AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Joy K. Williams for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Title: Unspoken Realities: White, Female Teachers Discuss Race, Students, and

Achievement in the Context of Teaching in a Majority Black Elementary School.

Abstract approved:

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Jean Moule

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore White, female teachers'

attitudes and perspectives towards their African American students, the Black/White

Achievement Gap, and their teaching practice in regards to their students' achievement,

through the use of focus group discussions. The target group for this study was White,

female teachers with three or more years teaching experience in the selected school. The

northwest, urban school chosen for this study is 100% Title I with a minority student

population of 91.7%. African American students make up 67.8% of the students while

26 white females represent 72% of the teaching staff.

Findings suggest that the eight teachers in this study have built a bond of

solidarity around their Whiteness and their positions as White teachers in a

predominantly Black school. Their likenesses, shared experiences, stories, students, and the school have become the glue that binds them together and is what allows them to reinforce and support each other on a daily basis. As participants shared their stories, perspectives, and feelings, manifestations of their individual and collective racial identity status emerged. Teachers liberally used disclaimers, avoidance techniques, colorblindness, and stereotypes, and spontaneously shared their *outsider* feelings, as outcomes of their thinking around race throughout the focus group discussions. Findings revealed teachers' attitudes towards students included both caring and deficit thinking. Deficit thinking was found to influence their view of the Black/White achievement gap and the roots of its cause, as well as their classroom management, instruction, and interactions with parents.

A critical race theory perspective was incorporated to create an understanding of participants as a collective entity made up of individuals who are a product of American society and the educational system. I focused on mitigating factors that serve to reinforce teachers' participation in racist discourses. Culturally responsive teaching theory was used to examine, not only how participants view their students and teaching as individuals, but also to consider how the pedagogic theory could supply a framework for further development of teachers' cultural understanding and practice.

Unspoken Realities: White, Female Teachers Discuss Race, Students, and Achievement in the Context of Teaching in a Majority Black Elementary School

by

Joy K. Williams

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing Education

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Dean of the College of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Joy K. Williams, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mom and dad who taught me to never stop trying.

UNSPOKEN REALITIES: WHITE, FEMALE TEACHERS DISCUSS RACE,

STUDENTS, AND ACHIEVEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING IN A

MAJORITY BLACK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

CHAPTER ONE: THE RESEARCHER

Prologue

As if on cue, eight children in the reading circle turned to look at me. While I thought I was sitting inconspicuously behind them, these children were obviously very aware of my presence. My mentor teacher was reading to the students from "The Watsons go to Birmingham – 1963" by C. Curtis, and had come to a sensitive, historical happening where a white person had done something blatantly racist. I will never forget the children's reaction or the expressions on their faces! At that moment, there was no doubt in my mind, that my presence was making the children feel uncomfortable, intruded upon, and perhaps curious. Who is this white woman and what does she think about this story we are reading? What does she think about us? Why is she here?

Though I don't remember what 1960's incident was referred to in the book, I do recall feeling a mixture of deep anger, sadness and embarrassment, even before the children turned! It was an incredible experience.

..The teacher continued reading, engrossed in the task at hand, and I tried to make sense of what had just happened. I wanted to be here...it was not me who did those horrible things.... It was suddenly very lonely to be the only white person in the room.

This was the standout initiation of my beginning practicum at an urban African American elementary school. When asked later if she noticed what had occurred, my

mentor teacher said she was totally unaware, but maybe, I thought, she was embarrassed and unsure of how to respond to the children's reaction. I was struck by the lost teachable moment.

My mentor teacher was Chinese American, married to an African American, whose own children attended the school where she had taught for ten years. A respected and trusted member of the community, the children saw her as one of them. In a subsequent conversation, she noted that the children didn't act as though they were aware of her being Chinese. She thought it would take some time for them to accept me as someone other than another *white* person coming through *their* school.

We were to have many conversations centered on racial issues and their affect on my effectiveness in the classroom. We laughed about my lack of familiarity with expressions, difficulty in understanding some of the children's speech patterns, and about my initiation with some of the parents. But it was not until the Spring when she made plans to move to a suburban community with the prospect of teaching in a completely different setting that I felt she really began to comprehend what I was experiencing. Our conversations became mutually more meaningful, as we shared our questions and fears of being able to transcend the cultural, experiential, and language barriers. It is the question of transcending these barriers of culture and language that underscores the issue of whether or not a *white* teacher can be effective as a teacher in an African American school setting (Williams, 2000).

Introduction

The opening prologue is taken from the introduction of a paper titled, "White Teacher / Black School: Can Effectiveness Exist?," that I wrote for an Issues Class while completing my Masters degree. I chose to include it, as written, because it is a documentation of my thinking as I began my teaching career. Upon entering the "inner-city" elementary school, I realized that I was embarking on an unanticipated journey. Prior classroom experiences had given me a sense of self-confidence, but the sudden realization of racial and cultural differences made me feel very unsure of myself. I set upon a quest to learn as my awareness increased through new experience and subsequent reflection. And though my inquiry has gone down several paths, I continuously return to thoughts of how I and other *White* teachers can be the best teachers possible for our African American students.

Becoming a teacher in this "inner-city" school made me a member of a unique community. The term "inner-city" is euphemistic for a school with children of low socio-economic status, children of color, children with difficult behavior and/or academic issues, and an environment surrounded by fear and violence. Although this is society's description based on media portrayals, exaggerations, and statistics, it is not what I see. I see marginalized (by society) children who deserve the opportunity to learn and grow to their potential so that they are empowered to make decisions regarding their own lives and futures. I see children who are entitled to the same advantages afforded children in other parts of the city. I also see teachers who struggle with their "make a difference" dreams as they join together in their efforts to teach their students.

This study seeks to explore the attitudes of White, female teachers towards their African American students, their parents, and community. This study also examines the White, female teacher's perspective of the Black/White achievement gap, the reason for its existence, and how they respond as teachers of African American students. The following research questions (RQ) were used as an overall guide for my research:

RQ 1. How do White, female teachers see their African American students, parents, and community?

RQ 2. How do White, female teachers view the Black/White Achievement Gap and their teaching in regard to their students' achievement?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the on-going conversation around cross-cultural relationships between teachers and students in the elementary classroom – specifically White, female teachers and Black students – through an examination of teachers' attitudes. Important considerations include how such relationships may affect the Black/White achievement gap, teaching practices, and the people (including teachers and students) involved.

A void exists in current research material that examines the attitudes of typical White, female teachers towards their African American students (Frankenberg, 2006). Though studies connecting Black teachers and student achievement have been conducted, existing research on in-service, White, female teachers' attitudes and teaching is minimal and has been done primarily through self-selection (Irvine, 2002). Much attention has

also focused on pre-service teachers, including their introduction to multiculturalism and White identity, attitudes towards their students of color, and first year of teaching in a diverse school. Little has been done, however, to follow teachers once they are removed from the university (Banks, 1993a; Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Tatum, 1999a; Vavrus, 2002).

While preparing excellent teachers is an appropriate goal, given the increasing numbers of retiring teachers, the high attrition rate, and the difficulty of recruiting would-be teachers, it is also necessary to examine in-service teachers' attitudes and self-proclaimed practices in hopes of turning the tide for African American students (Cooper, 2003; Frankenberg, 2006).

As a teacher/team member, I have had opportunities to interview prospective teachers. I have been disappointed by the shallowness of district or administrative prepared questions in regard to cultural competency. Typical questions seek to establish past experiences, qualifications for the position, and goals of the applicant and/or school. Ensuing discussions include typical teacher talk consisting of academic achievement, classroom management, and logistics of the position with a goal of securing it. As expected, applicants usually purport themselves to be "good" teachers.

But what does it mean to be a "good" teacher, especially in a classroom where the student body is predominantly African American and the teacher is a member of the dominant culture? Can a "good" teacher teach anywhere? As a White, female teacher, I have been asked *little* about my personal sense of cultural competency or culturally relevant teaching in either interviews or evaluations, despite the fact that I come to the classroom with a whole different set of experiences, ways of thinking, and ways of being.

I believe there are many questions that should be asked of me, or any teacher, beginning with how I negotiate issues of race and culture in the classroom. I should be asked about my multicultural perspective, my ability to promote Social Justice, and how I plan to mitigate the effects of institutionalized racism. I should be asked whether I've developed a strategy to turn off voices and habits from my past that would serve to promote the status quo. I should be asked what I do advocate for my students, what I do to teach in a way that is culturally responsive, and what do I do to develop a relationship with my students that transcends race. I should also be asked what I bring to education that will improve opportunities for students of color. The answers to all of these questions may help to determine whether or not I'm a "good" teacher for African American students.

I feel strongly that it is the teacher's responsibility to bridge the racial and cultural gaps that may exist between student and teacher. "We can't teach what we don't know," (Howard, 1999) and, because it takes concerted effort, time, and focused reflection to move towards cultural competency, we must go through a continual process of self-examination and reflection (Banks, 1993a; Gay, 2002; Howard, 1999; Vavrus, 2002). I would welcome the opportunity to address issues of race in the classroom collectively with my peers through the use of honest and open discussion, but it has been my experience that few opportunities for such discussions arise, due to the lack of willingness for us as an educational community or as a society to address issues of race and culture in a systematic way.

Rationale for the Study

In 2004, students from minority groups made up 42.1% of the public school student body (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2004). That percentage rose to 43% in 2007 according to a report released by the Civil Rights Project of the University of California, Los Angeles (Orfield & Lee, 2007). In urban schools, non-Whites are in the clear majority, or comprise nearly the entire student body, as our schools become increasingly re-segregated. African American students represent 17.3% of enrolled minorities nationwide (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2004).

Current trends in public school demographics indicate that African American students most frequently experience White teachers at the head of the classroom, given that White, female teachers dominate the American school system. According to the U. S. Department of Education (2003), 84.3% of the nation's teaching force is White, non-Hispanic, with many schools consisting of 90-95% White teachers and 83% of elementary teachers being White females.

The cultural mismatch between African American students and their White teachers contributes to unintended consequences that include issues of poor achievement and inequity (Cross, 2003; Howard, 1999; Irvine, 2003; Kunjufu, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). The percentage of African American fourth grade students scoring at or below basic skill levels in reading and math is 87%, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005; Kunjufu, 2002). The achievement of African American

students is below that of White students, creating what is commonly known as the

Black/White Achievement Gap (e.g. Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks & Phillips, 1998;

Jones, 1984; Lee, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2005; Peng & Hill, 1995).

Furthermore, issues of achievement and inequity exist in all areas of the educational

system, from access to Talented and Gifted programs to over-representation in Special

Education and disciplinary actions (Ford & Thomas, 1997; Gay, 2000; Harmon, 2002;

National Research Council, 2002).

A plethora of research exists on the Black/White Achievement Gap, and theories

for addressing the learning of African American students and reducing the gap are also

well established in the literature (e.g. Banks, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Dilg, 1999; Gay, 2000,

2002; Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1990, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Landsman &

Lewis, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). Despite the documented state of African American student

achievement and the magnitude of material on what pedagogical strategies should be

taken, however, progress is slow and, more than fifty years after Brown versus the Board

of Education (1954), the education of many African American students remains in

jeopardy (Meier & Wood, 2004). There is an urgent need to determine how we, as an

educating body, can improve the plight for a significant number of America's students as

the achievement gap in schools is argued to have lifetime consequences for African

American students (Diller & Moule, 2005; Gay, 2000; Jencks, 1992; Ogbu, 1994).

My Background

I am a White, middle-aged, upper-middle class woman currently working as a program coordinator for a newly instituted academic program in an elementary school. I was hired after student teaching in the same classroom, and I have taught at this school for nine years. Previous to receiving my elementary teaching license, I worked as a musician and Para-professional in a White, small-town high school in Washington and as a teacher in a parochial K-8 school in Florida. I have extensive experience working with young children and teens, as well as adults, through involvement in schools, as a soccer coach and referee, and as a music performer, church musician, and choir director.

I grew up in a small Wisconsin town in a blue-collar, middle class family, acquiring my belief system through my traditional Lutheran up-bringing. My parents gave my siblings and me a rich background of family, love, and caring, while at the same time instilling in us a strong work ethic and sense of determination to attain more than had been afforded them. I attended both public and parochial schools, and I was the first generation of our family to graduate high school. While I dreamed of going to college, my goals were not realized until much later.

I am a wife of thirty-five years and a mother of two grown sons. My experiences with raising my boys have profoundly affected my life. These experiences often shape how I interact with my students. Though I worked sporadically to continue my college education, I finally returned to college full-time when my boys graduated High School. I celebrated the opportunity to enter into discussion with students and professors, touting a much different insight than would have been present in my early twenties.

My Teaching Background

I began my career as an elementary teacher thinking I could do anything, but I was surprised by the challenges brought on through my lack of being able to relate to my students and their families. I was in my *medium* working with children, but the underlying current of cultural differences between my students and me created a divide to which I was not accustomed. Surprised and disappointed, I began to realize how little the lone multicultural class in my graduate teacher program had prepared me for my new challenges. My reaction was to read, listen, observe, and ask questions. The first book I purchased was Lisa Delpit's (1995) "Other People's Children." As my interest and awareness grew, I read James Banks (1997), Geneva Gay (2000), Gary Howard (1999), Jonathan Kozol (1991), Herbert Kohl (1967), and Ralph Ellison (1995). I was amazed at my ignorance and lack of exposure to such material.

Up to this point, I had never considered my *own* racial identity or entertained such a concept as *White identity*. As a young girl in the late '50s and early '60s, I had little interaction with people of color, with the exception of knowing that "*Negroes*" worked for my dad down at the shop. As was typical in that era, I was subjected to dialogue that included the stereotyping and denigrating language towards African Americans.

I recall seeing the signs of segregation on a family trip to the South. One hot Sunday morning stands out in my mind. I remember the crude signs denoting separate bathrooms, drinking fountains, and church pews, as we attended the huge First Baptist Church downtown. I had no language or understanding for what I saw, and I distinctly remember my questions being left unanswered by our Atlanta hosts, the resulting "hush" from my Mom, and the snickers from my Dad.

I was still young when protest marches and struggles for civil rights were a nightly menu on the television, which I watched in the safety of my lake-side neighborhood in a small town outside of Milwaukee. Dad worked in the city, but was at times unable to travel home because of the curfews. My parent's reactions to such events and the images of assassinations, protests, riots, and the Vietnam War had considerable impact on me, but my thoughts were left largely unexamined until the last stages of my formal education and my immersion in my first certified teaching assignment.

Truthfully, until I took an under-graduate class on Immigrants & Minorities, I never fully considered my family's history as immigrants in the early 1900s. Additionally, my understanding of *class* and its ramifications was limited to unexamined notions common to the dominant culture. I never fully comprehended the complexities of class and poverty. I now realize that, though I studied race, culture, and class in my sociology and communications courses, the concepts did not crystallize until I was immersed in an environment rich with diversity.

I continued my personal studies while completing my Masters degree and, fortunately that summer, I landed in a Curriculum Issues class where I consequently wrote a persuasive paper, the beginning of which is quoted in the prologue. The assignment coincided with my nearly losing my temporary teaching position to an equally novice teacher, but one who was African American. I argued that a White teacher could be an equally effective teacher for Black students, provided the teacher was culturally competent and taught in a culturally responsive way. These ideas had germinated through my reading of Geneva Gay's (2000) "Culturally Responsive Teaching." My professor and I had thoughtful discussions, at which time he suggested I

consider doing a PhD. He planted a seed, and it was later nurtured when I was approached by my Major Professor, Dr. Moule. I decided to enter the Oregon State University Doctoral Program with the idea of continuing my on-going personal research in a more formal manner.

My Research Paradigm

While admittedly I carry post positivist tendencies, my research paradigm is Constructivist in nature, peppered with Critical Theory. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) have noted that, within social sciences, there seems to be some blurring as the paradigms are still in the formative stages. Constructivist science asserts that unique multiple realities exist, given that each person has constructed their own reality from their individual experiences and vantage points. These realities are able to be examined using abstract mental constructions that are experientially based, local, and specific (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

When immersed in discussion, individual constructions of reality are joined together in the process of co-construction by participants and the participant researcher (Hatch, 2002). Through this mutual engagement, participants and researcher construct the reality under investigation (Mishler, 1986). The active use of dialoguing results in this inquiry being dialectical in nature, yet the construction of reality is "elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Critical theory is used as a blanket term for several paradigms, including feminism and participatory inquiry. Within Critical theory, the aim of inquiry is for critique and transformation to occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The key components of advocacy and activism are highly important in education as concerned educators work to create a more equitable education system (e.g. Banks, 1997; Gay, 2000; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Kozol, 1991). Just as Denzin and Lincoln (1998) stated, it is my desire that this study will produce an understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people initially hold, aiming toward consensus, but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve.

Within the critical theory perspective, attention is paid to "the material world made up of historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals" (Hatch, 2002). These structures exist as part of an individual's reality and result in differentiated treatment of individuals based on race, gender, and social class. I believe, like Hatch, that as researcher and teacher, I consider how these structures continue to influence the well-being of both my students and their teachers, using the lens typical of a critical scholar. The knowledge I represent as a critical scholar is inherently subjective and political, as knowledge is always "mediated through the political positioning of the researcher" (Hatch, 2002, p. 17). Because the purpose of Critical inquiry is to raise consciousness of oppression and elicit transformation, dialogue is an integral part of the process. This purpose dovetails with my overall objective to stimulate change within my educational community via dialogue and collaboration.

My Research Paradigm Background

I began my Doctoral classes with great excitement, anxious to dive into the reading and class discussions. As anticipated, I thoroughly enjoyed the philosophical discussions with my colleagues and instructors. I eagerly sought to make sense of the information, but wrestled to align my beliefs with the multitude of theories and paradigms. My assignments were consequently approached with some hesitation, as I resisted plugging myself into the puzzle, acutely aware of the conflict between the theories and dialogue of my upbringing. I found it difficult to commit, knowing that choosing a philosophical position would establish a connection to ideas and others that I would possibly not be willing to accept. Hatch (2002) has addressed this very idea in, "Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings:"

> Most students, like most individuals socialized into Western belief systems, hold a taken-for-granted metaphysical view that fits best within the positivist paradigm. When they start to think about what that means about them and about research, it is often a troubling experience. For some, such contemplations include a religious dimension – they are intellectually attracted to belief systems that challenge the notions of absolute Truth while at the same time holding that certain truths are unquestionable (p. 20).

As I examine and re-examine my epistemology and research perspective, I realize I'm traveling on a "learning continuum" of philosophical, theoretical, and research concepts. Coming to terms with my philosophical paradigm is analogous to my growth in cultural competency, as growth in either requires learning, time, and reflection. Given my positivist background, I still struggle to put myself into a category that is fitting for the "present moment." As Laurel Richardson (1991) stated, "*there* is doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authoritative knowledge" (as quoted in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 2). However, I now

understand that categorizing me is not the end-all I once feared, as I am allowed to position myself in a way that allows for alternate thought that may come with time and new experiences. Coming to this constructivist understanding empowered me to cease agonizing and continue with my work.

Epistemological Disclosure

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge as defined by each individual, and is determined by one's unique set of experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Since who I am and what I believe affects how I do my research and analysis, it is incumbent of me to carefully consider my perspective and disclose that which would assist my reader in understanding my position in time and place.

A belief system is complex and integral to one's being. It generally determines how one reacts to knowledge, the environment, or a given situation. The core of my belief system is my Christian faith, and, while I openly profess my faith, my relationship with God and adherence to his Word is personal. Like Mill (1869), my goal is to live as moral a life as possible, doing what is generally considered beneficial for the "common good" of individuals, society, and the environment in which we live, and taking care of those items we have the privilege of using. While the term "good" is subject to interpretation, I believe there are moral and ethical premises that are shared in general by humankind, regardless of personal religious or spiritual convictions, and this is the good to which I'm referring.

How we know, and from where we believe knowledge originates, is inherent in the concept of epistemology. I believe human knowledge is constantly evolving or unfolding, and the nuances of applying my beliefs may differ according to new experiences, interactions, and information. Previously, I thought of knowledge in a more rigid way, as a set of *constants* or pieces of data. Through my post-graduate work, I have come to view knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge, as being much more fluid and dependent upon experience and context.

My epistemology has been shaped, and continues to be shaped, by my relationship to my local community, American society, and the global community. As a member of the dominant culture and the middle class, my way of seeing the world has developed through a lens uninhibited by race and class. Similarly, my American citizenship affects my relationship within the global community. This privileged citizenship carries both positive and negative connotations and, when traveling abroad, it causes me to experience a *dual consciousness* of sorts in that my corporate membership is recognized before my individuality. Conversely, my individual awareness and daily decisions create a personal relationship to the world and its inhabitants.

I value historical knowledge, knowledge in transition, the esthetics of nature, and the works of humankind. As a learner, I appreciate knowledge from books and other media, but I greatly enjoy building knowledge together with both children and adults. I believe that people can work together to build a brighter future that allows for greater happiness through individual autonomy and freedom.

It is my nature to be philosophical, hopeful, and to ask questions. As I consider my research, I am hopeful that *good* (specifically improved educational opportunities for

students of color) can appear as a positive outcome, regardless of the current restraints found in society, education, and the classroom. While my *hopefulness* may stem from my Christian background that views *hope* as a theological virtue, like Halpin (2003), I believe the secular interpretation

> entails both anticipating future happiness and trusting in present help to come to it. This is something any good teacher would quickly be able to identify with, in the sense that being such a person entails having both high expectations of students' potential as well as faith that the educational process will realize them. (p. 14)

And like Kohl (1994), I believe "*hope* can be sold, it can be taught or at least spread [and] it can survive in the strangest and most unlikely places" (p. 43). I am perfectly content to be known as a *hopemonger* for change, and if I should cease to be so, I believe I should no longer be in education, for central to the idea of teaching is the belief that change will occur.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter Two begins with demographic trends in America's education system. It continues with relevant literature that explains the possible condition of education for our Black students, and finishes with an overview of Culturally Relevant Teaching and its components.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the study and an explanation of the research plan and methodology. The use of focus groups is discussed along with a more detailed description of the participants and an explanation of the analysis and emerging themes. Chapter four presents the research findings of the study. An analysis of the

discussions by each of the focus groups is presented using salient themes and the research questions as headings. Chapter five presents an overview and summary as a discussion of the study. The limitations of the study, possible implications, and considerations for future research are also discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Julie Landsman and Chance Lewis (2006), in "A Call to Action for White

Teachers in Diverse Classrooms," said:

> There is plenty of research for public consumption …around the simple fact that
> students of color, in particular African American students, are not achieving at the
> same rates academically as their White classmates. ...[N]ow is the time to engage
> in the uncomfortable talks, the continuing dialogue, the community work
> necessary to truly understand and change the situation for those students who are
> being failed by our public educational institutions and assessment standards.
> …Now is the time to look at our position of power in the classroom and question
> our assumptions about the kids we teach. (p.1-2)

Teaching is commonly considered as the act of imparting knowledge or skill and

of giving instruction to another. Inherent in the idea of education or schooling is the

concept of teaching by teachers and learning or achievement by students. While the

purpose of education is open to discussion and interpretation, the common perception is

that students' learning or knowledge of discrete bits of information can be determined

through formal or informal testing procedures and in turn reported to interested parties

(Caine & Caine, 1997). Many students, and especially students of color, are not learning

or achieving the desired designated curriculum as measured by State Achievement Tests

(U.S. Department of Education (NCES), 2004; Kunjufu, 2002).

This literature review attempts to demonstrate the reality for many African

American students by looking at pertinent statistics, the Black/White Achievement Gap,

referrals for Special Education, Talented and Gifted Programs, discipline, and the high

drop-out rate. Additionally, this review attempts to demonstrate why these phenomena occur by looking at White teachers, their attitudes, and teaching practices. Finally, this literature review seeks to establish what we know that could vastly improve educational opportunities and achievement for Black students. Moving towards the use of research based practice that specifically addresses Black students would serve to lessen the disadvantages incurred by our marginalized students (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Landsman & Lewis, 2006). Despite a history of intense study, the question remains: Are we making progress towards closing the Achievement Gap, and if not, what prevents us from doing so? If research shows the connection between effective teaching and student achievement, why do we struggle to make use of such teaching for our students of color? By looking at current research literature, a connection may be made between this study and others, adding to the conversation focused on the attitudes of White teachers and the Black/White Achievement Gap.

Demographic Trends in America's Education System

According to a report released by the Civil Rights Project of the University of California, Los Angeles (Orfield & Lee, 2007), students from minority groups now make up 43% of the nation's elementary and secondary student body with Black, non-Hispanic students representing 17.3%. In some urban or inner-city schools, students of color are in the clear majority at 64.8%. In some schools, however, Non-Whites comprise nearly the entire student body, as our schools become re-segregated once more due to the redrawing of district lines and neighborhood school boundaries. From 1986 to 2001, the White,

Non-Hispanic population of students decreased by 10.1%, while minority students increased by 9.9% (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2004). These statistics demonstrate a trend towards an increasingly more diverse school population (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2004). When looking at the overall population of the United States, Riche (2000) projected that, by 2020, Non-Hispanic Whites will represent 64% of the population, compared to the 36% of non-White minorities. By 2060, it is estimated that non-White minorities will comprise more than 50% of the American population and, within our elementary schools, half of our students will be students of color by 2030 (Riche, 2000). Statistics show significant increase expected in minority populations will be due to both immigration and birthrates (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993).

Meanwhile, the (state) Department of Education reported data for 2004-05 in which students of color made up 25% of the over-all student body, but African Americans accounted for only 3% of the minority total. The 2007-08 enrollment reports for the largest urban district in the state reported that African American students made up 15.6% out of a total student body that is 43.9% minority. Within the district, statistics reveal a segregation of students by schools, demonstrated by the fact that two elementary school student bodies are made up of over 60% African American students, while most schools have less than 20%. Additionally, the minority populations of the district's schools vary greatly, with some student bodies consisting of nearly 80% – 95% students of color and others the exact opposite in numbers.

In contrast, reported statistics on teachers' ethnicity show that the racial make-up of the nation's teaching force is significantly different from that of its pupils (NCES,

2004). 84.3% of the nation's public school teachers are White, Non-Hispanic, while only

7.6% are Black. White females comprise 83% of elementary teachers, and there is no

staff of color in 44% of the United State's Public schools (Irvine, 2003; Kunjufu, 2002).

The urban district in this study has a teacher population less diverse than that of the

nation. 87.7% of its active teaching force is White, while 7% of the teachers are Black.

72% of its schools have a staff made up of 15% (or less) teachers of color.

      This vast difference between the student body and teaching force implies that

many African American students may go through school without *ever* having someone

who reflects their race or culture at the front of the class (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hale-

Benson, 1986; Irvine, 2003;). Additionally, with the diversification of the United States

(Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993), it is increasingly more likely that White teachers will

stand in front of a class that is comprised primarily of students of color, especially in

urban areas.

The Cultural Mismatch in the Classroom

      These data demonstrate a considerable racial and cultural mismatch between the

student population and the teaching force that is especially acute in urban districts (Cross,

2003; Howard, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). It is the contention of many (e.g. Banks,

1997; Brophy, 1988; Delpit, 1995; Dilg, 1999; Gay, 2000, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003;

Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1990, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Landsman &

Lewis, 2006; Siegel, 1999; Sleeter, 2001; Vavrus, 2002) that the cultural mismatch and

resulting differences between African American students and their White teachers may produce possible negative effects for African American students, including the following:

- Achievement that is not up to potential, commonly known as the *achievement gap* between African American and White students.

- Greater number of students referred for Special Education.

- Fewer numbers of students of color recommended for Talented and Gifted Programs.

- Greater number of students of color referred for discipline.

- High drop-out rates among students of color.

The Achievement Gap

The discrepancy in achievement between Black and White students has been well documented (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2005). The Achievement Gap (a commonly used term to refer to the discrepancy in test scores between White and Minority students) is reported through the use of NAEP and SAT results that measure national average test-score differences between racial and ethnic groups. The NAEP (2005) reported that the average score for White students in grade four was 224 in 2000, while the average score for Black students was 191. According to Kunjufu (2002), 63% of African American fourth-grade students are below grade level in reading and 61% of eighth graders are below grade level in math. The Black/White Achievement Gap is not an isolated phenomenon, as it exists in every state of the union. The (State) Department of Education (2004-05) reports that 80% of African American students in third grade met or exceeded in Reading compared to 90% of White students.

In Math, third grade African American students that met or exceeded equaled 75% compared to 90% of White students. In the same year, 40% of eighth grade African American students taking the state math exam met or exceeded compared to 69% of the state's White students, and 45% of eighth-grade Black students met or exceeded the required standard in reading, compared to 68% of White students.

The Black/White Achievement Gap was first brought to attention in the Coleman Report in the 1960s, resulting in a considerable body of empirical research (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Jones, 1984; National Center for Education statistics [NCES], 1995; Peng & Hill, 1995). It has been argued that the Achievement Gap can have lasting effects, including limiting opportunities in higher education, employment, and earnings (Carnavale, 1999; Jencks, 1992; Ogbu, 1994). Furthermore, despite an improvement over the last three decades, progress in reversing the gap has slowed and has even shown signs of a setback since the 1990's (Lee, 2002).

Theories have been postulated as to why the Achievement Gap exists and how to fix it. Rhetoric abounds that seeks to either directly or indirectly blame the victim, including situations of poverty and socioeconomic conditions, family conditions (such as educational attainment and single parent households), and youth culture and student behaviors (such as lack of motivation and drug usage) (Kozol, 1991; Kohl, 1994; Lee, 2002; Swadener & Lubek, 1995). In searching for solutions, the educational system has been examined for effective teaching practices, instructional resources, and conditions of facilities (Kozol, 1991; Kohl, 1967, 1994; Lee, 2002; Rosenfeld, 1971).

Many committed scholars and researchers, including Kathryn Au, Roland G. Tharp, A. Wade Boykin, Sonia Nieto, Lisa Delpit, Jacqueline Irvine, Gloria Ladson-

Billings, and Geneva Gay among others, have worked to address the Achievement Gap (Gay, 2000). These scholars have "constructed a theory of culturally responsive pedagogy or teaching (also called culturally sensitive pedagogy) that gives hope and guidance to educators who are trying to improve the academic achievement of these students" (Banks as quoted in Gay, 2000, p. ix). Much attention has focused on teacher efficacy and teacher-student relationships, as well as the teacher's White identity, cultural competency, and resulting teaching practice (Banks, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Dilg, 1999; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1990, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Sleeter, 2001).

Students Referred for Special Education

Kunjufu (2002) has reported that African American students comprise 17% of the U.S. student population, yet African American children account for almost 40% of students placed in Special Education. The disproportionate minority placement in Special Education, like the Achievement Gap, goes back to the 1960's. Three National Academy of Sciences panels (Heller, Holtzmann, & Messick, 1982; Morrison, White, & Feuer, 1996; National Research Council, 2002) were given the task to study this issue. Despite the attention, it remains a serious problem (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Gay, 2002; Ladner & Hammons, 2001; Losen & Orfield, 2002). A documented consistent pattern of disproportionality exists, as found most commonly in judgmental disability categories, emotional disturbance and mild mental retardation, and among Native American and African American students (Losen & Orfield, 2002; National Research Council, 2002).

Russell, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, and Wu (2006) have reported that consensus over the existence of disproportionality exists, but the reasons why are less clear. Their study, "The Context of Minority Disproportionality: Practitioner Perspectives on Special Education Referral," (2006) explores three possible reasons: social and environmental factors; contributions of general education; and the special education referral process. In their thoroughly controlled study, Russell et al. found, through educator interviews and consequent analysis, that race had a significant effect on the subject's perspective. More specifically, the educators had difficulty talking about race and preferred to attribute the problems of achievement and the need for referral to poverty. They also reported that educators responded most frequently about the lack of available resources. This prompted many referrals for Special Education, inferring that assistance was needed to deal with behaviors and lack of achievement of difficult students (Russel et. al., 2006).

Gay (2002) has proposed another possibility as to the source of the disproportionate numbers of referrals. She contends that the lack of knowledge about or appreciation of cultural values and socialization possessed by educators, along with understanding how this affects learning behaviors, causes them to over-refer African American students. Gay argues for increased attention to teacher training and in-service professional development that centers on Culturally Responsive Teaching. She agrees with Artiles and Trent (1994) who said that mild learning disabilities may be a socially constructed category that serves as a dumping ground for students of color. Gay explains that teacher attitudes towards diversity and differences, diversity and disability, and their

lack of critical, cultural consciousness have significant effects on the education and achievement of African American students.

Talented and Gifted Education

The other side of the Special Education referral's coin is the number of African American students referred to the Talented and Gifted Education program. Recall that African American children comprise 17% of the student population, yet only 3% of African American students are placed in gifted and talented programs (Kunjufu, 2002). Ford and Thomas (1997) have reported that Black students may be under-represented in Talented and Gifted programs by as much as 30% to 70%. In addition to lack of representation, Deborah Harmon, in her 2002 study entitled, "They Won't Teach Me," raises the same issues thought to affect African American students in general education classes, such as low teacher expectations, a poor learning environment that alienates Black students, and a lack of multicultural curriculum. There is also a lack of racial diversity among the identified students placed in the Talented and Gifted classes (Harmon, 2002). Harmon has added her voice to others calling for increased cultural competency in teachers, as well as an inclusive multicultural curriculum that reflects the needs of all students (Banks, 1997; Ford, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1999; Frasier, 1995).

Disciplinary Actions

The frequency that African American students are disciplined or recommended for disciplinary actions is also under scrutiny. There is an imbalance between Black and White students referred for discipline when considering the ratio of Black students

referred to total number of Black students compared to the ratio for White students (Gay, 2000; Hale-Benson, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Dilg, 1999; Banks, 1997; Sleeter, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003). Nationally, Black students represent 17% of all students, yet they receive 37% of corporal punishments, 32% of out-of-school suspensions, and 31% of school expulsions (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). Statistically, Black students are two to five times more likely to be suspended than White students (Irvine, 1990). Qualitative findings indicate that teachers assign consequences to Black students even when students of other races exhibit the same behavior (McCadden, 1998), and African American students, especially boys, receive harsher punishments than White students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Pertson, 2000; Ferguson, 2000). Four conditions contributing to current disparities have been suggested: lack of appropriate response to cultural behavior by teachers; criminalization of Black males; race and class privilege; and zero tolerance polices for subjectively defined offenses (Brophy & Good, 1970; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Monroe, 2005).

Not only are Black students referred for discipline as a result of their behavior, but their behavior puts them at risk for referral of behavioral/emotional disorders in which, as previously stated, they are over-represented (U. S. Department of Education, 2002; Meyer & Patton, 2001; Neal, McGray, & Webb-Johnson, 2001). African American males, in particular, are often seen as being too active, when in reality they may be demonstrating what is called *verve* within the African American culture (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Boykin, 1983). Children with verve are socialized to be active and dynamic learners, coming from homes that encourage movement, exploration, inquiry, and sometimes challenge (Boykin & Bailey, 2001; Webb-Johnson, 2002). Teachers

unfamiliar with such behavior often misinterpret it as problematic, as demonstrated by high rates of discipline, referrals, and suspensions (Harry & Anderson, 1999; Townsend, 2000). As a result of feeling unfairly treated, many African American students develop coping strategies that may include withdrawing intellectually and emotionally from the learning environment (Boykin, 1983; Webb-Johnson, 2002).

Examinations of the emotional and sociological effects on Black youths suggest a connection between school experiences and future incarceration (Monroe, 2005). Simon and Burns (1997) have linked school disciplinary patterns with trends in delinquency and recidivism. Over representation of Black males in the U.S. justice system (Wacquant, 2000), combined with disproportionate representation of Black students referred for school discipline (Applied Research Center, 2002), justify the need for continued study in this area.

The Drop-out Rate

The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2004 that the likelihood of a Black student choosing to drop out of school was nearly 6% compared to 3.7% for Whites. Most major cities in the U. S. have a dropout rate of approximately 40%, with the rate for African Americans being 56% (Kunjufu, 2002). Additionally, studies have shown that there are on average 120 to 130 male, high school drop-outs for every 100 females (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2003), contributing to the increasing gender gap at colleges and universities.

Somers and Piliawsky (2004) have found that developmental transitions, especially from 9th to 10th grade, create a serious risk for losing students to drop-out. In

serious than it really is. Regardless of the political posturing, a serious problem exists in that young people without high school diplomas are at risk for failure in the job market (Finnan & Chasin, 2007; Irvine, 2003; Jencks, 1992; Jones, 2005; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Ogbu, 1994; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004).

White Teachers, Their Attitudes, and Teaching Practice

Studies indicating the importance of teacher processes (Solomon & Battistich, 1996; Waxman, Huang, Anderson, & Weinstein, 2001), teacher-student relationships (Fritz & Miller-Heyl, 1995; Yoon, 2002), and the quality of teacher characteristics and development (Marx, 2001; Siegel, 1999; Vavrus, 2002) exist, connecting these phenomenon to student achievement. Yet, evidence also exists that shows teachers, especially those in high-poverty schools, tend to have negative attitudes towards their students and tend to use ineffective teaching practices (Solomon & Battistich, 1996; Waxman et al., 2001; Yoon, 2002).

Student achievement is directly affected by a teacher's instructional strategies (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993; Solomon & Battistich, 1996; Waxman et al., 2001). Additionally, Solomon and Battistich (1996) found a strong correlation between a teacher's perception of students in poverty and their teaching in the classroom. According to Solomon and Battistich, teachers who appeared to believe that students were less capable also thought students required more control and a more compensatory curriculum. Such teachers tended not to use the more advantageous teaching practices of collaborative learning, the embedding of skills in contexts, and

linkages between subject areas and outside life (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993). Instruction that does not make use of such strategies tends to create a situation where students feel less valued or autonomous and develop less attachment to school or their peers (Solomon & Battistich, 1996).

Interactions between teacher and student relate positively with student achievement (Waxman, Huang, Lindvail, & Anderson, 1988). Relationships that are responsive, caring, and communicative are linked to better student behavior and school adjustment, especially when such relationships are missing outside of school (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Werner, 1990; Yoon, 2002). Lack of caring and empathy hampers the development of student/teacher relationships, and conflict and dependency in the relationship is related to such negative outcomes as poor school attitude, school avoidance, and aggression (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994).

It has been found that effective teachers spend at least 70% of their time interacting with their students, creating a more positive learning environment resulting in students' improved perspectives towards their teachers and classmates. In many failing inner-city schools, however, observations have shown no student/teacher interactions more than 40% of the time (Waxman et al., 2001). Effective student/teacher relationships include teachers supporting their students in personal issues, encouraging the students to succeed, and showing interest in students' work, but teachers in failing schools have spent little time demonstrating these activities (Waxman et al., 2001). Quality staff development that promotes such interaction is crucial for successful education in urban

settings (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1995; Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1995; Waxman & Padron, 1995).

Improved Educational Opportunities Through Culturally Responsive Teaching

The theory of Culturally Responsive Teaching (also called *culturally sensitive pedagogy*, *culturally responsive pedagogy*, and *culturally relative teaching*) gives hope and guidance to educators who are trying to improve academic achievement of low-income students and students of color (Banks, 1997). The theory postulates that the academic achievement of students will improve when teachers draw on the language and strengths of the students and when the student is at the center of the curriculum (Gay, 2000, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). While student achievement is also affected by issues found outside of the school, such as funding, systemic school reform, recruitment, assignment and retention of teachers, and administrative leadership (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 1999), the theory of Culturally Responsive Teaching addresses what happens in the classroom and acknowledges the power of teaching and what it can accomplish for marginalized students (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000).

Due to our increasingly diverse student population, the need for Culturally Responsive Teaching has become a key component of preparing teacher educators. Prior to, or ongoing during the process of learning and implementing such teaching practice, however, is the need to develop cultural awareness and competency in the teacher (Delpit, 1995; Diller & Moule, 2005; Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Vavrus, 2002). It is not enough for would-be teachers to be exposed to

diverse settings. A concentrated program of study needs to be incorporated that will lead the student into their teacher identity (Banks, 1993a; Howard, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). Combining teacher identity formation within the teacher education program is imperative to helping teachers develop transformative and culturally responsive teaching strategies that stem from an anti-racist, social justice perspective (Banks, 1993a; Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Tatum, 1999a; Vavrus, 2002).

Much attention has been paid to the need for developing a cultural awareness and beginning competency in pre-service teachers, as teachers must understand their own worldviews, confront their own racism and biases, learn about their students' cultures, and understand the world through a multi-cultural lens (Banks, 1994; Bennett, 1993; Diller & Moule, 2005; Gay, 2000; Gillette & Boyle-Baise, 1995; Nieto & Rolon, 1995; Sleeter, 1992; Vavrus, 2002; Villegas, 1991). A person working towards cultural competency possesses an intellectual and emotional commitment to all humans while appreciating and accepting cultural and individual differences (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). Christine Bennett (1995) has added that a commitment to fighting racism, prejudice, and discrimination is also desired. Three process models have been identified as possibly assisting in one's journey to cultural competency: Helms's (1984, 1990) Racial Identity Development; Banks' (1984) Typology of Ethnicity; and M. J. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Gary Howard (1999) has called this "the inner work of multicultural teaching that has been the missing piece in the preparation of White teachers…expecting to be something they have not learned to be, namely, multi-culturally competent people" (p. 4).

Teachers who have not examined their identity and racial structures are likely to use teaching strategies that have worked well in mainstream settings, thereby perpetuating the status quo and academic achievement discrepancy between students of color and White students (Vavrus, 2002). Well-qualified teachers with traditional teaching skills may not possess the skills necessary to teach in a diverse, high-poverty school, with many experienced teachers assuming individual persistence and perseverance as being what enables them to "last" in these settings (Rios, 1991; Sleeter, 1992; Vavrus, 2002).

Culturally Responsive Teaching is not something that happens once a day; it is an umbrella under which all aspects of teaching occur (e.g. Banks, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000). Four components of Culturally Responsive Teaching that stand out for consideration are issues of (1) power in the classroom, (2) the teacher's attitude towards the learner, (3) the use of a comprehensive multicultural pedagogy, and (4) the teacher's expectations, efficacy, and empowerment (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000).

Power in the Classroom

Lisa Delpit, in "Other People's Children" (1995), describes five power concepts teachers must understand in order to adequately analyze and negate the power forces within the classroom. These concepts are:

1. Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.

2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a culture of power.

3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have the power.

4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.

5. Those with power are frequently least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 24)

Delpit goes on to explain that to provide schooling centered only on middle-class values and aspirations will serve to perpetuate the status quo. She also states that children must be taught explicitly the accoutrements of the dominant culture of power so that they may participate in their education and in society.

One issue that arises is that of *speech*. It has been shown that speech patterns differ between Blacks and Whites, and between the working class and middle class (Delpit, 1995; Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 2002; Payne, 1996). It is generally accepted that African American parents speak much more directly to their children, where as a White mother will be more indirect though having the same intention (Delpit, 1995). For example, whereas a Black parent might say, "Get yourself up to bed, now," a White parent with the same intention might say, "Don't you think its time to get ready for bed?" Similarly, in the classroom, the White teacher may say to the child, "Don't you think you should put the scissors away?" The child may need to hear, "Put the scissors away now, please."

Most Black children expect to hear direct instructions and expect an authority figure to act with authority (Delpit, 1995; Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 2002). Many

African Americans typically see authority differently in that they expect authority to be

demonstrated through personal characteristics (Delpit, 1995). Irvine (2002), in

comparing Black and White teachers, has found that effective Black teachers "are

demanding of students in all areas including curriculum and discipline" (p. 52). It should

be noted, however, that speaking with authority is not to be misconstrued as a license to

be authoritarian. Black teachers in Irvine's study did not appear to be interested in

authority for authority's sake, but rather they had the children's best interest in mind, not

their own.

Teacher's Attitude Towards the Learner

Cross (2003) has found that many teachers who do not share the same ethnic,

social, racial, and linguistic backgrounds as their students may have conflicts and

negative attitudes in the classroom. Additionally, the incompatibilities that may exist are

evident in value orientations, behavioral expectations, social interactions,

communication, and cognitive processing

The United States is very color conscious, and color consciousness affects the

way people view their world and others in their world (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Racial stereotypes abound, especially in the media (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Cortez,

2000). Teachers come to the classroom with stereotypes and biases reinforced by the

media (Diller & Moule, 2005; Irvine, 1990; Vavrus, 2002). Typical racial stereotypes

can be used to justify having low educational and occupational expectations for Black

students, referrals of Black students to separate programs (i.e. Special Education),

"dumbing" down the curriculum and pedagogy, and over-reacting to behaviors (Graybill, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Teachers sometimes project a cultural deprivation model onto the student to explain the lack of achievement of students from another culture or economic level (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Swadner & Lubeck, 1995). Through the years, these children with low achievement have been viewed as *disadvantaged, socially deprived, low socioeconomic, culturally deprived, culturally deficient*, and *children at risk*. Educators sometimes consider these students educationally disadvantaged because they believe these students have not had proper exposure to appropriate educational experiences (Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Swadner & Lubeck, 1995). Although the labels highlight different aspects, they point to a deficiency, or deficit, model of the home and/or the student that is seen as substandard (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000). These labels are not neutral and they contain assumptions about the problem and the remedy, as well as potential for damage and disempowerment to the student (Swadner & Lubeck, 1995).

Well-intentioned teachers can begin to ascribe to a deficit way of thinking towards their students when they experience lack of support services and/or a negative school climate (Dewey, 1938; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, 2002; Marx, 2001; Valencia, 1997; Weiner, 2006). Backlash applied to students can also be a result of the structural racism found within our society and thus the school (Omi & Winant, 1994; Winant, 1997). When blame for underachievement and irresponsibility is directed to students and ascribed to by the teaching staff, a solidarity base is built that leads to resurgence in deficit thinking (Delpit, 1995; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). This deficit lens may be perpetuated in teacher education programs and society in general, and

it is not unusual for teachers to buy into it, even though it may not be intentional (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997; Vavrus, 2002). Teachers may adopt these negative ways of thinking about their students in order to deal with the pressures created by administration and the community (Marx, 2001).

A teacher striving to teach in a culturally responsive manner will work to change his or her attitude to one of "difference orientation" (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Educators who accept differences focus on the strengths of the student rather than feeling the need to remediate (Delpit, 1995; Diller & Moule, 2005). For example, when considering an African American boy's propensity to socialize, the teacher uses his skill to assist with a learning task by making him the leader in a group project. Learning to teach through difference orientation requires time and effort to get to know more about the cultural background and strengths of the student (Sleeter & Grant, 1999). Though educators may become discouraged when faced with the unfamiliar, they can acknowledge deficit, or deficiency, explanations and examine them critically, looking for strategies that focus on student strengths (Marx, 2001; Weiner, 2003).

Culturally Responsive teaching also means that a teacher exhibits an attitude of caring towards her students (Cochran-Smith, 1995a, 1995b; Cooper, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parsons, 2005). Parson (2005) has contended that individuals who operate within a framework of caring consider responsiveness to others and nurturing of interpersonal relationships paramount in their actions. She adds that justice and caring must be paired to stop systemic inequities and inequalities found in the United States. Parson shows that, while many teachers, especially White teachers who may be less aware because of their experience of White

privilege, are defensive and indifferent to inequities and inequalities, they can broaden their perspectives when they approach their classroom from an ethic of caring. This caring can be demonstrated by disrupting dominance and creating space for Black students' learning, providing help through a belief in their strengths and abilities, and through enforcing and reinforcing demonstration and competence in academic tasks.

Patricia Cooper (2003), in "Effective White Teachers of Black Children," examined the practice of three White teachers nominated by the Black community in which they teach. She found the *personal norm* of *teacher as mother* to be a necessary component of culturally relevant teaching. Cooper defined a personal norm as a trait that revealed a respect for and commitment to the Black community and empathy for Black children. The teachers in the study cared for their students' physical and emotional health and demonstrated concern for their safety and comfort. They also promoted interpersonal and whole group relationships, viewing the classroom community in familial terms.

Comprehensive Multicultural Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1994) explained that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, and emotional learning by using cultural materials to give knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The teacher works to teach the whole child using culturally appropriate social situations for learning and culturally valued knowledge in curriculum content (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 1994; Sleeter, 2001). The teacher helps the child to maintain identity and make connections between their community and their learning, weaves expectations and skills throughout the curriculum rather than in

isolation, and holds students accountable for each others' learning as well as their own (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom environment, student-teacher relationships, instructional pedagogy, and assessments as the teacher teaches in and through the curriculum.

The use of a multicultural curriculum that focuses on the contributions of minority cultures takes the emphasis away from the dominant culture (Banks, 1997). This is a move that involves essential philosophies about what to teach, and the implication can be quite significant for both the student and the teacher, while also implying that the teacher values the student's place in the learning process. According to Banks, whereas the Contributions and Additive approach calls for adding ethnic celebrations, holidays, and tidbits about celebrated heroes, teachers must seek to reach the Transformative and Social Action Approach in their curriculum to be most effective. The Social Action Approach, just as it sounds, teaches students how to be active citizens in a democracy through taking action and ownership in educational activities and daily routines (Banks, 1997).

Knowledge in the form of curriculum content is central to students' feelings of empowerment (Gay, 2000). To be effective, knowledge must be accessible and connected to student lives and experiences (Sleeter & Grant, 1991). Dewey (1902) suggested, almost 90 years earlier, that curriculum content should be seen as a tool to help students assert and accentuate their present and future powers, capabilities, attitudes, and experiences. The importance of student relevance and participation cannot be over-stated, as students must be seen as co-originators, co-designers, and co-directors of their education, rather than consumers only (Gay, 2000).

Textbooks are the basis of seventy to ninety percent of all classroom instruction (Apple, 1985; Wade, 1993). Textbooks, which are controlled and produced by the dominant culture, often present information through the dominant culture's experiences and perspective, confirming its status, culture, and contributions while excluding certain information about various racial minorities (Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 1991). Little systematic empirical research has been done on how biased textbooks affect the achievement of diverse students, but observations and recommendations made by Chun-Hoon (1973) and Sleeter and Grant (1991) are relevant for teachers today. They suggest that authors and publishers reorient their focus to portray more authentic and contextualized multicultural content.

When using textbooks, teachers can avoid some of the inadequate coverage of cultural diversity by including accurate, wide-ranging, and appropriately contextualized material in their instruction on a regular basis (Gay, 2000). Ethnic literature and trade books are one good alternative to textbooks and important for students' ability to make connections to their personal lives and the real world (Kim, 1976). Since no one source can provide the wide range of content needed to fill knowledge voids and correct existing distortions, it is necessary for teachers (and curriculum designers) to use a variety of content sources (Banks & Banks, 1997; King, 1994; Nieto, 1999).

Teacher's Expectations, Efficacy, and Empowerment

It is imperative that the teacher believe in and transmit high expectations for all students, as the ideal of high expectations by teachers has been strongly correlated to student achievement (Cooper, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-

Billings, 1994). According to Delpit (1995), an effective teacher of Black children is one who knows her subject matter, sees herself as the authority in the classroom, and holds high expectations for all children. Ladson-Billings (1993) found that effective Black teachers have many like characteristics, including the promotion of academic achievement without sacrificing the students' African and African American identity. In many African American communities, teachers are expected to show that they care about their students by controlling the class and "pushing" students to achieve the standard (Delpit, 1995). Kunjufu (2002) has said, "The most significant characteristic of Master Teachers is not their race or gender but the expectations they have of their students" (p. 43).

In a speech to the Texas Middle Schools Association, Hayes Mizell, director of the Program for Student Achievement at the Edna McConnel Clark Foundation, underscored the impact of the beliefs and subsequent actions of educators on the success of students by stating the following:

> If teachers and administrators and schools want students to succeed, they have to believe that all students can and should succeed. More importantly, they have to act to make it happen; they have to do almost anything to make it happen. The practices for student success are not a mystery; they are well known. They are not, however, self-implementing. (Quoted by Gloria Harper Lee in "The Development of Teacher Efficacy Beliefs," Irvine, 2002, p. 67)

It is suggested that the key to student success is in teachers' beliefs and practices (Irvine, 2002). What teachers believe about their abilities may be related to teaching effectiveness. Teacher efficacy refers to the belief one has in one's self to be successful in teaching practice, including execution of instruction and student learning. Self-efficacy develops as an individual formulates beliefs of personal competency (Bandura,

1977). Based on prior experience, one expects to complete a similar task successfully in the future. In applying Bandura's theory to teaching, teachers gain information about their efforts in the classroom through personal experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasions (a positive suggestion can encourage extra effort), and physiological and emotional states of the individual.

Teacher efficacy has been associated with student achievement, student motivation, teachers' adoption of innovation, and teachers' classroom management (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Demo & Gibson, 1985; Woolfolk, Rosoff, and Hoy, 1990). Pang and Sablan (1998) found that "high-efficacy teachers developed warm relationships with students, gave more positive feedback to students, and held high expectations for all students" (as quoted in Pang, 2001, p. 181). Furthermore, their findings suggest that one appropriate way to support teacher efficacy is by providing teachers with needed organizational and instrumental tools. Yost (2002) has found that participation in mentoring boosts the efficacy of both the novice and the veteran teacher.

Stress can affect the sense of efficacy a teacher exhibits. The presence of significant stress and lack of strategies to deal with it may contribute to a decreased sense of efficacy, resulting in less-positive student/teacher relationships, a decreased interest or willingness to participate in curriculum innovations, and increased role strain (Yoon, 2002). Research supports that teachers are key change agents in the classroom; and, in order for teachers to participate in any of the above, teachers must possess a certain amount of efficacy (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995; Fitz & Miller-Heyl, 1995; Stein & Wang, 1988).

When a teacher teaches with high expectations and high-efficacy, both teacher and students are empowered to obtain higher levels of success (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Pang, 2001). Teachers who teach through a culturally responsive framework work to develop a learning community that helps everyone succeed, getting each individual involved in their own learning and caring about the learning of the whole group. Teachers must make the task at hand accessible to the students and demonstrate faith in their ability to accomplish the task successfully. This empowers the student to reach a higher level of competency. Teaching with high expectations and high efficacy is "fundamental to effective teaching and learning. This is true whether the students are in kindergarten or doctoral programs" (Gay, 2000, p. 190).

Conclusion

In this literature review I have attempted to demonstrate what the educational experience may be like for many African American students by looking at pertinent statistics, the Black/White Achievement Gap, referrals for Special Education, Talented and Gifted Programs, disciplinary actions, and the high drop-out rates. I also attempted to demonstrate why these phenomena may occur by looking at White teachers' attitudes and teaching practices, and by showing what improvements might be made through Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Irvine, 2003).

"The changing racial and ethnic demography in the United States challenges schools to educate an increasingly diverse student population" (Lee, 2002, p. 3), and a multitude of concerns has resulted in a significant body of research (Coleman et al., 1966;

Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Jones, 1984; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995). The achievement gap in schools is argued to have lifetime consequences for African American students, forcing the argument for educational reform (Jencks, 1992; Ogbu, 1994).

Geneva Gay (2000), in arguing for educational reform, stated:

Systematic reforms must be undertaken that deal with multiple aspects of achievement (academic, social, psychological, emotional, etc.) within different subject areas, across school levels, and through different aspects of the educational enterprise. These reforms also need to be diversified according to the social variance of students, attending deliberately and conscientiously to such factors as ethnicity and culture, gender, social class, historical experiences, and linguistic capabilities. (p. xiii)

Research findings indicate that how teachers teach affects results in the classroom, but Gay (2000) has asked, "Will teachers have the courage, competence, and confidence to do what they must?" (p. 201).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLGY AND DESIGN

Introduction and Overview of Study

As a researcher, I am interested in examining how White teachers approach their students and their teaching when they are racially and culturally different from their students, specifically African American students. I am also interested to know what concerns, if any, White teachers may have in regard to providing effective teaching for African American students, and whether their concerns cause them to choose particular ways of teaching. Additionally, I want to examine their attitudes towards the Black/White Achievement Gap and what, if anything, they do to address it.

The purpose of this study was to explore White, female teachers' attitudes and perspectives towards their African American students, the Black/White Achievement Gap, and their teaching practice in regard to their students' achievement through the use of focus group discussions. My interest in this research stems from my experience as a White, female teacher of African American students. The research questions that guided this study asked:

RQ 1. How do White, female teachers see their African American students, parents, and community?

RQ 2. How do White, female teachers view the Black/White Achievement Gap and their teaching in regard to their students' achievement?

Information gathered and analyzed may serve to further inform the understanding of cross-cultural relationships between teacher and student in the classroom and how such relationships affect teaching and learning.

There are many kinds of qualitative research, but each qualitative study has its unique character that develops and changes as the study is implemented (Hatch, 2002). This study was implemented within a constructivist framework. I worked with respondents to co-construct understandings that were reported as interpretations or narratives, much like those in Ladson-Billings' (1994) study of successful African American teachers.

The target group for the sample of this study was White, female teachers with more than three years teaching experience in the selected school. The school chosen for the study is a 100% Title I school with a minority student population of 91.7%. African-American students make up 67.8% of the students, and 26 White females represent 72% of the teaching staff (District 1J, Preliminary Spring Summary of Student and Staff Ethnicity, 2007). An attempt was made to solicit all teachers within the school who fit the specific criteria of gender, race, and years of teaching at the school. Some variability occurred as respondents came forward. Groups were created according to their years of teaching experience, years at the school, and the teaching teams they represented, adding another dimension to the study (Hatch, 2002).

Focus Groups as Data Collection

Social scientists Robert Merton and Patricia Kendall developed the focus group method in 1946. In the 1950s, it became identified with marketing research and was soon picked up by politicians on the campaign trail (Morgan, 1996; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). The use of focus groups in market research has long been regarded as part of standard practice (Calder, 1977; Langer, 1979; Linda, 1982). Data has been gathered using focus groups for patient/customer satisfaction (Cunningham & Frontczak, 1988), sensitive issues (O'Brien, 1993), user education and empowerment (Basch, 1987), the development of promotional or teaching materials (Bryant & Gulitz, 1993), and questionnaire/ survey formulation (Court, 1995; O'Brien, 1993). The use of focus groups for gathering data in the social sciences, including education, became popular once more beginning in the 1990s (Woodring, Foley, Rado, Brown, & Hamner, 2006).

The most common purpose of a focus group is for an in-depth exploration of a topic to "[provide] information about why people think or feel the way they do" (Krueger, 1994, p. 3). Reed & Payton (1997) have defined a focus group as a "group discussion organized to explore a specific set of issues…. The group is 'focused' in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity" (p. 765).

Using focus groups to conduct my study allowed me to gather data in four sessions from a number of participants whose opinions and ideas are of particular interest to me. The focus groups met for approximately 90 to 120 minutes, and the conversations were digitally recorded. Conversations and informal interactions were also recorded through hand-written field notes (Morgan, 1996).

Research literature alternates between referring to focus groups as group interviews (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Morgan, 1997) and group discussions (Coreil, 1995; Krueger, 1994). The difference lies in the relative amount of control exerted by the moderator/facilitator (Woodring et al., 2006). In a focus group run as a group interview, the moderator/facilitator attempts to control both the specific topic and the group dynamics, acting in an investigative role by having the group respond to specific questions and even engage in dialogue with selected participants (Smithson, 2000).

Conversely, in the discussion model focus group, the moderator/facilitator is less involved, thereby allowing a more free flow of dialogue (Woodring et al., 2006). My intention in this study was to conduct a focus group discussion that was minimally directed, as my interests lie in the multiple perspectives of the participants (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997). As Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson (2001) have explained,

> In focus groups…the objective is not primarily to elicit the group's answers…but rather to stimulate discussion and thereby understand (through subsequent analysis) the meanings and norms which underlie those group answers. In group interviews the interviewer seeks answers; in focus groups the facilitator seeks group interaction. (p. 42-43)

By taking a peripheral role, I allowed the inter-relational dynamics of the participants to take center stage (Johnson, 1996; Kitzinger, 1994a). Within such a discussion model, members of this study were encouraged to discuss issues specific to teaching in their setting, in order that their underlying norms, beliefs, and values, as well as experiences common to their lives, could be uncovered (Bloor et al., 2001; Parker & Tritter, 2006).

Participants' Voice

Though often used in conjunction with other methodologies, focus groups are increasingly being used as stand-alone sources of data collection (Woodring et al., 2006), with one reason being to address the need to incorporate the subject's voice in the research (Barbour, 2005). There is an emerging consensus that considers focus groups "uniquely well-suited for eliciting the insights of segments of consumers who have been underserved, unheard or overlooked in previous research" (Koppelman & Bourjolly, 2001, p. 142). Researchers conducting research on historically marginalized peoples have found that utilization of the focus group method has increased the opportunity for silenced voices to be heard (Morgan, 1996; Woodring et al., 2006). Additionally, Barbour (2005) has stated, "Homogeneous groups offer participants a relatively safe environment in which to share their experiences…. [T]his can pay dividends in encouraging relatively uninhibited discussion." (p. 743) According to Clifford (1989), teachers, as a group, have relatively little power or status. The homogeneous nature of the groups in this study offered the participants a safe environment, allowing them to discuss and share their stories.

Recruitment, Selection, and Timeline

The researcher must pay close attention to the recruitment of participants (Parker & Tritter, 2006). If the group dynamics work as intended, a synergy will emerge between the participants, contributing meaningful data to the discussion (Kitzinger, 1994a). However, despite collective interests and commonalities, participants may impede the

desired interactional synergy (Parker & Tritter, 2006). Participants may be reluctant to engage with each other, or they may know each other so well that the interaction becomes based on social patterns rather than the intent of the research. Parker and Tritter (2006) argue that, because of desired outcomes,

> the recruitment of group participants is not something which should be carried out simply on an ad hoc or random basis…. Issues of sampling and selection are likely to prove crucial in relation to the form and quality of interaction in a focus group and therefore the kinds of data one gathers. (p. 27)

Recruitment of participants can be a major obstacle when utilizing the focus group method, and some researchers address the perils of participant attrition through over recruiting by 20% and through incentives (Bloor et al., 2001; Morgan, 1996). Incentives used for participation may or may not be monetary, but according to Bloor et al., there is no guarantee that either strategy works.

As an insider of the desired community with ready access to would-be participants (Krueger, 1994), I knew to be mindful of creating a sample of convenience (Allsop, Tritter, Turner, & Elliot, 1995; Parker, 2000) and/or taking advantage of my membership. I also knew I was asking a lot of my participants, a considerable amount of time and the request for them to reveal sensitive information (Hatch, 2002). In return, I informally offered them additional support or assistance with particular needs that might arise in a typical day at the school; showing my gratitude and appreciation on a personal level.

In this study, the number of focus groups were determined by the number of respondents agreeing to participate. Particular attention was paid to the membership of the focus groups because of the nature of the discussion (Madriz, 2000; Morgan, 1997). Barbour (2005) and Morgan (1997) contend that, since they may need to share a deeper

acquaintance (as is often the case with controversial topics), it is important that members are comfortable with the constituency. As an insider, I possessed an awareness of the participants' relationships, which gave me an opportunity to create cohesive groups according to my impressions of their teaching teams and friendships.

The number of members within each group was carefully considered for this study. Though groups are often six to ten in number, when there is potential for high involvement or a high level of emotional attachment, it is advisable to keep the number of participants within each group low (Morgan, 1997). Concentrating on small numbers allowed for a deep understanding of the topic through the perspective of the individual (Madriz, 2000; Morgan, 1997). Enough respondents came forward to make two groups of four. By keeping the groups this small, I was better able to facilitate rich discussions unhampered by participants' reluctance to share.

In accordance with the Oregon State University academic policy, I submitted my proposal and paperwork and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I also submitted a Human Subjects Form to my district for approval to conduct research with teachers from a selected school site. I received an electronic communication that determined a formal application to the district unnecessary.

Data collection occurred in late November and early December of 2007 through the facilitation of four focus group sessions; two sessions each for two groups made up of four participants (See Table 3.1 for a timeline of the research process).

Table 3.1. Timeline

October – November 2007	Submitted proposal to IRB Recruited participants, secured informed consent forms, gave overview of process, and arranged dates for sessions
November – December 2007	Held focus group sessions, and did verbal member checks
January – February 2008	Followed steps outlined by Hatch (2002) Triangulation of data through member checking of transcripts and summaries

Potential Significance and Limitations

Significance of an ethnographic study lies in its ability to interpret and reveal the lived experience of the people involved (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The potential significance of this qualitative study lies in its ability to add meaningful data to the existing collection of research regarding teaching in a cross-cultural setting (e.g. Cooper, 2003; Irvine, 1990; Vavrus, 2002). By examining White, female teachers' perspectives towards their African American students, the potential exists for new understandings to be uncovered. Though pre-service teachers' attitudes and perspectives have been studied (Banks, 1993a; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Marx, 2001; Sleeter, 2001; Vavrus, 2002), there is a dearth of research on the experience of in-service White, female teachers teaching together in one elementary school with a predominantly African American student-body (Cooper, 2003).

All studies have limitations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This study was designed to examine teaching through participants' perspectives on particular issues through their stories. A limitation common to all studies with human participants, is the need to rely on their ability to recall stories and their willingness to share the incident or impression (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). A limitation was also reflected in my position as researcher (Bishop, 2005). I am a teacher in the school that was the site of the research, and, while I am optimistic that my relationship with the subjects had a positive effect on the study, my position within the school community may have unknowingly coerced teachers into participation, or may have caused them to feel inhibited and less likely to fully respond. It is also possible that participants in this study were guarded in their responses because race and cross-cultural relationships, as well as the achievement gap, are difficult for some White teachers to talk about (Diller & Moule, 2005; Howard, 1999; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Siegel, 1999). Participants might have feared sounding racist or admitting to what could be considered bad teaching (Narayan & George, 2003).

Researcher Considerations

As researcher, my presence in the study and in the participants' lives was unavoidable (Hatch, 2002). Given my many years at the school, I have relationships with these teachers. I believe I have a reciprocal level of trust with my colleagues, but a range of strategic, ethical, and personal relationships, as well as issues of personal dilemmas, reciprocity, bias, and participation roles of the researcher required an ongoing assessment on my part. This was especially important as I worked through my analysis and

interpretations. As interpretations emerged, I realized the volatile nature of the study's results, and it became even more important that I remain mindful of the potential danger of retribution from outside sources to the participants.

Researcher Bias

Bias in qualitative research refers to influences that impair complete or accurate sampling, data collection, data interpretation, and reporting (Hyde, 1994; Reid, 1994). While, the possibility of bias always exists, I was aware that my emic perspective supported and enhanced my data gathering. However, it is possible that friendships with my colleagues may have caused me to be subjective rather than objective or detached from the data I collected. Additionally, because of my years of study in this field of cross-cultural teaching, it was necessary to leave my "knowledge at the door" and enter without pre-conceived notions of what I would have *liked* to hear. In my analysis, I found it necessary to attempt to put my personal reactions to the data aside and look at the data as unencumbered as possible.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations such as informed consent and protecting participants' anonymity were carefully protected by following standard research procedures through the IRB, as required by Oregon State University. Typically, as researchers we give assurance to respondent confidentiality (American Sociological Association, 1997), but the use of a focus group comes with the difficulty of ensuring that the participants will

adhere to strict stipulations (Parker & Tritter, 2006). Notions of confidentiality and anonymity were presented, and participants had the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms for the final report. As researcher, I looked for the unexpected, both in the research data and the process as a whole, recognized the status, position, and specific needs of the participants as much as possible, and offered assurances of sensitivity and confidentiality (Parker & Tritter, 2006).

Discussions of highly sensitive and potentially stigmatizing information can be a primary concern of participants (Quine & Cameron, 1995). Woodring et al., (2006) in The Emerging Disabilities Project, found consideration of participant needs necessary not only for the physical needs present, but also in regard to the discussion matter and possible repercussions from supervisors. Ethical and practical issues are closely related when making decisions regarding participants. While repercussions from supervisors towards the participants were doubtful in this study, due to the fact that they may have feared back-lash from colleagues with whom they share a workplace, it was crucial that I considered possible ramifications between participants (Barbour, 2005).

The possibility that some of the participants might have found it difficult to talk about issues of race and culture (Howard, 1999; Vavrus, 2002; Siegel, 1999) meant that I needed to be sensitive to their dilemma and allow them to withdraw without pressure (Bishop, 2005; Morgan, 1997). If a participant had decided to withdraw, I would have reacted non-judgmentally (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; Bishop, 2005). My willingness to offer a full disclosure of my research intentions, as well as give a clear message that participation was voluntary, appeared to have made the participants feel comfortable with

their involvement. Just as Hatch (2002) has suggested, I revealed an awareness of, and an appreciation for and commitment to, ethical principles for research.

General Procedures

Three general criteria should be present for effective focus group research, including a large range of relevant topics: data that is as specific as possible; interaction that explores the participants' perspective in depth; and the personal context of the participants' discussion (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956). As facilitator, I attempted to be flexible and allow for deviations not anticipated; I emphasized the need for participants to not only be specific, but to take their discussion to a deeper level, paying close attention to the interactions not readily obtained in other research methods (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merton et al., 1956; Morgan, 1997).

The over-all goal of this study was to uncover White, female teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards their African American students, the Black/White Achievement Gap, and their teaching practices. Like Marshall and Rossman (1999) have suggested, I used a set of questions (delineated in chapter four) to guide the focus group discussion as needed, but the course of discussion was managed with relative flexibility so that a sense of freedom was retained for the respondents.

Data Collection

I used four data collection tools in my study. The use of several tools for data collection enhances reliability and validity by allowing for cross-checking or cross-referencing. This triangulation also allowed for the opportunity to highlight differences for interpretation (Silverman, 1993). Actual data collection for this study involved a pre-session questionnaire or registration (see Appendix A), research journal/field notes by researcher/moderator, digital recordings, and follow-up member checking communications (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Data Sources

Questionnaire/Registration	Notes on all aspects of implementation of the focus group and my meaning-making
Two Focus Groups	Transcriptions
Individual Member Checking	Transcripts and Summaries
Pre-session / background information	Research Journal/ Field notes

Although my intention was to facilitate/monitor the focus group session, it was also to remain as un-intrusive as possible. Upon completion of each focus group session, I made notes and writing impressions of the session as a whole in my electronic journal (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997). The resulting multitude of sources served to triangulate

the data and better ensure appropriate interpretations of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Morgan, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire provided pertinent information regarding individual background characteristics such as educational history, years of experience, recognition received, participation in multicultural courses, professional development courses on race/culture, and any self-study of racial or cultural issues (Morgan, 1997). This information served as a resource for running the focus group sessions and was somewhat useful for analysis.

Research Journal/ Field Notes

I documented most interactions with participants in an electronic journal, from the invitation to the final stage of member checking. In this journal I recorded my thoughts, insights, and issues regarding the research process. I had originally intended to use a non-electronic journal on-site (the school) to record any interactions that might have occurred before or after the focus group session in informal situations at work, but that proved to be un-necessary and cumbersome in terms of my work. Instead I chose to write notes into my electronic journal. During the focus group session, I made the decision not to record notes, as it seemed distracting. Though I thought hand-written notes might have been useful for information not readily captured in an audio recording, it was readily apparent to me that it would inhibit the conversation. Group dynamics, non-verbal communication, and side-conversations not intended for whole group are

examples of what I might have notated, had it appeared necessary. By making entries in my electronic journal immediately following the sessions, I was able to record my thoughts and reactions to the group discussion. These non-verbatim notes aided in my interpretations.

Digital Recordings

The focus group sessions were digitally recorded and then transcribed using Dragon Speak Naturally Preferred, a voice recognition program. With this program I was able to set the computer to *type* the discussions, as I listened to the audio recordings and relayed the data via a microphone into the computer.

Individual Member Checking

Another source of data was provided through member checking. When sharing the transcriptions with the participants, I asked them to add insight or information and clarify or take away information they felt reluctant to share in my presence. Immediately following the sessions, and again within two weeks, I spoke with each of the participants asking them how they felt about the experience and if they needed to share anything with me. Within six weeks of the focus group sessions, each member was able to review the complete transcripts and a completed summary of the questions and discussions. They were asked to make comments and/or take time to write impressions or concerns. I also asked them to add any additional stories they would like to share that may have come to them as a result of post-discussion thinking. They were offered the option of

communicating with me as part of the member checking either through email or hard-copy, as to their preference, but chose to respond on the hard copy.

Logistics of the Focus Group Session

As the session began, I reminded participants of the ground rules for discussion and stated the purpose of the study along with opening questions. I facilitated the discussion to ensure participation by all members. The sessions were digitally audio-taped for later transcription. Though I was physically unable to place myself outside of the discussion circle, I encouraged discussion to be directed among participants and not to me, the researcher. Within the ground rules, I stated explicitly that I was interested in specific examples through stories whenever appropriate. When necessary, I used a technique suggested by Krueger (1994), referred to as "think back questions," to encourage the participants to offer deeper experiences. Within the introduction to the sessions, I revealed my own interest and shared a personal story. Like Narayan and George (2003) have suggested, sharing my experience served to set an example for participants and seemed to put them at ease.

Analysis

Analysis of focus group data is much like the analysis of other qualitative data, focusing on the identification and refinement of themes, categories, and subcategories (Barbour, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data collected through focus group

research is a product of both the research agenda as presented by the facilitator and the interaction between members of the group (Merton & Kendall, 1946). For this reason, it is necessary that data analysis also examine the interaction between participants (Carey & Smith, 1994; Johnson, 1996).

There are several logistical reasons that made analyzing the data challenging. The dynamic of the group setting and the nature of the discussion were dependent upon the participants, context, and time, and were somewhat difficult to clarify once the focus group had disbanded (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). Also, focus group data frequently contain incomplete and interrupted speech, as well as both individual and group level data that are often difficult to untangle from one another (Hyden & Bulow, 2003). As the discussion progressed, members of the group influenced one another and sometimes shifted in their positions. Attention was paid to the group perspective and how it was negotiated and developed between members. By working through these challenges, there emerged a number of viewpoints that captured the majority of the participants' perspectives (Barbour, 2005; Parker & Tritter, 2006).

As researcher, I attempted to pay particular attention to the more sensitive moments and unanticipated issues that emerged in the focus group discussion (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999; Morgan, 1997). I attempted to conduct my analysis in such a way that an assessment of the overall discussion was made with consideration paid to the group (primarily), to individuals, and the interactions (Parker & Tritter, 2006). Additionally, I not only tried to be cognizant of the participants' reactions to me and whether these perceptions were affecting what the participants were willing to divulge, but I also looked

for significant differences of contribution (such as dominance, words spoken, and social interactions) (Parker & Tritter, 2006).

Doing the actual analysis of this study necessitated the transcription of the digital-recorded sessions for a Transcript Based analysis (Hatch, 2002; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997). Armed with transcripts, research journals, and field notes, I read the data and immersed myself into it, attempting to get a sense of the whole (Hatch, 2002). I looked for emerging themes and developed coding categories for coding the data. The *unit of analysis* consisted of two levels; each group separately, but with attention paid to individual contributions and the two groups as a whole (Morgan, 1997). Analysis was made that sought to contrast and compare the two groups. As the analysis unfolded, I found that simple counts of codes without the performing of statistical tests were useful (Morgan & March, 1992). While interpreting the data, I attempted to determine what the participants found interesting and what they believed was important. According to Morgan (1997), when interpreting focus group data,

> [there are three] basic factors (that) influence how much emphasis a given topic should receive: how many groups mentioned the topic, how many people within each of these groups mentioned the topic, and how much energy and enthusiasm the topic generated among the participants. The best evidence that a topic is worth emphasizing comes from a combination of all three of these factors that is known as "group-to-group validation. (p. 63)

Interpretation

As Hatch (2002) has explained, qualitative research that is focused on gathering and interpreting the stories people use to describe their lives, including personal experience, is similar to narrative inquiry. Using narrative is based on the notion that

people make sense of their experience through story (Bishop, 2005; Bruner, 1986; Hatch, 2002). One of the distinctions of this study was that the narratives were contextualized within the specific boundaries of this school (Hatch, 2002). But while environment is a crucial aspect of a study, and being situated within the natural setting is desired, it was necessary for reasons of privacy to meet away from the school, allowing the participants to feel a sense of safety in their discussions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Morgan, 1997).

Once I created an inductive analysis at a basic level, I moved my analysis to what Hatch (2002) has called an "Interpretive Analysis." Wolcott (1994) said that qualitative researchers transform data and emphasize description, analysis, or interpretation. While all studies use elements of each, the balance depends on the purpose of the study. Just as Hatch (2002) explained, this study emphasized interpretation: "The interpretive analysis model provides a process for constructing meaning from data that goes beyond the analytic emphasis." (p. 180). To provide a richer and more convincing interpretation of the data, I followed the following steps outlined by Hatch:

- Read the data for a sense of the whole

- Review impressions previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols and record these in memos

- Read the data, identify impressions, and record impressions in memos

- Study memos for salient interpretations

- Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged

- Write a draft summary

- Review interpretations with participants

- Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations (p. 181)

<center>*Trustworthiness*</center>

Validity in the traditional sense (the degree to which findings can be replicated) is not the goal of this study. Rather, I hope that scholars in the field of cross-cultural teacher/student relationship and those looking for clues in addressing the Black/White achievement gap will find the study informative. According to Holstein & Gubrium (2003), because the study was conducted through a focus group, the answers cannot be replicated. In the place of validity, I have attempted to produce trustworthy interpretations which, according to Phillips and Carr (2006), meet the following criteria:

- Represent multiple perspectives that are thickly layered.

- Include articulated description of context, relationships, and methods.

- Practice self-reflexivity.

- Arise from extensive exploration and analysis of the data.

- Acknowledge their limitations.

- Be tentative.

- Result in meaningful action (p. 134-136)

Summary

Data in this study were gathered through focus group discussion. The data were expected to reveal teachers' attitudes towards students, parents, and community, as well as achievement. The study was designed to be data specific, provide interaction between participants, and provide a personal context within which the participants could have an opportunity to express opinions that were important to them. The use of focus groups was also employed so that participants would have an opportunity to have their voices heard. By using a discussion model for the focus group sessions, a degree of flexibility was built in to allow for deviation by the participants if needed.

The significance of the study is determined by its ability to add meaningful data that reveals lived experience. The data from this study is expected to add to the conversation around cross-cultural relationships between teacher and student in the classroom, and provide insight into White, female teachers' attitudes towards their students, parents, and the Black community.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Educators, as professionals, are expected to demonstrate expertise in transmitting curriculum and structuring the classroom for optimal learning. Cross-cultural teaching should be no less an area to be mastered. Only by gaining the requisite awarenesses, knowledge, and skills necessary to become culturally competent can teachers hope to actualize their professional commitment to insure the academic success of all students.

Diller & Moule, 2005, pg. 2

Connecting White, Female Teacher's Attitudes and Literature

There is an abundance of research on issues surrounding cross-cultural relationships in the classroom and culturally responsive pedagogy that would serve to address the Black/White Achievement Gap in a productive way (Banks, 1997; Brophy, 1988; Delpit, 1995; Dilg, 1999; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hale-Benson, 1986). Also abundantly available is research on pre-service White teachers and their need for training regarding their White identity, cultural competency, and culturally responsive teaching (Diller & Moule, 2005; Gay, 2002; Sleeter, 2001; Vavrus, 2002). However, little research looks at White, female, in-service teachers and their attitudes towards their African American students, the Black/White Achievement Gap, and the teaching they provide in response to achievement issues. This study seeks to add to the conversation regarding White, female teachers and their practice through addressing the following two questions:

RQ 1. How do White, female teachers see their African American students,

parents, and community?

RQ 2. How do White, female teachers view the Black/White Achievement Gap

and their teaching in regard to their students' achievement?

By considering these questions, my goal is to better understand the perspectives of this particular set of teachers and to explore reasons as to why the progress in educating our marginalized students is so slow.

Data Triangulation

In an attempt to answer the research questions, I gathered data through the use of two focus groups, background questionnaires, and researcher impressions through journal entries. I transcribed the discussions and created summaries (see Appendices B and C) using the focus group questions as headings. I then gave the participants copies of both and asked them to read and respond. With this aspect of the study, I ensured that the participants would have an opportunity to comment on, add to, and/or withdraw dialogue with which they were uncomfortable. The participants were asked to read the summaries with the following questions in mind:

1. Has the general group answer to the question been captured as I remember?

2. Do I feel compelled to add or restate anything?

Participants were also encouraged to reflect on the transcripts, summaries, and their experiences. They were asked to share their impressions through hard-copy or email. Participants were reassured of researcher confidentiality and reminded not to discuss the study with anyone. All of the summaries and transcripts were returned. Through written comments and verbal feedback, summaries and researcher impressions were corroborated.

The background questionnaires served to provide information on each of the participants. This information regarding the participant's formal education, including self-directed study on cultural issues through book clubs, workshops, or courses, gave a more complete picture of each participant, establishing a better understanding of the participant in terms of their self-disclosed cultural competency training.

Finally, journal entries served to record events, conversations about the study, and reactions to the sessions and data. As I proceeded through the analysis, I continued to make notes detailing my progress and my subjective and emotional reactions to my understandings of the participants' discussions, ways of being, and possible attitudes towards their students.

The Study

Setting and Background Information

The setting is an important facet of this study and is included with the findings because it is the frame of reference for the participants, directly affecting how they perceive the school and community. Carver Elementary School (all names and identifying items are pseudonyms) is an urban school located in a historically African American community within a large, predominantly White northwestern city in the United States. The families living in the surrounding community are working-class and predominantly people of color. The school has been the center of activity for the African American community for many years and has an attached neighborhood community center.

Demographics of the School

According to district data, this 100% Title I school has a 91.7% minority population, 67.8% of which is African American. In contrast, White, female teachers make up 72% of the 76.7% of White teachers at the school. If you consider the whole staff, 67.8% are White while 27.1% are Black (District Data, 2007). Ten years ago, African American students represented 92% of the student body, and a typical classroom consisted of nearly all African American students, with maybe one Hispanic or White student. An increase in the average rent, due to neighborhood revitalization and gentrification, has caused many Black families to relocate. This has created significant changes for the Black community and the racial demographics of the neighborhood and school. The changing neighborhood has caused an increase in the percentage of Hispanic and White students, primarily in the lower grades, and also a decrease in the student count. Whereas the school at one time had a student population of approximately 850 students, the student count currently hovers at 370. The decrease in students means a decrease in teacher allocation that has resulted in some teachers having split classrooms, adding significantly to their workload as they now teach two separate curriculums.

Instruction

After 40 years of operation as a Pre-K – 5th grade school, Carver Elementary has now transitioned back to a Pre-K – 8th grade configuration. In an effort to address literacy achievement, the school became a recipient of a Reading First Grant in 2005, forcing primary-grade teachers into a scripted and highly regimented reading program structure. This reading program came on the heels of a new Basal reading adoption

which followed seven years of a rigidly scripted program entitled, "Success for All."

Teachers currently participate in the second year of a (State) Writing Project grant

designed to improve writing instruction. These changes are in addition to new math and

science adoptions.

Leadership

The current leadership team consists of a female Principal and Assistant Principal,

as well as a male Student Management Specialist, all of whom are African American.

For both administrators, this is their first assignment as Principal/Assistant. Previous to

this administration, the school went through a three year administration where the front

office was predominantly White and female. The new principal had arrived on the

departure of a highly respected African American male who was transferred after more

than ten years at the school. Administrators before him were also African American.

Most teachers in the study's focus groups served under these various principals, and all

have undergone contract negotiations and several changes in District Superintendents

while teaching at Carver Elementary.

The Staff

Previous administrations had ensured a school's staff of predominantly African

American. As teachers have retired, however, they have been replaced primarily by

White teachers. The retired African American women teachers were seen as "medinas"

(well-respected grandmother types) in the African American community. Currently, one

middle-aged African American teacher appears to be a barometer of the community for

the White teachers, as they look to her for answers to their questions regarding their African American students and parents. The young Black teachers do not appear to have the same influence.

The hiring and removal of teachers' aides and school custodians has also affected the social structure of the school. Administrative decisions, made at both the school and district level, due to the district's outsourcing of jobs, resulted in the transfer of key community members. Recent district history has brought about a constant change of custodians. Teachers in this study have had to contend with a lack of custodial services and a un-surety as to who to trust with access to students and classrooms. Currently, the situation has stabilized due to the rehire of the head custodian who is a long-time community member invested in the school; however, he is limited by district cuts and a lack of materials and support.

Community/Volunteers

It is important to note that while Carver Elementary has a Site Council it does not have an active PTA. Typically, attendance is low at parent teacher conferences, Back to School nights, and evening events. Though parent volunteers are few, Carver Elementary does maintain a partnership with a local university which sends significant numbers of volunteer university students into the classroom. Additionally, Carver Elementary teachers mentor student-teachers from one or more colleges of education each year. Carver Elementary students are tutored through a SMART (Start Making a Reader Today) reading program and an after-school SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods)

program. The students also receive regular visits by the public library's "Books2U"

program.

The Physical Plant

The physical plant also affects teachers' perceptions of the school and their jobs.

The original, red-brick school-building was built in 1926. There are daily reminders of

the building's age and lack of appropriate maintenance. A constant struggle exists over

the lack of heat from old boilers. The previous administration had the inside painted by

volunteers from a local business, ending a 35 – 40 year stint of damaged and peeling

orange paint. A leaking roof, however, has already caused significant damage to the new

paint. Remnants of very old, dirty carpet remain, as do some unusable blackboards. The

phone system is out-dated, there is no intercom, and technology resources for teachers

and students are below Twenty-first Century standards.

Day to Day Operations

There is an unending concern over behavior, attendance, and achievement (and in

that order). In 2005, two self-contained behavior classrooms and one life-skills class

were added to the school. The addition of these classrooms significantly altered the

responsibilities of the school staff. The school is now included in a district initiative

entitled, "Safe and Civil Schools." There are signs of increased gang activity in this

section of the city. Teachers and assistants have expressed concerns for the safety of

students and themselves. Finally, prior to running the second focus group sessions, a

teacher was accused of misconduct involving a student, and several teachers voiced dissatisfaction with administrative decisions.

The Study: Participants

The target group for this study consisted of twelve White, female teachers who have taught at Carver Elementary for three or more years. Eight teachers agreed to participate in the focus groups and were subsequently split into two groups of four. The constituency of the groups was based on years of teaching at the school and happened to coincide with them being placed with others from their grade-level teams. As a community member, I was able to consider the personal relationships between the teachers when making the groups, avoiding possible interpersonal conflicts in the sessions.

Once the constituency of the groups was determined, date, time, and location was agreed upon. Each focus group agreed to meet for two sessions that lasted 90 to 120 minutes each. Before meeting, the participants filled out questionnaires that gave them the opportunity to provide background information. One participant became ill the day of session one for Group A, but it was decided to proceed. At session two, this group summarized the first session as they remembered it and the participant then voiced her opinions in response to the summation. This opportunity for participants to revisit the first session through summary also allowed for a reiteration of their opinions.

Group A: Constituency and Background Information

Group A consisted of four elementary teachers who work as a team with the same students. In addition to their close interactions at work, they spend social time together away from school. Participants of Group A included classroom teachers and support specialists, all of whom work with a lot of the same students. These four teachers participate in extra-curricular activities at Carver Elementary and attend evening events. None have received special recognition for their work other than one report of an excellent evaluation. As revealed through the information they provided in a background questionnaire. All of Group A participants have Masters Degrees and have participated in a variety of cultural classes, workshops, professional development sessions, and/or readings of their own choosing.

Group B: Constituency and Background Information

Group B also consisted of elementary classroom teachers who team together and are familiar with each other's students. Three of them have known each other for many years. Two of the four teachers regularly participate in extra-curricular activities for the students. Like the members of Group A, none from Group B have received special recognition for their work. Background questionnaires revealed that these teachers are older and have been teaching for ten to twenty-nine years. Two of them have Masters Degrees, and all have taken at least one multicultural course. Two of them reported doing some sort of self-study.

Guiding Questions

Questions were read at the beginning of each session to inform the participants of the nature of the desired discussion. The participants then directed the course of the conversation and were only prompted when needed. The questions were prepared to guide the focus group discussions and were designed to draw out their attitudes towards their African American students and their teaching.

Session One questions focused on the teacher's perspectives of their African American students, their students' parents, and the community. Questions regarding students' parents and community helped to give a more complete understanding of the teachers' attitudes. I intentionally included a question regarding the participant's perceived challenges to see if they would make a connection between their challenges and the students. The questions were the following:

1. How do you view your African American students, their parents, and the community?

2. Describe your relationship with the African American community.

3. How do you think the African American community views you?

4. How do you feel you are treated by the African American community?

5. How do people you come in contact with outside of school view your job setting?

6. How do you think people's reactions to your job affect your perspective?

7. As a White, female teacher working in a predominantly Black school, what do you see as your biggest challenge?

Questions for Session Two focused on the Black/White Achievement Gap and the possible teaching strategies used by the participants. They were asked about their opinions regarding the Black/White Achievement Gap, if they believe there is one, and their explanation for its existence. They were also asked what they do to address the learning needs of their African American students and whether they thought their teaching was different in any way as compared to teaching in a predominantly White school. The session finished with questions concerning their comfort level with teaching assignment and desire to stay or leave. The questions for session two were:

1. What is your perspective of the commonly phrased Black/White Achievement Gap?

2. What do you see as an explanation for the Black/White Achievement Gap?

3. What if anything, do you do to address the specific learning needs of African American students?

4. What do you see as your most important role or responsibility as a teacher of African American students?

5. What would your teaching look like in a majority White school? In what ways would it be similar or different?

6. Describe your comfort level with your teaching assignment. Why do you teach in this setting? What brought you here initially?

7. Why do you stay?

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine White, female teachers' attitudes towards their African American students and their teaching. Studies of pertinent research literature that addresses the Black/White Achievement Gap and pedagogy include the

theory of *Culturally Responsive Teaching* as a tool with which to improve the education of African American students. Within the theory of Culturally Responsive Teaching are themes that focus on teachers and pedagogy. Careful analysis of the data from this study resulted in the appearance of categories and sub categories that were able to be grouped into themes. Themes that emerged from the data aligned with existing themes in research literature on this topic. It is within such themes that the findings are organized.

The focus group discussions revealed specific responses and attitudes towards race. Through analysis, themes of *racial awareness, disclaimers, outsider feelings, stereotyping,* and *avoidance* appeared as an umbrella under which other themes specific to teaching arose. Two themes (specific to the classroom) that surfaced were *attitudes of caring* and *deficit thinking*. Though points of discussion were designed to reveal teachers attitudes towards students, parents, and community, the participants focused primarily on students and parents and spontaneously revealed their attitudes towards the administration. Along with the theme of caring and deficit thinking, the theme of avoidance also emerged in regard to the classroom. Participants avoided showing responsibility for the following:

- Student behavior and student achievement – placing it on students and parents resulting in a "blame the victim" approach.

- Cultural misunderstandings – placing the burden on students and parents.

- Shared leadership – placing all responsibility on administration

- Culturally responsive teaching – resorting to remedial instructional methods

In an effort to report the findings in a cohesive manner, the findings are organized in three major sections. Discussion of the participants' responses and attitudes towards

race is presented first as an over-arching category. It is followed by findings that detail their attitudes towards students, parents, and administration. The third section reveals the participants' attitudes towards the Black/White Achievement Gap and how they teach. Finally, the chapter concludes with a group comparison, a summary of membership checking, and a summary of the findings.

Findings: Section I: Teachers' Responses /Attitudes Towards Race

The participants' attitudes towards race were apparent throughout the focus group sessions, both in what they said and in what they avoided. Through examination of the data, I found recurring themes that served to further inform the understanding of their perspectives. Within the analysis process, I created four categories to organize their responses around race. The categories are: Awareness, Denial, Confusion, and Avoidance.

I placed these categories in a linear progression beginning with "Awareness" (See table 4.1). Participants' utterances showed an awareness of issues of race, demonstrating a varying degree of historical knowledge and behavioral norms.   Their awareness appeared as an understanding of the presence of race and its affect on their work and relationships. It moved them to be conscious of actions and language in a given situation or setting.

The second category is "Denial." Opening statements by participants showed a possible denial towards their true feelings regarding race and working at Carver Elementary. This attitude of denial was evident through their use of disclaimers.

Disclaimers are common in our language. We sometimes say things such as, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I don't like your hair that way," or "I like old people, but I wish that old geezer would get out of my way!" Disclaimers allow us to deny the validity or possibility of something. All participants used disclaimers at some point, asserting the idea that they couldn't possibly be racist. The use of disclaimers continued throughout the sessions, as participants sought to disconnect themselves from an event or what they were about to say. I saw this as an outcome of their awareness, but also as a reluctance to acknowledge or know what to do with their feelings when confronted with race.

The third category, "Confusion," stemmed from what appeared to be a lack of clear understanding of racial issues by the participants and the emotions generated in their discussion around "being White" and feeling like an "outsider." Whether the participants taught at Carver Elementary by choice or happenstance, they appeared to be defensive of their decision and to value having made that choice. Their strong feelings towards teaching at Carver Elementary and wanting to "help" demonstrated their desire to be accepted by, or included in, the Carver community. Student, parent, and community member reactions to these participants, however, caused them to feel excluded. Dealing with this feeling of exclusion appeared difficult for the participants. Though they showed some cognitive understanding, they seemed to have mixed feelings over why their efforts would be misunderstood or refused by the Black community.

The fourth and final category became "Avoidance," due to the way in which participants dealt with social and educational issues that presented themselves within a racial context. In an effort to protect each others' ideas, actions, or feelings, they remained silent or switched their conversation to another social phenomenon such as

class, *poverty*, or *power*. They avoided using the word *race*, preferring *culture*. They also participated in *colorblindness* throughout and professed that they don't see their students as "color," not realizing they were denying a salient aspect of their students' being (Delpit, 1995). Stereotyping was also put in this category, as some participants switched from their own thoughts to what they saw as an accepted societal expression.

The four categories are represented in Table 4.1 below. The arrows symbolize a fluidness of movement between the themes, as the reactions to race were not static and the participants demonstrated characteristics from all categories. Their responses and attitudes towards race were intertwined throughout their discussions.

Table 4.1. Four Categories for Teachers' Responses to Race

← *Awareness* →	← *Denial* →	← *Confusion* →	← *Avoidance* →

Group A: Responses and Attitudes towards Race

To put participants at ease and set the tone, I began the first session with a personal experience from my early years at Carver Elementary and an explanation of my study. One of the participants quickly responded to my explanation with the following: "I feel like any conversation that we've ever had, at school or in a study we've attempted to have, has in no way, shape, or form been authentic. Most people say what they think they should say or say nothing at all." Her heartfelt words demonstrated an acute observation and were met by silence from the group. I then asked each participant to share something that framed their experience of being at Carver Elementary. All three of them began with a lengthy monologue which included awareness, denial through the use

of disclaimers, memories of feeling like an outsider, and fear of offending the African

American community.

The first story recalled an event where the participant first told her rural university

supervisor that she wanted to work in the city. When she explained the manner in which

the supervisor reacted, laughter and phrases, some beginning with, "Oh, my God," arose

among the participants. In these opening comments, the first participant to speak didn't

believe there's an inner city (a euphemism for a poor Black community), denying the

African American community surrounding the school, while the other two used their

exposure to "different people" to prove that they could not be racist. Participants'

disclaimers included references to their parents, even relying on their parent's home-

buying decisions to assert their *natural* acceptance of others. Additionally, participants

spoke of their youth to infer they are not racist, with one having grown up in the south

with Black friends and having served in the Peace Corps. Here the participants share

their stories:

> I just kind of cracked up. This old city doesn't have an inner-city; give me a
> break. And I still think it doesn't, but it was just so funny the way she said it. But
> I did end up in the inner city, and I remember thinking, 'I guess this is no problem
> because I'm so open and I'm so cool.'

> A second participant began her story:

> Well, when I started at Carver, well, I want to back up a little bit by saying I grew
> up in a very diverse neighborhood. I grew up in a predominantly White part of
> the city, but my parents sought out a very diverse neighborhood. The neighbors
> to the left of us were a male gay couple, across the street was a Chinese-American
> family, and the other two neighbors on the other side were African American, so I
> grew up with a strong mix of people, languages, and occupations…so I was very
> aware that people were different but quite aware that people are people and it
> didn't, I mean, I don't know, I was raised around different people my whole life.

The final story also included disclaimers in the participant's opening discussion about race:

> [W]ell I would say I have never felt so White as living in this city because I grew up in North Carolina. The poor folks were Black and the White folks were rich but the schools were 50-50 and that's how it was and that's what I was used to, but the classes were mixed but they were segregated because the college bound kids tended to be White and remedial were mostly Black. I did have Black friends, and my dad was an attorney; we had African American attorney friends who worked on the civil rights law. And I was in the Peace Corps in West Africa for two years so I was used to being a minority and I never felt weird about it, but when I got here I have always felt very White here.

All participants reported openly feeling like an outsider at some point in the conversation. One participant spoke of feeling like an outsider and her fear of saying something inappropriate:

> The first couple of years I kind of felt like an outsider. Well, I still kind of feel like an outsider of the community. I felt like it took a while and maybe trust issues, I still feel it. So I felt guarded with anything I said. I remember Sharon said something (referring to an incident with kids running in the halls after school) and it made me feel like oh jeez, I shouldn't have said that. I didn't mean it in a bad way, but I think she took it because I'm White and she's Black and I think she took it that I was criticizing the little kids.

Another recalled her first-year experience as feeling "totally alone" and as a "complete baptism by fire," especially at her first parent/teacher conferences:

> Maybe only five parents showed up and the parents that showed up were younger than I was. Here they had kids in second grade and that was quite a shocker and they're looking at me like, you're a 22-year old White female! How do you have any right to be here? And I had a lot of parents say stuff like that to me.

In the monologue below, while suggesting that race doesn't matter, the participant indicated feeling like an outsider, used language of "Color-blindness," (it doesn't matter what color children are, etc.) and foreshadowed a "Savior" attitude (further described under the Caring theme):

…I knew I wanted to be in a low SES school, didn't matter what race any of the kids were, I just wanted to try to make a difference in those kids lives, you know? I didn't really notice that all the kids were Black; I was so focused on getting a job and on making a difference. It didn't make a difference if I was White or not, I thought, until the second day that I was teaching and Mary (a Black female teacher) walked up to me and said, 'I want you to know that I don't have a problem with you being White. There're quite a few people who do, who don't think you should have been hired for this because you are White, but I don't have a problem with it.' And I was like, 'well, thanks I guess it doesn't really matter.' And then two days later my student came up to me and said, 'my mom said your skinny even for a White girl!' And I thought, 'okay, well he's noticed that I'm White.'

At another point in the conversation, the three participants again spoke of "feeling White," not quite understanding the divide between them and the Black community. Here the participants exchanged ideas about being the outsider and admitted to some lack of understanding of the Black culture:

In the hall or whatever, everyone's always polite and very kind, but I do feel and maybe this is coming from me, but I feel that there is a wall there, which I never felt growing up or in Cameroon. I feel more White here than anywhere else, it feels like there is a wall in this city, that's really hard to get through, but….

Another participant interrupted saying she feels the distance between her and the parents. She then explained how it appears to be different when compared to relationships between an African American teacher and African American parents:

Yeah, and I feel like I think I've never had, I mean, rarely have parents been rude to me, and generally they're very polite and nice and some are even friendly, but generally there seems to be like an arm's length between us and I don't know if it's because, because I don't have that big of a role in their child's (life) but I might work with the child for a year or two. I do work with them over the years, but like sometimes, we're having an IEP meeting and this might be a parent that I've worked with for four years and it's obvious that they (the African American parent) have a closer relationship with the African American teacher even though they maybe have only known them for a year (she paused) but then I might find out that they go way back, because the community ties run so deep and they are really tight in terms of everyone's considered family or they are family, or they belong to the same church. I definitely feel like an outsider and I always have and probably always will even though I've been there for so long. And there are some parents who, you know, who are very, very friendly to me, but….

Supporting her colleague by also describing feeling like an outsider, the first participant continued:

> I didn't realize how, how much of an outsider I felt like within the community until I was on Site Council, and most parents who come to Site Council, well, not most, all of them are African American. Angel's mom and Clayton's grandma said to me one night, 'I like you because you teach like a Black teacher', and I assume she meant that I'm extremely strict or something along those lines. And I thought, 'well, that's odd,' and one thing that happened at our Site Council, [the principal], who obviously is Black, completely changed her dialect when she was speaking with the Black people of our community. And I would look at her like, who is this hot ghetto mama? And that may sound terrible, but what does this gain? What are you doing where does this get you? People in the community want a leader not somebody….

One of the participants, who appeared to be listening intently, broke in, "But does it change things? I mean, I'm wondering does she do that. I can understand why she would do that." The first then replied:

> I can understand why she would, but it seemed to me, actually, maybe it was just me, because I'm White, it sounded so phony and so fake! But no one else seemed to mind or picked up on it, but I noticed what you're talking about, after school I see Mary or the principal walking arm in arm with some of the parents who won't even come into my classroom and talk with me. Is it an authority thing, or is it because I'm White? I don't know.

Agreeing, the other participant replied, "It makes me feel devalued or ignored. I have students who still can't remember my name; they just don't give me the time of day."

When the fourth participant joined them in the second session, she listened carefully to what the others summarized and then offered her thinking. In her monologue, she put the responsibility of a *touchy interaction* between her and a student onto the student, demonstrating her reluctance to accept any racist tendencies. She framed her denial through color blindness, saying she's an "equal opportunity discipliner." As she went on, she referenced relationships with parents as they are now

versus when she first began at Carver Elementary, but she alluded to having difficulty

and outsider feelings. The participant recalled:

> I had a student two years ago, who whenever he was in trouble it was because I was racist. It wasn't because you know, he was goofing off. Like I said, I'm an equal opportunity discipliner or I don't care if, you know, what they are…I will discipline you if you are goofing off. I know that his mom was shocked and I think she was actually slightly embarrassed, because I recall, we don't say those kinds of things; that's not okay. She was really embarrassed by him and let him know (it wasn't acceptable) if he actually thought it or if he thought it was a way for him to get out of it. But I find it interesting listening to you guys feel so on the outside, because I feel, maybe because I've been there so long and I'm starting to have siblings of kids I've had before. I mean not all my relationships are good, but I have some. I'm kind of nosy and I get to know who the kids are. I'm also at the front door every day, so people see me and they know me. I do sometimes. (Feel on the outside) I mean yes, I've had my run-ins with a few parents as we all have, but I think I agree with (the other teacher), it's more a position of authority than it is necessarily that I'm White versus them being Black. …When I first started at Carver I was scared to death of talking to parents. I don't know if it was just because it was my first year teaching and scared of parents or if it was some of them it was, you know, a little tough; not sure how to handle things. I don't remember that year being much of a big deal, I mean, it was overwhelming for me, but I had a lot of kids and I think it's the nature of kindergartners; they don't see colors. I didn't have too much interaction with parents except for conferences; I didn't have a lot of parents show up."

This participant also spoke of her awareness of cultural differences and reluctance to

offend:

> I'm very aware of the fact that I don't want to say anything that's going to offend anyone, you know, because I mean when I'm around certain people like you guys, I can say certain things and not feel like I'm going to say the wrong thing, but it's more of a, just being very aware of a lot of things as I say and how I do things so as not to offend people. And I think just completely understanding all the culture.

Agreeing with her, another participant recalled:

> You know, that reminds me I call my kids, my birth kids, monkeys all the time. I would never call a kid at Carver that because I would think it would be taken entirely the wrong way; that I didn't mean it that way. And I'm the same way, that piece really terrifies me. I don't want to say something that is taken how I don't mean it to be and I think that can be true anytime you cross any sort of culture.

As the conversation continued, the participants showed their awareness and insight from working in a cross-cultural setting. They gave themselves credit for their positions, yet they tended to place issues of race elsewhere, outside of themselves. One of the participants referred to Mary, a Black middle-aged long-time member of the community, as a validating source:

> I think it's interesting too because I think Mary one time said to me. She's like, there are White teachers who teach at Carver that are very much, they're fine with the kids while they're here, but then they leave Carver and it's still the Black culture; kind of they're away from it, they're not integrated into it and then there are White teachers, like I would say most of us, that are kind of integrated ourselves in, really caring. We get to know the culture and everything, but there are some that kind of stand on the outskirts. This is their job, this is where I am, this is what I have to do, but they don't necessarily –

She was interrupted as one of the others switched the "blame" from "those who don't integrate" to a reason beyond their control. She said, "Part of *that* is this city. It is not an integrated city…this city has more racial divide." In agreement they offered, "I don't think a lot of the cities on the west coast are," and "The east coast is totally different in that regard." In this interchange, the participants supported each other and ignored the possibility brought up that perhaps some teachers, including themselves, may not "integrate" into the community away from work. One of them continued with an observation she made at her church that morning. In her statement, it appeared she blamed her dilemma on the Blacks in her community, rather than questioning the nature of her church:

> I thought about it when I was at church today. There was a Black man who came in with his wife who is White and he was the only Black man in the entire service. And I was like; if he wasn't there I wouldn't even notice that there wasn't anyone. It wouldn't have even seemed odd to me that there wasn't anyone of color there. Why? Why aren't there more? I know there're a lot more African American people in my community that live around there. I think it's because I heard a statistic one time. There was a trivia question, when is America the most

segregated, and it was on Sundays between nine and noon because of types of churches.

Discussion ensued over Christian denominations, church attendance, and even church attire as participants noted the differences between Black and White churches and traditions. The conversation was changed again and the participant used an explicit disclaimer, while demonstrating a further awareness of Black/White relationships.

> I'm all over the map right now, but talking about race made me think of Sandy's (a teacher at Carver) wedding; Mark (The participant's husband) has had a lot of interactions with Kaleen (a young Black teacher at Carver) and I would not say that Mark is a racist nor would I say that I am a racist, but when Kaleen walked in with her husband, Mark goes, she's married to a White guy?! Yeah, and he said I never ever would have thought that. It's just interesting. I guess you don't, when you see an interracial couple, I think it's fine, it never puts me off, but when you meet somebody and you get to know them you feel like you know them and you just think most people marry somebody the same race.

Another participant agreed and explained her viewpoint, "The reason I was shocked was because I see Kaleen as very Afro-centric. I mean, she's very much Black. She is a strong Black, very strong (others agreed) so it surprised me that she was not married to an African American man." In this statement, the participant acknowledged her surprise of an inter-racial relationship attributing her shock to her personal assessment of the Black teacher. The discussion between the participants appears to indicate their awareness of racial interactions, and that they have private reactions to incidents in which there is a racial component.

Throughout the discussion, members of Group A avoided talking about race by switching instead to poverty, culture, and power. While discussing a student's act of racism, however, participants looked for any plausible reason for the event, eventually blaming the victim in their conversation, when it was said, "…he does kind of walk a little bit –" One of the participants recalled:

> At conferences both Jasmine's and Joey's, who are White, parents talked to me about them being made fun of a lot at Carver because they are White and I actually heard it the other day, when Joey was walking by they called him Forest Gump; they were like, run Forrest run! He was just walking. It was interesting I never heard somebody making a comment like that. I knew it went on.

In reply, another asked, "Do you think they were, I mean, do you think they were making fun of him because of his race or because he does kind of walk a little bit…" But the first participant continued, "It could have been, but after that happened, Joey pulled me aside and said they make fun of them all the time for being White and call him White bread…"

As the participants continued, they looked for ways to attribute the motivation behind unseemly student behavior to something other than race. Another participant recalled a story of student interactions that might have indicated prejudiced behavior.

> I know that Alyson's mom was talking to me. She pulled her out of Carver because she was given such a hard time. She told me she let Alyson open up a My Space page and kids from Carver were sending her stuff on her My Space page that absolutely shocked me!

Not wanting to attribute it to racism, another participant asked, "Referring to her Whiteness?" Then she continued, "But how much of that is truly race and how much of that is the fact that they are middle school kids and that's what middle school kids do? They take whatever is different about anybody and capitalize on it." The participant aware of the incident replied, "You know it's hard to know without knowing how those kids really see things." The first participant answered, "And it's hard to know where they're getting it; at home or if they're picking it up at school, or if they're just independently coming up with ways to make fun of other kids."

Finally, participants demonstrated an attitude of defensiveness about working at Carver Elementary. While on the surface it may appear that being defensive about the

school and students falls under caring, the discussion never took place in that context.

Rather these comments were expressed in relationship to their job choices and were a

natural outcome of their group membership (Allport, 1954). Additionally, the comments

seemed to be used to bolster their choices, self-confidence, and perspective.

One of the participants said more than once: "Sometimes I'll say I work at Carver

and they're like, 'ooh, that's so good of you.' I get the pity reaction like, 'That's so sweet

of you to work there.'" All the participants recalled instances of peers' concern for their

safety. Here one said, "When I tell people I teach at Carver you would think that a lot of

them think I need an escort to walk me in and out of the building because I might get

shot! I don't need CPR every day." Another agreed, "Yeah, my mother-in-law asks, 'do

you feel safe driving there? I worry about you every day.' 'Its fine,' I say, it's so

different I mean; this is not Chicago! " Later, when the subject was brought up once

more, yet another participant recalled:

> I've had a few people say, do you wear a flak jacket and I've had a lot of people
> really concerned. I say it's not that bad. Depending upon who it is and how
> they're saying it. If they're joking, it's no big deal, but if they're really serious,
> you know, I just feel like they're kind of ignorant of what's going on. I feel like
> some people just don't have an idea and then just assume that it's still the ghetto
> that it used to be.

Group B: Responses and Attitudes Towards Race

This session began much the same as Group A did, with my sharing my first days

at Carver Elementary and the reason for my study. The group was very polite and quiet,

perhaps indicating a lack of comfort and reluctance towards discussing race. They

approached the topic of race gingerly and appeared to want to avoid speaking directly

about the Black/White relationship. One of the participants began by explaining her

background with the Hispanic culture when she was young and working in a Head Start

program. After admitting to difficulties with the language, she explained:

> I was in the minority. When I first started working in the Hispanic culture. I was the only White woman. They would say to me, how do you know about children, you don't have any? But I learned how to be a minority and how to respect what the rules were and how to adapt my upbringing to the culture that I was in. So I think it was easier for me when I…. I really feel like Carver is where I'm supposed to be. I'm happy at Carver. I don't feel that my being White has made me less effective…. I've had problems with some parents because I am White, but I also feel that if we can talk with these parents one-on-one, we can usually break through those walls.

> Another participant continued with a similar thought about gaining a parent's

trust:

> I think I have the luxury of seeing my parents every day. You establish not only a rapport with the child but with the parents and they become your friend. But I've had but one parent, over the years, who accused me of being prejudiced, and she said at open house that I was not paying attention to her, but you know, in my heart, I knew in my heart, that wasn't true, and I just said it was unfortunate thing you felt that way because I do not feel like I am prejudiced. But among young children, it is that they honestly do not see race; they honestly do not!

In both of these opening statements, the participants showed both a sense of self-

confidence and racial awareness. They also indicated feeling like outsiders and denied

the possibility that they may unintentionally harbor racial prejudices. One participant

repeated her conviction that "young children don't see color" several times, to which the

others whole-heartedly agreed. It appeared as though they were saying that since young

children don't see color neither do or should adults. In fact, in talking about how much

she likes working with "fours" (pre-kindergarteners), one participant said, "I just feel it's

a real luxury to be [with] fours, as they don't view race." This statement and another

comment about the difficulties in teaching fourth graders who "see" race, made it appear

that this participant thought teaching "fours" was a way to avoid having to deal with race

on a daily basis.

One of the participants entered the conversation with a disclaimer about race, but

also demonstrated her awareness when she said:

> They really want to help and it doesn't matter which race it is; its cross racial.
> But I've had two incidents …two really big (White) bigots in my rooms, but I've
> been able to turn it around. I had one kid that walked in the room and saw the
> class picture, and he goes 'Black kids!' …But you know about two weeks after
> school started he goes, 'they're just like everybody else.' It's fun to see that, and
> I'm like, we're all the same.

Just as the participants in Group A did, participants in Group B also gave

disclaimers about their youth:

> …I had grown up in the southeast part of the city, and we had a mixture of
> everything in our school, especially in my neighborhood; Muslims next door,
> Catholics, Chinese, Blacks and a little bit of everything. We grew up with a lot of
> multi-cultural stores and language.

Another participant attempting to prove herself gave a disclaimer; but it proposed

an opposite concept as to why she could not be racist:

> You know what's interesting? I grew up in Westland, which was all White and I
> think it made me, if anything less prejudiced, because I had not been around
> Black people and a lot of people, who went to high school and college with Black
> people had very negative connotations with their friends, and for me I was open
> and you know. So I think that was always kind of interesting.

With this pronouncement came agreement from the others, with one adding, "For me it

was just the opposite because we all grew up together, it was just so, it was, you know."

Supporting her, the other participant said, "There's people you don't like, but their race

doesn't have anything to do with it. They're just nasty people or something, you know."

One of the participants appeared reticent to say anything about her background,

only explaining how she came to Carver Elementary through substitute teaching. In

showing her thinking about race, she offered, "There have been several times that a

parent would request to have a student transferred out of my class because I'm White."

When asked to qualify the statement, she simply replied, "She didn't want to come out

and say it, but it was obvious." Some talked ensued about African American women, and

then one of the participants recalled a church experience that "proves" she's accepted in

the community and why:

> I even had one Black pastor invite me to participate in a woman's retreat, so I feel
> that my being White (she paused) I don't know. I just feel like the respect is
> there, because I respect them, and if we respect them, I mean we have those….

But at this point she recalled an incident that made her feel like an outsider:

> I had one family many years ago that their child would come to school and his
> eyes were all bloodshot, everyday. So I asked, what time do you go to bed? Do
> you have allergies? Do your mommy and daddy smoke? And I was like, Okay.
> Then I got called on the carpet for asking personal questions. I was just
> concerned why this child's eyes were constantly bloodshot. But, the
> administration at the time; well you shouldn't be asking those kinds of questions.

> Picking up on the conversation, another participant recalled a story of feeling the

"outsider," but she insinuated that the unfairness directed towards her by the African

American parent was a "race card:"

> This one mother, she didn't like me and she didn't want her kid in my class. She
> went [to the principal] (a previous Black administrator) and said I made all the
> Black kids sit in the back of class together. (She paused) Well, first of all the kids
> could choose wherever they wanted to sit and the whole group was Black. I
> didn't have a single White kid in that class! I had all the Black kids, you know,
> sitting in the back of the class! …She was a tough one!

> At another point in the conversation, the participants began to reminisce back to a

time when there were more African Americans on staff. In this discussion, they hinted at

their feelings of being left out and their separateness from the Black community. One

offered, "We used to have a lot more visible Black presence in the school with staff."

Another agreed and added, "That's why it was harder to be White. It was harder to be White back then." The first continued, "If you counted the entire staff, including the assistants, it was –" "Predominantly Black," finished another. "It was a predominantly Black school," echoed one of the participants.

I asked in what way it was "harder to be White," and one of them answered, "Because the African American parents would have more choices where they wanted their kids to be; there were more Black teachers." "But now they don't have any choice," Another cut in while laughing, then the first added, "Yeah, that's made a difference to just not give them a choice. At the end of the year, it'd just turn into this huge popularity contest." "Yeah, I had a problem with that too, I mean some of the parents didn't even know who they were requesting," agreed another in the exchange.

The participants shared more instances of outsider feelings and became more animated as they referred to Kaleen, a young Black teacher. One of them began, "I've got to say this, she can get away with saying things to African American parents that I can't." The others agreed and one of them continued, "Many, many assistants that were Black in the building; some of the things they said, there is NO WAY (said in unison) we could say that if you were a White teacher or an assistant, to parents or to kids!" Everyone started talking at once. One of them went on, "My assistant at Douglas, she was Black, 'you get your little Black butt over there'…. "Now there's no way I could ever say that to a kid, but she could." Another interjected, "No, because then you would be called prejudiced." The others agreed and one of them went on, "It used to be that Carver had a lot more Black staff members who did say things that the kids were accustomed to." She was interrupted by another, "Oh, they were very inappropriate, but

if we would have said that, oh my!" Unrelenting, another participant said, "Even in daily dealing with parents, Kaleen can have more of a take charge, 'I'm in charge of this,' control the conversation than I can, they just." Her voice trailed off and everyone was quiet and appeared to be thinking.

When the participant continued, she spoke with emotion, "In the past it's been a real bone of contention (said with nervous laughter), because you feel so (she paused) pressed under when you can't confront a parent and you can see someone else doing it right in front of you, and you know there's no way!" "Well," another participant took over quite adamantly, "I know some of the things that were said, but you know, she never really said things that were way out." One of the others interrupted, "No, not inappropriate, but umm, even the way MiMi (a Black assistant) talks to the kids, it's very derogatory a lot of times." At that point, the first participant replied, "I'm not saying I wish I could talk like that." "But she can get away with it," finished her friend. Then the first continued, "Yes, and the parents don't come in. I mean I asked this big sister of one of my students why they were always late, and, boy, the mother was in the principal's office that afternoon because I was getting in the family business!"

There was so much emotion running through this conversation at this point that I spoke up, "You all chimed in at the same time and said there are things that a Black teacher can say that a White teacher can't say." Again everyone adamantly agreed and added, "Oh, there's no doubt!" I then asked, "Did anyone teach that to you?" One replied, "I just watched it and saw." The others agreed, but one laughing said, "What do you mean teach it to us? Oh, no, no, never! [It was] just my personal observations! We kind of reasoned and deducted."

Group B participants, like those in Group A, avoided attributing challenges of achievement to race and instead switched to other concepts. One of them switched from race to behavior when she said, "So my kids' gap is because of behavior issues, it has little to do with color." And another switched from race to social economics, "Some of it is also social economics because other schools…they're both pretty White, but I saw big gaps." To which the first agreed, "I think that plays into it, the social economic standards, [and] the parents who can afford books, who are concerned about education."

Additionally, participants in Group B used several stereotypes or allusions to stereotypes of African Americans. They referred to drug use, low IQ, chaotic families, father-less children, laziness and lack of motivation (these will be described in the section on deficit thinking). Some members appeared ambivalent when speaking of race. Strong feelings and stereotyping were evident, but participants were careful not to be overly overt in their comments, instead locating their racial prejudices outside of themselves.

Finally, just as Group A participants did, Group B participants recalled instances of needing to defend their workplace. One recalled:

> I remember people saying, you're wasting your education, why would you want to work up there? But my reply was, it's nice, we work together and the kids are great, but I still get that. …I have never felt unsafe but people have a negative connotation.

Another had a similar recollection to share, "People say, 'don't you feel uncomfortable going to work there?' My husband would not let me ride a bike. I wanted to get a moped or something. He said, 'No, you go in a car'." The first continued, "People ask me, 'do your kids have weapons at school?'" At which another answered for her, "No more than at any other school." And yet another added, "It's a school! I've never felt unsafe! I mean, I've had a fourth grader who brought a 10 inch knife to school, years ago." To

which was said, "I've confiscated pocketknives and stuff. But it's nothing any more than any other school."

One of the participants, who was very matter of fact in showing her acceptance of Carver Elementary, spoke up:

> I think people I know have finally gotten it from me. You know, when I first started they'd say, aren't you going to transfer? How can you work there? And I just said, you know, I love it there. I feel safe and I tell the parents who are afraid to bring their kids to Carver…it's what hits the news and some of it's not true! But it's the fear of what they don't know. I mean if they would come to visit, you know, I think they would be pleasantly surprised.

At another point in the discussion, people's reactions to Carver Elementary came up again. One of them said, "You know, a long time ago it made me want to be at Carver even more, 'how dare you put down my school?' (Laughing) …it would make me defensive." "It doesn't bother me, because I know I love what I do," another added, and then another asserted, "It just fits everybody's perception of me already, I don't fit into any box – for me to teach in a predominantly Black or where I'm in the minority doesn't surprise anyone at all." Another participant continued, "The only thing that bothered me, it doesn't bother me anymore, but I'd always think, they think I can't get another job …this is where they've stuck me!" "Exactly!" someone agreed, and another added, "Well, in my case it's true!" The participants burst into laughter.

Summary of Findings of Teachers' Responses & Attitudes Towards Race

Participants from both groups demonstrated typical human patterns of behavior in response to race, as people tend to avoid those things that cause them discomfort or dissonance (Allport, 1954). As White teachers in a predominantly Black school, they

experience a daily reality that is different from their background as members of the

dominant culture. They appeared cognizant of situations that stemmed from their being

White in a cross-racial setting. As members of this *unique* White group of teachers, an

idea reinforced by their White peers, they appeared to react in specific ways. As a group,

they used disclaimers and stereotypes as responses to issues of race and resorted to

blaming the victim. These frequently unintended reactions have been found to be typical

when individuals are confronted with something foreign, outside their group, or when

they feel insecure (Delpit, 1995; Diller & Moule, 2005; Howard, 1999; Pang, 2001).

Participants also spoke of feeling like outsiders, a common reaction by in-group members

when confronted by the out-group or cross-group interactions (Pang, 2001). Table 4.2

gives a summary of the findings of participants' responses and attitudes towards race.

The table denotes pieces of what they said under the four themes that appeared in the

data.

Table 4.2. Summary of the Findings of Teachers' Responses & Attitudes Towards Race

← Awareness →	← Denial →	← Confusion →	← Avoidance →
• Fear of offending • Notices student prejudices/ behavior • role of European influence in our society /schools • Need for cultural instruction-additive	*Use of Disclaimers:* • grew up in a diverse neighborhood • "My parents…" • "I like diversity…" • Racism is due to… • Racist city, region, etc. • Non-authentic conversation	• Being "White" • Feeling "White" in awkward moments • "Hard to be White" • Told to "yell" or be more firm… • Told not to "yell" or raise voice • Feel in the minority • Biracial couples *Outsider Feelings:* • Kept at an arm's length • Feel disrespected, ignored, & devalued • Object of anger/rude behavior • Treated badly by young women • Told to stay out of the "family business" • Feeling unsupported by Black parents & administration • "I can't say …" • "I can't interact the same way…"	*Switch to:* • SES/Poverty • "doesn't matter" • Culture • Power *Defensive of School, Students and Work Choice* *Use of Stereotypes* • Laziness • Chaos *Colorblindness* • All the same • Equal opportunity discipliner • Doesn't matter *Teacher's account for student acts of racism* • Age • Behavior • Poor parenting *Teacher's account for parent questions* • Book reading • Organizations • Denial of child's behavior *Blame placed on Administration*

Findings Section II: Teachers' Attitudes Towards African American Students, Parents,
and Administration – Caring

Ladson-Billings (1994), in "The Dreamkeepers," saw caring as a traditional value

expressed in emotion and expressive behavior. According to Noddings (1984, 1992),

teachers as caregivers initiate a relationship by becoming engrossed in the students' well-

being. A caregiver sees a student's reality as a possibility and commits to act in the

student's best interest. The participants in this study expressed an ethic of caring for their

students and parents both implicitly and explicitly throughout the discussions. Caring

was evident in their desire to have students do the right thing and statements such as,

"pushing them hard." Caring for students appeared to be a *taken for granted* attitude,

demonstrated by the simplicity and brevity of some utterances.

Group A: Caring

Participants in Group A were more implicit (than explicit) in their demonstration

of caring. Nonetheless, when asked why they stay at Carver Elementary, one of the

participants replied, "The kids and the people around this table, (referring to her

colleagues)." Another agreed, "Friendships with other teachers and the kids, the kids

make it worthwhile." Much of the conversation centered on how these participants

wanted to be at Carver Elementary for the students. Their sense of caring surfaced

implicitly in the amount of emotion injected into their opinions. At one point, in

describing a student having reading difficulties, one of the participants said, "My goal is

to just build his confidence, so at least he feels good about himself."

One of the participants told the following story with a lot of emotion as demonstrated by raising her voice and repositioning herself to lean forward. It was easy to sense her devotion to her student as she explained her desire to help the girl be successful. She was proud that she was able to develop such a strong relationship, demonstrating her sense of caring:

> I remember the second year at Carver. It was my first year of doing third-grade and I had this one girl that I rode hard, and she, you know; she kind of wanted to goof off. And I was on her all the time; really, really hard on her and I can't even count on two hands how many times I made the girl cry, because I'd be like listen, you've got to, you've got to pull it together. But she and I had the greatest bond. She would come back in fourth and fifth grade and come in and check on me, bringing me pictures of her. I even took her to a basketball game when she was in fourth grade, because we had made such a good bond.

Another participant showed her ethic of caring when she expressed what she sees as a lack of resources for her African American students. She lamented, "I can fill the holes the public school cuts create (speaking of her own children), but other people can't fill those holes, so the kids have holes. They just have everything against them and they haven't gotten the steps they need along the way." As she continued, she included references that demonstrated her sense of socio and political awareness in addition to her caring:

> I would like the school district to quit allowing student choice in schools so that kids have to go to their neighborhood schools and they'll become more desegregated and kids will have a lot better opportunity for an equal education. I don't want to give up the ship. I want to be here. I love the kids and like the community. I like the cross-cultural exchange. I like working with communities that are different than me.

Another participant expressed her caring through her stories of how hard she works to serve the students according to their special support needs. A considerable amount of her time is spent pursuing parents to come into school, meet about the

children's needs, and then teaching the parents how to support their child in their learning difficulties. She told a story about coming in on her day off solely for the purpose of meeting with a mom because she wanted to help the child. The mom did not show up for the meeting, saying she forgot to come to the school. And while the participant appeared to have a nonchalant attitude towards the incident speaking in a matter-of-fact voice, she may have been disguising her disappointment and feelings of rejection, as she many times in the discussion spoke about feeling disrespected and dismissed by parents and students.

Group B: Caring

One of the participants expressed her caring most plainly when she said, "I love it here. I love my four year olds." She continued by relaying a conversation from a social gathering where a friend said to her, "I just want to let you know, my wife was saying just how much she respects you for what you do…. It's just nice to hear that somebody understands why you stay where you are to teach, because you love where you are and that's where your heart is." One of the participants responded with:

> And I think because you sincerely believe that and you radiate that, the parents know it, who likes their kids. We, most of us like most of our kids, I mean let's face it, we love these kids, just like our own kids. Just like our own kids and there's things we really don't like, but we still love them.

Another participant added, "We don't like some of the things they do," which caused another to finish with, " I think that's the way we are; we love these kids and I think most parents realize is that we really love their kids and we're going to treat these kids with respect."

Later in the conversation, these three reiterated their ethic of caring in this manner:

> If they know that you love them. I just figure if they know that when they come to school, they are in a safe place and that we love them; and that big people care about them. Could be some of them don't have any big people that care about them and others have been told that they're not worthwhile. I want to build them up so that they know, hey, I'm this really good person.

"They say one of the number one things is that they feel like they're in a safe place," agreed another.

Group A & B: Caring Teacher as "Savior."

While caring is an important facet of culturally responsive teaching, crossing over into seeing oneself as a "savior" can create a situation where the emphasis is placed on self rather than the recipient (Noddings, 1984, 1992; Pang, 2001). This orientation is consistent with White dominance or Colonization practices prevalent in history where members of the dominant culture feel the need to "save" the "other" from themselves or their situations (Howard, 1999).

One participant from Group A, talked freely about wanting to be a "role model" and coming to Carver Elementary to "make a difference." She expressed it this way:

> Feeling very sympathetic for these families; having feelings for the situations that they're in, but I feel like I've given such an effort like a lot of people at Carver have. And we give these families so much help that they're not even taking that I'm finding myself starting to resent certain people or make certain judgments that I didn't think I would ever make.

Another participant agreed with her and said, "They (the teachers) come in with really high hopes of wanting to help these kids and wanting to change their lives." The

first participant then continued to express her frustrations and strong feelings of needing

to "save" her students:

> It's terrible. Well, it's not terrible to say, well, it's a reality. I look at some of my kids and I think pretty much no matter what I do, you're going to go down the wrong path. And that's a terrible thing to think but I have some kids unless I literally tied them to my side and had them with me from 6 a.m. 'til 8 p.m. I don't know, my mom and I said the other day, what we need for some of these kids is boarding schools where they're allowed to see their families maybe on the weekends, but that these kids need to be somewhere from six in the morning until eight at night with someone guiding them!" Later she adds, "I want to stop feeling like I have to *save* them from their own families and their futures, which you can see going down the drain unless something drastically changes.

A participant from group B also put the emphasis on herself as she expressed the

idea of wanting to help when she said:

> I've referred families to counseling and I've helped a couple of my parents get into shelters, because they've been in abusive situations. I work with the entire family…I make it pretty clear at the outset; I'm here for you; for your family, not just for the child and the parents.

Another Group B participant did the same when she added, "I got all these kids who had

no skills and so I like being with those little ones; I can get them up."

Findings Section II: Teachers' Attitudes Towards African American Students, Parents, and Administration – Deficit Thinking

Current research literature highlights several possible consequences stemming

from the cultural mismatch between White teachers and African American students. The

White teacher in the position of power has the responsibility to make decisions regarding

students' academic placement, instruction, and discipline. These decisions are made

through the teacher's orientation or perspective. Society, and thus teachers, has ascribed

labels such as *disadvantaged*, *socially deprived*, *low socioeconomic*, *culturally deficient*

and *children at risk* (to name a few) to children with low achievement, specifically

African American students (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Swadner &

Lubeck, 1995). Although the labels highlight different aspects, they all point to a

deficiency or deficit model of the student, parents, home, and community (Delpit, 1995;

Gay, 2000). Deficit labels say something about the problem and the remedy, as well as

the potential problem for the student. The theme of *deficit thinking* was pervasive

throughout the data. The participants focused or transferred most of their attention on the

parents and administration, but also included students in their deficit thinking.

Group A: Deficit Thinking Towards Students

All members of Group A spoke of their students in deficit terms, though some

were more direct with their comments. One participant stated:

> I have the students who it's so painful to see that in third grade, they already, they
> don't care. They're unbelievably unmotivated and there's not a punishment or
> reward or consequence that you can give them. I haven't seen children that young
> who are just already so jaded by life and that (is) so hard to see.

Another continued, "There is no intrinsic motivation or want to please." The first

participant then offered her opinion of her students' speech, demonstrating another aspect

of her deficit thinking. In the following passage, the participant brings up vernacular

speech that she refers to as "Ebonics or whatever you call it." While sharing her

perspective, her vocal inflection insinuated her disapproval of her students' social

language. She put it this way:

> This is too specific and kind of off topic, but I wanted to say. One thing I have
> struggled with since I started at Carver is the language that my kids use and
> getting across to them that it's okay to talk like that when you're with your
> families and your peers, kind of in Ebonics or whatever you call it, but if you're
> going to be taken seriously in this world, you can't talk like that and as a White

teacher I don't think I can put it that bluntly. So that's one thing that obviously sticks out with my African American students, their language.

Another participant presented deficit thinking as she recalled teaching first-grade for two years, yet in this instance she also questioned whether teachers may be responsible for the situation. While this demonstrated a tentative approach, it was an isolated idea that the others did not respond to and one that was not brought up again. She offered this reflection:

> I came in ready to do centers and creative learning and not have them do worksheets, but by the end I was yelling at kids and I didn't like what I turned in to. They couldn't or wouldn't do what I wanted them to do, you know. Why aren't they? They're not doing it. Is it because they don't want to because it goes against their culture; they're not raised doing those things? Is that us or is it the kids?

But another added, "They need those rewards all the time, I kind of quit giving rewards because that's all they work for. That's all they wanted. 'Are we getting a treat today?'"

In a segment about making a difference, one participant talked about her feelings at the end of the day:

> I have maybe one kid at the end of the day that I think okay I made a difference with that kid, but then I think of the other kids. That's one thing that kills me about my kids at Carver. The three or four boys I have that are pains in my rear completely steal from those other high achieving African-American kids because I'll go days without talking to them. I have a kid right now who's the most outstanding African-American boy I've ever had, and I will literally go days without talking to him because I'm so busy dealing with the other little brats!

Another participant agreed, "It's like Whack-a-Mole (referring to a board game); sit down, sit down, sit down! You can't teach! And yet another participant added, "Yeah, our behavior problems. There are a lot of them who still need a lot more intervention!"

The first participant continued:

> As a teacher with a conscience, you just can't let those kids go, but you know they're not going to make it. It's not going to happen by the end of the year. Part

of me wants to say; Do whatever the hell you want as long as you're quiet so I can actually teach the kids who I believe have a solid chance of making it, because unless there's divine intervention, I'm sorry but you're not going to make it!

In the preceding, the participants both show their disdain for students, who in their eyes, are unwilling to cooperate or they act as roadblocks to their teaching. Later it was added, "I feel like there is a discipline problem at Carver. Teachers spend 60% of their time disciplining versus instructing." Another agreed and said, "I wish my job was more about teaching than managing." A later segment of the discussion included a discussion about the older students at the school and their behavior. One of the participants said, "We need better role models, because I think our seventh and eighth graders are absolutely just atrociously behaved!" "Or managed," interrupted another. And as she agreed the other participant said, "There is no respect. …They act as though I'm not even there!"

Group B: Deficit Thinking Towards Students

Participants in Group B also found fault with the students and were vehement with their viewpoints, demonstrating a line of deficit thinking. One participant used other teachers and the students' eventual incarceration as backup, providing proof that the students were the source of her difficulties. She spoke of her first year experience, "I had an awful, awful class. I mean two of the kids ended up in prison. I didn't feel it was because I was White, because there were three White teachers, and unfortunately they were a group (the students) that was naughty, naughty, naughty, the whole way through." Her colleague described her current class as having a range of behaviors and said, "We have these other kids (referring to children who did not go through the Carver Elementary

Pre-K program) who are just kind of…." She made a face and hand gesture to describe how poorly the children are able to do their work and again referred to their poor behavior and lack of academic readiness. A bit later, this participant brought those students into the conversation again by suggesting a lack of educability when she said,

> Intellectual ability; there's some biological stuff there and if there's not much to work with. If you have somebody with a below average IQ, you're going to have a problem with the child learning. There's just not a lot of IQ to work with and you get two sub IQs having a baby and that baby is going to have a hard time.

The participant's statement was met with silence, signifying either shock, silent agreement, or a reluctance to disagree from the others. After a pause in which participants appeared slightly uncomfortable with their eyes cast downward, one offered:

> I think all kids are given the same opportunities and I do think there is something to be said that some of these kids think that things are owed to them and they're given, given, given; this free, that free because we're an inner city school. So they don't learn that they need to do certain things in order to be rewarded.

Another participant then added, "I think you have something there; immediate gratification! We've got to have it now!" One of the participants then interrupted with, "They don't see a value in going to school, writing papers, and doing all the reading and things because 'I'm not going to college.'" The other mockingly stated, "'I'm going to be a basketball player. I'm going to be a multimillionaire. I'm going to be a rapper or Miss America,' seriously, they've got it all planned out by the time they're seven and they're serious!"

Group A: Deficit Thinking Towards Parents

Participants turned again and again to thoughts of deficit thinking throughout the sessions, but it appeared as though it was easier to think of parents in a negative light, and

more readily blamed the parents for contentious issues. At one point in the conversation, a participant stated, "I see my kids as complete victims of their families, to be brutally honest!" And another added, "I sense a lot of chaos; just a dysfunctional kind of chaos. Where they just can't find things in the morning and they're late, because they just didn't get around to do[ing] this and the other thing, or chaos in terms of marital status or relationships, you know?" The first went on, "Or who's bringing in the kids to school, not picking them up, where are they going after school?"

As the exchange of deficit thinking towards the parents continued, one of the participants recalled a story about waiting on a mother who didn't show up for a meeting, and then finished with the following:

> I suspect she was napping which you know; I would love a nap, but the child's attendance. He missed 23 days of school! That's a month of school! So that's what I see a lot of in the Carver community. Just dysfunction; I just can't really put my finger on it, but it's chaotic! There's just some chaos in their lives! Just that type of chaos, you know, they don't have money for gas and stuff and it's just a vicious cycle. Do this or that based on a lot of money issues. I think its relationship issues within the family, certainly in some more extreme cases with more extreme issues, it's a lot of drug problems.

When asked how these instances make them feel, one participant replied, "Angry!" Another added, "Irritated! I mean, I don't care, but I was angry and frustrated and I'm thinking 'why, why do I even bother!' I mean, do you know how much easier it would have been to say he just didn't qualify?"

Earlier in the conversation, one of the participants recalled this story through which she compared the African American parent to her own mom pointing out the *deficit* behavior:

> His mom took me outside and essentially I thought she was going to beat me up! Honest to God! She got this close to my face and she was screaming at me! I never had this experience. I can't imagine my mother going and then screaming

at a teacher an inch away from her face!   I mean if I did something, my mom would always take the teacher's side. You don't see that anymore. That's just kids today. It's entitlement. Everybody's entitled, you know. You're responsible for your own behavior no matter where you're from.

Within this segment, another participant finished up with the following monologue which points to her deficit viewpoint of her students' parents. As she spoke, she leaned forward and raised her voice declaring her opinion of what she sees as a lack of parenting skills. She began:

> I feel like a ton of our parents don't understand the correlation between what they do and how it affects their children. I'd say 99% of the time when I'm talking to the African American parent about their child and their child is right there and their answer to the problem is to look at their child and say, why do you do that? Why are you being a bad kid? Why do you keep doing that? Stop doing that…and they don't realize that there is a disconnect; that there's something that's not happening there in that parent-child relationship to encourage the child to do something different or to give him or her and outlet. The other day I sent home a behavior slip, which I do every day, and his dad says, Well, I see it but I just don't have time to sign it. And for the child it's hard because then he gets a consequence from me because I want it signed…and his dad says; I don't have time! And I think, how, pardon my French, god dam long does it take to grab a pen and sign it so your son feels successful! I have two kids whose parents call every day at about 2:45 to tell them where they're going that day and that makes me angry because these poor kids can't focus in school if they don't know who's picking them up at the end of the day; are they going to Boys and Girls club? Do they have their jackets? And I get mad at the parents not so much when I'm trying to call them and their numbers are fake, but when I see how much it affects the kids in their ability to work!

In answer to the question what she would say to the parents, she continued:

> I would say to them, you brought this child into the world. If you want them to be a successful adult you need to take some parenting classes. I think some of these parents honestly think they're doing a good job, they don't know any different; they're just doing what they've learned. I mean I'm sure you've had parents who told you we should hit their kids. So I don't know what I would say to these parents, but there's not enough that I could say other than if I could show them 20 years from now when their kids are in the same cycle or in jail!

One of the participants responded to the preceding with a statement that highlights one of the consequences of conflict between teachers and parents, that of the child

realizing what's going on and having to choose between parent and teacher. She also

exposed her subconscious conflict between caring and the deficit thinking brought on by

her frustrations, but she assumed her assessment of the parent not wanting to try to be

correct:

> The whole thing with the parents; it's really hard to respect. I mean its one thing to see parents who are having their own issues and you can help them, or it they want to try, but when you see parents who don't even appear to want to try. It's really hard to even respect them at all as human beings and if you're not respecting them as human beings I'm sure that comes across a little bit to the kids and you try not to and then the kids get in the position of having people who they love in their lives, maybe never even meeting each other but still being at odds. Does that make sense? And that can't be good either. I don't know.

Her colleague replied:

> I get frustrated with parents, I can think of two right now where the parents are saying that they don't have time to deal with whatever the issue is. She just plays games with us and she's vicious! I look at her and I think, I have two kids at home waiting for me and I manage to go to work. You're not the only working mom! I almost get offended that I'm trying to help their kids and at the same time work and raise my own family. It really irritates me. It saddens me.

The three of them continued to display their deficit thinking as they talked about

parents not showing up for conferences or school events, despite sending home

reminders. They agreed the parents didn't seem interested and added, "We're just not

getting the parents or the parents aren't respecting us at home."

Group B: Deficit Thinking Towards Parents

Participants in Group B also had plenty to say that demonstrated their deficit

thinking towards parents and the African American community/culture in general. One

participant began with, "I think the problem is we need more fathers. You know, because

there aren't enough of them!" Another participant added, "Most of our kids don't have

fathers." Agreeing, another cut in with, "Like I have a great-grandmother raising her great-great grandson at conference." With these opening remarks, participants shared their view of a "broken family," demonstrating not only their deficit thinking, but a tendency to buy-in to negative stereotypes. Further along in the discussion, one of the participants referred to the family in crisis when she said:

> I think of it as a big cycle. It just goes around and round and round. You know, the mom had a baby at 16, and the next mother has one at 16, and the next one has it at 16; it's hard to get out of that cycle and I do think there reaches a point where it's too much work to study hard, or they don't have anyone to help them so they just say, I'm done.

The participants were particularly hard on mothers, mentioning how "tough" some are. One participant said, "They're the nasty defensive ones. They don't show up at functions, but they show up at the worst possible time of day and just ruin your day." The others agreed, and one recalled:

> There was a parent on a fieldtrip once. She was downright rude to me; she'd gone into the store after we said specifically not to, but she goes in and buys her kids doughnuts and chocolate and then gives it to her kid. Then she throws the napkin on the ground."

Another offered, "She's a piece of work." The first continued, "She's just a nasty person." To which another participant added, "You know, they'll just fabricate these things and they want to be mad and make accusations and put you on the defensive. These parents will be almost nonexistent and then all of a sudden they'll be in your face!"

The group went on about defensive parents, especially young mothers. "I've been treated very badly by African American women, never by any of the fathers. They've treated me like a queen," one said. The others agreed and one added, "I've never had a problem with any male, but there've been a couple of moms who get on the defensive. If you say, 'you're child's acting up' or whatever, they're really defensive." Another

agreed with a similar statement, "They're just very defensive about a lot of things and I've always been, looked older, so they tend to be a bit more respectful." "But sometimes their just looking for excuses," interjected a third participant.

This group also took time to talk about parents in regard to their perception of quality schoolwork. In the following interaction, the participants furthering their deficit thinking imply that some Black parents don't understand or don't know the real way kids learn. Referring to an often requested, but now retired, Black teacher, the group spoke about her strict style and affinity for worksheets. One participant said, "She did paper work all day long; worksheets all day long!" To which another responded with, "But see, a lot of people think…." "That is what they think…" cut in another. "Not what I believe," finished the first. Wanting to push it further, one of the participants continued:

> For some Black parents, because that is one difference, a lot of Black parents believe that a child; to sit and do paper work is the best way to learn. I don't know if that's a cultural thing, how they were raised, because they will come and tell you, I'm not seeing any work come home. That homework isn't hard enough. They need to do more paper and pencil. They've told me that. It's always been that way. Product is the key. These older Black parents needed to see something tangible.

Frustration with parents who they see as non-supportive and non-productive was also expressed by Group B participants. It was said:

> If the parent is supportive, they will see that the kid does their homework and the parents themselves usually have enough education that they can help them. But then we have the families where the parents don't have enough education to help with even kindergarten homework.

It was then added, "There's just a lack of parental participation or involvement." The others agreed, and one added, "I think there's a lack of parent support; it's a huge thing." And another said, "I think it's a lack of parent involvement, but some don't have the education and they don't have the skills." Repeating an earlier thought one participant

went on, "I have so many kids who bring their homework back undone, because her mom didn't understand it. This is first-grade homework, African American parents!" When asked why they thought it was that way, one replied, "Half of them dropped out of school, they had trouble, they struggled." There was agreement from the others as they said, "And they gave up." In this last interchange, participants framed their deficit thinking through their buy-in of the "lack of persistence" stereotype responsible for African American students "dropping out of school."

At one point, participants talked about what they view as strange familial arrangements. "I get a little upset because you are the product of who's raising you, but in general it's not the color of their family, it's how you let your child get this far out of line in five years," offered one participant while the others agreed. Then she continued:

> My problem child; they've looked for reasons to excuse her behavior and they've told her; you act this way because you're adopted, but it's a biologically related family. But this is a 5 year old child being raised by a great grandmother who is, she's got to be late 70s. They got her when she was about a year and they say she acts the way she does because she's adopted! The African American families are very tight. They have this big extended family like so and so is everybody's cousin. You never know if they are really cousins. I remember one year I had two kids in the classroom and they didn't know they were half-sisters. They didn't even know. And dad found out [that] both of his daughters were in the same classroom, at open house when both moms were there and he was there with his current friend. There's a strong desire to maintain the family ties…stronger than in Caucasian families…and that is why they're determined to raise this child even though they're ill equipped. And there's no man and she's always bawling.

To which one of the participants said, "So could you please fix her this year?" And another added:

> I've got a little boy who's being raised by the great grandmother, who's doing a great job, but these parents are missing out on this little boy's life and she's old too, like 68. You know older and raising this little guy, but like she says neither one of them is responsible enough.

The topic of teenage mothers came up again as one of the participants explained, "You know the worse behaviors (from a child) I've ever seen were children of teenage mothers." The others agreed, and she went on, "Usually without a dad." "And they're spiteful and vindictive and just angry, you know?" Another added. The first participant replied, "They're angry because that kid is taking away their life! And they're resentful and they're going to take it out on anybody. 'It's your fault and I'm going to blame everybody else for my problems because I don't have a life. It's not my fault that my kid's a brat!'" When asked if these experiences change the way they interact with parents, one of the participants replied, "It makes me more apprehensive, you know, about getting too involved with parents."

This participant unknowingly shared a response possibly motivated by feeling like an *outsider* – reflecting the conflict between her and the *other (or a member of the out-group)*. The participants never suggested that their attitudes towards the parents might be picked up by the parents causing them to stay away or be unsupportive. They appeared to consider the "defensive" parent as somewhat common, but preferred to put the parent's defensiveness outside of themselves, as though they, as the teachers, could not have caused the breakdown in communication.

Group A & B: Deficit Thinking Towards Administration

Though discussion points for the focus group sessions did not include the administration, all participants included the principal and assistant principal in the conversation many times. It appeared that the participants wanted to blame some of their difficult situations on the administration, using them as scapegoats. As stated earlier, this

tendency to scapegoat appears when someone needs to shift the blame of a problem

(Pang, 2001). None of the participants appeared to accept responsibility for shared

leadership, though they insinuated that they felt a lack of autonomy in their job situations.

Some of them used stereotypes in connection with their comments.

Group A: Deficit Thinking Towards Administration

Two of Group A participants were vehement in their comments toward the

administration, and while the remaining two did not allow themselves to be drawn in, the

first two appeared very frustrated and appeared to use the administration as scapegoats.

Near the end of the session, one participant voiced her dissatisfaction and her thoughts of

leaving:

> The lack of leadership; one (referring to the assistant principal) I'm trying to
> figure out what she does, the other I don't think does it very effectively; just
> feeling undervalued by the administration. There is never a thank you good job,
> you know, you did this really well. Hey, everybody this is great. You know, I
> think more of those would be nice.

Another agreed:

> I feel completely, often times, disrespected by our administration. I feel like there
> is a, 'this is my school and you're my teachers feeling.' I feel like if I went to our
> administration and I said, 'I honestly feel like leaving; I'm planning on leaving'
> that [neither of them] would not in any way shape or form try to convince me to
> stay, they'd be like, fine that's your choice.

Then she added, "I'm not comfortable that our administration does not know what's

going on in the classroom, and that's been proven to me time and time again." With that

statement she alluded to her own lack of confidence in the administration and her view of

(in her opinion) their incompetence.

The two discussed being observed during a reading class and how they felt that comments given to them by administration were *canned* and inappropriate (to the reading lesson). The participants also discussed how their very hectic schedule is crazy for both them and their students. Though the Reading First Grant is in large part responsible for the schedule, and the teachers assisted in devising their daily schedule, as they spoke, one seemed to put the blame on the principal as she referred to what she called, "The lack of leadership at our school." Another participant agreed and added, "There wasn't even any support for all of this, for us, you know." The first participant continued:

> With such a lack of support; I have kids that are causing issues in the classroom, but I would have had to make an appointment the week before with [the principal] if I want her to help, and Lord knows I'm not going to call the assistant because they're (the students) going to be treated like a superstar, instead of disciplined. That makes me feel completely unsupported. We have to send kids to each other's classroom when they're acting up.

The participants discussed the morale in the building and how many people, according to them, are dissatisfied and ready to leave because of the stress. It appeared important that they had others in agreement with them. They brought up issues of meeting with the administration, the amount of time they put in beyond their paid work hours, and the possibility of leaving. The thought of leaving Carver Elementary, because of administration, seemed to be very disconcerting. One participant explained it in the following manner:

> I feel like teachers that really want to teach with this population who made a choice like myself and I'm sure most of you, are going to leave because of it and a lot of these kids are going to be stuck with teachers who are only working here because it's the only place they can get a job and that is not what that population needs.

The other participant interrupted by referring to an incident between a teacher and the principal, "Not only that, teachers who really care and are trying to put up the fight for it

are given all kinds of Hell for it." As the participant in this exchange agreed, the group remained silent as they chose not to discuss the recent event of a teacher disciplinary issue.

The remaining participants discussed the fact that they feel "okay" with administration because they're "left alone" and their working arrangements fit well into their personal life. The discussion went back and forth and focused on the lack of support and the perceived lack of respect by administration. It was said that the principal allowed parents to "run the school" and one participant said, referring to the principal, "You know there has to be some responsibility for what the kids are doing." At which point another added, "Well, and as nice as it is to do what you want, it's scary to think of how not held accountable we are. I could shut my door and do whatever the hell I want, and nobody would know." "You know, and that's nice for us; I know all of us do a good job, whereas, there are some teachers in our school that aren't," another interjected, insinuating her displeasure with some members of the staff.

One of the participants continued with strong emotion and worked stereotyping of African Americans into the conversation:

> If you're a principal, I'm sorry I'm just going to say this, but if you're coming in to do an informal observation and you see that I'm helping a kid and I have other kids with their hands up, bend over and help a kid! Don't just sit in the back of my room like a big lump of coal and do nothing! [The assistant principal] was in my room for an hour and did nothing but sit in the rocking chair! I could've used some help! She did nothing!

When asked what she attributed it to, the participant replied, "Laziness! Lack of knowledge!" Another participant agreed as well:

> Lack of knowledge, laziness; I honestly, honestly do not know what [the assistant principal] does! I really don't. 95% of the time I've gone into her office, she's on a personal phone call and when you ask her questions she says, I don't know.

Like, seriously, that's your job! I honestly feel like she's a big waste of money; like that money could be spent on something else. Her discipline sucks; she gives them color sheets!

Group B: Deficit Thinking Towards Administration

Though not as vehement as the participants of Group A, Group B participants also had plenty to say about administration. The participants made some references to difficulties early in the discussion. When asked a question about their biggest challenge, however, their immediate answer was administrative support. One participant put it this way:

> There have been times when I have had a parent conflict or a problem with a child, and I have, and I don't know if it's because I'm White or because for whatever the reason, I have felt like the administrator has taken the side of the parent without listening to me. And it's been when, I would say, [there's only been one] White principal that we've had since I've been teaching at Carver.

Another participant interrupted, "Most supportive principal (referring to the White principal) I've ever worked with!" The first participant continued:

> I felt supported, but I never had that many conflicts with parents, but where I've had a principal that was Black, I felt that because both the principal and the parents were Black that I didn't have much support and I don't know if it was because I mean, like the smoking incident. Instead of the principal asking me, what? He said; don't ever talk to a child like that. …It's none of your business. …And our principal's a nice person, and I'm not going to say she isn't, but I just don't know the kind of support I would get if it was a Black parent and the Black principal. I don't know if the support would be there the way it should be; I don't know if I would be listened to." She explains an incident and goes on, "I don't feel that as a White teacher, we have the same umm, I don't want to say credibility, cause I feel, I just, and I cannot rely on the support. I've had problems like I say; with [a previous Black male principal], there were some problems." Referring to past principals she adds, "I felt as a White teacher I would not be heard in a three-way conversation between a parent and a principal; I felt I would be discounted simply because I was White.

Another participant agreed in response to her biggest challenge. This participant

showed a lack of respect and confidence in the principal, along with her deficit thinking,

when she said:

> Same – lack of support. I don't even go to them, I work it out myself. I don't
> even make eye contact with [the principal] anymore. She put something on my
> evaluation last year that was uncalled for. …She put this little blurb at the tail end
> of my evaluation because of something she heard. …I went to the union. …It
> didn't feel good to me; [her] evaluations are so generic. ...But she's just not there
> for the most part; she's not visible when she comes into the room; she doesn't
> interact with the kids at all. …It's frustrating to have an administrator that you
> don't feel is really supportive or, you know, involved.

This participant, in referring to the Black principal who hired her, recalled that

she felt very supported by him, after which the first participant repeated her point: "He

was more supportive, but I still always had the feeling he would take the Black parent's

side over listening to me, to what I had to say." To which another replied, "He was

approachable." The other two, who had stayed out of the conversation up to this point,

now mentioned how it's unfortunate that so many people seem to have bad feelings, and

one added, "I don't think [our administration] has a clue."

One of the participants changed the subject, perhaps indicating her lack of

comfort with the conversation, but shortly thereafter one of them brought it back up again

by saying, "I think my biggest frustration is a lack of communication between the

administration and staff." She discussed the previous White principal, saying she was

"treated like gold." Supporting her, one of the participants then offered, "I was on Site

Council where she was treated very, very poorly by the Black community. I mean, I saw

it, it was definitely a race thing, I felt."

When this group met for the second time, I asked participants if they had any

reactions to their first meeting. One of the participants brought up her contention with

the principal once again. She showed both outsider feelings and deficit thinking,

indicating that such a principal wouldn't have the integrity to be unbiased in their

dealings between teachers and parents. The participant appeared to have given the subject

some serious thought and responded with some interesting language, using the word

"ganging:"

> I got to thinking about something about how I've work with principals. I've discovered, well it's not a discovery, but I seem to notice that principals of color, whether they are Hispanic or non-majority, principals have a harder time being on the side of the White teacher when they're working with parents of their group. I wonder if it's because they don't want to offend people in their racial group or their ethnic group, and it seems like there's less support of the White teachers when they're working. When it's the principal and the family, and it's almost like they're ganging up, well, not ganging up but they almost make you feel like you don't have much chance. …I can't say you know, they don't come out and say it's because you're White and White people don't well, I did have a principal say, you don't understand Black culture. …But I do remember the principal saying, you don't understand about Black culture, because I said the child talked too much.

One of the participants uttered some agreement with the preceding, while another sat

quietly listening. Another participant's only response was:

> I think that the only thing, I've been under a lot of principals, some White and some Black. … (The principal) knowing the community can be a plus or a detriment, because sometimes they are afraid to deal with issues, because they do know the community so well.

> After this statement, Group B changed the subject and did not speak of the

administration again.

Summary of Findings: Teachers' Attitudes Towards Students, Parents, and Administration

Findings showed that the teachers have strong feelings towards students, parents,

and administration. While all participants demonstrated an ethic of caring towards

students and parents, they did not offer the same to the administration. Their caring for

students and families was expressed in simple terms (I love my students). In order for

caring to be really effective, however, it needs to be reciprocated (Noddings, 1992).

There was evidence in the findings that not all participants felt as though their efforts

were appreciated. Findings also suggested a blurring of the lines between caring and

becoming a "savior." Paley (1979) wrote about this phenomenon in *White Teacher* and,

along with Noddings (1992) and Pang (2001), cautioned against having a martyr or

missionary mentality.

Findings also indicated strong tendencies towards deficit thinking by the

participants. Participants engaged in derogatory language towards students, parents, and

administration explicitly or through the use of innuendos, stereotypes, and scapegoating.

Lois Weiner (2006) has explained that the deficit paradigm is a concept embedded deeply

in our society and schools, and looking through this lens makes it difficult for the teacher

to have high expectations. The assumptions emerging from a deficit perspective imply

that something or someone needs to be fixed. This type of language was used explicitly

by one of the participants. Table 4.3 details key ideas that demonstrate teacher attitudes

towards their students, parents, and administration.

Table 4.3. *Summary of Findings of Teacher Attitudes Towards Students, Parents, and Administration*

Teacher Caring Attitudes towards Students & Parents	Teacher Deficit Attitudes towards Students	Teacher Deficit Attitudes towards Parent/Community	Teacher Deficit Attitudes towards Administration
- Loves kids - Wants them to learn - Wants to build self-esteem - Wants to meet with child's parents - Wants to help - Fear of offending - Respect for African Americans - Sees lack of available resources - Sees lack of appropriate education *Teacher attitude of "savior"* "I'm a role model" "I'm here for the family" - I supply needs… - Kids need my intervention… - Kids need to be saved from themselves… - I work with them and get them turned around…	*Classroom Behavior* - Disruptive - Needs controlling - Needs structure - Needs rewards "plays the race card" - Displays "entitlement" attitude *Academic Behavior* "can't or won't" - Off-task - Lack of effort - Lack of work ethic - Poor attitude towards learning - Students don't want to do deeper level work - Students don't like to share their work - Language issues - Low IQ - Disabilities	*Families in Chaos* - Broken families - Dysfunctional - Odd relationships - Early pregnancies *Poor Parenting* - Discipline - Nutrition - Meaningful activities *"Don't Care"/Lack of Support* - For child - Education - Of teacher - Of conferences/ events *Defensive Parents* - Jealousy towards young White female - Problem children - Personal issues *Stereo-typing* - Entitlement "play the race card" - Jobless - Money-less - Low IQ - Drop-outs - Lack of persistence	*Lack of Support* *"Sides with Parents"* *Lack of Awareness* *Lack of Competency* *Lack of initiative, availability, & follow-through* *Inappropriate Behavior & Language*

	Victims	Old educational ideas	
	• Of parents/ family • Of circum-stances • Needs intervention • Needs someone besides their parents	• Prefers worksheets/ rote learning • Expects rigid control	

Findings Section III: Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Black/White Achievement Gap and Their Teaching

Teachers' Attitudes towards the Black/White Achievement Gap

According to The Black Parent Initiative (BPI) (2008), 49.2% of African American students and 80.3% of White 8th grade students met reading benchmarks. 44.1% of African American and 79% of White 8th grade students met math benchmarks. These state statistics demonstrate a discrepancy in achievement between Black and White students, as measured by test scores. Research literature shows that teachers have a tendency to either directly or indirectly blame the victim when considering why the scores reveal such differences (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Pang, 2001; Weiner, 2003). While situations of poverty and socioeconomic status (SES), family conditions, and lack of motivation are common explanations for the gap's existence, research also exists that shows the racial gap still exists when accounting for poverty (Kozol, 1991; Kohl, 1994; Lee, 2002; Swadener & Lubek, 1995).

As seen in the research, *blaming the victim* is a common response to an issue like achievement difficulties, and whether responding by habit, lack of alternative model, or

honest consideration, teachers in this study appeared to ascribe to such rhetoric as they explained their view of the Black/White Achievement Gap. Even despite Group A's acknowledgement of cultural differences brought on by the educational system's European history, the group persisted with their line of thinking. Deficit thinking was intertwined in both groups' conversations, but it appeared through their spare use of the word "race" and their consistent *switching*, that participants preferred to attribute the achievement gap to SES or other concepts. Additionally, it appeared participants were reluctant to accept any responsibility for lack of achievement from their students, though they did take credit for their end-of-the-year teacher work results. At no time in the focus group discussions did a participant suggest that they should try a different instructional strategy.

Group A: Attitudes Towards the Black/White Achievement Gap

The first participant who responded to the question initially showed insight on behalf of students from minority cultures. As the conversation continued, however, she and the others consistently switched from race to class or socio-economic conditions and included both color blindness and deficit thinking in their conversation. She began:

> I think there is an achievement gap, but I don't know, it's more of a class achievement gap, and it happens to be that most African Americans are still struggling out of the place they have been put by history. I also think we live in a predominantly White culture. Everything we do in this culture is European. We are not working together so we're trying to get those kids to achieve into the current White middle-class European culture. I don't know, I think it's unfair to ask them to do that, so I think there's a class piece, and we're pushing our culture onto others; I have the same problem with second language learners. You have to be able to cross cultures and be able to put a foot in both worlds and we're going to teach you how to put your foot in this other world, but it doesn't mean you have to let go of the original one.

A second participant supported her with a similar line of thinking, but used colorblind

language and shared her desire to acculturate students into the dominant culture's way of

doing business:

> I agree, in that I think it's more of a class gap than a Black/White issue. But at
> the same time, I also think that, I don't know, I mean, that a lot of questions. I
> guess I don't necessarily look at my students as far as this kid's Black or White. I
> know which kids need extra help and which kids don't and I kind of tend to hit
> the ones that need extra help. And if they don't, I know they're okay. And I
> don't necessarily look at it color wise. And I think (she paused) unfortunately, I
> think that the way our country runs and the interactions we have with the world is
> that we are. We do run predominantly European-based or whatever. That's the
> culture they're going to have to go out into to do business and there is a certain
> standard for business. They need to know what the culture is for business, and
> whether it's Black versus White. But kids have to be prepared for that and
> different families deal with it. So I don't know if it's family culture or if it's a
> culture, culture makes a difference.

Another participant explained her thinking, placing the cause on poverty:

> I think it's a combination of many factors, and yes I do think there is an
> achievement gap. A lot of it I think is a cycle that's really hard to break and I
> learned more about that poverty cycle where you have families that are
> generations of poverty and those who are just broke month-to-month; but
> someday they'll do fine. So breaking that cycle I think it's hard and I think that
> cycle could be poverty, but I also think it could be along the lines of not really
> valuing school. So generations of families don't do well in school, and it was
> fine. It was okay that you went through and then they went to work. That's just
> what their family does. There's just not the value of school in terms of education;
> the moment like day to day it just doesn't matter day to day. You see that with
> some families.

In agreement, one of the participants continued asserting that the difference lies in

the Family and whether or not they value education:

> You can see which families really value education and which ones don't. If your
> family really values education, it doesn't matter if you're Black or White, poor or
> not, you can tell that your family values education and there are lots of families
> that just don't care. Maybe because of bad experiences they've had or they just
> don't think that they're going to go anywhere or whatever; so they make excuses
> and education is that big of a deal since they don't put value in it.

Another participant replied, "And some have really bad attendance." "Exactly, the ones that struggle a little bit more," finished the first. With that, participants brought up *discipline* and how teachers spend more time on classroom management than instruction. The conversation returned to the original idea of class, but with added thoughts of deficit thinking that appeared to support a deficit culture model as one of them said:

> I don't think the achievement gap is Black or White, I think it is class. But I think a lot of that has to do with lifestyle and that kids of a lower class all often have extremely poor health, extremely poor diet, and they don't exercise other parts of their brains; they don't play musical instruments, they don't play sports, they don't do those types of activities, nor is education valued. So I think there's a lot that goes into the achievement gap. I think it plays out as Black or White because the majority of the population living in poverty, that we really are aware of, is Black or minorities.

In response, another added, "You know it's true, if you think about what happens before they go to school, not just attending a good preschool, but do they go to the science museum?"

One of the participants then brought up the idea of *language acquisition* as she recalled hearing, "Children in poverty learn fewer words a day than those who are middle class or more educated, so I think if their parents aren't very well educated they're going to come in with a much lower vocabulary and knowledge base." One of the participants blamed the problem on society, "We don't give, as a society, those kids our best, and I think it's a societal issue. In a lot of ways we just don't give those kids the best we've got to offer." At which another replied, "It all comes down to money." And referring to government funded Head Start programs, she said, "They're not going to pay teachers a lot of money, so they don't get quality teachers and they don't have the control over discipline."

A participant recalled an incident that happened during a parent/teacher

conference. She remembered a parent objecting to her son being tested for ADHD,

bringing an article that said young Black boys were being targeted unfairly. In this

incident, the participant considered the issues brought up by the foster mom, but took no

responsibility for the possibility that the parent could be right:

> She was very defensive. Unfortunately this boy has been pegged as a little
> trouble maker. You know, he's very high energy; he's a lot of things. He was
> also a drug affected baby; his mom was on heroine, he's got a lot of issues, he's
> Black, and his foster mom's Black, but you know her first thing was race. For
> some parents, it (race) can be used as an excuse, well, could it be because he's
> Black and you just don't understand him because he's Black? Or he just hasn't
> been understood, because he's not being taught in ways that really reach the Black
> community. And you know, so, she's like, 'I'm reading this book and could it be
> because he's Black and you guys are just not teaching him the way he needs to
> be.' And she wasn't accusing by no means because she and I have gotten a really
> good understanding and we've done a lot of talking about it and I think that I've
> been trying really hard and she's actually gone out of her way to say I really like
> the way you're dealing with discipline in your class. So she's not accusing me by
> any means, but I think she just mentioned generally the whole school system. Is it
> that his needs aren't being met, because the school system isn't necessarily
> focused on the way that African American children learn.

As this participant responded, she brought the issues together using a structural critique,

yet still placed all the blame outside the classroom:

> Being drug affected, generational poverty, more likely to use drugs, having
> babies, you're way, way, way, behind the curve. And then these families are
> living in houses with lead paint; they've got everything going against them. It
> really makes me mad, and they start talking about our test scores. We can always
> do better, the fact that they're making gains is huge, given as far behind as they
> have to come to catch up.

Another participant returned the blame to the parents:

> But even with those improvements do you ever find yourself kind of resenting
> some of their families thinking if you helped at home, this much. Can you
> imagine where half of our students would be if they had any sort of help at home,
> any!

The first participant replied, "I totally agree with you, but to me, I see it more as some of the parents don't have good follow-through. But I don't necessarily see that…you know? I think there're certain parents that, no matter what color they are, that don't have good follow-through." Another participant cut in, "Right, it just sticks out that they're Black, because that's what the majority of our kids are." "I totally agree with you. See, I think I'm much more infuriated with a lot of the parents with the problems we have than with the kids," The first answered, and then another reiterated, "That's what I said last time. I said so many of these kids are victims of their own family!" "They're too young to be of anything else," finished another participant.

The participants were asked how they would compare Carver Elementary students to other students in the district. When asked this question, the participants alluded to an incident where a sixth grade teacher from Carver Elementary observed in another school and found the students working at a higher level and rate. When asked how this could be so, one of the participants replied:

> I think it comes down to a lot of factors, especially money. Our school does not have the money. We don't have money for good technology or parent volunteers. You know they're either working or can't make it in. We don't have the resources that they (other schools) have. We just can't go willy-nilly and take them on a field trip. We can't just go out and buy, you know, extra equipment and we don't have PTAs.

Another participant moved the reasons for this to the kids, "And don't you think our school doesn't have a culture of kids wanting to share their work. I mean, you don't see kids' work up around our school, whereas at other schools, there's kids' work everywhere. I don't know." Another interjected, "We need better role models." And another participant added, referring to Carver Elementary students going to another

school, "It would take them a while to get *on par*. I mean, they're capable of doing it, but they don't know how to work that hard."

The participants realized the possible discrepancy in their students' achievement, but were quick to place the blame on external factors (including money, volunteers, technology, and the students). Though they had just claimed that it "makes no difference what color they are" and that "it just sticks out that they're Black because that's what the majority of our kids are," they ended up agreeing and placing the blame on their Black students who "don't know how to work that hard."

Group B: Attitudes Towards the Black/White Achievement Gap

Initially, upon being asked about their perspective on the Black/White achievement gap, participants in Group B didn't seem to know what to answer. One responded with some thoughts about TAG (Talented and Gifted Program) which puzzled her: "What's the ratio of White students at Carver; I mean, what's the percentage? There are way more White students who are TAG, than there are Black students at Carver. I mean, the ratio is not balanced between White and Black and the rest of the population."

Not acknowledging her comment, another participant changed the direction of the conversation:

> We're all in early childhood education, and we don't see it quite as much. I mean you may see them in different groupings, but they're still pretty balanced. Some are low and some are high, but they could be White, Black or Brown, but for some reason the older they get the gap increases.

She went on to explain that where the child went to pre-school made the biggest difference:

Most of the Black kids, the African American kids have been in Head Start or in the pre-K program, which the kids in her program are at a much higher point than other kids. If they've been in Head Start their behavior is poor, regardless of their ethnicity. If they've been in a private program, they're often very shy, but I see a wide range of behaviors and I'm going to be very specific the *local* Head Start program students have extremely poor behavior.

A participant asked, "Do you find that behavior correlates with academic achievement?"

She replied:

I was just going to say that the poorer the behavior the harder it is for them to succeed academically on the whole and the lower the academic and the less parental support there is, even though Head Start requires parental involvement. (She paused) They are just not positive about school. That Head Start (local), and parents have told me this, say it is the school's responsibility to educate their child, and that's in every area: manners, academics, and behaviors. And that all the parents have to do is get their child to and from Head Start, but it's the school's responsibility to do the educating.

These remarks were met with silence, as the participants appeared to be thinking.

One of them broke the silence, "I don't really see any gap, because they're all coming, and you know, it's their first school experience. They're all kind of mixed presenting the same way. It's definitely different than the upper grades I'm sure." Another gave her perspective, "Boy, well, it's definitely substantial, a gap and a tough one to figure out. I mean (she paused) I don't know." Another began:

Well, my kids have so many problem behaviors. All my kids have big gaps, whether they're White or Black. I get second graders that know five letter sounds. But my kids' gaps have to do with behavior issues, but that's why they're in my room. They need a lot, but several who are really hard to turn around are the ones that are being raised by single mothers and they're an only child and they are brats! It's emotional.

The conversation was then directed toward socioeconomic status. One of them opened it with, "Some of [the problem is] socio-economics, because I worked at Greenwood (an economically mixed, predominantly White school), and I saw big huge

gaps between Greenwood and Auburndale (a high SES White school)." "I think that

plays into it," added another while the first continued:

> The parents who can afford books, who are concerned about education, who go beyond you owe me an education, who really sees an education as important, because they are supportive, their kids do better. This goes back to what I was saying about Head Start. I've been told that the administrator said that they (parents) do not have to do anything to help their kids with homework. It was the teacher's responsibility to teach that child and if that kid wasn't learning it was the teacher's fault and homework had nothing to do with that. And all they had to do was get their kid to school…he did a lot of damage…he was one of the big criticizers of Carver, and yet never came into the school.

One of the participants, who appeared emotionally involved with her idea,

repeated her disillusion with Head Start one more time. It was at this point that she also

spoke of low IQs, to which her colleague brought up "those kids" feeling like they are

entitled to "free this and that." But then she added, "I don't think any teacher I've ever

worked with has sat down and said, 'I don't think that person can learn because of this.'"

Another participant broke in with:

> Well, I've had students who have never handled money. They don't know what it is! And I say, 'don't you go to the store?' 'Well, yeah but you use the card.' You know they've never even paid for anything or see their parents pay for anything. …It's a welfare card! And when I try to teach money, just the kids have the hardest time trying to understand the value you know, because they've never witnessed their parents using it for anything. And I've had kids come to school with those security tags still on the clothes every day they come to school with new clothes on with the security tags still stuck onto their clothes; nicer clothes than anyone I know!

Yet another agreed and said: "They feel like they're owed because they get their food for

free." Another, who also agreed, said:

> I feel it is the economic standards that are making the gap probably more than race, but it could be a combination. And I don't understand their culture as well; maybe they don't expose the kids to the science museum or the zoo. I don't know

how many kids I have that never been to the beach. Is that because they can't afford it, or is it because they just don't go places?

At which point, one of them added, "Well, when we go to the pumpkin patch, I have kids that have never been over the bridge."

Another spoke, "You have families that are lower economic and it makes it real hard not to have an achievement gap because there are some holes created by the lack of financial resources. You have young women having children when they're still babies; they drop out of school." Involved in the exchange, one of them interrupted:

> I think it goes back to the time of slavery, personally, just being that; well, we were brought over here against our will. You know, this has just been carried from generation to generation about how they didn't choose to be in this country, so now this country owes every African American that will ever live here, you know, as much as they can get.

But another broke in, "Without for many of them, without really having to do too much, to do anything." "Right," agreed the first, and another continued:

> When we get them in kindergarten some really want to succeed, most of them really want to succeed, but it seems as they get a little bit older they lose that intrinsic reward system, and it's got to be something on the outside they've got to get something. Education has lost its value because unless I can see what it's going to do for me right now. I don't know that may go back to socioeconomic stuff; it may be culture.

At this point, I asked the group to summarize their explanation for the Black/White Achievement Gap. One of the participants emphatically stated, "I'd say, 'let's look at the socioeconomic status; what are the Black families who are in the middle class, what is the achievement of those children?'" Another answered, "It's usually high. I mean the schools I've been in. The parents on that side of town want to get out of that (Carver's) area. You know, they want their kids at good schools. The parents send their kids to those schools." Another interrupted, "And the parents work with them." And yet

another cut in, "But at the same time, there are White parents out there sending their kids to Carver." "That's right, and those parents work with their kids," explained the first, blaming Black parents. One of them added, "But they want them there to experience other cultures, and that's why they send them there." "And, we are a good school, we have good academic standards, but we have…. I think the achievement gap, to me, is a lack of parental participation involvement," the first participant added succinctly as another agreed.

One of the participants, who had been quiet for some time, spoke up:

I think that's a huge thing, lack of parents' involvement. It's the same people on Site Council for the last seven years, and they don't show up for PTA meetings. I have so many moms that work; just parent involvement. And the kids go from house to house and they're cranky. But, I think, lack of parent support is a huge thing.

Another agreed and added, "It knows no color." And, from what I can decipher from the recordings, she added, "I don't think we have a good answer for your question." But one of the others said, "I don't think there is a good answer. Lack of parent involvement and the parents who are involved, their kids generally do better." This exchange matched the impression I got as they discussed this subject; that they really hadn't considered questions regarding the Black/White Achievement Gap in terms of their own perspective or teaching.

Findings Section III: Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Black/White Achievement Gap and Their Teaching

Teacher's Attitudes Towards Teaching

According to Delpit (1995), African American children expect a teacher to speak directly and act with authority. Students also expect teachers to show a sense of caring through their classroom management, interpersonal relationships, and high expectations. High expectations in behavior and academics not only demonstrate a sense of caring to the student, but they also demonstrate a belief that the student can accomplish the goal (Irvine, 2002). To be effective, the teacher must also consider and value social aspects of the classroom, as African American children may be more influenced by the need to affiliate with their peers than to succeed academically (Diller & Moule, 2005).

Culturally Responsive Teaching, at its best, addresses students' needs in a holistic and comprehensive way. It allows for social and emotional development, while cultivating academic success, without compromising the student's individual or ethnic identity. Teachers who teach through a culturally responsive lens use a variety of instructional strategies and curricula that reflect the learner's culture, experience, and learning style, demonstrating a sense of commitment to their students (Gay, 2000).

In an effort to discover participants' attitudes towards their teaching of African American students, I asked them to discuss how they address their students' learning and what they believe is their most important role as teachers of African American students. These discussion questions did not generate a lot of conversation. Due, perhaps, to the fact that all teachers espoused a color-blind approach to their students, participants

appeared somewhat puzzled by the concept and seemed reluctant to specifically answer the question in terms of their African American students.

The findings demonstrate a self-learned style of classroom management and instruction that appears to be guided by personal and shared experience. The participants appeared to have looked to African American parents and teachers to guide them in their classroom management. They were not comfortable, however, with all aspects of the African American style as they understood it, and they discussed their need for discretion in what they say and how they act because of their White identity. Instructional decisions appear to be made through the day-to-day necessity of getting through the material. Participants' attitudes towards classroom management are reported first, followed by their discussion on classroom instruction. Though participants from both groups appeared confident in what they had to say about teaching, they were actually brief in their comments.

Group A: Classroom Management

One participant began by switching the focus from race as she referred to teaching fifth graders the year before: "I had to employ a lot more management and things like that because that's an American kid problem, but…I don't think I did anything different." Another participant continued:

> I mean, I think the only thing for me in my teaching that's different is the way that I manage things. And I don't think it's necessarily like White culture versus African American culture but somewhat maybe like when I did my student teaching in another school district, and I could, you know, 'Okay, everybody eyes on me. Kind of thing la, la, la, did you hear me?' And it worked. (She said this in a sweet voice and then changed to a voice more loud and gruff.) Now I'm like, 'come on, pay attention. You know you got to listen and I'm not going to –.' So it's kind of more, there is much more emphasis and structure and you know.

One of them laughed, and another said, "My mom always says that when she comes in to help, 'Could you imagine if you disciplined like this at Richardson (an elite White school)?' Which is the neighborhood where they lived and where I went to school; 'you'd have parents so far on top of you!'?" The participants agreed, and one of them continued with:

> Yeah, I think there you have to. Well, you know … (she talks in a singsong voice) whereas here, you better stop doing that or this isn't going to happen anymore. You cannot do this! So I think you're able to be much more stern or I guess I am much more stern with these kids then I ever was in any of those schools.

Another said:

> It was something I noticed though when I first started at Carver. I remember that stood out to me the way the kids, no, the way the teachers just spoke to the children. It was much more, (she paused) less frill. It was very strict actually. I mean some, I mean just stood out. Kind of the way I hear Mary (a Black teacher) talking to the kids; anyway very direct.

One of the participants added, "A volunteer that comes to my classroom every week says that she's just appalled of what she hears walking up to my classroom. She told me, 'If I ever heard a teacher talk to my child that way I would've pulled my kid out of that class so fast.'" At which point one of the others interjected, "See, she'd be appalled if she went by my classroom." Another added:

> That's interesting. I know that's something I've had to grow into because I didn't go to a school like that, everybody was gentle and sweet (referring to the school she grew up in). I was at Valley Park (a higher SES and predominantly White school) for a field trip a few weeks ago and the kids were not paying attention. I almost stood up and said, everybody sit down! But I thought, Oh, I better not –.

One of them laughed, and another said, "I know I'm afraid if I ever leave Carver, "I'd have so many kids crying."

Another participant, supporting her colleagues, said, "A lot of teachers at Carver that are strict are definitely not mean. Like, I wouldn't ever call you mean. You're very strict just as I am very, extremely strict." "There are a few times that I pushed it" cut in another. "Oh, yeah, we all have, but generally very respectful," said one of the other participants as she also supported her colleagues. "With our population, you can see what happens when you're not. Look at [that teacher's] room, she's all smiles…," one of the participants offered letting her voice fade away. Another participant continued:

> But it's kind of like what you said, that Sylvia (a Black assistant) told you, you have to be real strict. And I'll never forget what Mimi (another Black assistant) said in that staff meeting, that 'all you new teachers, you don't know, but you got to yell at these kids!' And even [the principal] corrected her a little bit and I felt pretty White at that moment. I'm like, 'God no,' I don't want us to, you know? It doesn't seem to work that well.

But then she added, "I do try to keep a pretty short leash on the kids."

Group B: Classroom Management

Participants in Group B said very little about classroom management, but referred several times to the volume a teacher uses with her voice. At this point, one of them described an incident where another teacher was told that, "'White teachers don't yell at Black kids! They don't! You just don't yell at a Black child,' the parent told the White teacher. 'White teachers don't yell at Black children!'" She went on, "The teacher was using a big voice and the parents felt that that was inappropriate and was yelling at them, and yet I've had other parents say my kid doesn't understand unless you yell at him." Another participant then added:

> I do notice that my parents who tell me you need to be more firm and get in his face and be louder…you're not hard enough on him; you need to get in their face and yell at them. I don't really want to yell at them, you know. And if they're

getting out of control, I did find out that you get right in their face and say, stop it!
…But I don't really want to yell at the kids unless it's an endangerment.

Earlier in the conversation, when describing how she had come to be at Carver

Elementary, one of the participants talked about having control of the class and how she

believed that was why she was called in to substitute teach. She began with, "I started

subbing in 1981 and I was at Carver a lot." Then another participant interjected, "You

must have fit in good?" The participant continued by relaying her experience:

> I was really strict and didn't let the kids walk all over me and I had some rough,
> rough classrooms back then, because it was rough for me. Douglas (a
> neighboring predominantly Black school) was the hardest school. I don't know; it
> was something, just the hostility, a real hostile environment; just the disrespect
> from the kids, no respect whatsoever. The staff members were always really
> pleased when I showed up for the day and very polite. I subbed for temporary
> placements. I subbed for a long time.

Nothing more was said by Group B participants about how they manage their

classrooms. They appeared nonchalant about classroom management, almost as if they

shared an understanding of what was required of them as teachers.

Group A: Instruction

When talking about instruction, Group A remained rooted in their *colorblind*

approach, switching the focus from race to socioeconomic status (SES). They seemed to

understand the need for offering instruction that considers a student's prior knowledge,

but not from a cultural perspective. Rather, their perspective reiterated their deficit

thinking of the students. One of them began:

> I have to say for me personally and maybe this is naïve of me, but I don't think I
> look at them, kind of like I said before, as Oh you're African American or you're
> White, but which of my kids are struggling and I do what I have to do to help
> them figure it out. I don't necessarily go to the books and say, well this is an
> African American kid; what can I do to make this kid successful? I sit there and

talk to other teachers and or other people on, okay this is what I'm trying to get across this is what I'm trying to find other ways. But you know, I don't think I necessarily look at my kids as (she paused) I don't see them as color, I see them as this kid's low and this kid's not and what do I need to do to help those kids that are.

Another interrupted:

I think having a lot of kids that are low SES, one of the things I know that you do and I try very hard to do; and I find to be one of my biggest challenges is building background knowledge, because our kids don't have it and when you look through our Basal stories that the kids have to read I can pick out so many things that I have to teach my kids about before they even read the story because they are going to have no clue what I'm talking about. So I think that's not the Black community, but I think in our classroom it's mainly the Black community but it has more to do with the fact that they're poor and the lack of resources and outside world knowledge.

The participant continued, bringing up the possibility that the kids had not crossed the city's bridges, just as Group B had:

Yeah, like to me the one thing that's always baffled me is being like third-graders; how few of them have actually gone across the bridges. It has always baffled me how few of them know what the bridges look like or have been across them. Like really, you haven't been across the bridge or the bridges in *this city!* So you do have to do a lot of that background knowledge and stuff for a lot of the kids. It comes down to a lot of factors. Maybe parents don't have time or are working a lot; quite a few of our parent s don't have cars, so they don't necessarily have the freedom to go back and forth across the bridge. I think that's more what I kind of attribute it to.

Returning to the topic of *instruction*, one of them explained, "I teach how I teach. I don't know if it would be any different somewhere else." In this statement, she acknowledged no special consideration of her students' cultural background. Another participant meanwhile, speaking about literacy instruction, asked, "Well, at Valley Park or Kellwood (both predominantly White schools), do you guys think, if you walked into a third-grade classroom, you would ever see the type of direct instruction that we're doing

in reading, like *sound-word, sound-word*?" One of them replied, "You know, I think there is some, probably, but I don't think nearly as much." And another added, "I would agree; there's probably a lot more explicit instruction at Carver." To which one of the others said, "Definitely, seems like in other schools there's more time for projects, learning through doing." The first participant continued, "More holistic centers; project based, the kids don't, they've got a lot of the basic stuff already and the ones who don't, I think they bring them out in smaller groups and do that with them. But they don't do it whole class." The participants agreed as she went on, "Yeah, I mean, I don't know that for a fact, but that's my guess. I know they have kids behind that they, you know, take out to do in small groups to get caught up, reading recovery sorts of things."

In the preceding, the participants considered their instruction as compared to another setting, but they saw it as a result of the students' need for remedial work, not their instructional decision making. As the discussion continued, the participants returned again to classroom management. One of them introduced *high expectations by parents* and *parental involvement* into the conversation. As she did so, she seemed to take all possibility of project learning away from the teacher:

> You have to do a lot of explicit stuff, because again I think it's the whole kids are low because the education (she paused) isn't looked upon as, you know. Somewhere like Richardson where you have high educational expectations you have mostly highly educated parents or parents that believe in high education, so I think there's a lot more parent involvement. So you can do more projects at home because you know, they'd get done, whereas, you know, Carver and probably Brice (A lower economic, mixed demographic), you couldn't maybe send as much home, because number one they don't have the materials at home to be able to do it and the parents just don't have time or wouldn't have the understanding to do it. So I think it depends upon where you're at, you know. I think you could ease back on the management a little bit, but I think you could do a lot more with the kids because you can have parents you know extending projects and things at home.

The participants discussed the lack of parental support in returning homework or behavior notices, and how this experience taught them not to send home anything that needed to be returned. One of the participants then recalled her student-teaching experience in a high SES predominantly White school.

> The kids had more time to just be kids. They got to have two or three recesses a day, because we weren't worried about every second of instruction and they had time every day to use a different part of their brain whether it was going to the library, going to a dance class, going to PE, or doing enrichment activities such as art, because you only had two or three kids who were really low that just went with the specialists. You didn't have to really worry that much about how to modify or how to adapt for those kids.

Another participant agreed with her, "I always feel stress, like I have to get all of this in. Trying to make sure we're getting everything, it's just really stressful." "That's a complaint I always hear from the teachers, 'I don't have time to do projects,'" agreed another. And then one of them added, "It would help if we had assistants. That would make a huge difference."

Group B: Instruction

Group B had little to say about instruction. Like Group A, however, they also saw a need to consider a student's prior knowledge, and their discussion reflected their lens of deficit thinking. Although Group B spoke more about their students from a caring perspective, they also seemed to want to switch the focus away from race. One of the participants began by talking about her students' emotional needs:

> Self-esteem; let them know that you can do what you want to do. Get that self-esteem up so they know that they can learn because mine (special-needs students) are a little different. They come in thinking they're stupid because they haven't learned anything, so the first thing we work on is self-esteem, makes a big difference"

Responding, one of the participants said, "I think every child is different. My approach depends on the child, no matter what color they are." Another participant agreed, "Yeah, I don't look at it all at color. I want to get them to love school." At which point one of the other participants added her statement about loving the kids and making them feel safe. Trying to return the conversation to instruction, I reiterated the question after acknowledging their discussion of affective needs. One of them replied:

> I try to bring out all cultures, you know like in social studies so they can see that in all different races you can succeed. And it's not just in Black history month; we do it throughout the year, whatever we're studying at the time I try to find people especially women, because girls have an issue too, and I try to find people of all colors and all, just so the kids can see; trying to find things from his country (referring to one of her students). So they can see; so he can be proud of his country and that's important.

Another responded, "There are prejudices, even within the Black community; the boys against the girls." "Oh yeah, got to build the girls; I feel like the girls are at the bottom," Another agreed with her and continued, "They (the boys) say things all the time, putting girls down; you run like a girl. Could be that came out of an adult mouth. I remember when I was little, just putting up with the stuff boys said, and the girls are still putting up with it." Referring to teaching girls about the first woman astronaut, one of the participants answered, "I like to push those kinds of things, and not just George Washington Carver either, I mean, that's the only person I knew about when I was growing up. Just make everyone feel worthwhile." Another participant added, "Everybody has a value; everybody has something to contribute. So we really work on that."

The participants went on to talk about teaching at Carver Elementary, versus teaching in a majority White school. They insisted it would matter more according to

SES, and the big difference would be, as one of them put it, "You get parents trying to tell you how to do your job. And, I think it would be different according to what side of town, because in outer southeast there's zero parent involvement; trailer park population."

I, again, attempted to steer the conversation toward instruction, but the participants wanted to qualify the economic condition, "It depends. Do you mean a poor White neighborhood?" One of them spoke about her experience with a high SES school, "They have all this prior knowledge and exposure, and you can expand and do some things. But at a school like Carver, you have to add quite a few steps." Interrupting, another agreed, "You have to teach the basics. My instruction with kids who have no exposure, you have to start at the beginning with things." One of the participants, who had been quiet for a while, spoke up, "Depending on the area, a lot of things wouldn't even need touching upon." Then the first participant explained herself further:

> Like in math; measurement, money, you know, and time, when kids come to me in first-grade, I have to back up and teach. They can't name our city or state, so I certainly can't teach continents. That is how my instruction is different at Carver then it would be at anyplace else.

Summary of Findings of Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Black/White Achievement Gap and Teaching

The participants professed several reasons for the Black/White Achievement Gap, including SES, poverty, culture, parents, and students' unwillingness to work hard, all common excuses that may be connected to their *deficit thinking* paradigm and *blaming the victim* approach (Pang, 2001). The participants never made a connection between

student achievement and their instruction, possibly indicating reluctance to take responsibility.

Findings indicated that the participants agreed on the need to have a firm command in their classroom management, including a stern voice and a no-nonsense approach. Delpit (1995) spoke of an effective classroom management and teaching style that incorporates direct language and instruction. Participants in this study spoke of teaching the basics and building background knowledge, but did not include any additional culturally responsive methods. It appeared their direct teaching stemmed from the adopted reading program. Table 4.4 gives a summary of participants' attitudes towards the Black/White achievement Gap and their teaching.

Table 4.4. *Summary of Findings of Teacher Attitudes Towards the Black/White Achievement Gap and Teaching*

Teachers' Attitudes towards the Black/White Achievement Gap	Teachers' Attitudes towards Classroom Management	Teachers' Attitudes towards Classroom Instruction
Poverty *Parents* • Poor parenting • Lack of support • Don't require homework to be completed • Attitude towards education *Students* • Off-task behavior • Disruptive behavior • Lack of effort • Poor attitude towards learning • Students don't want to do deeper level work • Students don't like to share their work • Low IQ • Learning disabilities *Head-Start* *Age of Students* *TAG Inequities:* • Parents don't recommend	*Teacher must:* • Have & maintain control • Use strong discipline • Use structure • Use a strict, firm voice • Have a no-nonsense approach • Keep a tight rein *Evidence of teacher self-efficacy in Classroom Management* *Evidence of lack of self-efficacy in Classroom Management*	*Instructional Strategies include:* • Teach the basics • Build background knowledge • Build vocabulary *Difficult to do projects/extended learning* *Will not send home project work* *Two instances of high expectations mentioned* *One mention of multicultural/gender instruction – additive* *Evidence of self-efficacy in instruction* *Evidence of lack of self-efficacy in instruction*

Findings: Comparing the Two Focus Groups

Despite the difference between the personalities in the two groups, responses were more similar than not. Participants were extremely supportive of one another, rarely disagreeing. Group members created an ebb and flow in the discussions. As each member spoke, the listeners would either nod or verbalize their agreement, or support the speaker with an additional example or point of understanding, frequently joining in, interrupting each other, or finishing a sentence. The interruptions, and few instances of disagreement that occurred, were voiced in a polite manner. While three times it appeared as though a member changed the subject to avoid validating someone's point, it appeared participants held their tongues rather than appear non-supportive. This support, or solidarity, built by participants is consistent with research on group membership and racial identity theory (Allport, 1954; Billig et al., 1988; Diller & Moule, 2005; Howard, 1999).

Participants from both groups also used a language pattern associated with building solidarity. As noted by Gee (1999), people speak with what linguists call, *collocational patterns*, a grammatical device to "co-locate" the conversation. In particular, participants used the expression "you know," or some variation, almost continually throughout the focus group discussions. Gee (1999) explained it as, "You know" is an utterance used in "informal social language to achieve solidarity." (p. 29) Likewise, Larson (2003) reported a similar explanation:

> The teacher's sporadic laughter in her interview may indicate a colluding stance with the interviewer. I have found that White teachers reveal their ideologies in specific ways to interviewers who are also White. This air of collusion, indexed in her "in-joke" tonal semantics and "you know what I mean" laughter and

gestures, may indicate the teacher's assumption of a shared indexical field (Hanks, 1990) with me because I am White, that I would know what her joking tone meant. (p. 95)

Just as Larson observed in herself, I sensed a desire by the participants to pull the other group members into their understanding.

Along with collocational patterns, utterances from both groups included similar word usage, examples, stories, and avoidance techniques. Participants also shared similar stories as examples of their opinions. Finally, members from both groups stated how much they enjoyed coming together and talking about their experiences. One participant said, "It was positive for me because I thought I was the only one who felt this way…. It was emotionally beneficial for me."

Differences between the groups appeared to lie in their ages and experience. The older and more experienced members of Group B appeared much more relaxed and calm towards points of discussion. Group B members stated their caring more explicitly than Group A, and also appeared more patient towards students and parents and the day-to-day difficulties inherent in teaching at Carver Elementary.

In contrast, Group A members appeared considerably more stressed, frustrated, and emotional over their circumstances. They were considerably more vehement in their conversation. While Group A participants appeared more familiar with current language and issues surrounding race and culture, their discussion of classroom management and instructional practice varied little from Group B's. Some differences in discussion occurred simply because of the grade level each group teaches.

Findings: Member Checking of Transcripts and Summaries

Upon completion of transcripts, I produced summaries organized by discussion points for participants from each group. Participants were given both the summaries and the transcripts and were asked to review and respond. Although all materials were returned, only four of the participants made written comments, and two of them were brief. I did speak with each of them individually and made note of their verbal comments.

Upon return of the transcripts and summaries, participants shared that they were satisfied with my summaries. Written and verbal comments included, "I think it looks good," and, "You did a good job." The lack of responses to specific utterances that implied deficit thinking, stereotyping, scapegoating, and avoidance appear to indicate their acceptance of the discussion and what it contained. It is possible that members did not recognize these phenomena or, if they did, they were admitting to having said them.

Group A

The participants spoke highly of their experience both at the end and between sessions. At the start of the second session, two members recalled feeling racist after the first session, but neither they nor the others appeared upset over their discussions. Three Group A participants had an opportunity to summarize what they had discussed in Session I at the beginning of Session II. Although this was an opportunity for them to recant on their previous discussion, they did not. Rather, they repeated much of what they said in the first session, holding to their opinions.

One member of Group A wrote no comments. In speaking with me, she accepted both the transcripts and summaries and said, "They were an accurate description of what we talked about." She did, however, express her interest in the nature of the discussions.

Another member wrote a few notes on her summary. In regard to this statement, "Much was said about parents who appear *incompetent*…," she wrote, "This is a strong word. Did we actually say or imply that?" Transcripts revealed members described a lack of parenting skills and follow-through, as well as a statement, "Parents are worthless." She also made a comment that reinforced her tendency to switch from race when in response to the statement (taken directly from the transcripts), "Students at high SES, White schools…," she wrote, "I don't think color is a factor here."

The comments another participant wrote on the summary reinforced her opinions. In response to, "Some older students are seen as disrespectful to teachers and not willing to listen," she underlined the sentence beginning with "disrespectful" and wrote, "In my experience as young as grade 1." On a paragraph about students, parents, and community she added the comment, "Lack of education," to "Discussion included how these phenomena appeared to be part of a vicious cycle based on money issues/poverty."

The final participant made the most comments on the summaries, and wrote a one page response. She wrote, "This looks good," in regard to the summary on how the participants viewed their African American students, parents, and community, and on the summary about teaching. In regard to the question on the "biggest challenge," she added, "Also behavior issues are a challenge." In her one page response, she wrote:

> I think it's interesting that many of us have similar feelings about what's going on here at school, with our students, administration, and families. It was a nice chance to talk about these issues in a safe environment.

She also reiterated her feelings over resources, but in doing so appeared to accept the way

things are at Carver Elementary more than she had in the focus group session:

> Overall, I'm not sure our school faces a lot of things that other schools don't face, but the difference is funding. Many other schools have funding that ours doesn't so they are able to get more equipment, supplies, even teachers. We could do so much more with our students if we had more people, supplies, etc.

She finished her response by referring to what people say about her choice to work at

Carver Elementary. She wrote, "[People] don't have a realistic view of what it is like

here. It can be tough, but that can be said about schools in other districts too."

Group B

Only one participant from Group B wrote comments, but all participants spoke

positively about the experience. They said they agreed with the summaries and found the

transcripts an interesting read. They were fascinated with the nature of discussion and

their speech patterns, making comments over their grammar. When pushed to make

comments about content, one of them replied, "It is what it is. I told you I had a lot to

say." Another answered, "It's interesting, it makes me want to get out my spiral and

write things down." One of the participants had a lot of meetings and things to attend to

when I gave her the transcripts and summaries. She was the last to return the package

and simply stated, "It looks good. It's what goes on around here."

One participant responded on paper. In response to, "Your feelings of frustration

were tempered with disliking the behavior, not the child," she wrote, "Very, very true. In

many cases I have concluded that I can't change the family; it's made up. So I've learned

to focus on the child and what I can accomplish at school with him." She also took the

opportunity to respond to the section about things "Black teachers or aides can say that

Whites cannot." She wrote, "This is so true…a White teacher could never, ever say!" She finished in a way that exemplified her personality: "Joy, I think you did a great job summing everything up. It was interesting reading and true to what we said. Good luck."

Summary of Findings

This study was designed to investigate White, female teachers' attitudes towards their African American students and the Black/White Achievement Gap. The participants presented strong opinions and emotions in the focus group sessions, resulting in a rich set of data. Through analysis, the data revealed themes consistent with existing literature around culturally responsive teaching and race.

One outcome of the findings was the apparent solidarity of the teachers. Participants from both groups were supportive of each other in the discussions and opinions. They expressed their friendship and support of each other, as well as how much they enjoy working with their team. They also revealed their tendency to depend on one another rather than seek the help of the administration.

Participant responses to racial issues were categorized to fit under themes of Awareness, Denial, Confusion, and Avoidance. These themes acted as an umbrella for participant attitudes towards students, parents, and administration. Their attitudes included both Caring and Deficit thinking. Actions of effort and avoidance appeared out of these attitudes. Participants reported acting with racial sensitivity towards their students and parents. They also reported using conventional classroom management and

instruction tailored for the setting in which they work. However, through their discussion, a tendency for participants to avoid some issues of race and culture, achievement of their students, and culturally responsive instruction and behavior management techniques appeared.

Finally, participants were expressive in regard to their feelings about working at Carver Elementary. At times, participants spoke of their teaching assignments with care and pride. They shared aspects of their job that they enjoyed. However, through discussion, it was apparent that there were circumstances in their daily work that caused them to struggle. These struggles sometimes loomed so large that the participants expressed extreme frustration. In Table 4.5, teachers' feelings are placed on a continuum, stretching from Satisfied to Very Frustrated. Within the categories are comments/issues that were voiced in connection with these feelings.

Table 4.5. *Summary of Findings*

Teacher Solidarity
Teachers supportive of each other in discussion and opinions through silence and/or agreement Teachers support & enjoy their teaching teams Teachers lean on one another rather than seek administrative assistance

Teachers' Response towards Race			
← Awareness →	← Denial →	← Confusion →	← Avoidance →
Caring	Deficit Thinking		
Students School Parents Each other	Towards students Towards parents Towards community Towards Administration		

← Continued Teacher Efforts →	← Avoidance of Teacher Responsibility →
Racial sensitivity Conventional classroom management and instruction	Race, racial & cultural issues Black/White Achievement Gap Shared Leadership Culturally Responsive Instructional methods Culturally Responsive Behavior Management

Teachers' Feelings		
← Satisfied →	← Struggling →	← Very Frustrated →
• Enjoy their colleagues • Like their students • Want to make a difference • Want to be at Carver • Love their job • Like their assignment • Like their room • Feel relatively safe	• Students • Parents • Community • Effectiveness • Teaching • Safety • Lack of resources • Time • No aides • Lack of volunteers	• With students & parents • With administration • Dislike their assignment • Difficult schedule • Too many students • "always some new hoop" • Too many demands • Giving up – "tired of it all" • Wanting to leave • May take early retirement

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study was to examine how other White, female teachers view their teaching of African American students, stemmed from four realizations:

- The condition of education for African American students.

- My desire to effectively address the learning needs of my own students.

- My personal growth in cultural competency and resulting changes in my teaching.

- My interest in teacher education and professional development that would create better teachers of African American students.

I was curious as to what other teachers at Carver Elementary may have learned in their multicultural classes, self-study, and/or work-shops, and to what degree they incorporated such information or research into their practices. I wondered if other teachers shared my struggle and desire to further increase understanding of teaching in a setting that is filled with significant daily challenges.

As I have attended conferences and considered the plethora of material written on issues of education, pedagogy, and social justice, I have questioned, like so many have, what is the real cause of the achievement gap between Black and White students? If multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching could promote change, why is culturally responsive teaching progressing so slowly? And, if progress in closing the achievement gap is not being made, why is it not? What keeps teachers from teaching to empower?

Within my teaching, I have struggled to apply material I learned on culturally responsive teaching in that it takes time and concerted effort to adopt a new way of thinking and doing. This caused me to question if connecting this pedagogy to the classroom is difficult for other teachers as well. In a conversation with an African American colleague, I was once told, "We don't teach through a multicultural perspective." I was confused. I thought to myself, "Well I sure am trying, isn't everyone?"

With these musings in mind and believing that my research needed a local connection, I designed my research study to both satisfy my curiosity and passion and to give me direction as I consider how I can best serve our students at Carver Elementary and around the district in which I am employed. My objective included the possibility of adding trustworthy material to the conversation at large in order to advance the education of African American students who have been marginalized by our schools and society.

As I refined my research approach, I chose to focus on White, female teachers who have taught at Carver Elementary for at least three years. The goal of the study was to explore the attitudes of teachers towards their students and to examine their attitudes towards their students' achievement by looking at the Black/White Achievement Gap. The questions that guided my research were:

RQ 1. How do White, female teachers see their African American students, parents, and community?

RQ 2. How do White, female teachers view the Black/White Achievement Gap and their teaching in regard to their students' achievement?

Since my desire was to go to the source of the data, I chose the use of focus groups as a method of obtaining data. With this method I could give teachers an opportunity to exchange ideas, build upon each other's contributions, and collaborate in ways that allowed for both individual opinions and group consensus, while allowing them to be heard in a safe environment. In hopes of better understanding issues of race and achievement, I also wanted to add teachers' voices to existing research around the topic of White teachers teaching African American students.

Limitations

An inherent limitation of this study was the inability to generalize the findings. Due to the small sample size, it is not representative and no statistical significance can be attached to my findings. The homogenous nature of the sample limits its transferability to other populations and the potential to precisely replicate it, as once a focus group has disbanded, it is impossible to recapture or recreate the conversation. The study relied on the participants' ability to recall experiences and their willingness to share. The nature of discussion around race, however, makes it possible that participants were not forthcoming or were reluctant to divulge their true opinions. It is also possible that my position as insider researcher may have inhibited participants in their responses. And, despite my best efforts, I may have been biased in any aspect of the study.

Helms' (1990) White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) was not used as part of this study. While using an attitude inventory would have strengthened the findings in regard to an individual's status of development within racial identity and may

have allowed a direct correlation between individuals and their responses, I chose not to use the survey so that the study would be framed without restrictive parameters. Participants may have been reluctant to volunteer for the study if they thought they would be analyzed individually by a fellow colleague for their racial attitudes.

Another limitation of the study was that there were no classroom observations. While comparing participants' discourse with their classroom practices would have provided additional information, it would have involved another level of data gathering. It also would have been logistically difficult to include classroom observations as a practitioner researcher.

Findings: Solidarity in Whiteness, Friendship, and Teaching Assignment

While this study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of students, achievement, and their teaching, race became the umbrella under which the findings emerged. Findings suggest that the participants in this study have built a bond of solidarity around their Whiteness and their positions as White teachers in a predominantly Black school. These participants have developed, and value, a connection of friendship, experiences, and support, all of which grew through their work relationship. (Participants did not know one another prior to working at Carver Elementary.) Their likenesses, shared experiences, stories, students, and the *school,* with all its implications, are the *glue* that holds them together and are what allows them to reinforce and support each other on a daily basis. Within the context of their teaching, this *glue* appears to have assisted them in developing and maintaining like attitudes and behaviors around race. Their bond of

solidarity appears directly tied to the theories of minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, 1970), prejudice, and in-group/out-group theory (Allport, 1954). Minimal group paradigm theory states that human beings by nature categorize and negatively discriminate against, even over trivial matters, out-groups (Tajfel, 1970; Howard, 1999). Prejudice and in-group/out-group theories show that predictable group behaviors include the tendency for individuals to seek out their own kind, develop relationships, and support each other in thinking and actions (Allport, 1954; Diller & Moule, 2005; Pang, 2001).

As participants shared their stories, perspectives, and feelings, manifestations of their individual and collective racial identity status emerged. The participants liberally used disclaimers, avoidance techniques, colorblindness, and stereotypes, and spontaneously shared their *outsider* feelings as outcomes of their thinking throughout the focus group discussions. The participants' responses mirrored findings in current research on White identity and behavior around race (Delpit, 1995; Howard, 1999). Though utterances indicated some variance in participants' positioning, participants appeared to have more similarities than differences as individuals, just as the two focus groups were more alike than not. Their bond of solidarity appeared to reinforce their individual and collective thinking. This thinking affects the way they look at their students and conduct their practice, as suggested through their discussions.

Discussions around Race: Perspectives for Interpretations

Four premises guided this study: (1) race is a social construct around which people organize their identities and behavior (Omi & Winant, 1994); (2) racism is the institutionalization of social injustice based on skin color, physical characteristics and cultural difference (Kivel, 2002); (3) prejudice is a preconceived judgment or opinion typically based on limited information (Tatum, 1997); and (4) we are enculturated into our racial identity or way of being and stages of racial identity produce specific behaviors (Helms, 1990; Howard, 1999).

According to Greene and Abt-Perkins (2003), critical race theorists view racism as a social practice rather than locate it in individual acts. Framing racism in this way allows us to consider that racism is a form of oppression, not based on personal prejudices, but stemming from a system that includes cultural messages, and institutional policies and practices (Tatum, 1997). This perspective of racism also puts the responsibility to make policy decisions that create equal opportunities for society members, on those in power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Issues of social justice are ultimately about the collective action of ridding society of inequities that keep people from equal opportunities.

Many changes are needed within society and our educational system if we want to create a more equitable playing field (Gay, 2000). Within the educational system, reforms in areas of policy, funding, and administration are desperately needed to address the state of education for students of color (Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 1999). However, proponents of culturally responsive teaching work towards solutions for the classroom

(Delpit, 1995; Diller & Moule, 2005; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2001).

Three crucial assumptions from culturally responsive teaching theory apply in this study: culture is inherently connected to teaching through purpose and the players involved; conventional paradigms are doomed to failure because of their tie to deficit thinking; and good intentions are not enough.

In this study, I looked to critical race theory to better understand that the participants, as a collective entity, are made up of individuals who are a product of American society and educational system. In particular, I have focused on mitigating factors that serve to reinforce teachers' participation in racist discourses. As a group, these participants have been influenced, not only by their personal racial development, but also by the structures in place that weave a story for White teachers in an *inner city school*. Most teachers are well aware of the perceptions and discourses common in society that denote children of color, neediness, poverty, violence, fear, dysfunctional families and upbringings, poor language skills, and lack of resources as *givens* in inner city schools. These perceptions are reinforced when teachers find themselves in a situation that appears to validate the stereotypes; they are faced with a decision to resist or buy in. Carver Elementary, as the setting for this study, has served to reinforce negative thinking. Participants have dealt with significant, ongoing challenges over time due to changes in administrative leadership, lack of resources and support (both physical and in personnel by the district), and shared stressful experiences ranging from reporting child neglect to deaths of students and parents.

I have also turned to culturally responsive teaching theorists to examine, not only how participants view their students and their teaching, but also to consider what could

provide much needed improvement in classrooms. Participants' attitudes in this study

reflect existing research data that have driven the development of culturally responsive

teaching theory. This suggests that participants are not unique, but rather they are a

product of a system that has enculturated them in their unintended racist thinking and

discourse. Culturally responsive teaching provides a framework from which to operate

that allows teachers a way to resist negative discourse and a way to move in a positive

direction.

*Discussions Under the Race Umbrella: R.Q. 1. How do White Female Teachers
See Their African American Students, Parents, & Community?*

Color-Blind

Participants consistently wanted to make it clear that they do not see their students

"by color," rather that they view them all the same. Throughout the discussions,

participants used "color-blind" language, choosing to ignore a salient feature of their

students and failing to recognize their students' cultural heritage. Just as Dodd and Irving

(2006), I believe that when teachers ignore a student's race, they do a disservice to

students because all cultures are not the same.

Caring

Findings support participants have a strong sense of caring towards their students,

demonstrating a critical characteristic needed in culturally responsive teaching (e.g.

Cochran-Smith, 1995a, 1995b; Cooper, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002). Caring produces

action as true caregivers commit to act in the best interest of their care-recipients

(Noddings, 1984, 1992). Participants not only professed care through statements such as,

"I love my kids," but also through the emotion that was present in their dialogue when relating stories that bore examples of their dedication in their teaching efforts. Participants described relationships that resulted from persistence in developing interpersonal relationships with students and parents. Acts of stern guidance and classroom management were also recalled by participants. Delpit (1995) considers these acts of teaching as caring when she describes African American interactional styles that include:

> Controlling the class; exhibiting personal power; establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships; displaying emotion to garner student respect; demonstrating the belief that all students can learn; establishing a standard of achievement and "pushing" students to achieve the standard; and holding the attention of the students. (p.142)

When considering the care needed to produce true, empowering results, three red flags appeared which indicated a possible lack of understanding by the participants. The first flag was raised when comparing the findings to culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2000) juxtaposed a caring and non-caring person when she said, "Caring interpersonal relationships are characterized by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants. Uncaring ones are distinguished by impatience, intolerance, dictations, and control" (p.47). Though participants professed caring and spoke of their patience and persistence, participants also expressed traits considered to be uncaring.

The second red flag was raised when considering reciprocation of care-giving, as described by Noddings (1984, 1992). Throughout the focus group discussions, participants mentioned instances of feeling the *outsider*. While this was oftentimes in reference to parents, the lines between students and parents were frequently blurred and

the participants' perception of ingratitude created a "why do I bother" response. The

quality of caring could also be diminished as a result of the participants feeling

disrespected by students and parents, an action which would also show a lack of

reciprocity.

Finally, the third flag appeared as I considered teachers' perspectives of *saving*

their students from their families or themselves. As stated in chapter four, this creates a

situation that emphasizes the power of the teacher and the deficit nature of the "other," in

this case the student or family. It also puts forth the message that "I can solve your

problems" with a strong undercurrent of superiority (Pang, 2001).

Deficit Thinking

Deficit thinking appeared the loudest in the findings, as participants repeatedly

voiced their deficit thinking towards students, parents, and administration. Deficit

thinking appears, throughout the literature, to be linked to a multiple of consequences for

African American students, including disciplinary and special education referrals and the

lack of high expectations (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter &

Grant, 1999). Participants dwelled on discipline and poor behavior, spoke about the need

to refer or fix students, and brought up the lack of educability. Deficit thinking discourse

that disparaged parents and administration appeared rooted in a deficit culture model, as

participants referred to dysfunctional families, lack of museum/travel experiences,

deprived background knowledge, social ineptness, and lack of moral fiber. In describing

adults in the community, participants used multiple stereotypes commonly used in

conjunction with African Americans, including "laziness," "incompetence," "entitlement," and "drug use/incarceration."

All participants expressed what appeared as deeply embedded deficit thinking towards students and parents. Teaching from a deficit thinking perspective prevents teachers from acknowledging the strengths and contributions students have to offer. Additionally, the way teachers think about their students affects, not only how they develop their curriculum and instruction, but also the decisions made on the student's behalf (Gay, 2000; Landsman & Lewis, 2006, Weiner, 2006).

Discussions Under the Race Umbrella RQ 2: How do White, Female Teachers View the Black/White Achievement Gap & Their Teaching in Regard to Their Students' Achievement?

The Achievement Gap

Participants consistently avoided the possibility that race (either as a socially constructed identity or as a population determinant) could have an effect on achievement, possibly indicating their discomfort of discussing racial differences. In their denial, they ignored the possibility of cultural and institutionalized racism in our society or schools (Diller & Moule, 2005). Participants demonstrated a strong tendency to "blame the victim" when considering the causes of the achievement gap. Participants attributed the source of achievement discrepancies to the following:

- Socio-economic conditions or poverty;
- lack of parental support, education, guidance, values, and/or parenting skills; and

- the students who "were unmotivated," "had poor behavior," "felt entitled," "won't do their homework," and "don't know how to work that hard."

Findings suggest that participants saw the issue of low achievement as being completely outside of themselves. While searching for answers, in addition to blaming the students and parents, they attributed low achievement to lack of money, volunteers, technology, and general resources. Just as Larson (2003) reported, in "Negotiating Race in Classroom Research: Tensions and Possibilities," participants in this study appeared embedded in the institutionalized racism of deficit thinking that relieved them of all responsibility of student achievement. Participants' predominant discourses replicated what Larson reported,

> Teachers overwhelmingly located failure in the students, not the curriculum, instructional practices, or institutional constraints. Moreover, they described their students as incompetent English speakers, attributing their reading difficulties to a lack of "language" and to their backgrounds. (p.94)

Teaching

Classroom management was foremost in participants' minds when asked about their teaching of African American students. Participants spoke of using a strong approach with very direct language, even demonstrating their meaning with a loud, harsh voice. They collectively agreed that one could not teach at Carver Elementary with a "less-frill, sing-song-y" demeanor. Participants recalled receiving advice from members of the African American community to "yell" or "get in their (student's) face." These recollections seemed to be used as backup for their approach. While culturally responsive teaching uses an African American teacher style that incorporates direct language and authoritative demeanor, it appeared that participants' efforts to use strong

discipline were more often about maintaining teacher-control than about empowering the student.

Discussion around instruction was limited. It appeared as though participants had never considered the idea, or thought that delineating instruction specifically for African American students was unnecessary and somehow wrong. Participants did speak of using direct instruction, especially in reading, and providing students with "lots of background information" in order to address students' "lack of experience." Participants also agreed that they needed to "provide the basics." They spoke at length about the limited strategies available to them as teachers. Participants discussed their inability to do projects, display work in the halls, or do "much group work," due to students' behavior and lack of work ethic. Participants also claimed that lack of resources and support had an effect on their instruction.

Conclusion: Real Situations – Real Possibilities.

A critical finding of this study was teachers' unintended racism, as demonstrated by their participation in color-blind and racist discourses that included deficit thinking towards students, parents, and the community. Participants' attitudes served to further their unintended racism through their quest to "save" their students and families, not realizing that essential among teachers identified as culturally relevant is a respect for and value of the students and their home communities (Gay, 2000). This enculturated, pervasive deficit paradigm serves to limit students at Carver Elementary, contributing to inequities inherent in the school system. Findings support that participants' deficit

thinking affects their classroom management, instructional choices, and decisions for their students.

Two critical findings that would serve to improve the situation were the deep collegial bond and friendship between the participants and attitudes of caring, persistence, and a willingness to serve the needs of their students. Participants' solidarity and positive attitudes could be the basis for their ability to challenge their deficit thinking frameworks. Their collective ethic of caring could be the springboard that takes them from a traditional caring model to one that is built on culturally relevant practices (Parsons, 2005). Because participants individually and collectively placed students at the center of their reason for being at Carver Elementary, it is a natural place from which to begin. Gay (2000) explained that if:

> [T]eachers stopped blaming and trying to "fix" the students, validated the worth of the students' cultural heritages, accepted the inevitability of cultural influences on their own beliefs and behaviors, disavowed the sanctity of educational conventions, and placed the burden of change upon themselves … (change can occur). (p. 211)

We can be assured that as White, female educators that have been educated and live in America, we have participated in some form of racism by virtue of our group membership. Prejudiced thinking is also nearly unavoidable, given the consequences of living in a racist society. However, our personal beliefs and attitudes either support or confront prejudice and racism. As individuals we need to be responsible for how we treat others and realize that we are either confronting or contributing to injustice, just like we are either perpetuating the status quo or not. Just as Lewis believes (2003), I believe that "the only choice is to acknowledge the elephant in the schoolroom and to struggle openly with the ways race influences much of what transpires" (p. 11). Racial meaning and

racial identity are reproduced in society and schools as students come to understand how race is learned and lived, constructed, and negotiated in everyday routines (Lewis, 2003). Teachers suffer unneeded stress due to adhering to an embedded, faulty paradigm that blames the victims of a system that marginalizes significant numbers of students. Unless teachers actively resist a deficit thinking model, enculturated norms, and institutionalized practices, they, too, can be marginalized by their circumstances and do nothing to empower their students.

Implications of Study

Systemic reforms are needed to address the state of education for African American students. While fodder for entertainment, headlines, and political posturing, the litany of inequities that contribute to disproportionately poor academic achievement for African American students prevent us from moving forward. Though the results of this study should be applied with caution, due to its inherent limitations, it can nevertheless suggest, along with previous studies and current research, that serious systematic action needs to be implemented both beyond and within the school walls.

Public Policy Makers

Beyond the school walls, using a critical race theory lens, I suggest that the burden for change lies most heavily on the collective enterprise of those in positions of power to affect policy. While teachers armed with honorable intentions can "make a difference," the challenge at hand is too great for individual efforts if we don't want to

look back in another fifty years and ask, "Why aren't we further along?" Policy makers in all areas of education must serve through a social justice perspective that works to put equitable opportunities in place for all students. Findings from this and like studies suggest that a change in policy is needed in the areas of schools, curriculum, teacher training / professional development, student referral/placement systems, administrative decision making, and accountability systems:

1. Schools – Bring all schools up to standard with like resources, funding, and support systems.

2. Curriculum – Ensure that all curriculums reflect the needs, culture, and contributions of all peoples.

3. Teacher training/professional development:

   - Make multiculturalism, cultural identity development, and culturally responsive pedagogy the norm in teacher training regardless of where would-be teachers think they will teach.

   - Provide mentors and ongoing professional development that works from teachers' strengths to support development of cultural competency and culturally responsive pedagogy, realizing that teachers' education is a continuous process.

4. Student referral systems/student placement – Create equitable systems that work in the best interests of children. Overhaul systems that track students according to race and other delimiters, reducing the disproportionality of referrals for students of color.

5. District administrative decisions – Schools must be staffed with personnel that are up to the task of supporting needed change.

6. Accountability systems – A system must be put in place that ensures adherence to specified goals and timelines.

While these enumerations loom large, recall that abolition was a public issue that took two-thirds of the 19th century to accomplish. Civil and voting rights were public policy issues that were eventually afforded, and Japanese American struggled years to make reparations for the internment of citizens during World War II (Kivel, 2002). I agree with Kivel when he asserts:

> Which issues are addressed, how they are addressed, who gets to participate in the discussion, and what solutions are considered viable are all influenced by racism. As informed and active citizens, we can influence the nature of public policy discussion and decisions. (p. 174)

I believe we can, in fact we must, organize around issues of equity in our educational system in order to create a better future for our citizens and our country. As Banks (1997) stated:

> The need for schools to play an important role in a civic education project that recognizes both the challenges and opportunities of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity has perhaps never been greater in the nation's history. (p. 5)

Teachers and School Administrators

Within the school walls, reform cannot wait. Teachers and administrators, who went into education because they care, can resist racist paradigms and work for change. If teachers genuinely care, they can deliberately transform the state of education one school at a time. Participants in this study demonstrated a strong sense of solidarity. Good administrators, who genuinely care about students, will work with their teachers,

building on their strengths and solidarity and pushing them to embrace change and opportunity in pedagogic strategies the serve the students' need for empowerment.

Participants in this study reported having participated in multicultural classes and selected workshops around cultural issues, but such classes appeared as isolated events that lacked continuous development and support. As Howard (1999) and Vavrus (2002) suggested, teacher training needs to include on-going study, reflection, and support in order to move the teacher to a place where they can teach from a solid stance of cultural understanding and anti-racist teacher identity. Focus group participants appreciated the opportunity to come together and talk. Jokingly, they said they'd be at my house every Tuesday because they felt so good about sharing. These attitudes reveal teachers want and need the opportunity to discuss issues with their colleagues. An in-tune principal can tap into these feelings and promote opportunities that allow teachers to come together to work on their professional growth and development, as well as on issues that concern them and their students.

On another note, teachers need to take personal responsibility for their philosophical and pedagogical development, looking inside themselves, their practice, and educational research for answers to hard questions. Teachers are educators and, as such, cultural transmitters. They must therefore be life-long learners so that, prepared with current knowledge and understanding, they can teach students how to mitigate the effects of societal racism in their lives, empowering them with knowledge and skills that are relevant for their futures. Individuals who choose to teach need to nurture their ideals, seek out others for support, and work to build collaborative and collective efforts within their schools. They need to work side by side with their administrators to do

what's in the best interest of the students, parents, and community, as they help to create future citizens of the world. Above all, as educators, teachers need to arm themselves with the necessary knowledge to be able to resist paradigms of thought that leave their own students out of the equation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several suggestions for future research have emanated from this study that could serve to advance understanding of teachers' attitudes in cross-cultural settings and further substantiate findings from this study. It is recommended that future studies include the use of Helms' (1990) White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS). Use of the WRIAS would add an additional perspective to the study, allowing for deeper understanding of the teachers' attitudes. It is also recommended that data collection include classroom observations. Adding classroom observations would extend the findings as observed teacher practices could be compared with teacher discourse and WRIAS. Student voices could also be added to research around cross-cultural relationships in the classroom. Though sometimes difficult to accomplish, adding student voices would provide another perspective and possibly reveal existing realities for students in a cross-cultural student/teacher relationship. Finally, a longitudinal study designed to assess teachers attitudes over time would serve to further inform the strength and validity of various programs of teacher training and professional development.

Epilogue: Unspoken Realities

As researcher, my unspoken reality is complex. And while I do not want to label my colleagues, the truth of my situation is that I have uncovered a reality I must act upon. I'm hesitant to share directly with my colleagues because I'm fearful of their reactions and possible lack of understanding. But the situation for students at Carver Elementary is worse than I had anticipated. Several unaddressed and unspoken realities exist:

- Carver is a majority Black school with experienced long-term White, female teachers who exhibit racist thinking, discourse, and practices.

- Teachers participate in unintended racism; in fact most are unaware that they do.

- Teachers work in a Black school but don't recognize institutionalized racist behavior or practice.

- Teachers, in their solidarity, protect each other even when they recognize a racist attitude.

- Teachers are marginalized, yet perpetuate the marginalization of their students as opposed to empowering them.

Negotiating race in this study triggered strong emotions and many dilemmas. As both a practitioner researcher and a participant researcher, I was faced with tough decisions regarding my presence in the focus group sessions, my analysis, and my final report. Within the sessions, I was well aware of racist statements and collusions among participants, but I remained quiet as I in turn colluded to gather my data. At times I made statements like, "Just to be sure I understood you correctly; I heard you say…." When meeting for the second session, I allowed participants to summarize what they said

earlier, wondering if, hoping, they would recant. But, and though presenting the participants transcripts and summaries provided the opportunity, no one chose to object. As I worked my analysis, I looked, to no avail, for ways to justify participants' statements. And, as I wrote up my final report, I was struck by tension and indecision, nearly unable to move forward.

My dilemma springs from my feelings of caring and empathy for my colleagues. I am part of their solidarity in many ways. We have shared personal trials and more challenges than most can imagine around our students. Through my years of teaching at Carver Elementary, I, too, have struggled in turning off voices of my Whiteness and have participated in damaging discourses, either by thoughtlessness or through silence. Even though I have worked to resist deficit thinking towards my students and have attempted to be a culturally responsive teacher, I now realize assumptions I made about my colleagues were left unexamined, and therefore I missed opportunities to do more. My silence was complicit.

The winning side of my dilemma is students. Good intentions are not enough. I care deeply about and empathize with the Carver community and beyond. I am working to be an ally; I want to fight the fight of injustice and take action for what is right. How I do that is what becomes so difficult. What do I do about what I have uncovered? I gave my promise of confidentiality to my colleagues (my friends), but I must find a way to actively make a difference so that what I found out doesn't become an *Unspoken Reality*.

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Appendix A

Participant Questionnaire

Participant Questionnaire

Name: _____

Pseudonym one-name choice: _____

Age: _____ School Year you began at Carver: _____

Total Years of Experience at Carver: _____

Below, please delineate grades taught / years at each grade:

_____

_____

Please list where else you have taught, what grade and for how long. Include the general

demographics of the school. (For example Carver is currently about 67% African

American / 100% Title I)

_____

_____

_____

Please list any teacher recognition you have received:

_____

Educational Background:

College	Degree Received – Date

Please list and briefly describe any Multicultural Classes you took in college:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please list and briefly describe any classes/professional development courses on

race/culture in which you have participated in as a teacher.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please talk about any self-study you have done in regards to racial or cultural issues.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. It will serve as background

information for the study. Please know that this questionnaire is confidential. If you

want to add more thoughts, please attach an additional sheet.

Appendix B

Summary for Group A: Sessions 1 & 2

Summary for Group A: Sessions 1 & 2

We began the sessions with all but one of you giving a little vignette of your initial experience including how it is that you began working here. You included some of your past experiences that have shaped your perspectives; for example, growing up in a diverse neighborhood. In varying degrees you recalled some of your apprehensions and first experiences in dealing with race at Carver Elementary.

1. *How do you view your African American students, their parents, and the community?*

This question was addressed throughout the sessions. All of you mentioned or inferred how much you care for your students. You have a desire to help them be successful in school so that they can participate in business and society. Respect for their physical being as African Americans was also evident in mentioning of their hair etc. When addressing their race or culture, you generally agreed that both in matters of instruction and classroom management, you view the children as individuals not as to their race. One of you said that "you're an equal opportunity disciplinarian." As a group you discussed your concern for their well-being in how you felt African American children in our school generally deal with a lot of situations that are beyond their control. Comment was made that African American students are capable, but have "so many things against them that make it hard for them." It was mentioned that some children are "victims of their family," "chaos" and/or parents who do not support them as one would expect.

Some students are seen as being unmotivated and having lost their desire for learning, somewhat due to family circumstances, but also due to them not having appropriate role models or a desire to get an education. It was felt that a lack of resources makes it difficult for students to be successful. Some students are seen as extremely disruptive taking away the opportunity to learn from others. Some older students are seen as disrespectful to teachers and not willing to listen. It was also mentioned that a feeling of entitlement exhibited by some students, can be difficult to deal with as a teacher. Feelings of great concern and impending doom were expressed for students who don't appear able to fight the circumstances controlling their lives.

It was generally felt that supportive parents have more successful children in school and examples of caring parents were given. However, a feeling of exasperation, frustration, and anger was expressed towards other parents resulting

in some feelings of "Why bother?" This frustration and anger caused a general feeling of disrespect for such parents. Much was said about parents who appear incompetent and do not support their children in ways that help them to be successful. For example, not providing assistance with homework, not following through with discipline or general parenting expectations, not attending conferences or activities, not signing behavior contracts, not providing assistance with reading or speech, and allowing children to use the "Race Card." Additionally, it was felt that many parents fall into a category of chaos or dysfunctional behavior. Examples recalled included those items mentioned above, plus tardy and attendance issues, not knowing what the child is doing after school, not showing up for meetings, issues of corporal punishment, inappropriate behavior at school such as yelling at a teacher or yelling at or hitting students, illegal behavior such as drugs and alcohol, and relationship issues. Discussion included how these phenomenon appeared to be part of a vicious cycle based on money issues/poverty.

When thinking about the community, the discussion went back and forth between family and community, making it hard to draw a line between the two. Again, the chaos and lack of involvement were mentioned as well as lack of attendance at school community activities. Lack of respect for events was mentioned recalling the general nature of behavior at such events as Back to School Night & the Winter Program where it is difficult to have quiet for the person on the microphone or for performers.

2. *Describe your relationship with the African American community.*
   a. *How do you think the African American community views you?*
   b. *How do you feel you are treated by the AA community?*

The general perception of how the African American community views and treats you is ambivalent. You all mentioned that you feel as though you are treated nicely or politely, yet, all of you spoke more than once about feeling like an outsider; as though a wall exists between you and the parent community or that there is an arm's length between you and them. In fact, it was said that, "We definitely don't feel a part of the community in any way, shape, or form." One of you disagreed and was surprised, feeling as though the tendency to assert yourself and be visible made the difference in feeling more a part of the community. All of you spoke of initial apprehension and experiences that made you realize that the African American community sees your Whiteness and in some cases, your age. In fact, two of you used the expression, "feeling White" at different points in the conversation. You also recalled emotionally laden experiences that initiated

you into the community, as well as experiences that demonstrated your feeling of being disrespected. Mention was also made of the questioning of your teaching or the way you do your job by parents/community.

3. *How do people you come in contact with outside of school, view your job setting?*

All of you had something to say about your peers' reactions to your job setting. Most comments from people centered on your safety or fear of the unknown such as, "Do you wear a bulletproof vest?" or "That's so sweet of you to work there." Mention was also made of how people in different areas of the city may have skewed perceptions. The other common reaction was for people to compliment you for teaching at Carver.

4. *How do you think people's reactions to your job affect your perspective?*

This question was answered only by referring to your reaction to comments from peers. Generally, the feeling was either ambivalence or of feeling defensive. Your reaction was determined by the manner in which the comment was made. Some reference was made to the lack of understanding by the peer or outside community. All of you inferred that teaching at Carver was not a big deal in your mind, and you made light of the notion of "inner city" school.

5. *As a White, female teacher working in a predominantly Black school, what do you see as your biggest challenge?*

One challenge mentioned by all, was that of not saying something that might offend a member of the African American community. Along with that was the challenge to understand the culture. Discussion ensued about how difficult it can be to participate in the community when the city itself is not seen as an integrated city. As a group you viewed challenge of speaking/acting appropriate as your number one concern. The conversation then went in another direction, but later it was brought up that building background knowledge was a challenge because the students need a lot of input before they can read stories etc. within the curriculum.

6. *What is your perspective of the commonly phrased "Black/White Achievement Gap"?*

All of you agreed that there is an achievement gap but you attribute it to class rather than race. Mention was made of the White middle-class European

culture and how students from different back-grounds are asked to participate in ways in which they're not accustomed. That being said, you agreed you want to help your students to be able to participate in the business culture, if they choose. However, even when attributing the gap to class, questions remain.

7. *What do you see as an explanation for the Black/White Achievement Gap?*

Again, the gap is seen as being the result of class or power issues, rather than race. Reasons for the gap include an attitude of not caring or valuing education, family culture, lack of role models, availability of resources for the family, cycles of poverty, cycles of chaos, making excuses, bad attendance, discipline issues, possible poor health due to poor diet, and lack of brain stimulation through the playing of musical instruments and/or involvement in sports. While the feeling was that it is a class issue, it was felt that it played out in Carver as being due to race because of the high African American population. Mention was also made of the lack of exposure to varied vocabulary in a home with uneducated parents and that the children begin school with a lower knowledge base. Some mention was also made of children who were born drug affected and how that may affect not only their academic achievement but behavior as well.

Discussion also included frustration with parents who don't seem to support the teacher in their efforts. Lack of assistance, support, and follow-through from parents with homework etc. was seen as detrimental to the child's success. The child is seen as a victim of families and circumstances, and the children are seen as being too young to have any control in the matter. It was also brought up that some parents believe that the school as a system does not allow for the differences of teaching Black children.

Societal issues were also discussed. Concern was shown over families living with lead paint in their houses, effects of drugs, generational poverty, and below standard teaching in Head Start schools as compared to Pre-schools to which White middle-class parents may send their children.

When asked about the Achievement Gap in terms of the students at Carver specifically, it was felt that a lack of resources exists compared to other settings and that the lack of resources, including the lack of parent volunteers, affects the education of students at Carver. Lack of appropriate role-models for both students and parents was seen as an issue in that, students and parents are both in need of peer pressure and peer models to assist them in participating in the

educational process. The competence level of Carver students was questioned as stories of students not measuring up in project work ensued. This was debated, however, as some students could be singled out for doing good work depending upon circumstances including which teacher the students had, giving credit to teachers with high expectations and teaching abilities. Some of you felt you had students that might be average to competitive in another setting, while other students might become reserved and shut down.

As the discussion continued it switched over to the administration of the school and the affects of present leadership.

8. *What, if anything, do you do to address the specific learning needs of African American students?*

With this question, it was brought up that you do not think of the student's color, but rather see them as an individual. You agreed that regardless of their race, you assess their needs according to their skills and academic output. At this point the question of building background knowledge also came up. It was stated that there is a much higher need for building basic content knowledge. Reference was also made to the amount of direct instruction that is utilized as a teaching strategy.

The majority of the time devoted to this question was spent on discussing the difference in Classroom Management. Everyone agreed that a less-frill, down to business attitude was needed and that the sweet-sing-song voice employed in other settings wouldn't work at Carver. Comment was made as to how the style of classroom management employed at Carver may not be tolerated in another school. The use of a stern, strict, and direct approach was seen as a necessity at Carver and examples of what would happen otherwise were given. Examples were also given of the Black community endorsing this style of behavior management. Such examples by other employees and parents were seen as modeling or direction for White teachers. An example was given to demonstrate how being tough with a student can result in positive outcomes.

Yet, some of you stated how this type of approach was not your preference. A desire for being able to run learning centers, projects, and a more relaxed classroom was expressed.

9. *What do you see as your most important role or responsibility as a teacher of African American students?*

This question was answered in conjunction with the previous question and not answered directly, but at one point it was inferred that "high expectations" were necessary for good teaching.

10. *What would your teaching look like in a majority White school? In what ways would it be similar or different?*

When asked this question, the discussion went back to class. It was believed that teaching in a low SES White school would be similar to Carver in that one would need to use more direct instruction, build background knowledge, and use a tight classroom management style. Comparing that to a higher SES White school, it was believed that the teacher could "ease back on management and would also be able to do a lot more with the kids because you can have parents extending projects and things at home…" It was also believed that there would be a lot more parent involvement and more available resources. This was contrasted with what couldn't be done at Carver because of such involvement and resources missing.

Students at high SES White schools were seen to benefit from increased recess time, free time, and additional activities afforded them. Teachers in such setting were also thought to be less pressured about covering the basics and meeting test scores enabling them to do more enrichment activities. These ideas were drawn from your past experiences either as student teachers or through association with your children's schools. It was also agreed that the schedules at Carver drive instruction and are a significant source of stress for both teacher and student. The subject of scheduling and the unavailability of educational assistants are seen as particular to Carver/low SES schools.

11. *Describe your comfort level with your teaching assignment.*

All of you said you were quite comfortable with the kids and families. The majority of the discussion centered on dissatisfaction with administration. Two of you said you were extremely unhappy citing a lack of support, follow-through, and leadership as reasons for your discontent. Many examples were given to explain your position. This break-down in administration is contributing to your stress and desire to possibly resign. Within this discussion two of you

acknowledged the situation, but in your positions didn't necessarily feel as though it caused great concern for you personally. You spoke of the benefits of being unencumbered by someone looking over your shoulder. The lack of staff cohesiveness and administrative support/leadership was seen as detrimental to the work-place making it a less desirable work location.

12. Why do you teach in this setting?

Reasons for teaching at Carver included a desire for diversity, a desire to be a role-model, a desire to help those less fortunate and a desire to teach in a low SES setting. A sense of real caring for students was expressed.

13. What brought you here initially?

One of you was assigned here with some choice, but the rest of you never stated an answer directly, other than taking an open position in a school that fit your desired criteria. A desire to work in such a setting was expressed as stated in question 12.

14. Why do you stay?

Again, caring for the students and diversity seem to be the primary motivation, as well as the support and friendship of your immediate co-workers, but it was also mentioned that the logistics of working at Carver fit into the demands of personal lives.

15. What would cause you to leave?

Reasons for leaving could include life changes such as having a family or issues of commuting, however, at this time two of you said you are considering a job change because of issues connected to the school's administration. Lack of appropriate support and understanding, the feeling of being valued and respected, and the lack of staff cohesion are seen as problems that at this time are nearly insurmountable. Statements of desperation were made, such as "I don't know how much more I'm willing to take." Support from within your peer group is important to you and gives you cause for hesitation.

Two of you expressed that you are relatively content especially considering how your work and personal life fit together, but you also questioned what the future may hold. One of you raised the question of teacher effectiveness

in regards to being a White teacher in a predominantly Black school. You also questioned the seemingly constant struggle to teach in a setting such as Carver, that has so many challenges with both systemic issues and student issues.

Conclusion:

In the course of your discussion, many issues surfaced that do not specifically fit one of the questions. However, discussion about the difficulties with administration, indirectly contribute to the understanding of the topic at hand. Issues recalled of lack of support, leadership, and understanding come up when dealing with difficult situations with both students and parents thereby compounding the conflict. Through your discussion you also stated how these administration issues contribute to your feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration. Much was said about collegial understanding and support that also served to complete the picture of your position as a White teacher in a predominantly Black school.

Appendix C

Summary for Group B: Sessions 1 & 2

Summary for Group B: Sessions 1 & 2

You began the first focus group session by giving background information about yourself as a teacher and how you came to be at Carver elementary. Each of you taught at different grade levels prior to taking the position you currently hold. Each of you also shared some of your past experiences of being in cross-cultural situations. For example one of you worked within the Hispanic culture at an Early Learning Center, and another did considerable subbing in various locations, but subbed primarily at Carver before receiving a position. One of you came to Carver as a result of teaching a unique population, which was relocated to Carver.

1. *How do you view your African American students, their parents, and the community?*

All of you spoke about your positive feelings for your students. It is evident that each of you cares deeply about your students and their welfare, and in fact you are defensive of them when challenged about your involvement in the Carver community. It was agreed that young children do not see color, and that when you consider your children, neither do you, but rather you concentrate on the child's needs. You also spoke about respecting your students and their parents, and saw the importance of developing relationships with them. You explained that you believe that teaching in the primary grades allows you to have greater contact with parents, and in varying degrees, you see yourself as an integral partner in the young child's initiation into school.

As a group, you greatly appreciate parents that support you and their children, and repeatedly spoke to how involved parents make a great difference in a child's education. Some of you spoke to looking for ways to assist or encourage parents in their personal situations as part of your being the child's teacher. This included instances of locating resources and encouraging them in completion of their education and/or literacy development.

You also spoke of the challenges you have faced with both children and parents over the years. Your feelings of frustration were tempered with disliking the behavior not the child. Most of these recalled experiences were somewhat emotional events. Examples were given of children who were naughty, mouthy, and down-right difficult to deal with, including instances of children using racial put-downs of you or others, being extremely disruptive, and being non-compliant. You generally agreed that the older the students, the more likely for them to exhibit behavior that is difficult to deal with, including them exchanging racial or

gender put-downs of each other. Generally, you attributed the behavior to bad experiences in their young lives or poor parenting.   Poor parenting was mentioned many times and connected with how it affects your students. Young mothers, who seem angry and vindictive, were seen as being most problematic, and the absence of fathers or a child living in more than one household, was discussed as being chaotic for the child resulting in a lower level of academic and behavioral success at school.

Considerable frustration was expressed with parents who do not support you in your efforts to teach their children. Parents, who do not assist with homework, attend parent-teacher conferences, or follow-through with typical parenting expectations, create a source of stress or dissatisfaction for you as teachers.

Your negative experiences with parents included being yelled at, being subjected to rude behavior, and being accused of "getting into the family business" or racism. These experiences made you feel disrespected and/or devalued. The group agreed that typically it is more difficult to work with young mothers than fathers, and that you felt better-treated by African American men than women. In your conversation you considered the possibility that a mother may feel threatened by a young female, White teacher. You also discussed the difference of being able to "hold your ground" in a confrontation as a White female teacher versus how a Black female teacher might be able to handle the situation. Grandmothers or older mothers were seen in a different light, as were foster parents, as they are "typically friendlier and more supportive."

In your discussion you brought up defensive parents many times. As a group you agreed that a defensive parent creates a particular challenge for you as teachers. It was agreed that defensive parents come in "all colors" and that it is not a race issue, but rather can be attributed to individual differences. These troubled interactions with parents have sometimes made you feel fearful or hesitant of making contact with parents, feeling that it may be easier not to engage in potentially difficult conversations. However, you also mentioned that negative events sometimes allowed you to reflect on how to better deal with such a situation the next time something similar occurred.

One item brought up about African American communities was that of how tightly knit they appear to be and how the extended family stretches beyond biological ties. This was sometimes seen as detrimental such as when a child's care is taken over by a family member that seems ill-equipped to do so.

Secondly, comments were made over the fathering of children and the relationships that are created, cousins, aunties, etc., that are sometimes seen as strange or chaotic. Yet, examples of grandmothers who take over in bad situations were viewed with respect. Sadness was expressed for the young parents who "miss out."

2. *Describe your relationship with the African American community.*
   a. *How do you think the African American community views you?*
   b. *How do you feel you are treated by the AA community?*

When speaking of the community you generally feel that you are respected and treated nicely. You agreed that with age, came more respect and that some segments of the Carver population treat you more respectfully than others. It was said that if you as the teacher, treat them with respect you will likely be treated the same, because they understand that you care about them. However, you also said that you sometimes felt like an outsider. One of you recalled instances of a parent requesting a change of teacher due to you being White, and several times you relayed experiences having to do with being told to "stay out of the family business." Many times, however, situations that caused you to feel like an outsider were brought on by school staff or administration.

3. *How do people you come in contact with outside of school, view your job setting?*

All of you recalled instances of your peers outside of Carver questioning your job setting. Issues brought up usually center on safety; in fact one of your husbands would not allow you to ride a bike or moped. Other comments included talk about weapons and drugs, and yet another peer questioned as to whether you "were wasting your education teaching at Carver." One of you recalled being asked "when you were going to transfer out."

4. *How do you think people's reactions to your job affect your perspective?*

The question of people's perception of you, the teacher working in an "inner city school," drew much reaction. The general response was that people's comments of this nature make you feel defensive and that after having taught here for so long, people have stopped asking. One of you wondered whether people thought you couldn't get a job elsewhere, and another replied that was true due to the number of unemployed teachers at the time your license was issued. One of you said that you thought people expected you to work in a setting like Carver because it matched your personality. But with all this, the general consensus was

that you feel comfortable teaching at Carver, you love the kids and the people with whom you work, so you don't care what people say.

5. *As a White, female teacher working in a predominantly Black school, what do you see as your biggest challenge?*

    When asked this question, a quick response was that of "lack of administrative support." Two of you agreed that this was a big issue, whereas one of you felt that turning a defensive parent or child around was the most challenging, and the fourth didn't really have a big challenge, but agreed that the school's administration played a big part in making things run smoothly and coherently. A significant amount of time was spent discussing the importance of a supportive principal, and examples were drawn from past experiences.

    A big concern is whether or not an African American principal from the community can ever "take the side of the teacher" in a conflict between an African American parent and a White teacher. One of you recalled a meeting where you felt as though it was three against one; with you not granted the opportunity to speak. Examples were remembered that left you doubting the principal's support and recalled strong feelings of being the outsider when in the room with the principal and the family, almost like they're "ganging up on you" or that "you don't have much chance". You also remembered situations where you were told what or what you should not do as a White teacher for example, "White teachers don't yell at Black kids!" This statement creates some confusion, because as White teachers you've also been told to be "tough" or "my kid doesn't understand unless you yell at him." You did agree however, that yelling at your students was not your goal.

    When comparing teaching under a Black principal with teaching under a White principal, you felt that there was a definite difference; that you were much more supported by the White principal. Common among you was that you sought support from your colleagues or solved your problems on your own, rather than seek out the assistance of the administration. One of you has sought the assistance of the teacher's union, but even that didn't satisfactorily solve the situation and now you feel quite distant from the current administration.

    Systemic situations that are generally beyond a teacher's control were also brought up as challenges; those having to do with class size, and demands placed on the teacher. It was noted that these difficulties have a great affect on the teacher's stress level and ability to deal with the day to day duties of teaching.

6. *What is your perspective of the commonly phrased "Black/White Achievement Gap"?*

When asked about the Achievement Gap, the first thought had to do with the TAG program. It's been noticed that there is an imbalance in TAG, with more White students represented than Black students, despite the overall racial balance of the school. Later it was questioned as to whether White parents recommend their children more often than do Black parents.

The discussion centered on the differences in the children according to where they attended pre-school. The feeling was that the achievement gap is not as noticeable at a young age. But as you continued, you entered into a lively discussion concerning the children's aptitude or readiness, as well their behavior. It was agreed that when children enter the Pre-K program they are pretty even because it is typically their first school experience. In Kindergarten it was felt that their prior experience made a great difference. If the children had attended the local Head Start program, it was agreed that their behavior was generally bad and that it correlated with their success at Kindergarten activities. Those children coming from private programs were seen as shy, and if they've attended Carver's Pre-K there is a range of behaviors, but generally they're better behaved. It was generally agreed that behavior correlates with academic achievement. At the first grade it was stated that there is "definitely a substantial gap and a tough one to figure out," while those children in the behavior classroom are quite low due to significant behavior issues brought on atypical situations in the home, however, it was agreed that the worse the behavior the lower the academics.

7. *What do you see as an explanation for the Black/White Achievement Gap?*

There was much discussion over whether it is a racial achievement gap or an achievement gap due to socioeconomic conditions. It was agreed that parents with lower economic status may not have the resources or be as concerned about education. Specific reference was made to the local Head Start, whose leader has set a standard of relieving parents in their responsibility for the child's education, telling them homework was not that necessary. As a group you do believe that homework is essential and that it requires parental support. It was also brought up that a young mother who has a baby at 13, 14, or 15 years old may not have much education and may be unable to assist their child with their homework. Examples were given of parents being unable to read Kindergarten or First Grade work and that this lack of intellectual ability is going to contribute to the achievement gap. Some reference was also made to biological factors such as IQ. Reference was

also made to parents having dropped out of school and the consequences being unable to make it financially or educationally. Some responsibility for the situation that these parents find themselves in, was attributed to poor educational opportunities in previous years of schooling, but that it is also a big cycle of misfortune that seems to follow these families.

Another issue brought up was that of entitlement. Despite the fact that "all kids are given the same opportunities," you agreed that some children seem to have an attitude of thinking that they are owed everything; because "they see a lot being given to them as students in an inner-city school, they don't learn that they need to do certain things in order to be rewarded." You discussed how this idea is reinforced in their lives through the use of welfare cards, as you gave examples of the children's lack of familiarity with money. You reiterated that it seems to be an issue where they begin in Kindergarten wanting to succeed, but lose their intrinsic reward system to where they need to "get" something, like "education has lost its value." The term "immediate gratification" was brought up as you talked about the children not seeing a value in reading or writing, but rather they focus on their desire to become a basketball player, a rapper, or Miss America. There seem to be many expectations that do not include college.

Continuing with economics you discussed what might be the reason that so many of the children are not exposed to enrichment activities such as going to the science museum, the zoo, or the beach. It was brought up that some children have not been over the city's bridges and come to school with very little background knowledge.

You also compared Black families at Carver with Black families who are middle class and felt that students from a higher economic status do better because the parents support them and work with their kids. You agreed that parent involvement is essential for the child to have success in school, and lack of parent support is a huge factor in the achievement gap.

When asked to compare your students from Carver to other schools in the district, you felt fairly confident that by the end of the school year your students would match up quite well. You also stated that because of the emphasis on reading, they may not fare as well in math. The question was also raised as to what area a teacher should concentrate; social skills, academic skills, math or literacy. Discussion ensued over parental expectations and over how expectations have changed over the years.

8. *What, if anything, do you do to address the specific learning needs of African American students?*

Working on self-esteem was a priority; feeling that the child needs to believe they can succeed. It was agreed that color was not a concern but rather that you approach your students according to what they may need, and that your aim is to give them a safe place where they can learn that people love and care for them.

Pressed further you responded that you try to bring out all cultures in your instruction, as well as gender issues. You agreed that you want them to understand everyone has a value and something to contribute.

9. *What do you see as your most important role or responsibility as a teacher of African American students?*

This question was not specifically addressed.

10. *What would your teaching look like in a majority White school? In what ways would it be similar or different?*

The first response to this question was, "depends upon where the White school is." A school within a higher economic area was thought to be very different. Parent involvement would be almost over-whelming from a teacher's viewpoint. Whereas it was felt that a White school with a similar economic demographic would be very much the same as Carver in terms of parent involvement and parent behavior. It was felt that the students in any school with a similar economic demographic, would require teaching that provided a lot of basic instruction coupled with providing background knowledge.

11. *Describe your comfort level with your teaching assignment. Why do you teach in this setting? What brought you here initially?*

Three of you said that you felt very comfortable at Carver. You love your job, your kids, and the diversity this side of town brings. You also mentioned you "like the challenges that come with the job, whether it is with the child or a parent." Working with young children is gratifying as you watch them "take everything in like a sponge." Each of you had a particular reason for being at Carver initially, and those reasons still exist. The desire to work with the very young, with children from a diverse background, and with students you've had

more than one year, continues to drive your decision. However, one of you admitted that when you started at Carver you were younger, had more energy, and enjoyed the excitement more. Now you do not want to be here much longer. You said you were tired; not of just the neighborhood or the community but of the demands that are put on you as teacher. You said, "It's a different way to reinvent the wheel…and I don't know maybe it's like that everywhere." You did add that you don't want to give up teaching entirely, but give it a try somewhere else, because you see how happy your friend is in a different setting.

12. *Why do you stay?*

As you continued, you answered this question by reiterating how much you care for your students, how you enjoy the challenges in particular getting their skills up, and just working in a place where you feel you can make a difference. One of you added that you believe in multicultural education and that every child deserves a chance to be as much as they can be and you believe you can be a part of that equation. You prefer to work with children with needs found at Carver rather than in a higher economic setting. As a group you also discussed how job particulars make a difference. You all have a desire to work with the age group you've taught for so long. You also enjoy the people you work with and one of you really likes your classroom, which the group understood, agreeing that the space a teacher sets up is very important.

13. *What would cause you to leave?*

One of you couldn't see any reason to leave, but three of you spoke of systemic reasons such as too many demands, too large a class-size, and adding an additional grade level to your multi-age classroom.

Conclusion:

In going through the transcripts, a few things came up that did not directly answer a specific question. You all spoke at length about some of the differences you've encountered working in a school that has a predominantly African American population. You discussed what it was like when the school staff was predominantly Black as compared to now, noting that it was "harder to be White." You also talked about parents wanting Black teachers, about the things Black teachers or aides could say that Whites could not, and about the difference in teaching styles.

You also discussed at length how much support teachers offer each other, in particular teachers that teach in similar grade levels. Being a part of a team and working with others whom you enjoy is very important. Your conversation emphasized that supportive colleagues make a huge difference in being a teacher and handling your daily challenges. Along those lines, you all agreed that getting together to talk about your teaching and racial issues was helpful in that it helped you to know that you are not alone in your struggle to make a difference.