review: A Compilation of My Thoughts* is an eighteen-week unit of study I designed to meet the unique needs of urban adolescent African American males. The unit addresses the following themes and Essential Questions: a) Place and Race: What does my history have to do with me now? Isn’t that just some old stuff from the past? and b) Advocacy: If I have power, how can I empower those who do not? Students viewed and critiqued Spike Lee’s documentary *4 Little Girls*, analyzed music, images, and graphs (Appendix K), created illustrations and *Raw Writings (Tatum & Gue, 2010)*, read several informational and literary texts, as well as wrote several papers and participated in discussions with the attempt to meaningfully engage in learning various state content standards for English Language Arts.

All students were able to draw conclusions, inferences, pose questions about the images, music, and graphs, as well as begin to consider the implications the information might have for their future. While students across each subgroup were able to make several connections to “self,” students in the medium and lower group expressed very few connections to other texts and the world (Alvermann et al., 1998; Gee, 1990; Freire, 1997; Friedman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Noddings, 2005; Street, 1995; Woodson, 1933). Altogether, students discussed their interest and the
intertextual linkages associated with how they created understanding and meaning about:
a) self, b) text, and c) world.

**Self**

All cases suggested images were effective tools to help explain complex or ambiguous content. Students identified and discussed how they mixed modes, using a combination of viewing images, listening to music, and reading words to better understand different historical time periods. Students mentioned how they would pay close attention by reading the lyrics while the song was being played or how they would close their eyes so they could actually imagine the scenes being depicted in the song. Students agreed this technique was more useful than just reading the words, and that it gave them the opportunity to more fully connect to content they recalled from the past.

Being able to actually see the words and images was perceived positively.

Shawn (H):

They gave me a good vision of that time period. You still see images of slavery and stuff and some of these images I saw before, so that gave me a link into my memory of when I saw the pictures last. Then with these pictures, it’s like you can see exactly what they’re trying to say and what the pictures are trying to prove.

The use of music, rap in particular, also had deep connectivity, emotional and cultural appeal for all subgroups. Students viewed the use of music in classroom instruction to analyze lyrics and tone as important to their ability to grasp a deep understanding and think critically about various topics. Several of the boys mentioned they were excited and surprised by having the opportunity to study rap music in school, as they had not experienced such concepts prior to sixth grade. Amari’s reference to the
novelty of studying Old School rap and both Amari’s and Shawn’s rationale regarding their interest and level of engagement express the sentiments of all subgroups:

Amari (H):
Me and my friends that I was hanging out with at the time, we really liked rapping, because we would probably rap every day, so that really got us interested in old school rap even more. So nowadays we still listen to rap music like this, but it’s different. So I guess this kind of got us in the mood to hear something new that we never heard before and I liked it.

Shawn (H) commented, “Rap music. I prefer rap music because it’s more interesting and engaging. You can compare to it a lot and you can follow it better.”

Amari (H):
Yes, ma’am, cause music is a key factor, in my opinion, on how people represent how they were – or how they would talk about, I guess, life, anything that they wanted to reflect on, something they want to get off their chest, kind of like inform people about-- I guess music is like a real key factor for everyone to use for any color, any race. I think music really helps you basically find out information better, but in song.

Student responses demonstrated how they were able to mix genres—in and out of school genres, as well as the interrelated nature between present and past historical events.

Below students across subgroups share their perceptions of the interrelated nature of rap music, particular reference is made to Eric B. and Rakim’s Microphone Fiend.

Shawn (H):
I noticed that they used a lot of figurative language, cause I like to look up lyrics so I can know the lyrics to the song and I noticed a lot of the imagery inside of it.

Edward (M):
Because rap songs had a message that would go back into segregation time or something like that.

Ray (L):
I think rap has a whole bunch of similes and metaphors in there, because I think that’s what they use mostly to get their point across. I think he said something
about nicotine, like “I’m a fiend for nicotine,” like smokers really want something to smoke, so they go out and buy cigarettes. But he’s a fiend for rap, I guess.

Students also had not analyzed data related to the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) in their community before sixth grade. Although several students shared descriptive instances of family members, mainly male, who committed crimes that led to jail sentences, they expressed confusion and shock when learning about the DMC data and shared how the data related to their personal lives.

Amari (H):

I was kind of confused. Like how do they have more people than us, and most of us are in jail. I don’t get it. I was kind of confused by that part. Like how do they have more people in modern day society and we have over 60% in jail? I was stuck. I cannot find out what rules the decision.

Text

Students in the high group made intertextual connections between songs, various musical genres, history, and math. Shawn (H) discussed *We Shall Overcome*:

It sounded like a Negro spiritual, like a gospel. The actual tone was not actually serious. Well, there were a lot of black men signing, so it did seem kind of serious tone.

Amari (H):

The lyrics are really strong, so they get you in the mood with the song and I think jazz music really gets people in the mood, because jazz is basically, I think it’s a mood setting. It swings your mood. You could be happy and then you would listen to that song. Like that song’s got me so sad just now. It depends on how the song is and how you would basically listen to it or take the perspective of what you hear from the song and use it in modern day life basically. It does help to me. If you really like music, it would really help if we were able to use it all the time, but I guess you really can’t nowadays, because it’s different. To other people it’s different.

Amari (H) also critiqued the majority of teachers’ views towards rap music, “Like some teachers don’t like us listening to rap music because they say our music
nowadays is, I guess, ignorant.” While Clarence’s (M) comment does not show a connection to another text, it does support Amari’s (H) view and counters the negative stereotypes traditionally associated with rap music. Clarence (L):

We all like rap. It’s interesting. You’ve got to be smart to know how to rap. That’s basically how I’m thinking about it. You’ve got to know similes basically.

Shawn’s (H) explanation of the intertextual relationship between *We Shall Overcome* and *A Change is Gonna Come* highlights his ability to explain the major themes in both texts.

Well, first like the title, they both were convinced that change is going to come and they knew that change was going to come and this will be over and we shall overcome. They kept talking about, in both songs, they still had the power just to see the lightness, because it’s not going to be here for long; like they could still sing and still hope, because they all had hope.

He elaborated by providing his interpretation of the imagery and lyrics in both songs:

At first it says, “I was born by the river in a little tent,” showing he started off really rough and kind of unfair of his lifestyle and he moved on to try to change that and how everything was still segregated, but he still wanted change to come and finally change did come and we were starting to become equal as a race and he said "There's been time that I thought I couldn’t last for long, but now I think I’m able to carry on.” So after all that segregation and all that, he feels he can carry on. “But it’s been too hard living, but I’m afraid to die, cause I don’t know what’s up there beyond the sky. It’s been a long time coming, but I know change is gonna come.” So now present day it’s started over, like the last couple verses meaning it’s already been too hard, all this fighting and fighting for equality and hope for change and now he’s afraid that it was all for nothing because they’re at the same spot where they started from.

“I go to the movie and I go downtown, somebody keep telling me ‘Don’t hang around.’ It’s been a long, long time coming but I know change is gonna come.” That is a lot of racism and there’s a lot of segregation and like the policeman, all the dogs and the hoses and stuff, telling them don’t hang around if you don’t want to be part of that.

Students across all subgroups discussed how the texts related to other school subjects like history and math, but again with not much elaboration, especially from the medium and lower groups. Shawn discussed the importance of studying texts related to
African American scientists and inventors, while Jaylen critiqued texts that show the Disproportionate Minority Contact throughout the city.

Shawn (H):

It’s really important to study these, because it’s how you keep in touch with your history and if you keep getting fed all this other history like a lot of what’s going on in school now, then you kind of lose sight of that and you’re not truly in touch with your heritage and your ancestors.

Jaylen (H):

My conclusion is that even though we only have 27 black to 63 Caucasians, we still manage to somehow have more in jail than the people that have more than twice our population. I don’t know how that happened, because you can’t have 27 to 63 and be 69 to 31. That means we’re only involved in crimes.

*World*

Overall, students thought blacks were to blame for the disproportionately high incarceration rates, but the reasoning for the root causes differed across subgroups. The high and medium groups credited black on black crime, blacks being more violent than whites, and poor decision-making skills as the reason, while the low group suggested poor listening skills and blacks being too reactionary as root causes.

Jaylen (H):

It seems like our mentality is violence compared to Caucasians. We get in trouble more than they do and we’re bad instead of good.

Amari (H):

I don’t know. I think it’s just decision making. Our decision making is kind of poor. I’m not saying that Caucasian people don’t make bad decisions, but I don’t know I think our outcome is, I guess, more defiant. We just like being more defiant.

Clarence (M):

We’re still doing stupid stuff, so we’re really not free.
Clarence (M):

Could be racial profiling. I really don’t know.

Students were asked to recreate their thoughts on a lesson activity from the Civil Rights unit used during their sixth grade year. Students were asked to match the following labels to different groups of images (Appendix L): “slavery,” “Civil Rights” and “present day,” then share their thoughts on what led them to categorize the images in the way they selected.

Edward (M): I’d add this one here, because African-Americans are in jail just kind of like slavery.

Q: What makes you think so?

Edward (M): Because they’re in chains, they’re locked up, they do labor in jail.

Q: Okay. But we have a black president, so we have some change happening, right? But you’re saying we still have some—

Edward (M): I mean, that’s who it’s supposed to be. I mean you can’t just do a crime and expect to get away with it. You can’t get away with everything. You can’t do a crime and get away with it, cause if you did get away with it you would just go back and do it again and again. Even though we still have a black president, he still has to follow the rules and stuff. He can’t just have like separate rules for African Americans. Everything has to be equal.

Q: So all the African American men and women that are in jail are supposed to be there?

Edward (M): Yeah, they’re in there for a reason.
Although Edward’s father is an attorney and Edward may have participated in more in-depth conversations related to incarceration rates for African Americans, overall students believed the reason so many African Americans were in jail was solely because of their own actions. All groups expressed clear, articulate views on issues of race and present day injustices, however medium and lower performing students did not view racism as happening where they live. Medium and lower performing students also did not view racism as systemic or institutionalized. Higher-performing students were more critical and suggested several instances of current injustices taking place in their neighborhoods, in the media, and around the world.

Jaylen (H):

We’re judged – well, not judged, but seen as in a bad way…They tell us to put our hoodies down at [a high school] and one of our teachers, Mr. L, he said something that I didn’t like, he said, “Put your hoodies on, Trayvon Martin.” That’s when I’m like, “Why did you have to say his name?” He said, “Because if you don’t want to end up like him, you’ve got to learn how to dress up.” They were sagging, carrying guns and this and that. There’s just more bad eyes on African American boys than there are white.

Amari (H):

I mean it’s not considered slavery because they have done a crime, but I guess they’re not always guilty. Some people go in there and they’re innocent and they were just framed or something like that. So I put slavery there because of the shackles and how people are grouped so tightly together in the jail cells, it’s like they were back in slavery.

Jaylen (H):

I think personally it’s TV that’s showing the bad boys. When I watch that, it's crazy. It doesn’t make me want to be bad, but it just does something when you watch certain things like that, movies like that, it makes you want to try it out. I watched Dr. ______ Biggy about how he was selling drugs and stuff and making a lot of money, had all this gear and stuff. He left the house and he went up in the roof and put all his gear that he got from selling drugs and then we did all this and
became a rapper and everything. And you’ve got little dude kids trying to do the same thing, but ending up dead instead of living the life.

Two students used texts to make connections to the concepts of hope and racism. Jaylen (H) used Sam Cook’s *A Change is Gonna Come* to explain hope.

Jaylen:

His voice was just like – it had hope in it, as in everything was going to get better, that he still had – that there was still a chance, cause he help saying, “Oh, yes, it will” as in he was certain for the change. He didn’t say “I think” he was like “Yes, it will.” It actually did happen like that, but not exactly the way he pictured it.

Clarence (M) self-initiated a discussion sequence related to racism from the images:

Sad. Slavery is crazy. I’ve got a question though. How come-- I don’t want to ask it. How come whites will never like us?

In most interviews students struggled to understand how such injustices had persisted for so many years and how the injustices began. During those times in the interview I briefly explained the history and role of power in America, as well as how all white people do not support racist ideologies. Throughout the interviews students discussed white teachers, mentors, coaches, and family members who have played important roles in their lives, but still questioned the motives of “others” (i.e. police officers) that do not know them on a personal level. We drew connections to the several Whites studied in our unit (i.e. Freedom Riders, clergy, attorneys etc.) who helped advocate for African American’s during the Civil Rights Movement. I encouraged students to continue exploring and critiquing questions of inequity and discrimination throughout their lives because they are important issues to consider in all facets of society.

**Documentaries to appreciate, critique, and transcend.** “It stuck in my head for like two weeks straight, the images, everything stuck in my head.”
Student’s perceptions of *4 Little Girls* were expressed through their appreciation for the sacrifices made by others, their critiques of the situation, and their ability to transcend their school environment by sharing their knowledge with others. Similar to findings previously discussed, the medium and lower performing related more textual connections to “self” and very few examples to other texts and the world. Their perceptions were synthesized across three major domains associated with intertextuality: a) self, b) text, and c) world.

**Self**

Student perceptions of the documentary dispelled common phrases from young people, “Oh, if I was back then I would’ve fought back for my rights…ain’t nobody gonna tell me what to do…I wouldn’t let nobody treat me like that…I ain’t afraid of nothing or nobody.” Instead all subgroups demonstrated an appreciation and humility for the sacrifices made and students were hesitant to suggest what their responses might have been to such treatment.

Shawn (H): …

I think one of the questions was how we react to something like this. I said I would pray a lot and get as much help from God as I could, cause I don’t know how I’d get through it. That was a question that stood out to me.

JC (M):

… it changed my view on how the people who marched and fought for desegregation, it changed my view on them... It made me like think about that more and stronger and I was kind of more glad to hear – I was more glad that they did that so I didn’t have to go through it now.

LeQuan (L):

I don’t think I could have told my kid that she couldn’t eat there. I think it was hard for her cause she didn’t understand it.
Data from their *4 Little Girl Notebooks* in their school portfolios revealed student’s appreciation for the style of the film and shared how mixing modalities added clarity to the content.

Amari (H):

The style of this film helped me because you see their expressions in their words. You could see the emotions they had and also how they were still shocked.

Clarence (M):

The style that made me understand this better is the music. How it was played and when it was played. It was sad when they played it but that’s what helped me understand the whole movie.

LeQuan (L):

I was able to tell when it was a sad moment for them and when it wasn’t a sad moment, because the music would be happy and loud and then it would start to get real soft and people started to change the tone of their voices. By reading my paper you can tell that I pay very close attention to this film.

Students also expressed an increased understanding of the social issues surrounding the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the racism and hatred towards blacks and church bombings.

Shawn (H):

When we were watching the documentary I was real shocked and surprised that people would act like this. I knew it was a lot of racism back in the civil rights movement, but I never knew anything like that. That was just a whole other level of hatred.

JC (M):

I knew they acted like that, but I didn’t know they were going that far to blow people up.

Ray (L):
I think that in my opinion I really liked it because it explained a lot to me. I never knew – I thought it was a sin to put crosses on fire and put them in your front yard. I don’t know they were blowing up churches. I didn’t know they were blowing up churches.

Students also raised several questions regarding trust of authority figures, personal intent, and forgiveness in the documentary.

Edward (M):

I mean unless he [George Wallace] changed his ways, but he maybe could have been faking it because you say you hate black people and then your best friend becomes a black person. He could have been faking it or he could have been telling the truth.

While LeQuan (L) was the only student who firmly believed George Wallace learned, grew, and changed from his experiences as governor of Alabama, the other students were not convinced. Students ultimately believed that people can change for the better, but based on the footage presented in the documentary were not willing to believe that was the case with Governor Wallace.

In Edward’s (M) portfolio he wrote, “I think she didn’t put Carol’s funeral with them because she thought she was better than them.” During the interview Edward (M) related, “Well I think there’s no point in having privacy at a funeral.” His concerns stemmed from the manner in which the girls were killed. In his view all the girls, by default, were part of a movement and thus part of a public event, and the families should not have separated their funerals. We discussed how some of his peers thought Carole’s mom’s personal intent regarding the decision to have a separate funeral from the other three girls was to isolate her family from the media, not so much the movement and Dr. King’s eulogy, but rather opting for a more personal and intimate ceremony with someone they loved very deeply.
In their portfolios students also offered critiques of the status quo, their emotional response, and interpersonal insights to the documentary, then followed up with more questions and commentary during the interview. Students, whether they attended church regularly or not, appeared to have a respect for God and the church.

Shawn (H):

Well, it was emotional for me. My thoughts—I was just very—it was—I put—a lot of times on paper—just like real speechless, because of what happened. It’s like no words I can really describe the pain that these families felt.

Jaylen (H):

It was sad. The movie, the documentary was sad. It stuck in my head for like two weeks straight, the images, everything stuck in my head. It made me realize that’s crazy to actually bomb a church with kids inside, families inside.

Edward (M):

What was going through my mind was like how you would bomb a church. They bombed a church while like people were in the church. It was kind of like heartbreaking a little bit.

JC (M):

It was like I didn’t believe it at first. Then when we watched the documentary I kind of started believing it.

Ray (L):

I thought that was very wrong to do that, because I know they thought that black people shouldn’t be living, but I don’t think you should do that to a church or to anybody as a matter of fact. I think if you do that you should go to hell.

Interestingly, given his previous thoughts regarding everyone is in jail for crime they committed, Edward (M) discussed how although racism was a construct from the past, it could still exist in today’s society. LeQuan (L) described how the documentary helped him to better understand why parents might overprotect their children by limiting the
places they go. Jordan’s (L) comments from his portfolio and interview were illustrative of the participants:

“After watching the Spike Lee documentary 4 Little Girls, which explores the 16th Street church bombing, my emotional response the part that most affected me was when the bomb had killed the four little girls and how the man was happy about killing the girls. What was surprising to me was why did they not kill the man that killed the little girls. What I couldn’t believe was how they got killed. It’s just sad how they did not like the blacks. If I could talk to one of the characters I would ask why this had to happen? Why did all the people get hurt?”

In the interview Jordan (L) continued to elaborate on his disbelief someone would bomb a church “cause that’s God’s temple,” he stated.

Students communicated a universal feeling of distrust towards the police. Shawn (H): It’s not a coincidence that they [the police] were there so perfectly, like the timing. So I was just thinking that they were in on it, cause they knew it was going to happen or else they would have come at a regular response time, that it was all just a big plan.

LeQuan (L): I still don’t like police. My thoughts about police still haven’t changed.

LeQuan discussed how even prior to watching the documentary he experienced difficulty trusting the police, but the documentary confirmed his lack of trust. Throughout his discussion he related how even though he does not believe all police officers should not be trusted, he has witnessed enough wrong doing to believe most of them should not be trusted. Jordan (L) shared LeQuan’s sentiments citing examples from the documentary when the police were acting suspicious about the bombing.

All groups were able to transcend the boundaries of school by sharing their learning with their parents and other family members who in turn independently searched YouTube and asked follow up questions for more information. Shawn shared how emotional his family was when he told them about what he was learning, but they were
pleased about the content he was learning in school because they did not have those types of opportunities when they were in school.

Jaylen (H):

…I told my dad and then he decided to get on YouTube and actually look it up, because he wanted to see it. The way I told it to him made him want to see it. After he saw it, he was like quiet. He was like, “Wow, that’s crazy.”

Ray (L):

She thought when I first started telling her, she thought — at first I thought she didn’t like it and then at the end she was like, “What happened next?” I said “I don’t know. We never got to that part yet.”…I think she felt very sad when I told her a couple other parts and then I guess she got on YouTube at work and then started watching it.

Text

Shawn (H) discussed how the young people were instrumental in the Civil Rights Movement and made reference to the text Speak and a poster hanging on his teacher’s wall. In his view the poster reminded him young people should speak up because:

It’s a different type of point of view, which is really important. So kids can, nowadays, if they speak up and what they’re talking about is right, a lot of people will listen and would respect what they’re saying.

Jaylen (H) expressed his appreciation for the visual content of the film, as well as its connection to historical content.

I really wanted to see the graphic part just to see how they were killed and how everything played out. I don’t know why, I just did. I’m just so into history and finding out more about history, so I wanted to see that a lot.

During a discussion related to the film’s impact, LeQuan (L) offered a connection to a writing activity he self-initiated. He shared how he wrote a letter about the documentary because he was genuinely interested in the content.

World
Students also expressed a lack of security, short life expectancy, and the general belief that “nowhere is safe” in the world.

Shawn (H):

It opened my eyes to society now showing that not a lot has changed obviously, but once you go deeper and think harder, you can still see comparisons.

Shawn (H):

Like the racism, how it still—the Trayvon Martin case, it was a lot of racism that you can’t see when you’re first looking at it, but when you think about it, you can see some in a way.

Jaylen (H):

I had like a little reality check, like the world is real type of thing, like I have to walk outside right now and there’s a driveby and I can see getting shot and killed. It made me think like I’ve got to be safer in what I do and who I’m with. It made me realize that really nobody is really safe, that you can die any moment.

Jaylen (H):

Everybody is fighting for themselves and alliances are being formed, like bad alliances, that aren’t really fair. It made me realize that nobody can be trusted type of situation, that people do what they want to do for different causes. They don’t care what happens in the end, like the bombing that happened in Boston. Those type of situations make no sense.

Ray (L):

Yeah, cause I know now, as I progress on, I think now I’m starting to learn anything can happen in life and it can happen very quick.

Jordan (L): It made me feel like there’s really nowhere safe. Things happen.

**Novels and online text as a lifeline to explore self and others.** “It shouldn’t be like Mark and Molly went to the store and bought five oranges and came back with two. I mean do something.”
Students thought the texts related to their lives in significant ways, provoked deep discussions, and opinions regarding several controversial topics. Student perception of novels and online texts were thought to be a lifeline, a safe manner in which to explore themselves and others (Kirkland, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Tatum, 2005, 2008). Consistent with the themes present with the images and documentaries sections, students expressed more text-self connections than text-text or text-world with the novels and online texts. Only students in the high group expressed their active or potential community involvement on controversial issues. The other subgroups were undecided or skeptical of participation. Their perceptions were also synthesized across three major domains associated with intertextuality: a) self, b) text, and c) world.

**Self**

Participants could relate to Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* because they thought it focused on issues associated with growing up as a black boy, how to build their confidence, and learning to stand up for oneself and one’s beliefs. Shawn’s and Jaylen’s comments describe the thoughts of other participants.

Shawn (H):

It was really relatable…First of all, he was a black boy in the neighborhood, which is really relatable because it’s real obvious…I remember I was going—my mom sent me to get something from my grandma’s house when we lived in the same neighborhood as my grandma, something like salt or dishwashing liquid or something. People, they wouldn’t really put their hands on me, but they would bully me and stuff like that, like verbal—more verbal than physical.

Shawn (H):
Yeah, cause relatable topics are just something that get your attention and it really becomes more personal and you can just follow the story more and more as the more and more comparisons and relations you can get.

Jaylen (H):

Because it seemed like a story that can occur in real life. It didn’t seem just like a fairy tale type of thing. It seemed like this could really happen. Somebody’s mom really could say to their son, “Fight for yourself or you’re not coming in my house.” Me and my mom, you know, “Get a girl pregnant, you’re not coming in the house.” So that’s like, hey, I’ve got to do this and I don’t have to do that. I want to stay in my house. I don’t want to get kicked out.

Students expressed deep connectivity to Tookie William’s *Life in Prison*.

Amari (H):

Those are the types of books that keep me interested, like books about either African-American history, something that happened in jail with people—I guess reflecting on people’s life like people that you never met, or people that you would like to meet, or celebrities, like if they have a struggling past, I guess that just keeps me interested. “Oh, I never knew that, I just thought you came with all this money, but it turns out you didn’t.”

Their curiosities regarding prison life, current gun violence, as well as how to avoid going to prison were some of the main reasons for their high level of interest in the text.

Portfolio and interview data revealed students across all groups had several questions:

LeQuan (L):

How do you survive in jail without seeing your family every day? How to take baths in the sink without hot water? How to live a life knowing that you’re not safe every day, knowing that somebody – that any time you can die or something can happen?

Both Clarence (M) and Edward (M) discussed how they were curious about the term “death row” since they were not aware of the meaning or reference prior to sixth grade.

JC (M) referenced his portfolio data to discuss the similarities one of his family members
had with Tookie Williams, “…both dropped out of school and hit the streets, both went to jail and were both Crips.” Jaylen (H) also commented on the use of imagery in the text:

And the book had pictures and when we get books all we do—we just go around for the pictures. We don’t care about the words at first. We look at the pictures. For me, whenever I have the book I look at the pictures and I saw this one picture where they had all the bodies with all the stab wounds and stuff like that and that’s when I closed the book immediately. I did not want to read the book because it felt—it seemed scary. So that’s when I got completely scared and me and [Trent] and all of them were like, “Oh, go to page this and this,” and “Look at that. Look at that.” That’s when we all got scared and we’re like, “Oh, man, this is serious.” So we all had to just listen, cause we didn’t want to end up like they was.

Students watched a video clip of Tookie expressing his views regarding his redemption.

Interview and portfolio data revealed the majority of the students expressed disagreement with Tookie’s views. LeQuan was the exception.

Jaylen (H):

I said no. I think he killed a father, too, at the store. That’s what I remember. If he was that father’s son, that another man killed his father, he wouldn’t want that man out. It don’t matter how redeemed he thought he was or was. Cause if you kill my dad, I want you dead. I don’t want you to go to jail for 30 years and then come back, like, “Oh, I’m goody-goody two-shoes.” I want you to stay in there, rot in there. It’s not fair to the family members of the people you killed to see you walk out of jail standing up. I can’t agree with that.

The following are excerpts from portfolio data:

Amari (H):

I said I think Williams’ redemption was not genuine, because he thought too late in the process of becoming a co-founder of the Crips.

JC (M):

No, cause once you start killing people, it’s addictive and you keep on doing it. I don’t think he’s redeemed and should be let out of prison even if he is saying he’s going to do something good.
LeQuan (L):

His life changed after joining the Crips, because he sees that the reason why he’s in jail is because of the Crips and he don’t want to be in jail for another 20 years. Yes, I do, because I think he was honest about being innocent and that he really did change and wanted to get his life back and change his life. Learning about the young leaders involved in the Civil Rights Movement in *Freedom’s Children* was viewed as particularly important because participants thought the lessons could be used as a model for young people in today’s context. It was the first time they learned about other “every day” people who were not national figures involved in the movement.

Shawn (H):

It was real amazing how people so young could step up and do such a mature job that you’d expect grown people to do. It just seemed really even more important that you have children out there marching for their own freedom and doing whatever it takes to be free.

Amari (H):

I was kind of like shocked. I didn’t think anybody else had actually helped. I just thought it was the main people that I’ve always heard about.

Clarence (M):

It made me think I could help. How this happened made me feel like no matter how old you are, or how young, you can help.

Participants shared how reading the online biographies of various African American scientists and inventors for their projects helped them better understand the history, unique contributions, and obstacles scientists from diverse backgrounds had to overcome. Clarence (M) mentioned the project as his favorite activity. Shawn (H) shared the limited knowledge some students face regarding the history of African American scientists and inventors who made tremendous contributions to the field of science. He
thought students were taught mainstream views related to the presidents and U.S history, but “you don’t know about the first black people in Congress, like the first black judge or stuff like that.” Shawn (H) and others went on to share several comments to demonstrate the positive impact such information had on their personal lives.

Shawn (H):

Because to know an example of greatness and to know that everything in the media like it was different before now, like it was actually excellence coming from African Americans and that it was a high standard because of all the intelligence and excellence that was coming from it.

Edward (M):

What that does for me today is see what they did and see how they went through all the steps and see how I can get there too, just by step-by-step.

Jordan (L):

Cause normally people say mostly African American boys always— 90% end up in jail and we’re trying to prove that it’s not true.

Text

Very few students made connections from the novels they read in class to other texts. While discussing Freedom’s Children and the role young people played in the Civil Rights Movement, Ray (L) recalled images in the book, The Ruby Bridges Story. After reading Life in Prison, Amari (H) recollected how he went to view the Jamie Fox movie based on the life of Tookie Williams since it was showing at the theaters during that time.

Then I watched the trailer and went to see the movie cause it had Jamie Foxx playing him and I was kind of like, “Wow, I really want to see this,” cause we watched him getting interviewed [in class] and they were asking him why he did what he did and different stuff like that. I don’t remember what he did, but they were asking him why he did all the stuff and he would kind of just go around the answers, but he would answer them truthfully. I don’t know, it just kept me interested.
Jaylen (H) used the statistics from his research paper to relate the importance of learning the biographies of African American scientists and inventors.

Well, it brings back a lot of information that I have forgot over the years, because a lot of the statistics, I didn’t really remember them. Now I do and it’s astonishing because I really didn’t know that percentage compared to black and white were that much one-sided, 48% white people get doctoral degrees and only 1% black. That’s crazy. And Andrew J. Beard, all this information about him came back to my head and how much he put himself—like he made a national hall of fame for inventors and all this and that. I forgot all these details about him.

*World*

Students in each group discussed how young people are too distracted or do not care enough to “stand up” for the issues taking place in today’s society like the youth in *Freedom’s Children* and *4 Little Girls*. Each subgroup differed in their responses regarding if they would take action to “stand up” for their rights or the rights of others. Students in the high group were very vocal about their feelings and thought young people should be actively involved in helping to solve issues in the community and provided examples of their active and potential community engagement (i.e. fundraising, running a 5k, presentations) on issues in their neighborhoods, such as black-on-black crime, abortion, and human trafficking. Jaylen’s comments were the most illustrative.

Jaylen (H):

Yeah. What we’re talking about, black on black. I will want to stand up for that, because there’s no point into it. It doesn’t make any sense and doing it is just hurting ourselves and decreasing our population.

Jaylen (H):

Oh, abortion, abortion. I will stand up for that. I will stand up against that. I don’t like abortions because I’m hearing that a lot of young girls are dying. I think the doctors need to have more—be taught more into abortion because—like the babies are dying, but the same time the moms are dying after the babies are dead.
and that’s hurting me. I’m hearing on TV on stuff like disgusting things like doctors killing the babies once they’re out, not doing the procedures right.

Jaylen (H):

Yeah, that kept the babies in the refrigerator—Oh, man, if I was in front of him, that dude would not have a nice day. It was nasty. I don’t like that. I don’t like the abortion piece. I hate that. And human trafficking, I hate that too, because it talked about how somewhere—I forget, but somewhere across the sea, they have a belief—since they have so little education that some of them believe they can get rid of HIV by intercourcing with a virgin and they will start with virgins such as little babies and when I heard that, cause [another high school] boys came in to do a Power Point with us, I’m like—I thought of my little sisters and stuff and I got mad. Like that is nasty. Me and Mr. A were both steamed off. I had to walk out of the room because I didn’t want to hear anymore of like babies two months and stuff like that. Disgusting.

Students in the medium group were undecided about youth being involved and did not provide any examples of their involvement, while students in the lower group did not think young people should get involved in community affairs because of the risks and possible consequences associated with doing so.

Ray (L):

They had real guts, because I don’t think I’d be out there doing that at such a young age, because at the age they were, I wouldn’t want to get hosed that far away with a fire hose that pumps 80 pressure of water at you in like 5 seconds and then a dog that is trained to kill or just to rip your whole arm off.

Jordan (L):

It wasn’t normal. You wouldn’t expect a kid to be in something like that.

Jordan (L):

I think they shouldn’t do it because every time someone speaks up and tries to step for themselves, they get killed. Once someone gets so much power and they’re really starting to be heard, they’re going to end up being killed.
Discussion

An overview of each section and a thematic analysis of the differences across the cases have been provided. Four findings were identified from the analysis of texts and are discussed below.

*The science textbook was rarely used prior to and after sixth grade.* In many urban districts, technological resources and materials to facilitate inquiry-based labs are minimal, therefore learning to effectively use the resources (i.e. textbooks) that are readily available is optimal. In elementary, usually the focus is on the foundational skills of reading and math. If science is introduced, minimal instruction time limits deep analysis and inquiry (Tate, 2001). In science teacher education training, the main focus is on a “hands on” epistemology that does not always include a “minds-on” pedagogy (Armbruster, 1992; Donahue et al., 2000). In the present study, students did not recall reading the science book in elementary school. In instances when the science text was used, the teacher read the text to the students. While read-a-louds are common practice and supported in research, the elimination of providing adequate instructional support for students to independently grapple with various texts can become problematic. Students not only need opportunities to practice the strategies that will assist them in understanding the content and being motivated as discussed in Brozo & Flynt (2008), they also need to be explicitly taught the strategies and the value of using them (Newfeld, 2005) when students find it difficult to comprehend text.

After sixth grade, students discussed their involvement with “hands on” projects without textbooks. Although reading “small packets” of information and completing worksheets supplemented the instruction, students expressed difficulty explaining the
scientific content they were learning. Armbruster (1992) discussed how de-emphasizing reading textbooks in science might limit the goals of students becoming scientifically literate. She argues reading and “doing” science both require cognitive demands and one should not be positioned over the other in the classroom, as scientists must rely on both. The learning cycle referenced in the Science Curriculum Improvement Study (Barman, 1992) focuses on three facets: a) exploration (an activity to raise questions about a topic), b) content instruction (read and study about the topic in greater depth), and c) content application (apply the information in a new context). Embedded within each facet is evaluation and discussion.

While the participants in this study appeared to have adequate opportunities for exploration and application, the explicit teaching and scaffolding of content instruction appeared to be underrepresented in their explanations. Structuring a balanced approach to teaching science is necessary for adolescents to comprehend, draw meaning from, and critique the omissions and imperfections of disciplinary text. Reading from multiple texts (including the textbook) should coexist in the world of “hands-on” activities (Fleming & Billing, 2005). Interdisciplinary project-based pedagogies (Moje et al., 2000) that press for real world questions, investigations, creating artifacts, collaboration, and using technological tools to explore various inquiries is optimal, has a rich research base, and has been useful in motivating traditionally reluctant learners, but many of the studies either omit reference to the reading or comprehension strategies or de-emphasize their role which may leave readers thinking such practices are not necessary to effectively teach students science; however Guthrie et al. (1996) is correct when he suggests “hands-
on” activities do not have to substitute comprehension instruction, but rather the two can co-exist and work in tandem.

*After sixth grade, at times, the science textbook was used as a form of punishment.* As an outgrowth of the epistemological orientation related to science education, reading in science could be viewed as inferior to “doing science” (Brozo & Flycot, 2008), although some scholars argue reading is an active process that involves “doing” science because of the cognitive demands required for both (Armbruster, 1992). When the science textbook and corresponding activities involving the textbook are used as punishment, an alternative to participating in a lab experiment, these practices reinforce negative associations with learning science. Students from each subgroup shared how if they did not earn a project, they were punished with doing an alternate assignment, which involved reading the textbook and answering the section review questions. Emdin (2010) warned science educators of facilitating practices that appeared “science like” versus being truly engaged in the discipline. Ideally, teachers want to ensure students are engaged with the content being taught. If the teaching practices (for comprehension instruction let’s say) fail to engage, students will avoid reading about important topics in science, which can at times be convoluted and uninteresting. When students are positioned against reading due to punishment they may never acquire the discipline to unpack complex text, gain critical background knowledge, or the discourse required to participate in scientific discussions while refining their understanding of concepts, all of which are fundamental for academic success in school and beyond (Brozo & Flynt, 2008).
Lower-performing students expressed a priority preference for using the science textbook. The need for scaffolding and extra support towards their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) was consistent with the findings in this section, as well as the results from their reading survey (lower-performing students preferred the textbook). Students seemed to use the science textbook as a tool to mediate discussion with their peers and build their background knowledge. Learning how to mediate discussion with scientific text is important, especially for learners who struggle because translating the patterns of written language to spoken language can be difficult and students will generally, if given the opportunity to discuss with peers or teachers, use their spoken language to help them reason, solve problems, and comprehend information more readily (Lemke, 1989).

Overall students agreed a balanced approach to teaching science, including reading from the textbook and doing projects, was most desirable. However, the lower-performing students appeared to express more appreciation for using the science textbook. LeQuan discussed how the textbook helped him stay more focused on the information, while Jordan thought the textbook provided more information than the projects. Although students enjoyed the visual aspect to watching video clips to introduce topics (Rowsell & Kendrick, 2013), Clarence’s (M) comments indicated reading from the textbook might still be useful for some learners:

Cause videos really confuse my mind. You can come back and look at that [pointing to the book], but you can’t go back and look at that [pointing to a computer]. You can, but you can’t, but you really can the book because it’s there and you can read it.
It is important to stress this finding is not to suggest inquiry based “hands on” activities do not have their place in the science classroom, but rather more scaffolding of scientific concepts may be necessary, especially for learners who struggle to understand abstract concepts.

*All students used intertextuality and hybrid forms of literacy with print and non-print texts to create meaning, critique social conditions, and explore self and others, but the medium and lower groups primarily focused on text-self relationships.* Students expressed several examples of their cultural, emotional and social literacies (Tatum, 2005) through the comparative images of slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and present day events, to rap music, and graphs of the Disproportionate Minority Contact in their community, through viewing of documentaries such as *4 Little Girls* and *Louder Than A Bomb*, as well as reading texts such as *Black Boy*, *Freedom’s Children*, *Life in Prison*, *Male Codes*, and various online biographies of African American Scientists and Inventors. By doing such students did not have to “bow down” to the curriculum (Noguera, 2008) in order to identify themselves as readers, rather the intertextual linkages and hybrid forms of literacy shielded students from the fear of public embarrassment. Their views, language, and identities were not only acknowledged, but valued and made important as the texts shed light on their current context (Kirkland, 2011).

Although the students were deeply engaged with the content, and found the information to be personally meaningful and significant, students believed African Americans were to blame for the disproportionately high incarceration rates. They believed the negative depictions and stereotypes being portrayed in the media and provided examples of how specific depictions played out in their communities. Their
vivid descriptions demonstrated their efforts to make broader social, cultural, and political links by considering their lives as the texts within various social interactions (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Kristeva, 2002). However, the medium and lower-performing did not view civil rights as being an issue where they lived. Overall, students shared several insightful examples of how engaging in critical media literacy increased their agency, defined their textual positioning, and construction of knowledge related to their current social and political positioning (Alvermann et al., 1998; Freire, 1997; Gee, 1990; Street, 1995), still spending more time exploring the connections between national and local issues might be beneficial as many of the students could not identify injustices in their communities or identify other explanations for the disproportionate number of African Americans in jail. For example, Ohio State University law professor Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow* could be introduced to give students a more comprehensive view of the judicial and penal system in America.

Further, while text-self connections appeared to situate the learning experience and motivate students to participate, their dialogue with other external texts (text-text and text-world) (Hartman, 1992) needs to be expanded to more fully comprehend the socio-cultural issues facing communities, as well as the underlying causes of the issues. One tool to expand how students (re)construct their experiences and expand their understanding of broader connections through dialogue with other external texts is through the use of online media (Voithofer, 2006). Personal reflection and connections (text-self), while useful to initially engage students in complex concepts may not be enough to benefit them or adequately prepare them for the Next Generation of assessments required for promotion and graduation. The new system of assessments
being field-tested requires students to draw on information from multiple texts to synthesize and write conclusions (CCSS, 2010).

As previously stated, the intertextual connections spurred self-exploration, helped learners create meaning and critique social conditions throughout the learning process (Bessler, 2007; Tatum, 2008; Wright, 2008). Surprisingly only the high performing students demonstrated active roles in their communities and supported a commitment to advocate for controversial issues. The medium and lower performing students were undecided and skeptical about their involvement in “standing up” for issues facing their communities. The major goal of purporting an emancipatory-type educational agenda (Friere, 1997; Woodson, 1933) is to teach students how develop a socio-political consciousness so they can critique, not perpetuate, the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2009), to (re) create agendas that support one’s social, cultural, political, and economic well-being (Greenfell et al., 2012), and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between knowledge, education, and power structures (Apple, 2013). Students appeared to have tangential knowledge and awareness of what it means to advocate for a cause, but only the high performing students took up the role of being “actors” or activist within the social condition (Apple, 2013). When asked about who should take a stand when something is wrong in the community, Jordan (L) responded “the president” and went on to share how historically when people speak out for what they believe they are often assassinated. Throughout analyzing the transcripts, creating meaning was an individual endeavor negotiated between text and reader (Bessler, 2007), and at times disrupted and contradicted by the texts of their lives. Kristiva (2002) explained:
...meaning is not a unity that comes before or after the text, but an irruption, an always unstable revelation on a more or less undermined ground embedded in a plural unity; it paradoxically imposes itself through the recurrence of nonsense, distortion, ambiguity and contradiction. The text and the reader form a necessary unity during the act of reading...

The next chapter provides a synthesis of the student’s perceptions of *Enabling* pedagogies.
Chapter 6: Pedagogy Findings

Enabling Pedagogies: A Multiliteracies Approach

Pedagogy (Appendix J) that meets the distinct needs of urban adolescent African American males is a critical component in motivating students to succeed. Several researchers have noted cognitive (Piaget, 1963), cultural (Blumer, 1970; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009), identity (Brown, 2005; Kinlock, 2010; Moje, 2000, 2002a; Moje et al., 2008; Tatum & Gue, 2010), and linguistic (Baugh & Smitherman, 2007; Brown, 2006; Godley et al., 2007; Rickford & Rickford, 2000) considerations as essential pedagogical components to student success. Taken together, this body of research aims to help students read print and non-print material, learn important content vocabulary, investigate, critique, question, analyze, write about what they are learning, and share content with others by using the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). In this framework, the four interrelated phases include: a) situated practice (Immersion in students’ lifeworlds and experiences to make learning authentic), b) overt instruction (Systematic and explicit scaffolding of meaning, metalanguages, and processes), c) critical framing (Questioning the social, cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts of material being learned), and d) transformative practice (demonstration or expression of learned material in another context). High, medium, and lower performing students’ cases are used to discuss the two major themes that emerged in this section: a) Multiliteracies in the Science Classroom, and b) Multiliteracies in the English Language Arts Classroom. Within each of the two major themes, four subthemes
are presented using the four interrelated phases of multiliteracies: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. The section concludes with a discussion and summary of the differences across the cases.

**Multiliteracies in the science classroom.**

*Modified reciprocal teaching as situated practice.* Reciprocal teaching is an instructional activity that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students regarding segments of text. In its original form (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), the dialogue is structured by the use of four strategies: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. The teacher and students take turns assuming the role of teacher in leading this dialogue, usually a group effort to help bring meaning to the text. Modifications to the original strategy included peer-led dialogue where students assume the position of “expert” on their assigned section as well as “critical peer” on the other sections. A significant amount of attention was given to preparation for teaching by pre-reading sections and taking Cornell Notes, as well as receiving and providing written feedback regarding interactions during teaching. A 4-point rubric (exceedingly well, mostly well, could have been better, needs to focus), was used by students to: a) conduct self-evaluations on the effectiveness of their preparation, teaching and contributions, and b) participate in peer-evaluations to provide criterion-specific feedback to other students on their preparation, teaching and contributions. Teachers provided a final evaluation, using the 4-point rubric and Reciprocal Teaching Observation Log to evaluate the effectiveness of students’ preparation, teaching and conceptual understanding of various topics.
The medium and lower performing students, excluding Jordan, did not participate in Reciprocal Teaching (Lysynchuck, Pressley & Vye, 1990; Palinsar & Brown, 1984; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Slater & Horstam, 2002) because their science teacher did not use the strategy. However, students in the high group were motivated and interested in the strategy because they preferred peer-to-peer discussion over traditional teacher-led instruction (Brown, 2004, 2006; Lee, 2001; Lemke, 1989). Shawn mentioned, “If you're going to present, that would motivate you to do your work and make it good, because you're going to present in front of people so you want it to be as good as possible.” Amari shared how he would sometimes lose his focus while others were teaching because he preferred to present the material and would oftentimes volunteer to teach extra sections if someone was not prepared to teach.

Jaylen (H):

It allows us to work on what we're going to teach instead of just hearing it. Like we have to go through the researching and Cornell Notes on what we're going to tell. It made us work and then show our work, literally show our work to other people so they can retain it. It made us feel better because we're like, "Oh, I'm teaching somebody." It made us feel good that we're giving somebody--making somebody smarter type of thing and we're getting smarter back by the person that we taught and it made it easier to work with instead of having somebody talking to you the whole time and not asking questions back and stuff.

Being a community of learners was viewed as important (Emdin, 2010; Seymour & Osana, 2003). Students also expressed embarrassment when not prepared to teach, but shared differences in their responses regarding scoring their peers who were not prepared to teach. Jordan did not assess his peers based on their relationship status like the higher performing group, but rather on their actual academic performance. Jordan also expressed having a negative relationship with his peers. Overall students discussed the dynamics of
a) group accountability, b) listening to each other, and c) receiving peer feedback, which according to New London Group (1996) are important constructs to the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies.

*Group Accountability*

Amari (H) explained how the groups were arranged, facilitated, and scored by students:

There would probably be three in a group and we would each get a section. We’d basically go over the sections and read them together, and then we would have to study our section and then we would have to present what we learned from the section, each of us. I think we had like two sections each or something like that. Basically after we spoke on what we did, we were graded by each other on the chart. I think it was from 1-10 or something like that. No, 0-4.

While they all expressed similar views regarding the pressure of group accountability, Jordan’s (L) comments were complicated by his negative relationships with some of his peers. When asked about his perceptions of working in small groups for Reciprocal Teaching he mentioned, “I think if I was with a different group…Clinton and I really didn't get along, cause he always talked a lot and I didn't get along with him that much.” Being embarrassed when they were not prepared to teach was mentioned frequently, however Jordan’s (L) comment appeared to take a serious tone of concern, “Well, you had to have it done because if you didn't, you don't want to get embarrassed.”

Students in the high group mentioned being embarrassed as well, but spoke about their experiences in jest, similar to Jaylen’s (H) comment:

Well, when I wasn't prepared to teach, they were like, "Oh, Jaylen, you didn't do your work.” They're making me feel bad like we had, "We had all this time, but, Jaylen, we're not going to be smart now. You made us dumb.” It made you feel bad about yourself. When you did do your work, you're getting claps, you're getting--they're paying attention to you and you feel like you're the boss. You feel good. But when you don't take it seriously, it's really bad…I'd be shaking my
head, like, "You had all this time, but you didn't pay attention.” I'd make them feel really bad, like "you're not going to teach me?"

**Listening**

The importance of listening was another important attribute described by students. Jaylen (H) lamented, “I don't like talking with nobody listening to me. I would ask questions to make sure you are listening to me and, if you got it right, I would know that you're listening.” Amari’s (H) comments described how he varied the facilitation of his peer-peer discussions. Sometimes he would allow students to use his book to follow along if they happened to forget theirs, other times he would allow two students to share books, and other times he would allow students to listen to him talk without the book, but he would ask them questions to check their understanding. Shawn (H) seemed to appreciate the intimacy of listening to his peer explain concepts in a small group versus whole class because he could better understand the material:

A lesson is real different coming from a kid your friend, than it is coming from an adult. It brings it down to a level of their understanding. You feel more comfortable, them talking to you about it and it becomes easier to comprehend versus like a teacher teaching everybody else. Like you have some kid that you sit by all the time and talk to, he's telling you and he knows like the right answers and stuff. He's telling you and explaining it to you, so it brings the level down to his understanding.

**Peer Feedback**

After each round of peer-peer discussions students provided each other with written and verbal feedback. Students in the high group appreciated and welcomed the opportunity to receive feedback from their peers. Amari (H) explained how having the rubric motivated him to improve his grades because he could clearly see the guidelines...
and his progress. According to Shawn (H), “Yeah it's a good way to know where you stand in the eyes of your peers.” Jaylen (H) agreed:

I felt good, because I actually understood what they thought of what I said and they showed me what I could have done better on or what I did worse on so I could make sure that I don't do it again. It helped me, because instead of asking them, I could actually see it.

Students in the high group also shared how they would “exaggerate” some of the scores in favor of their peers earning higher grades, but Jordan (L) did not support such practices stating, “I’d give them the grade they deserved.”

Students took on multiple and different roles (Moje, 2002a) during RT. Students in the high group embraced the idea of being “teaching experts” whereas Jordan (L) did not view himself in the teaching role required by RT and thus, most times, did not prefer to participate. Jaylen thought switching roles was helpful and later elaborated on how he thought it made learning the material easier, “It helped because it put me on the other side. Instead of being talked to, I'm allowed to talk to other people and teach other people so it made me feel both sides.” Students in the high group explained various teaching strategies they would use to explain scientific concepts to each other. Jaylen (H) described how he used his Cornell Notes for reference during his teaching:

I used my Cornell Notes as guides if I forget or get lost, I can look at it and it can tell me where I'm at and what I left off on. I've got like a backup system. That's how I use my Cornell Notes and my books. Most of the time I try to take it out of my head and look professional.

Shawn (H) described how he used the textbook during his discussions:

I'd like hold it up. You know how you read to little kids, like you show them the pictures and stuff? I'd use that to show where I got my answers from, it has like diagrams in a book. I'd write that same diagram on my paper, showing that's where I got my diagram. I'd just use it just to show them my reasoning for what I did. Show them I didn't just make all this stuff up.
Amari (H) shared their sentiments, but also described how participating in peer-peer discussions also influenced his ability to study and gain confidence in his speaking skills. Amari (H) states, “At first it was different, but I started really liking just speaking, period. I don't know why. I just like to talk a lot, so they always wanted me to be the speaker, so I liked telling people what I learned.” He continued by sharing:

I think reciprocal teaching taught me how to basically speak about something I’ve learned by basically just going over it multiple times and studying, because I’d get into a habit of that, because my study habits aren’t really good at all. So I think that will help with studying and with speaking to your peers or teachers, anybody who asked you about that one section.

Beyond the context of the classroom, students spent time practicing and attending to disciplinary content, vocabulary, and their presentation skills. Even though Jordan’s (L) comments demonstrate he also spent time practicing and preparing, he still did not perceive himself as prepared to teach his peers. Students shared different techniques they would use to prepare for their teaching. Shawn’s (H) comments revealed how he would practice with his mother and brothers, “They just sit at the table and then I'd just read my paper and practice what I'd actually say, but I have done the mirror thing. It's like showing facial expressions.” Jordan’s (L) explanation for preparing echoed Jaylen’s (H):

I would read as much about what I'm going to teach on over and over again to make sure that most of the information stays in my head instead of looking at the paper or the book that you're going to teach on. Just the more you read, the more you retain, the better and easier it is because you don't have to go flipping pages. You already have it in your head. That's what I did. I just studied, and studied, and studied so when the day came I already knew what to do.

Amari (H) described his preparation in the following manner:

If I was already in class, I would probably take it to lunch and take notes on stuff that I need to do while I’m eating. Or I would just be—me and [Aaron] hung out
most of the time and we would just go over our parts together and he would tell me about his and I would tell him about mine, then we would quiz each other and then we would both grade each other on how we did.

Video data from school records showed high, medium, and lower performing students, some of who were not interviewed in this study, using scientific vocabulary to explain concepts to their peers in a student-led, small group discussion, using their textbooks and CN to assist with their explanations, using various questioning techniques, as well as making connections to phenomena in their everyday lives (Moje, 2004; Brown, Reveles & Kelly, 2005; Gomez, 2007). (Characteristics of Seed Plants excerpt 25:22-27:30):

1. **Student 1:** The leaves are the main sites for photosynthesis. Photosynthesis is
2. basically like umm when the leaves uses the suns energy and rays to create uhhh sugar
3. that the roots need to survive. Without the sugar the roots can’t survive, without the
4. water the leaves can’t produce sugar. And ummm (pointing to notes) I wanted to show
5. ya’ll a picture of a seed. It’s a bean. This seed here is a bean, right here, in the little
6. squiggly lines in here, is where the stored food is. Ummm. That little it’s kinda like a
7. leaf it’s like inside of it, inside the leaf already.
8. **Student 2:** Umm Hmm
9. **Student 1:** That’s an embryo. And the surrounding that you see like you see, like when
10. you’re cooking a bean and you see like the little brown part, that’s the seed coat. And
11. ummm, my diagram for the roots is right here. Ummm. The root cap is here. The
12. xylem and phloem are here in the middle. And the root hair uhhh is kinda like a furry,
13. hair kinda and it’s right there on the outside around and ummm ummm
14. **Student 2:** I have a question.
15. **Student 1:** Go ‘head.
16. **Student 2:** Uhh when you say the embryo, what do that do to the bean?
17. **Student 1:** The embryo? The embryo is a [inaudible] plant. It, the embryo takes the
18. stored food and uses the 17: stored food to grow so it starts out a plant, a young seed,
19. and the embryo is inside it already. Then the embryo sees the stored food already
20. inside the seed and it umm the embryo uses the stored food and uses it to grow. And
21. it uses it to grow it’s stem and it’s leaves and ummm, that’s basically what the
22. embryo does. Any more questions? (pauses, looks around) Well umm my questions
23. that I had were ummm, were, why do you think plants, why do you think some plants
24. vascular tissues are different and some are the same? Another question I had is umm
25. if you change the color of water that the plant is in, if you change the color of water
26. will it change the color of the plant?
27. **Student 1:** Ummm Ummm some of my connections were ummm last year in my
28. ummm 5th grade class we did a experiment ummm with how plants need uhh need the
29. sun to go through photosynthesis. Our experiment was we took one plant and we took
30. another plant. One plant we set by the window and another one we kept in the 31. cabinet. And we were going to wait a couple weeks later, pull ‘em back to see the 32. differences. The umm plant next to the window grew more than the plant in the 33. cabinet. The plant in the 34. cabinet barely grew any, but the within like two weeks the plant next to the window 35. was already trying to come up out of the dirt. So our conclusion was that, not having 36. the sun does affect some ummm plants.

37. **Student 1**: And another connection I had was now I know how plants are able to 38. circulate the carbon dioxide and ummm carbon dioxide and water and all that stuff 39. through the plants is the way it does it is actually a little, it’s this microscopic, kinda 40. like an organ I want to say on the plant that opens and shuts, it needs carbon dioxide, 41. it’s stomata opens and carbon dioxide comes in and then it closes and when it wants 42. to release oxygen it opens back up. Any questions?

[student 1 & 2 shake hands giving each other approval and praise, student 3 looks 33. around]

Students felt a sense of accomplishment and empowerment after working 34. collaboratively to help their peers understand what appeared to be difficult content. Even 35. still several of the vocabulary words mentioned in this excerpt were repeatedly 36. mispronounced (e.g. embryo, xylem, and phloem) most likely because students 37. pronounce what they hear and since they had very little exposure to these words or 38. understanding regarding word roots, they did not fully understand how to pronounce 39. them. However, RT did provide the opportunity for students to practice the vocabulary in 40. context so others could hear and then have a person who is more skilled at pronouncing 41. the vocabulary (i.e. teacher or another student) say the word correctly so all students hear 42. and understand the correct pronunciation. Without being given the opportunity to use the 43. vocabulary in context, teachers would struggle to know which students understood the 44. meaning and pronunciation of several vocabulary words. Also throughout the excerpt, 45. students are being given the opportunity to discuss content by listening to their peers 46. create student-centered explanations (lines 9-13), posing and answering questions (lines
14-27), connecting to their personal experiences (lines 27-36), and identifying new learning (lines 37-42). These concepts are all important to increasing comprehension, particularly with students who struggle. Another important feature associated with this excerpt is the relationships and sense of accomplishment shared between the boys. Student 1 (H) and student 2 (M) share a sense of camaraderie and connectedness as demonstrated through their hand shaking at the end of the clip, as well as head nods and eye contact towards each other. Several times throughout the exchange (line 8, line 14) student 2 feels comfortable enough to interject phrases suggesting he agrees with what student 1 is saying and then self-initiates a question at line 14. Although it is clear student 3 is actively listening and following the conversation he does not attempt to enter the conversation and makes very little eye contact with the other two students. In fact, student 3 looks away when he sees the other two shake hands at the end of the clip without inviting him to share in the accomplishment.

**Interactive Cornell note taking as overt instruction.** Interactive Cornell Note taking (iCN) is a systematic process for taking notes during and/or after reading or viewing information, with an overall goal of summarizing the important ideas presented. Students analyze the notes to form questions, make relevant connections to other material and life events, prepare for peer-peer discussion and/or informal/formal assessment. Modifications were made to the original strategy to make it more interactive and focused on improvement. In addition to the original strategy, iCN included a graphic organizer prompting students to illustrate important concepts, explain vocabulary, make predictions, and respond to stems for connections, and questions. Using a 4-point rubric (excellent, good, acceptable, needs work), students a) conducted self-evaluations on the
effectiveness of their note taking and summaries, and b) participated in peer-evaluations to provide criterion-specific feedback to other students on their note taking. Teachers provided a final evaluation, using the 4-point rubric to evaluate the effectiveness of students’ note taking and summary skills.

All students could explain the process they used to implement the strategy. Although Amari (H) suggested, at times, CNT caused him to not want to read (Enriquez, 2013) and JC (M) resisted using the strategy when the content was boring, both including the other participants perceived the strategy as most useful in helping them organize their thoughts. Jordan (L) also valued the strategy and suggested, “I think they should make it like a school thing for like all the schools. I think it can help other people too. A lot of boys, they’re normally not organized with their work and stuff.” The following quotes were representative of each subgroup:

Shawn (H):

It was really easier to organize, cause with notes like other kind of notes, it would take like 3-4 pages to take all these different notes, but this is easier to write, easier to read. It’s more neat and more professional. I know a lot of older people use this type of note taking and it helped me a lot studying and whatnot.

Clarence (M):
It’s organized. I like the way it gets organized. How this is right here. It’s a question, so you would know where to go back about—you go back into the book and you can answer it easily cause it’s right there in your face.

Jordan (L):

It was easier, because if you just take regular notes on the paper, it’s not explained to you where to put your stuff at. It’s not in order. Then when everything’s not in order—

When discussing the benefits and limitations of using CNT across various contexts, Jordan explained a drawback, “Sometimes I didn’t like doing it, cause
sometimes normally people was always gone from the house and for those things I really
didn’t understand, then no one’s home I would just skip it.” In contrast, other students
shared how they perceived the strategy helped prepare them in other classes, for high
school, and college:

Amari (H):

It did, because it would show what I had to improve on and then it would show if
I needed to improve on anything outside of that. So if I was taking notes in a
different class, it would help me improve on that, too.

JC (M):

Yeah, cause when you get to college, you’re expected to know what to write
down and what not to write down. I mean if they’re not taught that, then in
college they won’t know how to take notes and they’ll fail.

Ray (L):

I think they was helpful. I think now if I move on to high school, I think it’s going
to be easier for me because note taking now is very easy since I learned Cornell
note taking in 6th grade.

Overall students perceived they had an awareness and control (New London
Group, 1996) over what was being learned. While several reasons were shared regarding
how they perceived their usage of the strategy, groups shared different reasons for why
they enjoyed using the strategy: they were good at the strategy, it helped them learn the
vocabulary or text features, assisted with lectures, prepared them for the next grade level
or college, focused their reading and helped them read the text more closely and helped
them understand, recall the information, and prepare for tests and quizzes. Specifically,
students in the high group shared the most variety in their responses, touching on every
reason except text features. Shawn (H) and Jaylen (H) explain their experience below:

Shawn (H):
It’s more interactive. When we all read a book and then we do a test over the book, it’s real basic and a lot of people are already used to that. But when you do this, it just looks different. It’s easier to look at and easier to grade. And when you get this rubric, it pinpoints all the things that you did good and all the things you could do better on.

Jaylen (H):

No. I just took normal notes. I’d look at the story and write down every big word, the most important word. Compared to Cornell Notes, it was different. It’s a different way to do it, a more easier way but, at the same time, a more effective way to do it. I never had to do a summary at the end of every note taking. Cornell Notes added that which helped me more understand what I read.

All students in the medium group thought text features were helpful, followed by recalling information and studying for test. JC (M) recalled, “It allowed me to take better notes and remember stuff easier.” Students in the lower group thought the strategy helped them primarily focus on the reading, learn text features, and prepare for the next grade level or college. Ray (L) mentioned, “I think it makes me read more closely because now since this part right here, I know it’s long, but if you—what I’d do, I’d read it and then I sum it all up together.

Only students in the high group shared their process and some of the difficulties they experienced receiving guided practice on the strategy: identifying the most pertinent information, making connections, constructing “beyond the book” questions to science content, and the pacing of lectures during the initial modeling of the strategy (Brown & Ryoo, 2008).

Shawn (H):

I liked it because I think I was fairly good at it. About the connections and questions, I know we had to do like thick questions instead of thin questions. Like I wasn’t really good at that because—it’s not that I didn’t have any questions, but not any like really good juicy questions that I couldn’t really answer if I didn’t
look in my book. Then with the connections, it’s not hard, but it’s not easy making connections to your life from something in the science book.

Jaylen (H):

Because it made you think more than you wanted to think, how to do something, what did I really connect with? I think it made you look through more instead of doing what you usually do and sometimes when you thought you got the wrong thing. You got sidetracked thinking. You just write down what makes sense…It makes you worry about the type of notes that you write down, because you want to write down the most important ones. You’re writing it down and then you’re reading over it like, “Is this really important?”

During the initial modeling and scaffolding of the strategy students described the difficulty involved in reading a section of text whole class, then listening to my think-aloud while taking notes. Jaylen’s (H) last quote explains why students in the high group preferred doing their notes at home instead of in class.

Shawn (H):

Well, if we’re reading as a class, and we’re taking notes—well, taking any kind of notes and reading at the same time is hard, cause you either have to remember or go back. You just can’t—it’s hard to, while you’re reading and still stay with the group, and write stuff down.

Jaylen (H):

Plus you’re going over it on the board so fast and we’re like, “Miss Stewart, slow down. Miss Stewart, slow down.” And you’re like, “In high school or college they’re not going to slow down, so you’ve got to keep up with the pace. So whatever you think is important write down quickly, quickly, quickly. You don’t have to write the same as the board, put it in your own words and know what you’re talking about.” We’re like we can’t keep up with this type of thing, but it really helped when it came to big tests and stuff like that because you always had Cornell Notes to help you.

Jaylen (H):

It gave me more time. When I do it at school, I’ve got like 45 minutes to do everything but at home I’ve got the entire rest of the day to do it and the more time I spend on it, the better I do it instead of being rushed, so doing it at home
helped me. I didn’t have to think fast. I could think slow and get my thoughts together. I don’t have to look at the clock, like when it is over type situation.

In terms of receiving written feedback, students thought the rubric was explicit, improved their note taking skills, and was a motivating factor for their grades. The medium and lower student performing students, excluding Jordan, received science instruction from a different teacher who used a modified version of CNT and did not use a rubric. JC (M) explained, “She gave us all the answers on the Cornell Notes, so really I think everybody got an A.” Ray (L) explained how they were allowed to work in groups and take turns submitting their group’s notes instead of individual notes. LeQuan (L) elaborated on a strategy that was effective for him:

She’d read it. She’d put it on a little smart board and read it. I never read with them. I read and then I read by myself. That’s why I always got it done quicker. I’d read it by myself and take notes.

Jordan (L) mentioned how the rubric helped him reflect on his mistakes with note taking. His peers in the high group agreed:

Shawn (H):

I think the rubric was better because we got the rubric before we got the notes—I mean before we got the Cornell Notes, so we knew what to do. It’s easier once you get a step-by-step thing, it was easier to show exactly how you want something, because you can just do it.

Jaylen (H):

It was confusing at first, but as we kept doing it I got used to it. Every time I do Cornell Notes and I get a bad feedback, it makes me want to do it again and get a good one and good one. Even the fact that I keep getting feedback, “Oh, maybe I’ll get a good feedback this time,” makes me want to keep working and do them over and fixing what I didn’t do right before that gave me the bad grades.
Students in the high and medium groups offered advice for how to improve implementing the strategy. The high group suggested explicit modeling of the strategy and ideas to differentiate its process and implementation.

Jaylen (H):

Make sure the Cornell Notes are organized, because we students get confused easily. So you have to make sure that if somebody gets a paper and has a normal question, that if they take a second look at the paper, they’re like, “Oh, never mind.” You can’t let us guess what’s happening. Everything but the answers has to be on the Cornell Notes, because the way we process it is, “Okay, what do I do first? What do I do second?” If you have numbers, everybody will know what to do.

Students in the medium group, who were taught CNT by another teacher, suggested offering time at the end of the session for students to ask questions and the opportunity to write their CN independently. JC (M) explained, “I would tell them to read over it with the class and have the class do the worksheet by themselves. Cause if they don’t do the worksheet by themselves, then they won’t learn anything.”

*Combined Cornell note taking and reciprocal teaching as critical framing.*

Students in the higher performing group had the opportunity to voice their opinions more readily than the other two groups due to both strategies being combined in their science class. Both discussion and posing questions were valued tenets in their science course. Shawn’s (H) sentiments were indicative of the group’s, “It encouraged, because I like to present my stuff. I like to communicate with everybody else and show what I had. I liked just sharing my stuff.” Students in the medium group related wanting more of an opportunity to discuss the text with their teacher, as indicated by Edward (M), “May be better if they would like make up a question of something they didn’t know
about and ask the teacher later on.” Jordan (L) did not perceive his role as one that involved him voicing his opinion (Laughter & Adams, 2012).

The types of questioning also varied, primarily because of the strategy being used across groups. Students in the high group were able to elaborate on more of a dialogic, authentic style of questioning given their usage of RT, while the other groups were limited to a more didactic, process oriented style of questioning as they referenced the usage of their CNT:

JC (M):

Then right here we would pick two of the questions and answer them on the other side of the line and then we would pick some questions that we have right here and then pick two of them, pick two of the starter questions and then ask a question that we had.

Shawn’s (H) reference to “juicy” questions illustrates the difficulty high performing students experienced when trying to critically frame the text, “It’s not that I didn’t have any questions, but not any like really good juicy questions that I couldn’t really answer if I didn’t look in my book.” Jaylen’s comment regarding rather or not to agree with the text is another example of the high performing students ability to critically examine the text, “… and you’ve got to find out like out of the questions that it asks you, which ones do you really know and which ones can you agree with.”

*Collaborative online inquiry as transformed practice.* According to their website, the *Web-based Inquiry Science Environment* (WISE) is a research-based platform that fosters exploration and science inquiry. Students observe, analyze, experiment, and reflect as they navigate various interactive models. Students explore new ideas and evidence, ponder discrepant events, write reflections, and form fact-based
theories. They collaboratively validate these theories through discussion and model-based testing and refine their ideas using a variety or representational tools.

Of the high performing students and Jordan (L) that participated in the project, each discussed the novelty of using computers in science (Moje, 2000). Amari’s (H) quote typified students in the high group, “I think it was all interactive, so that’s what probably kept me into it, because I don’t like being bored. I like doing hands-on activities and different stuff like that, so the computers really helped.” Although Jordan (L) expressed his preference for learning from the textbook because he perceived the book had more background information, he also appreciated having the opportunity to participate in a different activity using the computers. Jordan (L) thought sequencing the online inquiry activity first, then CN, followed by RT was most desirable which Amari (H) corroborates in a later quote:

I think we need a mix. I think it would balance out the different things you will want to do. So if you were to have a week or half a week of hands-on activities and then the rest of the week would be Cornell Notes. You could alternate them and maybe people would be comfortable with having fun and then actually writing and doing work. I mean you’re actually doing work on the computer, but I think it would just be different.

Diverse intertextual relationships were explained in relation to other texts and their personal lives. Students enjoyed “the mix”—investigating problems online, discussing, collaborating, reading, multitasking, and participating in a “hands-on” activity. Students also thought the online inquiry unit was authentic and relevant to their personal lives (Osborne, 2002; Brown, 2004; Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, Fishman, Soloway, Geier & Tal, 2004; Brown, 2006; O’Brien, Beach & Scharber, 2007; Moje, 2009). Jordan (L) recalled, “I liked learning about it to figure out what it is, cause I got
somebody in my family that has a type of disease like that… Multiple sclerosis.” Jordan also related how the images on the computer assisted him in making sense of the content.

Jaylen (H):

It was better to do it like that, because you’re active but, again, you’re learning, because you’re searching the web and reading. You’re doing many different little fun bits at the same time, which is really just you researching and learning. It was good. I liked it better than what we do now.

Amari (H):

…Because it was based on an actual person and it was something new that I will probably, I don’t know, make a change for. So I’ve really started getting to memorize all this stuff and that’s how it kind of stuck with me.

Participants also mentioned positive identity development (Brown, 2004), the importance of collaboration and selection of student groups. Jordan (L) appreciated having the opportunity to work collaboratively with someone he viewed as friendly. He discussed some confrontation in the beginning of the partnership, but shared how he and his partner reached a resolution and began working together to complete the tasks.

Shawn (H):

It was cool. I felt like a detective because we were investigating this problem and we were finding as we went along with the experiment, we found out what was going on and then we took turns typing and stuff, so that was cool.

**Multiliteracies in the English language arts classroom.** As a culminating activity to *The Civil Rights Movement in Review: A Compilation of My Thoughts* presented in the text section, students composed raps, songs, or poetry (Raw Writing) in dedication to the four girls killed in the Birmingham bombing and their families, then performed a Poetry Slam during a school-wide presentation where community guests were invited to attend. In preparation for their poetry slam presentations, students were
invited to view the documentary *Louder Than A Bomb* at a local theater, which captured the unique and diverse stage performances, teamwork and preparation techniques used by four Chicago-based Poetry Slam teams. Similar to the subthemes described in the science section, the English Language Arts section revealed the same four sub-themes (Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice), but with different pedagogies.

**Raw writing as situated practice.** Tatum and Gue (2010) suggests Raw Writing should extend beyond teaching students how to write or even *writing to learn*, but extend to helping students “write to live” in an effort to document their personal growth as human beings. By creating student writing experiences across what they identify as four platforms: 1) defining self, 2) becoming resilient, 3) engaging others, and 4) building capacity, the authors position Raw Writing as a social act instead of limiting its purpose to solely a school sanctioned activity, which is oftentimes viewed as rote, irrelevant, and uninteresting. In the former, the pedagogy lends itself to accommodating the socio-emotional needs of students and authentic student voice, which are both important for adolescent literacy development.

Students in the high group were motivated by the type of writing they were required to do and the opportunity to share their work school-wide. Prior to the *Raw Writing* assignment, all students watched the trailer of the documentary *Louder Than A Bomb*, while several students attended the class trip to a local theater for the full viewing. The documentary chronicles the lives, teamwork, struggles, perseverance, defeats, and victories of four, inner city, high school Chicago teams preparing for an annual Poetry Slam. High and medium performing students mentioned how watching the video clips
from the *Louder Than A Bomb* documentary also helped motivate their writing. Portfolio data (Appendix M) revealed students blended their knowledge and critique of the Civil Rights Movement with different genres such as rap and poetry to express their thoughts (Emdin, 2010; Varelas, Becker, Luster & Wenzel, 2007). Shawn’s (H) comments were similar to other high and medium performers:

Shawn (H):

> You untapped a different part of creativity, like just thinking something to write. But that’s like it’s pleasuring like a different part of your brain, like satisfies like a love for music and music really drives this generation…I just like writing stuff like this, it’s nice to do. I do it for fun but to do it—cause this was just like popping out of me, so just like these words and watching a video it gave me a lot of inspiration and it did motivate me to try to make it over the top.

With the exception of Jordan (L), all students submitted final written pieces for this project. Jordan (L) acknowledged, “I was thinking about it at first, but then by the time it came I kept procrastinating and it was too late to do it.” Although Ray (L) submitted a final piece he explained his difficulties with the assignment, “…I can’t rhyme. I can write, I can do all that, but I just can’t rhyme.”

Medium performing students described the class atmosphere, which was also supported by comments from their peers in other subgroups. JC (M) explained the class atmosphere stating, “The energy was good, because everybody wanted to write something good, wanted to write a good rap or poem/song. So I think everybody was into the clips.” Edward (M) used another example, to describe the effort and perseverance being put forth in the class.

> Yeah, at first, because—at first I didn’t think I could do it, but I had a very good start and then when I just kept reading that part over and over and it just got me writing some more.
Students recalled being a community of learners as positive experience. They continued to describe a vibrant, diverse learning environment for this project.

Amari (H):

I was, because my bud—we used to always rap in class. We’d just get up in the middle of class or it would be towards the end of the class and we’d just start beating on the table and once we got a beat started, we’d just start free styling. It was me, my friend Brian, Kameron, and Tyrone.

JC (M):

Some people were like—it was kind of noisy, but it was kind of quiet in some parts of the room. Some people were focused on their project and some people thought they were going to do good, so they did it—they just kept talking.

Scaffolded learning as overt instruction. Scaffolded learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009; McDougal, 2009; Slater & Horstman, 2007; Vygotsky, 1976; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) is based on each student’s individual needs and involves the systematic and explicit integration of academic student support by using teacher modeling, mentor texts, graphic organizers, rubrics, self-reflection, peer feedback, and at times “chunking” larger tasks into smaller ones. Although all participants thought Louder Than A Bomb was motivating and helped scaffold their presentation skills, the majority of the students in the lower group did not believe it assisted in preparing them for their presentations. Edward (M) thought having the opportunity to view the documentary assisted him in learning how to share his feelings with others (Moje, 2009).

Edward (M):

Uh-huh, because maybe some people have like emotions that are feeling bottled up and they don’t want to share it with other people and that’s not good at times...I like to write, but not about feelings at first, but now I get used to it since I watched that and before I just started like writing.
From the documentary he learned, “That they’re not afraid to show their feelings. They’re not afraid to tell a whole crowd or audience or their family about how they feel about this and that.” His comments were comparable to other high and medium-performing students who learned how to model their presentations from what they viewed in the documentary. Jaylen (H) said, “…and I get into my poem and I’m starting to raise up my voice and this and that, what I really saw in the little preview on the computer, I tried to copy that.” Shawn (H) went on to say:

… because a lot of people, when they think of rapping, they are poetry, they think it has to rhyme, but it really doesn’t. You can change words and say it different, like differently and rhyme that with something. So it helped a lot of people with the styles of how they were saying it and how to present it and what to do with your hands while you’re standing up on stage. So I think it helped a lot.

Another example of Overt Instruction involved scaffolding the usage of technology in an integrated science and English Language Arts unit, which culminated in a community-wide research presentation. Over an 8-week period, students conducted online research of lesser known African American scientists and inventors in their science classes and composed a research paper in their ELA classes. Students were also provided with books from the school and public libraries. In preparation for a community-wide presentation during Black History Month, students created a multimedia presentation of their findings using PowerPoint. Students were provided with graphic organizers for writing their research paper and creating their multimedia presentation. Prior to their final community-wide presentation, students participated in one small group class presentation, one whole group class presentation. A presentation rubric was used prior to and during the presentation to provide and opportunity for self-reflection, peer-
peer, family, and community member feedback. A community luncheon was served and an African dance team and drummers also performed during the community-wide event.

There were similarities and differences amongst the groups as they used the computer as the primary tool for online research and their group presentation. None of the students had prior experience using PowerPoint Software and only Clarence had experience using a flash drive (Moje, 2009). The rigor associated with this assignment and the technological demands were novel for each group. The high group experienced difficulty with the rigor of the writing, gathering online information that was not readily available, and copyright issues, whereas the medium group struggled to find credible sites, and find access to computers during non-school hours. Also, learning to use the software, hardware and losing data appeared to be a common challenge across all groups, but the high and medium group shared stories of how they were able to overcome the obstacles with the help of family members, teachers, and self-determination, whereas students in the lower group did not have the same success.

Jaylen (H):

I didn’t know there was Power Point until the 6th grade. I didn’t know how to work it out. I had to keep asking how do you save this? I got so irritated every time you were working with anybody else. I’m like when is she coming over. I’m wasting valuable time that I could be researching but, instead I’m trying to figure out how this is working and too scared to click anything for fear I’ll lose everything.

Amari (H):

I think I lost my flash drive once, but I found it somehow someway. It was kind of difficult because I’d never used it before, but my brother and sisters have, so when they were in middle school they had used it. So when they got in high school I kind of just asked them for guidance on how to use everything.

LeQuan (L):
It was complicated. I still don’t know how to save data on it.

Jordan (L):
I don’t really use them much. This year we haven’t really used them like that.

**Socratic seminar as critical framing.** A Socratic Seminar is a framework for the facilitation of whole group discourse based on “essential” open-ended questions. Essential questions are defined as questions that point to the heart of a topic and its controversies and that generate multiple answers and perspectives. Students were reminded hand raising is not necessary during Socratic Seminar, as listening and observing the gestures of others was more prized to determine one’s turn to speak. Prior to implementation, students also received some modeling of a mock Socratic Seminar. The purpose of the Socratic Seminar was to discuss *Male Codes*, a multimedia tool ([www.rogersparkywat.org](http://www.rogersparkywat.org)) to explore the meanings of masculinity among young men. Overwhelmingly positive responses were shared regarding Socratic Seminar. Students across all subgroups agreed that having the opportunity to openly voice their opinions and respectfully argue was important (Wilkinson & Son, 2011). Ray (L) recalled, “I think it gave everybody a chance to talk about the stuff that they thought was interesting.” LeQuan (L) agreed, “That was fun…Just talking about the situation. It looked like everybody was enjoying it.” Amari (H) and Edward (M) shared their sentiments as well:

Amari (H):

It was good. We would know when to stop talking like with the heated parts. If stuff would get too heated and we had to know when to stop so nothing would escalate… It was different, because we had to let other people talk even when we wanted to. It was basically like sharing. You have to share the mic, so that’s what we did. We were very cooperative.

Edward (M):

...
That activity was great. Everybody wanted to speak, to tell how they felt about the things that we had done or read, but you couldn’t interrupt somebody, but we all got to speak open mindedly, no wrong answers or anything like that.

While students in the high and medium group discussed the discipline, self-control, and privilege associated with not having to raise their hands to speak, Ray (L) acknowledged the privilege but admitted some of his peers struggled to gain entry into the discussions and how he subsequently encouraged his more reticent peers to share their thoughts, thus helping them engage in the conversation. Edward (M) explained his thoughts, “We got to speak our minds. We didn’t have to raise our hand and have it up in the air to wait to be called on. We could just talk and go with the flow what we feel about that topic.” Additionally, students in the high group felt more mature, as if they were in a position of authority, and learned to follow the body language of their peers during discussions.

Shawn (H):

…So it was really different that you could actually just say what's on your mind at the time, but be respectful if somebody else is talking or not. It made you feel more than a student, that everybody was equal in the room. Even though you were our teacher, we all felt even, like at an even level and that we could all say what was on our mind at the time.

Shawn (H):

Because when we get older, and you’re in like a board meeting that everybody’s just going to talk like regular people and nobody’s really going to raise their hand and wait for somebody to call on them. Everybody just talks because they can be civilized like that and everybody can just have a simple conversation.

Jaylen (H):

I felt grown, because I hate raising my hand and waiting to get called on. I like when I got to speak out about what I thought, about my feelings on something and I felt like I was the president or on a high like class judge room type of thing where we all, Yeah, but— It got intense.
Overall students’ perceived developing a new understanding from their peers, although sometimes not reaching agreement and difficult, was a beneficial and informative practice. The following comments were illustrative of all students:

Jaylen (H):

I had them little “why would you say that” faces on, like, “really? that’s how he thinks?” And it made me lose a lot of friends but, at the same time, it made me closer to the ones that had the same ideas as I did, because after we left class we kept the conversation through 7th and 8th period. We didn’t let it go. “I can’t believe you thought this and that and this and that.”

Amari (H):

I did, because some people before I came to school, I did not want to come here just because I didn’t want to be around all boys. I didn’t know why my mom put me here, I just thought she was punishing me, but she told me it was better for the future. Then when I started meeting all my friends from the past that I hadn’t seen in a while, it started basically getting to me. I started learning about new people. So I guess it was cool hearing other sides of other people’s lives.

Clarence (M):

I felt like it was good for us to do that because it gave us a chance to talk about what we know about and, if we didn’t know about it and other people knew about it, we’d have to learn from them and they’d tell us what it was about.

*Poetry slam as transformed practice.* The Poetry Slam was presented during a school-wide assembly where community guests were invited to attend, score participants by holding up signs, and then declare first through third place winners similar to the documentary *Louder Than A Bomb*. Students perceived the majority of their peers were motivated to write in order to perform their work (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Shawn (H):

I think they did it more because they wanted to perform it. I think they made sure they did it, because they like to perform. It’s cool to do. I guess.
Jaylen (H):

Yeah, I was motivated. I don’t know if you noticed it, but after watching the movie, when that poetry slam thing was introduced to me, I was in my seat writing. It touched me so deep I’m like hurting for them. They lived life 14 years and I’m only like 11, 12 years old. I’m like, it’s not fair for them to have their lives done like that for no reason. That made me appreciate that I’m still here and I’m still living and breathing and growing up.

Amari (H):

I was nervous. I was real motivated, because Brian, he could really rap and he was doing my beat.

Although the Poetry Slam was voluntary, two students from the high (Jaylen and Amari) and medium (Clarence and Edward) groups respectively and one student from the lower (LeQuan) group presented their final pieces to the school and outside community members. Ray’s (L) comments are representative of the sentiments expressed by the lower performing students who did not present.

No, because I was already frightened that I had to talk to the whole school about it and I don’t want to get up there and try to rap and then end up messing up and I get booed off.

Although Shawn and JC also did not present, their comments related to their lack of participation did not appear to be motivated by fear and embarrassment. Students appeared excited about the opportunity to present their work and embraced the concept of teamwork. Clarence (M) explained, “The team helped a lot. We all worked together and it just came how it was cause we all worked together.” Shawn (H) described the pulse of the student body by stating, “Everybody was just going crazy, like Brian and Amari was at the bottom of the stage making beats with the pencils.” Other students described their experiences in the following manner:
Jaylen (H):

I went up there like—[another student] went up there and he read his poem and then I went up there. Right when I heard my name called, that’s—at first you go in and you don’t realize, ______ you’ve got your paper in hand and then when you hear “Jaylen,” I’m like, oh, my gosh. Everybody’s eyes are on me. The lights, the microphone, everything. You start to get scared, but you’ve still got to go up and do it and I started reading my poem and I get into my poem and I’m starting to raise up my voice and this and that, what I really saw in the little preview on the computer, I tried to copy that. I didn’t need to copy it. It just came naturally. I’m like wow. And after I was done with it, I took a deep breath and everybody was clapping.

Amari (H):

I was kind of used to the spotlight. When I’m in the spotlight, I kind of dance. I’m a dancer. So it was like my first time rapping. I’ve sung in front of people, too, but it was the first time rapping in front of people, so I was kind of nervous, but I just went with the flow. I think I messed up at the end, but I kept going.

Discussion

In this chapter, a brief overview of each section was provided along with a thematic analysis of the differences across the cases. From this analysis five findings were identified and will be discussed.

Across all cases, a multiliteracies approach was perceived as motivating, personally meaningful, transformative, and contributing to their comprehension of disciplinary content, although in practice Jordan’s (L) comments suggested he was rarely prepared for science class and did not submit his final written project for his English Language Arts class.

In 1983, 40 percent of seniors reported receiving meaningful schoolwork from their teachers, however in 2000 only 28 percent of seniors reported doing so (Zucker, 2008). In order to create an environment that speaks to students’ living and learning experiences, stakeholders need to gain a more in-depth and comprehensive view of
students and the factors that motivate them to excel. Zucker (2008) suggested educators must make the curriculum more challenging by organizing instruction around assignments that demand higher-order thinking, communication, and making connections beyond school. His research demonstrates that instruction is strengthened by the kinds of questions teachers ask and the teacher’s ability to teach students how to use the material they learn. In the present study, students recall different instances of being actively involved and motivated in the classroom context. Mainly their perceptions appeared to be influenced by their preference for peer-peer discussion and collaboration over teacher-led instruction (Situated Practice/Critical Framing), explicit instruction with formative feedback (Overt Instruction/Critical Framing), and the opportunity to share and practice their learning beyond the context of school (Transformed Practice).

Further analysis revealed two subfindings supporting a multiliteracies framework as motivating, personally meaningful, and transformative since many of these activities extended beyond the classroom:

The requirement to present their work to peers, family, and the community was perceived as an authentic, real-world experience. The high and medium groups expressed nervousness and discomfort, but appreciated the opportunity to demonstrate their oratory skills, while the lower group expressed fear, some avoidance techniques, and very little transformation from the process.

Referencing the Poetry Slam, Amari (H) described his nervousness while Ray (L) expressed his fear for speaking in front of a whole group of people and the risk of being ridiculed for messing up. In another project, integrating science and English Language Arts, similar results were found in the transcript data. Students also selected an African
American scientist or inventor to research and present to the community and their peers. Again, students in the high and medium groups were nervous, and somewhat uncomfortable sharing their presentations to a small group of their peers, family members, and the community, but they also related they believed they were engaged in the learning process because they had to “do something” with the material and not just learn it for the sake of learning. Two students in the lower group admitted to avoiding doing the assignment so they would not have to present their findings.

*Technology integration was perceived favorably, but differently across disciplines. While the high and medium groups negotiated extra assistance from family members and teachers, as well as their own perseverance to help them overcome the technological obstacles they encountered, the lower group did not appear to have the resources to offset those obstacles.*

Learning how to use computer software, hardware, and losing data was a common challenge across all groups, however the high and medium group were able to develop strategies to assist them in completing the academic tasks, whereas students in the lower group did not have the same success. Moje (2009) discussed how although many people believe all youth are “plugged in” when it comes to technology, the barriers in some low socioeconomic communities are still persistent in terms of access and the manner in which young people are utilizing the tools. Findings from the reading inventory survey supported Moje’s stance as each group reported enjoying using social media, however only the high and medium performers were able to, with extensive support, integrate technology into the classroom to accomplish academic tasks.
In the collaborative online inquiry unit, student responses were supportive of integrating technology, but not at the expense of the textbook. Students thought the textbook could be used to balance the integration of technology and share another perspective on the same ideas. Clarence (M) explained how at times during his eighth grade year, viewing videos on a particular concept did not give him enough time to fully process the material and he needed the textbook to go back and review the information more closely. Similarly, Jordan (L) also expressed his preference for using the textbook because of the way the information is presented. However, in the English Language Arts classroom, students did not share limitations to using non-print texts. Students were appreciative of having the balance reading various non-print texts such as the 4 Little Girls documentary, songs, raps, poems, as well as various images, coupled with reading printed texts related to the same topic. Students thought these practices gave them a more comprehensive view of the topic.

These findings support Tatum’s (2005) description of a student’s “flow” experience—the connection boys experience when the texts they read are personally meaningful, motivating, and relates to their immediate needs and interests. Although in his paper Tatum is referencing how students reach their “flow” with texts, I argue the same can be true with pedagogies:

1. **There is a feeling of control.** During their peer-peer discussions and Raw Writing activities, students appreciated the autonomy to discuss content and questions with their peers, as well as writing about a topic they viewed as important, having the opportunity to share it beyond the school context (Poetry Slam), and in the form of their preference (rap music). Similar to Jocson (2006), participants had
the opportunity to reexamine their roles as learners as they discussed the power differentials associated with several of the pedagogies. For example, peer-led discussions and not raising their hands to speak during Socratic Seminars created more agency for them as learners. Jocson (2006) also mentioned how the male participant in her study mixed genres, using in-school and out-of-school literacies, conducting research to demonstrate his understanding of school-based concepts.

2. *The activities provide an appropriate level of challenge.* Prior to sixth grade, participants had not participated in Cornell Notetaking or Reciprocal Teaching and expressed initial frustration with the process because of the difficulty. They also had not learned how to successfully integrate technology into their learning experience. Students had not learned to navigate Powerpoint software or flash drives to save data. Since they viewed these skills as “basic” and necessary to fully participate in academic life in their current context, they made every attempt to meet the challenges and expectations set before them. Also, particularly with difficult concepts like science, students should be given a balance of literacy experiences with opportunities to build their background knowledge so they do not become overly frustrated with learning the material. It is understood “hands-on” pedagogies have a prominent, and increasingly more important role in the science classroom, but because in many cases the content is new to students, they may need more than “hands-on labs” to truly grasp the content. In the ELA classroom, perhaps the appreciation for technology and other non-print text was more widely accepted because many of the students already had some working
background knowledge of the concepts being discussed, while in their science class this may not have been the case.

3. **Clear goals and feedback are included.** Students appreciated knowing, up front, what they were responsible for knowing, and to what degree they needed to know it. Clarity and feedback proved to be critical factors in their academic performance. The use of written feedback (i.e. rubrics), verbal explanations, modeling, and practice were used to set clear learning goals and offer feedback.

4. **The focus is on the immediate.** Their immediate need to be accountable to one another by learning new and difficult concepts (Cornell Notetaking) in an effort to explain them to their peers (Reciprocal Teaching) was important. They also enjoyed collaborating with their peers (Online Genetics Inquiry Project) to learn more about genetics so they could pose questions to an invited and respected guest speaker from the community who had cystic fibrosis, a genetic disorder. They viewed discussing stereotypes promulgated by the media related to boys (Socratic Seminar) as immediate, as well as creatively responding to a social condition they viewed as unjust (Poetry Slam). The majority of the pedagogies led to practices that reached beyond their individual scope to embrace a more communal sense of purpose. Likewise Kinloch’s (2010) participants, Phillip and Khaleeq, also focused on an immediate need in their community by exploring the issues of gentrification in their Harlem neighborhood.

Finding ways to keep African American males motivated and engaged in the learning process is significant because other studies (Moore & Lewis, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003) suggest African American males are disconnected from the learning
process because the learning is irrelevant to their everyday experiences which may subsequently lead to classroom discipline issues, suspensions, and ultimately dropping out of school altogether. There are several studies that detail systemic issues, beyond classroom instruction, that make it difficult for students in urban settings to excel. However, the present study departs from existing studies focusing on urban education (Anyon, 1980, 1997) in that students did not perceive their instruction as “cognitively low-level, unchallenging, rote material” (p. 7), but appropriately challenging and a solid foundation for learning how to actively participate in the learning process. Still for complex cases like Jordan (L), there are likely other factors (i.e. peer relationships) that should be addressed to better meet his social and academic needs.

*Peer relationships impact student learning.*

Peer relationships can positively and negatively shape a student’s learning experience (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Henfield et al., 2008; Noguera, 2003; Vega, et al., 2012). According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), one plausible explanation for the underachievement of African American students is they do not want to be perceived by their peers as “acting white,” oftentimes equated with high academic performance. Noguera (2003) discussed how:

Peer groups are also likely to impose negative sanctions on those who violate what are perceived as established norms of behaviors and who attempt to construct identities that deviate significantly from prevailing conceptions of racial and gender identity. (p. 444)

For example, in Henfield’s (2008) study of 12 gifted African American students, of which five were males, the students reported downplaying their academic efforts in an effort to appear “normal” and not face ridicule. The exception was Carlos who used his
association in sports activities to negotiate his academic identity with being accepted by his peer group. He believed since he participated in sports activities, his peers accepted him as being “smart Carlos” and would ask him for assistance in class. Also, as noted in the work of Hovart & Lewis, African American students struggle to maintain identities in two worlds: high performance in a gifted program with mostly White peers and friendships with their lower-performing African American peers, again causing them to diminish their academic effort, but this time to “spare their peers’ feelings” (quoted in Vega et al., 2012, p. 124).

In the current study, Jordan’s (L) comments are illustrative of the dissonance he faced with his peers. While the other boys shared stories of their collective identity as brothers, (Ogbu, 2004; Vega, et al., 2012), Jordan shared his peer’s nonchalant and indifferent attitude towards their relationship, “I think some of them don’t care. Most of them don’t even really pay attention. It’s just like if he makes it, he makes it.” Jordan’s feelings of isolation in relation to his peers may have led to his lack of preparation in the graded peer-peer discussions, which comprised a significant amount of instructional time. Similarly many of the Raw Writing assignments, students could work collaboratively in teams to develop their ideas. Jordan may have felt isolated and ill-equipped to work independently on the assignment, leading to his decision to eventually and perpetually not turn in his assignments at all. Students across all cases, detailed instances of ensuring group accountability and effortful attempts at assigned tasks. This study supports the social sanctions many African American students face when their academic identities do not mesh with the majority. The difference in this study is the majority of the students
embraced the identities related to high academic performance and effort, while students who demonstrated low effort academically were the minority.

While Ogbu (2004) outlined five coping strategies used by African American students to negotiate the demands of living in two worlds (Du Bois & Edwards, 1989), cultural and linguistic assimilation, accommodation without assimilation, ambivalence, resistance or opposition, and encapsulation his last strategy (encapsulation) seems to be most closely supported by the current study because the students were not opposed to “acting White” because they did not associate their desire to excel academically with whiteness or using their African American Venacular English (AAVE) to discuss, explain, or express concepts as oppositional. In their view, low academic effort was “abnormal” and high academic performance and effort was “normal” and expected.

Overall the other boys perceived their experiences with collaboration and peer influence as a motivating force. Recall how students rarely wanted to disappoint each other or let their team down, they shared how working together was a positive experience influencing their academic outcomes:

Jaylen (H):

Well, when I wasn't prepared to teach, they were like, "Oh, Jaylen, you didn't do your work.” They're making me feel bad like we had, "We had all this time, but, Jaylen, we're not going to be smart now. You made us dumb.” It made you feel bad about yourself. When you did do your work, you're getting claps, you're getting--they're paying attention to you and you feel like you're the boss. You feel good. But when you don't take it seriously, it's really bad.

Clarence (M):

The team helped a lot. We all worked together and it just came how it was cause we all worked together.

LeQuan (L):
That was fun…Just talking about the situation. I looked like everybody was enjoying it.

This finding is significant because it highlights exemplars of the positive and negative academic orientations African American males negotiate due to the role of peer influence. It also considers how lower-performing students, who are not socially accepted by their peers, may be further disenfranchised by the types of pedagogies they are expected to take up in the classroom.

*Scaffolding and combing Cornell Notes with Reciprocal Teaching was perceived as a beneficial practice to support scientific literacy, although Jordan (L) did not embrace the required “teacher” identity role. In the field of adolescent literacy it is generally understood that comprehension is greatly influenced by the reader (prior knowledge, motivation etc.), the text (content, organization, vocabulary etc.), context (school, classroom etc.) and the pedagogies used to engage readers (Sweet & Snow, 2003). Several studies support the use of direct and explicit instruction where intentional and focused time is spent teaching students how and why to use certain strategies, given time to practice the strategies, and receive feedback on their progress (Alston, 2012; McDougal, 2009; RAND, 2003). Comprehension instruction using discussion-based approaches, particularly peer-led, requires students to share more elaborate explanations by integrating more content knowledge and their experiences when compared to teacher-led discussions (Almasi, 1995; Lemke, 1989; Meyer, 2010). Further, researchers who explore science talk agree discourse is an important part of the learning process (Gallas, 1995; Lemke, 1989; Roth, 1996) and that in-school and out-of-school communication
patterns need not be in conflict with one another (Brown, 2004, 2006; Brown & Ryoo, 2008; Emdin, 2010).

In the present study, participants in the high group preferred peer-led discussions (RT) over teacher-led discussion primarily because of the opportunity to receive peer feedback, take on multiple and different roles, experience group accountability, and listen to each other explain various scientific concepts. Jaylen commented:

Instead of having it taught to us, we got a chance to teach somebody else and learn from the person we’re teaching, cause we kept switching back and forth on who’s teaching who. Then instead of learning from the teacher, we can learn from each other and that makes—that makes it easier.

While verbalizing their thoughts and discussing science content, students are better able to grapple with the vocabulary and learn how to “speak the text’s language” (Lemke, 1989) which he asserts is a new language for most students. Lemke critiqued the procedural patterns of most classrooms indicating they limit opportunities for students to “make the text talk in their own voices” (p. 138). In contrast, participants in this study were granted such opportunities, although Jordan (L) rarely participated in the discussions, which supports Brown’s (2004) definition of Opposition Status. According to Brown, students form Discursive Identities along a continuum as a tool to manage the possible cultural mismatch between the science discourse required in school and the various discourse genres they speak out of school: Opposition Status (avoids using scientific language), Maintenance Status (uses scientific language, but shifts to nonscientific genre to maintain cultural identity), Incorporation Status (some mastery of scientific language, attempts to fully incorporate scientific language into their vocabulary), and Proficiency Status (full incorporation of scientific discourse into their
everyday classroom practice). When analyzing video data, Jordan shrugs his shoulders to indicate he doesn’t know the answer being asked by one of his peers. He also shared how he was rarely prepared to teach his peers, although he practiced. He admitted procrastinating and did not view himself as knowledgeable enough to assume the teacher role. Jordan also mentioned having very little support at home assisting with his note taking skills, a prerequisite for RT. Although Jordan “employed several strategies to avoid using science discourse, including denying knowledge of answers, avoiding discourse opportunities, and yielding speech opportunities to fellow classmates” (p. 824), from this data set it would be difficult to conclude his avoidance tactics were due to a cultural mismatch instead of peer rejection, low self-esteem, poor grouping strategies, and lack of support from home. The other students participating in RT demonstrated Proficiency Status in that during their discussions the technical vocabulary evident in science discourse was used extensively, and in conjunction with their everyday (vernacular) language to more fully explain scientific concepts (Brown & Ryoo, 2008). In addition to various Discursive Identities, students were also exposed to various transaction patterns that support and constrain their communication patterns in the classroom. Emdin’s (2010) findings suggested higher level transactions (Levels 3 and 4) were perceived favorably by students in that they believed their teachers valued their input and they more closely resembled the out-of-school discourse patterns most familiar to students. Classrooms with Level 4 transactions were described as students sitting in circles explaining scientific concepts to their peers and heightened use of gestures, as documented in the current study. Level 1 transactions revealed heightened use of
gestures, exchanges were only with peers, and there was no focus on science in the discussions.

Discussion improves comprehension, even with lower-performing students (Reninger, 2007) and can be strengthened when students have some background knowledge of the topic at hand. Unlike with literary text, oftentimes students, particularly in urban settings, lack enough background to discuss scientific concepts due to their lack of class engagement and their years of exposure to underdeveloped scientific practices (Brown, 2004; Emdin, 2010). However all students were able to use CN independently which contributed to building their background knowledge prior to participating in peer-led discussions. Slater & Horstman (2002) explained how allowing groups of students to work collaboratively while incorporating strategies would benefit their independent reading practices, ultimately increasing their comprehension of the text. The researchers found this to be true because, “The processing that was once accomplished between learners in the group will eventually be accomplished within individual students” (p. 166).

Students shared how CN allowed them to organize their thoughts, read the text more closely, question, and prepare for peer-led discussion.

Although Cornell Notetaking and Reciprocal Teaching both required explicit instruction, modeling, written feedback, and practice and was perceived as critical to students’ academic success, the same was true for pedagogies used in in the ELA course. When discussing public presentations in ELA Jaylen explained:

We need more practice on it. We need more subjects that involve that type of thing... You can’t have like nine months only do one thing. How is that going to help us later on? This [presentations] is going to keep coming at us and coming at
us and we don’t have no experience with this and it’s going to be hard. We need more subjects, more things to do with presenting stuff.

Edward also shared how having the opportunity to study skilled writers was an added bonus for him while viewing the documentary *Louder Than A Bomb*:

I like to write, but not about feelings at first, but now I get used to it since I watched that and before I just started like writing.

Participants discussed how the use of graphic organizers was necessary for writing their research papers.

JC:

It helped because it told me what I needed to put and in which paragraph. It was like—kind of like an outline of what my story would be like, so it was helpful.

Jordan:

It’s step by step so it helps.

According to participants, prior to sixth grade, they had not received explicit instruction, modeling, feedback, and practice regarding how to write a research paper, construct “beyond the book” questions, deliver a public presentation, or participate in a whole-group, seminar-type discussion with conflicting viewpoints. As in the science course, lower-performing students stressed the benefits of these practices and of having a rubric to clearly outline the goals of the assignment and receive feedback (Tatum, 2005). These findings are consistent with scholars who demonstrated positive outcomes with African American students by explicitly and repeatedly targeting the skills students need to become academically successful. It is important to note these scholars do not support rote or inauthentic practices, but rather a balanced approach with intellectual rigor. Alston (2012) found explicit teaching and targeted strategy use provided students with the
necessary supports to gain skills in becoming better writers. Participants in McDougal (2009) explained how students learn better when a teacher goes beyond just giving them the assignment or directions for the assignment. Students prefer teachers to “break it down,” explain how to do the assignment “or how to engage in a given process step by step, in easy understandable language” (p. 437-438). Shawn explained:

I think the rubric was better because we got the rubric before we got the notes—I mean before we got the Cornell Notes, so we knew what to do. It’s easier once you get a step-by-step thing, it was easier to show exactly how you want something, because you can just do it.

Also, Palinscar & Brown (1984) discussed how for students, “‘finding the good right question’ was the most difficult activity” (p.). Shawn agreed, “…it’s not that I didn’t have any questions, but not any like really good juicy questions that I couldn’t really answer if I didn’t look in my book.”

Scaffolding and combing Cornell Note Taking with Reciprocal Teaching is important for urban African American males because according to NCES (1996), in order for students to be considered scientifically literate they should be able to: a) ask, find, determine questions that emerge from curiosity about their everyday experiences, b) understand basic scientific facts and their meaning, as well as c) engage in a range of social conversations about scientific text. Cornell Note Taking and Reciprocal Teaching provides students with the opportunity to engage in those types of practices.

Many urban African American males scientific literacies have been underdeveloped throughout their academic careers (Brown, 2004; Brown, 2005; Brown, 2006; Brown, Reveles & Kelly, 2005; Brown & Ryoo, 2008; Emdin, 2010, Emdin, 2011) resulting in low vocabulary and language development, background knowledge, and
comprehension of content. Since students generally speak what they hear, students need to time to practice scientific vocabulary and the nuances of the language so they gain a better understanding of what the words mean in context and how to pronounce them correctly. In general conversation, students use words and language differently than science textbooks, and sometimes even teachers. With Reciprocal Teaching students can use the power of their own language to explain otherwise difficult concepts. Oftentimes students do not have a solid command of scientific content because it is such a specialized, technical, and at times abstract discipline, which makes it difficult to apply their understanding in labs, discussion, or written assignments. Therefore, when students participate in practices such as combined Cornell Note Taking and Reciprocal Teaching, they can build their background knowledge by reading the textbook and other resources, talking to their peers, then exploring labs and various activities. When students understand the vocabulary, background knowledge, and have the opportunity to discuss scientific concepts, they gain a better understanding of the content. Students can then apply their understanding in labs, writing tasks, and other discussions.

By combing pedagogies like Cornell Note Taking and Reciprocal Teaching students also gain the opportunity to increase their scientific literacies and become more confident in their identity development. Lower-performing students like Jordan gain the benefit of hearing various concepts explained in basic terms. Lastly, student motivation is increased because the practices are situated (New London, 1996) in a manner they view as valuable—talking to their peers. The consistent written feedback students received allowed them to have an awareness and control over their learning process, which also supports Tatum’s “flow” experience: a) feeling of control (peer-led discussion), b)
appropriate level of challenge (scientific content), c) clear goals and feedback (rubrics), and d) focus on the immediate (team accountability).

In each chapter, context, text, and pedagogies respectively, a detailed analysis of the themes and subthemes were presented followed by a discussion of the findings. Overall, urban adolescent African American males perceptions of contexts, texts, and pedagogies differed based on their achievement levels, however there were several similarities across all cases, which students found to be Enabling. In chapter seven, a summary of the findings and conclusion is provided.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to extend the research that focuses on the interplay of factors that affect reading achievement for African American students by examining the perceptions of high, medium, and low performing adolescent male literacies in an urban context. The research question used to guide this study asked:

How do the perceptions of urban adolescent African American males’ experiences with Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts differ based on their achievement levels?

In the previous chapter, the key findings related to this question were presented and discussed (Appendices C-E). The 15 key findings by section were:

*Enabling Context: The “Value-Added”*

- All students perceived their parents had high expectations for their academic success.
- Home routines were evident, but varied in consistency across achievement levels.
- Students perceived their administrator as highly relational and had high expectations for their success.
- Student-teacher relationships differed based on achievement levels. Higher-performing students reported having a stronger connection to their teachers compared to the other two cases.
- With the exception of Jordan, students perceived their peers as brothers.
Lower-performing students had less access to intentional socio-emotional support (i.e. Community Development Day) when compared to high and medium-performing students, but more access to one-on-one school programming options like mentoring activities, which were not sustained past the first year.

Enabling Texts: Intertextuality in Print and Non-print

- The science textbook was rarely used prior to and after sixth grade.
- After their sixth grade year, at times, the science textbook was used as a form of punishment.
- Lower-performing students expressed a priority preference for using the science textbook.
- All students used intertextuality and hybrid forms of literacy with print and non-print texts to create meaning, critique social conditions, and explore self and others, but the medium and lower groups primarily focused on text-self relationships.

Enabling Pedagogies: A Multiliteracies Approach

- Across all cases, a multiliteracies approach was perceived as motivating, personally meaningful, transformative, and contributing to their comprehension of disciplinary content, although in practice Jordan’s (L) comments suggested he was rarely prepared for science class and did not submit his final written project for his English Language Arts class.
- The requirement to present their work to peers, family, and the community was perceived as an authentic, real-world experience. The high group expressed nervousness, but felt responsible for the learning of others, the medium groups
expressed nervousness, but were open to trying, and both groups appreciated the opportunity to demonstrate their oratory skills. The lower group expressed fear, some avoidance techniques, and very little transformation from the process.

- Technology integration was perceived favorably, but differently across disciplines. While the high and medium groups negotiated extra assistance from family members and teachers, as well as their own perseverance to help them overcome the technological obstacles they encountered, the lower group did not appear to have the resources to offset those obstacles.

- Peer relationships impact student learning.

- Scaffolding and combing Cornell Notes with Reciprocal Teaching was perceived as a beneficial practice to support scientific literacy, although Jordan (L) did not embrace the required “teacher” identity role.

Overall, students perceived their school context added significant value to their lives and school performance. Higher performing students perceived they had more access to consistent home routines, positive student-teacher relationships, and intentional socio-emotional school support. Students perceived their level of access to intentional socio-emotional school support was directly proportional to their achievement levels. Peer relationships across all subgroups positively impacted learning. With the exception of Jordan (L), students relied on building camaraderie and team accountability to strengthen their learning experience. Jordan perceived his isolation beyond the classroom interfered with his peer-peer classroom interactions, particularly in small group settings. Having a unique overall school context is a very important factor in considering achievement for African American males. While oftentimes in literature what the teacher
does in the classroom is touted as most critical, and I do not deny this concept in my findings, but I also think more attention should be placed on the overall structure of the school context and how those features, such as intentional socio-emotional support, have been leveraged to strategically assist African American males in negotiating their socio-emotional needs which is missing throughout the school day in most programs.

Across all cases, a multiliteracies pedagogical approach was perceived as motivating, personally meaningful, transformative, and contributing to their comprehension of disciplinary content. Lower-performing students did not embrace pedagogies that required them to stretch beyond non-traditional classroom roles. Students in the lower group also perceived less access to resources at home to assist them in overcoming the technological obstacles faced during the school day, which was much different than their peers in the other groups who shared detailed stories of family members, teachers, and the self-determination they used to negotiate technological setbacks. Traditionally, lower-performing students are exposed to a completely different curriculum in schools when compared to their higher-performing counterparts. In part, this study attempted to show how when all students, regardless of their skill level, are exposed to high levels of learning they can still make progress without having to “water down” the curriculum. These lower-performing students were still learning to enact the highly prized communication and thinking patters some of their peers were already accustomed to using in the classroom. Additionally, higher-performing students generally have more assets and have been exposed to more experiences, sometimes even explicitly through workshops or seminars, that focus on teaching them how to be resourceful and negotiate obstacles. Students with less assets (i.e. lower-performing students) struggle to
find ways to negotiate obstacles, which again points to the need for asset-building approaches to be taken up in schools through creative school programming structures.

Lastly, although for the most part, only high-performing were able to extend their intertextual connections of various texts beyond themselves to include connections to other texts and the world, all students perceived non-print forms of text as valid and important resources to assist them in comprehending various concepts. When used meaningfully as an instructional tool, and not as a form of punishment, students embraced using the science textbook. Lower-performing students were more pronounced in their preference for using the science text to assist them in tackling new concepts, but in the ELA classroom documentaries and other non-print texts were welcomed and expected additions to their learning repertoire. I suspect this may be because students are much more familiar with the concepts and vocabulary presented in the ELA classroom since most of the concepts are traditionally taught in a spiraling fashion. Whereas, students’ background knowledge and exposure related to science content may be limited, causing a gap in understanding therefore providing pedagogy to help students grasp those topics is perceived as welcoming and empowering.

According to RAND (2002), these factors (readers, texts, pedagogies) should not be considered in isolation, but in relation to the other and inside of a larger school context. In this study, high-performing students benefited from a synergistic relationship between texts, pedagogies, and a context that supported and affirmed their identity, whereas medium and lower-performing students’ synergistic relationships were also influenced by context, but at varying degrees (Appendix M). The synergy between lower-performing students and their context was not as tight as the high and medium students.
Therefore, although they shared some of the same perceptions regarding the texts and pedagogies as their high and medium performing peers, their distance from the context (i.e. peers, teachers, intentional socio-emotional support) gave them more opportunities to distance themselves from learning and benefiting from the intentional socio-emotional support provided by the school.

In this final chapter, I will summarize the significance of new information unearthed through the study findings. I will also discuss the implications these findings have for parents, administrators, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers, as well as the limitations in this study and possible lines of inquiry for future research.

**Significance and New Learning**

Extant studies illustrate there are multiple factors contributing to low reading achievement levels ranging from family and community background, teacher quality, lack of cultural synchronization, opportunity gaps, homework, and parent expectations to name a few. The field has shown there are several linked factors at play. The current study confirmed these conclusions, this time drawing on the perceptions of urban adolescent African American males to provide a more lucid understanding of how although the relationship between multiple factors is extremely complex, these factors can be used to support academic achievement for African American males. The pedagogy of multiliteracies approach offers a counter-narrative to the “African American Males as Failures” meta-narrative—blending hybrid forms of literacies to discuss, learn and present science content. Further, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of curricular and instructional supports to minimize academic challenges for African American males in science. To my knowledge, there has not been another study to
compare the differences of high, medium, and lower performing African American male students’ perceptions of informational and literary texts, school contexts, as well as science and English language Arts pedagogies in the same study. Doing so has added some other layers of understanding regarding how to better support positive learning outcomes from traditionally underperforming students.

First, regardless of achievement level, discussion-based pedagogies using informational, literary, and non-print text were perceived favorably. Although, Jordan (L) rarely participated in the science discussions, this was not the case in his English Language Arts class where the discussions were more dialogic. In science class, students were expected to assume the role of “teacher,” an identity Jordan did not embrace. He was clearly disconnected from his peers, thus unintentionally isolated from much of the learning process in his science class. Although video data shows Jordan making attempts at teaching, using scientific vocabulary, and listening to his peers discuss scientific content, we can assume even his passive participation may have benefited his understanding better than making the attempt to understand the text by himself without the support and discussion of his peers.

Building a positive male identity is a major thrust at the Boys School, part of which is doing well academically. Interestingly, all participants embraced being called a “scholar” and desired to do well in school because the identity was intentionally built into the culture and programming of the school. The role reversals were extremely evident in this environment, as students who were on the fringes, the ones who were not performing well, were not considered the “cool kids” by their peers. There was a distinct pressure from peers to perform high academically. In other words, it was not “cool” to be low-
performing, nor did students view their high performance as “acting white”. Although students in the lower group embraced the idea of being a “scholar,” it appeared as though the primary benefit was their academic achievement, but this was not enough to build their confidence in other areas (i.e. relationships with teachers, presentation skills, leadership roles in the classroom etc.). In order to bolster their socio-emotional development, the lower-performing students may have benefited from more active participation in the creative school programming options where such skills were emphasized.

As previously discussed, the impact of peer relationships in the classroom and in terms of identity development was important, but the student-teacher relationship should also not be underestimated. Students, again regardless of achievement level, tolerated dense and “boring” reading assignments from science texts mainly because they were required to apply the learning and they did not want to disappoint their peers by not being prepared, but also because they trusted and respected their teachers. On several occasions participants mentioned not wanting to disappoint their teachers. They wanted to meet their teacher’s high expectations and trusted their teachers’ understanding regarding the knowledge and skills they would need to be academically successful. Their trust and respect transcended ethnicity and gender to focus solely on mutual respect. Students made mention of their teachers being “mother-like” and having high expectations for their learning. A salient point here is students, rather doing reading or doing an experiment, they appreciated being actively engaged in the learning process.

As I employ Green’s (2012) double-dutch methodology and reflect on my own practice as a science educator, I realize my own epistemological orientations to literacy
were evident in my instruction. I allowed my beliefs about reading and discussing science to have more priority than experiments. As an educator, time is never on our side and I often felt conflicted with how to best construct my lessons to allow for optimal understanding. While I did incorporate several “hands-on” activities to introduce, elaborate, or demonstrate understanding on various scientific topics, most of my instruction focused on helping students learn how to learn from informational text. Now, given the wealth of research on multimodal texts, with many experiments occurring online and in collaboration with others across spaces, I would certainly look for more ways to balance these practices into a science class.

Another significant dimension of new learning entailed the manner in which participants described Enabling. Although prior to the study I viewed the texts, pedagogies, and contexts as Enabling, I only “penciled in” the word as part of the title because I was not certain how participants would perceive the various factors. I suppose it could be argued that since all the participants showed some level of growth on their standardized tests, and now we understand several other positive outcomes they were able to demonstrate (multiliterate lives with various intertextual linkages), then the factors presented in this study (texts, pedagogies, and contexts) could be considered Enabling. However, what if their perceptions told us they had a horrid experience, yet still made gains? This study helped illuminate what urban adolescent African American males mean by Enabling, creating an image for the necessity to consider texts, pedagogies, and contexts in the definition:

_They contribute to a healthy psyche._
Participants discussed how texts involving music, particularly raps, were deeply connected to their emotions, experience, and positive male identity. While initially it was difficult to understand how a science textbook could be considered Enabling, students shared how it contributed to them learning scientific concepts, which made them feel more empowered as learners since it built their background knowledge and introduced them to language and topics they did not know. Pedagogies such as Raw Writing gave them the opportunity to express their feelings without the constraints of being right or wrong, while Socratic Seminar helped them feel “grown” and in control of their learning. Within the context of their school, programming such as advisory helped them “feel as if their school knew how students learn” and that students need to sometimes take a break from academics to focus on the social-emotional needs of students to keep a balance. Being referred to as “scholars” also appeared to have a positive impact on their psyche, as many participants expressed desiring to live up to the expectation. All of the interactions were mediated through the principal and teachers.

*They focus on a collective struggle.*

Being in a single-gender, primarily African American school context, students shared how they were able to focus on redefining stereotypical images of African American males. Peers worked collaboratively to maintain high standards of excellence as the administrator and teachers assisted in repetitiously communicating high expectations. Texts like *Freedom’s Children* focused on the collective struggle of the Civil Rights Movement, *Black Boy*, focused on the struggles growing up as a Black male, *and Male Codes* gave students the opportunity to explore the collective and implicit messages pushed on boys in society. Pedagogies such as Cornell Note Taking and
Reciprocal Teaching assisted students in gaining the necessary skills to independently read, and take notes using a complex text and collectively participate in peer-led scientific discussions. Students viewed the pedagogies as difficult, but relied on peer support and accountability to become successful.

*They provide a road map for being, doing, and acting.*

School-wide programming such as Scholar Summit and Community Development Day provided opportunities for several guest speakers to share their experiences. The administrator and several teachers were also instrumental in sharing stories, as well as their own experiences. Students could explore multiple ways of being, doing, and acting in today’s context through these interactions. The documentary text *4 Little Girls* demonstrated how blacks, whites, and the international community worked collaboratively and peacefully to bring about justice. Teaching students how to respond and act upon new learning was perceived favorably as they participated in a Poetry Slam dedicated to the *4 Little Girls.*

*They provide modern awareness of the real world.*

Again Scholar Summit, Community Development Day, administrator and teacher stories were all used as tools to provide awareness of the real world. Speakers from the community came in to discuss various topics, representatives from different colleges and careers facilitated workshops, and students also participated in skills to develop their collaboration and social-emotional skills. Pedagogies such as scaffolding learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009; McDougal, 2009; Slater & Horstman, 2007; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) by providing overt instruction assisted students in better understanding what they could do and what they needed to improve upon academically. This type of
transparency and feedback increased their motivation to participate in the learning process. The life science textbook provided an awareness of the real world by introducing and explaining various new concepts, which gave students the opportunity to draw connections to their personal lives, raise questions, and critique some of the texts assertions. Also, texts of the graphs related to the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) in their city, as well as imagery questioning the definition of freedom in the 21st century all appeared to provide new learning and an awareness of the real world.

Again, as demonstrated through this analysis, an Enabling context is also critical to student success. Jordan (L) showed us that although these texts, pedagogies, and contexts were perceived as Enabling, they were not Enabling to the same degree for all learners, which has important implications and establishes a need for future research.

Implications and Recommendations

This section provides a discussion of the implications and recommendations this work has for parents, principals, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers.

Parents: All students perceived parents had high expectations for their academic success. Parents of higher performing students had more clearly established home routines and attended church on a regular basis, while lower performing students studied irregularly and oftentimes just before bed. The more Developmental Assets a student has, the more likely they are to succeed in school. While various congregations may provide such assets, there are also several other community organizations geared towards being a resource to young people. Parents should help students create a consistent study schedule and space whether they have a test or not. Parents should seek out opportunities in the
community that may assist in bringing more Developmental Assets into the lives of students.

Principals: Overall, students found Mr. O to be relational and caring. He played a critical role in establishing the school context, particularly decision to intentionally include school-wide programming to meet the socio-emotional needs of male learners. While the learners could discuss the benefits of the programming, they also shared some frustrations regarding some of the speaker’s delivery and the timing some of the programming happened in the school day. Given the paucity of resources available in most urban schools and the needs consistently outweigh the available resources, partnerships are key. Principals should seek out community partnerships and agencies in an effort to increase the number of assets available to their students and strategically align those resources as part of the school day and during after school hours. Principals should deliberately arrange the school schedule, with the input of students, to address the socio-emotional needs of its students while focusing on student-teacher relationship building in a non-academic context. Careful consideration should be given to the access lower-performing students have to these activities. Inviting different groups of students to assist in planning the activities may be warranted given the negative impact (i.e. low confidence, alternate identity development) associated with students who do not participate in programming. Principals should support the creative and effective flow of teachers who desire to move away from a scripted curriculum and focus on Enabling texts and pedagogies. Principals should provide common planning time for teachers to work collaboratively in exploring the strengths and limitations of explicitly incorporating discussion-based approaches in their science courses.
Teachers: Students held mixed views about their teachers. Overall the high group cited more positive examples of relational teachers, followed by the medium group, with the lower group stressing the most dissatisfaction. Also of significance, the high group shared how their teachers were supportive of them beyond the school day (i.e. sporting events), the medium group discussed the in school support (i.e. tutoring at lunch), while the lower group struggled to identify ways they were supported by teachers. Additionally, students perceived some pedagogical practices as *Disabling*. On the other hand, pedagogies undergirded by a multiliteracies approach were perceived as *Enabling*, as were uses of intertextuality with print and non-print texts in Science and English Language Arts classrooms. Teachers also played a critical role in supporting the context of the building by actively participating in school-wide programming. *Teachers should support creative school-wide programming and scheduling as these factors can make the difference in building solid relationships with students outside of an academic setting, which has a significant impact on the learning taking place inside the classroom.*

*Teachers should seek out professional learning opportunities that build on their existing expertise by incorporating: a) Enabling print and non-print texts using intertextuality, and b) Enabling pedagogies using a multiliteracies approach. Science teachers should seek ways to meaningfully balance comprehension instruction, discussion, and “hands-on” activities into the landscape of their classrooms in an effort to support calls for scientific literacy. Teachers should consider the role of peer pressure and power dynamics when organizing learning activities.*

Teacher Educators: Much of what teachers learn, and thus gets played out in urban classrooms, was conceptualized from either a teacher’s education program or the
education they experienced as a child. Teacher educators have a unique opportunity to provide literature, activities, and reflective moments geared at repressing Disabling ideologies, texts, and pedagogies by introducing Enabling ones. Teacher Educators should provide ample opportunities for teachers to explore the theoretical underpinnings to the practices they are using, particularly how such theories support and detract from building student confidence and positive male identity development. Teacher Educators should introduce the framework for Enabling texts, pedagogies, and contexts and have teachers consider how they might be used in various settings with different groups of students. Science Teacher Educators should introduce a framework for balanced science instruction involving multiple and explicit comprehension strategies for teachers to learn how to meaningfully engage the textbook with students, facilitate peer-peer discussions, and incorporate “hands-on” activities to mediate scientific discussions and build students’ background knowledge.

Researchers: New literacies and its impact on student outcomes remains an embryonic field of study, especially in urban settings. From a policy standpoint, we still do not know if our next generation assessment system will be able to determine what students know and do not know well enough to predict their performance in college or if they will be able to fully engage as active, thoughtful citizens in a global society. Researchers should seek mutually beneficial collaborations with urban districts, buildings, or teachers who employ a multiliteracies approach, especially in science and math, to carefully document and disseminate the findings.
Limitations and Future Research

What is clear throughout this study is the relationship between various factors impact student achievement, further the field should consider each factor in relation to the other and certainly not in isolation. Even still, there are three important limitations and future directions for research that should be discussed.

First, due to the selection criteria used in this study, no medium-performing students and only one lower-performing student participated in Reciprocal Teaching. Future research should include similar numbers of students at each level of achievement for all pedagogies being explored, creating a more balanced view of students’ perceptions.

Next, the current study primarily focused on student perception data from nine urban adolescent African American males at varying levels of achievement. While the study was meant to demonstrate how African American males are not a homogenous group, by grouping the students in this fashion, the false conclusion that all high, medium, or low performing students have the same perceptions could be made. Further research might replicate this study with other African American males in single and mixed gender settings, as well as rural and suburban districts. Also, this study focused on the similarities and differences across cases, but inevitably there may have been some within-group differences as well. Future research might illuminate the complexity of this subject by also exploring those within-group differences more fully.

Lastly, I intentionally privileged student voice in the current study. In doing so, interview data from parents, teachers, and administrators were not collected. Methodologically, future research might triangulate the different perspectives to learn
more about various parenting techniques and how parents marshaled resources from the community for their students. From teachers we could have learned about their perceptions of students, their teaching practices, their beliefs about education, and their reasoning for selecting specific approaches. Future research could document the specific multiliteracies *processes* used by effective teachers of African American students, and the subsequent *products* students are able to produce as outcomes, particularly in science classrooms. Another line of inquiry could be to explore: What are the characteristics of teachers who foster *Enabling* relationships with African American males? How (or do) these characteristics change across elementary, middle, and high school, urban, rural, and suburban contexts? Then, how do we attract and retain these teachers? Administrators may have been helpful explicating how they build the capacity to collaborate and sustain a meaningful relationship with community partners. For example, a research question might be: How do principals in urban settings perceive their capacity to create active community partnerships that bring assets to students during the school day and after-school?

“If the corn don’t grow, nobody don’t ask what’s wrong with the corn.”

—*grandparent of a Head Start student in rural Louisiana* (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003, p. 9) As this quote implies, there are multiple factors that contribute to the consequences of failure evident in some of our most vulnerable populations, particularly related to literacy. If corn does not grow, farmers might ask under what conditions were the seeds kept, did they receive enough water, light and time to germinate. Similarly, we must begin to ask some of the same questions about our urban adolescent African American male students, particularly in science courses given the STEM focus. Are they receiving
enough water (relationships, student-teacher, peer-peer discussions, and relevant content for multiple kinds of success), light (i.e. knowledge like comprehension instruction, opportunities to think critically about their world and the discipline, multiliteracies, using their own languages and literacies to make sense of text, design and inquiry-based approaches) and time to hone their skills? Ultimately, urban adolescent African American males do not have to be failures in school. Although socioeconomic status continues to be an intense hurdle for them cross, schools can become important sites of change by enacting *Enabling* texts, pedagogies, and contexts to support the different needs of high, medium, and lower performing students. Their voices have clarified what they mean by *Enabling* and demonstrate how students like Jordan can become engaged in the learning process and “tune in” to school again.

In the end, from a policy standpoint, how we choose to define achievement and what it means to be literate will be determined through our assessment system. These set of measures will crystallize what we value as a nation. It should go without saying that we need better ways to assess achievement so that all stakeholders (including teachers) can be informed and certain groups of students are not further marginalized. Research indicates that comprehension instruction should take place, especially in disciplinary courses and especially for lower-performing students who have had a history of failure. Teachers, and indeed our nation, stand to gain much from students who are motivated to *read to learn and transform* because they have been taught how. Our “Jordans” may become more successful in their academic classes, increasing their probability for graduation, and ultimately actively contribute and become productive members in their communities in multiple ways.
References


Barone, T. (2004). Arts-based educational projects and the redressing of the political


Calabrese-Barton, B. A., & Upadhyay, B. (2010). Teaching and learning science for


the promise, what we don’t know about the potential. *Harvard Educational Review, 78*(1), 84–106.


Dunbar & McNeal, 2012 (p. 81–91) principals, Dr. Moore’s book, strategic work to get around accountability measures.


Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43, 412–420.


Grier, R., Blumenfeld, P., Marx, R., Krajcik, J., Fisherman, B., Soloway, E., ...Clay-Chambers, J. (2008). Standardized test outcomes for students engaged in inquiry-


Hilliard, A. (2003). No mystery: Closing the achievement gap between Africans and


Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC.


Street, B. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development*,


Appendix A: Biographical Survey

Name: __________________________________________________________

Survey Questions

Part A: Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Current GPA:

4. What is your current grade in science class?

5. What is your current grade in ELA class?

6. How do you get to and from school? How long does it take?

7. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities beyond school (service or volunteer, music, sports etc.)

8. What are some of your hobbies?

9. What are your parents'/guardians' names?

10. Where do they work?

11. What do they do at work?

12. What are the age(s) and gender of your siblings?

13. What is your favorite subject? Why?
# Survey of Adolescent Reading Attitudes

**Part B:** Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1-6.

1. How do you feel about reading news online for class?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

2. How do you feel about reading a book in your free time?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

3. How do you feel about doing research using encyclopedias (or other books) for a class?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

4. How do you feel about texting or emailing friends in your free time?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

5. How do you feel about reading online for a class?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

6. How do you feel about reading a textbook?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

7. How do you feel about reading a book online for a class?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

8. How do you feel about talking with friends about something you’ve been reading in your free time?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

9. How do you feel about getting a book or a magazine for a present?  
   - Very Good  
   - Very Bad  
   6 5 4 3 2 1

10. How do you feel about texting friends in your free time?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

11. How do you feel about reading a book for fun on a rainy Saturday?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

12. How do you feel about working on an internet project with classmates?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

13. How do you feel about reading anything printed (book, magazine, comic books, etc.) in your free time?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

14. How do you feel about using a dictionary for class?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

15. How do you feel about using social media like Facebook or Twitter in your free time?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

16. How do you feel about looking up information online for a class?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

17. How do you feel about reading a newspaper or a magazine for a class?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1

18. How do you feel about reading a novel for class?  
    - Very Good  
    - Very Bad  
    6 5 4 3 2 1
Appendix B: Semi Structured Interview Questions

Context

1. Who and where do you get most of the support in your education?
2. What is the purpose of education for you?
3. What are your career goals and how did you decide on that career? How did City Prep influence that decision?
4. Tell me about Community Development Day (Scholar Summit, Advisory, single-gender)? Did you have something like this at other schools you’ve attended? What impact has it had on you?
5. What does it mean to be called a scholar? How does that make you feel?
6. What is your typical day like?
7. How do you study/prepare for classes? How many hours do you spend outside the classroom on school?
8. What is it like to be a student at City Prep?
9. What factors (most) influenced your decision to attend City Prep?
10. Are your personal interests supported here at City Prep?
11. How supportive is City Prep’s atmosphere for your academic pursuits?
12. What is your relationship with your teachers like? Administrators? Peers?
13. What kind of expectations are expected of you at City Prep from teachers, administrators and parents?
14. Have you changes since you started at City Prep? How do you know?

Text/Pedagogy (science)

Cornell Note Taking (CNT)

1. What do you remember about your 6th grade science class?
2. Explain how CNT worked in your 6th grade science class?
3. Had you used CNT before 6th grade?
4. What did you think about CNT?
5. What did CNT allow you to do?
6. What was the experience like for you? Was it helpful or unnecessary? Did this influence your decision to improve or discourage your participation in reading?
7. What type of feedback would you receive on your CNT? Looking back at some of your CNT, why did you receive this score?
8. Most CNT, happened through independent reading at home, what was this experience like for you? How would you approach it? What was your mindset?
9. Do you think CNT and reading your science book helped or discouraged your learning science content? Examples?
10. Do you read your science textbook more or less this year?
11. Would you suggest CNT and written teacher feedback for other students?
12. Have you used CNT in other classes since 6th grade? What is the same or different?
13. What advice would you have for a teacher using CNT with their students?

**Reciprocal Teaching (RT)**
1. Explain how RT worked in your 6th grade science class?
2. Had you used RT before 6th grade?
3. What did you think about RT?
4. What did RT allow you to do?
5. What was the experience like for you? Was it helpful or unnecessary? Did this influence your decision to improve or discourage your participation in peer-peer small group instruction?
6. Explain what you would do to prepare for your RT.
7. How did your peers respond when/if you were not prepared to teach?
8. How did you respond when/if your peers were not prepared to teach?
9. Were you (always, usually, sometimes, never) prepared to teach?
10. What type of feedback would you receive on your RT? Looking back at some of your RT, why did you receive this score?
11. RT happened during class, peer-peer (small group), what was this experience like for you? How would you approach it? What was your mindset?
12. How did you use your science book and Cornell Notes during RT?
13. Do you think RT helped or discouraged your learning science content? Examples?
14. Do you participate in peer-peer, small group instruction where you are expected to teach your peers content (give and receive feedback to peers) more or less this year?
15. Would you suggest RT and written teacher and peer feedback for other students?
16. Have you used RT in other classes since 6th grade? What is the same or different?
17. What advice would you have for a teacher using RT with their students?

**Online Inquiry Based Genetics Unit**
1. What did you think about learning in this format (collaborative inquiry, online)?
2. Who was your partner?
3. Was it helpful or discouraging collaborating with your peer on this project?
4. How was learning in this format different from other ways of learning science?
5. Look at your online response to question X, how did you arrive at this answer?
6. Did learning about genetics relate to your personal life or not?
7. Did you share your learning with anyone at home?
8. What was their response?
9. Would you like to use this format more regularly to learn science concepts?
10. We used different types of technology in science class (clickers, flipcams, SMARTboard simulations, digital storytelling), describe your experience with these technologies? What did you learn about science?
11. What advice would you give to teachers who are interested in using this format to teach science?

**Text/Pedagogy (English Language Arts)**

1. What do you remember about your ELA class from 6<sup>th</sup> grade?
2. What were your overall thoughts about Spike Lee’s documentary *4 Little Girls*?
3. What was going through your mind when you learned about what happened to the four little girls? How did this impact you?
4. Did you tell anybody else about what you learned? What was their response?
5. Did watching the documentary change your views about society?
6. What parts of the unit study still resonate with you?
7. What was the most important concept you learned from the documentary?
8. What did you think about developing your rap in dedication to the four little girls?
9. Were you motivated to do it? Why or why not?
10. How did you (or your group) do during your performance of your rap?
11. What was this experience like for you?
12. What did you think about going to see *Louder than A Bomb*? Helpful in developing your rap ideas (mindset) or unnecessary?
13. What did you think about exploring figurative language through old school rap (Eric B and Rakim *Microphone Fiend*)?
14. What did you think about *Freedom’s Children*?
15. What youth did you study?
16. Was learning about the role of youth during the Civil Rights Movement important to you or not? Why?
17. Look at your response about disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in Columbus currently, what do you think about this?
19. Did the analysis of music, poetry and pictures (Dream’s Deferred (Langston Hughes) *We Shall Overcome*, Sam Cooke’s *A Change is Gonna Come*, Obama family picture, *The New Jim Crow* text image (Michelle Alexander), *Scared Back of a Slave Named Gordon*) help you better understand about this time period (mood, tone, intertextuality)?
20. Do you think it’s important for you to study these types of issues (Civil and Human Rights)? Why?

What other projects, books or activities have you studied since 6<sup>th</sup> grade that expose things that are wrong in society?

**African-American Scientist and Inventors Project**

1. Who was your AASI?
2. Do you think it’s important to study AASI?
3. What did you enjoy about the research process?
4. What was difficult about the research process?
5. What lesson will you remember most as a result of completing the project?
6. Did using graphic organizers help or hinder your progress? Examples?
7. Did you complete a Powerpoint?
8. What was this process like for you? Use of flashdrives, saving data, including music, pictures, slide organization, working at home vs. school etc)?
9. Did you experience any obstacles? How did you overcome them?
10. Did you present your research findings to the community?
11. How did you feel about presenting to community members and getting feedback? From your peers?
12. How did knowing you had to present to the community help or hinder your research and writing process? Motivated or less motivated? Why?
13. Do you feel more student projects should be shared with others beyond the school context? Why? Benefits or drawbacks?
14. What advice would you give to teachers who are interested in helping their students develop speaking and listening skills (projects)?
Appendix C: Context Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT</th>
<th>Creative School Programming as a Double-Edged Sword</th>
<th>Other School-wide Programming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Low-High-Set” Home Lives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Relational Principal</td>
<td>Highly Relational vs. “Funny Acting” Teachers</td>
<td>Peers as Brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
<td>I get home around 4:00 and from 4-6 or 6:30, something like that, I’m doing work, studying.</td>
<td>I looked at him as a family member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaylen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amari</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence</td>
<td>I study every time I know there’s an important event tomorrow. That’s the only time I study.</td>
<td>We really didn’t talk that much unless I got in trouble, but he helped me too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>I’ll wait until somewhere near dark and then I’ll study all night.</td>
<td>He’s a strict person. I think he wants everything on point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeQuan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think some of them don’t care. Most of them don’t even pay attention.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got home around 4:00 and from 4-6 or 6:30, something like that, I’m doing work, studying.</td>
<td>I looked at him as a family member.</td>
<td>Beyond-School Support: They actually cared about you and wanted you to learn, so they’d do whatever it takes to get you to that level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I said, “I don’t like doing it. They sent me out. I had to leave.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Text Findings
Appendix E: Pedagogies Findings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Shawn</th>
<th>Amali</th>
<th>Clarence</th>
<th>Edward</th>
<th>JC</th>
<th>Ray</th>
<th>LeQuan</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy of Multiliteracies</td>
<td>Reciprocal Teaching (RT)</td>
<td>Cornell Note Taking (CNI)</td>
<td>RT &amp; CNI</td>
<td>COI</td>
<td>Raw Writing</td>
<td>Scaffolding Learning</td>
<td>Socratic Seminar</td>
<td>Poetry Slam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situated Practice</td>
<td>Overt Instruction</td>
<td>Critical Framing</td>
<td>Transformed Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precluded peer-to-peer discussions over teacher-led; community of learners—group accountability, listening to each other, receiving peer feedback; students took on multiple roles; spent time practicing and attending to disciplinary context, vocabulary, presentation skills.</td>
<td>Organizing thoughts, benefit access to content, increased awareness of context; what was being taught was related to what students were learning. Strategies helped students become better at critical thinking and problem solving.</td>
<td>Voices opinions on different topics during peer-to-peer discussions; dialogic discussions, beyond the text questioning attempted, but difficult to write during CNI and during RT.</td>
<td>Worked positively and collaboratively in an online “hand-on” environment to apply new learning related to genetics.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred peer-to-peer discussions over teacher-led; community of learners—group accountability, listening to each other, receiving peer feedback; students took on multiple roles; spent time practicing and attending to disciplinary context, vocabulary, presentation skills.</td>
<td>Organizing thoughts, benefit access to content, increased awareness of context; what was being taught was related to what students were learning. Strategies helped students become better at critical thinking and problem solving.</td>
<td>Voices opinions on different topics during peer-to-peer discussions; dialogic discussions, beyond the text questioning attempted, but difficult to write during CNI and during RT.</td>
<td>Worked positively and collaboratively in an online “hand-on” environment to apply new learning related to genetics.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More didactic, teacher-led discussions, mostly text-only questions, some attempts at beyond the book questions.</td>
<td>Text features helpful, recalling information, studying for tests.</td>
<td>More didactic, teacher-led discussions, mostly text-only questions, some attempts at beyond the book questions.</td>
<td>Text features helpful, recalling information, studying for tests.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on reading, text features, prepare for tests.</td>
<td>Text features helpful, recalling information, studying for tests.</td>
<td>More didactic, teacher-led discussions, mostly text-only questions, some attempts at beyond the book questions.</td>
<td>Text features helpful, recalling information, studying for tests.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked positively and collaboratively in an online “hand-on” environment to apply new learning related to genetics.</td>
<td>Worked positively and collaboratively in an online “hand-on” environment to apply new learning related to genetics.</td>
<td>Worked positively and collaboratively in an online “hand-on” environment to apply new learning related to genetics.</td>
<td>Worked positively and collaboratively in an online “hand-on” environment to apply new learning related to genetics.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Note: Jordan did not submit writing piece.</td>
<td>*Note: Jordan did not submit writing piece.</td>
<td>*Note: Jordan did not submit writing piece.</td>
<td>*Note: Jordan did not submit writing piece.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td>*Note: Less mention of positioning of authority (i.e. hand setting).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Cornell Notes

Chapter 8: Plants
Section 4: Gymnosperms and Angiosperms (pages 272-281)

1. A gymnosperm is a seed plant that produces naked seeds.
2. Every gymnosperm produces naked seeds. In addition, many gymnosperms have needle-like or scale-like leaves, and deep growing root systems.
3. Gymnosperms are the oldest type of seed plants.
4. Cycads, conifers, ginkgos, and gnetophytes are the only groups still extant today.

Q: What are the four types of gymnosperms?

Reproduction of Gymnosperms

- Female cones: reproductive structures.
  - Contain an egg cell.
  - First, pollen falls from a male cone onto a female cone. In time, a sperm cell and an egg cell join together in an ovule on the female cone.
- Pollen: the transfer of pollen from male reproductive structures to female reproductive structures. It is transfer.

Angiosperms

- Flowering plants.
  - First, they produce flowers.
  - Second, in contrast to gymnosperms, which produce seeds, angiosperms produce seeds that are enclosed in fruit.
Q: Where do angiosperms live?

Q: What are the male and female parts of a flower?

Reproduction in Angiosperms:
1. Flowers come in all sorts of shapes, sizes, and colors, but despite their differences, all flowers have the same function: reproduction.
2. A flower is a reproductive structure of an angiosperm.
3. If the pollen falls on the stigma of a similar plant, fertilization can occur.

Q: What parts of a flower are pollens?

Q: What flower part develops into fruit?

Types of Angiosperms:

Q: How do the petals of monocots and dicots differ in number?
### SECTION 3 SUMMARY

These sections were about Angiosperms and Gymnosperms. Every gymnosperm produces seeds, while angiosperms produce flowers. In addition, angiosperms have needle-like or scale-like leaves and deep, growing root systems. Flowers are produced in an ovary. The flowers of Angiosperms are pollinated by insects. Pollen is carried from a male flower onto a female flower. This fertilization process results in seeds that are enclosed in fruits.

Flowers come in all sizes of shapes, sizes, and colors. But, despite their differences, all flowers have the same function; reproduction.

### CONNECTIONS I MADE...

(pick any two)

1. How does this topic relate to you?
2. How does this topic relate to other things that you have read?
3. How does this topic relate to other people, things or ideas?

### QUESTIONS I HAVE...

(pick any two)

1. What if...?
2. How did...?
3. Why did...?
4. What would happen if...?
5. What caused...?
6. What might...?
7. How would you feel if...?
8. What traits describe?
9. Why do you think?
10. Why is...?
Appendix G: Raw Writing

Day 21: Homework: Write a rap/song dedicated to the 4 Little Girls and The Civil Rights Movement. Who am I?

Who am I to sit in a classroom and not listen to the teacher while 4 little girls lie dead under bricks like a load I'll let who am I to yell at my teacher who I'll never make it to 40, who am I to skip school when democracy never even included from the sixth grade, who am I to do wrong and forget about school when people were bitten tortured, even killed, who am I to split off and still when thousands went on a bus for equal rights, who am I to give up life when 4 girls never had one, who am I to thank God for men when birds suffered of racism, who am I to sit on the street who John Holman waiting to be shot by a group who men were hurt and strangled, who am I to shoot a woman without respect and pleasure when women where killed for money by the KKK.
The time has come, we have made a stand
Some whites say we're enemies, but some say we're friends.

That's bull, let's just come to march for civil rights
Had to be an honor.

Back then if we spoke out or term we were beaten still,
You kill, you take a life, blacks don't have 9 lives ordinary guys.

They blew the church but it's okay,
We marched for our rights now we have them today.

We have been enslaved, it's almost like a prison,
Your time has come, your freedom has risen.

We stood up for ourselves with sit-ins we did it
Over and over and over again.

I'm really sorry about the 4 little girls
I'm sorry they didn't have their whole world.

They got sprayed with water hoses but they kept on going and they rocked their feet.
When you heard the countdown you fell in confusion... BOOM there was an illusion.

They kept on going, they kept on trying while people were killed and people were dying.

I know your families been through much pain. You take your freedom serious, it ain't no game.

16th Street church was blown into pieces. While attack dogs were let off the leashes.

Some blacks think our history is lame when it comes to City Prep we don't think so.

During the march, dogs attacked left & right but those blacks put up a fight. Some couldn't withstand the powerful bite.

Dr. King was a man of no violence. In all marches there was no silence. We always came with a speech.

Dr. King had times when he came to preach. Why did u kill da H girls that way?

Come on. Bob chomblake it ain't your day.
Be blessed in the Lord we try to survive got live your life with the Lord is on your side. I wish we could be those for the 4 little girls give the strength to pursue through the world. The world is a place were you got to live your life with the Lord on your side, Bob Chambless was the one who killed the 4 girls and pled to his wheel. The 4 little girls died for our race 50 years from now will still have faith. Don't matter in the day or the nights we got to fight for our Civil Rights. People of our race got bitten by dogs but the Lord helped them heal and bless them all.
Day 21: Homework: Write a rap/song dedicated to the 4 Little Girls and The Civil Rights Movement.

4 little girls
you all black (name)
They want to
Crush and i
never came
back
You feel
the pain
I felt
It's
Through
the hard
times every
one felt to
Wehn we laughed about we started
to cry we are sorry that your
girl had to die
But it is okay cause they
went to heaven from 1963
to 2011. They was walkin' to church
It probably not together
But what do I know
I would or try
to make it better
At Birmingham, Alabama 1963
Our little girls buried are
Life for me

By:

I am my mother’s son, I am her only one. I am blessed to have her in my life. Then there’s my dad, the only one for me and now I can see that he was the only one for me. Never shy of love, this is an image of my life. Family and friends play a part in raising me right. I believe in chasing a dream; we can’t lose heart although it is not easy as it seems. I built up faith so I conquer my soul, each day a lesson beyond measure priceless blessing unfold. Some say you choose the path in which you walk. I say complete the journey ahead, calm and gentle as though if we ask ourselves the truth, even turn a blind eye, there is no real answer for life, but try and you will fly high. I have some questions like can a woman teach a boy to be a man? Maybe, but I think that a woman can teach a boy how to be man because a woman knows just as much as a man knows but men do know just a little bit more than women. My mom is teaching me how to be a man because without a father, who’s going to teach me how to be a man. someone has to teach me. Dad, what dad? Beep, beep, beep, private caller days later football tournament in Louisville, Ky, playing running back, coach says time out so I am on the sideline looking for my dad. I asked my mom she says I don’t know, okay, we win the game and I am so happy, I’m still looking for my dad, we get home mom says after I get out the shower, your dad is in jail. I burst out crying so angry she did not tell me at the game. I would have been motivated to run even faster but she played it off like did not know, so I am saying in my head if he would have been friends with the right people, he would not be there right now. I bet that’s what happened to Jackie Williams. I’m sitting at the table, crying, praying every night, that he would get out and also burning my eyes out reading and studying the Bible asking for answers, why God? why? Where is my blessing? I pray, I read, where is my blessing? You gave Michael Jordan the gift to play basketball, where is my blessing? But all my answers are in my head, and the answer for me is life.
Day 21: Homework: Write a rap/song dedicated to the 4 Little Girls and The Civil Rights Movement.

Get this

Segregation is wack
but desegregation is all that
now equality
was the main thing for
the civil rights movement
Dr. King
Malcolm X
did their best to
protect
and God tell me why
Did these four little girls have to die
by the hand of a devilish man

I know that their families want
Justice! Knock knock with a mallet
and that man should rot in
hell
and we all know that man's name was
Bob Chambliss
now all of this is a bunch of crap

and we all know this man
Day 21: Homework: Write a rap/song dedicated to the 4 Little Girls and The Civil Rights Movement.

I feel your pain.

I feel your pain, but let me say that you don't need to continue
that pain. Those four little girls went insane when
that church came like a piano, and that's why I feel
your pain.

The Civil Rights Movement was breaking the
security. Days were moving to break up some protest stuff.
The whole world knew that your need of the those
things that Stole the thing that make you
feel so free indeed.

Martin Luther King had a dream that black
people would be free and drink some tea with
that pineapple juice, but when you lose a child, you can't even smile, and that's why
when those four little girls died I just wanted to cry. I pray for them.

All the time I just wish they were still alive.

It was so inspired by the freedom riders that people were trying to call
them. But a lot of people died during those really hard times.

I hope there's much more. I'm touch that people
all did some much and now I'm touch that people
would do so much to fight for them. This whole thing
all comes from give and shout to those people. Yeah,
that's what it's all about.
Day 21: Homework: Write a rap/song dedicated to the 4 Little Girls and The Civil Rights Movement.

4 little girls they was black they went to church and never came back. Her said there was dynamite strapped to the back. The church was 16th street, it happened in dc. The punk kids said they had to do it cause we called the hill and said they couldn't come to us. The city was blue then it went away. The case came immediately, but they was fake forensic. They said they would help put that case together. MLK said he had a dream for blacks and whites to come as a team. He said he had a dream but the whites didn't like so they said we will fight it. There was no reason for fighting so many ended up crying. The dude bob channels thought he was sick and he went to prison being someone.

Since I can't say it we will just play it. I think it was crap that the girls had to die cause it almost made me cry. It been so many years, we've been called a blight but the time has risen for us to come back. They say we were supposed to stay put but when I grew up I made it most blacks what happened to them was a shame but to my mind and my head they was in the hall of fame.
you see the four little girls died because
of the bomb at 16th Street Baptist Church
I think you would think it was crazy so
I'm gonna tell you what happened at the
time. There was a man his name is
BobChambers. He led blew up the church. He
was a real jerk. I think for the girl
prazin the Lord it just had to heart.
They were in the basement doing their stuff
when I was watching the film. I just now
they should of asked for prayer. It was
3 minutes exact before the four little girls
went straight in the air. I think BobChambers
really don't care about killing people there.
They now that thing like that in Alabama
would happen there but they was not expecting
something like that to happen at the church
the man was really sick so to him on
the in side it really hit him. The killing
of the little girls changed peoples lives
like they was shocked. Because on a Sunday
four little girls lost their lives. it scared
peoples rip. For the rest of their lives they
was afraid to step out side. So they
moved so that they could buy closer their home.
The poem of the four little girls who lost
their lives.

26 Sentence.
Appendix H: Description of Enabling Context

The Boys School, located in a large mid-western urban district, initially servicing 6th graders (with the intent to add one grade per year) was established in 2010 as an all-male middle school. Parents and guardians interested in their son attending the school participate in a lottery system and receive busing services throughout the city. The school has the following demographics: 86% African-American, 9% Caucasian, 3% Latino and 2% Multiracial. Almost 80% of the students receive free and reduced meals. The 6th graders were organized into two teams, referred to as Team A and Team B in this study. Each team consisted of approximately 60 students divided among three female teachers for their CORE classes: English Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies, Math and Science. The researcher in this study taught all of Team A English Language Arts (ELA) courses and once section of Life Science. Thirty-five percent of the students on Team A were at or above proficiency in reading according to standardized testing data. Additionally 60%, 58%, 56%, 48% scored below proficiency in vocabulary, process skills, informational and literary text respectively. The other two teachers, Mrs. Z taught the Social Studies courses, Mrs. B taught the Math courses, and each taught one section of Life Science. Students were also enrolled in ENCORE courses such as band, technology, and physical education. Additionally, all CORE teachers were required to teach one section of Reading in the Content Areas (RICA) as a non-credit intervention and enrichment course.

With a combined fifty-one years of teaching experience, none of the teachers had taught in a single-gender program prior to this assignment. Consequently, they saw the need to formalize a professional learning community to explore the best practices associated with teaching boys. For the ELA and science courses taught by the researcher of this study, a multiliteracies approach was employed. All science courses integrated explicit comprehension instruction to build learners’ background knowledge. Each quarter, students on Team A were flexibly grouped in RICA based on their intervention and enrichment needs. The principal of the school was a first year administrator and former high school social studies teacher with a strong background in the arts. He organized the school schedule so that teams had daily common planning time to explore inquires related to the academic, social, and emotional development of boys.

According to the School Overview, the school’s vision states: *We are committed to addressing the unique academic and affective needs of male students through a rigorous college preparatory, inquiry and project-based curriculum.* While the School Overview provides a comprehensive description of its program features, this study mainly focuses on the following:
**Social-Emotional Intelligence**

**Scholar Summit** – Each Thursday the entire school community meets third period inside our school auditorium. Scholars join in reciting our Scholar Creed, become informed about important dates and accolades called “Atta Boys” are shared for those demonstrating the A.R.I.S.E Core Values. We also address the four components of literacy (listening, speaking, reading and writing) through community literacy activities where scholars share their perspectives on various topics and essential questions.

**Advisory** – Advisory takes place each Tuesday and Thursday. All staff teachers advise during the second half of third period. Scholars have informal boy related discussions and do team building activities during advisories. **Advisory groups consist of no more than 15 to 20 scholars, which is a recommended best practice.**

**Project Mentor** – A select group of 6th, 7th and 8th grade scholars participate in Project Mentor on Thursday’s.

**Community Development Day** – Every third Friday of each month we modify our bell schedule and conclude the last hour and fifteen minutes with friendly competition events, or growth and development activities. Sporting events such as hockey, free throw competition, matt ball, tie-tying relay, electric fence etc. brings the competitive edge out of scholars. Scholars who are not into sports compete in events such as math scavenger hunts, ARISE core values scramble, knowledge bowls etc. Merit points are earned for each team (Kings vs. Knights) and maintained throughout the grading period. The team with the most merits at the end of quarter gets a prize (i.e. 10% grade boost coupon, dress down day, game day, dessert party).

**Guest Speakers** – Our scholars need role models in front of them often to inspire them to believe and achieve beyond their possibilities. Once a month during Scholar Summit men with inspiring stories of personal achievement speak with scholars. Scholars have an opportunity to interact with our speakers by asking questions.

**Academic Identity**

“*We Are Scholars*” – Our male learners are identified as scholars instead of students. We are intentional regarding planting a seed of excellence through how we identify them throughout the school day.

**Scholar Creed**

*The Creed is memorized and recited by all scholars at the beginning of each Scholar Summit.*

We the scholars of (city) City Prep agree to live by our core values.
We are accountable to ourselves, family, school, and community.
We show respect by valuing ourselves and the uniqueness of others.
We demonstrate integrity at all times—honesty, fairness and righteousness.
We are service-minded, we believe in giving back to our community.
We strive for excellence in all we do, we are not settling for mediocrity.
WE ARE SCHOLARS!
Appendix I: Description of Enabling Texts

**SCIENCE**

*Science Textbook:* Pearson’s Life Science text was the primary resource used to instruct the sixth grade science class.

*Online Science Text:* The text used for this project was the Life Science Module: *Who Inherits Cystic Fibrosis? from the Web-based Inquiry Science Environment* site [www.wise.berkeley.edu](http://www.wise.berkeley.edu). In this module students learned about cystic fibrosis, a trait that is controlled by a single gene. Modes of inheritance including dominant and recessive allele transmission and genotypic combinations were also explored.

*Online Science and ELA Text:* Texts consisted of online biographies and summaries of known and lesser known African American scientists and inventors.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

*Images (Appendix L):* The purpose of the activity was to introduce the analysis of themes. The *Enduring Understandings:* Themes, patterns, and symbols can be found in literature from different eras and cultures. Although African Americans have made significant sacrifices and contributions to the issues surrounding equality in America, change is still needed. *Essential Questions:* How do I identify themes, patterns, and symbols and analyze their use in literature? What does my history have to do with me now? Isn’t that just some old stuff from the past? The images discussed in this section consisted of a collage of seven images representing three different time periods in United States history: a) a slave’s back, b) an African American male in jail, c) an African American male in an integrated classroom, d) The Obama family, e) an African American male with sagging pants aiming a gun at the camera, f) Malcom X, Medgar Evers, and young children being hosed by policemen, g) runaway slaves. Students were given three notecards of each time period (Slavery, Civil Rights, and Present Day) and asked to match the notecard to the image and justify their reasoning for the match.

*Music:* The purpose of the activity was to explore tone, mood, and analyze various uses of figurative language. *Enduring Understandings:* Authors establish mood and meaning through word choice, figurative language, and syntax. Although African Americans have made significant sacrifices and contributions to the issues surrounding equality in America, change is still needed. *Essential Questions:* How is word choice used to impact the meaning or mood in a text? What does my history have to do with me now? Isn’t that just some old stuff from the past? The music discussed in this section consisted of Sam Cooke’s *A Change is Gonna Come*, Erik B. and Rakhim’s *Micrphone Fiend*, and The Morehouse Men’s Choir version of *We Shall Overcome*. Students were given individual access to the lyrics. The audio and visual imagery of the music was accessed through YouTube. An image of Sam Cook and a brief biography was included with the lyrics of *A Change is Gonna Come*. 
**Documentary:** Students spent approximately three weeks analyzing and critiquing 25-minute clips of Spike Lee’s *4 Little Girls* which included first account interviewing techniques to explore the events associated with the historic 16th Street Bombing in Alabama during the Civil Rights Era. *Louder Thank A Bomb*

**Graphs:** County Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) statistics from 2008 were used to explore the current condition of African American males in their community. Students created graphs and drew conclusions from the data.

**ELA Texts:** Four primary texts were associated with this unit: a) *Life in Prison* (Williams & Becnel, 2001) which chronicles the life of notorious Crips gang leader, Tookie Williams, b) *Freedom’s Children* (Levine, 2000) which portrays the activism young people demonstrated during the Civil Rights Movement, c) *Black Boy* (Wright, 1993), the autobiography of author Richard Wright, and d) *Male Codes*, a multimedia tool ([www.rogersparkywat.org](http://www.rogersparkywat.org)) to explore the meanings of masculinity among young men.
Appendix J: Description of Enabling Pedagogies

For this study, participants provided their perceptions on eight pedagogies: a) Reciprocal Teaching, b) Cornell Note Taking, and c) Collaborative Online Inquiry for the science course, followed by: d) Raw Writing, e) Poetry Slam, f) Socratic Seminar, g) Community-wide Oral Research Presentation in ELA, then h) Scaffolded Learning with was used across both disciplines. Analysis revealed the combination of these pedagogies supported the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies Framework (New London Group, 1996): a) situated practice, b) overt instruction, c) critical framing and d) transformative practice.

SCIENCE

Modified Reciprocal Teaching (mRT)
Reciprocal teaching is an instructional activity that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students regarding segments of text. The dialogue is structured by the use of four strategies: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. The teacher and students take turns assuming the role of teacher in leading this dialogue, usually a group effort to help bring meaning to the text. Modifications to the original strategy included peer-led dialogue where students assume the position of “expert” on their assigned section as well as “critical peer” on the other sections. A significant amount of attention was given to preparation for teaching by pre-reading sections and taking Cornell Notes, as well as receiving and providing written feedback regarding interactions during teaching. A 4-point rubric (exceedingly well, mostly well, could have been better, needs to focus), was used by students to: a) conduct self-evaluations on the effectiveness of their preparation, teaching and contributions, and b) participate in peer-evaluations to provide criterion-specific feedback to other students on their preparation, teaching and contributions. Teachers provided a final evaluation, using the 4-point rubric and Reciprocal Teaching Observation Log to evaluate the effectiveness of students’ preparation, teaching and conceptual understanding of various topics.

Interactive Cornell Note Taking (iCN)
Cornell Note taking is a systematic process for taking notes during and/or after reading or viewing information, with an overall goal of summarizing the important ideas presented. Students analyze the notes to form questions, make relevant connections to other material and life events, prepare for peer-peer discussion and/or informal/formal assessment. Modifications were made to the original strategy to make it more interactive and focused on improvement. In addition to the original strategy, iCN included a graphic organizer prompting students to illustrate important concepts, explain vocabulary, make predictions, and respond to stems for connections, and questions. Using a 4-point rubric (excellent, good, acceptable, needs work), students a) conducted self-evaluations on the
effectiveness of their note taking and summaries, and b) participated in peer-evaluations to provide criterion-specific feedback to other students on their note taking. Teachers provided a final evaluation, using the 4-point rubric to evaluate the effectiveness of students’ note taking and summary skills.

**Collaborative Online Science**
According to their website, the *Web-based Inquiry Science Environment* (WISE) is a research-based platform that fosters exploration and science inquiry. Students observe, analyze, experiment, and reflect as they navigate various interactive models. Students explore new ideas and evidence, ponder discrepant events, write reflections, and form fact-based theories. They collaboratively validate these theories through discussion and model-based testing and refine their ideas using a variety or representational tools.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

**Raw Writing**
Tatum and Gue (2010) suggests Raw Writing should extend beyond teaching students how to write or even *writing to learn*, but extend to helping students “write to live” in an effort to document their personal growth as human beings. By creating student writing experiences across what they identify as four platforms: 1) defining self, 2) becoming resilient, 3) engaging others, and 4) building capacity, the authors position Raw Writing as a social act instead of limiting its purpose to solely a school sanctioned activity, which is oftentimes viewed as rote, irrelevant, and uninteresting. In the former, the pedagogy lends itself to accommodating the socio-emotional needs of students and authentic student voice, which both are important for adolescent literacy development.

*The Civil Rights Movement in Review: A Compilation of My Thoughts* was a nine week unit of study designed to address the following themes and Essential Questions: a) Place and Race: *What does my history have to do with me now? Isn’t that just some old stuff from the past?*, and b) Advocacy and Being Service-Minded: *If I have power, how can I empower those who do not?* Students viewed and critiqued Spike Lee’s documentary *4 Little Girls*, analyzed music, images, and graphs, created illustrations and *Raw Writings*, read several informational and literary texts, as well as wrote several papers and participated in discussions to meaningfully engage in learning various state content standards for English Language Arts.

**Poetry Slam**
As a culminating activity, students composed raps, songs, or poetry in dedication to the 4 Little Girls and their families, and then performed a Poetry Slam during a school-wide assembly where community guests were invited to attend. In preparation for their poetry slam presentations students were invited to view the documentary *Louder Than A Bomb* at a local theater, which captured the unique and diverse stage performances, teamwork and preparation techniques used by four Chicago-based Poetry Slam teams.

**Socratic Seminar**
A Socratic Seminar is a framework for the facilitation of whole group discourse based on “essential” open-ended questions. Essential questions are defined as questions that point to the heart of a topic and its controversies and that generate multiple answers and perspectives. Students were reminded hand raising is not necessary during Socratic Seminar, as listening and observing the gestures of others was more prized to determine one’s turn to speak. Prior to implementation, students also received teacher and peer modeling of a mock Socratic Seminar.

**Community-wide Oral Research Presentation**

Over an 8-week period, students conducted online research of lesser known African American scientists and inventors in their science classes and composed a research paper in their ELA classes. Students were also provided with books from the school and public libraries. In preparation for a community-wide presentation during Black History Month, students created a multimedia presentation of their findings using Powerpoint. Students were provided with graphic organizers for writing their research paper and creating their multimedia presentation. Prior to their final community-wide presentation, students participated in one small group class presentation, followed by one whole group class presentation. A presentation rubric was used prior to and during the presentation to provide an opportunity for self-reflection, peer-peer, family, and community member feedback. A community luncheon was served and an African dance team and drummers also performed during the community-wide event.

**Scaffolded Learning**

This pedagogy was embedded into each instructional unit and is based on each student’s individual need. It involves the systematic and explicit integration of academic student support by using teacher modeling, mentor texts, graphic organizers, rubrics, self-reflection, peer feedback, and at times “chunking” larger tasks into smaller ones.
### Appendix K: Intersections of Theories, Definitions, Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Theory/Culture</th>
<th>Framework/Comprehension</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Text/Category</th>
<th>Concept/Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Psyche</td>
<td>Situated Practice</td>
<td>Academic Achievement, Cultural Competence</td>
<td>Reader Response</td>
<td>Learning as Construct Knowledge, Personal Social and Economic Empowerment</td>
<td>Collaborative Learning Environments, Raising Students’ Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadmap for Teaching, Doing, Acting</td>
<td>Overt Instruction</td>
<td>Academic Achievement, Cultural Competence, Socio-political Consciousness</td>
<td>Rhetorical Criticism</td>
<td>Learning the Norms and Discourse of School Science</td>
<td>Pedagogical Interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Awareness of the Real World</td>
<td>Critical Framing</td>
<td>Academic Achievement, Cultural Competence, Socio-political Consciousness</td>
<td>African American Criticism</td>
<td>Learning Multiple Ways of Knowing and Practicing Science</td>
<td>Cultural, Literary Resources, Scaffolded Opportunities for Discourse (Time to Demonstrate Their Understanding of the Newly Acquired Discourse through Oral and Written Form)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Struggle</td>
<td>Transformed Practice</td>
<td>Academic Achievement, Socio-political Consciousness</td>
<td>Creation and Sharing of Student-Assembled Comic Strips Related to Themes of Revenge, Discrimination, Resistance</td>
<td>Allow Rich Discussion (i.e. Reciprocal Teaching)</td>
<td>Learning Critical Activism and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L: English Language Arts Images

SET 1
I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh and just like the river I've been running ever since
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

SET 2
I go to the movie and I go downtown
somebody keep telling me don't hang around
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will
SET 3
There been times that I thought I couldn’t last for long
But now I think I’m able to carry on
It’s been a long, a long time coming But I know a
change gonna come, oh yes it will

STATISTIC #1
The population of X is 7,693,360.
Approximately 63% of the population is
Caucasian and 27% African American.
The youth population parallels this
demographic breakdown.

SET 4
It’s been too hard living but I’m afraid to die
Cause I don’t know what’s up there beyond the sky
It’s been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

STATISTIC #2
Approximately 69% of the youth referred to the
Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center in
2009 were African American youth. Of the total
youth admitted to the Franklin County Detention
Center, 70% were African American youth.

STATISTIC #3
In terms of raw numbers, in 2009, 1,731
were African American youth and 607
were Caucasian.
Most of the youth admitted by age were
between the ages of 15 through 18.
Appendix M: Relationship of Factors for High, Medium, and Lower-Performing African American Males