Effects of Non-Traditional Instruction on the

Classroom Discipline of African American Students

Daudi J. Abe

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This is to certify that I have examined this copy of a doctoral dissertation by

Daudi J. Abe

and have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by the final
examining committee have been made.

Chair of Supervisory Committee:

_____

    Geneva Gay

Reading Committee:

_____

    Geneva Gay

_____

    James Banks

_____

    Edward Taylor

Date:_____

University of Washington

Abstract

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by Daudi J. Abe

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Professor Geneva Gay
Department of Education

An increasing amount of data has indicated that African American students, particularly in the late primary/middle school grades, are being suspended and expelled from school at a highly disproportionate rate. Further analysis of this issue reveals an important dynamic at work in the types of discipline dispensed. "Objective discipline" consists of offenses such as fighting, assault, and drug or weapons violations. Instances of disruptive conduct, disrespect, and rule-breaking are much more open for interpretation and fall under the category known as "subjective discipline," which accounts for more than half of the reported disciplinary infractions for African American students. This study examined how teaching styles interact with curriculum, and what affect this has on the discipline dynamic of classrooms. The main research question was: Do non-traditional teaching practices impact discipline among African American students? If so, how?

The purpose of this study was to discern if there was a relationship between non-traditional instructional styles and curriculum content and a reduction of classroom discipline for African American students in the 'fork years,' or grades four through eight. The analysis of the data generated by this study revealed three major themes. They were classroom environment factors affect student discipline; relevant instructional methods lead to positive student behaviors; and engaging materials reduce negative student behavior. Other findings included: classroom management and instructional quality and

style are interactive; the environment of a classroom plays a significant role in the overall disciplinary dynamic that exists between teachers and students; the establishment of a personal relationship between teachers and students is important for effective instruction and classroom management; the way teachers decide to apply the power they wield can either minimize or accelerate disciplinary issues; students tended to respond positively to novel instructional methods; engaging and relevant instructional materials decreased the disciplinary behavior and improved academic efforts of African American students; relevant instructional materials attended explicitly to factors of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and experience among students. These findings are consistent with previous trends in research on culturally relevant teaching, and support the argument that non-traditional instruction and curriculum reduce discipline problems among African American students.

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DEDICATION

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Finally, to all the youngsters out there on your way to the schoolhouse, this is for you. May your teachers be wise and not afraid to fully invest themselves in the educative process.

Chapter I

Introduction

In 1969 the Gallup Poll first asked the public what it thought of schools in the United States. Among other things, respondents were asked to name the biggest problems facing the nation's public schools. Concerns over a perceived lack of discipline emerged as the top choice. In fact, this response remained at the top of the list until 1986 when it was replaced briefly by concerns over drug use in schools (Sperry, 1990).

This study assumed that there is a relationship between instructional practices and curriculum choices of teachers, and the disciplinary infractions of African American students. The main research question was: Do non-traditional teaching practices impact discipline among African American students? If so, how? The ultimate goal of this study was to contribute to the overall reduction of school discipline.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In the first chapter the statement of the problem and conceptual framework of the study are presented. The second chapter is a review of related research and scholarship that examine how discipline has affected African American students in a disproportionate manner since the desegregation of schools in the United States. Also discussed in this review is research and scholarship on non-traditional instruction in general and for African American students in particular. In the third chapter the methodological procedures employed in the study, and the data collection and analysis processes are discussed. The research findings of the study are presented in the fourth chapter. Chapter five includes the significance and limitations of the study, summary, discussion, and recommendations for future research that emerged from the study.

Statement of the Problem

Mainstream mass media frequently present information about the nationwide

trend of African American students being disciplined at a highly disproportionate rate in

comparison to their European American peers. Whitaker (1991) reported on studies of

several school districts across the United States and found that in all of them, African

American students had significantly higher suspension and expulsion rates. For example

in Milwaukee, Wisconsin public schools 94 percent of the students expelled from the

school system in 1989-1990 were African American males. The Seattle Post-

Intelligencer in Seattle, Washington, cited a Seattle Public School District analysis of

short and long-term suspensions and expulsions among the 20,592 middle and high

school students in the 47,000-student district. African American middle school students

made up 22 percent of the total population but accounted for 46 percent of disciplinary

actions. This disparity translated to African American middle school students being three

times as likely to be disciplined as students from other ethnic groups. At one middle

school, African Americans were 8.5 percent of the students enrolled but made up 37.8

percent of those disciplined (Denn, 2001). Other research has shown that this

phenomenon is present in schools all over the United States (Garibaldi, 1992; Office for

Civil Rights, 1993; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Townsend, 2000).

Discipline often has been dispensed in an uneven fashion depending on the race,

ethnicity, gender, and class of teachers and students. This uneven application of

sanctions can be extremely confusing for students, and disrupt their equilibrium toward

what is and what is not acceptable behavior in school. When this unevenness is

combined with an authoritarian model of discipline that relies on heavy-handed

punishment, the level of student alienation and misbehavior can increase, and the

possibility of addressing problems in a constructive manner often decreases (Edwards,

2000). An historic illustration of this dynamic was reported in a National Education

Association (1976) nationwide survey on school discipline. Teachers, after citing

irresponsible parents and poor home conditions, named overcrowded classes, irrelevant

curriculum, lack of services available for exceptional children, and lack of teacher

authority as the major causes of discipline problems in schools. Three of these five

responses – poor parents and home conditions, overcrowded classes, and lack of services

for exceptional children – are things teachers cannot control. However, about this same

time a critical eye was being cast towards the things teachers do control, such as their

own authority and instructional methods. Maynard (1978; p. 34) stated:

> The force model – sit down, shut up, or get out – has its advantages: You
>
> can raise your achievement scores, lower your absentee rate, and so on.
>
> All you have to do is enforce dozens of rules hard and fast, and get rid of
>
> the kids who can't conform. Achievement scores go up because they're
>
> gone. Absentee rates go down, because they're gone. That's it. Your
>
> problem is over. You got rid of them. You *can* do that, and that is exactly
>
> what's being done in a lot of schools.

The force model that Maynard described is closely associated with methods of

traditional teaching that numerous scholars and researchers have identified as being a

contributing factor to the disengagement of ethnically different students from the learning

environment, particularly at the secondary level (Gay, 2000; Irvine 1991; Marshall 2000;

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1992; African American Male Task

Force of Milwaukee Public Schools, 1990; Taylor & Foster, 1986). This disconnection

from the educational process can lead to "black students' exclusion from classes, their

perceptions of mistreatment, and feelings of alienation and rejection, which result

ultimately in their misbehaving more and/or leaving school" (Irvine, 1991; p. 16).

What has become known as the discipline gap is having a significant impact on

the academic achievement gap between African American students and some of their

peers. Townsend (2000) argued that many disciplinary measures, whether intentionally

or not, that exclude African American students from classrooms and school can create a

"domino effect" and further widen the existing achievement gap between Black and

White students. Bates (1996; p. 8) observed:

> We spend a lot of time talking about achievement gaps. But it is pretty
>
> clear that one cannot be educated if he or she is not in school. When we
>
> take all of the reasons and put them together as to why some children are
>
> not in school and count those numbers, I think it becomes readily apparent
>
> that we are going to have a serious problem educating the children…
>
> because many of them are not there.

Students who are excluded from school as a result of continued disciplinary problems lag

behind their peers academically. This often leads to school personnel relegating

frequently suspended students to lower-ability groups (Townsend, 2000).

Over time, the role of instruction in the discipline dynamic has become a

significant factor. The highly traditional method of teacher-centered instruction renders

students passive participants in their learning process (Marshall, 2002). In this

environment, expectations of proper behavior include long, uninterrupted periods of

attentiveness, gaze, eye contact and body posture. When these characteristics "are not exhibited by learners at times, at intervals, and for durations designated by teachers, the students are judged to be uninvolved, distracted, having short attention spans, and/or engaging in off-task behaviors" (Gay, 2000, p. 22). Teacher-centered, didactic instruction has been demonstrated to be inconsistent with the learning style of many African American students (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1992; Marshall, 2002; Hale 1986; Shade, 1994; Boykin, 1986). This inconsistency becomes even more pronounced when working with students performing below grade level. As a result, many African American students are more likely to disengage from the learning process (Marshall, 2002). A school in which this situation exists is fertile ground for classroom management problems, and disciplinary referrals of African American students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study is depicted visually in Figure I. It is composed of ideas from three main theoretical sources. The first theory is the grade levels that will form the parameters of the study. The study will be contextualized within grades 4 through 8. This period hereafter will be referred to as the "fork years" for African American students. It is named such because it is typically the time when the divergence in academic achievement, and the frequencies and patterns of disciplinary infractions become increasingly apparent between African Americans and other students.

Student Experience in <=======➔**Non-Traditional** ⬅========➔**Low Disciplinary**
  "The Fork Years"   **Instruction**   **Referral**

- Grades 4 – 8

- Disciplinary patterns established

- Achievement disparities crystallize

- Traditional teaching stimulates
  disciplinary issues

* Alternative to traditional teaching styles

* Develops academic achievement

* Raises social consciousness

* Fosters cultural affirmation and competence

* Builds community

* Creates personal connections

* Promotes an ethic of caring

* Objective and subjective
  discipline

* Fewer subjective
  infractions

* Higher academic
  performance

* Collaborative
  classroom management

* Higher interest and
  involvement in teaching
  and learning

* Classroom climate
  conducive to learning

Figure I: Conceptual Framework

Next this study argued that non-traditional instruction can have positive effects on the

academic performance and discipline of African American students, and these effects are

interactive. Specific elements of this type of non-traditional instruction include high

academic efficacy, cultural affirmation and validation for every student, and connecting

the learning process to the lives of the students. Several leading scholars in the field of

multicultural education have endorsed this pedagogy as an effective alternative to

traditional teaching methods in successfully educating African American students (Gay,

2000; Hale, 1986; Foster, 1995; Boykin, 1994, 2000; Hollins, 1996; Irvine, 1991;

Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1995). The double-headed arrows at the top of Figure I

represent the interactive effects of teaching and discipline.

The final part of the conceptual framework is that non-traditional instruction leads

to a decrease in disciplinary referrals for African American students. This outcome is a

result of an assumed relationship of high interest and relevant teaching, and a high level

of engagement for African American students. The inclusive nature of non-traditional

instruction works to maintain the connection between African American students and the

learning environment. When this connection is absent, the converse of the assumed

relationship in this conceptual framework occurs. Consequently, there are increased

levels of disciplinary referrals among African American students in grades 4 through 8.

Each of the components of this conceptual framework is discussed in greater detail next.

Student Experience in the 'Fork Years'

The conception of "fork years" is based on theoretical explanations offered by

Morgan (1980) and Kunjufu (1995). Morgan (1980) theorized that a steady decline in the

schoolwork of African American students occurs about third grade. He attributed this

decrease to traditional instructional styles and schooling patterns that lead to

"management for docility" (p. 51), or the promotion of absolute quiet in classroom

settings. Teachers discipline students for disruptive behavior in a learning environment

that does not help to defuse the buildup of sensorimotor energy. Management for docility

leads to "reserved classrooms where many Black children disengage from the mainstream

of academics" (p. 51). Morgan contended that by the time many African American

students reach fifth grade, they have developed strong feelings of cynicism. This

replaces a sense of eagerness, enthusiasm, and interest that these same students possessed

at the time they enter school in the primary grades. The onset of a passive and apathetic

attitude toward school often leads to a downward spiral in the achievement of these

African American students, which tends to continue for the duration of their academic

career.

Kunjufu (1995) expanded on this notion, referring to it as the "Fourth Grade

Failure Syndrome" (p. 33). He defined it as the failure of African American students to

make a satisfactory transition between the primary and intermediate grade levels, brought

on by schooling experiences that engender negative images. To illustrate this point,

Kunjufu charted the performance of 20 African American male students on the reading

portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills from the beginning of the third grade to the end

of the seventh grade. He randomly selected the participants from a pool of students who

remained in the same school for the length of the data collection. The median test score

at the beginning of the third grade was in the 52nd percentile. At the end of the seventh

grade the median test score had dropped to the 29th percentile. Only one student

improved his reading by a total of five years. Kunjufu concluded this was an

illustration of the apathy and limited interest in school that African American students

caught up in the fourth grade failure syndrome typically display. The decline in test

scores was so severe for several students that they could have achieved similar results if

they had "stayed home and watched Sesame Street" (Kunjufu, 1995; p. 37)

Non-Traditional Instruction

As used in this study, non-traditional instruction focuses on shared learning and

teaching ideals, values and processes. According to Gay (2000; p. 43), this type of

teaching

> simultaneously develops academic achievement, social consciousness and
>
> critique, cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange; community
>
> building and personal connections; individual self worth and abilities; and
>
> an ethic of caring. It uses ways of knowing, understanding, and
>
> representing various ethnic and cultural groups in teaching academic
>
> subjects, processes and skills. It cultivates cooperation, collaboration,
>
> reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students and
>
> between students and teachers. It incorporates high-status, accurate
>
> cultural knowledge about different ethnic groups into all subjects and
>
> skills taught.

Teachers who practice non-traditional instruction also share some personal traits,

such as placing a high value on the dignity and intellectual capabilities of all students.

Learning is seen as possessing intellectual, academic, personal, social, ethical, and

political elements that must be addressed together. To facilitate high level learning, non-traditional teachers make connections among ethnically diverse students, their cultural experiences, and the content of the academic curriculum (Gay, 2000). They employ a wide spectrum of approaches to "all aspects of the educational process, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment embedded in multicultural contexts. Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success" (Gay, 2000; p. 44).

Ladson Billings (1994) described several teachers who practiced non-traditional instruction with their African American students. These teachers experienced low levels of student disciplinary referral by believing that every student can succeed and taking an active role in promoting that success. In commenting on her students, one teacher said, "You know, they're all successful at something. The problem is that school often doesn't deal with the kinds of things that they can and will be successful at" (Ladson-Billings, 1994; p. 46). Other studies have indicated that connecting instruction to the lives of students promotes behaviors that contribute to a classroom environment that experiences limited disciplinary referrals. For example, Heath (1983) performed a decade long research project on language learning in the African American community of Trackton, North Carolina. She found that the reduction of sociolinguistic discontinuity between home and school had a positive influence on the participation of African American students in school lessons. This incorporation of interactional features from their cultural community into the classroom decreased students' off-task behaviors and disciplinary referrals.

These effects of non-traditional instruction on disciplinary infractions form the basis of the final part of the conceptual framework of this study. To summarize, non-traditional instructional strategies, including high expectations for all students, solid organizational and management of academic learning time, use of active teaching methods, and making connections between the culture of students and the classroom, are important factors in the creation and maintenance of a pleasant and respectful learning environment (Irvine, 1991). Such an environment is a place where African American students can develop their scholarly selves, as opposed to traditional teaching and learning settings that often cultivate disciplinary situations.

Traditional Instruction

The traditional model of instruction is the opposite of non-traditional instruction. Ideologically, traditional teaching is rooted in a paradigm of cultural deprivation for ethnically and racially diverse students. In the 1960s cultural deprivation became the dominant paradigm that formed the basis of programs and pedagogies for low-income and racial minority populations. The operating assumptions were: Academic failure experienced by low-income students and students of color are a result of limitations in their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds; and as a result of this, the school is limited in its ability to help these students achieve. Yet, schools must do what they can to help students in overcoming these deficiencies. Two fundamental problems were embedded in this ideology. First, such a heavy emphasis on the shortcomings of children often prevented educators from seeing their strengths. The second problem was that the

continued focus on what is wrong with the student leaves what may be wrong with

school in the shadows (Banks, 1995; 1999).

In practice traditional instruction is based in mainstream ethnocentrism and

cultural domination. Consequently, it prevents the acquisition and application of new,

culturally relevant knowledge (Gay, 2000). This pedagogic invalidation of other cultures

is delivered by what Ladson-Billings (1994; p. 22) described as, "assimilationist

teaching," which is "a teaching style that operates without regard to the students'

particular cultural characteristics." These teachers, like the cultural deprivation theorists,

believe that their role is to make sure that students fit into school and, ultimately, society.

Unfortunately, "the place that the [assimilationist] teacher believes the students 'fit into'

is on society's lower rungs" (Ladson-Billings, 1994; p. 22).

According to Darder (1991) traditional methods of instruction are firmly

entrenched in the preparation of teachers prior to their entry into classroom practice. She

explained that

> Teacher education programs are notorious for reducing the role of teachers
>
> to that of technicians. Instead of empowering teachers by assisting them
>
> to develop a critical understanding of their purpose as educators, most
>
> programs foster a dependency on predefined curriculum, outdated
>
> classroom strategies and techniques, and traditionally rigid classroom
>
> environments that position not only students but teachers as well into
>
> physically and intellectually oppressive situations. This occurs to such a
>
> degree that few public school teachers are able to envision their practice
>
> outside the scope of barren classroom settings, lifeless instructional

practices, bland textbooks, standardized tests, and the use of meritocratic

systems for student performance evaluation. (p. 100)

This type of professional preparation is likely to produce teachers who rigidly control the

movement of students through time and space, and unilaterally decide when tasks will

begin, what the duration will be, when the task ends, and where they will happen. A

great percentage of these tasks have students sitting, listening, or writing. Students who

move too slowly, or too quickly, from one task to the next can easily find themselves

facing disciplinary referral (Goodlad, 1984; Ferguson, 2000).

Another fundamental tenet of the traditional model of instruction is a refusal to

take into account how ineffective teaching and other negative factors of schools

contribute to the failure dynamic among students of poverty and color (Banks, 1999).

Recent studies of classroom management and discipline have raised further questions

about this relationship. Siddle-Walker (1996) found that some teachers create their own

problems with students. Negative teacher attitudes most often engender negative student

responses resulting in the creation of an environment of student resistance and

unwillingness to perform. She observed that, "You make them cut up. Sometimes

teachers make students make problems for themselves. Some teachers have the attitude,

'Well, I've got mine, you've got yours to get. And if you don't get it, it's no problem of

mine'" (p. 154). In a study of student and teacher perceptions of disciplinary conflicts in

culturally pluralistic classrooms, Sheets and Gay (1996) found:

Students readily admitted that they committed the acts for which they

were disciplined. They felt, however, that some dynamics of classroom

interactions for which they were not solely responsible precipitated events

that led to disciplinary action. They thought it was possible to prevent minor

classroom conflicts from escalating into major disciplinary actions, and

they agreed that the teacher is a significant factor in both the causes and

the solutions.

Summary

In this chapter the research problem, the research question, the purpose, and the

conceptual framework of this study were discussed. The following chapters include a

review of related scholarship and research, methodology, report of findings, and research

summary, discussion, and recommendations. Research and scholarship related to the

study are presented in Chapter II. The methodologies used to identify the participants,

data sources, data collection procedures, and data management system are described in

Chapter III. The findings of the data analysis are presented in Chapter IV. A summary

and discussion of the findings, significance and limitations of the study, and

recommendations for future research and implied practice are discussed in Chapter V.

Chapter II

Review of Research and Scholarship

The review of research and scholarship pertinent to this study is presented in this chapter. It is divided into three sections. An historical overview of scholarship about the relationship between African American students and school discipline is presented in section one. The second section focuses on scholarship about non-traditional instruction in general and for African Americans specifically. The third section summarizes scholarship related to the research methodology chosen to investigate the relationship between classroom instruction and discipline of African American students in upper elementary and middle school grades.

Discipline of African Americans

As schools in the United States desegregated in the 1960s and 1970s race, class, and achievement became major issues of concern. In the mid 1960s Vredevoe (1967) examined the effects of desegregation on school discipline. His research team visited 102 schools and interviewed 1,800 students, 900 parents, and 257 school administrators. Before entering university teaching and undertaking this research, Vredevoe was a teacher and administrator for 20 years. He undertook this project in the interest of promoting "equal educational opportunity for all and the development of better attitudes, ideals and goals for students of today and parents of tomorrow" (p. 7). One issue of interest in his study was student discipline, which he connected to teacher competence. Also significant was whether the levels of resentment expressed by some teachers and

administrators toward desegregation policies were consistent with those of individuals outside the schools.

Vredevoe stated that, "Desegregation of a school does not necessarily mean a change of heart or attitude on the part of all faculty members" (p. 3). He found strong relationships among high incidences of African American students in recently desegregated schools being assigned to low achievement groups, their teachers being perceived as low status and limited competence, and higher levels of discipline. He explained that, "Closely associated with this was incompetence on the part of some staff members which only resulted in greater disciplinary problems because of desegregation. It was sometimes difficult to determine if desegregation or incompetence was the basic reason for the increased disciplinary problems" (1967, p. 3). Even when teachers are not intentionally biased in their treatment of students based on race, they still engaged in low quality interactions, and had negative or low level expectations of these students. Both dispositions may cultivate disciplinary situations (Marshall, 2002). Underlying racism and possible incompetence on the part of teachers can lead to subsequent disengagement of students from the learning environment, which is accompanied often by an increase in off-task behavior (Gay, 2000).

Vredovoe (1967) also found that when teachers and administrative staff knew what they were teaching, how they were going to teach it, and how they would motivate students, there was a favorable pattern of discipline in their schools. Segregation and desegregation became largely of secondary importance. Vredevoe concluded that

Teachers and administrators must be selected on the basis of competence, not who they are or the group they represent. An incompetent teacher is

both a misrepresentation of the profession and the ethnic group from which he comes. It is neither fair to students nor any group to select school personnel on any other basis. To do so will develop problems in school discipline (1967, p. 6).

In the years immediately after the first wave of desegregation school districts across the nation reported an increase in suspension rates, one strong indicator of school discipline problems. These numbers were particularly pronounced at the secondary levels (Larkin, 1979; Garibaldi, 1992; Kunjufu, 1995; Michigan State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1996). In an attempt to comply with court ordered desegregation, some districts reduced enrollments in certain schools, closed others entirely, or converted regular schools into specialty schools. One result of these practices was the creation of a significant segment of students who were forced to attend different schools. Students who felt "unwelcome" and "not really wanted" (Vredevoe, 1967; p. 2) in their new schools were caught in the middle of an unpleasant dilemma.

Larkin (1979) analyzed quantitative suspension data in the Milwaukee Public Schools in the years immediately before and shortly after desegregation. The high schools in this district had a suspension rate of 30 percent in the years preceeding desegregation. This compared to a 45 percent suspension rate in the second year of desegregation. The suspension rate in junior high schools in Milwaukee increased from 52 percent to 62 percent in the first three years following desegregation. These data indicated that African American students were recipients of a disproportionate amount of the suspensions across secondary schools. Larkin (1979) concluded that these changes were not surprising when "public education, with a remarkably poor historical record of

serving America's black population, is forced to confront and work through the fears,

prejudices, and animosities which have directed its past behavior" (p. 495).

Another study of school suspensions was conducted by Taylor and Foster (1986).

They collected data from the records of a medium sized school district in the southeastern

United States during the 1983-84 academic year. This district was comprised of 10

elementary schools, 5 junior high schools, and 4 senior high schools. The results of the

study revealed a pattern of disproportionality in the suspensions of African Americans

beginning in the elementary grades and continuing into the secondary ones. While

African American students represented 44 percent of the district's elementary student

body, they accounted for 67 percent of the suspensions. At the secondary level, African

Americans comprised 45 percent of the school district's enrollment. Still, they were 59

percent of the students suspended from junior high and 61 percent of those suspended

from high school.

Taylor and Foster (1986) acknowledged that undoubtedly there were cases of

student behavior that threatened the welfare and safety of other students, and that school

officials have a responsibility to protect those in their charge and deal with these

instances by enforcing discipline policy in an appropriate manner. They also argued that

"other educational policies such as tracking, special education programs, and mental

health referrals, which were purported to improve the quality and the opportunity of

education, have actually served to erect racially and sexually discriminatory structures in

the school environment" (Taylor & Foster, 1986; pp. 502-503).

Further research has indicated that disproportionality in school suspension by race

and gender continued unabated (Townsend, 2000; Ferguson, 2000; Advancement Project,

2000; Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000). The Michigan Advisory Committee to the

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1996) issued a report that studied the prevalence,

nature, and effect of various disciplinary measures in the state of Michigan. The data

were collected from a sample of selected school districts across the state between 1978

and 1986, and analyzed by the Law and Policy Institute. The 1986 sample included 115

urban, suburban and rural school districts. A similar study of school districts throughout

the Midwest and the U.S. was conducted to compare results in Michigan with regional

and national patterns.

   The results of this study, as reported by Vergon (1996), indicated that students in

Michigan faced discipline 44 percent more often than their national counterparts. The

suspension rate for the entire state was 70 students per thousand. The number ranged

from 0 students suspended per thousand in several districts to 311 students per thousand

in others. The suspension rate for mainstream European American students was 56

students per thousand, but 141 students per thousand for groups of color. The rate for

African American students was the highest with 167 suspensions per thousand. While

African American students had the highest rate of suspension in the United States, those

in Michigan were nearly twice as likely to be suspended than others nationwide.

Between 1978 and 1986, the suspension rate for African American students in Michigan

increased by 61 percent. Vergon (1996) offered three explanations for these

disproportionate suspension rates. They were:

- Differential behavior on the part of students from groups with low socioeconomic status.

- Differential treatment by school staff or by organizational and institutional policies.

- Inconsistent applications of school procedures or rules.

In an effort to correct these disparities, the Michigan State Advisory Committee (1996) recommended that local school districts regularly collect and analyze data on school discipline to determine if students of color were unfairly impacted. If so, these local districts must find the reasons. Another recommendation was to develop interagency cooperation. For example, the Michigan Department of Civil Rights and the State Department of Education should work together to address the problem of disproportionate discipline. The committee further urged follow-up studies of every district in the state; examination of legislation that mandated expulsion for certain actions; the expansion of authority for discipline decisions; provision of alternative education opportunities; and the involvement at the state and local levels of elected and government officials, school leaders, educators, juvenile court judges and administrators, parents and all other concerned parties in addressing accountability in the administration of discipline in schools. Finally, the Advisory Committee urged school leaders to have a district-wide philosophy regarding discipline, internal district controls that ensure discipline codes were enforced uniformly, and a specific plan to assist students who are affected.

In an analysis of over 10,000 discipline records of middle school student in a large, urban Midwestern public school district of over 50,000 students, Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) found that disobedience was the most frequent reason given for disciplinary referral. The next most cited infractions were misconduct, disrespect, and

fighting. The researchers noted that serious offenses such as vandalism, possession of weapons and arson, drugs, and violent acts were among the least frequently cited reasons for disciplinary referral of African American students.

Distinctions in types of disciplinary referrals among African American students have emerged from the research and scholarship. One type is "subjective" discipline, which includes disobedience, disrespect, and insubordination. This discipline is based on teachers' perceptions of behavioral events, and is subject to their personal biases, prejudices and racism. The second type of discipline is "objective." It includes possession of alcohol and drugs, assault, and truancy. Transgressions such as these are less vulnerable to individual bias. Research has indicated that African American students are suspended more frequently for subjective, as opposed to objective offenses (Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982; Irvine, 1991; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Marshall, 2002).

For example, African American students may speak out loudly or interrupt in class, often even arguing with teachers or further pressing their point of view. These are actions that many teachers interpret as insubordinate or disrespect, when in actuality these students may be engaging behavior common to African American male adolescents (Schwartz, 2001). Marshall (2002; p. 59) posited, "When compared to their white peers, black middle school students are disciplined in ways that reflect misunderstanding or devaluation of black cultural traits, and possibly, the racism of their teachers." Consequently, African American students often are suspended and expelled, "not because they commit serious offenses, but because they do not get along with a particular

teacher… the problem is that teachers tend to overreact to the behavior of black students, particularly black male students" (Irvine, 1991; p. 18).

African American students continue to be disciplined at an alarming rate. Townsend (2000) argued that school discipline of ethnic minorities involves widespread ethical and practical concerns. Specifically, she observed that, "While questionable discipline practices that exclude students from school settings are used with students across ethnic groups, they are especially problematic for African American students who continue to be disproportionately subjected to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion" (p. 381). This pattern calls for increased self-examination, introspection, and significant changes on the part of professional educators working in schools. One proposal for correcting this disproportionality is to make fundamental changes in instructional practices to make them more culturally relevant for African Americans, create more hospitable classroom environments, convey high performance expectations for success, and provide opportunities and assistance for students to accomplish high levels of achievement (Schwartz, 2001; Townsend, Marshall, & Gay, 2000).

The implementation of zero tolerance policies in schools is another complicating factor in the discipline of African American students. In an effort to combat violent incidents in public schools, Congress approved laws in 1994 designed to punish violent and criminal behavior by students in schools. These laws required mandatory expulsion for possession of firearms on school grounds. Individual states have expanded the sanctions to include other weapons and possession or use of drugs. School districts then broadened zero tolerance policies again to encompass other types of behavior and

infractions that represent little or no safety concerns or drugs (Advancement Project, 2000).

Schwartz and Rieser (2001) argued that zero tolerance policies in schools have "very little to do with zero tolerance, and everything to do with one-size-fits-all mandatory punishment." Adults responsible for dealing with misbehavior of children should ensure that their responses are "appropriate to the age, history and circumstances of the child as well as to the nature of the 'offense'" (p. 128). The effects of these overly harsh rules often criminalize children for trivial misconduct and innocent mistakes. Some examples of the consequences are:

- A six year-old African American child suspended for ten days for bringing a toenail clipper to school.

- A kindergartener suspended for bringing a toy ax to school as part of a Halloween costume.

- An African American female honors student with no prior disciplinary referrals suspended indefinitely for fighting.

- A 14 year-old boy mistakenly left a pocketknife in his book bag after a Boy Scout camping trip. The student was expelled under the district's zero tolerance policy, which requires expulsion for possession of knives, even after the boy's Scout Master testified on his behalf (Advancement Project, 2000).

Research by the Advancement Project (2000) on the effects of zero tolerance in several schools in Florida indicated these policies are more likely to exist in school districts that are made up of predominantly African American and Latino American students. They exaggerate consequences for both objective and subjective disciplinary

infractions. For instance, the study conducted by the Advancement Project found that

African American and European American students in South Carolina were punished in

equal proportions for weapons violations. However, "the discipline of Black students

soared in the most subjective categories, where the school official's determination that an

infraction occurred may be tainted by bias or stereotypes" (pp. 6-7). The following is a

case in point:

> A 4th grade ten-year-old African American girl was charged with defiance
>
> of authority for failing to participate in a class assignment. She was
>
> suspended for three days. Soon thereafter, she was charged with 'defiance
>
> of authority' for humming and tapping on her desk. She was again
>
> suspended for three days. She was subsequently suspended for five days
>
> for 'defiance of authority' for talking back to her teacher and for 'drug-
>
> related activity,' namely, wearing one pants leg up, although there was no
>
> indication of any drug involvement. (Advancement Project, 2000; p. 4)

Increasingly, discipline codes that derive from zero tolerance policies define subjective

terms such as "disrespect" or "defiance of authority" as punishable offenses. How these

codes are applied often depends more on the interpretation of individual teachers and

administrators than the actual behavior itself. According to Gordon, Piana, and Keleher

(2001; pp. 171-172), "discipline codes with too much room for arbitrary interpretation

may allow teachers conscious or unconscious beliefs about their students of color to

influence their decisions about how to discipline."

The zero tolerance philosophy represents a shift in public policy toward

disciplining children. This approach is increasingly grounded in theories of criminal law,

and practices of referring children and youth to the criminal justice system based on adult notions of punishment for crimes. These policies are part of an overall trend to treat young children as though they reason and behave like adults (Ferguson, 2000; Schwartz & Rieser, 2001).

These tendencies and their negative effects on students are demonstrated by zero tolerance policies and practices in the Chicago Public Schools. In their study of this pattern, Gordon, Piana, and Keleher (2001) noted that 23 students were expelled during the school year 1994-95. After Chicago implemented a zero tolerance policy in the 1995-96 school year, there were 81 expulsions. By the1997-98 school year, the number of expulsions had increased to 571, and was projected to be 1,000 for 1998-99. Gordon, Piana, and Keleher (2001) observed that the language of the Chicago Public School District 2000 budget

> about expulsions for the current school year [2000] is particularly
>
> revealing: rather than working to reduce the number of expulsions, the
>
> district's 'proposed' figure for the 1999-2000 school year is 1,500 – 50
>
> percent higher than the year before and 150 times as many expulsions as
>
> just six years earlier. Chicago suspends and expels African American
>
> students at disproportionate rates, which suggests that black students will
>
> likely make up a disproportionate number of those the school district
>
> 'propose[s]' to expel. (pp. 170-171)

Increasing research indicates that zero tolerance policies and the resulting increase in overall discipline disproportionately impact Latino and African Americans in general, and African American males in particular (Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Knesting 2001; Skiba,

Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Noam, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 1999;

Skiba, Simmons, Stadinger, Rausch, Dow, & Feggins, 2003). For instance, Skiba (2000)

studied the history and philosophy of zero tolerance school disciplinary policies. He

analyzed a wide range of zero tolerance suspensions and expulsions, how they were used,

their effectiveness, and unintended consequences. Skiba found that expulsions were used

relatively frequently in comparison to other disciplinary options, although "there is some

doubt as to whether students who are expelled are always those who are most

troublesome or dangerous" (p. 10). Suspension, on the other hand, was one of the most

widely used discipline techniques with fights or physical aggression among the most

common reasons given. Suspension was also commonly used for relatively minor

offenses such as disobedience and disrespect.

On the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies, Skiba (2000) noted, "school

suspension and expulsion appear to be effective primarily in removing unwanted students

from school. For troublesome or at-risk students, the most well documented outcome of

suspension appears to be further suspension, and eventually school dropout" (p. 26).

Unintended consequences of zero tolerance policies included resentment and student

counter-coercion. The counter-coercion came as a response to confrontational discipline,

which some students viewed as a way to escalate their misbehavior. Problems can also

arise from more intrusive school security measures, such as strip searches and the use of

undercover agents. These methods can create short term, and in some cases, long term

emotional damage among students. Skiba concluded his analysis with the observation

that, "the contribution of student behavior to suspension or expulsion decisions is

swamped by inconsistencies in administration at both the classroom and school level" (p.

15). For African American students, "these relationships are especially troubling in light of the highly consistent overuse of punishment... an overrepresentation that cannot be explained away by behavior or the effects of poverty" (p. 15).

In the aftermath of zero tolerance policies and practices, Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2000) explored "gender, racial, and socioeconomic disparities in school discipline in sufficient detail to test alternative hypotheses concerning disproportionate school discipline" (p. 1). Data were collected from standardized coding forms completed when administrators received a disciplinary referral. These forms included information about:

- The nature of the incident that triggered the referral

- The resulting action taken by the administrator

- Referral date and time

- By whom and to whom the referral was made

- Previous actions taken

- Date of administrative action

- Whether parents were contacted

This study took place in a large Midwestern public school district and included records of 11,001 students between grades six, seven, and eight. The findings of this study indicated when taking gender and race into account, disproportionality existed in all three disciplinary categories (referral, suspension, and expulsion). This research suggested a consistent rank ordering in the likelihood of who receives office referrals. They were black male, white male, black female, and white female. Skiba et al. found this school district similar to other districts "that rely to a significant degree on suspension and

expulsion as their primary disciplinary tools." In doing so they "run a substantial risk

of minority disproportionality, especially for African American students, in the

application of those punishments" (p. 17).

Non-Traditional Instruction

Recent descriptions of non-traditional approaches to teaching students of color

have been identified by several scholars (Irvine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Foster,

1995; Hollins, 1996; Lipka, Mohatt, & the Ciulistet Group, 1998; Gay, 2000; McCarty,

2002; Banks, 2004; Gay, 2004) as culturally sensitive, relevant or responsive teaching.

Implicit in these descriptions are assumptions that as the use of culturally relevant

teaching with African Americans increases, so does their performance in school. Two

critical dimensions of this performance are higher academic achievement and fewer

behavior problems in the classroom.

This study used a definition of non-traditional instruction that is similar to the one

provided by Gay (2000) for culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Although the two are

not analogous, non-traditional teaching has some of the same elements (such as being

student-centered, strong caring relationships between students and teachers, and

cooperative student learning), but CRT is more comprehensive.

Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as, "using the cultural

knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically

diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p.

29). She also characterized this approach to teaching as validating, comprehensive,

multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. It validates ethnically

diverse students by affirming their cultural and personal strengths, styles, and experiences. It demonstrates comprehensiveness by focusing on academic achievement, as well as "helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire a sense of community" (p. 30). The multidimensional aspects of CRT include the content of the curriculum, the climate of the classroom, the nature of student-teacher relationships, the instructional methods employed, and performance assessment techniques. As a tool of empowerment, CRT can lead to "academic competence, personal confidence, courage and the will to act" (p. 32). Non-traditional approaches to teaching such as CRT are transformative in that they do not dwell on the shortcomings of students. Instead, they respect the cultures and experiences of people of color, identify and incorporate their strengths and accomplishments into the learning processes, and establish academic achievement as a mandatory and accessible goal for every student. Finally, non-traditional teaching is emancipatory; when expressed as culturally responsive pedagogy "in that it releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing" (Gay, 2000; p. 35). It liberates students by helping them to recognize "that no single version of the 'truth' is total and permanent" (p. 35).

Gay (2000) based her conception of CRT on four basic tenets. They are the attitudes and expectations of teachers, the level of cultural communication in the classroom, the amount of cultural diversity included in the curriculum, and instructional strategies that are culturally appropriate for ethnically diverse students. These principles

are the foundations for methods of teaching that are designed to reverse current negative academic trends among students of color.

In her conception of non-traditional pedagogy for African American students which she called "culturally relevant teaching," Ladson-Billings (1990; 1991; 1994) described it as empowering students "intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (1994; p. 18). She conducted an ethnography of instructional effectiveness of teachers an elementary school demonstrated by eight teachers. Data were collected through teacher interviews, classroom observation and videotaping, and collective interpretation and analysis. Ladson-Billings found that the teachers in her study had a high sense of self-esteem and a healthy regard for others; viewed themselves as a part of the larger African American community; regarded teaching as a service to the community; developed reciprocal relationships among students; perceived teaching as an art and themselves as artists; believed that all students can succeed; helped students make connections among their community, national, and global identities; and considered teaching as mining the knowledge of students (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

These features of culturally relevant teaching were informed by several tenets that Ladson-Billings (1994) derived from her qualitative study of elementary teachers during their literary and math lessons. They included:

- Treat students as intellectual leaders in the classroom even if they come from limited economic, educational, and political resource backgrounds and communities.

- Students are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way.

- Real-life experiences of students are legitimized as part of the formal curriculum taught in school.

- Teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates culturally specific literature and oratory styles.

- Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the inequities embedded in the status quo.

- Teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings.

- When students are treated as competent they are more likely to demonstrate competence.

- Instructional scaffolding, based on cultural understanding helps African Americans students to move from what they know to what they need to know.

- The primary focus of the classroom is instructional.

- Extending the intellectual, cultural, social, moral, and political abilities of students.

- Effective teaching involves in-depth knowledge of both students and the subject matter.

Ladson-Billings (1994) cited four principles that guided her exploration of effective teaching for African American students, which are grounded in Afrocentric feminist theory. The first was a "basis of concrete experience" (p. 155), which suggests that someone who has lived through experiences about which they claim expertise receive increased credibility and become more believable. Next was the "use of

dialogue" (p. 155), which is based on the philosophy that "telling isn't teaching" (p.

121). When teachers talk with instead of to students both can "deconstruct the specificity

of their own experiences and make connections with the collective experience of others"

(p. 155). The third principle emphasized caring. According to Collins (1991, p. 215), an

"ethic of caring suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central

to the knowledge validation process." Finally, there was the principle of personal

accountability. Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested that, "claims to knowledge must be

grounded in the individual," and bring "private qualities to bear on public standpoints."

As a result, both what is said and who says it "give meaning and interpretation to claims"

(p. 156). When applied in instructional practice these ideas increase the participation,

ownership, interest, efforts and outcomes for students in all dimensions of schooling,

including academic achievement and behavioral adjustment.

Irvine (1991) discussed five aspects of ethnicity that should be considered to

foster cultural continuity in the learning environment for diverse students. They were

verbal communication, nonverbal communication, orientation modes, social value

patterns, and intellectual modes. Two important facets of African American verbal

communication as they relate to the classroom experience are phonological structure and

discussion modes. Phonological structure includes sound formation, pausal behaviors,

tempo, rhythm and pitch. Discussion modes can be informative, controversial,

exploratory, playful, and even insulting. Both of these are examples of the cultural

referents that scholars such as Smitherman (1977), Kochman (1981), Boykin (1986),

Ladson-Billings (1994), Foster (1995), and Gay (2000) described as essential to

successfully teaching and relating to African American students in classrooms.

Nonverbal communications include kinesics, or the study of body movements; proxemics, which is the study of interpersonal space; haptics, the study of interpersonal touching, and symbols and signals (Porter & Samovar, 1991). Irvine (1991) noted that, in considering cultural ramifications of personal space, sometimes "white teachers physically position themselves too close, causing some black students to become anxious and uncomfortable. It is also common for black students obtrusively to invade the personal space of another black student in order to provoke a confrontation" (p. 92). Similarly, orientation modes among African American students include several components, such as body orientations, attention, and time modes. Abe (2000) explained the meanings and implications of body orientations as they relate to what is known as a "b-boy stance" in hip-hop culture:

> Standing strong, leaning back slightly, with arms folded, usually in a
> sweat suit of some kind with a hat pulled low that allows the eyes to see
> but not be seen. The standing strong speaks for itself. If you do not stand
> strong in the places where hip-hop started, your life could be in jeopardy.
> The crossing of the arms implies that the next move is on you. What are
> *you* gonna do? Sweat suits represent the antithesis of the stiff-suit
> corporate world; the opposite end of the spectrum from where hip-hop
> began. (p. 65)

African American students also are frequently characterized as possessing short attention spans. Non-traditional, culturally relevant instruction calls for frequent varied classroom activities and the incorporation of physical movement to improve the academic efforts, attentiveness, and achievement outcomes of African American students. Boykin

(1982, 2000), Boykin and Bailey (2000), Allen and Boykin (1991, 1992), and Allen

and Butler (1996) have provided empirical evidence that validates these claims. For

instance, Allen and Boykin (1992) reviewed previous research that explored how the

African American cultural trait of *verve* could be used in task setting. Verve is defined as

"a preference for high levels of variable and intense stimulation" (p. 590). Their analysis

revealed that

> Potentially unrecognized cognitive competence of African American
>
> children may be fostered in appropriately eliciting pedagogical contexts.
>
> Thus, instructional settings designed around the sociocultural integrity of
>
> black children may serve to alleviate some of the academic ills forced
>
> upon them by the cultural discontinuity they experience in the United
>
> States educational process. (p. 593)

In another study, Boykin and Bailey (2000) examined the home cultural factors,

cultural orientations, and learning preferences of African American students. A total of

173 second, third, and fifth grade African American students completed "home

stimulation" and "stimuli preference" questionnaires. The findings of this study indicated

that the "children report a prevalence of communal, movement-expressive, or vervistic

attitudes and practices that are cultivated by family members in their home

environments." These cultural traits inevitably mix with the schooling process, as "the

children endorse learning orientations, as well as prefer classroom practices and learning

contexts that are more consistent with their commonly prescribed familial values or

routinely practiced home activities" (p. 18). Cultural attributes such as these may elicit

disciplinary actions from uninformed and unappreciative teachers. Conversely, the

understanding, affirmation, and use of them in classroom instruction may minimize

behavioral problems and discipline.

African-centered pedagogy is another variation of non-traditional instruction that

may improve school achievement and decrease disciplinary infractions for African

American students. Some of its features are building community, using cultural

practices, and developing self-esteem, historical accuracy, values clarification, and

personal and collective empowerment among students (Lee, 1994). Lee (1994) described

an effective African-centered learning environment as one that places legitimacy on

African funds of knowledge, and scaffolds the indigenous language while reinforcing

community ties and emphasizing service to one's family, community, nation, race and

world. It also, "idealizes a positive, self sufficient future for one's people without

denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others, and supports cultural

continuity while promoting critical consciousness" (p. 297).

Delpit (1995), Foster (1995), and Irvine and Foster (1996) interviewed African

American teachers on what constitutes effective teaching for African American students.

The answers that these teachers provided were "influenced by their own experiences as

learners, their own reflections about their students, and from the culture bearers in their

community" (Delpit, 1995; p. 116). The results indicated that good teachers care whether

or not their students learn; help them meet that challenge; refuse to be time-bound by

curriculum, books, or other instructional materials; do not move on to the next subject

matter until every student has a firm grasp of the previous one; connect learning to the

lives of students; promote critical thinking and decision making; take the time to

communicate with students; get to know the individual attributes and cultural

backgrounds of students; value and promote cultural solidarity; focus on the whole

student; cultural patterns familiar to students; and incorporate culturally compatible

communication styles into their teaching.

Another important factor in this instruction that works well for African American

students is the positive reactions of their teachers to their culture. Hale (1986) argued

that much of the ineffectiveness in teaching African American students comes from

failure to consider the influences of culture on instruction. She stated:

> It is important that the teacher has achieved the 'duality of socialization'
>
> that is the goal for Black children. She or he should share, understand,
>
> and participate in Black culture. On the other hand, the teacher should
>
> have assimilated enough of mainstream culture to be able to model
>
> behaviors that will enable the children to become upwardly mobile. This
>
> is a delicate balance to achieve, but it is one that most Black parents strive
>
> for in their child-rearing. Black people disdain members of the group who
>
> look down upon their fellows and seek to escape from their heritage. But
>
> they admire those who are able to function as a Black person in
>
> mainstream positions of responsibility. (p. 167)

Teachers who educate African American students in their own cultural traditions

require in-depth knowledge with a transformative perspective (King, 1994; Banks, 1996).

Once this happens they are able to incorporate this principle into their instructional

practices. According to King (1994), transformative instruction

- Enables students to recognize and affirm their collective identification with
  people of African descent.

- Gives student an enhanced sense of mutual responsibility for their own learning and the learning of others.

- Includes a humanistic, personally meaningful focus in all areas of the learning.

- Helps students recognize and maintain the world-view, values, and cultural standards and practices of the African American ethos.

- Teaches students to discover, understand and use the strengths of their community's cultural practices in their own learning processes, such as including peer group structures; relations with elders; interpersonal relatedness; role flexibility, and self-determination.

- Assists students in analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of their community's cultural patterns, inequities and opportunities in the society and global community in which we live. (pp. 42-43)

Personal knowledge, competence, and background experiences play important roles in the effectiveness of teachers of African American students and other ethnically diverse students (Hollins, 1996, 1999; Lomotey, 1994; Shujaa, 1994; Spring, 1995; Pewewardy, 1999; Pai & Adler, 1997). To illustrate how these operate in practice, Pewewardy (1999) presented particular aspects of the cultural and experiential backgrounds of Native American students that teachers should use in their classroom practice. These include being "sensitive, aware, and capable of employing cultural learning patterns, perspectives, family structures, multiple worldviews, tribal languages, and Indian English in the teaching, learning, and mental ecology of the classroom" (p. 91).

In formulating a theory of cultural mediation in instruction, Hollins (1996) based her arguments on existing research literature, professional practice, and related insights. The theory emphasizes the relationship between culture, information processing, and classroom instruction. It uses "culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in curriculum content. Culturally mediated cognition in instruction refers to approaches using the ways of knowing, understanding, representing, and expressing typically employed in a particular culture" (p. 138-139).

Pai and Adler (1997) based their proposals for cultural foundations of education based on an anthropological analysis. They argued that, "Given the nature and function of the cultural foundations of the education field, anthropology should be considered its parent discipline" (p. 5). It provides tools for understanding connections between the processes of learning, schooling, and education as cultural transmission. Pai and Adler concluded that increased knowledge about the cultures of diverse groups "breaks down barriers to effective communication, thereby improving our interactions with individuals from different sociocultural groups" (p. 238). These cultural sensitivities can minimize the possibility of making unfair evaluations of culturally different individuals. Pai and Adler also offered illustrative scenarios of these interactive effects between cultural understanding and instructional effectiveness. For example,

> teachers may be able to see the relationship between Native American
> children's reluctance to engage in competitive academic activities and
> their concern for group harmony. School principals and counselors may
> understand that Asian American and Hispanic students' avoidance of

direct eye contact with them is an expression of respect for adults. Similarly,

teachers may consider that the use of Black English by black students is

not an indication of lower intelligence but rather an expression of their

identity. (p. 238)

Shade (1989) identified three orientations that can make classrooms more

compatible with different cultural styles of thinking, perceiving, and interacting. First,

begin by "creating a culturally compatible classroom" (331). She cited one example in

which a school established a pleasant, warm, and inviting climate by placing bright,

attractive, and well designed bulletin boards that focused on educational objectives in

every classroom. In addition, colorful floors, hallways, and a sense of cleanliness and

orderliness were important factors. Most importantly, a climate of respect and belonging

was actively cultivated.

Second, Shade recommended concentrating on "developing motivation rather

than classroom discipline and management techniques" (p. 331). With African American

students, discipline and classroom management frequently means conformity to the point

of robotic behavior. As a result students are often rewarded more for behavioral

conformity than academic competence.

Third, Shade (1989) suggested teaching "the process of handling material as well

as content" (p. 332). African American students frequently possess finely tuned people,

perceptual, and cognitive skills. However, this type of intelligence is often ill-suited for

the abstract and more object oriented information presented by textbooks and teachers.

To counter this incompatibility Shade proposed that consideration be given to memory

process, elaboration process, and the structuring process. Memory process allows more

information to be committed to long-term memory and subsequently used to interpret

material used in texts. This means "teachers must take the responsibility of introducing

children and their parents to new experiences and relationships" (p. 333). The

elaboration process allows African American students to paraphrase or summarize ideas

or assignments that are to be assimilated or accommodated, while simultaneously finding

ways to extend their knowledge base to other situations or contexts. The structuring

process facilitates differentiation as a successful approach to learning objectives and

activities. This includes, for example, diagramming ideas out of paragraphs and

identifying the main components to teach reading.

　　　　Other suggestions about how to craft non-traditional teaching for non-mainstream

students, such as many African Americans, Native Americans, Latino Americans, and

Asian Americans, and the affects it has on their school performance are offered by

scholars in the broader field of multicultural education (Banks, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996,

1997, 2001; Gay, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 2000, 2004; Bennett, 1989, 1990; Grant, 1992;

Grant & Tate, 1995; Grant & Sleeter, 1986 Sleeter & Grant, 1987, 1991a, 1991b, 2001;

Sleeter, 1991, 1995; Cortes, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1995).

　　　　Multicultural education began in the societal agitation of the civil rights

movement of the 1960s. African Americans, and subsequently other groups of color,

started to demand that schools and other educational institutions reform their curricula to

accurately reflect their experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives. Further

demands included hiring more teachers of color, community control of schools in their

neighborhoods, and teaching knowledge and skills needed to resist racism and promote

social justice with materials that reflect the diversity of people in the United States

53

(Banks, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 2001). From its beginning, a primary goal of multicultural education has been to reform educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality and maximum academic achievement (Banks, 1995; Grant & Sleeter, 1986; Bennett, 1990).

The conceptual foundations of multicultural education are considered to be: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process. As an idea or concept, multicultural education is a set of beliefs that recognizes and values the importance of cultural and ethnic diversity in shaping lifestyles, personal identities, social experiences, and educational opportunities of individuals, groups, and nations. As a reform movement, multicultural education emphasizes revision of the structural, procedural, substantive, and valuative components of the educational enterprise to reflect the social, cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic pluralism that exists in the United States. As a process, multicultural education is a way of thinking, a style of decision-making, and a way of behaving in educational settings that is pervasive and enduring. This process requires long-term investments of time and resources, and carefully planned and monitored actions that incorporate culturally diverse heritages, experiences, and contributions into all dimensions of the educational enterprise (Bennett, 1990; Banks, 1990; Gay, 1995; Garcia, 1982).

Multicultural scholars believe, and related research confirms that these changes will have positive effects on ethnically diverse students in the form of greater interest in schooling experiences; heighten motivation; more efforts and time on learning task; increase feelings of belonging and identification with schools; lower feelings of

alienation, isolation and marginalization; better social adjustment to school behavioral

norms; and increased academic achievement (Banks & Banks, 2003, 2004).

Multicultural education operates on the notion that all students, regardless of their

gender, social class, ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, should receive equal

opportunity to learn in school. This idea is supported by the argument that under

conventional schooling European Americans have greater opportunities to learn in

schools than do students who belong to other ethnic groups or who have different cultural

characteristics (Banks, 2001). According to Gay (1992a), multicultural education will

correct these disparities by maximizing the individual choice and flexibility, academic

freedom, human diversity, and personal liberation and empowerment of students from all

ethnic groups.

Banks (2001) argued in implementing multicultural education teachers should

address five major dimensions. They are content integration, the knowledge construction

process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social

structure. Content integration involves the extent to which teachers use examples and

content from a variety of cultures and ethnic groups to illustrate important concepts,

principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject areas or disciplines. In the

knowledge construction process teachers help students understand, investigate, and

determine how implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and

biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed,

presented, and verified. Prejudice reduction focuses on knowledge and activities teachers

use to help students develop positive attitudes toward different racial, ethnic, and cultural

groups. Equity pedagogy exists when teachers adjust their instructional techniques to

facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and socioeconomic groups. This involves employing a variety of teaching styles and approaches that are consistent with the wide range of learning styles within and among different cultural and ethnic groups. The final dimension of multicultural education is school cultures and climates that promote equal status engagement and representation of cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, and socioeconomic diversity. All members of the school staff must examine the culture and organization of the school and participate in its restructuring.

Qualitative Research

This investigation was conducted to illuminate how non-traditional classroom instruction affects the disciplinary behaviors of African American students in grades four through eight. A qualitative methodology was the most appropriate research technique to use in conducting it. According to Miles and Huberman (1984) qualitative research is context-embedded and concerned with words over numbers. Five major features have been ascribed to this research methodology. The first is that the data are found in a natural setting, and the most important data collection instrument is the researcher. Second, the primary goals of qualitative research are to describe, *and then* to analyze human behavior in naturalistic settings. Third, there is an equal amount of concern paid by researchers to processes, or events that take place, and products or outcomes. Fourth, analysis of data places emphasis on inductive methods that resemble putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Finally, qualitative researchers focus on the meaning of things, or why things happen, as well as what occurs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Tuckman, 1999).

Qualitative research is designed to present the difference between actual circumstances

and the realities that are perceived as natural in society and educational systems.

Shulman (1997; p. 18) noted that in conducting qualitative research, "it is as if the

researcher is attempting to document, with vivid characterizations, that nature need not be

the way it typically is."

Qualitative research is comprised of three primary phases: the collection of data,

the reduction of data, and the organization and interpretation of data. Data are collected

through a variety of methods, including observation, interviews, documents, and field

notes. After the raw data are collected, they must be reduced for greater manageability

and ease of analysis. Data reduction refers to the process of "selecting, focusing,

simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the 'raw' data that appear in written-up field

notes" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21). It also includes summarizing codes, identifying

themes, and writing memos (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1984;

Seidman, 1991; Merriam, 1988)

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) coding is the "analytic processes through

which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory" (p. 3). Coding

procedures include constant comparison, theoretical questioning, theoretical sampling,

concept development, and the relationships among these techniques. These procedures

help prevent the researcher from depending too heavily on a single view of the data, and

encourage him or her to always be questioning and provisional about understanding data

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Previous scholarship has suggested that creating codes prior to

fieldwork is helpful because it requires the researcher to connect research questions and

conceptual interests directly to the data. By the time data collection is complete, a

researcher might have forgotten quite a bit about the data collected. Hence, as data are collected it is important to code it according to whatever scheme is relevant to the study. This provides the researcher with the opportunity to decide ahead of time to concentrate on observing certain events, behaviors, or persons. Code sheets can be designed to record examples of specified behavior (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Identifying themes is another important phase of the data reduction process. The designations used to identify themes within data can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases, or combinations of these. This approach occurs on two levels - identifying information about the data, and interpretive constructs related to analysis. The overall scheme can be quite simple, as in identifying a theme that can be illustrated with numerous incidents and quotes, or it can be quite complex. The importance of being thoughtful in identifying themes and recurring patterns of meaning becomes apparent as preparations are made to analyze the data and write up the findings. Themes are a set of tentative categories, or answers to research questions. In working with themes, researchers are organizing and refining rather than beginning data analysis (Merriam, 1988).

Memos refer to very specialized types of written records that contain the products of directions for analysis. They begin with initial analysis and continue throughout the duration of the research process. Memos can appear in several forms, including code notes, theoretical notes, and operational notes. Instead of simply reporting the data, memos combine separate pieces of data together into clusters. They can indicate that a particular piece of data is an instance of a general concept. Thus, memos help researchers to gain analytical distance from materials and simultaneously force the

researcher to move from simply working with data to conceptualizing them (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Another important phase of the research process is techniques used to organize

and interpret data. Before they are ready for use the data must be processed. This

includes recording, editing, transcribing, conceptualizing, and coding. The last aspect of

the research process is identifying conclusions that can be drawn from the research and

determining whether or not they are verifiable. Final conclusions may not be available

until the data collection is complete, although preliminary ones can be made throughout.

Conclusions derived from data must be verified by having their meanings tested for their

plausibility and strength. These results often appear in written and verbal reports, and are

presented as articles in journals, books, or at professional conferences (Cronin, 1995;

Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Qualitative research designs are best suited for understanding interpersonal

relations between teachers and students, and investigating their effects on instruction and

learning (Au, 1980; Cazden, 1986; Ladson-Billings, 1994). While research is concerned

with capturing an individual's point of view, qualitative researchers "think they can get

closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation" (p. 10).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), "qualitative methods can be used to obtain the

intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that

are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (p.

11). Qualitative studies also are used to examine the constraints of everyday life on

issues of research concern. Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted that qualitative researchers

"see this world in action and embed their findings in it. Quantitative researchers abstract

from this world and seldom study it directly" (p. 10). Another feature of this type of research is its ability to secure detailed descriptions, with high value placed on rich descriptions of the social world. The thickness of data that qualitative research produces allows the individual participants to maximize their contribution to the research process.

<u>Summary</u>

In this chapter a review of the research and scholarship related to the major issues of interest in this study was presented. It included sections on discipline among African American students; the nature of non-traditional teaching and its effects on the academic achievement and social adjustment of African American students; and the conventions of qualitative research. This review revealed disproportionate discipline of African American students, and the importance of using culturally appropriate methods in teaching them. The specific methodological procedures used in this study to explore the interaction between teaching and discipline are discussed in Chapter III.

Chapter III

Methodology

This study used qualitative research strategies to obtain detailed information about and develop a thick description of the effects of non-traditional instruction on the school discipline of African American students. It examined these effects from the perspectives of both students and teachers. The discussion of the research methods is divided into four parts. In the first part the setting of the study is described. The process of selecting the participants is presented in the second section. Methods used to collect the data are described in the third part. The data analysis techniques are explained in the fourth section.

Setting

This study took place in public schools selected from a large metropolitan school district in the Pacific Northwest. The district had 82 schools that served grades four through eight, the targeted level of the study. Twelve were middle schools (grades six through eight), nine schools served kindergarten through eighth grade, and 61 elementary schools had students in K-5 grades. According to data reported on October 1, 2002 this district served approximately 47,000 students in K-12 grades. About 33,000 of these students attended elementary and middle schools. For both of these types of schools, district data indicated that for the 2002-2003 school year European Americans made up approximately 40 percent of the overall student population, Asian Americans accounted

for 24 percent, African Americans 22 percent, Latino American 10 percent, and Native

Americans 3 percent (Seattle School District, 2002).

During the 2001-2002 school year, African American middle school students in

this district received the lowest percentage of A's, the highest percentage of B's, C's and

D's, and the second highest percentage of F's. Overall, their grade point averages (GPA)

remained stable between 2.06 and 2.23 from 1997 – 2000, but increased to 2.45 in 2000-

2001, and to 2.47 in 2001-2002 (Seattle School District, 2002).

Information on discipline trends within this district was somewhat mixed. Short-

term suspensions were defined as exclusion from school for 10 days or less, and the

student was not formally withdrawn from school. Beginning in 1997-1998, African

American middle school students accounted for the greatest percentage of short-term

suspensions at 32.1 percent. This number decreased to 25.7 percent in 2001-2002. While

it continued to be highest of all ethnic groups, the percentage has declined every year

since 1997-1998. African American students also received the highest percentage of

short-term suspensions at the elementary level. The five- year trend showed these

numbers had gone down slightly from 3.9 percent in 1997-1998 to 3.4 percent in 2001-

2002. Long-term suspensions last from the time of the infraction until the end of the

semester, and the offending student is usually placed in a re-entry program at an

alternative school. Except for the 1999-2000 school year, African American middle

school students received the highest percentage of long-term suspensions among all

ethnic groups. At the elementary level, there were 18 long-term suspensions between

1997 and 2002. Out of those, five, or 28 percent, were African Americans, which was

second behind European Americans, who accounted for 8, or 44 percent. For the school

years 1997-1998 through 2001-2002 African American students in the middle and

elementary schools represented 38, 50, 53, 36, and 40 percent of the expulsions,

respectively. However, the last three years have shown a significant decrease in the

actual numbers of African American expulsions. In 1999-2000, 53 African American

middle school students were expelled. That number dropped to 18 in 2000-2001 (Seattle

School District, 2002).

In this school district, classrooms that qualified to participate as data collection

sites for this study were found in one of three locations. They were an elementary K-5

building, a K-8 school, or a middle school serving grades 6 though 8.

Selection of Participants

This study included three teachers as participants. The teachers were identified

through a process known as community nomination. According to Ladson-Billings

(1994), "this means that researchers rely upon community members and community-

sanctioned vehicles in order to judge people, places, and things in their own setting" (p.

147). Pacific Oaks College Northwest, located in Seattle, Washington, was a primary

community organization through which community nominees were sought. Pacific Oaks

is a teacher certification and early childhood education institution with a heavy emphasis

on social justice and praxis. The college produced many culturally conscious and non-

traditional teachers, and the staff and faculty had extensive connections with many

community groups, organizations, and individuals who could identify potential teacher

participants for this study. Questions asked of community members in seeking potential

teacher participants included:

- Are you familiar with anyone who would be considered a successful

  teacher of African American students in grades 4 through 8?

- How did you hear about this teacher?

- What do you know about this teacher and his or her methods?

After gathering as many nominations as possible, these individuals were

contacted by phone or e-mail. After an explanation of who the researcher was and why

they were being contacted, some basic questions were asked to determine their "goodness

of fit" for the study. They were:

- Are you interested in participating in a research study about discipline

  among African American students?

- What is your basic philosophy of education?

- How do you apply this philosophy in your teaching?

- What causes discipline problems among students?

- Do you have significant number of African American students in your

  classes?

These questions allowed the researcher to get a better sense of who the teacher nominees

were and whether they had any attributes of non-traditional teaching. From this

information a list of five potential teacher participants was created. These five were

invited to participate in the study. Of these five, two were unable or unwilling to

participate. Each prospective teacher participant was informed that his or her

participation was completely voluntary, that strict confidentiality would be maintained at

all times, and they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Following

verbal agreement to participate, the teachers were asked to sign a Teacher Consent

Form, a copy of which is presented in Appendix A.

Once the teacher participants had been confirmed, African American students in

their classrooms were identified and selected. In each class, at least four African

American students were needed to participate in this study. The student participants were

chosen through a process of purposeful sampling. This technique for selecting

participants combined homogeneous sampling and maximum variation sampling (Glesne,

1999). The sampling possessed a homogeneous component because the participants were

African American students who may have a history of primarily subjective disciplinary

infractions. Maximum variation sampling was applied by selecting students from a range

of ages, grades, and gender. The grades were fifth through eighth. Purposeful sampling

allowed the researcher to carefully choose those participants who provided the richest

data. The researcher requested input from the teacher participants on which students

were best to include in the study. Acting on these recommendations the potential student

participants were asked the following questions:

- How would you describe your educational experience to this point in your life?

- What are the main things that led you to feel this way about school?

- Have you had any experiences with discipline in school? If so, what kinds of disciplinary infractions and referrals have you had?

These questions allowed the researcher to gain a sense of the students'

perceptions of their school lives, and the kind of discipline experiences they had

encountered. A minimum of seven students were identified and selected in each teacher

participant's classroom. Using responses to the questions and the teacher

recommendation as criteria, the students were ranked in order of the most to least

desirable to participate in the study. The top four from each class were invited to

participate except for the eighth grade group, which, due to a rich talent pool, had six

invitees. Potential candidates were asked to participate in an informal group meeting

during a time that did not infringe on the participating teacher's instructional time. At

this gathering students were informed that:

- participation was completely voluntary

- strict confidentiality would be maintained

- they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without any
  penalty

- nonparticipation, participation, or participation and subsequent withdrawal
  from the study would have no impact whatsoever on their grades and
  standing in their class

Once the students agreed to participate in the study and the teacher made initial contact

with their homes, parent contact letters and consent forms (see Appendix B and Appendix

C) were sent out. Students were asked to read, study, and sign student consent forms

found in Appendix D. Tables I and II present a demographic summary of all the

participants in the study. Information about the teachers is presented in Table I, and

about students in Table II.

Table I: Teacher Participants

Teacher	Race	Grade Taught	Subject Taught	Total Years Teaching	# of Years at Research Site
Ms. Letia	AA	8th	Science	12	3
Ms. Michelle	AA	5th	Self-Contained	9	4
Mr. Knowledge	AA	6th	Math	12	4

* All names are pseudonyms

** AA = African American

Table II: Student Participants

Student	Age	Gender	Grade
Lynn	11	Female	5th
Jordan	11	Female	5th
Tupac	11	Male	5th
Fifty	11	Male	5th
Erienne	12	Female	6th
Takeisha	13	Female	6th
Eminem	12	Male	6th
Mr. X	12	Male	6th
Marcus	14	Male	8th
Mike	13	Male	8th
Jamar	13	Male	8th
Jerry	14	Male	8th
Jeffery	13	Male	8th
Akbar	13	Male	8th

* All names are pseudonyms

<u>Data Collection</u>

The main research question examined in this study was: Do non-traditional teaching practices impact discipline among African American students? If so, how? Three related questions were explored. They were:

- How do teachers implement principles of non-traditional instruction in their classroom practices?

- Do some aspects of non-traditional instruction lower disciplinary referrals more than others? If so, which ones and why?

- What are the perceptions of teachers and African American students of these practices and their effects?

The data were collected over a span of three months. This allowed enough time for the researcher and the participants to become accustomed to each other (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that a sufficient time frame should allow for data collection to run its course "until theoretical saturation takes place. This simply means that the researcher finds no new data are being unearthed. Any new data would only add, in a minor way, to the many variations of major patterns" (p. 292).

Three data sources were used in this study. This number is consistent with the qualitative research requirement for triangulation. It is accomplished when multiple sources of evidence are used in producing data and reducing single source bias (Denzin, 1970). According to Miles and Huberman (1984) triangulation supports a finding "by showing that independent measures of it agree with it" (p. 243). Triangulation is a form of validation that ensures results are confirmed and completed. Assembling data from different points of view gives a rich representation of what is being examined (Denzin,

1970). The three sources of data in this investigation were individual teacher

interviews, classroom observations, and student focus group interviews. Each of these

methods of data collection are described in greater detail.

Teacher Interviews

Interviews are a vital component of qualitative research. They contextualize and

provide access to human behavior and thus are "a way for researchers to understand the

meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption of interviewing is that "the meaning

people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience"

(Seidman, 1991, p. 4). Seidman (1991) described a three-step interview strategy in which

one interview builds on the other. This study used an interview technique similar to that

of Kirkland (2001) who applied a modified version of Seidman's (1991) three- interview

series in his study of the critical cultural consciousness of African American male high

school students. This modification provided opportunities to examine the experience of

teachers and students in an in-depth way that was also culturally responsive (King &

Mitchell, 1990; Kirkland, 2001).

The first interview focused on life history and allowed for a broad discussion of

the participants' knowledge and experience. This is consistent with Denzin and

Lincoln's (1998) assertion that in first interviews, researchers should allow the

participants to "tell their stories" (p. 74). The initial interview contextualized the

participants' past experiences in their reconstruction of past events. The second

interview concentrated on the details of the participants' experiences. It allowed for

greater depth of analysis and interpretation, as well as the placement of participants

within a particular context. The third interview was geared toward reflecting on the

meaning of the experiences. It permitted the participants to extend the thoughts shared

during the previous interviews, and to think critically about them to extract more precise

meanings (Seidman, 1991). Kirkland (2001) slightly modified Seidman's (1991)

interview series by including accommodations for the participants to engage in collective

conversations. This group conversation followed conventions described by King and

Mitchell (1990) in their exploration of the relationship between Black mothers and their

sons. They employed a group conversation method that created a more relaxed

atmosphere that assisted the participants in discussing deeply personal and emotional

issues. King and Mitchell (1990) considered the technique "Afrocentric" because it

"elicits reciprocal dialogue and creates the conditions for the researchers to learn with

participants about what 'we' do and to reflect on 'why' we do it" (p. 6). Being an

African American as well as an eight-year veteran classroom teacher placed the

researcher in the "we" category with both the teachers and students who took part in this

study.

The questions in the teacher interviews and the student focus groups were

accompanied by prompts that served functions similar to those in the research of Sheets

(1995) on disciplinary issues of students of color. In her interviews

> the questions were accompanied by 'prompts' that were both planned and
>
> unplanned to elicit a greater depth of information. If the student
>
> responded, 'She's trippin'!,' the researcher would reply, 'Trippin'? What
>
> do you mean exactly by trippin'?' Another prompt might be, 'Earlier you
>
> said… Can you tell me more about that?' (p. 44)

The three teacher interviews were conducted once a week during the data collection period. They took place in the teacher's classroom at a time mutually determined by the teacher and the researcher. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length. According to Seidman (1991) this was an appropriate time frame because it allowed participants to "reconstruct their experience, put it in the context of their lives, and reflect on its meaning" (p. 13). At the beginning of the second and third interviews, the researcher briefly summarized what was discussed in the previous meeting to reacquaint the participant with the context of the discussion. The researcher used a pen and pad to take field notes as the interviews occurred to record thoughts, reactions, and further questions and prompts. The teacher interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher.

Teacher Interview One

The first interview took place at the beginning of the first week of data collection. The goal of this initial interview was to contextualize the experience of the participants by inquiring about their current attitudes toward and relations to discipline of African Americans, non-traditional instruction, and the interaction between the two. This interview was structured to determine who the teachers were demographically, philosophically, and pedagogically. The teachers were asked to identify influential and inspirational individuals in their teaching lives, and what they learned from these individuals. The guiding questions for this interview were as follows:

- How would you describe your teaching style?

- Who or what would you say are the primary influences that have helped make you the teacher you are today?

- Assuming you are not there yet, describe the kind of teacher you would like to be when you reach your teaching peak.

- How do you view the issue of school discipline among children?

- How do you view your personal role as a teacher during a time when disciplinary infractions are taking place in your classroom?

This first interview provided a foundation for the next two interviews as the data collection took place, and the occurrence of events that merited reflection accumulated.

Teacher Interview Two

The second interview was conducted approximately mid-point in the data collection process. Its goal was to gather details about the teachers' perceptions and experiences in non-traditional instruction and disciplinary referrals of African American students. It used relevant aspects of the first interview to provide background and prompts. Specifically, the teachers were be asked to give detailed descriptions of some of the important aspects of their curriculum and teaching, explain why these were non-traditional, and how they impacted the classroom behavior of students. Guiding questions for this interview included:

- Describe the curriculum you are currently using in the classroom, and what makes it culturally appropriate for African American students?

- How are the students responding to the curriculum?

- Describe the instructional methods you are using to deliver the curriculum, and explain why they are particularly appropriate for African American students?

- How are the students responding to the instructional methods?

- In your opinion, what appears to be the overall atmosphere of the classroom?

- How would you describe the discipline situation in your classroom?

- What connection have you observed among the curriculum, instruction and discipline in your classroom?

Teacher Interview Three

In the third interview the teacher participants were asked to summarize thoughts and reflections in two areas. The first was the perceptions of their curricula and instructional effectiveness in relation to the African American student participants. The second was explicit connections between non-traditional instruction and discipline among African American students. The specific questions that guided the third interview were:

- As you look back on your teaching career, what specific instances stand out for you in dealing with African American students in discipline situations?

- What kinds of disciplinary infractions are most common among your African American students? When and why do you think these occur?

- Are there discipline differences between male and female students?

- How does the discipline of African American students compare with other ethnic groups?

- How do your experiences with discipline issues compare with those of your colleagues and their interactions with African Americans?

- What aspects of your curriculum do you feel work best for African American students? Why?

- What did not work so well? Why?

- What instructional methods were most effective for African American students? Why?

- What instruction did not go so well? Why?

Student Focus Group Interviews

Focus group sessions with the students concentrated on descriptions of their discipline experiences and reflections on the non-traditional instructional practices of teachers. The students participated in three focus group interviews. King and Mitchell (1995) contended that group discussion as an approach to research inquiry is appropriate for use with African Americans because it is compatible with their cultural and communication style. It recreates common perspectives and enhances the self-knowledge of the participants by "identifying the social origins of their shared emotions and experiences and by providing a context and process for critically examining their experiences" (p. 4).

The focus groups in this study were convened at three different times during the data collection phase – at the beginning, at the midpoint, and at the end. The initial focus

group discussion took place during the students' lunch hour in the classroom of the participating teachers. The meeting times and places for the other focus groups were determined by the students, participating teachers, and the researcher. The times were scheduled so as not to create conflict with academic activities and the locations (conference rooms and empty classrooms) were private and conducive to free expression among the student participants. Each focus group was 30-45 minutes in length, which allowed the participants enough time to contextualize and connect their experiences within their lives, and provide reflection on their meaning (Seidman, 1991). All three focus group sessions were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher.

Student Focus Group One

The first focus group conversation took place during the students' lunch hour and were catered by a local pizzeria at the researcher's expense. Courtesies of this nature helped ensure smooth data collection by fulfilling the researcher's obligation to treat participants with respect and appreciation (Reinharz, 1992; Carey, 1994; Morse, 1998). To initiate the discussion, the researcher explained the research project and how the focus groups were to proceed, that participating in this study did not have any impact on the students' grades or academic standing, and described how confidentiality and anonymity would be assured throughout data collection, analysis, and presentation. One of these protections was selecting a pseudonym for each participant. The participating students (and teachers) were invited to create their own pseudonyms to be used in the study. Also, the researcher explained that all audiotapes of interviews would be destroyed once the transcriptions were completed. The objective of the first focus group discussion was to

obtain information on the students' experiences with curriculum, instruction, and
discipline in school. Some guiding questions for this session were:

- How would you describe your school experiences up to this point?

- What types of curriculum and instruction have best worked for you?

- What type has not worked?

- How have you expressed your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with these
  experiences?

- Do you see a relationship between discipline problems and different
  kinds of curriculum and instruction?

- What does a teacher need to do to help you be the best student you can
  be?

Student Focus Group Two

The second focus group discussion solicited the opinions of the students about
whether teachers use non-traditional curriculum and instruction, whether these methods
were successful, and if and how they influenced their behavior. The students were asked
to recall specific examples of lessons or activities that they considered were effective and
ineffective. They also were asked about how they respond behaviorally when successful
and unsuccessful teaching was occurring. The guiding questions for this focus group
session were:

- How would you describe your experience in this class?

- Are there things in what is being taught in class and how it is being
  taught that you feel good about? If so, what are they?

- Are there things in what was taught in class and how it was taught that you do not feel good about? If so, what are they?

- Is discipline a problem in this classroom? Explain why or why not.

- Do you think your classroom discipline is connected to what is taught and how it is taught? Explain why or why not.

- Describe your behavior in the classroom when you like what is being taught and when you don't.

Student Focus Group Three

The third focus group session was intended to have the participants reflect on and further clarify their learning and disciplinary experiences. Students were asked to compare and contrast their feelings with some of those expressed during the initial focus group. The guiding questions for this session were:

- How would you assess the overall abilities of your teacher for working with African American students? Explain.

- What are the main factors that led you to this decision?

- What do you think are the most important things about your teacher that help you avoid disciplinary referrals, or contribute to them?

- How do you compare the discipline in this classroom to others you have been in? What accounts for the difference?

- What kinds of disciplinary referrals have you received from your teacher? When do these occur? When is discipline not a problem for you?

■ What suggestions would you have for teachers who want to avoid discipline problems with their African American students?

Classroom Observations

Observations of the participating teachers interacting with participating students in classrooms were conducted to see how they actually behaved, and to determine consistency between what they said and did. Observations are a necessary part of all social science research, because, it is impossible to fully study the social world without seeing it in operation (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983; Hammersly & Atkinson, 1998). Observational data complement interviews and adds credibility and transferability to findings (Erickson, 1986; Spindler, 1987; Spindler & Spindler, 1993). Each classroom in this study was observed three times during the data collection period. The participating teachers and the researcher scheduled specific days and times for observations. Before beginning the first classroom observation, the researcher relied on protocol followed by Sheets (1995, p. 47) who began by

giving students and teachers a general overview of the main purpose and duration of the observation. Broad statements of the purpose were given to reduce the impact on their behavior. For example, the participants were told: 'I'm interested in knowing more about what causes discipline problems, what works, and what doesn't work. Hopefully, this knowledge can help make school a better place to learn.' The need to take 'running notes' to record what occurred was explained and permission solicited. A brief and casual introduction of the researcher was made to the class

(teacher choice), and throughout the observation period the researcher

maintained an unobtrusive profile.

Observations of the teachers included organization and development of

instruction, presentation of subject matter, verbal and nonverbal communication, and

management of student conduct. Observations of the students focused on their level of

engagement, including social talk, work-related talking, time on task, attentiveness, and

behavioral patterns such as interrupting teachers, and disturbing other students. The

instrument for observing teacher performance and student behavior focused on six

factors. They were: 1) descriptive information such as class period, subject matter,

ability level, and time of day; 2) student interest level and description of instructional

activities; 3) student involvement and off-task behavior in activities; 4) examples of

subjective disciplinary infractions; 5) notes of student-teacher behavior and reflections of

the researcher; and 6) a brief summary of preliminary interpretations, insights and

reflections. The complete classroom observation instrument is presented in Appendix E.

Data Management System

Specific notebooks were created for each of the three data sources. The

transcripts from the teacher interviews were placed in the first notebook. These interview

transcripts were organized in chronological order according to when they took place. The

second notebook contained the notes from the three classroom observations, also placed

in the chronological order of their occurrence. The third notebook contained transcripts

from the three student focus groups arranged in the sequential order in which they

occurred. From the first through the third notebook, all pages were numbered, front to

back. These notebooks were kept locked in a secure location which was accessible

only by the researcher. Each notebook was read in its entirety three times, and emergent

themes and ideas were highlighted.

Within a qualitative study, the purpose of data analysis is to ensure adequate

description and explanation of essential experiences and meanings in the lives of the

participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Established qualitative research conventions such

as those presented by Miles and Huberman (1984) guided the analysis of the data. These

scholars suggest that analysis of qualitative data "consists of three concurrent flows of

activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification" (p. 21).

These three aspects were included in analyzing the data generated by this study.

Data Reduction

Miles and Huberman (1984) define data reduction as, "the process of selecting,

focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the 'raw' data that appear in written-

up field notes" (p. 21). Reduction of data is a continuing process that starts before

fieldwork begins and lasts until after data collection is completed, and involves filtering

data through different organizational schemes to reduce the magnitude and better verify

the final conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The data derived from the interviews,

observations, and focus group discussions, were reduced or reorganized to facilitate

manageability. Several processes were used to accomplish this. They included

transcriptions, developing codes, and identifying recurrent themes in each of the three

data sets, as well as across them.

The researcher manually transcribed each of the teacher interviews as well as each student focus group discussion immediately after they occurred. Once the transcription was complete, the information was reviewed and coded. The data management methods for this study included first level coding, pattern coding, and memoing.

Given the narrative nature of qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that codes assist by classifying and categorizing words. These codes are "retrieval and organizing devices that allow the analyst to spot quickly, pull out, then cluster all the segments relating to the particular question, hypothesis, concept, or theme. Clustering sets the stage for analysis" (p. 56). Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 68) added that, "first level coding is a device for summarizing segments of data," while "pattern coding is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of overarching themes or constructs." Some important functions of first level and pattern coding are reducing large amounts of data into smaller more manageable analytic units, and increasing the focus of the researcher by drawing him or her into data analysis during data collection.

Coding began before the end of the data collection process to avoid trying to do the coding all at one time which can cause the researcher to get "sloppy, resentful, tired, and partial, thus damaging the study" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 63). Coding of the teacher interviews, student focus group discussions, and classroom observations was used to identify the themes brought up in each of the sessions that related to the study. Data related to the codes were organized on a post-it board with clear descriptions of each category. For example, three columns were used to display a brief explanation for the

general categories and the individual codes, the codes, and connection of the code to the research questions. The researcher completed the coding process manually.

Miles and Huberman (1984) stated that creating codes prior to fieldwork is helpful because, "it forces the analyst to tie research questions or conceptual interests directly to the data." However, they caution that the researcher "should be ready to bend the codes when they look inapplicable, overbuilt, empirically ill-fitting, or overly abstract" (p. 64). An initial list of codes was created for the teacher interviews, the student focus groups, and classroom observations. These codes were based on and generated from the conceptual framework and research question of the study. They were refined and extended as the data analysis evolved. A list of the codes is presented in Appendix F.

Memos

Memos do not "just report data, but they tie different pieces of data together in a cluster, or they show that a particular piece of data is an instance of a general concept" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 69). They are researchers' notes to themselves about ideas, thoughts, and relationships emerge while coding is taking place. They can be a few words, sentences, or pages long (Glaser, 1978). Memos serve as a quick and convenient way of documenting thoughts and ideas that occurs from data collection, reduction and display, drawing conclusions, and testing conclusions to the final draft (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In this study a separate note pad was used during the interviews and observations as well as the margins of transcriptions to record emerging thoughts, impressions, questions, trends, and reactions.

Data Display

Data displays are ways of organizing and assembling information that allow conclusions to be drawn and actions to be taken. Narrative text has been the most traditional form of data display in qualitative research. However, this can be cumbersome, poorly structured and bulky, can overload the information processing abilities of human beings, and can obscure major patterns or trends (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Faust, 1982). Miles and Huberman (1984) noted that many types of matrices, graphs, networks and charts can be used to make data more accessible and compact, "so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move on to the next-step of the analysis the display suggests may be useful" (p. 22).

Once coded, the data collected in the teacher interviews, student focus group discussions, and classroom observations were displayed in a matrix format. The three teacher participants were identified by their pseudonyms. The student participants also were identified by their pseudonyms, gender, and grade level. For example, 6[th]F after a name meant a sixth grade female student, while 8[th]M would be an eighth grade male student. A great amount of data reduction and data weighing took place to narrow down the data for each participant, and the researcher displayed selected excerpts from all three of the data sources. Initially each data source was assigned its own display sheet. This allowed a preliminary assessment of the content of the data through a time-ordered and coded lens (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Once this was accomplished, these three separate displays were merged. A sample of the individual data displays for the teacher interviews, student focus groups, and classroom observations, as well as the combined display for all three data sources are included in Appendices G-J.

Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

According to Miles and Huberman (1984) qualitative researchers should ponder the meaning of what they are seeing throughout the entire data collection process. Although noting regularities, patterns, explanations, potential configurations, causal flows, and propositions early on is important, researchers must avoid prematurely embracing initial conclusions as final. Gradually, with the aid of distance and reflection, these preliminary results can be viewed with increasing clarity, although final decisions may not occur until the data collection process ends. These conclusions must be verified throughout the analyses, because "the meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their 'confirmability' – that is, their validity. Otherwise we are left with interesting stories about what happened, of unknown truth and utility" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 22). The conclusions drawn from this study were based on

- Whether the data confirmed, or not, that non-traditional instruction had a lessening effect on the classroom discipline of African American students in the fork years of their educational experience.
- Identifying patterns in the data across sets and individuals within sets.
- Implications derived from the findings for future research and practice.
- What additional questions were prompted by the findings?

A critical friend provided thoughtful and evaluative feedback throughout the study. This person is a faculty member at Pacific Oaks College Northwest, an expert on cultural issues in education, an accomplished author, and an experienced researcher. She was selected to perform this function because of her wide breadth of knowledge about

and interest in the cultural dynamics at work in classrooms that impact the disciplinary

rates, educational opportunities, and academic achievement of African Americans and

other students of color. The insights, awareness and wisdom of this critical friend

provided valuable perspectives on the adequacy of the interpretation of the findings of

this study.

Summary

In this chapter, the research methodology for this study was presented. It

reflected the established best practices and research conventions proposed by

methodological scholars. The research sites, an overview of the research design, research

question, data sources, data collection techniques, and data management systems were

discussed. The specific findings that emerged from the data collection and analysis in

this investigation are presented in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV

Findings

This study assumed that there was a relationship between instructional practices and curriculum choices of teachers, and the disciplinary infractions of African American students. The main research question was: Do non-traditional teaching practices impact discipline among African American students? If so, how? The findings for this study are presented in three sections, one for each category of themes that emerged from the data analyses. These categories were classroom environment factors that affect student discipline, relevant instructional methods lead to positive student behavior, and engaging instructional materials reduce negative student behavior. Data on the themes are presented in order from most prevalent to least. Information generated from the teacher interviews, student focus groups, and classroom observations is used in presenting each theme.

Class Environmental Factors that Affect Student Discipline

Issues surrounding the environment and their relationship to student discipline in the classroom were by far the most recurring theme. Classroom environment consisted of outlooks, attitudes and social practices of teachers that determine management strategies, and the resulting responses of students. The interactive dynamics that occur in classroom environments can have a major impact on success for both teachers and students. Other issues embedded in this theme included establishing personal relationships, teacher understanding before acting, the social curriculum, and punishment versus discipline.

Personal Relationships

Personal relationships are necessary foundations for good discipline. All three teachers in this study considered relationships with students to be a major factor in effective teaching and student discipline. Ms. Letia placed her role as a teacher in the greater context of human connectedness. She explained

> In my spiritual realm, I believe that if I nurture and give my students what they need that there will be another person to return that to help my own children. I just feel like children are angels, so you have to treat them accordingly. I know what I want for my four babies. I want them to be respected. I want them to be recognized for the beauty they possess. I want them to feel good about their family tree, where they come from. I want them to relate to symbols and images. Once they get that grounded [ness] and have a foundation of who they are, they're able to respect and accept differences in other cultures.

For Ms. Letia, personal connections with students formed the foundation for everything else. Her objective was not to simply test students "to see where they are, but to build a trusting relationship with them."

Ms. Letia's idea of establishing relationships with students as a basis for teaching and learning was juxtaposed to Ms. Michelle's assertion that she does not treat every student the same. Her explanation provided some operational details for how building relationships with students can be accomplished. She said

> I don't treat every child the same, and any teacher who says that is lying. I get to know each and every student so I can tell you the pulse of that

student. I can tell you when they are having a good day, what's making them tick, what's going to make them tick, and I do that by developing a relationship with them. That doesn't mean that I'm their friend. What that means is that I just ask simple questions, or pull [them] to the side, or a pat on the back. [I ask] 'How are you doing today? How was your weekend?' Just little things, and all of it is really quick.

The level of investment Ms. Michelle placed in relationships with students was a distinctive attribute of her teaching style. She used short visits and small chats with the students to establish personal connections with them. Ms. Michelle also was careful to ensure that students respect teachers. For her, teachers who do not separate creating meaningful relationships with students from trying to be friends with them are making a crucial mistake. Although authority must be maintained, teachers should exert it in a way "that keeps [students'] esteem up, [not] breaking them down to a crumb because you're gonna lose them."

The teacher participants (all of whom were African American) identified race as an important reason for their connectedness to and relationships with African American students. Each teacher specifically mentioned the plight of African American males that reinforces the need for these positive relationships. For example, Mr. Knowledge declared

I do know that African American males, being one myself, have so many things ahead of them that they need to be prepared for. I think that the statistics will show that they get suspended at three times the rate of even

their African American sister counterparts, and that they're targets. They have

a bad reputation in the media as it is, so it's rough.

This awareness and concern affected how Mr. Knowledge dealt with African American students, particularly males. He contemplated his relationships with students when he noted, "I'm always reflecting on what I can do as a teacher and a human being to be more positive and not get down on the kids to where I crush their spirit, but to let them know the seriousness of education, and I try to develop the whole student." Following up on this thought, Mr. Knowledge acknowledged the need to balance being tough with sensitivity to the cultural and racial inequities in society that await his students. In explaining this point he said, "I have to be careful not to crush their spirit in trying to up the intensity as African Americans, knowing what they are going through and what the system has set up for them. I have to be careful to nurture them, mentor them, but also be tough on them."

This concern for the societal difficulties African American males would encounter was not limited to only the male teacher in this study. Ms. Letia expressed similar concerns. She said, "I'm not a Black man. I never will be a Black man. I only can sympathize and empathize with what my sons as Black men are going to go through and what I have seen with my own brothers and extended family." She acknowledged that she was harder on African American male students because she felt society was going to be even harder on them. Ms. Letia explained further that, "When I say I'm harder, I'm not talking about punishment, I'm talking about correcting behavior." She described her own experiences teaching in what was considered a "throwaway school" as a further

example of why African American males needed to be prepared to deal with racial

prejudices toward them. At her "throwaway school,"

> It was 98% African American males. They had either been in juvenile or
>
> expelled from a school, so my approach with them was an article from
>
> *Ebony*, 2001, 'Why African American Males are Committing Suicide.'
>
> That was the foundation of my whole year with them; teaching them about
>
> what's going on. It's funny because some of the students that are said to
>
> be 'throwaway students' are students I had when they were 3 and 4 years
>
> old. I know that people say the home environment and different aspects of
>
> their life contribute to their behavior in school. I strongly disagree with
>
> [this]. Sometimes I ask, 'What happened between me having them when
>
> they were actually toddlers and preschoolers, pre-k and primary, and when
>
> I get them at the secondary level?' Something big and huge happened.

Ms. Michelle offered some thoughts that provided at least a partial answer to Ms.

Letia's question on what occurred in the lives of African American students to cause

them to shift from seemingly normal, well adjusted kindergarteners to troubled

adolescents. She speculated that

> From kindergarten, society just in general has this expectation, or
>
> stereotype, that a young man [should be] seated, hands folded, and looking
>
> like a typical Caucasian little boy. There are biases from the beginning
>
> from teachers [against African American males], and maybe even from
>
> some Black teachers too, but I know for sure from White teachers. So
>
> then, if they see this young man who is not able to control himself, who

wants to maybe get up and move around, who maybe is a little bit more

aggressive, automatically they're going to begin labeling him. They may

not label him officially on paper, but they've labeled him in their mind.

The teachers in this study thought the societal and educational constructs that

affect the development of African American males must be recognized and addressed in

building personal relationships with students. As Ms. Michelle stated, "I want to see my

boys succeed, and I don't want them all playing basketball." She wanted them to become

teachers, professors, and firemen. To accomplish these goals, she cautioned that African

American males "have to have somebody that cares about them, that can basically pull

them to the other side of the number line, from the negative to the positive, and that takes

a lot of work."

Ms. Michelle stressed another important role of teachers in relating to African

American male students in ways to undo possible damage from previous negative

educational experiences. This was providing "a lot of persistence, patience, love, you

know, everything, because here I am trying to undo what he has experienced for the last

four years, or two years or three years or whatever."   She also expressed concerns about

teachers who gossip about students, and allow this to determine their relationship before

they even get to know the students. To illustrate this process, Ms. Michelle shared the

following scenario, and her response to it

Some teachers will say things like, 'Oh, you'd better watch this kid,' or

'You'd better do this or that.' I have to immediately shut them down and

say, 'Well, I need to build my own relationship.' I will go to the students,

sit them down and tell them, 'This is the word on the street. This is what

people are saying about you. This is what's happening. Let's talk about it because this can't happen in this classroom. They are giving me a check every month to help you meet the standards at fifth grade and be ready to move on, and so we need to talk about this.' So we sit down and I'm very candid with them and just discuss, 'What do you want out of life? Why are you here?' You know, just some of these basic questions that probably no teacher has ever asked them.

Ms. Michelle was adamant about forming her own relationship with students on her own criteria, regardless of the attitudes and behaviors of others. She was very aware that pre-judgments by adults can destroy potential relationships with students before they have a chance to even get started. When this was combined with her candid conversations with students about the perceptions and expectations of other teachers towards them, the importance Ms. Michelle placed on creating positive relationships with African American students was unequivocal.

Students also emphasized the importance of teachers establishing personal relationships with them as a factor of good teaching and classroom management from the beginning. Marcus thought that this should be the first thing that teachers do. To accomplish this he would advise "teachers coming in that, before they get started and assume that we like their work, I think they should talk to the students, [to] see how they feel and how they should be taught." Jamar saw efforts by the teacher to establish relationships with students as potentially making efforts at teaching and learning more successful. He suggested

a teacher should find out what works for the kids to learn. I'm a visual learner,

so if they find that out about me it will be easier to teach me without me

being a distraction to the class, or asking questions after she explained it to

people. When they write it on the board and then do an example and all

that stuff, then it gets easier for me. That's how I learn.

Some students also pointed out that the teachers who build good relationships with them

will get similar treatment from students. For example, Mike noted that his teacher

"shows a lot of respect to us so we really show it back to her, cause she'll have our back

on something. If something goes down or whatever in the classroom she won't just go to

the principal."

Another student felt that connectedness with his teachers enhanced the entire

classroom experience. In explaining how this worked with Mr. Knowledge, Mr. X said,

"He's good because he understands where we're coming from because he tells us, 'Yeah,

I was your age one time and I understand what you're going through, but you gotta end

up one day figuring out what's going on in the world." Mr. Knowledge's ability to

bridge the generation gap by sharing his own experiences as a youth developed a high

level of comfort and kindredness with his students.

Erienne elaborated further on these aspects of Mr. Knowledge's relational style.

She accredited him with understanding "what we're going through. He understands what

we're doing in class, and he relates it to life and stuff." His students felt close personal

connections to him, as evidenced by comments made by Eminem that Mr. Knowledge

will "sometimes take you out and tell what you need to get caught up and he'll help you

with it, like after school." Mr. X said, "I think everybody likes Mr. Knowledge because

he's always there for you." Takeisha added, "Mr. Knowledge acts like he's more one

of us than one of them, as in teacher/student. He's down to earth. He's goofy

sometimes. He can relate to what we're going through or whatever." The reiteration of

comments by students that Mr. Knowledge "understands what we're going through" was

an indication of the value they attached to him establishing personal bounds with them.

Marcus offered a somewhat different perspective on what teachers needed to do to

show him that they are personally invested in establishing good relationships with him.

Some regular prompting and encouragement is necessary because

I just need to be pushed; not exactly forced to do it, but a little pushing

every now and then. Like, 'make sure you do your work,' just to check up

on me. I have a lot of stuff to do nowadays, and so I just need to be

checked up on to make sure I'm doing that stuff. A lot of teachers don't

do that these days; they just let you go.

At the other end of the spectrum, Takeisha described a teacher who did not

establish personal relationships with the students. Instead,

She targets people, and she thinks more about our discipline. She's trying

to make us into like soldiers or robots who just write, left and right.

Instead of thinking of us as individuals she's acting like we're on an army

base or something, and she's like, 'Do this in this amount of time,' and

whatever. She's a drill sergeant.

Personal relationships between teachers and students were evident in classroom

observations as well. One example of this occurred in a group discussion in Ms. Letia's

classroom. Three days before, Jamar, Mike, and Jeffery had received notices from the

school administration that, due to insufficient academic progress, they might not graduate from eighth grade at the end of the school year. The students and Ms. Letia were anguished and puzzled by this possibility. Ms. Letia explained that her experience with these students over the school year indicated that they were doing reasonably well in all of their classes, including hers. After receiving anxious calls from the parents of these students, she began to investigate the situation, by speaking with other teachers and administrators. Her investigation revealed that the academic jeopardy of the targeted students had been exaggerated. However, these distortions were not the point of the group discussion. Instead, much of the talk centered on efforts of Ms. Letia to present a more accurate achievement record of the three students. Mike thanked Ms. Letia for advocating on their behalf. Ms. Letia responded that she was simply doing what she was supposed to, considering how much they meant to her as students and as young people whom she cared deeply about.

An episode in Ms. Michelle's class provided another example of the importance of personal relationships with teachers for African American students. When it came time for Tupac to leave Ms. Michelle's classroom for a regularly scheduled rotation to another 5th grade classroom, he indicated that he did not want to leave. She encouraged him to just give it a try and see how it went, at which point Tupac began to act as though he were hyperventilating. In a debriefing following the observation, Ms. Michelle said that from the outset Tupac preferred not to go to the other class. She was familiar with Tupac's "breathing issues" when he was faced with something he did not want to do. For her the simplest reaction would have been to say, "Boy, get up out of here!" However, her instinct and mood told her to be more subtle. Ms. Michelle suggested that Tupac go

see the nurse. He returned a few minutes later saying, "I think I'm okay." Tupac then gathered his things and went to the other class. According to Ms. Michelle, how different teachers handle situations such as these reflects how they relate to their students. In all the classroom observations, Ms. Michelle interacted with her students from a baseline of respect. In instances where she had to take corrective measures, she did so firmly but fairly, and by using "tough love."

Understanding Before Acting

Teachers' understanding of discipline situations before they take action and the impact that this has on the learning environment of the classroom were the second major theme that emerged from the data analyses of this study. Ms. Letia felt strongly about negative teacher conduct and its effects on relationships between teachers and students. Problems in classroom control resulted from "yelling [by teachers], the treating them [students] like they're in the military [and] not letting them bring a part of their home culture into the classroom." Mr. Knowledge agreed because, "You can't just tear down children without the intent of building them back up."

The teachers agreed that rules of behavior were necessary but how they were enforced was a critical factor in classroom discipline. Ms. Letia mentioned public humiliation as a major factor that can escalate disciplinary situations between African American students and their teachers. She thought that when students are publicly humiliated, "everybody's looking at you, and you're being shunned. That's what happened in slavery." Even some African American teachers "perpetuate the same B.S.,

and it's very clear that our internalized oppression is hurting students, and we're giving them something [negative] to pass on."

Two of the teacher participants commented on the importance of teachers using their power in a judicious manner to build positive relationships with African American students. One key point in constructive teacher-student interaction was the type of incidents that teachers choose to take issue with. Ms. Michelle noted that a lot of subjective discipline is petty and time consuming. It includes "things like talking out of turn. We just work that out in the classroom. Cause to me it gives up the teacher's power when you are writing them up every single time they either speak back to you or they're not doing their work." The "little petty stuff, like the subjective type [of discipline] are the things where there's room for the teacher to really intervene." Teachers must be able to recognize these instances and use them to help students refocus their attention on learning tasks, instead of "just saying you're out of here because you don't sit like this [up straight] all day and listen to me."

Mr. Knowledge suggested that many of the minor disciplinary infractions should be considered "teachable moments" that students "may not get at another institution, or may be looked upon as an infraction that will get them removed from the class instead of actually the teacher teaching that person." Whether a particular classroom disciplinary incident was viewed as a teachable moment or grounds for removal varied from teacher to teacher. Ms. Michelle described the process she used for sorting through the teachable moments, and compared it to how some other teachers behave. She explained

I've been known to take a conduct slip, and just say, 'Okay Student X, if

I'm talking to you again, it's getting filled out.' But the thing is, that's not

my first line of defense. Some teachers will be like, 'You know what? You're

talking too much. You're getting a referral!' That's their only line of

defense, and that generally will take your power away immediately

because that's not going to help them.

She added that the arbitrary attitudes and actions of teachers, who do not discuss

situations with students or offer choices, tend to escalate behavioral tensions in the

classroom.

Another point made by Ms. Michelle about how teacher conduct affects

classroom discipline was the willingness to take each case of questionable student

behavior on an individual basis. This should apply even in instances of senior behavioral

infractions. She stated that even in physical altercations between students,

I would definitely do an investigation to find out what's the root; is this

two weeks old, did somebody just do something. So I would need to find

out what was going on and a lot of times I'll ask the kids, 'What can we do

about this? Because if I make this decision, you're either going home or

you're going to be in in-house suspension.' But if it's the first offense I

may even let it go; it just depends. But if this is something that has

happened more than once or whatever then I'm going to go ahead and give

them that infraction.

For Ms. Michelle, every behavioral incident should be examined and treated

within the particular circumstances and people involved. She was not willing to simply

say, "if it's a fight its an infraction and you're outta here." Instead, she needed to

understand sources and causes of the behavior before determining a course of action to

take. Yet, she did not tolerate consistent misbehavior, or allow students to "get away with anything that's completely out of control." The determining factor was sorting out which infractions merited what kinds of responses, rather than employing a universal standard.

Students also frequently expressed similar comments that teacher understanding should precede disciplinary decisions. In describing the disciplinary procedures of some of his former teachers, Eminem explained, "Some teachers will give you a referral and not even know what happened." This approach is the opposite of Ms. Michelle's technique, who had to know what happened before taking any corrective action. Mr. X credited Mr. Knowledge for trying to understand issues related to student behavior before taking action:

> He actually explains what's going on before you get in trouble, so if you
> fought somebody he wouldn't write you up immediately. He'd ask what
> happened, why'd you do it, and then if he finds a good enough reason for
> you to get written up he'll write you up and send you to in-house
> [suspension].

Another point made by students involved teachers over-emphasizing "little things." Takeisha recalled a teacher who sent a classmate "to detention for two weeks because she [the student] got an attitude back with [the teacher] when she was getting an attitude for no reason." Taken in isolation, such subjective incidents may seem relatively minor. However, an accumulation of them can result in a lengthy record of disciplinary infractions. Jamar described his view of a teacher who focuses too much on little things. He explained

I think that in [a different teacher's] class, her discipline is all wrong. She's not

gaining no respect and I think it's because of her discipline, how she

disciplines people. She don't give no chances, [and] she disciplines for

some dumb stuff. I got in-house suspension for playing with a calculator

while my peer was doing her presentation.

Misuse and Abuse of Teacher Power

Both students and teachers in this study noted that how corrective behavioral

measures employed by teachers are delivered can escalate discipline situations. Jerry

recalled an incident where the use of an aggressive and confrontational tone by a teacher

had this affect. He described this teacher as

outrageous, [always] yelling and stuff, like he'll be getting out of control

with it. We'll be talking a little bit, or a lot sometimes, most of the times,

and he'll be like, 'Shut up, now!' He ran up on me cause I said something

wrong and he said, 'You don't ever get out of line!' I said, 'Man, get out

my face!' I had a little anger problem back then.

Marcus described the potential consequences of a teacher's overly aggressive response to

minor infractions:

Basically what I'm saying is that if you kick them out of the class [for

little things] then I think that will just make them angrier and they'll just

really hate you. So every time they come into class it's going to be a real

discipline problem; talking and just really disrupting the class and what

not.

Negative reactions toward perceived abuse of power by teachers made lasting impressions on several students. This happened even when it was verbal. Erienne recalled one teacher who threatened, "Well I might just bring you down here with me to the fourth grade class because that's how you act." In Erienne's opinion, this type of teacher conduct "shuts [students] down because people will think that you are bad and you don't understand the stuff that she's giving to you and you feel more bad about everything else that's going on." Erienne provided another example of negative teacher behavior where this same teacher said to another student, "You're not going to pass this year. I guess I'll be seeing you next year." Takeisha also commented on how this particular teacher "puts down the students. She makes people feel bad."

Tupac described a different instance of being publicly embarrassed by his teacher. He explained

> My second grade teacher Ms.Tigera, would point out the students that
>
> would make it. She never used to call out my name. That used to make
>
> me feel bad because she used to call out a lot of kids names except for
>
> mine that are passing.

This practice of publicly praising students who are doing well, and implicitly shaming those who were struggling also was troublesome to Fifty. He recalled that one of his teachers would routinely say, "These are the people who are making it and these are the people who aren't." As it happened, Fifty's name was on the list of those who were not making it, "so it made me feel a little discouraged."

Several students also mentioned that teachers who try to make students feel bad or embarrassed may be acting out of fear. Takeisha thought one teacher was "scared of the

students," because, "She either yells at us or sits behind her desk and acts like she's

not here." Erienne expanded on this point when she said

> Some teachers are scared and try to cover their fear with anger. And they
>
> try to make you feel bad in different ways. They'll use different excuses
>
> about things that you've done in the past. They'll say, 'Well you went to
>
> in-house [suspension] a couple of days ago, and it seems like you want to
>
> go again.'

Marcus expressed similar sentiments in the comments that,

> Some teachers don't even give you a chance to redeem yourself. If you
>
> was to get in trouble, they hold that against you for your whole grade.
>
> They'll continuously treat you like you're a big troublemaker. And, if you
>
> say one thing to them they'll just kick you out of class, and give referrals
>
> over stuff that's really not important.

The perceptions of these students about what motivates teachers' attitudes and

actions toward student discipline raise three primary issues. One is the impression that

teachers who consistently yell at students are responding to a perceived threat or

intimidation. Second, these behaviors are indicative of teacher disengagement from

students. Third, using public humiliation and resurrecting past infractions or disciplinary

problems were signals that teachers had limited skills and restricted visions in how to

conduct classroom management.

Another key point expressed by the students in this study was their perceptions

that some teachers fail to exercise sufficient authority. Marcus cited an example of a

teacher who "didn't discipline [students] enough." In some instances even students using

inappropriate language, "out loud, like yelling it" provoked no response from the teacher. Some of Marcus' friends "cussed extra loud just to see what [the teacher] was going to say. It was like two feet away from him… and he didn't do nothing." The willingness of teachers to tolerate what students recognize as misbehavior caused them to question their ethic of caring. Even in fourth grade Tupac hoped to have Ms. Michelle for his teacher because she cared, and "understood the students in her classroom." In contrast, his "other teachers would give you so many chances and not even give you a write up. They don't even care about you."

Classroom observations produced evidence to support the points made by the teacher participants and the students about misuse and abuse of power by teachers. For example, when presented with an opportunity to exercise power, Ms. Letia encouraged a cooperative solution. In this situation Mike was becoming frustrated in his attempts to properly fold an 8.5x11 sheet of paper into eighths in preparation for a science quiz. Ms. Letia approached him, inquiring about the nature of his problem. Initially, Mike did not respond. So she let him know that he needed to tell her what she could do to help, or begin the quiz. In a debriefing session following the observation, Ms. Letia stated that Mike had been experiencing erratic mood swings lately. A similar situation in another class had resulted in him being assigned to in-house suspension. Ms. Letia explained that she was intent on keeping Mike in the classroom. The choices she offered him (explain the problem or begin the quiz) simultaneously avoided the student leaving the classroom, and at least attempting to work on the assignment. Shortly after Ms. Letia's intervention, Mike recovered and got on task.

During another classroom observation Mr. Knowledge demonstrated how teachers use power in a verbal manner. During a lecture on geometry Takeisha, Mr. X, and Eminen were having some difficulty staying on task. Seeing this, Mr. Knowledge stopped the lesson and explained that students who remained engaged with the material received higher grades in the class. He pointed to Erienne as an example of his message who, at the time, was the only student participant in the class fully involved in the lesson. Mr. Knowledge suggested that Erienne's high grades were a direct result of her level of attentiveness. He then pointed out to the class that while Eminem was struggling at the moment, he had made great strides in his attending behavior. This, Mr. Knowledge concluded, was reflected in Eminem's improved grades in math over the school year.

The Social Curriculum

Another component of the classroom environment theme that emerged from the data analyses was the importance of establishing a procedural protocol for the classroom. This foundation was important for creating a positive classroom atmosphere from the very beginning of the school year. Mr. Knowledge commented

> The first six weeks of school should be just like professional development
> for teachers, but it should be cultural development with the students,
> learning about who you are serving, parents. You can still access the
> students, finding out about them, and having them bring a part of who they
> are into the classroom.

Ms. Michelle also endorsed the practice of taking time to discuss and create social norms in the classroom. She said, "I like to establish my rules and expectations with my

scholars during the first couple of weeks, or however long it takes them to understand

what my expectations are, or however long it takes for them to show me that they've

gotten my expectations." Ms. Michelle called the rules and expectations "the social

curriculum," and stressed the importance of working with students in creating them. In

her class

> We talk about why we're here in school. That's when we talk about
>
> behavior and expectations; what are their goals, who they are. We get
>
> down to the basics of simply how do you come into this classroom, how
>
> do you exit the classroom, what is a line, why do we stand in line, why are
>
> those things important. I always try to relate it [the explanation] to real
>
> life situations, like being in a grocery store line, or why is following
>
> directions the first time important.

Ms. Michelle's efforts in setting the standards for the classroom environment

included literally showing the students the ways she wants them to walk, and how to

position their bodies to show attending behaviors when she says, "Be quiet." She noted

that having to teach these skills might seem like a waste of time to many teachers because

they assume students "should know better." For her such assumptions are questionable.

Students should be taught explicitly what is expected of them, that way "they know what

I'm talking about when I say, 'be quiet!'" She believed that if teachers incorporate these

teaching methods into their social curriculum, they will significantly decrease classroom

management issues.

According to Mr. Knowledge, the social curriculum allows students to

"understand why we're doing what we're doing; why you don't come in yelling and

running around the room; why you're courteous to other students; [why] when somebody's talking you don't talk." For Ms. Michelle, the benefits of introducing students to the social curriculum at the beginning of the school year are realized on a daily basis in her classroom. She noted that, "for 90% of the kids the rest of the year flows because… they know what's expected of them. They know why they're here. They see purpose, and how being in fifth grade and doing well in fifth grade is going to help them as they move on to middle school and high school and as an adult." Ms. Letia further illustrated the importance of establishing clear procedural foundations and expectations by discussing her experiences with a class that she failed to develop any type of social curriculum from the beginning. She recalled, "What didn't work well was starting things off at the beginning of the year with academics without getting to know [the student], having classroom procedures without cultural relevancy prior to starting the class."

Several students mentioned the comfort that came from being familiar with rules and expectations that are communicated clearly. This was most evidenced when one student began quoting a familiar saying of Mr. Knowledge and was joined in mid-sentence by another

Eminem: Mr. Knowledge always says, "There's a time to play…"

Eminem and Mr. X together: "… and a time to work!"

Erienne added, in "Mr. Knowledge's class, he has the law settled down. If you don't understand it, you're going to understand it. On the first day, Mr. Knowledge laid it out." These clearly stated rules and expectations also helped to minimize and resolve conflicts. Marcus remarked that in the event of some sort of conflict in the classroom, Ms. Letia

"looks to the leaders of the classroom to come together and get things under control.

When you do that you're helping her out and she sees that you really care about the

class."

Classroom observations reflected comments made by students and teachers about

the value of procedural foundations. After giving instructions for an assignment, Mr.

Knowledge allowed students to work in small groups, on the condition that the noise

level in the classroom did not exceed appropriate levels. The students seemed to

understand what an acceptable level of noise meant and behaved accordingly for the first

ten minutes. After this point, a group containing Mr. X and Eminem began to talk loudly

enough to attract Mr. Knowledge's attention. He reminded Eminem, the leader of his

small group to, "handle his business" and ensure that his group not be the one to disrupt

the entire class. Eminem nodded solemnly and told Mr. X to remember that it was

"working time." The group had no further problems.

Ms. Letia's class also demonstrated benefits of laying a procedural foundation in

the classroom. One particular assignment called for a reconfiguration of the classroom,

in which two tables needed to be moved from one side of the room to the other. Ms.

Letia asked two of her "Kings" to assist, and Jamar and Marcus volunteered for the task.

In a discussion after this observation, Ms. Letia explained that at the beginning of the

school year she informed the students that males would be referred to as "Kings" and

females as "Queens." When called on, they were expected to respond to whatever

challenge presented in ways to "protect the kingdom." Another instance involved Jerry,

in a disagreement with Mike that seemed like a prelude to a physical confrontation. As

he got up to confront Mike, Jeffery and Marcus intercepted Jerry and escorted him out of

the room where they talked to him and defused the situation. Eventually Jerry and

Mike resolved the tension between them. In explaining this situation, Ms. Letia noted,

"once the students started taking care of it, and he [Jerry] decided that he was going to go

along with it, so the other kings took care of the king."

Punishment versus Discipline

Discipline and punishment are often used interchangeably in discussion of the

classroom behavior of African American students. Yet, distinguishing between them and

responsive techniques could be important to teaching African American students. The

findings in this study supported this contention. Two of the teacher participants made a

distinction between punishment and discipline. Mr. Knowledge, a sixth grade math

teacher, stated

> Punishment and discipline are two different things. Discipline is to try to
>
> develop some type of behavior, usually positive, or to discipline one's self.
>
> Either someone else is trying to teach discipline to you or you're
>
> disciplining yourself to act a certain way or possess certain traits.
>
> Punishment is punitive. You're locking somebody up… not to correct the
>
> behavior or develop character. You're doing it to straight punish them,
>
> lock them up, kill their will. To hurt them.

Ms. Letia, an eighth grade science teacher, expressed similar ideas in her comments that

> I think we need to define discipline versus punishment. I think children
>
> are being punished. I have never in my life seen so many children
>
> misused and abused, to be honest with you. To me, when a child comes to

school without their uniform sweater on and are sent home for three days for

coming out of uniform, that's a punishment. Discipline would be to

provide them with a sweater. Reiteration is a big part of teaching.

According to Ms. Letia, distinguishing between punishment and discipline was

fundamental to determining the overall climate of the classroom. She felt that

"punishment is done in a more vindictive manner, because I'm in control and how dare

you do that to me. Punishment leaves scars that can destroy a student's spirit."

Furthermore, continued threat of punishment as a tool of classroom management is

ineffective for two reasons. First, students who have been affected negatively by

"sociological trends" and "broken up families" are not impressed by threats and fear.

According to Ms. Letia, "these children don't fear nothing because they have been

without so long, and they have seen the worst of the worst." Second, students who "have

been treated bad over and over" develop a kind of immunity to threats and punishment

from teachers." They convey attitudes such as, "what makes you any different from the

people I've already dealt with?" Mr. Knowledge concurred on this point, stating, "the

students have to know that you care about them. If they don't feel you care about them,

they don't care about your punishment."

Ms. Letia associated the punishment approach with preparing African American

students for the penal system. She explained that, "If you're preparing them to go rob, to

be angry, to take their frustration out on people, displaced hostility, then you're talking

about punishing [children], training them to be punished." She recalled a time when a

minor offense involving one of her students quickly escalated into a major confrontation.

The student was suspended for three days for not wearing a uniform sweater in school.

This caused a lot of negative reaction from the student body. The contentions were not over the dress code being broken, but how the student was treated. According to Ms. Letia he was, "approached in a very demeaning way, and so he responded. People [including some African Americans] don't understand the rites of passage of African American males. So when you walk on that, and they respond, then you punish them." She concluded by declaring, "discipline is done in a loving way." The point being made by these teachers is not that disciplinary infractions are occurring, but the manner in which teachers and administrators choose respond to them. For Ms. Letia and Mr. Knowledge, aggressive approaches in correcting African American adolescents can easily provoke aggressive responses from students in kind. This was not surprising for them.

Ms. Michelle gave an example of how she handled a potentially troublesome situation with discipline instead of punishment. She said sometimes when students are having difficulty staying on task,

> I just tell kids "You know what? If it's that much trouble, put your head down. Just chill. You don't want to work, you don't want to study, just put your head down." But at least they're in class and they're doing some kind of listening. I'll say, "You're not going to disrupt everybody else. But, if you are choosing not to learn, that's okay with me. Just put your head down, and you can make up your work some other time, and if you don't it's a zero." I mean, I tell them straight up. But I try to keep them in class as much as possible because they're not learning a dog-gone thing when they're sitting in the office.

During classroom observations, each of the teachers practiced discipline instead of punishment. Mr. Knowledge kept a tally of conduct checks on a dry-erase board to monitor students' attendant behavior. A designated student was directed to write the offending student's name on the board and put a check next to it. This visual reminder put students on notice that they needed to remain on task. If Mr. Knowledge felt that the student continued to behave inappropriately, he added another check next to the name. The written notations were accompanied by a verbal reminder. A student was allowed three checks before the next action was taken, which could be a phone call home, a referral to the office, loss of lunch recess, or a private conference. Mr. Knowledge used case-by-case judgment to determine which consequences were appropriate for the individual student and the situation.

During each of the observations of this teacher, only one student got more than one check by his name on only one occasion. Eminem was attempting to grab a dollar from his neighbor the first time he received a check. The second check came a few minutes later as he was talking loudly to the same neighbor. Following the second check, Eminem regained his focus and remained on task for the duration of the observation. Mr. Knowledge stated that no more than two students per week received two checks by their names, and three check situations occurred only once or twice per month. Neither Ms. Michelle nor Ms. Letia had any noticeable incidents that called for significant reprimands while they were being observed. In both classes, minor off-task behavior was addressed firmly but respectfully.

Relevant Instructional Methods Lead to Positive Student Behavior

The positive effects of relevant instructional methods on student behavior in classrooms was the second major theme that emerged from the data collected in this study. It included two dimensions: novelty in teaching, and regressive instructional methods. Novelty in teaching included processes that were effective in keeping students engaged and connected with the material being taught. Regressive methods referred to instructional approaches that did not lead to successful student outcomes.

Novelty in Teaching

Each of the teacher participants gave examples of non-traditional instructional methods that they used and explained why they thought the results were positive. They varied noticeably from the whole group, teacher talk-student listen, passive worksheet approaches to teaching that are frequently used with many middle school students. Mr. Knowledge used an approach that involved a teacher explanation-student small group practice-large group discussion sequence. He described it as follows:

> I go through the instruction with the children and then I break them up into groups. I monitor their group work and group activities… [for] scholars who I know are having problems. I may actually be a part of that group and help them work through the problems and ask questions, or I may even read the stuff along with them. Then after the group work time is up I have them come back as a whole group and discuss the lesson. That seems to be very effective.

In the large group discussions, Mr. Knowledge asked questions of random students. He thought this tactic kept students "on their toes," because "they don't know who I'm going to pick next. This questioning strategy "seems to keep them more engaged."

Ms. Letia determined whether student learning objectives have been met by using non-traditional techniques as well. Among these were oral performance and artistic writing styles. In summarizing her instructional method, she stated

The most effective form of instruction is TPR, Total Physical Response. When I'm talking to them they actually have visuals, they're able to move around and participate. It's about finding out what their interests are, and using them to make the instruction student-centered.

Ms. Michelle described her instructional style as "very holistic and hands on." She employed a variety of organizational approaches that included whole group activities, quads, and dyads. These diverse and frequently varied arrangements allowed "for some of the pressure to be taken off kids that may not be as self-motivated, may not be as verbal, maybe can't handle the whole assignment." Collaborative learning "gives them more discussion [opportunities] so they can hear other ideas that might help jog their own ideas," and obligates the students "to make sure that everybody at the table knows how to do [the learning task]." The students had embraced this cooperative approach to the extent that they routinely asked, "Can we work in teams?" or "Can we work in our groups?"

Evidence of cooperative learning, inquiry teaching, interactive dialogue, and caring among students and teachers also was obtained from classroom observations. An example of this occurred in Mr. Knowledge's classroom. After introducing a geometry

lesson to the whole group, Mr. Knowledge divided the class into small groups. One group contained the four student participants from this class, Mr. X, Eminem, Erienne, and Takeisha. Mr. Knowledge approached the group and playfully, yet seriously mentioned that the level of focus he had come to expect from certain students was recently in decline. When he began speaking there was a hint of a smile on his face. By the time he was finished the smile was gone, there was a stern tone to his voice, and he had made eye contact with several students including Mr. X and Eminem. They glanced at each other, half smiling but with their eyebrows raised. Soon afterwards the group began to discuss the assignment, with the members using each other as additional learning resources. At one point, Erienne asked a question the group had about a particular problem. Mr. Knowledge came over and answered it by posing another question. Takeisha playfully asked a question of her own, and there was some friendly teacher-student chatter. The dynamic seemed to be one of competitive challenge on the part of the teacher toward the students, with the students willing to participate. A supportive atmosphere that pervaded the classroom underscored this interaction.

Another instance of the use of cooperative and participatory learning, and their positive effects on reducing off-task behavior and other potential disciplinary problems took place in Ms. Michelle's classroom. The students were participating in a science activity that required them to interact with each other as well as the materials. Dirt and rocks were placed in plastic tubs and arranged in a downward slope, with water from a bucket for the students to investigate river flow and erosion. They were given rubber gloves and encouraged to "get their hands dirty." They did so enthusiastically. Ms. Michelle had to warn Tupac and Jordan not to get out of control or lose sight of the goal

of the assignment. She circulated around the room, posing a question to Lynn and giving feedback to Fifty. In a debriefing following the observation, Ms. Michelle explained that the original lesson plan from the curriculum called for the teacher to perform the experiment while the students sat and watched. She argued that teaching the lesson in its original form would have decreased the engagement level of her students. In taking this initiative, she transformed the lesson from teacher-centered to student-centered, which increased student participation to an exceptional level.

Another unique aspect of Ms. Michelle's instructional method was her use of a Nerf football to gain attention and focus the spotlight of performance on particular students. Ms. Michelle described how this technique worked:

I have a Nerf football and they don't know where I'm coming from, left or right. But I'll just throw it at somebody and just ask a question… and then they'll answer it and their team will get points. Then they'll throw it back to me and I'll throw it to somebody else. They don't know if it's reading; they don't know if it's math, but it's like a cumulative review.

The unpredictability of what instructional method Ms. Michelle might use for the next lesson kept the level of student engagement high. In her assessment it was

Because I'm so crazy, they just never know what I'm going to do. Part of that is just trying to keep fresh, you know what I mean; just try to stay on my toes and keep them engaged and just no boring stuff. I just broke out and started singing a song one time, and they just started singing the song with me. That was just like a transition, and then we stopped and we went on to math or whatever.

Ms. Michelle also noted that she used instructional strategies such as call and response, inquiry, and discussion, which emphasized student participation. She said that the call and response method helped build vocabulary. Furthermore, "Its very musical, its very rhythmic, and again our kids respond to that sort of thing." Ms. Michelle described the inquiry and discussion strategies as asking, "Lots of questions for why and how do you know? You're giving students a chance to retell… a chance to regurgitate what they remember." She thought this was important because it helped students "to see what parts do they have down, and what parts are they missing." These approaches to teaching also allowed Ms. Michelle to better monitor who was excelling, and who needed further assistance.

Comments made by students underscored the value of novelty in teaching. For example, Jerry praised teachers who "make the learning fun by switching up the assignment to groups." This approach allowed students to "talk about things that happen in the group with your friends or associates." Several other students identified the benefits that derived from working in groups. Aside from the opportunity to share ideas with classmates, these included enjoyment in being able to work with each other in completing assigned tasks. Marcus commented that, "Ms. Letia's class keeps us busy and working in groups so that you can have a little fun, a little laughter with it. But she doesn't let it get all out of control and stuff."

The student participants in this study identified other elements of teaching that made lasting impressions on them. Erienne recalled an assignment about Maya Angelou in which students assumed roles of different characters and performed the story. This performance component of learning produced an enthusiastic response and increased

student interest. As Jamar explained, "usually presentations be boring; a person standing in front of the class and they're just, 'Blah, blah, blah.' But we'll make boards or something, or do a little play or something to make it better."

Takeisha expressed admiration for the way Mr. Knowledge taught math because of his involvement with the lesson. She explained, "When we're doing problems out of our book he does them at the same time we do them instead of just looking in the teacher's book. He goes over it by himself, does the problem himself, and then checks it over." This caused her to feel a connectedness with her teacher because, "He's down to earth. Sometimes he seems almost more like a student than a teacher." Mr. Knowledge's students used colorful descriptors to summarize his instructional methods. One was his teaching is not "vanilla." According to Takeisha's interpretation, "Vanilla means plain. It's like sit down, do your work. If you say anything you're going to detention." Erienne noted that, "Mr. Knowledge's teaching is like rainbow sherbert. Sometimes he does that twist." Takeisha explained further that

> Sometimes you throw in a joke here and there, but you say, "Do the work.
> You can do this part, you don't have to do that part. You can do that part
> for extra credit if you want to cause I wasn't planning for that to be in
> there. Partner-up, get in groups, talk a little, not a lot; lower your voice.

Fun was another factor in effective teaching for the students in this study. Jeffery pointed out that sometimes Ms. Letia "likes to use games for learning, especially competition. That's fun for us basketball players." The idea of teachers making the learning fun for students also was shared by Tupac, who added, "when she [Ms. Michelle] does teach, its fun. She finds a fun way to do it. She doesn't make teaching hard."

Regressive Instructional Methods

The data from this study also revealed significant emphases on ineffective instructional methods, and how they can have negative effects on disciplinary behaviors and learning of students. Ms. Letia connected these to traditional approaches that are linear and teacher centered. She described this as

> a teacher [standing] in front of the class, [with] desks or tables in a single
>
> file line. The teacher teaches from the blackboard and from the overhead.
>
> There is no student participation until, I would like to call it 'the script is
>
> completed.' Then they ask questions, and that's the only time you have
>
> the child participate. Basically just sitting at the desk, giving directions,
>
> writing the directions on the board, and expecting the students to just
>
> come in and get into it.

The teachers identified three different methods that regularly place restrictions on student participation. One was the manner in which teachers speak to students. Ms. Letia described it as, "teachers talking at children, as if they're the dictator and the child should just respond." She argued further that, "if [the curriculum] is not presented in an interesting fashion, you are going to be dealing with behavior, left and right." The second way that restrictive student participation occurs is through the inability of teachers to do engaging teaching. Ms. Michelle pointed out, "There's a whole lot of teachers who can probably teach real well but their delivery is messed up, and part of the delivery is the people you are delivering it to and they are able to relate to it." She thought even teachers who have high levels of formal education might still need to adapt their instructional approaches to be more engaging for African American students. The third

obstacle to participatory learning for students was teachers who simply withdraw from the teacher-student interaction, or take a hands-off approach. Mr. Knowledge noted that some teachers act as if they "don't want to really engage and teach the students," and "feel that it is easier for them to have the students run everything to where they're getting off scott-free without incorporating rules."

Students also described instances of perceived regressive instructional approaches and identified some of their salient characteristics. For them, lack of communication with the teacher was a serious issue. In discussing problems he was having with a teacher's instructional approach, Eminem explained, "She doesn't describe the work that we do. She just gives it to us and has us do it. She'll just give us the paper and tell us to do it, and a lot of people don't get it." Mr. X agreed and added, "And she's trying to figure out why we're failing. Cause she's not explaining the work! The teacher needs to explain the work more, describe it." Eminem admitted he needed to see how teachers did an assignment before he felt confident that he could do it himself.
These comments reinforced the importance of the suggestion made by Ms. Letia that African American students are more likely to succeed in a given task if the teacher acts as a bridge between the assignment and the student, instead of simply assigning work with little oral communication.

Perception of instructional non-engagement on the part of the teacher can be frustrating for students. Teachers refusing to communicate with students who ask for assistance further exacerbates this situation and creates disciplinary opportunities, as the students in this study frequently suggested. For Mr. X, the rule of no talking until

students finished all of their work was insensible and insensitive. So were efforts to ask clarifying questions that were ignored by teachers.

Fifty made another connection between relevant teaching and effective classroom management. He stated, "if the teacher is teaching in a way that keeps everybody interested, they'll be quiet." Takeisha supported this idea in her statement that classroom management is "more connected to the teacher than it is to the curriculum. Because the curriculum is going to be the same everywhere but the disciplinary problems are going to differ." Erienne added, "the curriculum is always going to depend on the teacher. It's the same work, but each teacher might put it in a different way."

Engaging Materials Reduce Negative Student Behavior

Several of the participants in this study identified elements that make instructional materials engaging for African American students and their positive effects on classroom behavior. The primary attribute of engaging materials was relevance to students' lives. The effects included a decrease in disciplinary problems.

Relevance to Students' Lives

All three teachers in this study emphasized creating bonds between the students and what is being taught. Ms. Michelle noted that "trying to connect curriculum to real life for a real purpose" was paramount in determining what she taught. Ms. Letia pointed out that in constructing her lessons plans, a primary point of focus was the anticipatory set. She explained that

The anticipatory set is finding out what [students] already know about what

you're about to teach and giving it a foundation of interest which is

usually something the students can relate to, and then building in the skill

and the guided practice.

Mr. Knowledge argued that relevant curriculum should allow African American students

to "draw from their past experiences… offer hands on learning where they can feel and

touch and maybe draw, and … allow them to reflect verbally and in written form."

Ms. Letia felt European Americans performed in school better then African Americans

because the curriculum "is for the dominant culture." To compensate for their culture

being excluded she has learned "to make everything centered around the students that I

am servicing." This centering should increase their academic performance.

The teachers also described other techniques they used to ensure that instructional

materials were relevant to their students, and the benefits that result. Mr. Knowledge

tried "to find experiences that they've dealt with and put them in mathematical terms so

[the students] can be more engaged." He explained further that,

The curriculum is what it is and basically it's like cooking some stew.

You may have the ingredients, but you may need to put some spices in it

and doctor it a little bit. So, yes I wish it was a more Afrocentric math

curriculum, but I'm doing the best with what I got.

Ms. Letia had a similar attitude about her eighth grade science curriculum. It was

designed by the National Science Foundation, but she has added African-centered content

to it. She focused on studying the foundations of ecology and evolution framed in "the

life, trials and tribulations of George Washington Carver who was an African

American scientist who contributed a lot to society, and the lives of Black farmers."

Ms. Michelle also explained how she adjusted the curriculum to ensure high

relevancy for her students:

I pretty much just have to re-write the textbook. I don't literally re-write it

but when I'm discussing with kids and trying to teach them a concept, or

teach them how to do something, I always use things that I know they are

familiar with so I can hook them in some way to listen and to gain that

understanding. I also will do that with whatever, science, writing, the

writing prompts that we use. I try to make them relevant, and not just to

culture, but also to age and what those guys are going through and what

they see and watch right now, like video games, PlayStation. You know,

you build a lot of that stuff in there, too. So the short of the answer is that

what the district required is not culturally relevant. So what I have to do is

supplement and augment, and make some changes.

According to the student participants in the study relevant instructional materials

(as with methods) are enjoyable, entertaining, and provocative. In recalling one teacher's

selection of curriculum, Erienne remembered reading and performing different selections

by African American authors. The introduction of these materials encouraged her to

interact and connect with them. When asked if this type of curriculum increased levels of

student engagement, Takeisha responded, "It taught us more than we usually would learn.

If it was about a little rat running into a hole, it wouldn't be that interesting so most

people wouldn't remember it."

Classroom observations revealed the teacher participants incorporating the experiences of students into the curriculum. Mr. Knowledge combined a discussion about operating a lemonade stand into a math lesson. Related topics included entrepreneurship, expenses, and profits. The students remained engaged with the lesson as they examined steps involved in launching and maintaining a successful business. The lemonade stand was introduced in a conversation about the types of businesses students may have seen in their neighborhood, or may have tried themselves.

Ms. Letia provided engaging materials for her students as well. As part of a lesson exploring the importance of scientific procedures, she required the students to create proper procedures for assembling a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. All of the student participants were engrossed in writing procedures and were eager to apply them in actual practice. High levels of enthusiasm occurred when their peers tried to construct a sandwich following the directions provided. The written instructions of only two of the students led to anything that even remotely resembled a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. But, the actual process was riveting to the students observing the attempted actions.

Teacher participants also shared perceptions about positive reactions to curriculum that was relevant to the lives of the students. In describing the scene in her classroom when students are engaged with the material. Ms. Michelle said:

They're looking at me; they're raising their hands. Sometimes they get so excited they start saying, 'Oh yeah, yeah, that's right; yeah, my family…' They start engaging really quickly and [sometimes] out of turn, and it just depends. Sometimes I'll just let it go, or I'll say, 'Okay, let's get back to what we're talking about,' and then have them raise their hand and share

their experience with whatever it is we're talking about. Kids really get

jazzed, and they get engaged when they see that they can relate to

something that you're talking about. Then you get that good learning.

The practice of incorporating personal experiences, their families, neighborhoods, and

communities into the curriculum was a common strategy that Ms. Michelle used to

connect her students to their academic work. This was motivated by her belief that when

"You get them hooked, obviously they're going to be excited; they're going to be more

willing to learn the procedure, or the concept [or] whatever it is that you're working on."

Student participants in this study gave examples of both positive and negative

responses that resulted from different types of curriculum materials. In Mr. Knowledge's

class, Eminem stated, "When I don't like it [the material], that slows me down. I mostly

talk with people around me." Mr. X said he starts "acting a fool, yelling and talking back

to the teacher." When Erienne is bored she "still likes to read," but does "stuff that

annoys the teacher, like talk to my neighbor." Takeisha added, "You get this, tapping on

the table" that annoys and distracts other students who will then start saying, "Can you

stop tapping?" Disciplinary problems were more likely to occur in these situations.

Students in Ms. Letia's class reported similar reactions. Jamar said, "When I

don't like what's being taught I just put the assignment to the side, go sit in the corner

somewhere, and just play the background." Jerry tended to "act out, I'll act like a clown,

and just be outrageous," while Marcus "just spaces out and doodles or something on a

piece of paper." When curriculum materials are not interesting and relevant Jeffery also

doodles or talks with friends. These disengagements increased potential misbehavior that

can result in disciplinary conflict between teachers and students in the classroom.

Conversely, instructional materials that are interesting and engaging cause students to have favorable reactions and exhibit positive behaviors. These responses were illustrated by Mr. X in his comments that, "I get my work done faster than I usually do." When Erienne likes the schoolwork she is doing she is happy, answers the questions, and reads a lot. Takeisha is able to be more attentive if the instructional materials are enjoyable. She said, "I'm into algebra, I love algebra. When I do algebra I'm like, 'What's next? What's next, what's next?' Instead of sitting there being bored, you're waiting for the next piece of algebra."

Interesting materials also motivated Jamar to "just do the work," and when he completes it he is "in a good mood." Both Jerry and Marcus were prompted to work harder, including seeking out help for things they did not understand. Marcus explained that, "When I like what's being taught I get into the work and try to do it the best way I can. I might joke a bit if somebody's next to me. I might get into a little conversation but overall I will get that work finished cause I like it or whatever." Jeffery showed he likes what is being taught, "by giving the teacher respect."

Summary

Research findings from teacher interviews, student focus groups, and classroom observations were presented in this chapter. The analysis of the data generated by this study revealed three major themes. They were classroom environment factors affect student discipline; relevant instructional methods lead to positive student behaviors; and engaging materials reduce negative student behavior. The classroom environment was shaped by personal relationships between teachers and students, teacher behavior, the

social curriculum, and using punishment instead of discipline. This theme was most

closely linked to the guiding question of this study, which asked what specific aspects of

non-traditional instruction lower disciplinary referrals. The instructional methods theme

included novelty in teaching and regressive instruction. The research question of how

teachers implement principles of non-traditional instruction in their classroom practices

was addressed in this theme. Novelty in teaching elicited positive academic and

behavioral reactions from the student participants in this study, while regressive

instructional methods were criticized strongly by them. Instructional material that was

engaging and relevant for African American students included aspects of the students'

lived experiences. All of these findings increased attendant behavior and enthusiasm for

schoolwork among students. They confirmed the assertion of this study that there would

be a positive relationship between effective classroom instruction and reduced

disciplinary infractions for African American students.

A summary, discussion, and recommendations for future research are presented in

Chapter V.

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section summarizes the major findings of the study based on the data presented in Chapter IV. In the second section these findings are discussed, along with how they relate to previous research and scholarship. Some reasons for why this study is important and how it contributes to the body of research on the discipline of African American students are presented in the third section. This discussion is followed in section four by an explanation of some things that were not accomplished in this study that limit the application of the findings beyond the setting in which they occurred. In the final section of the chapter suggestions are made for how the presented study can be improved in the future, and efforts examining other aspects of disciplinary issues in schools might be conducted. Some implications for classroom practice embedded in the findings of this study also are presented.

Summary

This study was designed to identify instructional methods that may reduce classroom discipline among African American students in grades 4 through 8. Data were collected through teacher interviews, student focus groups, and classroom observations during January, February, and March 2004. The study was conducted in two schools in a large city in the Pacific Northwestern part of the United States. One was a K-8 building and the other was K-5. It involved 17 participants, 14 of whom were students and 3 were teachers. Two of the teacher participants were female, one was male, and all were

African Americans. Eight of the student participants were in fifth and sixth grade,

and there were an equal number of males and females. All of the six student participants

in the eighth grade were male. All of the student participants were African Americans.

Analysis of the data revealed that the behavior of African American students was

affected by the environment of the classroom, the methods of instruction, and the

relevancy of curricular materials. There was strong agreement among the different

participants about the nature of these effects. The consensus also crossed gender lines

and grade levels.

The major findings of this study were:

- Classroom management and instructional quality and style are interactive.

- The environment of a classroom plays a significant role in the overall disciplinary dynamic that exists between teachers and students. This environmental context sets the standard of conduct and conveys academic and behavioral expectations to students.

- The establishment of a personal relationship between teachers and students is important for effective instruction and classroom management.

- The way teachers decide to apply the power they wield can either minimize or accelerate disciplinary issues.

- All of the instances of classroom management involved subjective disciplinary situations.

- Classrooms that included social curricula were viewed as places that encouraged academic success. Social curricula explicitly articulated expectations and appropriate classroom conduct.

- Similar distinctions were made by teachers and students between discipline and punishment. Punishment was viewed as a punitive action taken to humiliate or degrade the students. Discipline was seen as a corrective measure taken to hold one accountable, and as a learning experience that can assist in future growth and character development.

- The methods of instruction teachers use were cited as important aspects of successful student outcomes. Teachers and students agreed that the manner in which curriculum is transmitted is essential to maintaining behavioral integrity and learning in a classroom.

- Learning that was enjoyable for African American students promoted successful academic experiences and reduced disciplinary infractions.

- Traditional instructional methods were perceived as counterproductive in reducing disciplinary infractions. These techniques were also less likely to create successful academic outcomes among African American students.

- Students tended to respond positively to novel instructional methods, such as cooperative learning, inquiry teaching, interactive dialogue, and coaching from teachers.

- Engaging and relevant instructional materials decreased the disciplinary behavior and improved academic efforts of African American students.

- Relevant instructional materials attended explicitly to factors of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and experience among students.

Discussion

Several major trends were embedded in the findings of this study. These were related to different aspects of classroom instruction that scholars such as Foster (1995), Allen and Boykin (1992), Hale (1986), Allen and Butler (1996), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Shujaa (1994) have identified as effective for African American students. The most prominent of these was personal relationships between teachers and students, and its direct connection to discipline and efficacy in teaching. Both the teacher and student participants in this study placed a high value on making connections with their students that went above and beyond the conventional limits of instruction. They believed caring relationships were a condition of academic success for students, and compensated for the societal conditions that adversely affect African Americans, especially males. The teachers prepared students to overcome these obstacles by pointing out the positive attributes and skills the students possessed rather than dwelling on their shortcomings.

In this sense they exhibited attitudes and behaviors that were compatible with Boykin's (2002) notion of talent development of African American students. It asserts that all students can learn in demanding, high-expectation academic settings. To reach this goal schools must be committed to implementing multiple, evidence-based activities and all relevant stakeholders must be genuinely involved, supportive, and held accountable. First, however, the traditional function of schooling must be redirected from that of classifying, sorting, and weeding out students to maximizing every child's potential for academic development. The emphasis given to teachers establishing personal relationships with students in this study also is consistent with the research and recommendations of Ladson-Billings (1990; 1991; 1994), Irvine (1991), Lee (1994), and

Gay (2000). They consider meaningful personal connections between teachers and students to be a reflection of a high cultural value among African Americans, and necessary components of teaching African American students successfully. This success, as demonstrated by this study is apparent in heightened efforts and time on task, academic achievement, and social adjustment in school.

The teachers in this study also believed in facilitating self-efficacy among students, which included accessibility, individual accountability, students helping to monitor each other's behavior, and providing each other with academic assistance. These abilities could have positive affects and outcomes in both classroom behavior and academic engagement. These findings resonate with arguments made by Bandura (1997) and Gillette (1996) that teachers with high self-efficacy will believe in their own abilities to impact the school experiences of students can get students to reciprocate by increasing their own self-efficacy. These beliefs continually explore how they can better serve students, and students develop a higher trust level in and respect for them. Consequently, they are motivated to work harder on instructional tasks and managing their own behavior. All these interactions were apparent among the participants in this study.

The results of this study confirm theory about the positive effects of culturally and experientially relevant instructional materials and methods for African American students. Teachers consistently tried to connect their teaching to the lived experiences of the students. The student participants were enthusiastic about and responsive when teachers presented the curriculum in a way that appealed to them. This finding is supported by arguments offered by Good and Brophy (1986) and Shade (1989), that teachers who get students excited about learning and motivate them to focus their mental

energy on academic get better results in all dimensions of the educational enterprise, including academic, moral, and behavioral performance. Marshall (2002) stated that successful teachers of African Americans "create learning experiences that allow students to draw parallels between knowledge and skills they acquire in school and their real-life experiences beyond school. Most importantly, these teachers teach in ways that will not alienate students from their own communities" (p. 110). The teachers who participated in this study displayed these behaviors and sensitivities. They sought to achieve a learning balance for students by helping them learn enough mainstream regulations to function well in schools, while simultaneously learning about and maintaining their African American culture and heritage.

The results of this study also were in agreement with some other teaching techniques that have proven to be effective with African Americans. For example, all three teacher participants used cooperative learning, novelty, playfulness, drama, and various kinds of rhythm and movement, and music in their teaching. These approaches were even evident in the physical arrangement of the classrooms. The seats were arranged so that each student's desk touched at least one other desk. This was achieved by organizing students either in groups of three or four or in a horseshoe shape. Students worked together to accomplish academic tasks more frequently than individually. Previous scholarship by Ladson-Billings (1992), Boykin (1994), and Lee and Slaughter-Defoe (2004) indicates that African American students work well in cooperative learning arrangements. In particular, Boykin (1994) found that African American students preferred to work cooperatively in groups, even without the promise of an external reward, the intrinsic value of working together was sufficient motivation. The student

participants in this study exhibited similar attitudes. Cooperative learning grounded

them as well as safety, security, and support, especially when they were not very self-

confident about the knowledge and skills being taught. Contrary to the assumption of

some skeptics that student learning in groups offers temptations and opportunities for

misbehavior, this was not the case in this study. Even when the students occasionally

drifted a bit too much into socializing they were able to self-correct and refocus on tasks

after a single reminder from teachers.

As this study, and others, demonstrated successful teachers of African American

students create learning environments where teachers and students trust and respect each

other, have high expectations, and help all members of the class to learn and succeed.

When competition for grades was de-emphasized, students learned to see themselves as

responsible for their own and their peers' success. Cooperative learning enabled students

to demonstrate their individual talents and knowledge while simultaneously working with

their peers toward accomplishing common learning goals. The active participation,

varied formats of instruction, physical movement, aesthetic expressions, caring, music,

and community building helped to keep students focused and motivated and engaged,

which left little time for misbehavior. Scholars such as Pasteur and Toldson (1982), Gay

and Baber (1985), Hale (1986), Shade (1989), Boykin (1994), and Ladson-Billings

(1994) have described how these cultural characteristics are key factors in the

socialization and learning styles of African American students.

Both the teacher and student participants in this study indicated that they did not

have any problems with discipline that was "objective" in nature. Objective discipline

deals with identifiable misbehaviors specific to school rules, such as fighting, doing drugs

and carrying weapons. They are considered to be less susceptible to teacher bias,

than those that involved judgment calls, such as disrespect for authority, disobedience,

and defiance. Students recognized the need for teachers to maintain control of the

classroom for learning to take place, while teachers agreed discipline should be used

carefully and infrequently, and should be considered more of an opportunity for teaching

than for punishment. There was further agreement between the teacher and student

participants about the negative effects that too much emphasis on the "little things," or

"subjective discipline" can have on the smooth functioning of the classroom. These

findings are in agreement with those reported by Wu, et al (1982), Skiba, Peterson, and

Williams (1997), the Advancement Project (2000), Ferguson (2000), and Townsend

(2000). They, too, found that an excessive amount of subjective discipline is harmful to

the learning environment, and long-term academic achievement of African American

students. Rather than reducing classroom management issues it tends to increase them by

escalating tensions between students and teachers. Because these forms of discipline can

be capricious and unpredictable, students do not know how to respond to or avoid them.

This leads to feelings of frustration lacking a dependable course of self-defense. Thus,

students may feel trapped, alone, and alienated. They may retaliate with resistance, such

as random acts of rebellion, posturing, psychic and or physical withdrawal, absenteeism

and participation in only those classes or activities that interest them. These attitudes and

responses were identified and used by the participants in this study. Even so, they were

perceived as inadequate responses to feelings of injustice and unfairness that are often

provoked by subjective discipline.

What motivates teachers to use subjective discipline so frequently with African American students, especially males.

- Some of the participants in this study suggested it is due to fear on the part of teachers toward students (discipline was used as a tool to remove the source of the fear, threatening individuals or groups, from the classroom).

- Misunderstanding of cultural nuances/behavior (for instance, student desire for interactive learning experiences, or attempts to establish communication by "gaining the floor").

- Negative expectation that African Americans will behave badly in school.

These possibilities are supported by the research of Skiba, Michael, and Nardo (2000). They suggest that teachers stereotype African Americans (particularly males), as troublemakers more frequently than other ethnic group members, and are more prone to overreact to school disciplinary situations. This is especially true if "their anxiety is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction" (p. 17). However, these assumptions are not supported by factual analysis of disciplinary referrals. African Americans do not commit more disciplinary infractions, but they are punished more often (Wu, et-al., 1982; Skiba & Noam 2001; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000).

Teacher and student participants in this study displayed negative attitudes toward school discipline procedures that resembled zero tolerance policies. Several students recalled examples and expressed appreciation for teachers that took the time to investigate individual disciplinary situation, instead of immediately meting out punishment that may not be justified. Meanwhile, two teacher participants articulated their policies of working to ensure that they possess a clear understanding of all

disciplinary circumstances that occur before they take action. Members of each group also discussed examples that provided different approaches to zero tolerance. Their opinions were consistent with previous research that criticizes zero tolerance as a one-size-fits-all mandatory punishment model. One teacher participant in this study made associations between zero tolerance policies and practices that other researchers have documented. She connected these inflexible and aggressive discipline practices to preparation for prison. Scholarship by the Advancement Project (2000), Ayers, Dorhn, and Ayers (2001), and Schwartz and Rieser (2001), indicates that a significant increase in criminal charges filed against children for in-school behavior has occurred since the implementation of zero tolerance policies. Increasingly, more non-violent and subjective disciplinary offenses are being referred for law enforcement action by agencies outside of schools. These referrals for such minor infractions such as "disturbing the classroom and possessing pagers" disproportionately affect African Americans. Both the students and teachers in this study were very cognizant of this disproportionality even though they did not use the specific language of "zero tolerance." The teachers were adamant about not engaging in attitudes and behaviors that contributed to these inequities for their students. Instead, they were committed to preparing their students to avoid falling into these cycles of exaggerated disciplinary referrals and extreme punishment.

Teacher and student participants, as well as previous scholarship by Gordon, Piana, and Keleher (2001), and Schwartz and Rieser, (2001), suggest changes to zero tolerance policies should take place on two levels. The first is for schools to create unambiguous, objective discipline policies that allow for flexibility in the application of punishments. These institutional guidelines should clearly define prohibited behaviors to

minimize the possibility of subjective interpretation by individual teachers. A second recommendation was for policy makers to eliminate zero tolerance policies in favor of more contextually and situational-specific regulations for dealing with serious discipline problems. They did not question the need protect school communities from genuine threats to safety and security. However, several participants thought allowances should be made and consideration given for mitigating circumstances and students should be guaranteed due process in disciplinary dilemmas. All the participants felt that the most effective measures for presenting all kinds of disciplinary infractions were stimulating, exciting, engaging, and enjoyable classroom curriculum and instruction. Again, these results are in agreement with both scholars of classroom management in general and multicultural education in particular.

Results of this study indicated a common experience across grade levels and gender. There was no distinguishable difference in the responses according to grade level or age. Male and female students provided comparable accounts of their experiences with disciplinary issues in school. Teacher participants indicated that disciplinary biases existed against African American males, but this feeling was not specifically articulated by any of the student participants. However these results should be accepted with caution. Gender difference in discipline may have existed, but this study did not examine this issue specifically. The focus was more on the relationship between instruction and disciplinary temptation and actions, rather than on the commission of the actions themselves. The students may have been too young to discern any gender differences, especially since they were not the objects of a lot of disciplinary referrals outside the classroom. Furthermore the small number of students and how they were selected may

have narrowed considerably the possibility of gender disciplinary differences. Whatever the explanation for their absence, both male and female students and teachers agreed on what kinds of teaching minimizes discipline in classrooms.

<u>Significance</u>

One significant aspect of this study lies in its proactive approach to the problem of disproportionate discipline among African American students. It is manifested on two levels. First, this investigation was in search of potentially successful teaching strategies for African American students. These approaches are often considered "alternative" because they differ in important ways from conventional methods of teaching. Among other things, they emphasize cooperation, high expectations, and caring. Further knowledge and development of such strategies may one day preclude the need to do additional research on the effects of what has become known as the "discipline gap" for African American students in the fork years.

Second, a large amount of previous research has focused on the outcomes of disciplinary actions taken against African American students. However, the perspectives of students themselves have rarely been included as a major variable. This study contributed toward the elimination of this gap by examining the perspectives of African American students on how teaching affected their involvement in learning and their classroom discipline. Instead of others speaking for them, they spoke for themselves about what was happening to them. In doing so they engaged in self-empowerment about the control of their life in the classroom. The dimensions of non-traditional instruction and multicultural education also are reaffirmed by this study because it focused on the

specific experiences of adolescent and pre-adolescent African Americans, a

population that warrants more exploration within the contexts of teaching effectiveness

and minimizing the classroom discipline of students. .

Another significant aspect of this study is its contribution to rethinking and

transforming of traditional notions of curriculum, instruction, and discipline for African

American students. This was accomplished through the incorporation of insights about

relevant curriculum and instruction for African American students gained from their

assessment of teaching methods and materials, interpretations of learning experiences,

suggestions about what classroom dynamics either instigate or diminish disciplinary

behaviors, and individual expressions about the learning experiences. These aspects of

the study reaffirmed some existing claims and created others for research and

pedagogical reforms about improving equity of opportunities and excellence of outcomes

for African American students in the fork years.

This study also contributed to establishing direct linkages between discipline and

classroom instruction, and specifying the operational details of this interaction for

African American students taught by culturally responsive African American teachers.

Conventional wisdom has long held that misbehavior of African American students in

school was due to lack of interest in education and cultural deprivations in their

background experiences. Increasingly, the roles that teachers play in shaping classroom

management through the instructional methods and curricular materials they deliver have

come under greater scrutiny. This study reinforced the need for these aspects of the

educational process to continue to be studied carefully. It also contributed to the

theoretical explanations about the importance of classroom climate to teaching, learning,

and discipline for African American students. It encourages teachers to be more

deliberate and diligent about taking ownership of the classroom factors and making the

most of them. This can be done by examining and challenging assumptions and norms

about traditional teaching and discipline of African American students.

Limitations

The primary features of this study that provided its foundation were also the

sources of several limitations. Factors related to sample size, sample selection, data

collection methods, and researcher effects could not be completely controlled regardless

of the amount of careful preparation and design of the study.

This was a small, qualitative study that took place in two schools within one

school district. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the specific

individuals who participated in the study or the theoretical development that can be

drawn from the findings. Although the ethnic group involved was African Americans for

both students and teachers, the results are still beneficial because they provided a rich

descriptive narrative on the interaction between teaching and classroom discipline. They

could be instructive for other researchers studying other ethnic groups.

Another limitation of the study was the length of the data collection. Data were

collected over the span of three months. This time period may not have been indicative

of student and teacher behavior over the entire school year. Classroom dynamics and

environments can change dramatically from one part of a school year to another. What

begins as a promising learning experience between teachers and student can turn

combative later on. The brief amount of time spent in any classroom only give

researchers finite insights on their research questions. Longer and varied times and places spent collecting data could have produced very different results.

The presence of the researcher in the participating classrooms is another limitation. This is due to the potentially disruptive impact on the ecological integrity of the instructional environment that can occur when an outsider is present. This line of reasoning suggests that any "outsider" in a given setting contaminates the natural dynamic and can alter the behaviors of those being observed. In performing qualitative research, the researcher must resist falling victim to the assumption that an observer plays no recognized role at all. Therefore, the possibility that the researcher's presence during classroom observations altered the behavioral dynamics of the teachers and students must be acknowledged.

The fact that all data were collected and analyzed by the researcher is another limitation of the study. The researcher's status as an African American male and former teacher of African American students in their fork years may have influenced the interpretation of the findings. Personal experiences and anecdotal evidence of the researcher also may have influenced the manner in which the data were collected and interpreted. Controls for minimizing these limitations included audio-taping all interviews, taking detailed field notes during or immediately after observations or interviews, and checks for consistency of data across coding schemes, memos, and data display charts.

Recommendations

This study has identified some possible remedies to the problem of disproportionate discipline rates among African American students in grades four through eight. Five recommendations for future research are offered. First, is to do a follow up study with both sets of participants of this project. More time and distance could be useful in gaining additional data from the teachers and students who participated in this study. Hindsight may provide an opportunity to think deeper about and articulate further insights and reflections on the relationship between teaching and discipline. Also, it may be useful to interview the student participants individually. It is possible that some students may be willing to be more candid in answering questions without the presence of their peers.

Second, research similar to this study that would include different students and teachers in other school buildings and districts should be conducted. This would increase the overall depth of knowledge on the topic. For example, future studies could include African American students who specifically have or do not have a history of disciplinary infractions. More research with more participants could allow for the results to be generalized beyond the particular individuals who participate in any given study. Similar studies also might reveal additional examples of successful instructional practices employed by teachers of African American students. Ideally, these future research sites would be located in different geographic regions of the U.S. (North, South, East, Midwest, Southwest, etc.), and conduct comparative analyses across settings and grades.

Third, this research project was conducted using qualitative methods that allowed for in-depth explorations of the relationship between discipline and instruction with a

small number of teachers and students. Future research could use different

methodological procedures that compliment qualitative approaches, such as participatory

action research and quantitative studies. Participatory action research has two primary

goals that could compliment the results of the present study. One is to produce

knowledge and action that are useful to a given group of people. The other is to empower

people on a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own

knowledge. This approach may allow for greater depth in the data collected and

subsequent findings. A quantitative study could provide different perspectives and

results. Quantitative research emphasizes the measurement and analysis of causal

relationships between variables, and includes much larger numbers of participants. A

survey analysis may provide a wider view how to prevent classroom discipline through

culturally relevant teaching for students from different ethnic groups than a qualitative

study can. The problem of disproportionate discipline among African American students

in schools is widespread enough to merit the study of it on a much larger scale than that

used in this research project.

Fourth, it may also be useful to perform a study similar to this one using teachers

who are not effective with African American students. Teachers who are not effective

would be defined as having persistent classroom management problems involving

African American students. The perspectives of these of teachers and others who employ

instructional practices that do not promote academic success among African American

students are perhaps equally important in searching for ways to remedy the problem of

racial disproportion in school discipline. The thoughts and comments of the students

affected by these ineffective practices may provide additional valuable data and insights

that can assist in solving this problem. Although not apparent in this study, African American males make up a majority of the total numbers of African American students facing suspension and expulsion in schools. This indicates that at least on some level, there are differences in disciplinary experience for African American students related to gender. These needed to be explored systematically by future researchers, since solutions for one gender may not be as equally applicable for the other gender. Although the results of this study implied they would be this, they need to be examined more thoroughly in future research.

Finally, further research could explore ways to conduct classroom observations that are less intrusive than having the researcher physically present. This could be accomplished through videotaping, peer teaching, or observing classes in laboratory settings with one-way mirrors. These techniques may produce data that are free of the limitation created by the physical presence of an observing researcher concerning the behavioral and instructional dynamics between teachers and students in classrooms.

Final Statement

It is extremely important for African American students in the fork years (grades 4 through 8) to have teachers who can teach them in a manner that they deserve. These teachers exist, but unfortunately they are few and far between. Having the desire to make a difference in the lives of African American children is fine, but it is not enough. One must be willing to work long and hard to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to educate these students. The teachers in this study are models for how to create successful academic experiences for African American students and thus minimize their classroom

disciplinary infractions. They felt a personal connection to their work and their students, and they believed mutual respect and positive relationships were fundamental to both effective discipline and teaching. In these beliefs, and related behaviors, they subscribed to some of the basic tenets of culturally responsive instruction, and created a springboard for the future academic and social success of their African American students. They demonstrated how "rainbow sherbert teaching" can dispel disproportionality in discipline.

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APPENDIX A: Teacher Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Investigator: Daudi Abe, Doctoral Student, Curriculum & Instruction,
                (206) 227-5004 (cell) dana206@u.washington.edu (please remember that
                we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of any information sent by
                e-mail.)
Faculty Advisor: Geneva Gay, Professor, Curriculum & Instruction,
                College of Education, (206) 543-1847.

Investigator's Statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give
you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to participate in the
study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the
research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a
volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all
your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not.
This process is called 'informed consent.'

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

The purpose of this study is to examine how African American students perceive their
teacher's instructional methods and their experiences with school discipline. I hope that
the results of this study will infuse a fresh perspective into the debate on the roots of
disproportionate discipline rates in schools among African American students. You may
not directly benefit from this study.

PROCEDURES

If willing, you will participate in three separate interviews that will be about 30-minutes
long. The interviews will discuss the relationship between teachers, curriculum and
instruction, and discipline among African American students, and will occur about once a
month. Another source of data will be three focus group sessions with four student
participants. You will be asked to nominate suitable prospective student subjects. Each
of these focus groups will take about 30-minutes. The students will be asked, among
other things, to evaluate your performance as a teacher. All interviews will be audiotaped
and transcribed in order to focus on what is being said. Only my faculty advisor and I
will have access to the tape recordings. An example of the "most sensitive" question will
be asking about some past negative school discipline experiences. I will also be
performing three separate classroom observations in order to gain first hand experience

into the day-to-day operations of the classroom. Each observation will last about 30-minutes, and will occur about once a month. No identifiable information will be recorded during classroom observations.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

There is the possibility of stress or discomfort associated with talking about negative experiences involving school discipline. It is possible to feel depressed or angry after recalling memories related to painful past experiences. The participant will always have final say on what or what not to talk about. Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. Sometimes people feel self-conscious when they are audiotaped.

OTHER INFORMATION

Being in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time. Information about you is confidential. The audiotapes will be transcribed, the transcripts coded, and then the tapes will be destroyed. Only the researcher will have the master list of participants' names and codes. The data will be kept in identifiable form until the audiotapes and signed forms linking pseudonyms until the end of data collection or by June 30, 2004 at the latest. If the results of this study are published or presented, your name will not be used. I will not share individual information from this study with anyone else.

_____   _____   _____

 Signature of Investigator   **Typed or printed name**   **Date**

Teacher's Statement:

This study has been explained to me. I agree to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I give my permission for me to be audiotaped as described above. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____   _____

 Signature of Subject   **Printed Name of Subject**   **Date**

Copies to: **Participating Teacher**
                     Investigator's File

APPENDIX B: Parent Contact Letter

December 5, 2003

Dear Parent,

My name is Daudi Abe. I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Washington. I am writing to tell you about a study that I would like to conduct at your child's school. I am very interested in learning more about African American student experiences with school discipline. Specifically, I am interested in their opinions regarding the role teachers may play in the disproportionate rate that Black students face discipline in school.

I would like to ask your permission to talk with your child and ask him or her to reflect on what they have seen and heard in their time in school as it relates to African American students being disciplined. This discussion will take place in a group setting with three other classmates. I believe this perspective will be a valuable addition to the current debate on why African American students face school discipline at a disproportionate rate. Talking with your child about this topic will probably take 30 minutes on three separate days (approximately once a month) during a time when it is most convenient for your child and his or her teachers. I will not use any actual names. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child's answers are for the purposes of the study only and all of the information from this study will be held in confidence by the researcher and are not a part of any of their classroom grades. The interview questions your child will be asked are available to you at your request. I have not had any access to student records or files, and no children have been chosen to participate because they are considered "good" or "bad."

Attached to this letter is a permission form that explains the study. If you would like to give your permission for your child to be included in this study, please sign the form and return it to your child's teacher as soon as possible.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. You can reach me at (206) 227-5004.

Sincerely,

Daudi Abe
Doctoral Student
Curriculum & Instruction

APPENDIX C: Parent Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
PARENT CONSENT FORM

Investigator: Daudi Abe, Doctoral Student, Curriculum & Instruction,
                (206) 227-5004 (cell) dana206@u.washington.edu (please remember that
                we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of any information sent by
                e-mail.)
Faculty Advisor: Geneva Gay, Professor, Curriculum & Instruction,
                College of Education, (206) 543-1847.

Investigator's Statement

I am asking your child to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to
give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to allow your
child to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the
purpose of the research, what we would ask your child to do, the possible risks and
benefits, your child's rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this
form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if
you want your child to be in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent.'

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

The purpose of this study is to examine how African American students perceive their
teacher's instructional methods and their experiences with school discipline. I hope that
the results of this study will help student voices enter the debate on the roots of uneven
discipline rates in schools among African American students. Your child may not
directly benefit from this study.

PROCEDURES

If willing to participate, your child will attend three 30-minute focus group meetings with
three other student participants and take part in discussions surrounding their feelings
about teachers and school discipline. The discussions will be moderated by the
researcher and discuss the relationship between teachers, curriculum and instruction, and
discipline among African American students. Questions posed will range from asking
them about their own reflections and experiences with different teachers and school
discipline to what they think are the causes of the problem. These discussions will be
audiotaped and transcribed in order to focus on what each participant is saying. Only my
faculty advisor and I will have access to the tape recordings. An example of the "most
sensitive" question would be asking about a negative school discipline experience. I will
also be performing three separate 30-minute classroom observations, approximately one a

month, in order to gain first hand experience into day-to-day teacher-student interactions. During classroom observations, no identifiable information about anyone who has not agreed to be in the study will be recorded.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

There is the possibility of stress or discomfort associated with talking about negative experiences involving school discipline. It is possible to feel depressed or angry after recalling memories related to painful past experiences. The participant will always have final say on what or what not to talk about. Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. Sometimes students feel self-conscious when they are audiotaped. The researcher will keep the study information confidential and ask all participants do to the same. However, some participants may talk to others outside the study about what is discussed. Therefore, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

OTHER INFORMATION

Being in this study is voluntary. Your child can stop at any time. Information about your child is confidential. The audiotapes will be transcribed, the transcripts coded, and then the tapes will be destroyed. Only the researcher will have the masterlist of students' names and codes. The data will be kept in identifiable form until the audiotapes and signed forms linking pseudonyms are destroyed, which will be by June 2004. If the results of this study are published or presented, your child's name will not be used. I will not share individual information from this study with anyone else.

_____   _____   _____

Signature of Investigator   **Typed or printed name**   **Date**

Parent of Guardian's Statement:

This study has been explained to me. I give my permission for my child to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my child's rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I give my permission for my child to be audiotaped as described above. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____   _____

Signature of Subject   **Printed Name of Subject**   **Date**

Copies to: Parent or Guardian
                  Investigator's File

APPENDIX D: Student Consent/Assent Form

**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
STUDENT ASSENT FORM**

Investigator: Daudi Abe, Doctoral Student, Curriculum & Instruction,
(206) 227-5004 (cell) dana206@u.washington.edu (please remember that
we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of any information sent by
e-mail.)

<u>Investigator's statement</u>

<u>The reasons for this study:</u> I am interested in learning more about African American
students and discipline.

<u>What we will do:</u> If you choose to participate, you, three other students and I will meet
three times as a group, about one time a month, in a private part of the school. Each
meeting will take about 30-minutes. I will ask you questions about teachers, what they
teach, how they teach it, and discipline in schools. You will have the opportunity to
discuss your opinions, feelings, and/or personal experiences with discipline in school.
We will use a tape recorder to record your thoughts. This way, we will not forget exactly
what you had to say. I will type out everything you say on the tape. Once we are
finished with the study, I will destroy the tape. I will also be observing your classroom
three different times to gain first-hand experience in what your classroom is like. I will
not share individual information from this study with anyone else.

<u>Your participation:</u> You are free to decide whether you participate in the group or not.
You can ask questions at any point during the time we talk together. If you do not want
to answer a question, you don't have to. If you do not want to continue answering
questions, all you have to do is let me know. Your answers will only be used for this
study. They are not part of any of your classroom grades. During the classroom
observation, I won't record anything identifiable about you if you don't want me to.

_____
Signature of Primary Investigator   Date

<u>Student's statement</u>

The reasons for this study have been explained to me. I understand what we are going to
do, and I would like to be a part of this study. I have had a chance to ask questions about
the study, and I know that if I have more questions, I can ask Mr. Abe.

_____
Student's signature   Date

APPENDIX E: Classroom Observation Instrument

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Classroom Observation Number: 1 2 3   Date_____
Teacher (Alias)_____   Subject_____
Students (Alias)_____   Time_____
                                                           Ability Level_____

Student Interest Levels

	Interest Level		
Student (Alias)	Low	Medium	High

Instructional Activities
Description of Instruction

Student Involvement/Off-Task Behavior

	Involvement Level			
Student (Alias)	High	Medium	Low	Off-Task Behavior

Subjective Disciplinary Infractions

Student (Alias)	Infraction

Classroom Observation Number: 1 2 3   Date_____
Teacher (Alias)_____   Subject_____
Students (Alias)_____

                                                        Page __of____

OBSERVATIONAL RUNNING NOTES

Student Behavior	Teacher Behavior

REFLECTIONS/INTERPRETATIONS

APPENDIX F: List of Codes for Teacher Interviews, Student Focus Groups,
and Classroom Observations

List of Codes

I. Codes for Teacher Data

        CRCT – Culturally Responsive Curriculum/Teacher

        CRIT – Culturally Responsive Instruction/Teacher

        CURDISCT – Curriculum/Discipline connection/Teacher

        INSDISCT – Instruction/Discipline connection/Teacher

II. Codes for Student Data

        CRCS – Culturally Responsive Curriculum/Student

        CRIS – Culturally Responsive Instruction/Student

        CURDISCS – Curriculum/Discipline connection/Student

        INSDISCS – Instruction/Discipline connection/Student

III. Codes for Classroom Observation Data

        STUDINT – Level of Student Interest

        INSACT – Instructional Activity

        STUDINV – Level of Student Involvement

        SUBJDISC – Examples of Subjective Discipline

APPENDIX G: Data Display Chart: Teacher Interview

<u>Data Display Chart: Teacher Interview</u>

Code	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
CRCT	Like today we talked about lemonade, about creating your own business, what it would take, expenses and what goes out versus your profits, they bought into that so it was a good math lesson because I was able to break it down to where they could chew on it a little. The lemonade stand is something that came up in our conversation on what types of businesses kids or students or scholars may have seen on their block or may have actually gone into to try to make money or sell something, and that came up that way so it was their idea.	Right now in eighth grade science the curriculum I'm using is the National Science Foundation curriculum, but what I have done is put an African-centered approach to it. We've been studying ecology and evolution and the foundation of that is the life, trials and tribulations of George Washington Carver who was an African American scientist who has contributed a lot to society and also to Black farm workers lives. If you deliver the curriculum with love and compassion and it is culturally relevant and the curriculum approach is to the point where children can be able to read their own world into what is being taught, you don't have any discipline problems.	So basically what I have to do with that is I pretty much just have to re-write the textbook, I mean I don't literally re-write it but when I'm discussing with kids and trying to teach them a concept or teach them how to do something I always use things that I know they are familiar with so I can hook them in some way to listen and to gain that understanding. I also will do that with whatever, science, writing, the writing prompts that we use I try to make them relevant, and not just to culture but also to age and what those guys are going through and what they see and watch right now, so like video games, PlayStation, you know you build a lot of that stuff in there too. So the short of the answer is that what the district is not culturally relevant so what I have to do is supplement and augment and make some changes in order to bring that into the classroom.

Data Display Chart: Teacher Interview

Code	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
CRIT	But, I also feel that I'm new school in the sense that I mix in the authoritative with the more child-centered type teaching style which I have evolved into, really, where the child has more of a say in their learning. I've given them a lot more freedom to participate in their learning. I think there's always more that I can do to try to break the material down and make it more relevant to them or try to find experiences that they've dealt with and put that in mathematical terms so they can be more engaged.	I teach in a circle, we perform in circles, and we do presentations in circles, and the reason we do everything in a circle is because of what the circle symbolizes in African-centered education, which means 'there is no end.' With the proper instruction such as giving them the opportunity to strengthen or to demonstrate their intelligence through the different arts, and then that curbs discipline. One of the things that I found out is that if its not interesting or presented in an interesting fashion, you are going to be dealing with behavior, left and right.	I have a Nerf football and they don't know where I'm coming from, left or right, but I'll just throw it at somebody and just ask a question, "What is the name of our number system?" and then they'll answer it and their team will get points and then they'll throw it back to me and I'll throw it back to somebody else. They don't know if its reading, they don't know if its math, but its like a cumulative review. And because I'm so crazy, they just never know what I'm going to do and part of that is just trying to keep fresh, you know what I mean, and just try to stay on my toes and keep them engaged and just no boring stuff, you know I just broke out and just started singing a song one time and they just started singing a song with me and that was just like a transition and then we stopped and then we went on to math.

Data Display Chart: Teacher Interview

Code	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
CURDISCT	Sometimes I doctor up the curriculum and present it in a positive and more effective light to where the kids will be more engaged actually instead of negative behavior.	And the curriculum. They [students] told one of their teachers that I'm the only one that teaches them about them, and that he was boring and all this other stuff, and so that causes some conflict with co-workers. To the point where teachers come and ask me certain things. One thing about classroom management, you can have all the procedures you want in place but if you ain't representing the masses [in the curriculum] you not going to get nowhere because they are not going to be able to relate to you.	My teacher friends that teach all over the place and usually its like the kids wont sit down, they won't listen and that sort of thing and I say, "Teach them. Teach them how to do that." If children are acting out in your classroom, its generally because no teaching is going on, or it's the curriculum.

Data Display Chart: Teacher Interview

Code	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
INSDISCT	I was using a lot of energy focusing on behavior instead of focusing on myself and what I needed to grow, the areas I needed to grow in to better serve the children I'm teaching. Just had to look in the mirror, and instead of blaming the kids I had to take a long look at myself. You can't just tear children down without the intent of building them back up.	There's a whole lot of teachers who can probably teach real well but their delivery is messed up, and part of the delivery is the people you are delivering it to and how are they able to relate to it. Traditional, tables, and the desks in the traditional lined up, teaching from the board, sitting at the desk giving directions, writing the directions on the board and expecting the students to just come in and get into it. The yelling, the treating them like their in the military, not letting them put a part of their home culture, that's what I was talking about, cultures inside cultures would make up the ethnic practices.	Well I think its important because from kindergarten society just in general has this expectation, or stereotype I'll say that unless a young man is seated, hands folded, looking like a typical, I'll say Caucasian little boy, there are biases from the beginning from teachers, and maybe even from some Black teachers too, but I know for sure from White teachers, and so then if they see this young man who is not able to control himself, who wants to maybe get up and move around, who maybe is a little bit more aggressive, automatically they're going to begin labeling him. They may not label him officially on paper, but they've labeled him in their mind. Talk with them and remind them but you do it in a manner that keeps their esteem up and its not like, you know, breaking them down to a crumb because you're gonna lose them.

APPENDIX H: Data Display Chart: Student Focus Group

Data Display Chart: Student Focus Group

Code	Student Group 1	Student Group 2	Student Group 3
CRCS	You can look in his classroom. There's like on the walls, there's a whole bunch of African American heroes, well they're heroes to me anyway, on the walls and historians, like famous African Americans and even some that aren't really famous but that you don't see in the history books but were there and they made a big difference.	He delves into more of the history of our African American heritage, and thinking like, well you come from a great history so you should be able to achieve anything you believe you can achieve. You can do whatever you want, and you don't have any reason to be acting up, you have all this history behind you of this great nation of African people, so you should be able to do anything that anybody else can do and even more than whatever anybody else can do.	She also when we were doing stuff she would make it fun, like if we were reading all these different stories about like Maya Angelou and we would play out the story like, we would read it and play different people.
CRIS	Well, Ms. Jones was nice, but she wasn't soft. She was a nice teacher but she could lay down her foot any time. She takes you on field trips, she does the honor roll, and she did all kinds of activities in the process, she tried to make learning fun, because more people are able to learn when its fun.	I think a teacher should find out what works for the kids to learn, like I'm a visual learner, so if they find that out about me it will be easier to teach me without me being a distraction to the class, or asking questions after she explained it to people. when they write it on the board and then do an example and all that stuff, then it gets easier for me. That's how I learn.	They need to deal with you, take time out of their day and help you so like at the end of the school day you can ask them if they can help you and they should because you're not disrespecting or anything, you're just asking, "I need help with this and this," and then they should help you and that will make a teacher a good teacher.

Data Display Chart: Student Focus Group

Code	Student Group 1	Student Group 2	Student Group 3
CURDISCS	Like how we're doing graphing, that gets on my nerves because we've been doing graphing since the beginning of the year and its been the same graphing, like review, review, review. I'm like, boring!	We had Mr. Charles, and he tried to keep us straight from the book and not teach nothing to the point where we could understand it. He didn't want to do any real work, like he tried to give us straight paperwork the whole time, and he'll teach us one subject.	When I don't like what I'm getting taught I tend to act out, I'll act like a clown, and just be outrageous.

If the works bad then I don't really pay attention to it, I just space out and doodle or something on a piece of paper. |
| INSDISCS | Some teachers are scared and try to cover their fear with anger. And they try to make you feel bad in different ways. They'll use different excuses about things that you've done in the past. Like we'll use one of the boys in our class. They'll say, "Well you went to in-house [suspension] a couple of days ago, and it seems like you want to go again." | Maybe he doesn't discipline them enough, because in class I have heard people cuss out loud, like yelling it. One of my friends cussed extra loud just to see what he was going to say, and it was like two feet away from him and they yelled a cuss word, right by him, and he didn't do nothing. It was like he doesn't care about that kind of stuff. | That's just causing them to keep doing what they're going to do cause they know the teacher's not going to do nothing about it.

Some teachers don't know how to handle a class. They probably didn't pay a lot of attention when they were learning how to deal with a class. |

APPENDIX I: Data Display Chart: Classroom Observation

Data Display Chart: Classroom Observation

Code	Observation 1	Observation 2	Observation 3
STUDINT	Students talkative initially, but quickly come in line with a couple of prompts from the teacher.	Students highly interested and excited about being able to display relevant knowledge from previous lesson.	Students eagerly await the opportunity to draw what they have seen in the course of exploring how different levels of water affect the surrounding landscape.
INSACT	Assignment/experiment appeared to be equally working at developing teamwork among the group as well as reading/following directions and learning the scientific lesson.	"Rushing River" activity, builds on previous lesson on streams, requiring students to recreate a stream in their mini-environment and increase levels of rushing water to record the results on the dirt that it flows over.	Double entry journal, a pre-assessment activity that required student to fold paper into 8 parts to review for vocabulary test on properties of matter. Students had the option to define terms with traditional word definitions, pictures, in poetry form or to rap them.
STUDINV	Clearly respond positively to having a voice and being included in processing of the assignment.	Students, reading prepared notes, guided the rest of the class through the process of creating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, describing the steps and keeping in mind the parallels between this activity and proper scientific procedures.	Students actively reminded each other when one began to get a little bit too loud.
SUBJDISC	Talk that could be interpreted as "disruptive" is addressed, corralled and redirected by teacher to create a positive outcome.	One student almost seemed bored, began putting lotion on hands, the level of interest seemed to decrease as the lesson went on. Cumulatively could be interpreted as 'off-task.'	Called out loudly to teacher without raising her hand. Teacher reminded her not to shout for him, proceeded to ask her what she needed.

APPENDIX J: Data Display Chart: All Data Sources

Code	Teacher Interviews	Student Focus Groups	Classroom Observations
CRC	The teachers my children had offered them the opportunity to fall in love with who they were through curriculum that represented them and who they are.	Like the 'introduced species' thing we did. We just report on some species that was introduced to the United States and we were in groups and we picked like a certain species. Like my group we had Kudzu. Kudzu is a vine from Japan and it grows in the south.	
CRI	I have to be careful not to, like I say, crush their spirit in trying to up the intensity as an African American knowing what they are going through and what the system has set up for them of places for them to go. I have to be careful to nurture them, also mentor them, but also be tough on them.	Rainbow sherbert teaching: Sometimes you throw in a joke here and there, but you say, "Do the work, you can do this part, you don't have to do that part, you can do that part for extra credit if you want to cause I wasn't planning for that to be in there. Partner-up, get in groups, talk a little not a lot, lower your voice…	
CURDIS	What didn't work well was starting things off at the beginning of the year with academics without getting to know them, having classroom procedures without cultural relevancy, not representing their language prior to classroom starting.	When I'm bored [with the material] I still like to read, but I do stuff that annoys the teacher, like talk to my neighbor.	
INSDIS	Without discipline I wouldn't be able to teach anything. The kids are going to learn something, whether it be positive or negative	Less people respect Ms. Wilson, because when she first came, she acted like a little puppy, and then she started acting like a hound dog	

Data Display Chart: All Data Sources

Code Observations	Teacher Interviews	Student Focus Groups	Classroom
STUDINT			High levels of enthusiasm in student responses to questions posed by teacher.
INSTACT			Overhead presentation of geometry, areas of rectangles (length & width). Teacher mentions that those who participate get good grades, also praises those who have made strides and improvement.
STUDINV			Clustered seating arrangement allows for group student interaction to play an important part in students remaining engaged with the teacher/lesson as well as each other.
SUBJDISC			Student begins to appear 'off task' by wandering around the classroom before his group has finished the assignment. Eventually it appears as if he is actually acting as a teaching assistant, going from group to group, looking at the progress being made and actually even offering suggestions to groups that are struggling.

Daudi J. Abe

VITA

EDUCATION

- **Santa Clara University,** Santa Clara, CA, B.S. in Economics, Communications Minor; completed 6/92.

- **Pacific Oaks College Northwest,** Seattle, WA, Teacher Certification Program; completed 6/98.

- **Pacific Oaks College Northwest,** Seattle, WA, M.A., Human Development completed 7/99.

- **University of Washington,** Seattle, WA, Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction, emphasis on Multicultural Education, completed 8/04.

EXPERIENCE

- ➢ Teacher at **Zion Preparatory Academy** of all subjects, kindergarten through eighth grade; 9/92 – 6/00.

- ➢ **Head Basketball Coach** of Zion Preparatory Academy's eighth grade boy's basketball team that won city championship in 1997. 96/97 – 99/00.

- ➢ **Social and Political Contexts of Human Development**: Course dealt with multiple socio-economic and political factors impacting the development of human beings. Pacific Oaks College Northwest, 8/98.

- ➢ **Human Development and Learning**: Course explored theoretical framework and practical applications of how people develop and learn. Pacific Oaks College Northwest, 8/98- present.

- ➢ **Sociolinguistics**: Online and in-person course that deals with the dynamic of language in the context of social domination and liberation. Pacific Oaks College, 2/99- present.

- ➢ Presenter: **1998 National Black Child Development Institute Conference**. Facilitated presentation entitled, "Kinesthetic Learning With Kindergartners."

➢ Presenter: **1999 National Black Child Development Institute Conference**.
Facilitated presentation entitled, "Parent-Teacher Involvement in Education."

➢ Presenter: **Black Achievers of Seattle**. Moderated forum on race and parallel
issues with local teenagers and professionals; 5/99.

➢ Facilitated teacher in-service program at **Christian Brotherhood Academy** in
Tacoma, Washington on effective instruction methods for all children; 4/00.

➢ Numerous appearances at public schools for speaking engagements as a
representative of the **Institute for K-12 Leadership**; 2000-01.

➢ Member of Educational Equity Panel at 2001 **Seattle MESA Workshop**; 5/01.

➢ Presenter: **2002 National Black Child Development Institute Conference**.
Facilitated presentation entitled, "Black Males & School Discipline."

➢ Guest Speaker in **Mateo Ricci Program at Seattle University**. Topic: "Hip-
Hop Music and Culture: Past and Present"; 2/03.

➢ **Intercultural Communication:** Course explored issues and dynamics of
communication between cultures.
Seattle Central Community College, Summer 2003- Spring 2004.

➢ **Hip-Hop Theory and Culture:** Course explored roots, issues and perspectives
embedded within rap music and hip-hop culture.
Seattle Central Community College, Spring 2004.