

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Education Dissertations and Projects

School of Education

2019

Early Colleges: The African American Male Experience

Adreian M. Pitts

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education_etd



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

EARLY COLLEGES: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE EXPERIENCE

By
Adreian Merriweather-Pitts

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2019

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Adreian Merriweather-Pitts under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Stephen Laws, Ed.D.
Committee Chair

Date

Anissia Scales, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Date

Cheryl Lutz, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Date

Prince Bull, Ph.D.
Dean of the School of Education

Date

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Zarea, Michael, Malachi, Michaela, and Ayden; carry with you Jeremiah 29:11 and Philippians 4:13. With God, ALL things are possible.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, who is an amazing woman of God and is always encouraging me to continue to go after my dreams. Also, to my sisters, Sherrese, Quan, and Meisha, thanks. I am eternally grateful for your love and support in all my endeavors.

I dedicate this dissertation to Aunt Becky: I can hear the “I’m proud of you, “AA” from heaven. I love and miss you so much.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Michael. Babe, this dissertation would not be possible if I did not have your love and support pushing me to keep going. You believed in me when it was difficult to believe in myself. Without any complaints, you’ve prayed with and for me, cooked, cleaned, and entertained our children so I could focus and see this to the end. Thank you for the many sacrifices you have made to help make this dream a reality. I am so thankful God has entrusted you to be our earthly provider and protector.

Acknowledgements

First, I must give honor to Jesus Christ, the head of my life. Thank you, Lord, for promising me that you will never leave me nor forsake me. Thank you for your promises that will continue to manifest in my life. Not my will, but Your will... Psalm 37:3:4.

Dr. Laws, thank you for your encouragement over the years. I appreciate your willingness to take over as chair despite your commitment to others. Your support and confidence in my ability are invaluable. I am eternally grateful.

Dr. Isenhour, thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this journey. The text messages, phone calls, and weekly emails helped me to stay the course to see this to the end. Thank you for believing in me.

Dr. Scales, I am so thankful for your wisdom and encouragement throughout this journey. I am so appreciative of your sacrifices to work with me with this project. Thank you for inspiring me.

To the district who allowed me the opportunity to conduct this research, thank you. To the young men who contributed to this significant study, thank you for making this possible; we hear you!

Finally, to my mother and sisters “in love,” thank you all for the love and support you have given to me during this journey. I love you, and I am so happy to be part of such a supportive family.

Abstract

EARLY COLLEGES: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE EXPERIENCE.

Merriweather-Pitts, Adreian, 2019: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore lived experiences of African American males who were enrolled in an early college to obtain a deeper understanding of their experiences regarding academic barriers, self-efficacy, and perceptions of academic impact. The population of this research study consisted of eight African American males, all of whom were enrolled in Grades 9-12 in a large urban school district in North Carolina. Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory was used as the conceptual framework for the research. Three themes were identified from the first research question, "What are the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in an early college in North Carolina?" Those themes were (a) preparation for a 4-year college/university, (b) self-awareness, and (c) academic self-confidence. Two themes aligned with the second research question, "How has these lived experiences impacted academic performance?" They were (d) sense of belonging and (e) support systems. A final theme, representation, emerged through an open-ended response from participants regarding their thoughts on what, if anything, should be added to the Early College of North Carolina to attract more African American males.

Keywords: early college, social cognitive theory, scholar identity, sense of school belonging, representation

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study	8
Significance of the Study	10
Definition of Key Terms	11
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	14
Introduction.....	14
Constructs to Academic Achievement.....	16
Middle and Early College’s History, Purpose, and Implementation	19
Barriers to Academic Success for African American Males	25
Whiting’s SIM for African American Males	28
Conceptual Framework	35
Chapter 3: Methodology	38
Introduction.....	38
Methodology	38
Purpose of the Study	39
Description of the Setting	39
Demographics of Focus School	41
Academic Performance of Focus School	42
Participants.....	43
Instruments	44
Procedures	44
Interviews.....	45
Data Analysis	46
Summary of Chapter 3	47
Chapter 4: Results	48
Introduction.....	48
Restatement of the Purpose of the Study	48
Overview	49
Research Participants	50
Addressing Research Questions.....	57
Discussion of Major Themes	57
Responses to Research Question 1	60
Responses to Research Question 2	67
Emerging Theme.....	70
Summary of Chapter 4	72
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations	73
Introduction.....	73
Restatement of the Problem	73
Summary of the Study	74
Research Participants	75
Conceptual Framework	75
Discussion and Implications of Findings	76
Preparation for a 4-Year College/University	77

Self-Awareness	78
Academic Self-Confidence	79
Summary of Findings for Research Question 1	81
Sense of School Belonging	81
Support Systems.....	83
Representation.....	84
Summary of Findings for Research Question 2.....	85
Summary of Findings	85
Emerging Theme Summary	87
Implications of Practice	88
Suggestions for Future Research	94
Limitations/Delimitations	95
Final Reflections	96
References.....	98
Appendices	
A Interview Questions	115
B Participant's Informed Consent	118
C District's Approval to Conduct Research	122
D Parental Consent Form.....	124
Tables	
1 Overall Achievement and Growth Data for the Early College of North Carolina.....	43
2 Theme Identified During Coding.....	50
3 Information Regarding Participants.....	51
4 Major Themes Identified During Coding	59
5 Additional Theme Identified During Coding.....	71
Figures	
1 Hierarchy of Scholar Identity	27
2 Overall Demographic for the Early College of North Carolina.....	42

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is important to recognize the disproportionality that exists in current public school education structures that continue to believe that African American¹ male students are incapable of learning (Scott, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, research has been conducted in an effort to address the widening achievement gap (Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, & Chan, 2015). The achievement gap includes a plethora of subgroups; however, the gap between African American males and their counterparts continues to widen at an alarming rate. African American males are more likely to be in the lowest academic track, to be disciplined more often, and to be negatively stereotyped by teachers than White² students (Holzman, 2006). Musu-Gillette et al. (2016) found that school readiness gaps narrowed between 1998 and 2010, but progress was uneven among racial/ethnic groups. For instance, the gap between White and Hispanic students in school readiness has narrowed, but the gap between White and African American students showed less movement (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Perhaps the most telling statistic is the national adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for public high school students during the 2014-2015 academic year. White students' ACGR (88%) was 13 percentage points higher than the national ACGR for African American students (75%) in 2014-2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Although there are numerous approaches to dropout prevention, improvement of self-esteem remains a major part of interventions to help students complete school, yet evaluations of programs trying to build self-esteem to improve school performance

¹ African American and Black are terms that may be used interchangeably throughout the course of this document.

² White and Caucasian are terms that may be used interchangeably throughout the course of this document.

indicated a disconnect between feeling good about oneself and academic achievement (Jonson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005). Jonson-Reid et al. (2005) articulated that although academic success is theoretically linked to self-esteem, we lack data to show that improving self-esteem improves academic performance. Research linking academic self-efficacy with school motivation and performance has reported consistently strong effects (Jonson-Reid et al., 2005). Students with higher academic self-efficacy, regardless of earlier achievement or ability, work harder and persist longer; have better learning strategies such as personal goal setting or time monitoring; and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors (for example, delinquency and substance use) that negatively affect school success (Jonson-Reid et al., 2005).

Unlike self-perception, which is thought to be more stable over time, self-efficacy appears more easily influenced by changing experiences (Zimmerman, 2000). Over the past decade, studies have indicated that African American youth have career goals and value education equal to that of other students; however, not all students may have equal ability to perceive the link between education and later goals (Spencer, Cole, DuPree, & Glyniph, 1993).

Statement of the Problem

Academically, African American boys are at risk. Talented African American students find that one of the most surprising sources of obstacles to academic achievement is their peer group (Whiting, 2009b). Students from various racial or ethnic backgrounds experience negative labeling (e.g., brain, nerd, bookworm) for academic achievement. African American students who get good grades are often accused of trying to “act White” because performing well has been deemed as White behavior by

some (Signithia, 2008). Exacerbating this misperception that to achieve is to act White, African American males face pressures from peers who believe that being a high achiever and being intelligent is not masculine or is otherwise feminine (Whiting, 2009b). Though many African American males get accolades for their physical and musical talents (Sailes, 2003), too many also get teased or ridiculed for their intellectual or academic talents. All variants of these peer pressures effectively place much strain and stress on the motivations and academic identities of African American males (Whiting, 2009b).

African American males' test scores lag those of their White peers; and they are far more likely to grow up in poverty, attend struggling schools, and drop out before graduation (Yaffe, 2012). On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the test sometimes called "The Nation's Report Card," only 13% of fourth-grade African American boys scored proficient in reading, compared with 40% of White boys. The gap is no smaller in eighth grade, when 11% of African American boys and 37% of White boys scored at proficient levels (Yaffe, 2012).

Reports regarding academic performance ratings and overall academic outcomes of urban African American males have surged for educational reform initiatives that not only challenge traditional structures of education but also mandate that policy makers, administrators, and educators craft new models to posit success (Fenning & Rose, 2007). College readiness and preparedness programs, which have been implemented as a main thrust of some schools, have resulted in an increase in the percentages of African American males being accepted in schools and those attending and completing postsecondary education (Scott et al., 2014).

Early and middle colleges challenge the traditional structures of education and

have established a legacy of successes of their African American males, and the impact may be attributed to the self-efficacy the institutions impart upon their scholars. To address concerns about low graduation rates and a lack of workforce readiness, states and districts have not only experimented but have also implemented different models of high school reform. One of the most popular models has been the Early College High School (ECHS) model. The ECHS model is described as small schools that blur the line between high school and college (Edmunds et al., 2010).

Since 2002, the Middle College National Consortium (MCNC) has served as an intermediary organization for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation, all of which provide funding for the redesign of existing middle colleges and facilitating the opening of new early colleges throughout the country (Born, 2006). Targeted at students who are underrepresented in college to broadly include students who are the first in their families to attend college, students from minority backgrounds, English language learners, and low-income students of any background, these schools are located on the campuses of 2- or 4-year colleges and universities and are expected to provide an academically rigorous course of study with the goal of ensuring that all students graduate with a high school diploma and 2 years of university transfer credit or an associate degree (Edmunds et al., 2010).

In April 2007, along with state and national partners, the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP, 2007) launched an effort to create more than 100 new and redesigned high schools across North Carolina by 2008. The purpose of this type of high school was to provide scholars with an academically rigorous curriculum grounded in the skills needed to succeed in college and the 21st century workplace (NCNSP, 2010).

Many schools in the NCNSP have a focus in areas that are vital to the future of the state's economy, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (NCNSP, 2010).

These innovative high schools represented a critical mass for change among North Carolina's larger pool of regular high schools and served as models for the entire state for maximizing student achievement (NCNSP, 2010). NCNSP and its partners at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction worked to create two types of innovative high schools (NCNSP, 2010). The first of these types was the redesigned high schools which converted conventional high schools into sets of autonomous, focused, and academically rigorous new schools which operate on an existing campus. These new schools each adopt a curricular focus or common methodology as one strategy to enable teachers in the core courses to work together to make connections between courses and the world of work. The intent of a focus is not preparation for a specific career, but rather preparation for a lifetime of learning and workplace changes (NCNSP, 2010). The second were Learn and Earn Early College High Schools. Learn and Earn Early College High Schools emphasized recruiting and serving students who typically would not have an opportunity to go to college or who would otherwise have dropped out of school. Learn and Earn Early College High Schools are situated on the campuses of 2- or 4-year community colleges and universities which proclaimed an academically rigorous course of study that ensured all students graduated with a high school diploma and 2 years of transferable credit or an associate degree (NCNSP, 2010). Based on the guidelines set forth by the NCNSP, each ECHS was expected to implement and exhibit a specific set of principles, known as design principles. Those design principles, as articulated by the NCNSP, included ensuring that students were ready for college, instilling powerful

teaching and learning in schools, providing high student/staff personalization, redefining professionalism, and implementing a purposeful design (Edmunds et al., 2010).

The hypothesis underlying the ECHS model was that reluctant or discouraged high school students who may be unengaged in traditional school settings would be motivated at a relatively early age to view themselves as successful participants in the college experience (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010). An examination of programs that allowed high school students to take college-level classes for college credits, such as tech-prep programs, international baccalaureate programs, and middle college high schools, found three primary benefits for students: (a) the opportunity to earn free college credit, (b) gaining “a taste” of college, and (c) increasing student confidence in their academic abilities (Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2005).

In early colleges, academic pursuits are a priority for students. In North Carolina, early colleges are supported by the NCNSP and are required to implement six design principles that incorporate the components outlined earlier (NCNSP, 2013). Data collected from previous surveys administered to early college and control students showed early college students reported higher teacher expectations for their academic performance, better teacher-student relationships, more rigorous and relevant instruction, and more frequent and varied types of student support (Edmunds, 2016).

Self-esteem has often been identified as an explanation for academic failure; however, researchers have begun focusing on self-efficacy rather than self-esteem. Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual’s confidence in his or her ability to succeed in academic tasks and pursuits (Bandura, 1997). Academic self-efficacy has been the focus of a vast amount of research due to its influence on various aspects of

student academic functioning (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). Nebbitt (2009) noted that improving self-efficacy may hold promise for improving the life chances for this vulnerable population of youth. Understanding factors that influence self-efficacy in African American adolescent males is critical not only for their success in academics but also in all future endeavors.

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Bandura (1997) explained that people’s beliefs in their self-efficacy have diverse effects and such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, the amount of effort they put into given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (p. 3). This description showed that a person’s self-efficacy is not of a general nature but related to specific situations. Individuals can judge themselves to be very competent in a specific field and less competent in another field (Van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2001).

Self-efficacy is a critical link between possessing skills and engaging in specific behavior to accomplish desired goals (Bandura, 1997) and has been regarded as a consistent forecaster of academic achievement, influencing the processes of motivation, self-regulation, and self-perception, expectancy of results as well as the choices and interests of students (Rocchino, Dever, Telesford, & Fletcher, 2017). Self-efficacy has also been considered as a reliable predictor of academic outcomes with implications in child development (Rocchino et al., 2017).

Of the settings in which adolescents may struggle, educational settings can evoke considerable stress for adolescents lacking the self-efficacy to maintain academic success (Galla & Wood, 2012; Huang, 2013). Self-efficacy has been defined as a person's perceptions of his or her capabilities to complete a specific task with the skills that she or he possesses (Bandura, 1997).

According to Bandura's (1997) socio-cognitive perspective, individuals' self-efficacy beliefs often determine what they do with their knowledge and skills, and these beliefs are therefore good predictors of their actions. Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs are believed to mediate personal agency by influencing individuals' choices, efforts, anxieties, and the perseverance with which they face challenges and new tasks (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been found to be both a predictor of and a protective factor against internalizing and externalizing behaviors in adolescence (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American males enrolled in an early college and provide insight into how their experiences have impacted their academic performance as well as their probability to earn a high school diploma and a college degree.

Success in today's global society demands that employees possess at least the skills and knowledge required of a high school graduate if they are to be competitive in the workforce of the 21st century and beyond (Bailey, 2003). Failure to meet this minimum requirement, however, limits the economic and social potential for millions of young Americans each year (Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002). In spite

of the need to complete high school or to attend some postsecondary institutions, statistics indicate that educational attainment is not a reality for some African American students, especially African American males. According to national statistics, approximately 12.76% of African American males ages 20-24 interviewed during the time of this study left school before earning a high school diploma. Furthermore, only 16.6% of African American males ages 25-29 hold a bachelor's degree (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

To reverse this trend, educators with the support of parents and communities need to employ effective initiatives that help more adolescent African American males complete high school and continue their education in some postsecondary institutions as well as assist in identifying and removing academic barriers (Bailey, 2003). Decades of research indicate that a psychological sense of school belonging can have a particularly strong influence on the educational adjustment of adolescent students (Cemalcilar, 2009; Goodenow, 1992). Psychological sense of school belonging is defined as the extent to which students perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community (Cemalcilar, 2009; Goodenow, 1992). Bandura (1997) stated, "Teachers operate collectively within an interactive social system rather than as isolates. Therefore, educational development through self-efficacy enhancement must address the social and organizational structure of educational systems." (p. 243). A strong sense of school belonging has often been associated with higher grades, academic motivation, and high school completion rates (Goodenow, 1993b). For example, Anderman (2002) found that a sense of school belonging was positively related to grade point average (GPA) and self-concept and negatively related to school problems and absenteeism in a diverse

sample of adolescents.

Additionally, an increased sense of belonging to the school community by way of encouragement and positive interactions with teachers, administrators, and peers has been linked to overall school satisfaction and achievement. Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in his or her ability to succeed in academic tasks and pursuits (Bandura, 1997). Academic self-efficacy has been the focus of a vast amount of research due to its influence on various aspects of student academic functioning.

Significance of the Study

The information gained through this research is significant because it contributes to the existing body of knowledge related to early/middle colleges and its influence on school reform, student achievement for African American males, and their college preparedness. Early/middle colleges were designed to serve students for whom access to college historically has been problematic (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006). The target populations for North Carolina's early colleges are students who would be the first in their family to go to college, low-income students, and students who are members of racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in college (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006).

This study provides additional information on the impact of the early/middle college high school on African American males and its practices as an effective means of not only increasing college opportunities for underrepresented students but also ensuring that they are successful. This research has significance to secondary educators and policy makers interested in using the early/middle college model for high school reform and the continued efforts to eliminate negative stereotypes as well as other barriers to academic

success for young African American males.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms were defined in an effort to provide consistency, clarity, and conciseness during this course of this study.

Academic achievement/performance. An indicator of student academic performance in a course as measured by various assessment measures such as state standardized tests, benchmarks, and teacher-made tests.

Academic self-efficacy. An individual's confidence in his or her ability to succeed in academic tasks and pursuits (Bandura, 1997).

Achievement gap. Occurs when one group of students such as students grouped by race/ethnicity or gender outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant; that is, larger than the margin of error (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

ACGR. When states identify the "cohort" of first time ninth graders in a particular school year and adjust this number by adding any students who transfer into the cohort after ninth grade and subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or pass away (McFarland et al., 2017).

African American/Black. A Black American who has origins in any of the Black populations of Africa; relating to Black Americans who have origins in any of the Black populations of Africa.

College and career readiness. Academic and technical knowledge and skills to ensure students leave high school ready for college and careers.

Early college. Secondary schools located on college campuses with a target

population of students who are the first in their family to go to college, low-income students, and students who are members of racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in college. Early colleges also have a defined and structured program that enables the high school students to earn both their high school diplomas and their associate degree in 4-5 years with no cost to the student.

Early college initiative. Funds the development of early college high schools that provide students the opportunity to simultaneously pursue a high school diploma and earn college credits.

Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). Uses formulas to calculate each school's level of student academic growth in specific subject areas. Each school receives a composite index score, a growth status, and a performance composite (SAS Institute, 2016).

Growth. The amount of academic progress students make over the course of a grade or class.

Hispanic. A Spanish-speaking person living in the U.S., especially one of Latin American descent; relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries, especially those of Latin America.

Middle college. Secondary schools authorized to grant diplomas in their own name located on college campuses with the opportunity to take some college classes. Middle colleges provide a rigorous academic curriculum to a student population that has been historically underserved and underrepresented in colleges.

Motivation. Activation to action. Level of motivation is reflected in choice of courses of action and in the intensity and persistence of effort.

North Carolina cohort graduation rate (NCCGR). A school-based cohort at the beginning of ninth grade which is modified if students transfer to another school or if new students enroll. At the conclusion of the fourth year, and then the fifth year, the percent of students in the cohort who complete the requirements of graduation is reported as the cohort graduation rate.

Proficiency/proficient. Whether students have scored at a level that indicates they consistently demonstrate mastery of the content standards and are well prepared for the next grade or course. On the end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) assessments, students are considered proficient if they score a Level III.

Scholar identity. One in which culturally diverse males view themselves as academicians, as studious, as competent and capable, and as intelligent or talented in school settings (Whiting, 2006b).

School performance grade. A grade (A-F) assigned to a school based on student achievement (80%) and growth (20%). Achievement and growth are based on test scores; and for high schools, additional indicators that measure college and career readiness.

Self-efficacy. Refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997).

Underrepresented. Refers to racial and ethnic populations that are disproportionately represented in higher education.

White/Caucasian. A member of a light-skinned people, especially one of European extraction; belonging to or denoting a human group having light-colored skin, chiefly used of peoples of European extraction.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature relevant to the study conducted to search for supportive components as they relate to early and middle colleges. This chapter begins with a review of literature that discusses theoretical constructs that have been documented in literature to be positively correlated with traditional indicators of academic achievement from all ethnic groups. This chapter also reviews the literature regarding middle and early college history, purpose, and implementation. This section is important as it includes several evaluations/study groups regarding the existence and effectiveness of early and middle colleges. The final pages of this chapter are a review of literature regarding major barriers to academic success for young African American males. This information is important as it identifies stereotypes, beliefs, and other information regarding the culture of African American youth which influence their academic success.

According to Bandura (1997), during the crucial formative period of children's lives, the school functions as the primary setting for the cultivation and social validation of cognitive capabilities. School is the place where children develop the cognitive competencies and acquire the knowledge and problem-solving skills essential for effective participation in society. School performance of African American males, in particular, has been an area of concern in both educational and public arenas (Holzman, 2006). Recent studies and the national media have highlighted evidence that shows great disparity in school outcomes between African American males and other student populations. National statistics continue to show significant differences in high school

graduation rates, college attendance, and completion rates between African American male and White students, none of which favor African American males (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

A fundamental goal of education is to equip students with self-regulatory capabilities that enable them to educate themselves. Self-directedness not only contributes to success in formal instruction but also promotes lifelong learning (Bandura 1997). Multiple hypotheses have been suggested to explain the lower performance of African American students generally and African American male students specifically compared to their White counterparts. Many of these hypotheses have suggested intrapersonal explanations. For example, Irving and Hudley (2008) suggested that some African American students have developed an “oppositional” culture to academic achievement due to past discriminatory practices and limited educational opportunities.

Furthermore, African American students may be vulnerable to “stereotype threat,” which is characterized as a social-psychological threat occurring when individuals anticipate the possibility of fulfilling a negative stereotype (Nadler & Komarraju, 2016; Steele, 1997). The negative implications of stereotype threat include anxiety, low test scores, and low expectancies for academic success (Nadler & Komarraju, 2016; Steele, 1997). Interventions focusing on such psychological and environmental factors in addition to the cognitive or academic factors may play a critical role in promoting academic success among African American male students.

Three constructs that have been documented in the literature to be positively correlated with traditional indicators of academic achievement from all ethnic groups and therefore may hold great promise for promoting academic success among African

American males are psychological sense of school belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations (Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 2002).

Constructs to Academic Achievement

Psychological sense of school belonging. Psychological sense of school belonging is defined as the extent to which students perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community (Cemalcilar, 2009; Goodenow, 1992). Research has indicated that a psychological sense of school belonging can have a particularly strong influence on the educational adjustment of adolescent students (Cemalcilar, 2009; Goodenow, 1992).

A sense of support from encouraging adult mentors such as a teacher, counselor, or coach in the school has been found to have beneficial effects on school attendance, college attendance, and educational aspirations of minority youth (Uwah et al., 2008). A strong sense of school belonging has often been associated with higher grades, academic motivation, and high school completion rates (Goodenow, 1993a). For example, Anderman (2002) found that a sense of school belonging was positively related to GPA and self-concept and negatively related to school problems and absenteeism in a diverse sample of adolescents.

Additionally, an increased sense of belonging to the school community by way of encouragement and positive interactions with teachers, administrators, and peers has been linked to overall school satisfaction and achievement. Emotional factors such as how much students enjoy and feel connected to school are also key indicators of their psychological sense of school belonging (St-Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017). A sense of belonging or connectedness has been found important for all students, but it may be

particularly important for African American males. Students do not perceive themselves to be a contributing part of the school community; they are at greater risk of dropping out. This idea fits with Jeremy Finn's identification-participation model, which asserts that students must identify with the school and believe themselves to be a welcomed and respected member of the school community, or else they begin the gradual process of disengagement, which has led to school dropout (Lam, Chen, Zhang, & Liang, 2015). It may come as no surprise then that African American students tend to score lower than other students in measures of belonging, with African American males perceiving less school belonging than all other groups (Anderman, 2002; Goodenow, 1993a).

Academic self-efficacy. Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in his or her ability to succeed in academic tasks and pursuits (Bandura, 1997). Academic self-efficacy has been the focus of a vast amount of research due to its influence on various aspects of student academic functioning. Researchers have shown that academic self-efficacy is predictive of students' ability to succeed and that students with higher academic self-efficacy work harder (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003), are more persistent (Pajares, 2009), and develop better goal-setting and time-monitoring strategies than other students (Zimmerman, 2000).

Choi (2005) found that high levels of academic self-efficacy positively relate to academic performance, and others have documented the importance of perceived confidence in initiating and sustaining motivation and achievement-oriented behavior (Bandura, 1993). Previous research has provided evidence that academic self-efficacy is crucial in fostering educational success, both in terms of motivational outcomes (e.g., intrinsic interest) and on tests of achievement (Bandura et al., 2003; Huang, 2013).

Academic self-efficacy beliefs also influence career paths and job attainment, as higher levels of self-efficacy influence individuals to consider a wider range of career options (Bandura et al., 2003). In addition to achievement-related outcomes, academic self-efficacy has been linked to internalizing and externalizing problems. High academic self-efficacy not only increases scholastic attainment but may also help to reduce a student's susceptibility to depression and feelings of uselessness (Bandura et al., 2003).

Dweck (2002) argued that students' views of themselves in academic settings play a critical and fundamental role in their school achievement. Essentially, her work demonstrated that students who believe they are intelligent and capable in school are more likely to be persistent and more likely to persist than other students. African American males with academic self-efficacy believe they are strong or excellent students. They feel comfortable and confident in academic settings, they enjoy learning, they enjoy rigor, they seek challenges, and they value toying with ideas (Dweck, 2002).

Educational aspirations. Educational aspirations, which refer to early impressions of one's own academic abilities and the highest level of education an individual expects to attain (Furlong & Cartmel, 1995), also have been linked to academic achievement (Rojewski & Yang, 1997). Educational aspirations have been well documented in the career development literature and are seen as "the first step in the pipeline" (Berkner & Chavez, 1997, p. 100) of career attendance. Educational aspirations develop early in a student's academic career and are generally theorized to affect academic achievement by enhancing the possibility of participating in and/or pursuing educational opportunities (Arbona, 2000).

Students who have high academic aspirations are more likely to take advantage

of educational opportunities that may lead to academic success. Likewise, students with low academic aspirations are less likely to take advantage of these opportunities, thus limiting their future educational opportunities (Arbona, 2000). In this way, students' educational aspirations can influence what they learn in school, how they prepare for their postsecondary lives, and their ultimate academic and career attainment (Uwah et al., 2008).

Research indicates that African American males differ very little from White males in their educational aspirations, although African American males experience lower educational attainment than any other gender-race group (Uwah et al., 2008). This incongruence between African American males' educational aspirations and their ultimate educational attainment may be related to what Uwah et al. (2008) referred to as the dichotomy between abstract and concrete views of education. In other words, student aspirations may represent their hopes, but their eventual attainment may be affected by future concrete realities such as lack of resources, prejudice, and other social barriers.

Middle and Early College's History, Purpose, and Implementation

Middle college history. The middle college concept was first established in 1972 by Janet Lieberman. A public secondary school committed to meeting the academic, vocational, and affective needs of underserved youth opened its doors on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in New York City. The concept of middle college was an innovation that occurred under the Board of Education's category of "alternative schools" (Lieberman, 2004). The intent of the middle college was to provide a seamless secondary postsecondary educational continuum, use innovative curricula and pedagogy, and create a small nurturing environment. Additionally, the middle college produced an

exciting path to learning for students who had traditionally been the least well served by public education; decreased the high school dropout rate and increased the college-going and completion rate. Graduation rates exceeded 80%, and college-going rates soared to more than 85% (Lieberman, 2004). Middle college is what Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, U.S.

Commissioner of Education, and Chancellor of the State University of New York, called a “hybrid” (Lieberman, 2004). It covered the academic years of Grades 9-12, employed secondary school teachers, functioned primarily on a board of education budget, and fulfilled the high school curriculum requirements (Lieberman, 2004).

Lieberman (2004) explained that limiting total enrollment to 450 students, being in the presence of college students on college campuses, functioning on a college schedule, and providing both group and daily counseling to students were all vital factors in the success of the middle college. Financial support from the Ford Foundation aided in the replication of more than 20 middle college high schools on college campuses throughout the country (Lieberman, 2004).

Early college’s history, purpose, and implementation. Due to the continued failure of the nation’s school system to meet the needs of underserved students and under pressure from No Child Left Behind to restructure low-performing schools, urban districts found themselves with limited options (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). In most districts, schools were given the opportunity to choose how to restructure their organizations. While some districts solicited models developed by external consultants, others, like the Chicago Public School Systems, created their own designs. Either way, the territory was largely uncharted, and no particular strategy demonstrated a proven

track record on a large scale (Evan et al., 2006).

With the added incentive of substantial funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, a growing number of districts dismantled large low-performing high schools into small learning communities. A national study commissioned by the Gates Foundation (Evan et al., 2006) looked at 50 schools, including both new schools and redesigned or conversion schools. Researchers found more positive climates in the new smaller schools, including more personalized relationships for students and collegiality among teachers, compared with traditional comprehensive high schools. Redesigned schools also moved in this direction but more slowly (David, 2008). Each type of school had its own drawbacks. The newly formed schools strained teacher capacity, leading to teacher burnout; one half of the redesigned schools had lower attendance than traditional high schools (David, 2008).

The study team also compared samples of student work from the small schools with samples from traditional high schools. In the new high schools, but not the redesigned ones, the team found some evidence of work that was more rigorous and more relevant to the real world in English but not in mathematics (David, 2008). Evan et al. (2006) concluded that successful small learning communities rarely result from breaking up large high schools. For both teachers and students, creating a more personalized climate is a valuable end in itself and can certainly set the stage for changes in instruction, but expecting achievement to improve in the short term as a result of reorganizing students and teachers is unrealistic.

For small learning communities to influence learning, plans for improving what takes place in the classroom must be as explicit as plans for changing the school's

structure. What is missing in current efforts is a substantial investment in teachers; for example, providing opportunities to learn what it means to teach in a rigorous manner and how to achieve relevance by changing the nature of curriculum and instruction (David, 2008).

The planning and birth of small learning communities ask teachers to take on many new roles, which can leave them with less time for professional learning. Moreover, fewer colleagues who teach the same courses are now part of their immediate community. Without a focus and investment in teaching and learning, structural changes can actually inhibit teacher motivation and ability to improve their instruction (David, 2008).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) in 2002 with the primary goal of increasing the opportunity for underserved students to earn a postsecondary credential. The foundation's education program targets students from disadvantaged and underserved backgrounds, and the foundation expressly states that it hopes to serve low-income African American and Hispanic/Latino students (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006). This effort is consistent with observations made by the foundation's founders, Bill and Melinda Gates, who frequently have noted the inequities that face disadvantaged students in America's urban schools. Bill Gates, Jr., in a highly publicized address before the National Education Summit on High Schools, declared the following:

America's high schools are obsolete. By obsolete, I don't just mean that our high schools are broken, flawed, and under-funded—though a case could be made for every one of those points. By obsolete, I mean that our high schools—even when

they're working exactly as designed—cannot teach our kids what they need to know today . . . Today, only one third of our students graduate from high school ready for college, work, and citizenship. The other two thirds, most of them low-income and minority students, are tracked into courses that won't ever get them ready for college or prepare them for a family-wage job—no matter how well the students learn or the teachers teach. This isn't an accident or a flaw in the system; it is the system. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006, p. 4)

Early colleges provided underserved students with exposure to and support in college while they were in high school. Early colleges partnered with colleges and universities to offer all students an opportunity to earn an associate degree or up to 2 years of college credits toward a bachelor's degree during high school at no or low cost to the students. The underlying assumption is that engaging underrepresented students in a rigorous high school curriculum, tied to the incentive of earning college credit, motivated them and increased their access to additional postsecondary education and credentials after high school (Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Garet, Knudson, & Hoshe, 2014).

The target populations for North Carolina's early colleges were students who would be the first in their family to go to college, low-income students, and students who are members of racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in college. In early college, all students are expected to take a college preparatory course of study. The 2001-2005 Evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's High School Grants Initiative showed that participation in ECHSI led to more students taking and succeeding in the courses they need for entrance to college (Edmunds et al., 2012). For example, by the time students graduate from high school, 77% of the early college students had

successfully completed a college preparatory course of study, compared to 68% of the control group. Early college students also begin taking college courses, typically from a partner community college, as early as ninth grade. By the time students are juniors and seniors, most of their classes are college classes. In an ideal early college experience, once an early college student completes 12th grade, they will have received an average of 25.5 college credits; about a year's worth of college credit compared to approximately three credits earned by the average control student (Edmunds et al., 2012).

In interviews Edmunds (2016) conducted, students enrolled in early/middle colleges in North Carolina suggested that a big part of the reason they stayed in school was because of the relationships they had with teachers who followed up with them if they did not come to school. In a focus group in another early college Edmunds organized, one student commented “that it was easier to stay in school than to drop out” (p. 41). Edmunds’s study also showed that early colleges increased student enrollment in postsecondary education. From ninth grade through the beginning of their sixth year after entering high school, 90% of early college students had enrolled in postsecondary education, compared to 75% of the control group by the end of their sixth year after starting high school; 29% of early college students had obtained a postsecondary credential compared to 4% of the control group (Edmunds, 2016).

Research has consistently shown that minority students and students from disadvantaged families are underrepresented as college degree recipients. First, Hispanic and African American students are less likely than non-minority students to earn a bachelor’s degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a). Second, low-income students are less likely to earn a college degree of any type than higher income students

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2012b). Third, students who are the first in their family to go to college are less likely to leave college with a degree than students whose parents have attended college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012b). As a result, student subgroups historically underrepresented among college degree recipients are the intended target population of the ECHSI.

Taking college courses most notably differentiates early college students' high school experiences from their peers, but early colleges also are expected to offer rigorous high school and college courses. Completing a program of college-preparatory coursework is a traditional indicator of college readiness for high school students. High school transcript studies have found that academic curricular intensity, defined as the number of Carnegie units completed in English, mathematics, science, history, and foreign language as well as the number of advanced placement and remedial courses taken, is more predictive of bachelor's degree attainment than high school GPA, class rank, or test scores (Adelman, 2006). An impact study of North Carolina early colleges found that in ninth grade, early college students were significantly more likely than comparison students to take Algebra I or a higher mathematics course (Edmunds et al., 2012).

Barriers to Academic Success for African American Males

As previously mentioned, African American boys are at risk academically. Many African American males find their identities, their pride, their self-efficacy, and their self-esteem in a limited number of domains such as sports, music, and acting (Hébert, 2001). Many aspire to these areas and find their heroes and role models in these industries (Hébert, 2001). Less often, African American males see themselves as capable and

talented beings in school settings; these counterproductive self-images must change (Sailes, 2003). “Regardless of the age group we work with, it is still possible—and certainly essential— to change the way Black males see themselves intellectually and academically” (Whiting, 2009a, p. 227). To support the process of image building among gifted Black males, educators must recognize the importance of how having a scholar identity can improve the motivation, achievement, and aspirations of these students (Whiting, 2009b). Whiting (2006a) defined scholar identity as one in which Black males perceive themselves as academicians, as studious, and as intelligent or talented in school settings:

In my work with Black males, I have come to the conclusion that several characteristics contribute to a scholar identity. I share these characteristics with the hopes that readers will become more optimistic and more empowered as they work with Black males, too many of whom have heretofore not been recognized, developed, or nurtured, even at a very young age. I offer a central proposition—if educators (along with families and community leaders) can nurture a scholar identity within these otherwise capable students, then more [African American] males will achieve their potential in school and life. (p. 227)

Whiting’s (2006a) Scholar Identity Model (SIM) identifies nine characteristics of someone who possesses a scholar identity. The first seven characteristics are generic or neutral relative to race and gender; however, the model becomes race specific and gender specific when the last two characteristics, racial identity and masculinity, are included. In the SIM (Figure 1), self-efficacy lays the foundation for other areas of scholar identity; hence, it is described first.

Figure 1: Hierarchy of Scholar Identity (Whiting, 2006)

Scholar Identity in Black Males



Figure 1. Hierarchy of Scholarly Identity. (Whiting, 2006a).

Conceptual model: Characteristics of a scholar identity. Note: Adapted from "Promoting a scholar identity among African American males: Implications for gifted education," by G. W. Whiting, 2006a, *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*, 20(3), pp. 2-6.

Whiting's SIM for African American Males

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy helps the African American male to be resilient and persistent when facing barriers and challenges. Diverse males who have a scholar identity believe in themselves and their abilities and skills as learners; they are resilient, have self-confidence, self-control, and a sense of self-responsibility. While recognizing their shortcomings or weaknesses, they nonetheless believe themselves to be capable students. When self-efficacy is high, students would be more likely to repudiate negative stereotypes about Black and Hispanic males, refusing to fall prey to them (Whiting, 2006a).

Willing to make sacrifices. African American males who have a scholar identity understand how both personal and social sacrifices are necessary when preparing long term. Therefore, they are more likely to let go of some aspects of a social life (e.g., parties, dating, popularity, and so forth) and other potential distractions (e.g., TV) to reach desired goals (Whiting, 2006b).

Internal locus of control. Diverse males who have an internal locus of control are optimistic; they believe they can do well because they work hard, study, and complete school assignments (Whiting, 2006b). Black and Hispanic males with an internal locus of control are less likely to blame low achievement, failure, or mistakes on their teachers, families, or peers. In essence, they are likely to accept personal responsibility for not just successes but also failures (Whiting, 2006b).

Future orientation. Motivation theories indicated people who have academic aspirations tend to stay focused, make education a high priority, and prepare for success (Eccles et al., 2002). They think about the past, present, and future, particularly

regarding how one's past and current behaviors and decisions influence future achievements. Diverse males with orientations that are forward thinking are not overly concerned about immediate gratification or short-term interests and goals. African American males who have a scholar identity are less likely to make poor choices, narrowing options to those which are immediate and short term (Whiting, 2006a).

Self-awareness. Self-awareness is an honest appraisal and understanding of one's strengths and limitations. For those with high self-awareness, weaknesses do not distract them from believing in themselves. Whiting (2006a) stated that Black and Hispanic males who have a scholar identity are able to adapt, cope, and find ways to compensate for their weaknesses (e.g., they seek a tutor in classes where they are not doing well, they study longer and more often, they work with others).

Need for achievement. To be successful, the need for achievement must be greater/stronger than the need for affiliation, thus their pride and sense of worth are not determined by the number of friends they have or their popularity (Whiting, 2006a). Black and Hispanic males without a strong need for achievement must come to understand that high academic achievement carries much weight; therefore, learning gets higher priority.

Academic self-confidence. According to Whiting (2006a), diverse males with academic self-confidence believe they are capable students. They feel comfortable and confident in an academic setting and do not see any reason to negate, deny, or minimize their academic abilities and skills. These males have a strong work ethic; they spend time doing schoolwork, studying, and pushing themselves and recognize that ability without effort is a waste of gifts and talents.

Race pride. Racial identity, another type of self-perception, influences student achievement and motivation (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). For Black males who embody the SIM, race has high salience; they are comfortable being in their skin (race/culture). They want greater self-understanding as a racial being but also are aware of the importance of adapting to their environment and being bicultural. Just as important, they do not equate achievement with acting White or “selling out.” They refuse to be inhibited by social injustices based on gender, socioeconomic status, and race or ethnicity (Whiting, 2009a).

Masculinity. Whiting (2009a) explained that while masculinity is a sensitive and controversial topic, he referred to the notion that Black and Hispanic males with a scholar identity do not equate being intelligent or studious or talented with being “feminine” or “unmanly.” Instead, these diverse males believe that males are intelligent and that being gifted or intelligent does not subtract from their sense of masculinity or self-worth in any way. When masculinity is high, diverse males are proud to be scholars.

Cummins (2001) argued that institutional racism is an additional major barrier to academic success for young African American males. Oftentimes, this barrier has resulted in negative relationships between the adolescent African American male and school administrators, teachers, and counselors. Duncan (1999) noted several practices where educators promote feelings of alienation among adolescent African American males. These practices include

1. Seating African American male students closer to them than they do other students to serve the purpose of surveillance and control.
2. Giving African American males less direct instruction. This contributes to the

feelings of confusion and frustration over what is expected.

3. Paying less personal attention to African American males in academic situations.
4. Calling on African American males less often to answer classroom questions or to do demonstrations.
5. Giving African American males less time to answer questions before moving on.
6. Failing to give African American males feedback about their responses more frequently than other students.
7. Demanding less work and effort from African American males than from other students. (Duncan, 1999, pp. 175-177)

Ford (1997) reported that teachers tend to have lower expectations for African American male students, thereby encouraging students to have lower expectations for themselves and their African American male peers. Teachers need to examine their relationships with their African American male students in and outside of the school environment, incorporate strategies and/or techniques that result in academic achievement for these young men, and begin removing those behaviors that discourage academic involvement and success (Duncan, 1999). Educators are the gatekeepers to the power that comes with education. It is important that they understand their role in increasing the pipeline of African American male scholars prepared to take advantage of postsecondary opportunities (Bailey, 2003).

Additionally, research suggests the underrepresentation of African American teachers is also a contributing factor to barriers to African American success. Nationally,

students of color make up almost 50% of the public school student population, yet only 18% of all public school teachers in the United States are racial minorities (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Calls to increase the number of teachers of color, specifically African American teachers, have intensified over the past decade (Foster, 2018). Educators and their organizations, school administrators, and policy makers increasingly agree that a lack of diversity among teachers hurts U.S. students. Research has shown for some time that African American pupils benefit in a variety of ways when they have African American teachers. Black students with such teachers are less likely to be expelled or suspended, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to be recommended for participation in “gifted and talented” programs (Foster, 2018). Black students with Black teachers are also less likely to be mistakenly referred to special education programs for those with “behavioral disorders” (Foster, 2018).

In an effort to recruit and retain teachers of color, we must also understand the historical context as it relates to African Americans and joining the teaching profession. Tracing the history of Black teachers in the United States, Foster (2018) reported appeals to increase the number of African American teachers were first issued back in the 1980s. Foster noted the shortfall was, ironically, spurred decades earlier by the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board Education*, that declared the racial segregation of U.S. public schools unconstitutional. After this decision, many all-Black schools were closed in southern states and in border states such as Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and West Virginia. Because newly desegregated districts did not need as many teachers, they laid off teachers and principals in large numbers (Foster, 2018). By the late 1960s, when courts and policy makers finally noticed, upwards of 35,000 African

American teachers had lost their jobs. Foster gave her personal account as a teacher in Boston:

As the number of black teachers in southern and border states dwindled, courts demanded that northern school districts hire greater numbers of African American teachers. The public-school system scrambled to hire African Americans. During this period, however, teacher testing and certification took root – and African American teachers passed the certification tests at lower rates than their white counterparts. (p. 1)

Leonard (2008) stated that while all teachers regardless of race can be trained to be effective teachers of Black students, theorists believe minority teachers are particularly adept at motivating and engaging minority students because they often bring knowledge of student background to the classroom that enhances students' educational experiences (Evans & Leonard, 2013).

Teachers of color familiar with students' cultural backgrounds are more likely to build positive relationships between the home and school to enhance student learning. Black teachers are important in the teacher workforce because it is important for Black students to see them as successful role models (Evans & Leonard, 2013).

In light of research correlating the presence of teachers of color with the academic success of underperforming students of color, recruiting and retaining teachers of color have become growing concerns for teacher education programs, districts, and schools (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Many teachers of color enter the profession with deep ties and connections to their communities. They often articulate that they become teachers with the objective of returning to their own or similar communities to provide opportunities

for intellectual engagement that they felt were lacking in their own schooling (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). As cited by Kohli and Pizarro (2016), due to personal experiences with culturally disconnected curriculum or the underresourced conditions of their schooling, teachers of color have a heightened awareness of educational injustice and racism. Compared to White teachers, practicing teachers of color have more positive views of students of color, including more favorable perceptions of their academic potential and higher expectations of their learning potential (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Dee, 2005). Many teachers of color also enter the field with an orientation towards justice and equity. They often choose teaching as a profession because they want to improve the academic experiences of students of color. These teachers want their students to perform well academically in terms of GPA and test scores, but that is not how they primarily define racial justice. Instead, these teachers often come to teaching from an activist standpoint, seeking the creation of strong, critical, intellectual communities (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003) that honor and grow the knowledge, beings, and values of their communities (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016).

While there have been many efforts to diversify classrooms by adding more Black male educators, Kimberly Underwood, university research chair for the Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research at University of Phoenix, led a team of research fellows from the University of Phoenix's Center for Diversity and Inclusion Research of research to not only spotlight their valuable observations, opinions, and voices to increase the representation of Black males in the classroom but also to use the fellows' insights to provide recommendations for future initiatives, models, and actions supporting Black males in education (Underwood, 2019). After interviewing

Outstanding Black Male Fellows from the National Network of State Teachers of the Year to critically examine the career trajectories of Black male educators from three perspectives (recruitment, retention, and mobility), Underwood's team of researchers found that there continue to be consistent and prevalent challenges to diversifying the teaching population within education reform efforts (Underwood, 2019).

There is a theory that Black educators, with a specific focus on Black male educators, have a positive impact on children of all races and the teaching profession as a whole, with many noting that the lack of a diversified teacher workforce continues to undermine egalitarianism within society through the reinforcement of persevering social inequalities and inequities (Underwood, 2019). Continuing this research creates opportunities to strategically challenge many of the persistent stereotypes of Black men, and all people of color, within society (Underwood, 2019).

While schools of thought may vary surrounding the benefits of Black male representation in education, there is an overarching level of agreement: The lack of Black males in teaching positions has serious implications in classroom settings, and diversification needs to be a continuing priority within educational reform efforts (Underwood, 2019). To combat obstacles around recruiting, retaining, and advancing Black male educators, there is an obligation for policy makers and school administrators to examine and implement sustainable initiatives aimed at creating inclusive, equitable, and supportive school environments where all can thrive (Underwood, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

This study adds to the body of knowledge about self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and academic achievement. A review of literature highlights barriers African

American males encounter related to self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and their probability to earn a high school diploma and a college degree. Among the various theories that attempt to explain the processes that drive and regulate behavior, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) is undoubtedly one of the most prominent.

Social cognitive theory posits that a combination of external social systems and internal self-influence factors motivate and regulate behavior (Bandura, 2001; Pajares, 2006). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the belief in one's capabilities to carry out, organize, and perform a task successfully. Motivation consists of the internal and external factors that stimulate the desire to attain a goal. Both are the driving forces that make people pursue a goal and overcome obstacles, as it is believed that individuals with higher self-efficacy and motivation do their best and do not easily give up when confronted with difficulties.

The self-efficacy component of Bandura's (2001) social-cognitive theory has had a profound impact on the study of motivation and achievement in academic settings. It seems then that cultivating students' academic self-efficacy is a worthwhile goal for any institution of academic learning. Bandura (1997) made this very argument when he stated, "the major goal of formal education should be to equip students with the intellectual tools, efficacy beliefs, and intrinsic interests needed to educate themselves in a variety of pursuits throughout their lifetime" (p. 214). The influence of self-efficacy has been studied across a range of psychological disciplines; within an academic context, self-efficacy is frequently described in terms of academic self-efficacy, which defines learner judgment about one's ability to successfully attain educational goals (Elias & MacDonald, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American males enrolled in an early college and provide insight into how their experiences have impacted their academic performance as well as their probability to earn a high school diploma and a college degree.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher describes the methodology used in this study conducted at the Early College of North Carolina (a pseudonym). The researcher provides the purpose of this particular study along with research questions at the culmination of the study. Presented in this chapter is a description of the setting, the participants used in the study, instruments used during the study, the procedures used for collecting data, and the limitations of the study.

Methodology

Creswell (2014) illustrated five major research approaches that use qualitative methodology. These approaches are narrative research, ethnography research, grounded theory research, case study research, and phenomenology research. This research was conducted as a qualitative, phenomenological study. The focus of this research was the participants' viewpoints on the shared phenomenon of attending an early college as an African American male. As a researcher with a constructivist view, I am interested in the individual realities constructed by African American males and the implications of those constructions in their lives. Creswell stated that a researcher engages with a qualitative study to allow participants to share their experiences and reduce the power gaps that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study.

A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words; reporting detailed views of participants; and being conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014). Shank (2002) defined it as a planned inquiry into how others give

meaning to their experiences. Qualitative research is a broad term that covers several philosophical or theoretical orientations (Merriam, 2002) used by scholars in a variety of disciplines.

Merriam (2007) wrote, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how they interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). A qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. (Creswell, 2014, p. 9).

Purpose of the Study

Using interviews, this study was designed to examine the lived experiences of African American males enrolled in an early college and provide insight into how their experiences have impacted their academic performance as well as their probability to earn a high school diploma and a college degree. The following are the research questions the researcher used in this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in an early college in North Carolina?
2. How have these lived experiences impacted academic performance?

Description of the Setting

This research was conducted in a large urban school district in North Carolina. This district was formed in 1963 with the merger of both the city and county schools,

making the district in the North Carolina piedmont region the fourth largest system in North Carolina and the 78th largest in the nation. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the district served approximately 54,000 students. The school system has 43 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, 17 high schools, and nine special schools; bringing the system's school total to 84. Within this district, programs exist to serve every different kind of student. High school students can earn college credit in more than 30 advanced placement courses, the international baccalaureate diploma program, and courses offered at local colleges and universities. Parents at each level have an opportunity to select from either the school in their neighborhood, another school in their zone, or from 15 magnet programs offered within the district.

Since the time of the superintendent's arrival, there has been an unwavering focus to establish a culture that proves to be one of high expectations and high accountability in a psychologically safe environment. With the help of school leaders from the current schools in the district, the development of the following goals and priorities were established:

Goals of the District

- By 2020, 90% of third-grade students will read on or above grade level.
- By 2018, the graduation rate will be 90%.
- By 2018, the district will close the achievement gap between subgroups by 10 percentage points while increasing the performance of all subgroups.

Priorities of the District

- Provide all schools and departments the differentiated support they need to reach the full potential of the continuous improvement process to maximize

student outcomes;

- Train and support individuals to be strong instructional leaders and hold them accountable for achieving district goals; and
- Equip staff to support struggling students and intentionally engage our parent and community partners in understanding, supporting, and advocating for our district goals in service of students.

Collectively, the student demographics for this school district during the 2016-2017 academic school year were as follows: 28.5% were African American, 24.5% were Hispanic, 40.2% were White, 2.5% were Asian, 4.0% were Multiracial, and less than 1% were American Indian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (Campbell, 2016a).

In this large urban district, the 2016-2017 grade level proficiency gap between African American males and their White counterparts in reading was an astounding 39.8%; in Math, 41.5% (Campbell, 2016b). When examining the district's 2006-2017 4-year NCCGR, it is evident that a significant increase in NCCGR took place over a 12-year period. In 2006, this district graduated 73.7% of its students; that rate increased by 12.9 percentage points to 86.6% in 2016 (Campbell, 2016b).

Demographics of Focus School

The school of focus for this research is the Early College of North Carolina. During the 2016-2017 academic school year, the Early College of North Carolina had a total enrollment of 219 students. Of the 219 students, 12% were Asian, 21% were African American, 16% were Hispanic, 4% were Multiracial, and 45% were White (Campbell, 2016a). Figure 2 illustrates the overall demographics for the Early College of North Carolina highlighted in this research.

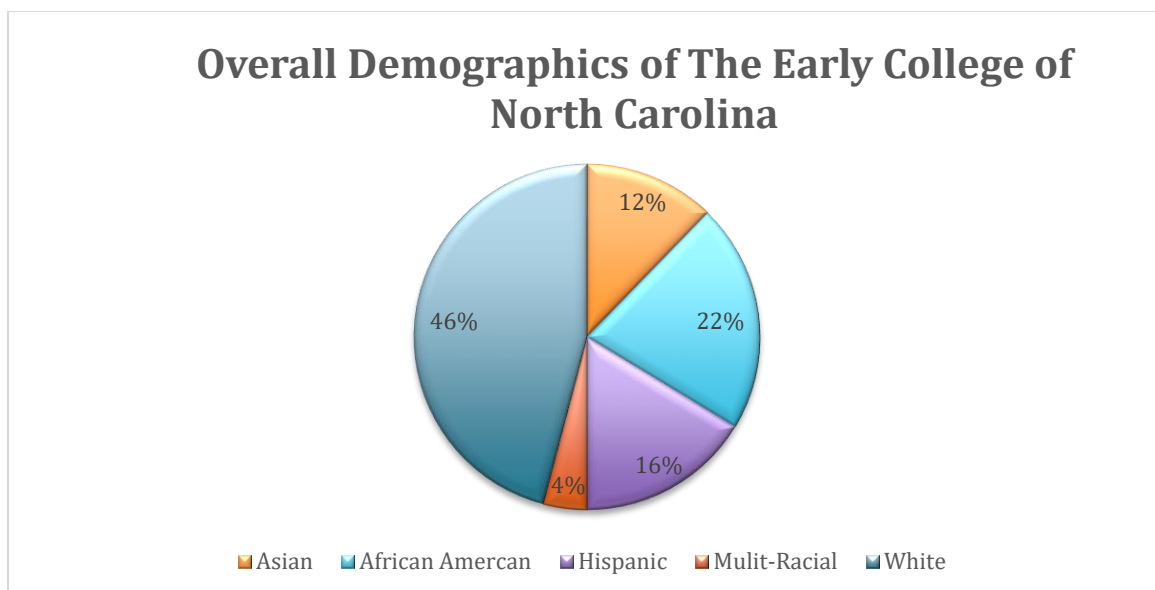


Figure 2. Overall Demographic for the Early College of North Carolina.

Academic Performance of Focus School

Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year data, per legislation (G.S. §115C-83.15) passed during the 2013 long session of the North Carolina General Assembly, school performance grades (A–F) based on test scores and high schools’ additional indicators that measure college and career readiness are reported for schools in North Carolina. School performance grades are based on student achievement (80%) and growth (20%; “School Performance Grades for North Carolina,” 2017).

The EVAAS model, which provides the growth measure, uses current and previous student test data to determine whether schools are maintaining or increasing student achievement from one year to the next. In the event that a school does not have a growth score, only the school achievement score is used to calculate the performance score (“School Performance Grades for North Carolina,” 2017). For the final performance score and grade, if a school’s growth designation is meets or exceeds

expected growth but the inclusion of the school's growth score reduces the school's performance score and grade, only the school achievement score may be used for the performance score and grade ("School Performance Grades for North Carolina," 2017). Based on the aforementioned achievement and growth formulas determined by the state of North Carolina, the Early College of North Carolina received a state school performance grade of A.

The state-issued standardized tests included in the achievement index are as follows: Math I EOC, English 2 EOC, Biology EOC, American College Test (ACT), Workkeys, and Math Course for Rigor ("School Performance Grades for North Carolina," 2017). Table 1 provides the overall achievement and growth data for the Early College of North Carolina highlighted in this research.

Table 1

Overall Achievement and Growth Data for the Early College of North Carolina

School	Achievement (80%)						Growth (20%)		
	Math I EOC	English 2 EOC	Biology EOC	ACT	Workkeys	Math Course for Rigor	Graduation Rate	Growth Status	Growth index
Early College of North Carolina	>95	>95	85	>95		>95	>95	MET	1.89

Participants

The population of this research study consisted of eight African American males, all of whom were enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina. Although there were precisely 20 African American males who were enrolled at the research site, only 10 responded to the researcher, with eight of those willing to participate at the time of this study.

Of the eight males taking part in this study, one was slated to be a first-generation college student. Six of the eight participants were from a two-parent home, while only two were from a single-parent home. One participant was a graduating senior, four were juniors, two were freshmen, and one a sophomore.

While the researcher worked to include a wide variety of students (e.g., students with Individualized Educational Plans or 504's, students with various socioeconomic backgrounds, and students who have been labeled academically gifted), none of the aforementioned labels were tracked during this study.

Instruments

This research was conducted as a qualitative, phenomenological study. The researcher conducted interviews as the primary instrument in this study. The interviews allowed for the examination of the interviewees' beliefs.

Since the beginning of the spread of qualitative research, interviews have been employed to gain an understanding of human beings (Dahl, 2010). The qualitative research investigates how and why an experience in a person's life took place by using interviews (Englander, 2012).

The researcher created 11 interview questions (Appendix A) to allow for a deeper understanding of experiences of African American males enrolled in the Early College of North Carolina. The interviews provided lived experiences of African American male perceptions of the impact the ECHS has had on them academically.

Procedures

An application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Gardner-Webb University was submitted for approval for the proposed study. Once approved and as

required by the IRB, all participants were provided with an explanation of informed consent. The Letter of Consent (Appendix B) detailed the procedures of the study; risks, if any, associated with participation; the extent of anonymity and confidentiality to each participant; and the process of withdrawal from the study should the participant choose to no longer be a part of the study.

Prior to beginning this project, the researcher obtained permission from the Early College of North Carolina school district's Research and Evaluation Department (Appendix C). Once approval was granted by Gardner-Webb's IRB, the researcher solicited the help of the school counselors at the Early College of North Carolina to aid in the process of student selection and securing dates and a location to conduct research over the course of the semester. Once students were selected, a letter of consent (Appendix B) outlining the purpose of the study was sent to both students and parents requesting a return signature to indicate approval of participation (Appendix D).

With all the appropriate permissions, the researcher conducted interviews with currently enrolled African American males to explore their experiences while enrolled at the early college.

Interviews

Participants were asked to volunteer their participation in personal interviews. For accuracy, interview sessions were audio recorded and transcribed. These interviews provided insight into the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled and how students perceive the impact of the early college on their academic performance.

Conducting qualitative research involves human relationships and collaboration (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2014). Participants learn to not only trust the researcher but also

the whole research enterprise, although they may not fully realize the broader implications of the information they choose to reveal during the research process (Hatch, 2002). To ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical manner, the names of participants remained confidential. Additionally, pseudonyms were used to identify participants throughout the study. The researcher emphasized to participants that participation was strictly voluntary, their words would be included in the study, and they could withdraw from this study at any point. During this process, no other person had access to the data. The audio recordings and transcribed interviews were stored in a password-protected personal iPad and computer. Filed back-up copies of audio recordings and transcripts were kept on a personal USB stored in the researcher's home office. All data will be destroyed 5 years after collecting them. The paper copies of transcriptions, list of participants' names and pseudonyms, consent forms, and other related documents will be shredded. The data files in the researcher's personal computer and USB will be deleted.

Data Analysis

The researcher reviews all the data, makes sense of them, and organizes them into categories or themes that cut across all data sources. The qualitative component is a way to understand how individuals and unique situations relate to a social problem or concern (Creswell, 2014). This information is usually gathered in a setting relevant to the individual and the problem being examined.

In this study, data were gathered by the researcher and examined for themes, with the researcher offering explanations about the data. Miles and Huberman (2014) suggested, the researcher develop a "start list" (p. 58) of possible codes and refine the list

as needed. Derived from the research questions and conceptual framework, the researcher created a list of codes to identify trends, themes, and commonalities according to the issues posed in the research questions such as (a) self-efficacy and (b) lived experiences while enrolled as a student at the Early College of North Carolina. Miles and Huberman recommended using a clear, rational code structure that is easy to apply and reference.

Summary of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 introduced the methodology for the current study. A qualitative, phenomenological study was chosen to explore the lived experiences of African American males who were enrolled in an early college and to answer two research questions relating to their lived experiences. The population of this research study consisted of eight African American males, all of whom were enrolled in Grades 9-12 at the Early College of North Carolina in a large urban school district in North Carolina. The data collected for this study were in the form of one-on-one interviews. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration, and transcriptions were completed utilizing Trint, an auto-transcription website. Chapter 4 includes the detailed results of data collected through one-on-one interviews. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of the results with conclusions and further discussion of the research study related to current practice and the possibility of future research studies.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This interpretative phenomenological research study was designed as an instrument to examine the lived experiences of African American males who were enrolled in an early college in the form of reflective practice. Phenomenology, through one-on-one interviews, was the chosen method to study their thought processes and reflections. According to Groenewald (2004), phenomenology is based on the perspective and experiences of people as they are lived. Creswell (2014) described phenomenology as “the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 10).

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American males who were enrolled in an early college. With an ever-increasing demand to close achievement gaps between African American and Caucasian students in American classrooms, the goal of this study was to provide insight into their experiences hoping to impact other African American students’ academic performance as well as their probability to earn a high school diploma and a college degree. Understanding how African American males feel about their academic and personal experiences furnishes pertinent information needed to help educators develop an awareness of issues existing in the lives of this underrepresented population (Holliday & Strange, 2013). It is essential for educators to implement and ameliorate programs at the university level to attract students and to retain African American males at their schools (Holliday & Strange, 2013).

Overview

The population of this research study consisted of eight African American males, all of whom were enrolled in the Early College of North Carolina, Grades 9-12.

Although there were precisely 20 African American males who were enrolled at the research site, only 10 returned a response to the researcher. Letters requesting participation in the research were sent to 20 African American males at the site. Eight males responded in the affirmative to participate in the research study, one declined by marking the appropriate selection on the consent form, and one submitted a blank consent form which the researcher accepted as a declined response.

Over a period of 1 week, the participants in the study were scheduled for an interview. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration and were developed to allow the researcher to explore and examine reasons, factors, themes, and/or individuals who encouraged and impacted participants to enroll and remain at the Early College of North Carolina. The interviews were recorded by audio to ensure all responses were documented.

Interview transcriptions were completed utilizing Trint, an auto-transcription website. The researcher edited transcriptions to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions provided by Trint's software. The data collected in the form of transcribed interviews were analyzed using a method similar to that outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) and Brubaker (2016) in which the researcher read and reread the data while making notations, descriptive code marks, and comments in margins.

This method of coding, called descriptive coding, "summarizes the primary topic of the excerpt" (Saldana, 2008, p. 3). While reading responses to transcribed interviews,

the researcher made codes or wrote descriptive words in margins. During this process, the researcher analyzed the data for similarities, patterns, and connections in experiences described by the participants as well as emerging themes that were further noted. If a similar experience was shared by more than one participant, the experience was categorized as a theme. After multiple readings of transcripts and reviewing of audio files, themes emerged and responses were explored for commonalities to give insight into African American males' lives and perspectives on education.

Like the method used by Brubaker (2016), the results of this interpretative phenomenological research data analysis are presented in the form of thematic descriptions as identified by the researcher. An example of this process can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes Identified During Coding

Theme	Exemplars
Parental Impact	“Well it wasn’t necessarily my choice as much as my parent’s choice” – Jeffery Stanford
	“...partly because my mom and dad wanted me to go, it just seemed like a smart move...” – Bobby
	“...influence from parents ... so to make them proud, to make them happy, I decided to go here and finish it all the way” – James
	“...my mother started researching [Early College of North Carolina] instead” – Foster

Research Participants

The participants of this research project were targeted specifically as African American males enrolled in the Early College of North Carolina. Each participant was

promised anonymity throughout the study and selected a pseudonym identifier. Table 3 provides an overview of the participants, the pseudonym used by the researcher to identify each participant, classification in high school of each participant, and indication of first-generation college student of each participant.

Table 3

Information Regarding Participants

Participant Identified by Pseudonym	High School Classification	First-Generation College Student
Jeffery Stanford	Graduating Senior	No
Bobby	Junior	No
James	Junior	No
Jordan	Freshman	No
Michael	Junior	No
Sun	Sophomore	No
Andre	Freshman	Yes
Foster	Junior	No

A general discussion of each participant's background and experience as an African American enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina is presented in narrative form as a way for the researcher and the reader to gain a better understanding of factors that could have influenced or had bearing on each participant's experience with the phenomenon being discussed.

According to Moustakas (1994), in phenomenological research, perception is regarded as the predominant source of understanding. The narratives are based on interviews and the data collected by the researcher from each individual participant. The narratives are also reflective of the researcher's general observations and perceptions of each participant. These general observations were confirmed by both the Early College of North Carolina's school counselor and principal.

When applicable, direct quotes from the participants were used to make the experience as genuine as possible.

Jeffery Stanford. Jeffery is a graduating senior at the Early College of North Carolina. The researcher's initial impression of Jeffery was that he is more mature than most of his peer group, straightforward and confident. When reiterating the purpose of the study and asked to tell about himself, he immediately began with, "Well, I'm a senior in high school. My parents are both African American as are their parents, aunts, and so on." Jeffery comes from a two-parent home where both of his parents attended and graduated from college. Jeffery shared the decision to attend the Early College of North Carolina was "not necessarily my choice as much as my parents' choice." He added that when they heard of the opportunity, they [both he and his parents] were "excited and saw the ability to graduate college in just two years compared to the traditional four and a huge way to save money. It was a huge way to get ahead."

Jeffery, who shared he had a passion for biology, is pursuing an associate of science degree and is planning to pursue a career in science. Jeffery is content with his experience at the Early College of North Carolina and added that he feels that his experience at a traditional high school would not have afforded him the same experiences or opportunities, despite having the opportunity to dual enroll.

Bobby. Bobby, a junior at the research site, also comes from a two-parent home and has an older sibling currently in college. When providing background information about himself and his family, he shared, "In our household, we have core family values [of] trust [and] responsibility." He added, "They hold me accountable. We hold each other accountable." While Bobby's father did not attend college, his mother completed

her bachelor's degree and received a master's from one of the local universities near the research site. He, like Jeffery Stanford, had an enormous amount of parental influence when making the decision to attend the Early College of North Carolina. He stated, "...partly because my mom, my dad wanted me to go. When they introduced the idea to me, it seemed like a smart move to save money and earn an associate degree."

Bobby, who expressed some ideas about how to attract more African American students to early college, has hopes to attend a 4-year university such as Clemson, North Carolina State, or Howard. While Bobby stated that there are certain parts of the traditional high school he misses, he is confident that his experience at the Early College of North Carolina has prepared him to "be competitive by trying something different."

James. James, who sacrificed his desire to attend a traditional high school for the desire to make his parents happy, possesses a quiet strength. Pausing to think before answering all the interview questions, James offered a unique perspective into his lived experience at the Early College of North Carolina. James, who is West African, believes that attending the early college has not only challenged him to be a more conscientious student but also a student who is held to a higher standard than those of his counterparts who attend a traditional high school in the local school district. James is a junior pursuing an associate degree in arts and admits, while not necessarily true at the Early College of North Carolina, there is "definitely more pressure to be popular and less academically successful."

Jordan. Jordan is a freshman at the Early College of North Carolina. He describes himself as an extrovert who "likes to get my work done and have fun." As with most participants in this study, Jordan is not the first in his family to attend college.

Although Jordan was assured complete confidentiality during this process, he was initially guarded when responding to questions regarding his lived experience as an African American male at the Early College of North Carolina. When referencing research that trend toward the idea that African American males were more concerned with being accepted by their peers versus achieving academic success and if he had experience with said trend, Jordan replied, “Kind of. Not really, but I did.” When he was asked to elaborate on the response, Jordan relaxed and admitted that while he is a “people person,” there is pressure to focus on the social more than academics. Jordan stated,

I [will not] say that sometimes you can't be yourself. You just have to think about different factors, like you don't want to be the kid that's left out or whatever. It's like you feel like you have to change. Then you have to take into account that you can't do everything [others] do.

Jordan, who aspires to be a criminal defense lawyer, is content with his experience at the Early College of North Carolina but believes adding African American instructors will help to attract and retain African Americans students.

Michael. Michael is a junior at the Early College of North Carolina and describes his family as one with deeply rooted religious beliefs and begins to acknowledge a long lineage of ministers, teachers, and pastors in his family tree. Michael's personality exudes self-assurance, amiability, and sincerity. Michael comes from a single-parent home; and while his mother attended college, she did not graduate. Michael, unlike the other participants, shared that the decision to apply and attend the Early College of North Carolina was solely his decision, but he had the full support of his mother.

Michael offered insight into why he believes the Early College of North Carolina

has added to his success as a student and how other African American males could be enticed to attend: “The Early College of North Carolina is like a secret. I think if it were talked about more and [people] understand that it’s not about being smart, it’s about how driven and passionate you are to achieve your goals.”

Sun. Sun was an absolute delight to interview. While only a freshman, he is energetic, focused, and intelligent. Sun offers a distinct perspective on his African American experience at the Early College of North Carolina as both his biological parents are Tanzanian and were invited to America by a college in New York to complete their studies. Sun’s biological mother’s and father’s professions are a lawyer and artist respectively; however, the “mother” and “father” he currently resides with and whose last name he has taken, are both doctors at one of the local hospitals. Sun indicated he was introduced to the Early College of North Carolina through his adopted brother and was initially waitlisted. When asked to talk about what it is like to be an African American male at the Early College of North Carolina, Sun stated,

It’s fun. It’s interesting.... When I came in, I noticed they mix cultures well.... I also noticed a few things like there were a lot of East Asians, Filipino, and Korean. I mean they have African American and they have me. I am African American because my parents are African, and I was born in America. But I feel like I’m more African because my parents aren’t American. So, it’s different.... And traditional African American parents and my parents even tell me this. No matter how much Americans tried to change, they look at you first and say, oh I can probably see how this is going. So, my parents, they’ve pushed me to do better.

Sun, who believes that his experience will continue to prepare him to attend North Carolina State, aspires to become both a medical doctor and a music teacher.

Andre. Andre, a freshman, is the only participant in this study who will be a first-generation college student. When asked, what it is like to be a first-generation college graduate, Andre responded, “I feel very accomplished. I feel that I’ve been able to make something out of myself and make my parents proud and just be able to grow into the person who I want to be.” Andre demonstrated ambition and grit to continue to pursue excellence for both himself, his siblings, and his parents.

During the interview, the question, “what has been your family’s influence to attend the Early College of North Carolina,” was posed. During the coding of the interview data, six of the eight interviewed young men had a heavy parental influence on their decision to attend the Early College of North Carolina. Andre, whose father is African American and mother Hispanic, stated,

I come from two different ethnicities and races which is kind of a building factor of who I am. Attending the Early College of North Carolina has really affected them [parents] because it’s kind of driving them to become better people. As I’m doing for myself, as they support me on this journey through my academic career, they are trying to improve themselves.

Andre, an incisive young man, has plans to continue his education beyond the 2-year associate degree he will receive in 3 years. He is excited about his future as well as the future of his mom and dad, whom he has inspired to go back to school.

Foster. Foster, a junior of few words, aspires to have a career as an aeronautical engineer. Foster’s parents, according to Foster, had a huge amount of influence over his

decision to apply to and attend the Early College of North Carolina. While he had plans to attend a traditional high school in the district, his mother researched and decided that the Early College of North Carolina would be a better fit. One's initial impression of Foster is that he is quiet and reserved in his manner. It is also clear that he wants to make his parents happy. When asked about the relationship between students and staff at the early college, Foster stated, "Very good. I don't talk about personal things, but I'm still very comfortable talking about academic things." Foster also stated that given his experience at the Early College of North Carolina, he felt prepared to move on to a 4-year university and would not change anything about his personal lived experience.

Addressing the Research Questions

The goal of the researcher in answering the research questions was to obtain a deeper understanding of experiences of African American males who are enrolled in an early college regarding academic barriers, self-efficacy, and perceptions of academic impact. This research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in an early college in North Carolina?
2. How have these lived experiences impacted academic performance?

Discussion of the Major Themes

Based on the responses provided by the participants during individual interviews, there were five themes identified. These five themes include (a) preparation for a 4-year college/university, (b) self-awareness, (c) academic self-confidence, (d) sense of school belonging, and (e) support systems.

The first three themes, (a) preparation for a 4-year college/university, (b) self-

awareness, and (c) academic self-confidence identified in this section from interview data, answer the first research question, “What are the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in an early college in North Carolina?”

The final two themes, (d) sense of school belonging and (e) support systems, address the second research question, “How have these lived experiences impacted academic performance?”

Quotations are used from interview transcripts to support each of the five aforementioned themes. These themes, as well as exemplars from participant interviews, are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Major Themes Identified During Coding

Major Themes	Exemplars
a. Preparation for a 4-Year College/University	<p>“...It is different from the normal work you are used to and slightly more difficult because your professor’s expectations are different that [traditional] high school.” – James</p> <p>“...the college professors, they won’t like come to you every two seconds to remind you to do this or you have to do that[assignments]. It helps me to become more efficient.” – Jordan</p>
b. Self-Awareness	<p>“I’ve always been focused on academic success and all my peers come second, always.” – Jeffery Stanford</p> <p>“...you just focus on grades and not focus on your peers” – Foster</p>
c. Academic Self-Confidence	<p>“I tell people that I attend early college and they look at me weirdly, but for me, I just look at it as an advantage... you have to be responsible...” – Bobby</p> <p>“I feel very accomplished. I am very academically driven...” – Andre</p>
d. Sense of School Belonging	<p>“Everybody is more accepted because we have so many different people from different ethnic backgrounds, sexuality and gender. You come here with an open mind.” – Michael</p> <p>“...it’s interesting because you get these people and you think that you’re gonna be the only different one, but it’s not...so you get this fun interesting way of seeing things.” – Sun</p>
e. Support Systems	<p>“...nothing about you race or anything. Just like who you are as a person. Like the faculty here look beyond skin color.” – Michael</p> <p>“It’s good. Like the teachers here are cool...it’s a good relationship.” – Jordan</p>

Responses to Research Question 1

Theme 1: Preparation for 4-year college or university. The first major theme to emerge from individual interviews included preparation for 4-year college or university. The ECHSI started in 2002 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as well as assistance from Jobs for the Future (Berger, Turk-Bicaki, Garet, Knudson, & Hoshen, 2013). The primary goal of the ECHSI, as stated earlier, is to provide students who traditionally may not have the opportunity to attend college with coursework or transferable credits and experiences necessary to transfer and perform successfully at another 4-year college or university (Berger et al., 2013, p. 2). The goal of the NCNSP and educational institutions is to prepare students to become academically successful in postsecondary endeavors in college (NCNSP, 2013).

In order to address Research Question 1, the researcher asked participants to describe their experience taking college courses as high school students and give detail as to whether the experience, thus far, has helped in their success. The following perceptions regarding preparation for 4-year college or university were shared during individual interviews.

Andre, the only first-generation participant in the research study, shared as a student at the early college there is a higher level of expectation and caliber to which he is held to in comparison to that of his counterparts who attend other schools in the district:

Well [Early College of North Carolina], there is a lot of academic expectations.

You're expected to excel and go beyond the minimum which is kind of what the program was meant to do, help students who are striving to excel. The standard is

set pretty high ... after leaving the early college, I plan to go to a four-year university and then after I graduate from there, possibly pursue a higher education. [The Early College at North Carolina] has pushed me beyond the limit and shows that I have more potential than I thought I have and that drives me to do better.

According to Sun, his success at the Early College of North Carolina is a direct reflection on the instructors who are teaching both his college and high school courses. He is certain that he will be fully prepared to enter North Carolina State or any other 4-year university he decides to attend. This is supported by his statement that

It's been interesting ... I guess [taking college courses] wakes up your eyes that these are college professors. I went from middle school straight to a college professor who is demanding my work by a specific time ... of course I need it because it is preparing me for med school and the professors there are definitely more rough at a [4-year university] than the professors here and I know that it is work that I have been prepared for.

While James, who is West African, does not necessarily believe that his success would be different if he elected to attend a traditional high school, he does believe his work ethic is much different. He stated,

Your work ethic essentially has to go up because the expectations that you are held to at [Early College of North Carolina]... It is different from the normal work you are used to and slightly more difficult because your professor's expectations are different than [traditional] high school teacher's expectations.

Michael stated,

Yes, [I think it is the early college experience versus a traditional school] that has helped prepare me for college. I really didn't do it to be the first one in my family to have a college degree. I just thought [attending Early College of North Carolina] would push me beyond my limits and I just saw myself going farther than I could push myself than I would allow myself to see.

Bobby stated,

I attended this school because ... well, partly because my mom and my dad wanted me to go. When they introduced the idea it just seemed like a smart move to save money.... It's part me, too. I just want to be competitive and put myself out there to try something different [from the traditional high school].

Jordan added,

The college professors, they won't like come to you every two seconds to remind you to do this or you have to do that [assignments]. It helps me to become more efficient. I thought it was going to be hard and stressful, but for me it really isn't. [my plans after leaving Early College of North Carolina] are to go to a four-year college and graduate. This experience is preparing me for what's to come.

Theme 2: Self-awareness. The next theme that emerged from individual interviews was self-awareness. For the purpose of this research study, self-awareness is defined as an honest appraisal and understanding of one's strengths and limitations.

After interviewing the eight African American males, the researcher was impressed by how each young man was confident and cognizant of his identity as an intelligent African American young man.

In response to Research Question 1, each of the participants was asked to discuss his experience as it relates to studies indicating that African American males are more concerned with peer acceptance rather than achieving academic success. Jefferey Stanford responded,

So, for me personally, I've always been focused on academic success; [how] all my peers think of me come second. I always push myself regardless of what my friends think. There is a certain stigma around being the smartest kid in the class. Being a nerd and that sort of thing, so I guess that could have some effect on [why there is more concerned with peer acceptance rather than achieving academic success]. I don't think it's that they don't have the ability to [apply themselves] just focused more on what their peers say.

Bobby, a junior who also aspires to attend a 4-year university, explained,

Oh, definitely. I kind of relate to that because I talked to some people who are in that position [the need for peer acceptance rather than academic achievement], but I've never experienced it. They feel like they are missing something, you know. They don't feel like trying or they put their trust in people as if people can always be there for them. They want to be cool for the moment. It's all about the now and not really thinking about the future ... I think it's more valuable to be a smart, African American male.

Andre added,

I think [being more concerned with peer acceptance rather than achieving academic success] really depends on the type of person you are regardless of your background. I don't think race is necessarily a factor. [While] I have seen it in

[peers] in the past, I just think it just depends on the amount of drive that you have and what your priorities are.

Sun, who at the time of the encounter below just enrolled to public school after his private school closed, added,

I'm going back to my middle school [experience]. I think that a lot of African American male boys there [and] even just Latinos, they all were in their little groups of guys or groups of guys and girls and then most of them weren't really succeeding in school. However, most of them, I knew for a fact because I was paired with some of them, were smart and I thought, Wow, I don't have to pull the group because they know what they're doing. But it's like when they were doing [work] with their groups their grades were not good, and I'm like, but they're like really smart. My parents, they've pushed me to do better because they told me that [society] will look at my last name [and] it's unpronounceable so [society's] like oh, it's this kid. We probably won't accept him. But if your [school] scores are great. Then they're like oh so he's one of those people that can do great.... I think most African American males are trying too much to be the top of the social society groups so much so that they're not focused on their grades and schoolwork. But there are some, like my cousins, some of my friends [and] even here [at the Early College of North Carolina] where we're focused ... we're all focused on our grades. I feel like most boys [of color] think that it's two different things. And so, they have to separate from one person. Either I'm socially aware and I'm this big social guy or I'm a really nerdy guy. They don't understand that you can have both and show [others that] a lot of African American males can

succeed and have their social name.

James said,

Yeah, I can see that. Me ... I'm not too affected by what people think. But I can also see how [with] peer's influence ... you're more likely to focus on that instead of what you're actually at school to do ... being smart and being African American, at least at [the Early College of North Carolina], it's not a very bad thing because it's common. [At a more traditional high school] Yeah, there's definitely more pressure to be up there in popularity, but less academically successful. Honestly, I think if you're cool or really up there in popularity, being smart would actually help you.

Michael said,

As African Americans were already kind of like outliers in society so really [we] try to do anything to fit in into any kind of crowd whether it's the African American community or just society as a whole.... It just depends on a person. [For an example] from my previous middle school, I've seen a lot of African American males who were more interested in sports than their education. And I have met some who are more serious about their education and sports [are] on the backburner. And so, it just varies on the person. I'm here where it's very small and you just have to be driven and prepared and willing to do the work.

Theme 3: Academic self-confidence. The third and final theme that addresses Research Question 1 is academic self-confidence. The participants in this study exude academic self-confidence. According to Andre,

My dad is African American and my mom is actually Hispanic. So, I come from

two different [minority] ethnicities and races which is a building factor of who I am. I feel very accomplished that I've been able to make something out of myself and just make my parents proud. In middle school, I noticed that I [was] very academically driven, and the traditional high school was really not [going to be] enough for me. I realized that [Early College of North Carolina] was very rigorous and prestigious and would challenge me to be the best person I can be ... I think the fact that I come from a diverse background [I] know I can be an inspiration to other people of diverse backgrounds who are striving to succeed but feel they can't just because of where they come from.

Jeffery Stanford's academic self-confidence was supported by his statement:

I think a lot of the time when I say I'm at [the Early College of North Carolina] they [respond] Wow, you must be super smart. So, I feel like people think that one of the requirements is to be extremely intelligent. Most of it [successful academic performance] is about rigor and how well [and] how hard you push yourself. I feel like if [the Early College of North Carolina] was not necessarily framed as a school for all the smart kids, rather for the school for the hardworking kids, that would help. So, I guess [other students have to] get the idea that no, you don't have to be a genius to come here. You have to be willing to apply yourself.

Michael added,

I get a questioned when I tell people that I go to [Early College of North Carolina] and they're like, oh really, you must be smart. I don't like that comment at all because I feel as though when people hear [Early College of North Carolina] they

think of smart. Really, for me, it shows good time management, and anybody can do it. It's just that if you put your mind to it and I think that a lot of people are so focused on so many other things that when it comes to education, they're not always a hundred percent focused on it.

Bobby stated,

It's definitely different. I tell people that I go to early colleges they can look at me weirdly, not weirdly, but it's kind of like it's different. Maybe that he's so smart or maybe they feel like they don't have most things in common with me. But for me, I just look at it as kind of an advance. I guess you could say it is difficult for me because you have to make sure you're on top of your work. You have to be responsible at an earlier age. [I do feel] like [attending the early college] is going to set me up or put me in a better position whenever I attend college.

Foster, a young man of few words, responded, “No. [I do not agree that African American males are more concerned about their peers about being accepted by their peers more so than achieving academic success]. You just have to focus on your grades here and not focus on your peers.”

Responses to Research Question 2

Theme 4: Sense of school belonging. The first theme identified in response to Research Question 2 is sense of school belonging. For the purpose of this study, sense of school belonging is defined by Goodenow (1992) as the extent to which students perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community.

The participants of this study were complimentary of the environment in which they learned, indicating that it helped them to navigate their educational journey while

enrolled at Early College of North Carolina. In Sun's own words,

It's fun, it's interesting ... being here and I noticed ... they [Early College of North Carolina] mix cultures well...I also noticed a few things like that have a lot there a lot of East Asians, like I have like a bunch of Filipino friends and Korean. So, it's like you take that and then you bring it to the school. And it's kind of like you get to add a little more to the school and you get to do a little more. And everyone here is like one giant family and [race] doesn't matter. I mean in this school ... I have other people that understand me. It's interesting because you get these people and you think that you're gonna be the only different one, but you are not. And so, you get this fun interesting way of seeing things.

Michael also agreed that the culture is one that allows you to be who you are without the pressures of trying to fit into a specific group of people. When asked to discuss what it is like to be an African American male enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina, Michael explained,

It's no different ... at this school, everybody's more accepted because we have so many different people from different ethnic backgrounds, sexuality, [and] gender. So, you just come here with an open mind. It's very few African American males. I was talking to a friend about this the other day, it's not a lot of us[African American males] but it's still good to see that as African Americans and African American males [we] are still doing something that's very positive because society sees African American males as negative. So, it's good that we're trying to change that mindset of society.

James's experience in his own words was, "Well, me personally, I'm not the most

outgoing person, but the staff are very kind. They like help you no matter what [the circumstances]. Some [staff] see students as family [and will] go do anything for students.” Andre added,

At [Early College of North Carolina] there is a lot of academic expectations. You're expected to excel and go beyond the minimum which is kind of what the program was meant to do to help students who are striving to excel. So, the standard is set high. And I think that if you go back to the academic relationships [with teachers, school counselors and other staff] those foundations are able to help us meet those standards.

Theme 5: Support systems. All interviews began with asking participants the influence of their family surrounding their choice to attend the Early College of North Carolina. One hundred percent of the participants indicated family was of tremendous influence and in total support of their academic journey.

When asked to describe the academic relationship between staff and students at the early college and if participants thought there was a difference with African American male students, Andre responded,

I think the academic relationship is really founded. I feel that students and teachers have a comfortable relationship enough where you're able to talk to them not only regarding academic things, but about other situations that you may have. They're very accessible and they are very open to help you out with any needs of any matter that you may have. So, I think that that's helpful to students especially as freshmen because you know there is a lot to take in. [With regards to the difference with African Americans] I don't believe [there is a difference] it's

balanced disregarding the background or ethnicity or race you come from.

Jordan's experience in his own words was,

The academic relationship is good. Like the teachers here are cool. One morning I came to school really upset. All my teachers were asking if I was okay, if I needed stuff. They were there for me and kept comforting me. So, yeah, it a good relationship.

While Foster agreed that the support systems were in place at the Early College of North Carolina, he stated, "I don't talk about personal things, but I'm still very comfortable talking to [teachers] about academic things." Bobby described his relationship with the staff as an African American male: "Well, it depends on the person. For me, it's interactive. I have a very close relationship with my counselors, teachers, and the college teachers. I and my friends interact with them more than most seniors." Jeffery Stanford explained, "I feel like [the relationship between staff and students] we have a really good dynamic going on here. Teachers are always really supportive of the students. I feel like with most teachers they genuinely want me to succeed."

Emerging Theme

Question 10 from the interview questions (Appendix A) solicited an open-ended response from participants, asking, "Is there anything that you think should be added to the Early College of North Carolina that would attract more African American males?" Due to the open-ended aspect of the question, the participants shared valuable insight that provided the researcher additional information to add to this study as one of catalysts in the movement to increase visibility of research specifically focused on closing the achievement gap of African American males in education.

Fifty percent of the participants in this study not only expressed the desire to have additional representation of instructors who “looked like them” but also believed that adding more representation would increase the enrollment number of African American males who apply and are accepted to their institution. Table 5 describes exemplars related to Question 10.

Table 5

Additional Theme Identified During Coding

Major Theme	Exemplar
Representation	<p>“Oh, I guess more African American students ...or maybe like another black male teacher...” – Jordan</p> <p>“... more African American staff...African American students gravitate to the African -American faculty...” – Michael</p> <p>“I think maybe more diversity and not just with African Americans, but like the Hispanic community...”– Andre</p> <p>“...add more diverse backgrounds...” – James</p>

When asked if there is anything that should be added to the Early College of North Carolina to attract more African American males, Jordan replied, “Oh, ... more African American students or African American male students because you don’t want to be the only black male here.... I’m not the only black male, but [there are very few]. Maybe another black male teacher.” Michael stated, “...more African American staff. I have seen that the African American students here gravitate to the African American faculty ... they are cool.” Andre said, “I also talk to the non-African American staff, but I think it is a good relationship that we can connect with more diversity and not just with African Americans, but like the Hispanic community also.”

Summary of Chapter 4

The analysis of this phenomenological study found five recurring themes. The first three address the lived experiences of the African American males who are currently enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina: (a) preparation for a 4-year college/university, (b) self-awareness, and (c) academic self-confidence.

The final three themes address how these lived experiences have impacted their academic performance while enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina: (d) sense of school belonging, (e) support systems, and (f) representation. Two themes, sense of school belonging and support systems, also examine the probability to earn both a high school diploma and a college degree. The final theme, representation, emerged through an open-ended response from participants.

While 100% of the students were cognizant of the negative stereotypes of African American males, they have not been deterred as evident by the fact that they are on target to graduate high school and earn an associate degree. This fact is notable as the statistics on African American males and school completion has been on a steady decline as indicated in recent studies.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore lived experiences of African American males who were enrolled in an early college. This study focused on the real-life, day-to-day accounts experienced and retold by students in their own words through one-on-one interviews. This research answered the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in an early college in North Carolina?
2. How have these lived experiences impacted academic performance?

The goal of the researcher in answering the research questions was to obtain a deeper understanding of experiences of African American males who are enrolled in an early college regarding academic barriers, self-efficacy, and perceptions of academic impact.

Restatement of the Problem

As stated earlier, academically, African American boys are at risk. African American males' test scores lag behind those of their White peers, and they are far more likely to grow up in poverty, attend struggling schools, and drop out before graduation (Yaffe, 2012).

On the NAEP, the test sometimes called "The Nation's Report Card," only 13% of fourth-grade African American boys scored proficient in reading, compared with 40% of White boys. The gap is no smaller in eighth grade, when 11% of African American boys and 37% of White boys scored at proficient levels (Yaffe, 2012). Black males, as a

group, experience disproportionate amounts of school failure (Whiting, 2009b).

Compared to Black females and White males, for example, Black males have the highest dropout rates, poorest achievement, and lowest test scores. Further, they are sorely underrepresented in gifted education and overrepresented in special education (Whiting, 2009b).

Considering these discouraging statistics and findings, inspiring work has commenced with respect to college preparation models that aim to prepare underrepresented students including African American males for college and beyond.

Early colleges, much like the one highlighted in this study, challenge the traditional structures of education and have established a legacy of successes of their African American males. Understanding how African American males feel about their academic and personal experiences furnishes pertinent information needed to help educators and policy makers develop an awareness of issues existing in the lives of this underrepresented population (Holliday & Strange, 2013).

Summary of the Study

The data collected for this study were in the form of one-on-one interviews. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration and were developed to allow the researcher to explore and examine reasons, factors, themes, and/or individuals who encouraged and impacted participants to enroll and remain at the Early College of North Carolina. The data collected in the form of transcribed interviews were analyzed by multiple readings, making notations, thematic code marks, and comments in margins.

During this process, the researcher analyzed the data for similarities, patterns, and connections in challenging experiences described by the participants as well as emerging

themes. After multiple readings of the data, themes were coded, and the results of this interpretative phenomenological research data analysis are presented in the form of thematic descriptions as identified by the researcher.

Research Participants

This study was conducted at one of 17 high schools in a large urban school district in North Carolina. The population of this research study consisted of eight African American males, all of whom are enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina. Although there were precisely 20 African American males who were enrolled at the research site, only 10 responded to the researcher, with eight of those willing to participate at the time of this study. All eight males were enrolled in Grades 9-12.

Conceptual Framework

Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory was used in this qualitative, phenomenological study and provided the basis for the research. Social cognitive theory subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency where individuals are agentic operators in their life course (Bandura, 2001). Persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyors of animating environmental influences (Bandura, 2001).

Based on this framework, individuals operate as thinkers of the thoughts that serve determinative functions. They construct thoughts about future courses of action to suit ever-changing situations, assess their likely functional value, organize and deploy strategically the selected options, evaluate the adequacy of their thinking based on the effects which their actions produce, and make whatever changes may be necessary (Bandura, 2001).

According to Bandura (2001), self-efficacy beliefs refer to people's convictions

that they can accomplish what they desire to achieve. It is positively linked to academic achievement (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). The construct of self-efficacy illuminates the experience of educational success of the African American male participants in this study.

This study adds to the body of documented literature to be positively correlated with traditional indicators of academic achievement among African American males using the following three constructs: psychological sense of school belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

The goal of the researcher in answering the research questions was to obtain a deeper understanding of experiences of African American males who are enrolled in an early college regarding academic barriers, self-efficacy, and perceptions of academic impact. It was the researcher's belief that if the experiences in the lives of the African American males enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina were better understood, perhaps more effort could be placed on educators to be conscious of their role with African American males in order to ensure, across all institutions, equitable opportunities to excel academically. This research was used to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in an early college in North Carolina?
2. How have these lived experiences impacted academic performance?

Based on the responses provided by the participants during individual interviews, the following five themes were identified: (a) preparation for a 4-year college/university, (b) self-awareness, (c) academic self-confidence, (d) sense of belonging, and (e) support

systems. The first three themes identified in this section from interview data align with the first research question, “What are the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in an early college in North Carolina?”

The next two themes align with the second research question, “How have these lived experiences impacted academic performance?”

A final theme, representation, emerged through an open-ended response from participants regarding their thoughts on what, if anything, should be added to the Early College of North Carolina to attract more African American males. This additional theme substantiates a need to increase teachers of color, specifically African American teachers, in education.

Preparation for a 4-Year College/University

In response to Research Question 1, the data collected for this research indicated that preparation for a 4-year college/university was one of the greatest areas of appreciation experienced by the African American males in this research study. The data further indicated that all eight participants agreed that attending the Early College of North Carolina has prepared them to attend a 4-year college or university. Michael stated,

Yes, [I think it is the early college experience verses a traditional school] that has help prepare me for college. I really didn’t do it to be the first one in my family to have a college degree. I just thought [attending Early College of North Carolina] would push me beyond my limits and I just saw myself going farther that I could push myself than I would allow myself to see.

The findings of this research align with findings in the literature review in that

college readiness and preparedness programs, which have been implemented as a main thrust of some schools, have resulted in an increase in the percentages of African American males being accepted in schools and those attending and completing postsecondary education (Scott et al., 2014).

Early colleges, much like the one highlighted in this study, challenge the traditional structures of education and have established a legacy of successes of their African American males. These programs serve to place all participating students on a track towards college and to support and prepare them along the way (Scott et al., 2014).

Self-Awareness

As discussed in Chapter 2, Whiting (2009b) stated to support the process of image building among gifted Black males, educators must recognize the importance of how having a scholar identity can improve the motivation, achievement, and aspirations of these students. Whiting (2009b) defined scholar identity as one in which Black males perceive themselves as academicians, as studious, and as intelligent or talented in school settings. Self-awareness is one of nine characteristics Whiting (2006b) described in his conceptual model of scholar identity.

Based on coded data, all eight young men not only perceive themselves as academicians, studious, and intelligent in the school setting, but they are also delighted to be a part of a school setting that fosters an environment that supports their academic growth and achievement.

During the decoding process, it was Jeffery Stanford's response that resonated with the researcher most as it relates to self-awareness: "So, for me personally, I've always been focused on academic success; [What] all my peers think of me come second.

I always push myself regardless of what my friends think.”

Academic Self-Confidence

In addition to self-awareness, academic self-confidence is included in Whiting’s (2009a) conceptual model of scholar identity. Academic self-confidence for the purpose of this study is defined by Bandura (1997) as an individual’s confidence in his or her ability to succeed in academic tasks and pursuits.

This theme is also aligned with Whiting’s (2006a) SIM. As discussed in the literature review, Whiting (2006a) identified nine characteristics of scholar identity as one in which Black males perceive themselves as academicians, as studious, and as intelligent or talented in school settings. Whiting (2009b) identified and described these nine characteristics as the following:

1. Self-efficacy – believe in themselves and their abilities and skills as learners; they are resilient, have self-confidence, self-control, and a sense of self-responsibility;
2. Willingness to make sacrifices – understand how both personal and social sacrifices are necessary when preparing long term;
3. Internal locus of control – are optimistic; they believe they can do well because they work hard, study, and complete school assignments;
4. Future orientation – forward thinking, are not overly concerned about immediate gratification or short-term interests and goals;
5. Self-awareness – an honest appraisal and understanding of one’s strengths and limitations;
6. Need for achievement – need for achievement must be greater/stronger than

the need for affiliation;

7. Academic self-confidence – comfortable and confident in academic setting and do not see any reason to negate, deny, or minimize their academic abilities and skills;
8. Race pride – refuse to be inhibited by social injustices based on gender, socioeconomic status, and race or ethnicity; and
9. Masculinity – males are intelligent and that being gifted or intelligent does not subtract from their sense of masculinity or self-worth in any way.

Whiting (2009a) stated that a student who has academic self-confidence is a good student, a smart student. He feels comfortable and confident in academic settings, thus he is willing to raise his hand in class, to ask questions, and to acknowledge that he does not know the answer (Whiting, 2006a). Most importantly, he does not feel inferior in class; he does not feel that he must hide his academic abilities and skills. This student also has a strong work ethic and recognizes that hard work pays off. In essence, the student recognizes that to be successful, effort is just as important, or more important, than ability (Whiting, 2006a).

Whiting (2006b) described males who are academically self-confident as diverse males who believe they are capable students. They feel comfortable and confident in an academic setting and do not see any reason to negate, deny, or minimize their academic abilities and skills. These males have a strong work ethic; they spend time doing schoolwork, studying, and pushing themselves; and they recognize that ability without effort is a waste of gifts and talents.

Andre stated,

I feel very accomplished ... I think the fact that I come from a diverse background [I] know I can be an inspiration to other people of diverse backgrounds who are striving to succeed, but feel they can't just because of where they come from.

The findings of this research align with findings in the literature review on the subject of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an individual's confidence in his or her ability to succeed in academic tasks and pursuits.

Researchers have shown that academic self-efficacy is predictive of students' ability to succeed and that students with higher academic self-efficacy work harder (Bandura et al., 2003), are more persistent (Pajares, 2009), and develop better goal-setting and time-monitoring strategies than other students (Zimmerman, 2000).

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

There is a need to understand reasons some African American males appear more motivated and resolute in their desire to seek higher education opportunities (Green, 2010). By identifying key factors, pertinent rationale, and significant lived experiences in the lives of the African American males enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina, more effort is needed by educators to be conscious of their role with African American males. The shared experiences and the themes from individual interviews suggest optimism for enhanced opportunities academically.

Sense of School Belonging

In response to Research Question 2, data indicated a strong sense of school belonging among participants. For the purpose of this study, sense of school belonging is defined by Goodenow (1992) as the extent to which students perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community. As previously

mentioned, an increased sense of belonging to the school community by way of encouragement and positive interactions with teachers, administrators, and peers has been linked to overall school satisfaction and achievement (St-Amand et al., 2017).

School belonging also has been referred to as school attachment, sense of school community, school membership, or sense of relatedness (Cemalcilar, 2009). Student sense of school belonging has been related to a number of distinct outcomes, including academic motivation and achievement (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010), commitment to school goals and school engagement (Corso, Bundick, Quaglia, & Haywood, 2013; Goodenow, 1993a), sense of well-being, and expectations of future success.

A sense of belonging or connectedness has been found important for all students, but it may be particularly important for African American males because as their mistrust increases, their academic outcome expectations decrease (Holliday & Strange, 2013).

Schools have an important role to play in recognizing student abilities and, particularly among high-ability students, helping to bolster their confidence (Smith, Walker, Chen, & Hong, 2019). Schools that cultivate a sense of school belonging among their students may simultaneously cultivate both interest and confidence in student future pursuits (Smith et al., 2019).

Jordan described his experience at the Early College of North Carolina:

The academic relationship is good. Like the teachers here are cool. One morning I came to school really upset. All my teachers were asking if I was okay, if I needed stuff. They were there for me and kept comforting me. So, yeah, it a good relationship. [With regards to the difference with African Americans] Most

of the teachers are white so, you think, Oh, she might not like me, but they actually like accept me and I don't feel like [there] is any discrimination. So for me, it's been good.

Support Systems

Finally, in response to Research Question 2, the influence of family surrounding participant choice to attend the Early College of North Carolina was categorically strong. Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010) disclosed family support was contributory to African American high school males' drive for success academically and professionally. Essentially, African American high school males needed reinforcement from their families and the feeling of mattering that helped build a solid groundwork for self-efficacy and assurance (Tucker et al., 2010).

Research has found substantial evidence that high levels of parental involvement significantly affect adolescent well-being and improve academic success outcomes (Causey, Livingston, & High, 2015). Hornby (as cited by Causey et al., 2015) reported that parental presence often increases self-esteem, academic achievement, and stability in peer relations.

The coded data from interviews overwhelmingly demonstrated the roles people, religion, mentors, families, and personal motivation play in the lives of these African American males. While this family support is a contributory factor in the academic success of African American males, it is essential to highlight that a healthy and nurturing school climate is an important factor in the success of all students (Tucker et al., 2010).

Bandura (1997) explained the school functions as the primary setting for the

cultivation and social validation of cognitive capabilities. School is the place where students develop the cognitive competencies and acquire the knowledge and problem-solving skills essential for effective participation in society.

Representation

Teachers of color tend to have more positive perceptions of students of color both academically and behaviorally. African American teachers commit themselves to ensuring the success of their students and often have an interconnected sense of success, in that they link their success with the success of their students (Acosta, Foster, & Houchen, 2018).

It is also a willingness to exert personal power and assert teacher authority judiciously but firmly. African American educators project this authority and assume personal responsibility to optimize student learning and achievement, shape student self-respect, promote a sense of community, and mitigate an educational system that has too often been oppressive rather than liberating (Acosta et al., 2018).

Although people of color make up more than 50% of public school students in the United States, they make up fewer than 20% of the teachers, and they leave the teaching profession at higher rates than White colleagues (Shafer, 2018). One of the most powerful supports a school can give a student of color is a teacher of color. With just one teacher of the same race, a non-White student is more likely to perform better on standardized tests, attend school more regularly, and be suspended less frequently (Shafer, 2018).

Jordan observed, “Oh, ... more African American students or African American male students because you don’t want to be the only Black male here.... I’m not the only

Black male, but [there are very few]. Maybe another Black male teacher....” Michael added, “... More African American staff. I have seen that the African American students here gravitate to the African American faculty ... they are cool.”

Underwood (2019) explained increasing the Black male teacher representation in schools across the nation requires strategic planning, including collaborative efforts at the national, state, district, and local levels. A long-term commitment of resources and continuous championing for diversity of our nation’s classrooms remains the most promising way to effectively staff schools with Black male educators. Black male teachers are critical to the education and social development of Black children, particularly Black boys (Dee, 2005).

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2

Relationships inspire learning (Holliday & Strange, 2013). Understanding the connection with family further reiterates the impact family has on individual achievement. Furthermore, finding a nurturing, accepting environment within the school is important for students in order to achieve and maintain academic success. African American male students need mentors, educators, and administrators who will encourage and promote their academic progress and success (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009).

Summary of Findings

Throughout the research process for this study, the research pointed to preparation for a 4-year college/university, self-awareness, academic self-confidence, sense of belonging, and support systems as means to not only understanding how African American males feel about their academic and personal experiences but also to furnishing

relevant information needed to help educators and policy makers continue to challenge the traditional structures of education. It is also important to note that parental support systems are pivotal and hold significant implications for a student's educational goals and aspirations.

While the literature states there are several challenges and barriers to the success of African American males which are also contributing factors to the achievement gap among African American males and their Caucasian counterparts, this study concurs with the review of literature in that the nontraditional structures of the early colleges increase the opportunity for underserved students to earn a postsecondary diploma and provide a rigorous and supportive high school environment to help students navigate and succeed in college. The ECHSI provides a challenging curriculum, and social support can lead to college entrance and success for students (Hoffman & Webb, 2010).

Based on data provided by the North Carolina School Report Card, the Early College of North Carolina has consistently, for the past 3 years, graduated 95% of the African American males enrolled in their institution. At the culmination of the 2018-2019 academic year, 94% of African American males at the Early College of North Carolina performed at or above grade level on the North Carolina EOC English II exam and 94% on the North Carolina Math I EOC.

Through interviews with participants, this study has provided personal insight into how their experiences have impacted their academic performance. The themes represented in this study (preparation for a 4-year college/university, self-awareness, academic self-confidence, sense of belonging, and support systems) substantiate that college readiness and preparedness programs, which have been implemented as a main

thrust of some schools, have resulted in an increase in the percentages of African American males being accepted in schools and those attending and completing postsecondary education (Scott et al., 2014).

Emerging Theme Summary

Representation. While racial diversity is important in any field, it is especially crucial when racial congruency, or lack thereof, affects young people in schools. Educators and their organizations, school administrators, and policy makers increasingly agree that a lack of diversity among teachers hurts U.S. students. Research has shown for some time that African American pupils benefit in a variety of ways when they have African American teachers (Foster, 2018). While Lindsay and Hart (2017) found a correlation between same-race teachers and reduced rates of exclusionary discipline and willful defiance among Black students at all grade levels, Grissom, Rodriguez, and Kern (2017) found that schools with more Black teachers and leadership also had more Black students in gifted programs.

Many teachers of color enter the profession with deep ties and connections to their communities. They often articulate that they become teachers with the objective of returning to their own or similar communities to provide opportunities for intellectual engagement that they felt were lacking in their own schooling (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). Teachers of color familiar with students' cultural backgrounds are more likely to build positive relationships between the home and school to enhance student learning. Black teachers are important in the teacher workforce because it is important for Black students to see them as successful role models (Evans & Leonard, 2013).

The participants in this study expressed a desire to add instructors who are

particularly adept at motivating and engaging minority students. Further, they desired minority teachers who can better relate to their educational and life experiences (Evans & Leonard, 2013).

Jordan replied to the interview question, “What can be done to attract more African American Males to Early College of North Carolina,” “...another black male teacher ... I know that we already have an African American male teacher. He’s cool, I like him. Maybe like one more or maybe two more.”

Increasing the percentage of teachers of color in the workforce is not just important and beneficial for students of color. Students of all racial backgrounds can benefit from a diverse teacher workforce that represents the nation’s overall demographics (Partelow, Spong, Brown, & Johnson, 2017).

Research validates nurturing school climates as important to student academic and personal success at school, and researchers have documented its importance for traditionally marginalized groups such as African American students (Stewart, 2007).

Implications of Practice

Results suggest African American males are more successful in higher education when provided with better information and guidance throughout high school experiences. When discussing school reform and the closing of achievement gaps of minority students, it is vital that high school leaders create environments to promote preparation for life after high school.

This academic management should extend beyond test-taking skills, preparation for standardized/college entrance exams like the ACT, and advance placement courses. Departments of instruction and school leaders must share academic expectations through

assemblies and seminars to allow African American males access to materials on college readiness and programs that aid in both graduation from high school and successful enrollment in college.

In this study, the participants felt that attending the Early College of North Carolina was opportunity that would allow them to not only be prepared for life in college but also an opportunity to be globally competitive with their counterparts. Sun observed, “[The Early College of North Carolina] is preparing me for med school and the professors there are definitely more rough at a [4-year university] than the professors here and I know that it is work that I have been prepared for.”

There is a need for additional strategies and interventions to help bolster both self-awareness and academic self-confidence for African American males. The literature showed that many African American males find their identities, their pride, their self-efficacy, and their self-esteem in a limited number of domains such as sports, music, and acting (Hébert, 2001). How Black males are depicted in the larger society filters down into schooling practices and policies used by teachers and counselors (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012). Stereotypical imagery distracts young African American men who desire to see exemplary males (Aymer, 2010).

Kafele (2012) proclaimed that in order to excel in school, Black male students need role models and dreams. Kafele went on to say,

Who is going to provide my black male students with the proper male guidance, direction, leadership, and structure that they desperately need? I wanted my black male students to see adult males who were striving to fulfill their own potential and who were also committed to the growth and development of the younger

generation. (p. 68)

Because of the need, Kafele (2012) developed a manhood training program in his high school for male students. The program gave the Black males a strong sense of purpose for achieving in school (Kafele, 2012).

To eliminate this narrative, educators must implement leadership academies and mentoring programs that will not only support the process of image building among gifted Black males but also “change the way Black males see themselves intellectually and academically” (Whiting, 2009a, p. 232).

The young men in this study were comfortable with who they are as African American males navigating their educational journeys despite stereotypical ideas and images perpetuated by media and antiquated mindsets.

Andre stated,

I feel very accomplished that I’ve been able to make something out of myself and just make my parents proud. I think the fact that I come from a diverse background [I] know I can be an inspiration to other people of diverse backgrounds who are striving to succeed but feel they can’t just because of where they come from.

Bobby stated,

I kind of relate to [the need for peer acceptance rather than academic achievement], because I talked to some people who are in that, but I’ve never experienced it. They feel like they are missing something, you know.... It’s all about the now and not really thinking about the future ... I think it’s more valuable to be a smart, African American male.

The literature showed that a sense of support from encouraging adult mentors such as a teacher, counselor, or coach in the school has been found to have beneficial effects on school attendance, college attendance, and educational aspirations of minority youth (Uwah et al., 2008). Educational leaders can take from this study that placement in remedial programs and other academic strategies should not be the only solutions when it comes to educating African American males.

Andre stated,

At [Early College of North Carolina] there is a lot of academic expectations.

You're expected to excel and go beyond the minimum which is kind of what the program was meant to do to help students who are striving to excel. So, the standard is set high. And I think that if you go back to the academic relationships [with teachers, school counselors and other staff] those foundations are able to help us meet those standards.

Jeffery Stanford stated, "I feel like [the relationship between staff and students] we have a really good dynamic going on here. Teachers are always really supportive of the students. I feel like with most teachers they genuinely want me to succeed."

Michael stated, "It's no different...at this school, everybody's more accepted because we have so many different people from different ethnic backgrounds, sexuality, [and] gender. So, you... just come here with an open mind."

Schools should include resources that address the whole child, such as counseling, mentoring, and other community partnerships. School counselors can work specifically with this population to address social, emotional, and cultural needs that may impact performance in school. Schools can create school climates that are family engaging and

culturally relevant. Students who have positive experiences at school are more likely to be a self-advocate and more likely to utilize services that may already be offered at schools.

Several empirical studies have linked positive student perceptions of teacher-student relationships and feelings of school belonging to positive achievement outcomes. For superintendents, departments of instruction, and other policy makers, it is pertinent they began to examine district practices surrounding the establishment of environments with mentors, educators, and administrators to cultivate an atmosphere that fosters a constructive representation of the African American male (Holliday & Strange, 2013).

While building a diverse teacher workforce to serve U.S. public school children is complex, it is essential, especially for our Black and Brown scholars who consistently perform lower than their White counterparts. Attending to this challenge will require far more than the increased recruitment of teachers of color. It will require attending to their various cultural and ethnic histories, cultivating their practices and professional lives, and supporting a successful experience for them once deployed in schools (Acosta et al., 2018).

Teachers who have limited knowledge about their students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and are inattentive to their students' diverse learning needs are not able to successfully teach their students; therefore, culturally responsive teaching is needed to enhance the learning opportunities and experiences of all students, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse students (Gay, 2002).

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse

students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them (Gay, 2000).

Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities, uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles, and teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages (Gay, 2000). Because culturally responsive teaching is empowering, it enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners. Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act (Gay, 2002).

Roehl (2012) stated that academic excellence for all students cannot be reached without educators committed to equity work and examining the structures in their schools that allow for curriculum gaps, tracking, and low expectations for some students. When educators isolate the role race plays in their structures and classroom practices despite the level of discomfort, it forces them to courageously fight for more equitable and more just education for students (Roehl, 2012). Roehl posited,

Closing the achievement gap is an ethical imperative in education today, and a pedagogical shift to culturally relevant teaching and active equity work can help educators reach that goal. No longer can teachers simply value diversity and multiculturalism and continue to teach all students the same way in the name of equality. A metaphor that helps me understand the difference between equity and equality draws from gardening—a favorite hobby of mine. In the garden, success

does not come from caring for each plant in the same way, but from nurturing each plant in the way it specifically needs. My tomatoes and onions are in the same garden, but my tomatoes get more water than my onions because that's what they need. (p. 2)

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of this study lend themselves directly to future research. The researcher suggests further exploration into the following areas:

1. A phenomenological study similar in methodology to the current study but to include more participants enrolled in other early colleges across various school districts. In retrospect, to obtain an in-depth and clearer understanding of the encounters experienced by various participants in similar programs could have provided for a more enhanced vision of the lived experiences of African American male participants.
2. Family structure and home life play an important role in the success or failure of African American males (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). A mixed methods study could be completed to include qualitative and quantitative data collection to obtain the implications surrounding target groups of individuals who come from a single-parent home versus a two-parent home.
3. A study to add to this body of research that would include the early colleges' admissions processes. This would also include the Early College Initiative's initial target group which would only include participants who are the first in their families to attend college; from minority backgrounds, English Language Learners, and low-income students of any background. This would allow the

researcher the opportunity to delve deeper into family dynamics and the implications of such.

4. A study that would also include traditional schools. This would allow for a comparison of the current study.
5. A quantitative study could be done to include data collection that would offer statistical information.
6. A mixed methods study could be completed to include qualitative and quantitative data collection to obtain answers that were not able to be collected in the current study.

Limitations/Delimitations

There were several limitations to the study. The most substantial limitation of this research was the sample size and the distinctiveness of the school involved. The research project only included one early college, and the number of students enrolled in the school totaled 219. Of the 219 enrolled students, there were only 20 African American males to target, and only eight participated.

A second limitation to this study was a dependency on the admission process of the research site which, aside from their minority background, may not necessarily include the Early College Initiative's target group which broadly includes students who are the first in their families to attend college, students from minority backgrounds, English Language Learners, and low-income students of any background.

A third limitation of this study was a lack of variance in both gender and ethnic perspectives. All participants in this study were African American males.

A fourth limitation to this study was the exclusion of traditional high school

institutions. The researcher would suggest including the perspective of African American males enrolled in a traditional high school setting may have presented additional perspectives.

Finally, the interviews for this study were completed at the site of the research study. After reflection, it is the researcher's belief those who are being interviewed could feel a sense of bias and intimidation onsite that may be eliminated in a more neutral location.

Final Reflections

Of all the challenges we face in education today, I can think of none greater than the challenge of motivating, educating, and empowering Black male learners (Kafele, 2012). Knowledge and understanding of how African American males feel about their academic and personal experiences equip policy makers with the tools necessary to further aid educators in creating programs and interventions in the lives of this underrepresented population. With this knowledge, it is essential for educators to implement and amend programs at all school levels to build self-esteem, improve school performance, and narrow the widening achievement gap among African American males and their counterparts.

This qualitative study which explored the phenomenon of African American males who attend an early college adds to the body of existing research which supports secondary educators and policy makers interested in using the early college model for high school reform. This study also adds to the existing body of research in the continued efforts to eliminate negative stereotypes as well as other barriers to academic success for young African American males. The lived experiences and perceptions

shared by the participants enhanced the validity of school reform efforts. The more educators know about this subgroup, needs, problems, pitfalls, and solutions, the better schools can provide appropriate resources and enable the leaders to improve motivational efforts.

In 2001, Bandura developed his social cognitive theory to give credence to the idea of human agency theory. Bandura (2001) explained that individuals have control over their situation through intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Social cognitive theory subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency where individuals are agentic operators in their life course. The positivity and hopefulness expressed by these African American respondents were notable. As agentic operators in their life course, these young men saw school as a caring, supportive place for all students; verbalized how they wanted more for their future, how they felt that they could go further, and how they could also be role models for younger African American males.

The researcher was amazed not only at how open and articulate these participants were about their lived experiences but also at their grit to reach for their goals for the future. It is the researcher's belief that if the experiences in the lives of African American males enrolled at the Early College of North Carolina were better understood, perhaps more effort will be placed on educators to be conscious of their role with African American males in order to ensure, across all institutions, they have equitable opportunities to excel academically. After all, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Nelson Mandela).

References

- Acosta, M. M., Foster, M., & Houchen, D. F. (2018). "Why seek the living among the dead?" African American pedagogical excellence: Exemplar practice for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69(4), 341.
doi:10.1177/0022487118761881
- Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Allensworth, E. M., & Easton, J. Q. (2007). *What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago public high schools*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.
- Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(4), 795-808.
- Arbona, C. (2000). The development of academic achievement in school-aged children: Precursors to career development. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 210-309). New York: Wiley.
- Aymer, S. R. (2010). Beyond invisibility: Psychosocial reflections on how President Obama's image can affect young African-American males. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 20(6), 827-837.
- Bailey, D. F. (2003). Preparing African American males for postsecondary options. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 12(1), 15. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/docview/222640784?accountid=11041>

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X>
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist*, 28(2), 117-148.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 1-26. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1
- Bandura, A., Caprara, G., Barbaranelli, C., Gerbino, M., & Pastorelli, C. (2003). Role of affective self-regulatory efficacy in diverse spheres of psychosocial functioning. *Child Development*, 74(3), 769-782.
- Berger, A., Adelman, N., & Cole, S. (2010). The early college high school initiative: An overview of five evaluation years. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85(3), 333-347.
- Berger, A., Turk-Bicaki, L., Garet, M., Knudson, J., & Hoshen, G. (2013). Early college, early success: Early college high school initiative impact study. Retrieved from https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/ECHSI_Impact_Study_Report_Final1_0.pdf
- Berger, A., Turk-Bicaki, L., Garet, M., Knudson, J., & Hoshen, G. (2014). Early college, continued success: Early college high school initiative impact study. Retrieved from <http://www.air.org/resource/early-college-continued-success-early-college-highschool-initiative-impact-study-2014>
- Berkner, L., & Chavez, L. (1997). *Access to postsecondary education for the 1992 high school graduates* (NCES 98-105). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2006, April 6). North Carolina New Schools Project, Inc. [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work/Quick-Links/Grants-Database/Grants/2006/04/OPP41526>

Bohrnstedt, G., Kitmitto, S., Ogut, B., Sherman, D., & Chan, D. (2015). *School composition and the Black-White achievement gap* (NCES 2015-018). U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved March 11, 2018 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>

Born, T. (2006). Middle and early college high schools: Providing multi-level support and accelerated learning. In D. Bragg & E. Barnett (Eds.), *Academic pathways to and from community college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Boyle-Baise, L., & Sleeter, C. E. (2000). Community-based service learning for multicultural teacher education. *Educational Foundations*, 14(2), 33-50.

Brubaker, W. M. (2016). *A teacher's journey: A phenomenological analysis of the lived experience of beginning teachers* (Order No. 10249178). Available from Dissertations & Theses @ Gardner-Webb. (1855473703). Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/docview/1855473703?accountid=11041>

Campbell, B. (2016a). 2015-2016 student demographic data. Retrieved from <http://wsfcs.k12.nc.us/cms/lib/NC01001395/Centricity/Domain/4/2015-16%20Demographics.pdf>

Campbell, B. (2016b). 2015-2016 school performance data. Retrieved from <http://wsfcs.k12.nc.us/cms/2016%20SPG%20REPORT%20w%20WSFCS%20SPG%20Included.pdf>

- Caraway, K., Tucker, C., Reinke, W., & Hall, C. (2003). Self-efficacy, goal orientation, and fear of failure as predictors of school engagement in high school students. *Psychology in the Schools, 40*(4), 417-427.
- Causey, S. T., Livingston, J., & High, B. (2015). Family structure, racial socialization, perceived parental involvement, and social support as predictors of self-esteem in African American college students. *Journal of Black Studies, 46*(7), 655-677.
doi:10.1177/0021934715592601
- Cemalcilar, Z. (2009). Schools as socialisation contexts: Understanding the impact of school climate factors on students' sense of school belonging. *Applied Psychology, 59*(2), 243-272.
- Choi, N. (2005). Self-efficacy and self-concept as predictors of college students' academic performance. *Psychology in the Schools, 42*(2), 197-205.
- Corso, M. J., Bundick, M. J., Quaglia, R., & Haywood, D. E. (2013). Where student, teacher, and content meet: Student engagement in the secondary school classroom. *American Secondary Education, 41*(3), 50-61.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cross, W. E., Jr., & Vandiver, B. J. (2001). Nigrescence theory and measurement: Introducing the Cross Racial Identity Scale. In J. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 371-393). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cummins, J. (2001). Empowering minority students: A Framework for Intervention with an introduction by the author. *Harvard Educational Review, 71*(4), 649.

- Dahl, A. R. (2010). *A phenomenological comparison of the attitudes and perceptions of police officers and mental health professionals when responding to female domestic violence victims in a rural and a suburban setting* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Order No. 3419566).
- David, J. (2008). What research says about small learning communities. *Educational Leadership*, 65(8), 84-85. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educationalleadership/may08/vol65/num08/Small-Learning-Communities.aspx>
- Dee, T. S. (2005). A teacher like me: Does race, ethnicity, or gender matter? *American Economic Review*, 95(2), 158-165.
- Duncan, G. (1999). The education of adolescent Black males: Connecting self-esteem to human dignity. In L.E. Davis (Ed.), *Working with African American males* (pp. 173-190). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.
- Dweck, C. S. (2002). Messages that motivate: How praise molds students' beliefs, motivation, and performance (in surprising ways). In J. Aronson (Ed.), *Improving academic achievement*. New York: Academic Press.
- Eccles, J. S., & Roeser, R. W. (2009). Schools, academic motivation, and stage-environment fit. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 404-434). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., & Schiefele, U. (2002). Motivation to succeed. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional, and personality development* (5th ed., pp. 1017-1095). New York: Wiley.
- Edmunds, J. A. (2016). Early college puts youth on a college track. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 97(5), 38. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/docview/1766275681?accountid=11041>
- Edmunds, J., Bernstein, L., Glennie, E., Willse, J., Arshavsky, N., Unlu, F., ... Dallas, A. (2010). Preparing students for college: The implementation and impact of the early college high school model. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85(3), 348-364. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/stable/25759033>
- Edmunds, J. A., Bernstein, L., Unlu, F., Glennie, E., Willse, J., Smith, A., & Arshavsky, N. (2012). Expanding the start of the college pipeline: Ninth-grade findings from an experimental study of the impact of the early college high school model. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 5(2), 136-159.
- Elias, S. M., & MacDonald, S. (2007). Using past performance, proxy efficacy, and academic self-efficacy to predict college performance. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37(11), 2518-2531.
- Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43(1), 13-35. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/docview/1023244850?accountid=11041>

- Evan, A., Huberman, M., Means, B., Mitchell, K., Shear, L., Shkolnik, J., ... Uekawa, K. (2006). *Evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's high school grants initiative: 2001-2005 final report*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research and SRI International.
- Evans, B. R., & Leonard, J. (2013). Recruiting and retaining Black teachers to work in urban schools. *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013502989>
- Fenning, P., & Rose, J. (2007). Overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline: The role of school policy. *Urban Education—Beverly Hills*, 42(6), 536.
- Ford, D. (1997). Reversing underachievement among gifted Black students: Promising practices and programs. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(1), 154.
- Foster, M. (2018). Why America needs more African American teachers - And how to recruit and retain them. *Scholars Strategy Network*. Retrieved from <https://scholars.org/contribution/why-america-needs-more-african-american-teachers-and-how-recruit-and-retain-them>
- Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (1995). Aspirations and opportunity structure: 13-year-olds in areas with restricted opportunities. *British Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 23(3), 361-375.
- Galla, B. M., & Wood, J. J. (2012). Emotional self-efficacy moderates anxiety-related impairments in math performance in elementary school-age youth. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(2), 118-122. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/10.1016/j.paid.2011.09.012>

- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.
- Goodenow, C. (1992). Strengthening the links between educational psychology and the study of social contexts. *Educational Psychologist*, 27(2), 177-196.
- Goodenow, C. (1993a). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13(1), 21-43.
- Goodenow, C. (1993b). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, 30(1), 79-90.
- Gordon, D. M., Iwamoto, D. K., Ward, N., Potts, R., & Boyd, E. (2009). Mentoring urban Black middle school male students: Implications for academic achievement. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 78(3), 277-289
- Green, A. N. (2010). *An examination of the adjustment of first generation African American male college students*. (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Southern Mississippi). Retrieved from <https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/650>
- Grissom, J. A., Rodriguez, L. A., Kern, E. C. (2017). Teacher and principal diversity and the representation of students of color in gifted programs: Evidence from national data. *Elementary School Journal*, 117(3), 396-422.
- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 42-55.

- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Hayes, R. L., Nelson, J., Tabin, M., Pearson, G., & Worthy, C. (2002). Using school-wide data to advocate for student success: Charting the academic trajectory of every student. *Professional School Counselor*, 6(2), 86-94.
- Hébert, T. P. (2001). Jermaine: A critical case study of a gifted Black child living in rural poverty. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 45(2), 85.
- Hines, E. M., & Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2013). Parental characteristics, ecological factors, and the academic achievement of African American males. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 91(1), 68-77.
- Hoffman, N., & Webb, M. (2010, June). Early-college high school: Modest experiment or national movement? *Education Week*, 28(35). Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/06/11/35hoffman.html>
- Holliday, C., & Strange, N. Y. (2013). The lived experiences of African American males in an urban university setting. In M. S. Plakhotnik & S. M. Nielsen (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 12th Annual South Florida Education Research Conference* (pp. 116-123). Miami: Florida International University. Retrieved from http://education.fiu.edu/research_conference/
- Holzman, M. (2006). *Public education and Black male students: The 2006 state report card*. Schott Educational Inequity Index. Cambridge, MA: Schott Foundation for Public Education.

- Howard, T., Flenbaugh, T., & Terry, C. (2012). Black males, social imagery, and the disruption of pathological identities: Implications for research and teaching. *Educational Foundations*, 26(1-2), 85-102.
- Huang, C. (2013). Gender differences in academic self-efficacy: A meta-analysis. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 28(1), 1-35.
Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/doi/epdf/10.1002/pits.22045>
- Irizarry, J., & Donaldson, M. L. (2012). Teach for América: The Latinization of U.S. schools and the critical shortage of Latina/o teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(1), 155-194.
- Irving, M. A., & Hudley, C. (2008). Cultural identification and academic achievement among African American males. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 19(4), 676-698, 751. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/docview/222696331?accountid=11041>
- Jonson-Reid, M., Davis, L., Saunders, J., Williams, T., & Williams, J. (2005). Academic self-efficacy among African American youths: Implications for school social work practice. *Children & Schools*, 27(1), 5-14.
- Kafele, B. (2012, October). Empowering youth Black males. *Educational Leadership*, 70(2), 67-70.
- Karp, M. M., Bailey, T. R., Hughes, K. L., & Fermin, B. J. (2005). *State dual enrollment policies: Addressing access and quality*. New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. CCRC Brief Number 26.

- Kohli, R., & Pizarro, M. (2016). Fighting to educate our own: Teachers of color, relational accountability, and the struggle for racial justice. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 49(1), 72-84, doi:10.1080/10665684.2015.1121457
- Lam, U. F., Chen, W.-W., Zhang, J., & Liang, T. (2015). It feels good to learn where I belong: School belonging, academic emotions, and academic achievement in adolescents. *School Psychology International*, 36(4), 393-409.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034315589649>
- Leonard, J. (2008). *Culturally specific pedagogy in the mathematics classroom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lieberman, J. (2004). *The early college high school concept: Requisites for success*. Boston: Jobs for the Future.
- Lindsay, C. A., & Hart, C. M. D. (2017). Exposure to same-race teachers and student disciplinary outcomes for Black students in North Carolina. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(3), 485-510. doi:10.3102/0162373717693109
- Mcfarland, J., Hussar, B., de Brey, C., Snyder, T., Wang, X., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., ... Hinz, S. (2017). The condition of education 2017 (NCES 2017- 144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved April 17, 2017, from
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017144>
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in Practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2007). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., McFarland, J., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, A., & Wilkinson-Flicker, S. (2016). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2016* (NCES 2016-007). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved April 17, 2017, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>

Nadler, D. R., & Komarraju, M. (2016). Negating stereotype threat: Autonomy support and academic identification boost performance of African American college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(6), 667-679.

National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). The state of racial diversity in the educator workforce. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>

National Center for Education Statistics. (2012a). Graduation rates of first-time postsecondary students who started as fulltime degree/certificate-seeking students, by sex, race/ethnicity, time to completion, and level and control of institution where student started: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2007 [Table 345]. Digest of Education Statistics 2011. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_345.asp

- National Center for Education Statistics. (2012b). Percentage distribution of first-time postsecondary students starting at 2- and 4-year institutions during the 2003–04 academic year, by highest degree attained, enrollment status, and selected characteristics: Spring 2009 [Table 347]. Digest of Education Statistics 2011. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_347.asp
- Nebbitt, V. (2009). Self-efficacy in African American adolescent males living in urban public housing. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 35(3), 295.
- North Carolina New Schools Project. (2007, December.). *Design principles for high school innovation projects*. Raleigh, NC: Author.
- North Carolina New Schools Project. (2010, April). Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schooltransformation/turnaround/archives/models/new-schools>
- North Carolina New Schools Project. (2013). *North Carolina new schools design principles*. Raleigh, NC: Author.
- Pajares, F. (2006). *Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Pajares, F. (2009). Toward a positive psychology of academic motivation: Theory of self-efficacy beliefs. In R. Gilman, S. Huebner, & M. Furlong (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (pp.149-160). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

- Partelow, L. Spong, A. Brown, C., & Johnson, S. (2017). America needs more teachers of color and more selective teaching profession. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/09/14/437667/america-needs-teachers-color-selective-teaching-profession/>
- Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. G. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Rocchino, G. H., Dever, B. V., Telesford, A., & Fletcher, K. (2017). Internalizing and externalizing in adolescence: The roles of academic self-efficacy and gender. *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(9), 905-917. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/10.1002/pits.22045>
- Roehl, J. (2012, October 10). Embracing discomfort: Speaking out for cultural relevance [Web blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2012/06/10/fp_roehl.html
- Rojewski, J. W., & Yang, B. (1997). Longitudinal analysis of select influences on adolescents' occupational aspirations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 51(3), 375-410.
- Sailes, G. A. (Ed.). (2003). *African Americans in sport*. Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Saldana, J. (2008). Analyzing longitudinal qualitative observational data. *Handbook of Longitudinal Research: Design, Measurement, and Analysis*, 297-311
- SAS Institute. (2016). School accountability growth report. Retrieved March 16, 2017, from About the EVAAS School Accountability Growth Report: https://evaas.sas.com/help/NC/EVAAS_help_evalcomp_school.html

- School Performance Grades for North Carolina. (2017, March.). Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/spgexecsumm15.pdf>
- Scott, L., Allen, A., & Lewis, C. (2014). Dispelling disparities for African American male students: A review of three successful school models. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, 5(1), 1-22.
- Shafer, L. (2018, June 12). The experiences of teachers of color [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/06/experiences-teachers-color>
- Shank, G. (2002). Qualitative research: A personal skills approach. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Signithia, F. (2008). Beyond Capital High: On Dual Citizenship and the Strange Career of "Acting White." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 39(3), 227.
doi:10.1111/j.1548-1492.2008.00019.x
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage.
- Smith, T. J., Walker, D. A., Chen, H., & Hong, Z. (2019). Students' sense of school belonging and attitude towards science: A cross-cultural examination. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 47(2).
doi:10.1007/s10763-019-10002-7
- Spencer, M., Cole, S., DuPree, D., & Glyniph, A. (1993). Self-efficacy among African American early adolescents: Exploring issues of risk, vulnerability, and resilience. *Development and Psychopathology*, 5(4), 719-739.

- St-Amand, J., Girard, S., & Smith, J. (2017). Sense of belonging at school: Defining attributes, determinants, and sustaining strategies. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 5(2). doi:10.22492/ije.5.2.05
- Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 613-629.
- Stewart, E. (2007). Individual and school structural effects on African American high school students' academic achievement. *High School Journal*, 91(2), 16-34.
- Tucker, C., Dixon, A., & Griddine, K., (2010). Academically successful African American male urban high school students' experiences of mattering to others at school. *Professional School Counseling*, 14(2), 135-145. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/docview/848719365?accountid=11041>
- Underwood, K. (2019, August 28). Why America needs more Black males teachers. *EdSurge*. Retrieved from <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-08-28-why-america-needs-more-black-male-teachers>
- Uwah, C. J., McMahon, H. G., & Furlow, C. F. (2008). School belonging, educational aspirations, and academic self-efficacy among African American male high school students: Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 11(5), 296-305. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2010-11.296
- Valle, M. F., Huebner, S. E., & Suldo, S. M. (2006). An analysis of hope as a psychological strength. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44(5), 393-406. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/10.1016/j.jsp.2006.03.005>

- Van der Bijl, J., & Shortridge-Baggett, L. (2001). The theory and measurement of the self-efficacy construct. *Scholarly Inquiry for Nursing Practice*, 15(3), 189-201, 203-207.
- Wentzel, K. R., Battle, A., Russell, S. L., & Looney, L. B. (2010). Social supports from teachers and peers as predictors of academic and social motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 35(3), 193-202.
- Whiting, G. W. (2006a). Promoting a scholar identity among African American males: Implications for gifted education. *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*, 20(3), 1-6.
- Whiting, G. W. (2006b). Enhancing culturally diverse males' scholar identity: Suggestions for educators of gifted students. *Gifted Child Today*, 29(3), 46-50.
- Whiting, G. (2009a). Gifted Black males: Understanding and decreasing barriers to achievement and identity. *Roeper Review*, 31(4), 224-233.
doi:10.1080/02783190903177598
- Whiting, G. W. (2009b). The scholar identity institute: Guiding darnel and other black males. *Gifted Child Today*, 32(4), 53-56, 63. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/docview/203261711?accountid=11041>
- Yaffe, D. (2012). Middle school matters: Improving the life course of Black boys. *Policy Notes*, 20(4), Winter 2012. Educational Testing Service. Retrieved from <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICPNV20n4.pdf>
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Self-efficacy: An essential motive to learn. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 82.

Appendix A
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Please note that follow-up questions may rise during this session and may not be listed below. This list is a draft and not be an exhaustive list of all questions to be asked.

1. Tell me about yourself?
 - a. Family Background
 - b. Childhood
2. Why did you elect to attend Early College of North Carolina and not a traditional high school in this district? What has been the influence of your family on this choice?
3. Describe your experience taking college courses as a high school student.
4. Has this experience helped you to be successful? Why or Why Not?
5. What course of study are you pursuing and why?
6. What is it like being an African American student at an Early College?
7. How would you describe the academic relationship between the staff and students of Early College of North Carolina? Is there a difference for African American Students?
8. What are your plans after leaving the early college? What has been the influence of your family on this choice?
9. There are studies that show that African American males are more concerned with peer acceptance rather than achieving academic success. Do you agree with this statement? Why or Why not?
10. Is there anything that you think should be added to the early college that would attract more African American males?
11. Closing question: Is there anything you would change about the early college

experience?

Appendix B

Participant's Informed Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Participant's Informed Consent Form

Title of Study:

Early Colleges: The African American Male Experience

Researcher:

Adreian Merriweather-Pitts

Department:

Education; Educational Leadership

Purpose:

Using interviews, this study is designed to examine the lived experiences of African American males enrolled in an early college and provide insight into how their experiences have impacted their academic performance as well as their probability to earn a high school diploma and a college degree.

Procedure:

Participants will be asked to volunteer their participation in personal interviews. Participation will involve an interview with open ended questions regarding the participant's experience as a current African American male early college student. In this study, data will be gathered by the researcher and examined for themes with the researcher offering explanations about the data. If necessary, follow-up questions to clarify previous responses may be requested. Portions of participants answers may be quoted in the dissertation and may be used in an oral presentation. To protect confidentiality, participants will select a pseudonym (fictitious name) to be used to in the dissertation and/or oral presentation. To protect confidentiality further, the researcher will assign a pseudonym to your school and school district.

Time Required:

It is anticipated that the study will require approximately 60-90 minutes of your time. If an additional follow-up is necessary, the session will require approximately 20-30 minutes of your time.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality:

During this process, no other person will have access to the data. The audio recordings and transcribed interviews will be stored in a password-protected personal iPad and computer. Filed, back-up copies of audio recordings and transcripts will be kept on a

personal USB stored in the researcher's home office. All the data will be destroyed three years after collecting them. The paper copies of transcriptions, list of participants' names and pseudonyms, consent forms and other related documents will be shredded. The data files on my personal computer and USB will be deleted.

Risks:

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in early colleges and how students perceive the impact of the early college on their academic performance. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment:

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw from the Study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio (or video) tape will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

- If you want to withdraw from the study, simply tell the researcher, "I no longer wish to participate in this study." There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact:

Adreian M. Pitts

Education Department

Gardner-Webb University

Boiling Springs, NC 28017

Researcher's Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Researcher's Email Address: [REDACTED]@gardner-webb.edu

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals:

Adreian M. Pitts

Email: [REDACTED]@gardner-webb.edu

Education Department

Gardner-Webb University

Boiling Springs, NC 28017

Researcher's Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Researcher's Email Address:

[REDACTED]@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Jeffrey Isenhour, faculty Advisor

Education Department

Gardner-Webb University

Boiling Springs, NC 28017

Telephone: [REDACTED]

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact:

Dr. Sydney Brown
 IRB Administrator
 Gardner-Webb University
 Boiling Springs, NC 28017
 Telephone: 704-406-3019
 Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

_____ I agree to participate in the interview session(s). I understand that this interview may be audio/video recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio/video recordings will be transcribed and destroyed.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the interview session(s).

_____ Date:

 Participant Printed Name

_____ Date:

 Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C

District's Approval to Conduct Research

Project ID 2019-01

**Approval Form for Research Project to be conducted
in the**

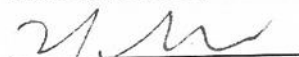
Name of Principal Investigator: Adreian Merriweather-PittsAdvisor's Name (if student): Jeffery IsenhourResearch/Educational Institution: Gardner-Webb UniversityResearch Title: Early Colleges: The African American Male Experience

The above project has been approved by the _____ County
Schools Administrative Offices. Stipulations to this approval, if any, are noted
below. *The investigator understands that the principals have the authority to
grant or deny permission for the study to be conducted in their schools.*

Project Timeline: August, 2018 thru December, 2019

Stipulations: _____

Data Confidentiality Form Needed? (Check if yes) : _____



_____, Ph.D.
Research & Evaluation

January 31, 2019

Date

Appendix D

Parental Consent Form

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Parental Consent Form

Title of Study:

Early Colleges: The African American Male Experience

Researcher:

Adreian Merriweather-Pitts

Department:

Education; Educational Leadership

Purpose:

Using interviews, this study is designed to examine the lived experiences of African American males enrolled in an early college and provide insight into how their experiences have impacted their academic performance as well as their probability to earn a high school diploma and a college degree.

Procedure:

Participants will be asked to volunteer their participation in personal interviews. Participation will involve an interview with open ended questions regarding the participant's experience as a current, African American male early college student. In this study, data will be gathered by the researcher and examined for themes, with the researcher offering explanations about the data. If necessary, follow-up questions to clarify previous responses may be requested. Portions of participants answers may be quoted in the dissertation and may be used in an oral presentation. To protect confidentiality, participants will select a pseudonym (fictitious name) to be used to in the dissertation and/or oral presentation. To protect confidentiality further, the researcher will assign a pseudonym to your student's school and school district.

Time Required:

It is anticipated that the study will require approximately 60-90 minutes of your student's time. If an additional follow-up is necessary, the session will require approximately 20-30 minutes of your student's time.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your student has the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. He also has the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If he chooses to withdraw, he may request that any of his data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality:

During this process, no other person will have access to the data. The audio recordings and transcribed interviews will be stored in a password-protected personal iPad and computer. Filed back-up copies of audio recordings and transcripts will be kept on a personal USB stored in the researcher's home office. All the data will be destroyed three

years after collecting them. The paper copies of transcriptions, list of participants' names and pseudonyms, consent forms and other related documents will be shredded. The data files on my personal computer and USB will be deleted.

Risks:

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand the lived experiences of African American males currently enrolled in early colleges and how students perceive the impact of the early college on their academic performance. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment:

Your student will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to withdraw from the study:

Your student has the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If he chooses to withdraw from the study, his audio recording will be destroyed.

How to withdraw from the study:

- If your student wants to withdraw from the study, he should simply tell the researcher, "I no longer wish to participate in this study." There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If your student would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact:

Adreian M. Pitts
Education Department
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Researcher's Phone Number: [REDACTED]
Researcher's Email Address: [REDACTED]@gardner-webb.edu

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Adreian M. Pitts
Education Department
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Researcher's Phone Number: [REDACTED]
Researcher's Email Address: [REDACTED]@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Jeffrey Isenhour, faculty Advisor
Education Department
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Telephone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]@gardner-webb.edu

