Where Do We Go From Here? Culturally Responsive Teaching and Literacy Among African American Males

Denise Evelyn Cyrus

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LITERACY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

By
Denise Evelyn Cyrus

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

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Acknowledgments

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). To God who deserves all of the honor, for every gift comes through you. Through you Lord, all things are possible.

I would like to give special thanks to my big, happy West Indian Village also known as my family. First, I dedicate this work to my heartbeat, my son Xavier. You are my greatest accomplishment. I am so blessed to have you in my life. To my mother, Ms. Ann, I cannot thank you enough for always encouraging me to be my best self. You mean the world to me. To my siblings, Jillian, Sean, Taj, Darryll, and Marsha, thank you for the years of continuous love and laughter. Thank you for always having my back. Most of all, thank you for sharing your precious daughters with me to love as my own. Thank you, Bobbi and Tyrone, for being the glue that kept me together whenever things started to fall apart. Thank you for believing in me when I did not believe in myself and helping me to see the value in my dreams. I love you both, dearly.

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“And for what (more) shall I say” (Hebrews 11:32)? For the time will fail me to thank the many others who have given me unconditional love and support throughout this
remarkable journey. Thank you all.
Abstract


Literacy skills impact academic achievement for school-aged children and almost every facet of modern day life thereafter. Low literacy achievement affects college acceptance, college completion, employment, housing, and socioeconomic status to name a few (Ford & Moore, 2013). Regrettably, the literacy skills gap between Black and White students in America has remained virtually the same for the past 20 years. Factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and teacher quality contribute to the sustainability of literacy gaps. Scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1995a), Gay (2010), and Hammond (2015) endorse the use of culturally responsive pedagogy as an approach to reduce achievement gaps. There is no shortage of studies about culturally responsive teaching (CRT), achievement gaps, or African American males; however, there is a gap in the academic literature about how to operationalize CRT from theory to practice. This research maintains professional learning communities (PLCs) are the gatekeepers for school improvement and have the potential to provide teachers with the job-embedded professional learning needed to improve CRT capacity. Using a transformative lens, the researcher (a) investigated literacy teachers’ perceptions regarding CRT; (b) identified how middle school literacy teachers differentiated instruction for African American males, and (c) developed recommendations for professional learning and supports for literacy teachers of African American males. Convergent mixed methods design was used to collect data in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged to make inferences.
about common CRT perceptions, behaviors, and strategies employed by literacy teachers in moderate- to high-poverty schools.

*Keywords*: culturally responsive teaching, literacy, African American males, middle school, literacy, differentiated instruction, high-poverty schools
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 granted African Americans their constitutional right to vote and use public facilities and prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and national origin (Civil Rights Act, 1964). President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill into law, using over 70 ceremonial pens after the Senate passed the bill with a vote of 73-27 (Library of Congress [LOC], 2010); however, centuries of institutionalized discrimination, racial isolation, and educational deprivation could not be undone with the stroke of Johnson’s ceremonial pens. President Johnson’s promise of equality had only grown into a bud and not a flower as promised (King, 2002). Enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was slow moving initially, and African Americans, particularly those living in the south, continued to experience the harsh realities of Jim Crow (LOC, 2010). Three years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asked his fellow delegates of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to consider what African Americans should do in response to the limited application of the civil rights law (King, 2002).

On a very hot day in August, King (2002) challenged his fellow SCLC delegates to trace the past, acknowledge the challenges ahead, and unite to devise a tactical plan to reconstruct American society for Blacks. He proposed the creation of a framework to assert dignity and develop a sense of pride in being Black in America; one that would strip away the false sense of inferiority experienced in the aftermath of the atrocities of chattel slavery and the injustices of Jim Crow (King, 2002). Now, some 53 years later, there is no clear path for how to equalize the playing field for generations of students who
inherited a system that has failed them for decades. Disenfranchised students, particularly low performing, economically disadvantaged African American male students deserve the opportunities promised to them under the laws of the land. This study recognizes culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as an approach for creating enjoyable and equitable literacy experiences for African American males in the middle grades.

**African American Male Literacy Gaps**

Despite making some gains in the 1990s, a growing achievement disparity exists between African American males and their White counterparts (Garibaldi, 2007; Patton, 1995; Wright, 2009). In fact, being born African American, male, and poor in America makes you more likely to be at risk for academic failure, high dropout rates, low graduation rates, low standardized test scores, low grades/grade point averages, underrepresentation in gifted programs, overrepresentation in special education, and high rates of school suspensions (Ford & Moore, 2013; Husband, 2012; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Tatum, 2005, 2008, 2012). As a consequence, the normalization of African American male failure has become acceptable and even expected (Noguera, 2008).

Marian Wright Edelman, President and Founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, declared, African American males suffer from a “toxic cocktail of poverty, illiteracy and racial discrimination” (Prager, 2011, p. 2) that creates and sustains achievement gaps.

Patton (1995) maintained those in education have made an insufficient attempt to address the educational status of African American males. The lack of research regarding African American males shows the research community has inadequately captured data on their schooling experiences (Dumas & Nelson, 2016).
The Black-White literacy skills gap is a national problem and requires a deep commitment from schools, communities, and policymakers alike (Ford & Moore, 2013). The implications of achievement gaps, in this case literacy gaps, factor into high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and college completion along with employment and unemployment rates (Ford & Moore, 2013). Educational institutions are the front line of defense in the battle to narrow achievement gaps. It is therefore the duty of every educator to ensure all students receive equal and equitable school experiences. How teachers interact with students, the assumptions teachers bring to the classroom, and how teachers perceive teaching and learning can have profound impacts on student achievement (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Ford and Moore (2013) stated the current state of African American male literacy achievement is difficult to admit, share responsibility for, and accept. African American males have made modest academic progress since the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) ruling, but the gains have not translated in the reduction of achievement gaps (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Garibaldi, 2007). Deep structural inequalities contribute to the continuance of African American male literacy gaps (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). For instance, African Americans are more likely to attend high-poverty schools in which more than 75% of students qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch (Lozenski, 2017). African American males attending high-poverty schools make up the largest population of underperforming students in America (Ntiri, 2009). Whether it is referred to as the achievement gap, educational debt, opportunity gap, or the educational divide (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013a), African American males attending schools in high-poverty areas are more likely to be taught by unskilled teachers, subjected to
disproportionate discipline referrals, and lack access to opportunities, thus widening achievement gaps (Ntiri, 2009).

The best source of data about achievement gaps comes from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; Reardon, Valentino, Kalogridges, Shores, & Greenberg, 2013). Though the overall Black-White achievement gap is half of what it was 40 years ago, not much progress has been noted since 1998 (Reardon, Valentino, & Shores, 2012). There have been no significant changes in the Black-White literacy skills gap from 1999 to 2004 leading to African American students entering high school with average literacy skills 3 years behind their White and Asian counterparts (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Reardon et al., 2012). These statistics are higher for students of low-income families whose literacy skills are approximately five years lower than high-income families (Reardon et al., 2012). To further illustrate this point, Guo (2016) identified that low-income African American female students scored an average of 12 points higher on NAEP literacy assessments than low-income African American males. Figure 1 illustrates the gender literacy gap with results from the 2017 NAEP reading assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Average scale score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE: Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant.*


*Figure 1. 2017 NAEP Grade 8 Average Scale Score by Gender. Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics, 2017.*
Figure 1 reveals females outperformed males on 2017 NAEP reading assessments by an average score of 10 points. Literacy skill gaps widen for African Americans once race becomes a factor. Figure 2 shows African American students scored an average of 24 points lower than their White counterparts on the Grade 8 NAEP reading assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Figure 2 presents little variation in Grade 8 NAEP reading scores since 1998, further demonstrating the need to focus on how African American students are educated. One possible explanation for the continued underperformance is that students in high-poverty schools experience stunted cognitive growth, which by default creates dependent learners (Hammond, 2015). In effect, many students leave school because they cannot
keep up with the increasing demands of reading and writing. By middle school, teachers do not know how to address the fundamental decoding and fluency concerns of older students, thus widening the literacy skills gap (Hammond, 2015).

**CRT**

Scholars such as Kirkland (2011a), Husband (2012, 2014), and Tatum (2005, 2015) have played an instrumental role shifting the discourse about African American male literacy achievement from deficit models to strength-based asset models. Models such as culturally responsive pedagogy honor the lived experiences of diverse students and use culture to facilitate learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings (1995a) defined CRT as an ideology for creating learning environments that allow students to experience academic success, maintain cultural competence, and develop a sense of sociopolitical consciousness. Most importantly, a CRT approach does not require students to sacrifice their cultural integrity for the sake of academic success. According to Laughter and Payne (2013), academic achievement and cultural competence go hand in hand and can be used as tools to support cognition and academic achievement. Culturally responsive teachers understand the relationship between cultural competence, student motivation, engagement, and achievement, creating conditions that promote achievement (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ford & Moore, 2013; Kirkland, 2011a; Noguera, 2008).

**Statement of the Purpose**

This study investigated literacy teachers’ perceptions of CRT. In doing so, the study assessed teacher knowledge and skills regarding CRT. Moreover, the study examined if and how literacy teachers differentiate instruction to meet the literacy needs
of African American males in moderate- to high-poverty middle schools. An in-depth analysis uncovered common culturally responsive practices used by self-reported literacy teachers of African American males. Finally, the researcher used the voices of literacy teachers to develop a list of professional learning resources needed to support literacy development among African American males.

**Research Questions**

This research study was developed in response to the various and sometimes conflicting perceptions teachers have regarding CRT. The overarching research question was, “How do teachers use a CRT approach to improve literacy development among African American males in the middle grades?” The researcher used the scholarship in the field to identify root causes for the persistently low literacy performance and underachievement among African American males. Three questions were used to guide the study.

1. What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?
2. How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?
3. What supports, if any, do literacy teachers need to facilitate culturally responsive instruction for African American males?

**Research Methods**

This study used a convergent parallel mixed methods design to answer the research questions (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Data were collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged to make inferences about the culturally responsive
knowledge and skills of literacy teachers of African American males in moderate- to high-poverty middle school settings. The sample for the study consisted of literacy teachers in moderate- to high-poverty, urban middle schools in the southeast region of the United States. The Multicultural Teaching Competence Scale (MTCS) instrument was used to capture perceptual data related to cultural responsiveness and multicultural teaching knowledge and skills. It is important to mention that multicultural teaching incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013b). Though CRT and multicultural teaching share many elements, they are not the same; however, the MTCS instrument aligned with the conceptual framework for this study and was used to gather data related to CRT knowledge and skills. At the same time, qualitative data were collected using observations in the natural setting, postobservation interviews, and document analysis. Data were coded and reduced to reveal themes used to make broad and narrow inferences about the sample.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms appeared throughout the study:

**Achievement gaps.** Significant and persistent disparities in academic achievement between different groups of students (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013a).

**African American.** Cultural identification assigned to people with ancestral roots tracing back to Africa. This study will honor the term “African American” which is used in much of the extant literature.

**Black.** A racial identification assigned to describe people with ancestral roots
tracing back to Africa. This study will honor the term “Black” which is used in much of the extant literature.

**Culturally responsive pedagogy/CRT.** Teaching based on the mindset that (a) all students can achieve academic success, (b) instruction helps students to maintain cultural integrity, and (c) instruction helps students to build a sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

**Professional learning communities (PLCs).** Groups of educators that (a) meet regularly, (b) work collectively towards a shared vision, (c) make data-informed decisions, and (d) focus on results (DuFour, 2004).

**Significance of the Study**

There is no shortage of theories about CRT, but few studies explain how teachers use CRT in a way that has a wide-reaching and sustainable impact on African American male literacy development (Young, 2010). The objective of this study was to develop a broader understanding of literacy teachers’ perceptions of CRT. Correspondingly, the study established if and how teachers differentiate and support the unique literacy needs of African American males in the middle grades. Such analysis resulted in the identification of common CRT practices employed by literacy teachers. In the end, the researcher used the voices of teachers to make recommendations for specific professional learning supports and resources to improve the delivery of literacy instruction for African American males.

This study is a starting point for reopening the discussion about CRT as an approach for enhancing literacy achievement among African American males. The researcher hopes district leaders will acknowledge the perceptions of teachers and
recognize the need to provide support and resources that facilitate the use of CRT. Moreover, findings from this study can be used to inform curriculum, instruction, and policy decisions that may have the ability to reduce the Black-White literacy achievement gaps. Furthermore, results from this research study can be used to advocate for much-needed support and resources to improve teaching practices. Last, findings from this research could help shape curriculum design and educational policy on a local, state, and national level.

**Summary**

In Chapter 1, an introduction to the research problem provided a strong rationale for the continued study of CRT and literacy among African American males. In Chapter 2, a review of literature traces the history of African American male literacy gaps and provides an examination of factors contributing to low literacy achievement among African American males. In addition, Chapter 2 summarizes how educational theory was used to develop the study’s conceptual framework to answer the research questions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

A thorough review of extant literature was used to develop broad areas of agreement and overarching conclusions related to research questions used in this study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Chapter 2 includes an in-depth review of literature about internal and external factors impacting literacy development among African American males. The discussion begins with an examination of how race, poverty, biology, and environment impact African American males’ literacy development. Next, the literature discussion focuses on CRT and the impact it has on learning. A conceptual framework designed from a transformative lens draws attention to five reoccurring CRT themes: soul, safety, setting, scaffolds, and support. These themes and the research scholarship were used to develop the Culturally Responsive Teaching Factors (CRTF), a framework that can be used to identify high-impact, sociocultural indicators found in culturally responsive classrooms.

The Duality of Identity and Race-Based Stress

W.E.B. Du Bois (2016) predicted the major problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color-line. The problem of the color-line is just as prevalent today as it was during the days of Du Bois and King. Du Bois wrote of the two souls, two thoughts, and two unreconciled strivings of life as an African American. This twoness Du Bois once spoke of is also known as a veil of double consciousness that forces African Americans to view themselves through the eyes of White America (Du Bois, 2016). African American males, in particular, struggle with their identity which impacts how they see themselves and how they perform in school (Dumas & Nelson, 2016;
Kirkland, 2011a). Consequently, many become passive and voiceless throughout their educational experiences due to the false sense of inferiority they have internalized (King, 2002).

According to Horsford (2018), race is not biological or genetic; race is a product of racism which has been used to justify inequity. Du Bois (2016) posited that Black people fight a daily battle where they must negotiate between their racial and cultural identities and the concept of being American. Black people in America wear a veil of double consciousness resulting in the creation of a conflicted identity (Du Bois, 2016). Along the same lines, Freire (1972) ascertained the oppressed suffer from a duality that prevents them from existing authentically. How students see themselves as belonging to racial categories has a tremendous bearing on school performance and the continuance of achievement gaps (Noguera, 2008). Consequently, many African American male students adopt coping mechanisms and behaviors to manage the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors associated with identity and race-based stress (Levy, Heissel, Richeson, & Adams, 2016). Moreover, coping mechanisms related to race-based stress are often misunderstood as micro-aggressions and contribute to high suspensions and low or underachievement (Hammond, 2015).

Race-based stress results in changes in stress hormones that can impact academic achievement (Levy et al., 2016). For instance, students receive implicit messages about race such as overrepresentation in sports, suspensions, and special education (Steele, 1999). As a result, African Americans are hyper-aware of stereotypes and negative expectations for their race which result in stress and anxiety (Aronson, 2004). Constant exposure to messages of implicit bias experienced by African American youth can result
in psychological stress, lower life satisfaction, higher depression, conduct problems, and poor academic motivation and performance (Hughes et al., 2006). Furthermore, negative images of Black masculinity can fuel negative self-concepts and destroy Black male confidence (Whiting, 2010). As a result, African American youth negotiate issues of identity and race-based stress by code-switching, adopting an oppositional culture, and/or internalizing stereotype threats (Aronson, 2004; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Perry et al., 2003).

**Code-Switching**

Code-switching is the act of switching language and communicating patterns to fit into social situations (Sparks, 2014). Switching up allows students to adopt multiple identities to fit into academic and social situations. Scholars like Wright (2009) encouraged educators to embrace the nuances of Black male language, for it is a part of their racial and academic identities. Harmon (2012) affirmed literacy teachers could support students in their ability to code-switch by teaching them how to recognize linguistic patterns and how to switch from one language to the other as oppose to labeling African American English as broken English. Greater linguistic sensitivity through reflection and monitoring of one’s own attitudes will help decrease unconscious negative messages sent to students (Pearson, Conner, & Jackson, 2013).

More research is needed to understand African American male language variations and how they can be used as a leverage point in the shaping of their literacy identity (Wright, 2009). In the meantime, Edmin (2016) recommended employing code-switching as an authentic method of teaching students to value themselves and other people’s codes. Teachers play an important role in this process when they are
linguistically diverse and aware of the differences in African American English rather than using language variations as a put down (Pearson et al., 2013).

**Stereotype Threat**

Most children are aware of broadly held stereotypes by age 10. Studies by McKown and Weinstein (2003) indicated 93% of students in a study of 202 girls and boys were able to infer individual’s stereotypes at age 10. Once children gain insight about the stereotypical beliefs of others, it impacts their relationship, social setting, and how they behave in society (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). The authors argued being able to infer individual stereotypes and awareness of broadly held stereotypes contribute to the manifestation of stereotype consciousness that consequently results in stereotype threat.

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Perry et al. (2003), members of minority groups internalize stereotypes and generate feelings of inferiority about their intelligence. Consequently, students either buy into negative stereotypes or work feverishly to prove them wrong. Steele (1999) researched the effects of racial stereotypes on the academic performance of African American students. Steele alleged African American students are highly susceptible to stereotypes that lower their confidence and ability to perform in school. Fear of confirming negative stereotypes becomes a stress trigger that shuts down learning, making it more likely for students of color to fail (Hammond, 2015). Findings from Steele suggested students are motivated by negative stereotypes and experience anxiety about living up to stereotypes about their racial and or ethnic group. Moreover, Aronson (2004) pointed out teachers play an equally important role in triggering responses to stereotypes. Steele concluded that teachers’ beliefs and
behaviors about intellectual inferiority are conveyed in their behaviors and transferred to students and impact cogitative performance (Steele, 1999; McKown & Weinstein, 2003).

**Oppositional Culture**

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) defined oppositional culture as a belief that schools are a place of forced assimilation. As such, students develop oppositional identities as a method of resistance (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Patton (1995) established relentless attacks on African American males have resulted in the development of a stereotypical machismo. Masculinity is defined as having the characteristics of manliness and being a man (Whiting, 2010). Some African American males adopt an oppositional stance toward education due to the negative ways in which curriculum is presented to them (Wright, 2009). All too often, the culture and experiences of African American males are dismissed and deemed as valueless, resulting in students who are ostracized and disengaged (Ntiri, 2009). How teachers introduce students to new knowledge can determine the ultimate success of instruction. Earl (2013) maintained students come into learning situations with preconceived notions about new information, thus it is imperative for students to have platforms to discuss their misconceptions before, during, and after instruction (Earl, 2013).

Coping mechanisms such as code-switching, stereotype threat, and oppositional culture undermine confidence and achievement (Steele, 1999; Wright, 2009). The presence of trusting relationships between teachers and students along with the presentation of rich and relevant learning experiences will combat oppositional culture, leading to higher academic achievement for groups like African American males (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).
Historical Origins of Achievement Gaps

The origins of achievement gaps have been well-documented by scholars such as Kozol (1991) who spent years investigating inequity and inequality in American public schools. Before Kozol pulled the curtain back to reveal the painful realities of American schools, the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) case ruled segregated public schools unconstitutional. It was therefore the court’s expectation that schools would desegregate, and all students regardless of race would receive better quality education and opportunities. On the contrary, 10 years later, schools continued to operate under segregated conditions, which further exacerbated the hundreds of years of political, social, and economic disenfranchisement experienced by African Americans (Noguera, 2008).

In the same manner as Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954), The Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) was commissioned shortly after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to examine the inequities in the American educational system (Camera, 2016). Interestingly enough, The Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) suggested the most significant influence on student outcomes is the manifestation of societal issues within schools (Brathwaite, 2016). In other words, educational disparities are closely aligned with social conditions such as race, culture, socioeconomic status (SES), family life, and school environment (Brathwaite, 2016).

Morris and Perry (2016) argued racial disparities represent the most significant source of inequity in American schools. Racial categories are human-made constructs based on skin color that have social, legal, and historical impacts on peoples’ lives (Milner, Allen, & McGee, 2014). Currently, schools are more diverse than they were
after the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) decision and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but the impact of social issues such as race, hyper-segregation, and school poverty indices continue to be significant predictors of educational outcomes for students of color (Taylor, 2017). Sadly, a half a century after supposed progress, African American students continue to perform significantly lower than other racial or ethnic groups (Camera, 2015, 2016).

One explanation for this continued educational disenfranchisement is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism purports all people are equal, racism no longer exists, and society is color-blind (Ntiri, 2009; Sleeter, 2011). Furthermore, the neoliberalism movement promoted the idea that educational opportunities are available for those who seek them, thus those who succeed do so by choice (Ntiri, 2009). Glennie and Kerckhoff (1999) alleged the academically disadvantaged would remain disadvantaged and follow consistently low patterns of academic progress also known as the Matthew Effect. The Matthew Effect analogy first used by Merton (1968, as cited in Glennie & Kerckhoff, 1999), drew parallel to the Bible verse, Matthew 25:29, “for whoever has will be given more … whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them” (The Holy Bible, 1973). In education, the parable of talents (Matthew: 25) is often used to describe reading achievement. Those who start early and are exposed to literacy supports will read better, while those who develop later will not be able to catch up (Glennie & Kerckhoff, 1999). Neoliberalism as a school of thought dismissed the ramifications of institutional racism, generational poverty, and poor performing schools, thus shifting the blame of low and underachievement from the state to the individual (Rowe, 2006). Moreover, neoliberalism contends poor academic outcomes are due to individual choice
subsequently producing unequal levels of knowledge in poor communities (Rowe, 2006).

African American students are more racially segregated than they were 40 years ago, due to patterns of urban hyper-segregation (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). Hyper-segregation is defined as areas that have an overrepresentation of people from a particular racial or ethnic group. Though hyper-segregation is often de facto, the consequences are catastrophic (Denton & Massey, 1993). Schools with high concentrations of African American students consistently underscore their counterparts on standardized tests, college acceptance, college completion rates, and grade point averages (Ntiri, 2009). Also, students attending hyper-segregated schools are unlikely to have contact outside of their communities, resulting in further stratification (Denton & Massey, 1993). According to Denton and Massey (1993), hyper-segregation consists of five dimensions: unevenness, isolation, centralized, clustered, and concentrated. Moreover, poverty is often highly centralized around the core and/or spread out along the periphery of urban cities (Denton & Massey, 1993). African Americans living in urban areas continue to experience advanced hyper-segregation. No other racial or ethnic group is more simultaneously segregated than African Americans (Denton & Massey, 1993).

Brathwaite (2016) argued access and equity in education have not improved for poor, hyper-segregated, low-performing schools. Nationally, 75% of African American students attend majority-minority schools (Tatum, 2015). Re-segregated schools and communities have led to the reemergence of separate and unequal distribution of resources and opportunities (Ntiri, 2009). As a result, raising achievement is challenging when so many low-performing students are concentrated in the same schools (Rothstein, 2004).
Factors Contributing to Achievement Gaps

McKown (2013) asserted that the Black-White achievement gaps are highly consequential social problems. These gaps begin before school entry and continue through graduation, impacting employment and SES. According to the U.S. Department of Education, African American males as a subgroup continue to fail to meet state and national literacy standards (Reardon et al., 2012). An examination of contributing factors provides a context for the relative stagnation of achievement gaps (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). The perpetuation of stereotypes, neuroscience, gender differences, and the issues that plague high-poverty schools have been noted as salient factors contributing to achievement gaps (Hale, 2003; Husband, 2012; Jensen, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Sax, 2007).

Societal

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), African Americans account for 13.4% of the population. African American males make up 48% of that 13.4% (U.S. Census, Bureau, 2017). Despite comprising a relatively small portion of the American population, African American males occupy a large space within the American psyche and imagination (Noguera, 2008). Regrettably, the space between perceptions and reality is saturated with stereotypical images about the behavior, intelligence, and potential worth of African American males (Noguera, 2008). Media plays a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes. For instance, movies and music lyrics where African American males are often portrayed as angry, violent, and criminal are popular. Accordingly, society receives messages of African American male pathology that overshadows positive images of them as husbands, fathers, brothers, intellectuals, and professionals. Even the appointment of a two-term African American male president did little to adjust
the tainted lens in which African American males are portrayed in the media (Samuel, 2016). America’s ugly racial past was on full display as President Barack Obama received unprecedented levels of race-based antagonism never experienced by his White male counterparts (Samuel, 2016). It will take more than an elected Black president to wipe away the devastating effects of institutionalized racism and discrimination inflicted on Blacks living in America.

**Gender and Neuroscience**

Race and gender play a role in shaping the development of Black youth (Skinner, Perkins, Wood, & Kurtz-Costes, 2016). Reading attitudes, preferences, and neurological differences exist between males and females (Husband, 2012). Moreover, females have consistently scored higher than males on reading and writing NAEP assessments with the most considerable gap being in 2006 (Kehler, Martino, & Watson, 2010). Despite being exposed to the same literacy instruction, males and females interact with text differently, resulting in different reading experiences.

In addition, the differences in the male and female brain have been well documented (Jensen & Nutt, 2015; Sax, 2007). Males learn inherently different from females due to the late development of the prefrontal cortex and the networking grid that connects the brain’s gray matter (Jantz, 2014). Researchers Jensen and Nutt (2015) contended some aspects of brain development occur later in males, therefore impacting how males learn (Jantz & Gurian, 2013; Jantz, 2014). In 2007, a longitudinal study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health reported though the male and female brains function the same, they evolve in different sequences and tempos resulting in developmental variations (Sax, 2007). For instance, females can integrate complex
information 2 years before most males, whereas the section that houses the gray matter responsible for muscle control and sensory perception develops at a slightly faster pace for males (Sax, 2007). Also, Husband (2012) affirmed the area associated with language and fine motor skills develops six years earlier in females than males. Females have less difficulty acquiring and utilizing language and verbal skills and can participate in traditional reading activities because chemical differences such as estrogen, oxytocin, and dopamine produce satisfaction and contentment in independent reading activities (Husband, 2012). Adversely, testosterone, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and impulsive behavior in boys make it difficult for them to sit still for long periods of time (Husband, 2012).

In short, the brain builds a foundation based on relationships that then becomes the precursor to learning (Hammond, 2015). Teachers can use these cognitive hooks as scaffolds to connect new content and promote information processing (Hammond, 2015). Culturally responsive instruction presents conditions for students to recognize the connection between their cultural experiences and new information resulting in cognitive skills and habits to increase brainpower and build schema (Hammond, 2015).

Teaching at High-Poverty Schools

Jensen (2009) contended social behaviors stem from a combination of one’s genes and their environment. To illustrate this point, Dwyer (2016) compared living in poverty to playing football without a helmet because the brain is impacted by the stress placed on the frontal lobe that regulates human behavior. Stress produces too much cortisol in the frontal lobe, causing receptor cells to send messages to the brain to switch on or off (Jensen, 2009). Accordingly, children of poverty experience emotional and social
challenges, acute and chronic stress, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues that impact school performance and social relationships (Jensen, 2009).

It is also important to mention high-poverty schools report higher than average teacher turnover, student suspensions, and low reading assessment scores (Tatum, 2005). Figure 3 shows how nationally, 45% of Black students attend a school identified as high poverty.

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3.** Percentage of Public-School Students in Low-Poverty and High-Poverty Schools, by Race/Ethnicity: School Year 2014-2015. Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics, 2017.

Figure 3 also indicates 74% of Black students attend mid- to high-poverty schools. Poverty may impact achievement, but according to Perry et al. (2003), poverty does not determine one’s ability to learn.

One thing that can be agreed on is the lack of diversity in the teaching field,
especially in high-poverty schools, impacts interactions among teachers and students (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). National teacher demographics do not represent the shift in the changing racial composition of public schools (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). Figure 4 reveals the majority of the P-12 teaching population is White and female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected school characteristic</th>
<th>Total number of teachers</th>
<th>Hispanic, regardless of race</th>
<th>White, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Two or more races, non-Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All public schools</td>
<td>3,827,100</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School classification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional public</td>
<td>3,608,600</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter school</td>
<td>216,500</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1,820,100</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>681,000</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1,097,800</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>228,200</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.* Excerpt from Public School Teacher Percentages by Race. Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics, 2017.

The latest national teacher and principal survey (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) in Figure 4 revealed 80% of the teaching workforce is White. Of that 80%, 3% are male. The average teacher has 14 years of experience but many still lack CRT skills needed to address literacy gaps experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse students. According to Gay (2010), most people depend on television media for the news; however, television journalists have had a notorious history of perpetuating erroneous concepts of people of color. Gay (2010) went on to contend subtle messages
transmitted through media leave emotional and psychological scars for targeted groups. Consequently, more effort must be placed into educating in-service and preservice teachers about the history of disenfranchisement experienced by African American males.

The lack of interaction between teachers and Black males results in a distorted perspective and lack of understanding about who they are. Scholars like Tatum (2005) have called for a reconceptualization of the literacy lives of African American males to reverse the trend of alienation and ambivalence they feel toward formal education (Tatum, 2005). Twenty-first-century schools can address the literacy skills gap by providing empowering instruction that gives African American male students opportunities to transform their lived experiences into knowledge (Kirkland, 2011b; Tatum, 2005).

This research study is built on the assumption literacy teachers have various understandings of cultural responsiveness. Ladson-Billings (2014) described CRT scholarship as fluid and evolving to address the changing needs of students. Unfortunately, numerous definitions and few guidelines for practice make it difficult to measure the impact CRT has on African American male literacy development. The research questions listed in the next section were used to frame the discussion in relation to teachers’ perceptions of CRT, differentiation methods, and professional learning.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of education is to (a) impart skills like reading, writing, and calculating; (b) facilitate information growth by adding to worldly knowledge; and (c) provide talent development that offers students with the tools needed to be successful in
life (Hale, 2003). Hale (2016) contended a disconnection exists between the teaching profession and African American students, specifically African American males.

According to Harris and Graves (2010), the study of children between middle childhood through early adolescence is essential, for this is the age when children move from dependence to independence. Also, the ages between middle childhood through early adolescence is a time when self-perception can most impact academic achievement (Harris & Graves, 2010). For African American males, the middle childhood to early adolescent years is especially challenging because they begin to be labeled as troublemakers, bound for jail, and at risk (Harris & Graves, 2010). Consistent patterns of low and underachievement among African American males is one reason why significant changes to curriculum and instruction must be considered (Ford & Moore, 2013; Gay, 2010; Husband, 2012; Tatum, 2005). This study conceptualized CRT as a viable approach for African American male literacy development in the middle grades.

The following three questions were used to guide the study.

1. What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?

2. How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?

3. What supports, if any, do literacy teachers need to facilitate culturally responsive instruction for African American males?

In short, a reassessment of what literacy teachers teach and how they teach is key to understanding how African American males learn and why literacy gaps persist (Schmoker, 2011).
Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are rooted in scholarship about oppression, social learning, and culture in education. Transformative researchers map out inequality by tracing injustice to a source, propose solutions to end the injustice, and work with the community to create a course of action for change (Sever, 2012). Critical theory in education was used in this study to examine the extent to which the ruling/dominant culture and class control education to protect their interest and maintain the status quo and levels of inferiority (Freire, 1972). As a result, schools naturally teach students in the ways of the ruling class that oppress individuality and creativity. In addition, this study used social constructivism theory to explore how students construct and interpret knowledge through lived experiences and reflection (Au, 1998). When students are not allowed to incorporate their lived experiences into the classroom, learning and culture become separate phenomena (Au, 1998). Finally, this study considered culturally responsive pedagogy theory as defined by Ladson-Billings (1995a) to research how middle grades literacy teachers acknowledged students’ educational capital, promoted sociopolitical thinking, and used differentiated instruction.

Critical theory. Critical theory foundations trace back to the Frankfurt School where a group of thinkers united due to their dissatisfaction with the state of capitalism and communism in post-war Europe (Budd, 2008). According to Budd (2008), social-cultural politics and economic forces have long shaped the consciousness of critical theorists. Along the same lines, the feminist and cultural studies movements were heavily influenced by thinkers who voiced concerns about oppressive social, political, cultural, and economic factors that preserve oppression. The four “I’s” of oppression
(ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized) become so prevalent in the life of the oppressed that they begin to believe the images of pathology imposed by the oppressor and adopt their cultural expectations and norms (Freire, 1972). To this point, Freire (1972) contended the oppressed are so immersed in their condition of oppression, they struggle to fight for the very freedom they desire. Accordingly, critical theorists advocate for the liberation and empowerment of oppressed people (Budd, 2008).

In education, critical theorists examine inequalities and injustices that prevent students from experiencing equal and equitable academic outcomes (Budd, 2008). To adequately explain a phenomenon such as CRT and literacy among African American males, one must study the conditions under which teachers interact with their students (Budd, 2008). Schools mirror the unfairness of power, wealth, and opportunities found in society (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). For example, Asante (1991), Kungjufu (1984), and Karenga (1986), as cited by Ntiri (2009), established a link between poor academic performance, cultural alienation, and the dismissal of cultural capital in public schools. Additionally, critical theorists in education determined the root cause of underachievement and failure is directly related to the social structures that exist in society (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Critical theory calls for social action by examining the forces that influence human behavior such as race, poverty, and access to education (Budd, 2008).

Power plays a significant role in the educational system (Delpit, 2006); therefore, those who hold power become the assumed reality of institutions, while those less powerful are taught to assimilate to these realities (Delpit, 2006). External factors such as structural racism, generational poverty, and inadequate educational resources and
opportunities result in achievement gaps. Furthermore, the systematic oppression of people of color and misinformation conveyed through the media perpetuate negative stereotypical images and other forms of propaganda about Black males, thus making it difficult for them to thrive in some academic environments (Kirkland, 2011a). Correspondingly, from a critical theory perspective, teachers must use their classrooms as a forum for combating the impacts of hidden curriculum, stereotypes, and deficit thinking of African American male students (Au, 1998; Steele, 1999).

**Social constructivism.** Social constructivism in education is built on the idea of reshaping schools to make them more rewarding for students from diverse backgrounds (Au, 1998). Social constructivism developed out of the works of scholars who asserted students need to construct meaning through experiences, collaboration, and reflection such as Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Rowe, 2006). This school of thought validates students’ cultural capital and recognizes how culture, lived experiences, and language shape the literacy learning of students (Au, 1998). Additionally, learning environments play a vital role under social constructivism. Carefully negotiated learning environments give students the opportunity to utilize their cultural capital as a tool for constructing new meaning (Au, 1998). Learning is directly connected to how knowledge relates to the learner, and the process of meaning-making is socially rooted in human relationships (Rowe, 2006). Moreover, social constructivists place the ownership of learning on students as they develop a personal investment in learning by making relevant connections and activating natural curiosity (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). To this end, literacy experiences for students from diverse backgrounds must be rooted in language and culture (Au, 1998).
Social constructivism theory also maintains that various social, cultural, political, and economic conditions can impact school failure among diverse students (Au, 1998). For instance, Au (1998) argued that chronic poverty and school failure are a manifestation of historical racism and discriminatory practices impacting the development of diverse students. Consequently, materials, instruction, relationships, community collaboration, and assessment are potential leverage points for reshaping the school experience for racially and ethnically diverse students (Au, 1998).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Theory**

Educational achievement gaps perpetuate due to unequal access to opportunities, resources, curricula, and qualified teachers. Factors such as structural racism and poverty juxtaposed with school contextual factors such as curricula, rigor, teacher preparation, teacher experience, teacher absences and turnover, class size, instructional technology, fear, and safety are salient issues that impact student achievement (Ford & Moore, 2013). Scholars such as Gay (2010), Ford and Moore (2013), Harmon (2012), Ladson-Billings (2014), and Hammond (2015) endorsed CRT as a pathway for reducing 21st century achievement gaps.

Researchers such as Gay (2010), Ford and Moore (2013), Harmon (2012), Ladson-Billings (1995b, 2014), and Hale (2003) established African American students learn best in school climates where teachers exhibit culturally responsive behaviors. Teachers who communicate high expectations, maintain positive personal relationships with students, and view themselves as members of the community in which they teach align with Ladson-Billings’s (1995a) definition of a culturally responsive teacher. Within this framework, teachers believe all students are capable of academic success.
responding teachers see themselves as members of the community in which they teach and see teaching as a way of giving back to the community in which they serve. Social relationships are another essential tenant of Ladson-Billings’s (1995a) framework. The manner in which social relationships are constructed and maintained is vital for developing learning environments that embrace acceptance, collaboration, and connectedness. Additionally, teachers demonstrating high levels of cultural responsiveness are masters of their content, enjoy teaching, and provide students with multifaceted opportunities to achieve mastery.

Geneva Gay (2010) is another noted CRT thinker. She defined CRT as instruction that uses cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to make learning relevant and effective for ethnically diverse students. She maintained all students acquire knowledge about cultural diversity and use the cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as instructional resources to improve their learning opportunities and outcomes. Gay centered her work on CRT competencies that advocate for students embedding their cultural identity and language into their school experiences (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In doing so, teachers deconstruct traditional teaching and learning and become receptive and conscious of the values students bring to the classroom (Gay, 2010).

Along with improving academic achievement, these approaches to teaching are committed to helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic group and communities, develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire an ethic of success. (Gay, 2010, p. 32) Gay (2010) also found that CRT is a strengths-based approach for facilitating the
acquisition of knowledge using the cultural diversity, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as instructional resources to improve learning. A strong bridge between home and school experiences helps students of color to maintain an identity in connection with who they are and the communities in which they live. Gay (2010) also explained culturally responsive teachers exhibit genuine care for their students while advocating cooperation, community, and connectedness. Along the same lines, culturally responsive teachers tap into students’ individual preferences and ways of knowing to create curricula for and with students. Gay (2010) also suggested culturally responsive teachers influence students to question knowledge and truth instead of accepting ideologies marketed by schools. The act of questioning knowledge and truth allows students and teachers to become scholars of ethnic and cultural diversity while generating equitable learning experiences that debunk myths about diverse people.

Cornbleth and Sleeter (2011) maintained CRT is an appropriate instructional approach for teaching all culturally and linguistically diverse students. Cornbleth and Sleeter also contended cultural responsiveness is situation specific and should be used in conjunction with research-based instructional practices to support student learning. Curriculum and instructional approaches that are standards based to the point they leave little room for teachers to creatively and culturally responsively instruct students fail to include the experiences of diverse students. In short, CRT acknowledges culturally different approaches to learning that are tailor-made for individual students and contextual to their experiences. For example, Santamaria (2009) conducted a 5-year study of administrators, students, and parents at two elementary schools that had been successfully raising student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps. Students who
struggled in traditional academic programs demonstrated improved levels of achievement once the school culture became more literate about academic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors that impact student achievement (Santamaria, 2009). Similarly, Vygotsky (1962, as cited by Rowe, 2006) argued culture, language, and the zone of proximal development are the most critical factors in the construction of knowledge. He also argued through others we as humans are impacted by peers, the environment, and exposure to culture (Vygotsky, 1962, as cited by Rowe, 2006). To this point, culture does not exist outside of humans; it is a part of the human composition (Nieto, 2008a). Culture is changing and always evolving. Consequently, curricula must consider the existence of the social, economic, and political factors that impact learning for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Hammond (2015) is another prominent voice in the CRT arena. She argued CRT practices have the potential to eliminate achievement gaps. She also asserted CRT instruction should focus on developing new cognitive skills and habits to increase student readiness for learning. Hammond’s CRT framework consists of four interdependent practices: (a) how teachers develop their sociopolitical lens, (b) the ability to build learning partnerships, (c) teaching students to expand on what they already know, and (d) building social and intellectually safe environments. To this point, CRT practices activate the wiring in the brain and give learning relevance and meaning for diverse students. Consequently, Hammond’s Ready for Rigor framework relies on the use of neuroscience to mediate effective and independent learning.

**Conceptual Framework**

CRT “addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm
their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 469). The CRTF in Figure 1 draws from the work of researchers (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Williams, 2003; Boykin, 2013; Danielson, 2006; Earl, 2013; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2014; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Tomlinson, 2017) to outline a conceptual framework centered upon academic achievement but also fosters conditions for affirming the sociocultural consciousness of diverse students. Diverse students, specifically African American males, have rich cultural experiences and perspectives to contribute to their learning if given the opportunity. Though this study concentrates on literacy among middle grades African American males, the CRTF framework is an appropriate approach for teaching all culturally and linguistically diverse students by providing a common language and expectations for practice. The researcher created the CRTF to guide the convergent parallel mixed methods study. The CRTF illustrates the intersection of research and practice in a way that supports equitable and culturally responsive exchanges between literacy teachers and African American males.
The CRTF consists of equally valuable transactional solutions to counteract instructional inequity and foster a culturally responsive mindset (Boykin, 2013). Boykin (2013) maintained transactional solutions are predicated on the ability for one to construct knowledge by connecting their experiences with new information. To this end, the researcher grouped reoccurring themes in the scholarship to create a CRT framework. It is important to mention, CRT practices will not look the same in every classroom; but certain commonalities will exist in beliefs, behaviors, and instructional practices (Gay, 2010). The matrix in Table 1 illustrates commonalities between the CRTF and the research of Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2014) and Gay (2010).
Table 1

*CRT Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soul- An individual reflection of bias and privilege</td>
<td>The belief that all students are capable of success</td>
<td>Emancipatory- exposes students to the truth about authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledgeable about students and the community</td>
<td>Empowering- encouraged to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Invested in the public good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety- Culture of trust and mutual respect among institutions students and the community</td>
<td>Understands the connection between culture and learning</td>
<td>Multidimensional- student-teacher relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting- Flexible and differentiated learning environments that consider the need to address learning styles and collaborative learning</td>
<td>Knowledgeable about learning styles</td>
<td>Multidimensional-classroom climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible use of students local and global cultures</td>
<td>Transformative- acknowledges students strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolds- Use of stimulating curricula that helps students to maintain cultural competence and develop an empowering sociopolitical consciousness</td>
<td>Knows their content area well</td>
<td>Multidimensional- curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses culture as a foundation for learning</td>
<td>Comprehensive- teaches the whole child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Validating- cultural knowledge and prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Empowering encouraging academic competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support- Ongoing feedback and formative assessment creates pathways for academic achievement</td>
<td>Encourages and supports students to achieve</td>
<td>Multidimensional- assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Empowering supporting academic competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Soul Factors**

The soul within the CRTF is defined as an individual reflection of bias and privilege. The conceptual framework for this study asserts culturally responsive teaching (CRT) starts with an in-depth and personal evaluation of one’s perceptions and beliefs toward bias and privilege. Culturally responsive teachers develop trusting relationships with their students, families, and the community because they feel connected to the
community in which they teach (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). As such, teaching with a culturally responsive mindset requires careful and continual reflection of one’s bias and privilege. “Reflective practice is thought to improve teaching, build leadership, and enhance student achievement” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 154).

Stereotypical images are powerful and can influence what teachers see and expect from their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Along the same lines, Gay (2010) maintained educators need to reflect on their cultural assumptions, rules, and attitudes that make teaching students difficult. When teachers critique bias and privilege, they can counteract behaviors, materials, and instructional practices that perpetuate educational inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Washington (2018) maintained if teachers take the time to examine their beliefs about Black boys, they will realize that they are just as brilliant as other boys.

Many teachers lack an adequate understanding of “how conventional teaching practices reflect European American cultural values and trends” (Gay, 2010, p. 22). Horsford (2018) argued a similar sentiment when she recommended the use of pedagogical approaches that promote personal reflection about one’s beliefs, values, and biases. She encouraged educators to engage in reflective work to develop an honest reflection of how their personal journey informs the work they do with and for children. Taking the time out to reflect on one’s beliefs, values, and biases is a powerful starting point for acknowledging the importance of teaching with a culturally responsive mindset. Likewise, Gooden (2018) encouraged educators to reflect on aspects of their personal identity to uncover the values and beliefs that lie deep beneath the psyche. What lies deep in one’s psyche is manifested in thoughts and actions, which is why reflection about
aspects of identity, race, power, and privilege help educators to avoid reproducing the inequities perpetuated in traditional school settings.

**Safety Factors**

Safety factors in the CRTF are defined as behaviors that promote a culture of trust and mutual respect among institutions, students, and the community. Teacher-student and teacher-family relationships where trust, safety, and support are prioritized positively impact student achievement (Cardillo, Cohen, & Pickeral, 2011). Safe learning environments result in favorable outcomes for diverse students (Boykin, 2013). Fluid and equitable relationships along with reciprocal learning between teachers and students, encourage students to work collaboratively with adults and peers to create a community of learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Most importantly, a classroom culture of mutual trust and encouragement promotes student engagement and allows students to feel safe taking risks, asking questions, and asking for help.

Trust is an essential element in developing student growth. Rhoden (2017) maintained African American males are cautious to trust. He conducted a qualitative study about how trust in one’s self, trust in close others, and institutional trust impacted the success rate of students at an all-male, predominately Black charter school. Recommendations from the study suggested administrators hire well to ensure candidates support the school’s goals and send the same message. Furthermore, academic institutions must maintain high expectations for all students. Students in the study attributed their success to the culture of trust and support that gave them the foundation they needed to achieve (Rhoden, 2017). Also, the relational trust developed in school gave them a positive outlook on the community and helped them to build trust outside of
the school setting (Rhoden, 2017). Participants in the study also admitted to teachers being hard on them which served as motivation because they believed they had their best interest at heart (Rhoden, 2017). Another important variable in the study was the support of the family unit. Many of the parents involved in the research were single parents with limited education; however, their support in selecting the best educational setting for their students was significant in their ability to complete high school successfully (Rhoden, 2017).

In another such study, Bell (2015) conducted a study of boys in Grades 6-8 in a public middle school located in the south. The discussion maintained that African American males have internalized stereotypes and are inclined to self-hatred which interferes with their ability to have positive school experiences. The study also concluded that African American males are often singled out due to misinterpretations of their behavior, thus these students develop an aversion towards school. Findings from Bell's study established the middle school African American males felt their feelings about school were tied to how their teacher sees them and how they feel about the teachers.

Laughter and Payne (2013) reported an increase in engagement, motivation, interest, student perception of self, and their overall confidence when African American males maintained positive relationships with their teachers and peers. In fact, Kunjufu (2018) contended relationships are more important to African American males than the content being taught, which is partially due to the communal nature of African American communities. Culturally responsive teachers elicit trust, communicate high expectations, and expect excellence from all students (Rhoden, 2017). The brain is not racial, and
teachers do students a disservice when they link appearance or SES to learning capacity (Pollock, 2008). In fact, the brain is a social organ and operates best when connecting with others (Hammond, 2015). Jensen (2009) reported secure relationships with peers, teachers, and families leads to emotional and social stability, improved reading and math performance, higher rates of attendance, successful peer collaboration, and positive socialization among students. Along the same lines, students with engaged families exhibit faster rates of literacy acquisition, higher grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have better attendance, and are more likely to pursue higher education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). It is therefore imperative for schools to build relationships and partnerships with families and communities to support students inside and outside of the schoolhouse.

**Setting Factors**

The CRTF asserts physical learning spaces support the development of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Students merely exist in classroom spaces when teachers do not embrace the physical space and psyche of urban youth (Edmin, 2016). The setting factor promotes the use of flexible and differentiated learning environments that consider the need to address learning styles. Learning environments impact learning outcomes (Little, 2018). Task engagement for African American students is highly dependent on the setting or how teachers set the stage for learning (Gay, 2010). A positive or negative climate is apparent immediately upon walking into a classroom, so it is incumbent for teachers to structure learning environments that engage all students in wanting to read and write (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Jensen, 2013). Culturally responsive classrooms use differentiation as the entry point for learning (Tomlinson, 2017).
Differentiated learning and assessment ensure students with different degrees of understanding have access to concepts and skills based on their level of readiness (Tomlinson, 2017). Since a strong relationship exists between reading engagement and reading achievement, culturally responsive teachers must adopt a strengths-based approach to learning (Boykin, 2013; Husband, 2014). In the same manner, Husband (2014) maintained learning environments that offer choice, make real-world connections, and connect to the personal interest and lives of Black boys create conditions for success.

To further illustrate this point, Boykin (2013) maintained the need to focus on student learning assessment-based strategies that impact achievement such as fostering positive relationships, promoting collaborative learning, and developing a sense of community (Boykin, 2013). Boykin and Bailey (2000) conducted research to support how learning performance is enhanced when linked to a cultural context. The study maintained African Americans have an interconnectedness with movement and communalism. These researchers studied the extent to which problem-solving and engagement is greatly facilitated in the communal context. One significant finding of the study suggested that learning for African American students is greatly enhanced when accompanied by syncopated music and movement. More importantly, the study concluded variations in learning environments and assessment types improved student engagement and achievement. In sum, the classroom setting must enable flexibility and differentiation to account for the various learning styles and preferences of diverse students.

**Scaffolds Factors**

The scaffolds factor of the CRTF recommends the use of stimulating curriculum
that maintains cultural competence and facilitates the development of a sociopolitical consciousness. Reading takes on an essential role in middle and high school because students start to synthesize and evaluate information at a higher rate than in elementary school (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Kirkland (2011a) suggested the reading of canonical texts maintain the status quo and do not allow African American males the chance to express who they are, what they believe, and how they want others to see them. Culturally responsive literacy teachers must tailor books to fit their students much like how a seamstress will tailor clothes, which allows African American males to have a diverse wardrobe of texts that speaks to who they are and want to be and how they want people to see them (Kirkland, 2011b).

Kirkland (2011b) also encouraged literacy teachers to learn more about the literacy ideologies of African American males to motivate and engage them in academic reading. Black boyhood, according to Dumas and Nelson (2016), is a social experience that must be lifted up in everyday experiences. Moreover, minority youth perform better in school when they are able to connect their racial-ethnic identity to academics (Wright, 2009). As such, their literacy identity should be constructed and shaped by the social context. Dumas and Nelson recommended schools embrace the imagination of Black boys, so schooling is not a place of suffering by making curricula decisions that give them a voice and value their experiences.

Literacy learning is socially and culturally rooted and should promote empowerment and ownership of literacy learning. Culture is politically, historically, and economically related to the context in which it is found; therefore, culturally responsive literacy instruction supports students to negotiate their sociocultural consciousness as
they interact and process new information (Nieto, 2008b). Current curricula fail to address the cultural alienation and marginalization of African Americans students (Ntiri, 2009). Robust and comprehensive curricula intentionally connect standards, instruction, and assessments (Ainsworth, 2010). High impact strategies for reading, writing, speaking, and listening must be reinforced daily for students to practice comprehension while addressing the standards.

Exposure to diverse perspectives and curriculum help students to develop the schema to negotiate their academic identity. In doing so, students avoid the twoness or veil that is associated with traditional curricula. CRT learning environments offer students opportunities to use intrinsic motivation coming from their natural curiosity to create extrinsic motivation in the form of the reward of acquiring new knowledge (Jensen, 2016). As a result, the classroom becomes a place to explore topics of interest to the learners, enhance cognition, and encourage active participation and movement (Mckinley, 2010).

CRT is one of the most effective ways to meet the learning needs of diverse students (Harmon, 2012). Students become empowered once they define their role in the learning process (Danielson, 2006). Tatum (2014) suggested teachers of African American male’s present meaningful literacy exchanges that cover academic, cultural, emotional, and social literacies. Along the same lines, Freire (1972) advocated for literacy education that liberated the individual while helping them to become conscious of the oppressive conditions that impact them. Likewise, Noguera (2008) recommended the creation of curricula for Black males that debunk racial stereotypes by incorporating history and culture related to their lived experiences. In the case of African American
males, Tatum (2005) recommended literacy instruction that nurtures masculine identity and legitimizes the male experience. Tatum (2012) also argued instructional, sociocultural, and personal factors impact African American male reading achievement.

The literacy setting is a place where students can maintain cultural competence and develop a sociopolitical consciousness (Tatum, 2000). Tatum (2000) conducted an 8-month study about how to integrate explicit strategies and skills development using culturally relevant literature. Tatum (2000) used a class of 29 eighth graders to examine how establishing an environment of cultural competence changed student views on reading. First, students worked with the teacher to change the classroom culture by developing goals for helping one another. In doing so, students reported experiencing less embarrassment about their reading deficiencies and more confidence in their ability to ask others for help and viewed the classroom as a safe place for them to fail and recover. Next, students collaborated with the teacher to design assessments which resulted in them feeling a sense of control about their learning outcomes. Finally, the introduction of culturally responsive literature helped students to build cultural competence and allowed them to discuss and analyze issues of injustice in society.

Findings from Tatum's (2000) study reported increased student engagement and less apathetic attitudes towards reading once students took ownership in their literacy development.

**Support Factors**

The support factors suggest ongoing use of feedback and formative assessment to create multiple pathways towards academic achievement. Assessment plays a significant role in understanding the quality of instruction and student achievement outcomes.
(Boykin, 2013). Consequently, greater emphasis must be displayed in the area of how teachers assess student learning. As it stands, achievement scores narrowly define literacy achievement (Tatum, 2008). Boykin (2013) recommended using formative assessment to gauge student learning accurately. Formative assessment is the process of evoking information about students and using it to modify teaching and learning (Black et al., 2003). As learning becomes transparent, students become more fluent in self-assessment, thereby enabling them to create goals, determine where they are in the learning cycle, and know what tools to employ to make progress (Boykin, 2013).

Once teachers determine what students know, they are equipped with insight into how, when, and whether students use what they know (Earl, 2013). The shift from summative to formative assessment allows teachers to diagnose and modify teaching and learning to engage students based on their immediate needs (Earl, 2013). Much like cultural responsiveness, teachers must change the way they think about teaching, learning, assessment, and feedback (Black et al., 2003). Assessment must be rooted in a choice of learning tasks, quality questioning, classroom discourse, and ongoing feedback (Earl, 2013). McKinley (2010) suggested creating small chunks of instruction directed toward specific objectives and match assessments, so they are appropriate to the learner.

Earl (2013) maintained assessment for learning shifts the goals from the summative to formative by providing building blocks and pathways for learning. She also maintained continuous use of formative assessment allows teachers to monitor academic progress and apply real-time interventions rather than waiting months on end for high stakes, summative assessment results. In short, Earl argued assessment for learning motivates learners to take responsibility for their learning as they work towards
Along the same lines, authentic assessment provides a meaningful context to assess learning. Authentic assessment derived from formative assessment results in the production of knowledge, higher order thinking, and problem-solving (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999). A combination of aesthetic development of the task, personal development of the response, and how the information connects to worldly knowledge is a true indication of the transfer of learning (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999). McKinley (2010) suggested designing curricula; instruction; and valid, authentic assessments such as observations, oral exams, performances, and debates as frequently as possible as evidence of mastery.

Feedback is equally as valuable as assessment for supporting literacy development. Teachers use feedback as evidence of learning to adjust instruction toward goal progression (Jensen, 2016). All feedback is not created equally. Simplistic and vague feedback does not motivate students to work harder. According to Earl (2013), teacher feedback impacts confidence and achievement; therefore, it must be worded so that it promotes students to act. Descriptive feedback helps students determine where they are and offers students recommendations for taking their work to the next level (Boykin, 2013; Earl, 2013). Earl argued descriptive feedback should provide students with manageable steps for achieving learning objectives. In other words, much like CRT, the quality of student work is determined by the quality of scaffolding and feedback provided by the teacher (Earl, 2013). Since literacy learning takes place in a social and cultural context and can either affirm or diminish the development of one's social and cultural development, it is essential for diverse students, specifically African
American males, to be presented with multifaceted opportunities to demonstrate growth and achievement (Cantrell, Correll, Malo, & Powell, 2016).

**Opposition**

Despite the best effort of researchers and practitioners, CRT is far from being accepted in all areas of education (Gay, 2010). CRT defies the status quo because it consists of a multilayered enterprise of teaching practices for students to not internalize stereotypes and restores justice by giving them agency to communicate their stories (Ladson Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The prescribed nature of the teaching profession makes it difficult to practice CRT (Sleeter, 2011). A common misconception about CRT is that it only benefits racial minorities (Rajagopal, 2011). On the contrary, CRT means teachers are in tune with the different subgroups in the classroom and design instruction to optimize their performance while connecting to their cultural capital (Rajagopal, 2011).

Sleeter (2011) affirmed CRT has not been recognized as a strength-based approach because of (a) simplistic conception of CRT, (b) gaps in research about the link to student achievement, and (c) fear of losing hegemony. Superficial solutions such as curriculum programs and test preparation programs for closing the achievement gap do not take into consideration the racial, economic, and political factors that result in disproportionately adverse outcomes for students, specifically Black students (Palmer & Maramba, 2011).

Scholars and practitioners widely misconceive the value of CRT (Young, 2010). According to Sleeter (2011), CRT is often trivialized as a paradigm that connects teaching with learning down to a list of steps to follow. Trivializing CRT in this way
creates a fixed concept of the culture of minority groups that assumes all members of the group identify with the same concepts (Sleeter, 2011). Additionally, a thin research base on how CRT impacts student achievement is used to discredit the merits of the approach. The literature presents conflicting accounts of CRT, making it difficult to operationalize.

Hammond (2015) stated some teachers believe CRT is separate from regular teaching. Ladson-Billings (1995b) maintained CRT is just good teaching and should not be viewed as a separate strategy or method. Hammond also argued that CRT is viewed as a social/emotional approach and not one rooted in cognitive development, which further demonstrates the need for continued study. By far, the most significant barrier for CRT is moving teachers from the realm of understanding the research to engaging in the practice (Hammond, 2015). As such, more studies like this one are needed to operationalize CRT and differentiated instruction among African American males.

Despite some misalignment of CRT research, policy, and practices, the literature shows CRT can have a profound impact on the literacy development of culturally and linguistically diverse students, particularly African American males. Though there will be some resistance, African American male students will continue to sustain trends of low literacy achievement until educational institutions acknowledge and capitalize on the connections between culture and learning (National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems, 2006).

**Where Do We Go from Here?**

The brilliance of Black boys is rarely published or publicized, and stories about their educational experiences are often associated with labels and images of laziness, disengagement, non-attentiveness, disruptiveness, confrontation, and violence (Little,
2018). Something fundamentally different must occur to make the education of African American males a national priority (Zamni-Gallaher & Polite, 2010; Gay, 2010).

Students of culturally responsive teachers believe in their ability to acquire academic success, develop and maintain cultural competence, and develop a sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Teacher knowledge and skills are the most important determinants of student success (Schmoker, 2011). Differing concepts of racial understanding, equity, and how children learn should compel the profession to further examine the link between CRT and achievement. All too often, teachers use their racial understanding to guide their pedagogy and practices (Taylor, 2017). Significant changes in professional development, accountability, and teacher evaluation must take place before the potential of CRT is realized in the profession (Gay, 2010).

As mentioned before, the research of Bell (2015) established African American male students’ perceptions of their teachers impacted how they thought of themselves as students. Tatum’s (2000) work with eighth graders to change the literacy culture of a class resulted in decreased apathy towards reading and increased student engagement. Finally, Rhoden (2017) examined the impact of relational and institutional trust among African American males. Each of these studies align to domains within the CRTF framework; however, this study was unique in that used a framework of multi-dimensional indicators to uncover broader themes such as teacher self-reflection of bias, leveraging student learning styles, development of student sociopolitical consciousness, providing supportive feedback, and multifaceted assessments.

Conceptualizing CRT in practice will support educators in developing an
understanding of the urgency for prioritizing literacy development among African American males. This study attempted to fill the gap in extant research by providing baseline data about culturally responsive perceptions and methods of differentiation for teaching African American males in the proposed district. Reopening the discussion about low literacy achievement among African American males is an opportunity for advocacy in creating a set of common CRT expectations in the proposed district. Most importantly, this study uncovered how literacy teachers of African American males reflected on their beliefs, relationships, learning environments, curricula, and use of assessments. Also, continued study of differentiation will uncover the differences between what is said and what is done regarding CRT. Finally, engaging in honest dialogue about the needs of teachers of African American males can be used to make future professional learning and curricula decisions in the district.

Summary

The literature review presented theories for why the African American male literacy skill gaps continue to exist. Chapter 2 also presented theoretical influences used to create the study’s conceptual framework. Chapter 3 outlines the mixed methods plan used to investigate the cultural responsiveness teaching and literacy among African American males.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

The literature review in Chapter 2 summarized several historical, social, and economic factors that contribute to achievement gaps. The CRTF developed by the researcher is a mixture of best practices and everyday actions teachers can use to negotiate culturally responsive instruction to culturally and linguistically diverse students. Chapter 3 presents the research plan, research approach, research design, and methods used in this study. Explanations regarding reliability, validity, limitations, delimitations, and ethical considerations are also presented in this chapter.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was, “How do teachers use a CRT approach to improve literacy development among African American males?” Data were collected in response to the research questions and then aligned to the scholarship about CRT and literacy among African American males. The CRTF was used as an organizational framework. Three research questions guided the study.

1. What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?
2. How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?
3. What supports, if any, do literacy teachers need to facilitate culturally responsive instruction for African American males?

Research Study Design

Mixed methods research is an appropriate approach when seeking a thorough
understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Using a transformative lens, this study investigated teacher perceptions of CRT and identified the specific practices used by literacy teachers to differentiate instruction for African American males. The researcher then collected and analyzed multiple sources of data to determine common culturally responsive practices of literacy teachers. Last, data analysis procedures identified professional learning supports needed to help teachers to better support literacy development for African American male students.

Researchers used a transformative paradigm or worldview as a tool for incorporating philosophy into research (Creswell & Plano, 2011). In doing so, the worldview shaped the researcher’s theoretical lens, methodology, and procedures (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Transformative research design presents problems in a political context seeking to empower marginalized groups (Creswell, 2014). This worldview supports researchers who collaborate with the community to develop change-oriented structures. The theoretical foundations that provided direction to this study were critical theory, social constructivism theory, and culturally responsive pedagogy theory (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

The transformative stance is an umbrella for researchers who view themselves as social justice agents (Mertens, 2012). This change-oriented research is intended to advance the needs of underrepresented and marginalized populations; in the case of this research, African American males in moderate- to high-poverty schools (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The transformative approach recommends first defining the research problem through the literature. Next, one should identify the research design, data sources, and participants for the study. Data collection in search of answering the
research questions may commence upon completion of the latter (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Transformative design was an appropriate approach for this study because the researcher served as an advocate to empower teachers to bring about change in the literacy methods used to teach African American males in moderate- to high-poverty middle schools (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Furthermore, participants played an active role in the research by sharing their perceptions, experiences, and instructional practices for the sake of continued study in the field regarding Black-White literacy skill gaps (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

**Convergent parallel mixed methods design.** Mixed methods research evolved out of the need to gather numerous forms of evidence to document and inform research (Creswell, 2014). As stated by Creswell and Plano (2011), mixed methods design became increasingly popular in the late 1980s as an approach for presenting the complexities of research that goes beyond quantitative findings alone to tell a complete story. Mixed methods research involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative data in multiple forms to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the researcher used quantitative perceptual data to investigate culturally responsive perceptions among middle school literacy teachers. Also, qualitative data stemming from observations in the natural setting, interviews, and document analysis were used to examine if and how literacy teachers differentiate instruction for African American males (Creswell, 2014). Finally, teachers contributed their voices to the study by sharing professional learning needs they had regarding African American male literacy development.
The researcher selected a convergent parallel design due to the need to collect different but complementary data during one phase (Creswell, 2014). Research questions were designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data about culturally responsive perceptions of teachers and methods of differentiated practices used to support African American male literacy development. Upon IRB approval, closed-end data were collected for the quantitative strand, and open-ended data were collected for the qualitative strand (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Another essential feature of convergent parallel design is the presence of two independent data strands that remain separated until the point of interface also known as the point of interaction (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Each data strand was collected concurrently and analyzed separately, using theme development procedures to furnish a complete understanding of the problem by assigning equal weight or priority to quantitative and qualitative data strands (Creswell, 2014). Merged results were compared, contrasted, and synthesized for results. It is important to mention results may be insufficient because all data are collected in one phase. To minimize this threat, quantitative and qualitative samples came from the same population to make the data comparable (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

**Setting.** Data from a district-wide assessment reported a strong link between race, poverty, and academic performance. These supporting data were used to compose a general description of the school district and the qualitative sample. The sample for the study came from a school district with a total student enrollment of 147,000 and an annual operating budget of $1.3 billion, as reported during the 2016-2017 school year. Currently, the top three demographic groups represented in the district are African-
American 39%, White 29%, and Hispanic 23%.

District wide, 56 schools in the district, or 33%, have identified student percentages (ISP) of high poverty. Fifty-seven schools, or 33.5%, have ISPs of moderate poverty. This study focused on literacy teachers in moderate- to high-poverty middle schools as illustrated in Figure 6. The district in which the study took place has 27 middle schools (Grades 6-8) with the typical school serving over 1,000 students. Of those 27 middle schools, 15 schools were included in the study. The cut score for the sample was 40% ISP. Four moderate poverty middle schools had ISPs between 40-49%, and 11 high-poverty middle schools had ISPs between 51-85%.

![Figure 6](image)

*Figure 6. Enrollment by Race and School Poverty Level – Grades 6-8 (School District Report, 2018).*

Figure 6 indicated 52.6% of African American middle school students have been identified as high poverty, and 45.4% identified as moderate poverty. High-poverty schools in the district are mostly composed of African American and Hispanic students (School District Report, 2018). As poverty percentages at these schools increase, so does
the number of Black students. As mentioned in Chapter 2, narrowing gaps becomes especially challenging in schools with high concentrations of low and underachievement (Rothstein, 2004). To this point, Figure 7 illustrates middle school reading growth by school poverty level.

![Figure 7. Reading Growth Categories by School Poverty Level](School District Report, 2018)

According to Figure 7, 31.5% of high-poverty schools in the district did not meet growth on the 2017-2018 end-of-grade assessment (EOG) compared to 35.7% in moderate-poverty schools. Only 14.8% of low-poverty schools failed to meet reading proficiency growth. Even more alarming is the number of African American students identified as having the college and career readiness (CCR) reading skills necessary for college and the workplace. Figure 8 displays the CCR reading percentages of middle school students by poverty level and race.
Based on Figure 8, African American students at high-poverty middle schools have the lowest CCR reading proficiency on the state’s EOG at 20.4%. At moderate-poverty schools, 32.5% of African American middle school students have proficient CCR skills as measured by the state's EOG reading assessment. The need for the continued study about the state of African American literacy in this district is quite apparent. It is unimaginable so few African American students have the reading skills needed to be successful in college and career. To further illustrate the need for the study, the number of African American students who had one or more suspensions during their middle school years is higher than every other race in the district as outlined in Figure 9.
According to Figure 9, African American students at high-poverty middle schools average 26.5% suspensions, compared to 16.1% in moderate-poverty schools and 8.5% in low-poverty schools. Disproportionately high suspension rates are also a trend for African American students in the district's elementary and high schools. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hammond (2015) explained culturally diverse students exhibit micro-aggressions that are often misinterpreted by teachers. As a result, small episodes of micro-aggression morph to the point where suspensions are issued to students. It is important to point out that Black middle grade students in low-poverty schools make up 8.5% of suspensions despite only accounting for 21.6% of the enrollment at low performing schools. These data further display the need for further study about the schooling of African American students, in particular, African American males. Also, these data suggested more study should be conducted on curricula, instruction, and teacher quality. To this point, the study examined teachers’ skills and knowledge for supporting African American males in the literacy setting. Figure 10 displays the percentages of students in a tested subject with at least one teacher with less than 3 years
According to Figure 10, Black students at high-poverty schools have a 27.7% chance of being taught by a teacher with 3 or fewer years of experience. Also, Black students at moderate poverty schools have a 33.9% chance of being taught by a teacher with 3 or fewer years of experience. It is important to mention high teacher turnover of highly qualified teachers in the district has resulted in high-poverty schools retaining less high-quality teachers (School District Report, 2018).

Despite curricula models, teacher training, and increased spending, African American males do not maintain high levels of literacy growth or literacy proficiency. Based on the data presented, this school district will benefit from this study in several ways. First, this study provides an understanding of how literacy teachers in schools with high numbers of low-performing students understand CRT. Second, the study established how literacy teachers plan and implement differentiated instruction to support African American male literacy development. Finally, the study identified specific
resources teachers need to facilitate literacy instruction for African American males.

**Quantitative Sample**

The sample for the study was purposefully based on location and subject matter. One hundred thirty-five in-service literacy teachers at schools with an ISP of poverty ranging from 40% ISP to 84% ISP were invited to participate in the study. Eligible participants were required to be the teacher of record for literacy classes in Grades 6-8. The ideal sample size for \( n=135 \) is 101. Due to data collection restrictions imposed by the school district, the sample size for the quantitative strand was \( n=50 \) and included a 95% confidence level.

**Qualitative Sample**

Patton (1990) stated the sample size for mixed methods research depends on what one needs to know and what can be accomplished in the proposed time frame. The goal of this research was to focus on the participants’ understandings of cultural responsiveness, gather insight about their instructional practices for teaching African American males, and identify resources to support CRT. Five literacy teachers volunteered to participate in the qualitative strand. Once the qualitative sample was identified, data from the state department of education and school websites were compared and contrasted to identify data-based needs regarding middle school literacy and African American males.

**Middle School 1 (MS1).** MS1 is a high-poverty middle school with an ISP of 51%. Data from the district’s 2017-2018 SES report show 70.4% of students were identified as low SES, 18.5% as medium SES, and 10.7% as high SES. At the time of the study, 1,101 students were registered in Grades 6-8. Female students account for 47% of
the population. Male students account for 53% of the school’s population. Of the 525 African American students, 277 are males, and 248 are females. Table 2 shows the racial demographics of the school.

Table 2

*MS1 Student Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African America</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MS1 has a large Hispanic population as illustrated in Table 2 and relies heavily on English Language (EL), which puts an additional strain on teacher abilities to address diverse literacy needs. The attendance rate is 95%, with an average class size of 24 in Grade 6, 25 in Grade 7, and 20 in Grade 8. According to the state report card system, MS1 achieved a score of 45 or D on EOG assessments in reading during the 2017 school year. The range for a D grade is 40-54. MS1 did not meet growth during the 2017 school year. The number of short-term suspensions was 13.55, compared to the district rate of 21.63.

Sixty-four classroom teachers work toward the mission, “We empower all kids.” Twenty-six point six percent of teachers hold advanced degrees, and 39% of the staff has 0-3 years of teaching experience.
### Table 3

**MS1 Teacher Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of Classroom Teachers*</th>
<th>Fully Licensed Teachers</th>
<th>Teachers with Advanced Degrees</th>
<th>National Board-Certified Teachers*</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Teacher Turnover Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>81.1%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also indicated in Table 3 is a teacher turnover rate of 14.3%. The goal for the school year is to decrease achievement gap between Whites and African American Hispanics, EL, and SWD.

**Middle School 2 (MS2).** MS2 is a moderate poverty middle school with an ISP of 49%. Data from the district’s 2017-2018 SES report show 51.1% of students were identified as low SES, 41.8% as medium SES, and .83% as high SES. At the time of the study, 1,046 students were registered in Grades 6-8. As reported in Table 3, African Americans make up 62% of the students at the school. Female students account for 54% of the population. Male students account for 46% of the school’s population. Of the 647 African American students, 343 are males, and 304 are females.
Table 4

**MS2 Student Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African America</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attendance rate is 92.8%, with an average class size of 25 in Grade 6, 22 in Grade 7, and 24 in Grade 8. According to the state report card system, MS2 achieved a score of 42 or D on EOG assessments in reading during the 2017 school year. The range for a D grade is 40-54. MS2 did not meet growth during the 2017 school year. The number of short-term suspensions was 54.8, compared to the district rate of 21.63.

With 57 classroom teachers and 8.8% holding advanced degrees, MS2 stands behind their mission of “PLCs will consistently deliver high-quality instruction, facilitate differentiated practices and integrate character development to ensure our students are prepared for academic and personal success.” Teacher demographics are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

**MS2 Teacher Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of Classroom Teachers*</th>
<th>Fully Licensed Teachers</th>
<th>Teachers with Advanced Degrees</th>
<th>National Board-Certified Teachers*</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Teacher Turnover Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0-3 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4-10 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 reports 47.4% of the teaching staff is in years 0-3 of teaching. With a
turnover rate lower than the district and state average, MS2’s goal is to improve schoolwide reading to 50% and decrease short-term suspensions by 10%.

Middle School 3 (MS3). MS3 is a high-poverty middle school with an ISP of 62%. Data from the district’s 2017-2018 SES report show 81.2% of students were identified as low SES, 18.98% as medium SES, and 0% as high SES. At the time of the study, 1,050 students were registered in Grades 6-8. Of the 396 African American students, 209 are males, and 187 are females. Table 6 shows limited diversity in MS3.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African America</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attendance rate is 91.1%, with an average class size of 25 in Grade 6, 22 in Grade 7, and 27 in Grade 8. According to the state report card system, MS3 achieved a score of 40 or D on EOG assessments in reading. The range for a D grade is 40-54. MS3 did not meet growth during the 2017 school year. The number of short-term suspensions was 65.94%, compared to the district rate of 21%. Sixty-three classroom teachers deliver instruction, according to Table 7, with 23% holding advanced degrees.
Table 7

**MS3 Teacher Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of Classroom Teachers*</th>
<th>Fully Licensed Teachers</th>
<th>Teachers with Advanced Degrees</th>
<th>National Board-Certified Teachers</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Teacher Turnover Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0-3 years</td>
<td>4-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 also demonstrated that 50% of the staff is in years 0-3 of teaching.

MS3’s alarmingly high suspension rate is above the district and state average. MS3’s vision is to provide a rigorous and relevant educational experience for every child. The school’s main goal is to increase end-of-grade reading proficiency to 36%.

**Middle School 4 (MS4).** MS4 is a moderate-poverty middle school with an ISP of 45%. Data from the district’s 2017 SES report show 17.83% of students were identified as low SES, 81.62% as medium SES, and .56% as high SES. At the time of the study, 738 students were registered in Grades 6-8. According to Table 8, of the 386 African American students, 215 are males, and 171 are females.

Table 8

**MS4 Student Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African America</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attendance rate is 91.1%, with an average class size of 20 in Grade 6, 26 in Grade 7, and 23 in Grade 8. According to the state report card system, MS4 achieved a
score of 50 or D on EOG assessments in reading. The range for a D grade is 40-54. MS4 did not meet growth during the 2017 school year. The number of short-term suspensions was 32.09%, compared to the district rate of 21.63%.

Based on Table 8, 45 classroom teachers deliver instruction, with 35.6% of those teachers holding advanced degrees. Forty-two point two percent of the teaching staff are in years 0-3. MS4’s collective school vision is to nurture and support the whole child to maximize potential and prepare and place all students on a pathway to proficiency.

Teacher demographics are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

**MS4 Teacher Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of Classroom Teachers*</th>
<th>Fully Licensed Teachers</th>
<th>Teachers with Advanced Degrees</th>
<th>National Board-Certified Teachers*</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Teacher Turnover Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0-3 years</td>
<td>4-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 also shows a suspension rate higher than district and state averages. The academic need at all four schools is similar. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2018), end of grade (EOG) assessments (a) measure a student's performance at one single point in time, (b) correlate with a student's demographics, (c) compare student performance to a standard, and (d) are critical to a student's postsecondary opportunities. Grade level reading proficiency (GLP) at all four schools fell below the state average of 57% and the district average of 57%, as reported in Table 10.
Table 10

*GLP and CCR End-of-Grade Reading Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GLP</th>
<th>CCR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS1</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS2</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS3</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS4</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 also reports illustrates CCR scores that are alarmingly lower than state and district averages. EOG assessments also measure growth across time, compare students to their prior performance, and are critical to future academic success (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018). All four schools in the qualitative strand did not make growth.

Student performance on the reading EOG assessment is reported in levels ranging from 1 to 5. Reading proficiency at or above grade level is indicated with levels 3 or above. Level 4 and 5 measure CCR. In other words, higher numbers of level 4 and 5 students are indicative of higher numbers of CCR students. Public state and school district data indicated none of the schools selected from the qualitative strand met reading growth during the 2017 school year. Table 11 outlines grade-level proficiency ranging from 1-5.
Table 11

EOG Reporting Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>MS1</th>
<th>MS2</th>
<th>MS3</th>
<th>MS4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior command of literacy knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>25.10</td>
<td>22.80</td>
<td>16.70</td>
<td>29.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solid command of literacy knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>11.70</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>9.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient command of literacy knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>26.70</td>
<td>33.60</td>
<td>31.60</td>
<td>31.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial command of literacy knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>30.70</td>
<td>28.80</td>
<td>40.70</td>
<td>25.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited command of literacy knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 illustrated a high number of level 1 students (School Report Card) and level 2 students at all four schools in the qualitative strand. Limited numbers of students were reported as having sufficient or solid command of literacy skills. Most troubling is no students were reported as having superior command of literacy skills in MS2, MS3, or MS4.

Another finding came from school demographic data indicating all schools for the qualitative strand are majority African American. CCR reading proficiency by race is presented in Figure 11.
Figure 11. CCR Reading Proficiency by Ethnicity.

According to Figure 11, Asians, Whites, and students with two or more races outperformed African American students at all four schools. Black and Hispanic students performed the lowest at all four schools. CCR reading was lowest for African American students at MS3 with 20.3% of students. CCR reading was highest at MS4 with 30.5%. It is important to note that the district’s CCR reading average was 45.9%, while the state average was 45.5%.

Another significant finding is the fact that females continued to outperform males in CCR reading at all four schools in this study, as illustrated in Figure 12.
According to Figure 12, female students at all four schools outperformed males in middle grades reading CCR. Despite the latter, females still lag behind the district average of 49% and state average of 48.2%. CCR reading proficiency at MS1 was 34.1%, whereas males were 28.1%. At MS2, CCR reading proficiency among females was 28.6% and males was 22.81%. MS3’s females scored the lowest of all four schools with 22.6%, whereas males were 15.6%. Finally, CCR reading among all four schools in the study was the highest with 35.4% for females and 30.1% for males during the 2017 school year.

Overall, the needs are similar among moderate- to high-poverty schools. The district defines SES using census data inclusive of English language ability, family composition, family income, homeownership, and parental education attainment (District SES Report, 2017). All four schools have an above average number of teachers in their first 3 years of teaching. With the exception of MS1, schools have high percentages of
uncertified teachers, which suggests that teachers are lateral entry, coming from another field or part of teacher residency programs. This factor can be attributed to high turnover rates in all four schools. The lack of student diversity, inexperienced teachers, high suspension rates, and small numbers of teachers are linked to student achievement.

**Data Collection Plan**

Multiple forms of data were collected to develop answers to the research questions. A quantitative survey, observations in the natural setting, postobservation interviews, and document analysis were triangulated to create a thorough understanding of the culturally responsive perceptions and practices of middle grades literacy teachers (Rothbauer, 2008). Concurrent data collection occurred as each data strand remained independent until the end. Table 12 outlines the instruments employed in the study.

Table 12

*Data Collection Instruments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>MTCS</th>
<th>Observation field notes</th>
<th>Semi-structured interview protocol</th>
<th>Document analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What supports, if any, do literacy teachers need to facilitate culturally responsive instruction for African American males?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The sample size for the quantitative strand was \( n=50 \), whereas the qualitative strand size was \( n=5 \) to answer the research questions in Table 12. Patton (1990) advised maximizing the variation in sample size by identifying the diverse characteristics of the sample. Purposeful and convenience sampling were employed due to limited site access, a short data collection window, and willingness to participate.

**Quantitative plan.** One of the benefits of quantitative data is the ability to get information from a large sample to create inferences. Upon IRB approval, the Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS; Appendix A) was used to measure culturally responsive knowledge and skills among middle school literacy teachers in mid-to high-poverty schools in the district (Spanierman et al., 2011). The MTCS was specially selected because it aligns with the tenants of culturally responsive pedagogy theory identified in the literature of Ladson-Billings (1995a), Gay (2010), Hammond (2015), and Ford and Moore (2013) as well as the CRTF indices. The MTCS assessment measures teacher awareness of (a) self and others as cultural beings, (b) their attitudes and biases, and (c) the need to create culturally sensitive learning environments for all students (Spanierman et al., 2011).

MTCS is a 16-item, Likert scale psychometric instrument that can be used to (a) self-report skills or behaviors in implementing culturally sensitive teaching practices and (b) self-report knowledge of culturally responsive theories, resources, and classroom strategies (Spanierman et al., 2011). The MTCS defined multicultural teaching competencies as (a) the ability for teachers to explore multicultural attitudes and beliefs, (b) an increased understanding of specific populations, (c) the ability to examine the impact self-awareness and knowledge has on what they teach and how they teach it, and
(d) the manner in which they interact with students and families. Authors of the MTCS concluded that high MTCS scores equal higher multicultural teaching competence.

MTCS statements in Table 3 measured multicultural knowledge. Though the MTCS measures multicultural competencies, all 16 items align to the tenants of CRT and the CRTF.

Table 13

MTCS Multicultural Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1. What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand the various communication styles among different racial and ethnic minority students in my classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have a clear understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am knowledgeable about racial and ethnic identity theories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of various racial and ethnic minority groups may affect students’ learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am knowledgeable about the particular teaching strategies that affirm the racial and ethnic identities of all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am knowledgeable about the various community resources within the city that I teach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statements in Table 13 align with Research Question 1 and measured multicultural knowledge. Statements in Table 14 align with Research Question 2 and measured multicultural skills.
Table 14

**MTCS Multicultural Skills**

Research Question 2. How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?

1. I plan many activities to celebrate diverse cultural practices in my classroom.

3. I consult regularly with other teachers or administrators to help me understand multicultural issues related to instruction.

5. I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups during my classroom lessons.

6. I plan school events to increase students’ knowledge about cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups.

8. My curricula integrate topics and events from racial and ethnic minority populations.

10. I make changes within the general school environment, so racial and ethnic minority students will have an equal opportunity for success.

12. I rarely examine the instructional materials I use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias.

13. I integrate the cultural values and lifestyles of racial and ethnic minority groups into my teaching.

15. I often promote diversity by the behaviors I exhibit.

16. I establish strong, supportive relationships with racial and ethnic minority parents.

The statements in Tables 14 and 15 also align to the CRTF and interview protocol. The qualitative instrumentation matrix in Table 15 illustrates the alignment of MTCS statements and interview protocol questions to the CRTF.
Table 15

**Qualitative Instrumentation Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRTF</th>
<th>MTCS</th>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soul- An individual reflection of bias</td>
<td>I have a clear understanding of culturally</td>
<td>How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and privilege</td>
<td>responsive pedagogy.</td>
<td>What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in curriculum and instruction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am knowledgeable about racial and ethnic identity theories.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I often promote diversity by the behaviors I exhibit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I consult regularly with other teachers or administrators to help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>me understand multicultural issues related to instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety- Culture of trust and mutual</td>
<td>I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of various racial</td>
<td>How do you engage the parents and families of your African American male students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respect among institutions students and</td>
<td>and ethnic minority groups may affect students’ learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the community</td>
<td>I establish strong, supportive relationships with racial and ethnic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>minority parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am knowledgeable about the various community resources within the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>city that I teach.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting- Flexible and differentiated</td>
<td>I understand the various communication styles among different racial</td>
<td>Do you incorporate the culture of African American males into your curriculum? If</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning environments that consider the</td>
<td>and ethnic minority students in my classroom.</td>
<td>so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need to address learning styles and</td>
<td>I plan many activities to celebrate diverse cultural practices in my</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaborative learning</td>
<td>I make changes within the general school environment, so racial and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and ethnic minority students will have an equal opportunity for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>success.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Scaffolds- Use of stimulating curricula that helps students to maintain cultural competence and develop an empowering sociopolitical consciousness

I am knowledgeable about the particular teaching strategies that affirm the racial and ethnic identities of all students.

Do you incorporate the culture of African American males into your curriculum? If so, how?

I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups during my classroom lessons

Do you differentiate instruction for African American males? If so, how?

I plan school events to increase students’ knowledge about cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups

Support- Ongoing feedback and formative assessment creates pathways for academic achievement

My curricula integrate topics and events from racial and ethnic minority populations.

I rarely examine the instructional materials I use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias.

I integrate the cultural values and lifestyles of racial and ethnic minority groups into my teaching.

What formative assessment measures do you employ to assess learning for African American males?

What interventions do you employ for African American males who consistently score below standards or demonstrate resistant behaviors toward instruction?

Administration of the MTCS commenced upon IRB approval and remained open for 7 days when the 50th response was collected. The district did not approve requests for greater than 50 surveys in an effort to not overburden school staff with data collection requests. The MTCS was communicated to teachers using a Wix website with an embedded confidential Survey Monkey questionnaire as outlined in Table 16.
As noted in Table 16, the quantitative strand of the study consisted of Research Questions 1 and 2. The district required data collection from a minimum of three schools to maximize generalizability. Furthermore, data requests for specific district data such as percentages by race, gender, and grade level were accessed from local and state department of education websites.

Two attempts were made to invite participants to take the survey via email, an initial invitation and one other reminder email. Upon opening the link to the survey site, participants received a short description of the study and an electronic informed consent agreement (Appendix B). A pdf link for the informed consent agreement provided a statement of rights and procedures for withdrawing from the study and was available for download on this page. Upon consent, respondents were redirected to the MTCS.
questionnaire. The questionnaire took approximately five minutes to complete, and all responses were recorded anonymously. Incomplete surveys were not included in the psychometrics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Methods of Analysis</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?</td>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Interview protocol</td>
<td>Transcribe interviews</td>
<td>October 9 to October 16, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=5 Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Convenience sampling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Categorize codes, themes, similarities and differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assess consistency triangulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?</td>
<td>n=5 Observations in the natural setting</td>
<td>Qualitative CRTF alignment: Setting, Scaffolds, Supports Convenience sampling</td>
<td>Observation protocol</td>
<td>Transcribe interviews from observations</td>
<td>October 9 to November 20, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson plan document analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop categories (observations and documents)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Categorize codes, themes, similarities and differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assess consistency triangulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Methods of Analysis</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. What supports if any do literacy teachers need to facilitate culturally responsive instruction for African American males effectively?</td>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>Qualitative methods</td>
<td>Interview protocol</td>
<td>Transcribe interviews</td>
<td>October 9 to November 20, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n= 5 Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Convenience sampling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Categorize codes, themes, similarities and differences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assess consistency triangulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, though the MCTS is an efficient method for assessing teacher multicultural competency, Spanierman et al. (2011) suggested using additional measures such as observations and examination of lesson plans and interviews to further explore this phenomenon.

**Qualitative plan.** Five middle grades literacy teachers participated in the qualitative strand. Each teacher received two observations and one interview, and lesson plans for the two observed lessons were requested. According to Creswell and Plano (2011), unequal sample size is acceptable for convergent design studies, providing the unequal sample size is listed as a limitation. Furthermore, Creswell and Plano encouraged the use of an unequal sample size to obtain rigorous quantitative examination and in-depth qualitative explanation of a topic.

At the conclusion of the MTCS, respondents had the opportunity to manually click a button to receive more information about how they can contact the researcher and how to participate in observations and an interview for the qualitative strand. Upon clicking, respondents were redirected to a page where they could voluntarily leave their
name and email address for consideration. MTCS responses were recorded anonymously, and no demographic or contact information was attached to responses; therefore, respondents manually clicked on a link to find out more about the qualitative strand.

The original plan stated that the first five respondents consenting to participate in the study would receive a confirmation email. All other respondents would have been informed that they may be considered as a study alternate in the event someone drops out of the study or the researcher needs more information to complete the study. The website recorded zero requests to participate in the qualitative strand. As a result, the researcher sent recruitment emails to 12 literacy teachers identified from the quantitative sample. Email invitations included a brief description of the study and a request to perform two 90-minute observations within 4 weeks. Once five teachers agreed to participate in the study, no additional recruitment efforts took place. Next, the principal letter (Appendix C) was sent via email seeking permission to conduct observations. Upon signed authorization from principals and informed consent from participants (Appendix D), the researcher scheduled observations and interviews.

Observations and document analysis of lesson plans provided concrete examples of how the participants' practices align with CRT research, the CRTF, and best practices for teaching African American males. The researcher used the field notes template located in Appendix E to record descriptions of events, processes, and reflective notes during each observation (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Finally, the researcher requested lesson plans for both observations to be included for document analysis and alignment to themes. Documents obtained the language and content of the lessons and provided an
unobtrusive source of information (Creswell, 2014). Unit plans aligned to the curriculum guides were assessed.

Table 18

**Qualitative A Priori Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A priori codes</th>
<th>CRT Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutual respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent and family engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolds</td>
<td>Stimulating learning experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sociocultural curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>Formative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations took place within 6 weeks of IRB approval and concluded after observation number two. The a priori codes in Table 7 consist of common culturally responsive practices and behaviors found in the literature review. Four of the five indicators from the CRTF conceptual framework were observed during the observations to identify culturally responsive teacher practices and behaviors. The MTCS only measured knowledge and skills, thus the “soul” factor was not measured through observations but was addressed in interviews.

The observed teachers participated in one postobservation interview after both observations were completed. The postobservation interview protocol in Appendix F was audio recorded, and responses were transcribed using Google Transcribe. Interview
questions were developed to align with the research questions and interviews. A pilot interview was administered to a language arts teacher in a neighboring school district. A total of 10 observations and five interviews were conducted. The researcher conducted the interview and read field notes back for member checking purposes within 45 minutes. Table 19 displays the alignment of the CRTF to the interview questions.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRTF</th>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soul</td>
<td>How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in curriculum and instruction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>How do you engage the parents and families of your African American male students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Do you incorporate the culture of African American males into your curriculum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolds</td>
<td>Do you incorporate the culture of African American males into your curriculum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you differentiate instruction for African American males? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>What formative assessment measures do you employ to assess learning for African American males?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What interventions do you employ for African American males who consistently score below standards or demonstrate resistant behaviors toward instruction?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The matrix in Table 19 illustrates how the interview questions satisfy multiple CRTF. Participants were given the opportunity to review and revise their answers as part of the member checking process. Recordings and transcripts were stored in a password-protected account accessible solely by the researcher. All transcripts, recordings, and documents will be destroyed 1 year after the conclusion of the study. Interview questions were triangulated with MTCS responses to determine levels of CRT knowledge and skills. Interviews were held based on the availability of the participants and as face-to-
face interviews or through Zoom video conferencing.

**Data Analysis Plan**

A combination of mixed methods was used to reduce bias and strengthen the credibility of the research findings (Rothbauer, 2008). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately using side-by-side analysis then merged to make inferences after each data strand had been analyzed (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative and qualitative strands remained independent until the end of the study when conclusions were drawn.

**Quantitative descriptive statistics.** Quantitative results were used to create broad interpretations of literacy teachers’ culturally responsive perceptions and practices used when teaching African American males. Descriptive statistics were applied to tabulate mean and mode (Urdan, 2017). Summary statistics about the quantitative data such as the difference between an individual score and the average score in distribution were assessed (Urdan, 2017).

**Qualitative content analysis.** Content analysis is a flexible way to reduce data to make sense of it (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, content analysis can help to identify conscious and unconscious messages located in texts. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) suggested one should immerse oneself in the data to find new meaning rather than only relying on scholarship in the field. A priori codes for the observations were created using the indicators from the CRTF derived from the literature review and the MTCS. Coding of responses verified teacher perceptions about CRT, methods of differentiation, and their professional learning needs. Data reduction and simplification were completed using a system of open coding. Chunks of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs were clustered
together to create categories (Creswell, 2014). Next, the codes were analyzed to identify
collections between the existing codes. Finally, the codes were reexamined to determine
if they required expansion or if a new code needed to be created (DeCuir-Gunby,
Marshal, & McCulloch, 2011). Essential themes were identified from the data to provide
a rich description of how the themes can be used to make generalizations about the
sample (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2005). Once coding was completed, triangulation was
used to assess the coding consistency, look for commonalities in data, and draw
conclusions from the coded data (Patton, 1990). Finally, themes were merged to form
interpretations to create a description of the relationship between teachers’ CRT
perceptions and practices (Creswell, 2012).

**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability refers to consistency in the correlation between scores in two
equivalent forms of a test or consistency of scores across replication (American
Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National
Council on Measurement in Education, Joint Committee on Standards for Educational, &
Psychological Testing, 2014). If a test is measuring what it is intended to measure, the
results should be reliable. Consistency through replication will support inferences and
generalizations made from the results (American Educational Research Association et al.,
2014). Item means were tabulated and compared to Spanierman et al.’s (2011) results for
consistency.

**Quantitative reliability and validity.** The MTCS is a 16-item, two-factor
solution. Factor 1: Multicultural Teaching Skill consists of 10 items. Factor 2:
Multicultural Teaching Knowledge consists of six items. Item 12 is reverse scored such
that higher scores indicate more significant levels of multicultural teaching competency (Spanierman et al., 2011). The MTCS demonstrated adequate internal consistency and was identified as a meaningful way to measure multicultural teaching attitudes after the administration of an exploratory factor analysis (Spanierman et al., 2011). Factor one consisted of 10 items that focused on teachers’ ability to integrate multicultural competence in their practices. The internal consistency of factor one was $\alpha=0.78$ and is considered acceptable. Factor two consisted of six items focused on teachers’ multicultural skills. The internal consistency for factor two was $0.80$ and considered good. Confirmatory factor analysis coefficient alphas for test two were $\alpha=0.80$ for skills and $\alpha=0.83$ for knowledge. Repetition on the factor analysis will be used to support consistency of MTCS results.

Spanierman et al. (2011) conducted reliability analyses for the MTCS. Cronbach alpha for the 16 items was $0.93$, which indicates that the items form a scale that has strong internal consistency reliability. Similarly, the alpha values for the MTCS skill subscale ($0.88$) and the MTCS knowledge subscale ($0.87$) had good internal consistency providing good evidence for the internal consistency reliability of the MTCS (Spanierman et al., 2008).

The findings from the current study further validate Spanierman et al.’s (2011) original findings that the two subscales are significantly related. This means that teachers with higher scores on the MTCS skill subscale were likely to have high scores on the MTCS knowledge subscale (Spanierman et al., 2011).

**Qualitative reliability and validity.** The qualitative validity of the study was measured based on the degree to which data support interpretations or justify
inferences made from data collection (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014). Validity procedures assessed the quality of data, the results, and the interpretations confirmation through triangulation (Creswell, 2014). The use of qualitative methods was used to get a broader understanding of teacher knowledge and skills regarding CRT. The triangulation of multiple data points validated findings (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Member checking procedures were employed to ensure accuracy to avoid bias or influence data in a way that might compromise the sample, collection, interpretation, or reporting of results (Ogden, 2008). Member checking invited participants to serve as co-researchers in the study. After the interview, participants were asked to validate their responses for accuracy and meaning (Sandelowski, 2008).

**Limitations**

Some limitations should be noted in this study. First, the school district used in this study imposed strict data collection restrictions. For a research study of this caliber, a maximum 50 questionnaires was allowed. More substantial quantitative data would have produced broader perspectives. In addition, the original recruitment plan called for the qualitative sample to be nominated by their school principals as teachers who demonstrated the use of effective culturally responsive practices. The district did not allow principals to nominate teachers; therefore, the researcher had to rely on self-reported data. Principal nominations would have strengthened the overall reliability of data in that participants would have had a proven CRT track record associated with student achievement data.

Next, demographic data were collected from participants in the quantitative strand
and could potentially impact findings. The researcher was unable to gain the full trust of the participants during the short time in which the study took place. Associating demographic data with the MTCS could have resulted over or underreporting. As a result, all quantitative data were anonymous and self-reported.

Another limitation was the fact that only Black teachers volunteered to participate in the qualitative strand. Examining the practices of non-Black teachers would have provided insight related to the research literature about how the lack of teacher diversity impacts literacy among African American males. It would have also provided a way to compare and contrast the perceptions and behaviors of a more diverse group of literacy teachers. The racial and ethnic compositions of the quantitative respondents was undetermined because no demographic data were collected. A more diverse sample would have further validated the findings.

A significant delimitation to this study that could potentially impact interpretations was the use of a priori codes. The abbreviated time frame and limited site access required intentional data collection aligned to the conceptual framework. Time constraints resulted in the data being collected, cleaned, analyzed, and evaluated in 6 weeks. As a result, data unrelated to the a priori codes were not used in this study and could potentially impact the results.

**Delimitations**

CRT is not an instructional approach exclusive to African American male students, nor is it a panacea for all low and underachieving students. CRT is contextual, thus all CRT research could not be applied to this study. Likewise, CRT is difficult to operationalize and presents a delimitation of this study. Researchers (Ford & Moore,
2013; Gay, 2010; Kirkland, 2011a; Ladson-Billings, 1995b) offer CRT as a viable approach for addressing persistent trends of low and underachievement among African American males.

Another possible delimitation to the study is presented as a result of conflicting frameworks and definitions of CRT. As a result, the researcher made conscious decisions to select the work of the most prominent researchers in the field such as Ladson-Billings (1995a) and Gay (2010) for reference in this study. Another delimitation of the study was deciding on which literature to cite. As a result, the researcher created the CRTF to align with the most prominent scholars in the field.

The CRTF can be applied to many different subgroups; however, the researcher consciously chose to apply the framework to the literacy development of African American males. The researcher specifically targeted literacy teachers and African American males for this study because their voices have been silenced with years of deficit models that blame them for their lack of growth and achievement. The study prioritized the learning of African American males by identifying teacher perceptions of CRT, uncovering practices used to strengthen the literacy development of African American males, and identifying supports to CRT.

**Ethical Considerations**

In compliance with the ethical treatment of human subjects’ requirements, the research study is based on the fundamental ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice (CITI Program, n.d.). Informed consent was presented in a clear and concise format disclosing participation as being voluntary (CITI Program, n.d.). A recruitment statement was embedded into the survey email to acquire participants. A checked
agreement to the informed consent appeared on the survey and was also provided at the time of observations and postobservation interviews. Confidentiality was of utmost importance and ensured that individual responses would not be divulged. No identifiable information was included about the participants or the school district. Data related to this study were stored in a password-protected account accessed by the researcher alone. Finally, all items and audio recordings will be destroyed after 1 year.

**Role of the researcher.** Every researcher has bias (Ogden, 2008). Though the primary role of this researcher was to coordinate and facilitate data collection and analysis related to the research questions, some experiences and biases exist that could be viewed as impacting the scope of the study (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Issues of equality and equity have always been close to the heart of the researcher. Strength-based instructional approaches such as CRT foster equitable learning environments for students to achieve academically, develop culturally, and question inequities that exist within society (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

The middle school years are an important time. Middle school is a time when students become more independent, are exposed to sensitive social experiences, and begin to develop their cultural and academic identities. On the other hand, many African American males associate their middle school years as a difficult time because they are viewed as troublemakers, worthless, and unteachable (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). CRT opens the door for teachers to enact strength-based approaches for teaching African American males while allowing them the freedom to be who they are, express who they are, and be proud of who they are (Kirkland, 2011b). As a certified middle and high school English language arts teacher for 15 years, the researcher encountered many
unmotivated, disengaged, and insecure African American males. It became apparent these boys all needed the same things: to be seen, to be trusted, to feel safe, to be challenged, to be supported, and most of all to be loved. As a result, the researcher prioritized trusting relationships; created a culture for learning; introduced high-interest topics of study; and used multifaceted assessments to provide students, especially African American males, with well-rounded literacy experiences reflective of who they are. It is the researcher’s hope that curricula designers, policy makers, school leaders, and classroom teachers will use the findings from this study to improve the delivery of literacy instruction to African American males to the point of closing achievement gaps.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the research study design and design rationale. Chapter 3 also described the site, research procedures, study limitations, and delimitations. Using a variety of methods to capture data about the perceptions and practices of middle school literacy, teachers will contribute to a growing body of research committed to eliminating the African American male literacy skills gap.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Overview

The purpose of this study was to (a) investigate teacher perceptions of CRT, (b) examine differentiated instruction strategies used when teaching African American males, and (c) assess professional development needs related to CRT and African American male literacy. Chapter 4 summarizes this study’s findings related to the research questions. Following the steps in convergent design, the researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data in parallel, conducted independent analysis, and formed broad and narrow interpretations of the data (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The information in this chapter is organized starting with a summary of questionnaire results, classroom observations, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews related to the study’s three research questions. Finally, merged results include patterns and inconsistencies found during data triangulation.

Quantitative Results

According to Creswell and Plano (2011), raw data must be converted into useful information or cleaned before it can be analyzed. Accordingly, the researcher inspected all quantitative data to determine if the data were complete and relevant to the study. The researcher did not use any incomplete data in this study. Then, the researcher read through each data set to acquire a general understanding of the content. Next, quantitative results were exported from Survey Monkey to Excel for tabulation of mean and mode. After several subsequent readings, data were organized, compared and contrasted, and then merged to form themes.

**Perceptions of culturally responsive instruction.** Research Question 1, “What
perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction,” was used to capture self-reported perceptions of culturally responsive instruction among middle grades literacy teachers. The MTCS measured literacy teachers’ multicultural teaching skill set, knowledge base, and use of culturally responsive differentiated instruction. Items related to knowledge and skill were aligned to Research Question 1, while items related to the use of specific culturally responsive differentiated instructional strategies were aligned to Research Question 2. The researcher sent out a total of 135 recruitment emails for the MTCS. Survey Monkey collected n=50 and recorded a 100% completion rate in 7 days.

The MTCS is a 16-item Likert scale used to measure responses ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6) to measure multicultural teaching knowledge and skill. Multicultural teaching and CRT are two distinctly different types of pedagogy; however, MTCS items used in this study closely align with the research of Ladson-Billings (1995a) and Gay (2010) in their work on CRT. In the original MTCS study, Spanierman et al. (2011) defined multicultural knowledge as “denoting teaching knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy and instructional strategies related to diverse populations” (445). Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, and 14 measured multicultural teacher knowledge. Table 20 illustrates responses for the multicultural knowledge subscale.
Table 20

**Subscale 1: Multicultural Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand the various communication styles among different racial and ethnic minority students in my classroom.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have a clear understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am knowledgeable about racial and ethnic identity theories.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of various racial and ethnic minority groups may affect students’ learning.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am knowledgeable about the particular teaching strategies that affirm the racial and ethnic identities of all students.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. I am knowledgeable about the various community resources within the city that I teach.</td>
<td>6% n=3</td>
<td>4% n=2</td>
<td>20% n=10</td>
<td>14% n=7</td>
<td>26% n=13</td>
<td>30% n=15</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 20, item 9, “I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of various racial and ethnic minority groups may affect students learning,” had the highest level of agreement in the subscale. This item stands out as a knowledge strength, in that 88% of respondents either moderately agreed or strongly agreed with this item. These data reveal a strength in the knowledge subscale.

Item 2, “I understand the various communication styles among different racial and ethnic minority students in my classroom,” had the second highest level of agreement in the knowledge subscale. For this item, 82% of respondents moderately or strongly agreed that they understand the various communications styles of their racially and ethnically minority students. These data indicate a strength in communication between respondents and students.

Conversely, item 14, “I am knowledgeable about the various community resources within the city that I teach,” had the lowest level of agreement in the knowledge subscale. For this item, 56% indicated strong or moderate agreement, whereas 14% of respondents slightly agreed with this statement; 30% of respondents strongly or moderately disagreed to being knowledgeable about community resources in the city where they teach, which indicates an area of weakness in the knowledge subscale.

Item 4, “I have a clear understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy,” had the
second lowest level of agreement in the knowledge subscale. For this item, 70% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed, whereas 22% slightly agreed with this statement. Conversely, a total of 8% strongly or slightly disagreed with item 4. The wide range in responses to item 4 indicate some level of misunderstanding regarding the tenants of culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Summary of subscale 1 results.** Mean scores for subscale 1 were tabulated and compared to MTCS knowledge subscale means reported by Spanierman et al. (2011) to measure validity. Higher MTCS scores are associated with higher multicultural teaching knowledge. The original study recorded a multicultural knowledge proficient mean score equal to or greater than 4.39. In this study, n=46 respondents had multicultural teaching knowledge scores equal to or greater than 4.39. Conversely, n=4 respondents had multicultural teaching knowledge scores less than 4.39.

Subscale 2 was used to measure multicultural teaching skill. Multicultural teaching skill refers to the ability to “select, develop, implement and evaluate strategies that facilitate academic, and personal development” (Spanierman et al., 2011, p. 445). Furthermore, multicultural teaching skill includes the ability to select and implement culturally sensitive classroom management, interventions, and participation in the ongoing review of policies, procedures, and practices with regard to cultural responsiveness (Spanierman et al., 2011). Table 21 displays responses for items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, and 16 in the multicultural teaching skill subscale.
Table 21

Subscale 2: Multicultural Skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I plan many activities to celebrate diverse cultural practices in my classroom.</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>20% (n=10)</td>
<td>32% (n=16)</td>
<td>40% (n=20)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I consult regularly with other teachers or administrators to help me understand multicultural issues related to instruction.</td>
<td>6% (n=2)</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>24% (n=12)</td>
<td>30% (n=15)</td>
<td>24% (n=12)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups during my classroom lessons.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>16% (n=8)</td>
<td>32% (n=16)</td>
<td>48% (n=24)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I plan school events to increase students’ knowledge about cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups.</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>16% (n=8)</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>16% (n=8)</td>
<td>32% (n=16)</td>
<td>30% (n=15)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(cont.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. My curricula integrate topics and events from racial and ethnic minority populations.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% n=1</td>
<td>4% n=2</td>
<td>10% n=5</td>
<td>42% n=21</td>
<td>42% n=21</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I make changes within the general school environment, so racial and ethnic minority students will have an equal opportunity for success.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% n=1</td>
<td>4% n=2</td>
<td>4% n=2</td>
<td>20% n=10</td>
<td>62% n=31</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I rarely examine the instructional materials I use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias.</td>
<td>46% n=23</td>
<td>20% n=10</td>
<td>6% n=3</td>
<td>8% n=4</td>
<td>10% n=5</td>
<td>10% n=5</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I integrate the cultural values and lifestyles of racial and ethnic minority groups into my teaching.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% n=1</td>
<td>24% n=12</td>
<td>34% n=17</td>
<td>40% n=20</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I often promote diversity by the behaviors I exhibit.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% n=1</td>
<td>6% n=3</td>
<td>34% n=17</td>
<td>58% n=29</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(cont.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. I establish strong, supportive relationships with racial and ethnic minority parents.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 21, item 15, “I often promote diversity by the behaviors I exhibit,” had the highest level of agreement among respondents. For this item, 92% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed. These data stand out as a strength in the way respondents perceive their skill in this area since no one strongly or moderately disagreed with this statement.

Item 16, “I establish strong, supportive relationships with racial and ethnic minority parents,” had the second highest level of agreement in the skill subscale. For this item, 88% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed. This item stands out as a strength in the way respondents perceive their relationships with parents since no one strongly or moderately disagreed with this statement.

Item 3, “I consult regularly with other teachers or administrators to help me understand multicultural issues related to instruction,” had the highest level of disagreement in the skill subscale. For this item, 54% strongly or moderately agreed, whereas 24% slightly agreed with this statement. These data indicate a weakness in the frequency of collaboration between teachers and administrators regarding multicultural issues related to instruction.

Item 6, “I plan school events to increase students’ knowledge about cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups,” had the second highest level of
disagreement in subscale 2. For this item, 62% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with this statement. These data indicate void in the planning of school events to increase student knowledge about the experiences of various racial and ethnic groups.

Item 12, “I rarely examine the instructional materials I use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias,” was reverse scored. As a result, lower scores indicated higher levels of competence; 66% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with this item. These data uncover a significant weakness in the area of examining instructional materials for racial and ethnic bias.

**Summary of subscale 2 results.** Mean scores for subscale 2 were tabulated and compared to MTCS skill scores. Higher MTCS scores are associated with higher multicultural teaching skill. The original study recorded a multicultural skill proficient mean score equal to or greater than 4.23. In this study, n=43 respondents had multicultural teaching skill scores equal to or greater than 4.23. Conversely, n=7 respondents had multicultural teaching skill scores less than 4.23.

**Differentiated instruction.** Research Question 2, “How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males,” was used in the study to identify common differentiated instruction strategies employed by literacy teachers of middle grades African American males. Differentiated instruction, as defined by Tomlinson (2017), is a teacher’s ability to “offer different approaches to what students learn, how they learn it, and how they demonstrate what they’ve learned” (7). It is important to note the Spanierman et al. (2011) study did not measure differentiated instructional strategies; therefore, no comparisons to that study can be made. For the sake of this study, the researcher evaluated MTCS items that aligned to Tomlinson’s
(2017) definition of differentiated instruction. Subscale 3 items include 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, and 15 are presented in Table 22.
### Table 22

**Subscale 3: Culturally Responsive Differentiated Instructional Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I plan many activities to celebrate diverse cultural practices in my classroom.</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>20% (n=10)</td>
<td>32% (n=16)</td>
<td>40% (n=20)</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I consult regularly with other teachers or administrators to help me understand multicultural issues related to instruction.</td>
<td>6% (n=2)</td>
<td>4% (n=1)</td>
<td>4% (n=1)</td>
<td>24% (n=12)</td>
<td>30% (n=15)</td>
<td>24% (n=12)</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups during my classroom lessons.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>16% (n=8)</td>
<td>32% (n=16)</td>
<td>48% (n=24)</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My curricula integrate topics and events from racial and ethnic minority populations.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>10% (n=5)</td>
<td>42% (n=21)</td>
<td>42% (n=21)</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I make changes within the general school environment, so racial and ethnic minority students will have an equal opportunity for success.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>4% (n=2)</td>
<td>20% (n=10)</td>
<td>62% (n=31)</td>
<td>n=50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. I rarely examine the instructional materials I use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias.</td>
<td>6% (n=23)</td>
<td>20% (n=10)</td>
<td>6% (n=3)</td>
<td>8% (n=4)</td>
<td>10% (n=5)</td>
<td>10% (n=5)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I integrate the cultural values and lifestyles of racial and ethnic minority groups into my teaching.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>24% (n=12)</td>
<td>34% (n=17)</td>
<td>40% (n=20)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I often promote diversity by the behaviors I exhibit.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2% (n=1)</td>
<td>6% (n=3)</td>
<td>34% (n=17)</td>
<td>58% (n=29)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 22, item 15, “I often promote diversity by the behaviors I exhibit,” had the highest level of agreement in subscale 3. For this item, 92% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with the statement. These data indicate that respondents feel confident about how they promote diversity by the behaviors they exhibit.

Item 8, “My curricula integrate topics and events from racial and ethnic minority populations,” had the second highest level of agreement in subscale 3. For this item, 84% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with this statement. These data indicate a strength in that the majority of respondents integrate topics and events about racial and ethnic minorities into their curriculum, which is a major tenant of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Item 10, “I make changes within the general school environment, so racial and ethnic minority students will have an equal opportunity for success,” had the third highest
level of agreement. For this item, 82% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with this statement. These data indicate another strength in that the majority of respondents make changes to the school environment so racially and ethnically minority students can be successful.

Conversely, item 3, “I consult regularly with other teachers or administrators to help me understand multicultural issues related to instruction,” had the highest level of disagreement in the subscale. For this item, 54% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with this statement. This stands out as an area for improvement and indicates a weakness in the frequency with which respondents consult with teachers and administrators to enhance their ability to understand multicultural issues related to instruction.

Item 6, “I plan school events to increase students’ knowledge about cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups,” had the second highest level of disagreement in the subscale. For this item, 62% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with this statement. These data indicate a weakness in the area of planning events to increase student knowledge of the cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups.

**Summary of subscale 3 results.** Items related to differentiated instruction were positively responded to in subscale 3. Since the original MTCS study (2011) did not measure differentiated instruction, the researcher tabulated mean scores for items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, and 15. The total mean score for items in subscale 3 was 4.54. In this study, n=32 respondents had total scores equal to or greater than 4.54. Conversely, n=18 respondents had total scores of less than 4.54 for subscale 3.
Qualitative Results

Five literacy teachers participated in the qualitative strand of the study. A volunteer sign-up link attached to the MTCS Survey Monkey received zero responses. As a result, the researcher used the quantitative email distribution list to recruit participants. Twelve recruitment emails were sent to literacy teachers in the sampled schools. The researcher received five responses within 9 days. Recruitment efforts ended after the fifth teacher consented to participate in the qualitative strand of the study.

Next, the researcher emailed principals a letter requesting permission to collect data at their respective schools. The researcher contacted participants via email to schedule observations. Each of the five participants was assigned a number and a color. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

The researcher completed a total of 10 classroom observations. Participants shared unit plans, lesson plans, and materials for the observed lessons with the researcher. As a nonparticipant observer, the researcher used a field notes template to capture data aligned with the a priori codes outlined in the CRTF. The researcher also took chronological notes in a notebook regarding interactions and the classroom environment.

Semi-structured interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time. The researcher facilitated a total of two face-to-face interviews and three Zoom meetings with the average interview lasting 25 minutes. Audio recordings were transcribed and coded within 24 hours of completion. The researcher listened to the interview once for general understanding and a second time to transcribe using the voice dictation feature of Microsoft Word. Audio recordings were transcribed and listened a third time to ensure accuracy. The researcher transcribed the recordings and identified chunks in the
transcribed data most relevant to the research questions. A member check of transcribed interviews was used to validate the data. The researcher emailed chunks of the transcribed interviews to participants for member checking. Participants were asked to review the transcribed text and make changes to any information. None of the participants made changes to their responses.

Qualitative coding occurred in stages due to the volume of data collected. The researcher created a coding matrix that derived from themes in the literature review and conceptual framework. In doing so, qualitative coding became manageable and connected data to the overall research hypothesis and the research questions. Each participant was assigned a color and number. All information pertaining to the participant was recorded on paper, sticky notes, or with ink of the assigned color. Responses were grouped based on color during level one coding. Next, data were sorted and combined to reveal common themes. Chunks of similar data were then sorted into categories aligned with the a priori codes. The frequency of data was assessed, compared, and contrasted during level three coding to establish validity and reliability of the qualitative data. Finally, data were reviewed holistically to develop thick narrative description.

**Perceptions of culturally responsive instruction.** Research Question 1 asked, “What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?” Semi-structured interview questions aligned to the soul category of the conceptual framework expanded the researcher’s understanding of the quantitative findings related to CRT. Transcribed text from the following three interview questions addressed participant perceptions of CRT and how they negotiate personal and instructional bias.
1. How would you define CRT?

2. How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher?

3. What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in your curriculum and instruction?

After individual descriptions, the results of the coding of these data are presented.

**Ms. Knight.** Ms. Knight is in her mid-40s and is a literacy teacher at MS1. As a graduate of a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), Ms. Knight said her background and experiences made her well prepared to teach African American males in Title I schools. When asked, “How would you define CRT,” Ms. Knight said, “CRT acknowledges differences and the different cultures in the classroom along with different perspectives students bring to the table. It is about being cognizant of your teaching methods, exposing your students to different topics and then being culturally sensitive.”

When asked, “How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher” and “What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in your curriculum and instruction,” Ms. Knight shared,

I combat my bias by learning as much as I can (about people), so I can be a culturally responsive teacher. CRT means we are teaching behaviors we expect and being culturally aware of the biases that exist in an education environment, especially being aware of the biases students think teachers have about them.

Ms. Knight is in her first year at MS1, but she has spent the majority of her career in the middle school setting. She currently serves as a member of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) team at her school. Ms. Knight shared that the majority of children who are receiving long-term, short-term, and in-school suspensions are Black males.
When teachers become culturally responsive to students that will decrease the number of suspensions that we have. Students are leaving our schools because they feel like there’s no sense of community … like we are not meeting their needs. The district will continue to be a revolving door until we show students and the community that we appreciate their cultures and their perspectives.

During the semi-structured interview, Ms. Knight shared she has not received any formal training and or support from the school district regarding CRT; however, she has read some research literature related to CRT on her own.

Coded data revealed that Ms. Knight defined CRT as acknowledging different cultures and perspectives and using varied teaching methods and topics. These data also indicated characteristics of culturally responsive teachers include willingness to learn about racial and ethnic differences, awareness of personal bias, and having an appreciation for different cultures and perspectives.

Mr. Goodman. Mr. Goodman also teaches seventh-grade literacy at MS1. He attended a top-ranked state university where he majored in English and minored in Africana studies. When asked, “How would you define CRT,” Mr. Goodman said, “Culturally responsive literacy instruction requires you to use culturally different literature, not just mainstream literature but introducing texts that are relevant to the issues of the student population.”

Though Mr. Goodman does not recall taking specific classes focused on CRT, he recalled taking an African American literature course and several Africana studies classes during his undergraduate study. When asked, “How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher” and “What steps do you take to combat bias
when it appears in your curriculum and instruction,” Mr. Goodman responded,

I have been fortunate to work with a really good PLC, and we always put each other
in check when it comes to bias and leaning toward one perspective. Having a strong
team allows me and forces me to consider different perspectives.

Mr. Goodman is a 17-year teaching veteran. Despite not having any advanced degrees,
Mr. Goodman confessed that he wants to and needs to learn more about CRT. He also
shared that he tries to stay informed about educational issues through his leisure reading.

Coded data revealed Mr. Goodman defined CRT as the use of diverse and non-
mainstream literature that relates to the culture and experiences of children of color.
These data indicated that Mr. Goodman believes culturally responsive teachers negotiate
bias through PLC work which forces them to consider other people’s perspectives. Mr.
Goodman credits his PLC, of which Ms. Knight is a member, for his ability to negotiate
personal and instructional bias.

Mrs. Givens. Mrs. Givens has been a teacher at MS2 for the past 8 years. A
graduate of an HBCU, she has no qualms about holding her students accountable. Her
diminutive stature does not stop her from voicing high expectations for her African
American male students, many of whom are much taller than her. When asked, “How
would you define CRT,” Mrs. Givens said,

As a culturally responsive teacher, I incorporate the culture, lifestyle, and
experiences of my students in my lessons. Every decision I make as a teacher
considers the culture, lifestyle, and experiences of my students. So, for example, I
use the content and the experiences of my students to make learning real for them.
If they can’t relate to the content, I have to pull from their experiences to help
them make those important connections.

When asked, “How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher” and “What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in your curriculum and instruction,” Mrs. Givens responded,

I want the best for my students, so I have no choice but to check my bias at the door. You’re not culturally responsive if you allow bias to shadow your work. There is no place for it in this kind of environment because there is so much diversity all around. Working in this kind of environment puts me in the middle of differences all the time. All I can do is learn from it and use it as an advantage when teaching them (her students).

Mrs. Givens does not hold an advanced degree; however, she is thinking of going back to school to earn a master’s degree in school administration.

Coded data revealed that Mrs. Givens defined CRT as the ability to incorporate students’ culture and lifestyle in a way that helps them to make real-world connections with curricula. These data also indicated that Mrs. Givens believes culturally responsive teachers check their bias at the door and focus on learning more about the teachers they work with and students they teach.

Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith is a literacy teacher at MS4. In his mid-20s, Mr. Smith is very passionate and protective of his students. When asked, “How would you define CRT,” he said,

CRT from my connotation would be stuff like resources, texts, and information that is culturally applicable to your classroom dynamic. It integrates and assimilates the interests of the children and things students are aware of like the ethnic
background and cultural experiences into instruction.

Mr. Smith recalls taking required diversity classes for his undergraduate degree in English. When asked, “How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher” and “What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in your curriculum and instruction,” Mr. Smith said,

Understanding my biases allows me to make sure I am holistic in my approach in regards to student interactions, instruction and how I receive individuals. Being aware means, I have to set my biases aside and allow myself to develop the whole child. I do this by having an understanding of ideologies and mindsets that have allowed me to be more culturally aware and diminish my own biases.

Now in his fifth year of teaching, Mr. Smith confessed to being on the fence about continuing in the profession in years to come.

Coded data revealed Mr. Smith defined CRT as aligning students’ background and culture with resources and texts that are applicable to students of color. These data also indicated that Mr. Smith believes culturally responsive teachers teach the whole child and are conscious about how negative ideologies and mindsets impact academic performance.

*Ms. Davis.* Ms. Davis is an eighth-grade literacy teacher at MS4. She holds a bachelor’s degree in secondary English education and a master’s degree in secondary English education. Ms. Davis did not have specific training in CRT but was exposed to equity education classes during her master’s study. When asked, “How would you define CRT,” she said CRT is “Just being aware of your students’ various cultures, the different demographics.” When asked, “How does understanding your own biases help you to be a
better teacher” and “What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in your curriculum and instruction,” Ms. Davis said,

Sometimes I am biased about things, so I make sure I am not strictly supporting one side. I try to see things as a whole. That’s normally what I try to do. I’ll stop and think about it and come back with a better response. As a teacher you have to be careful of what you say. I try to make sure I’m careful (of not to offend).

For example, we read “Ain’t I a Woman” which is about women’s rights. I am a woman and Black, so there’s going to be some bias when reading that particular speech. When I teach it, I make sure to apply it to all women and even men. By speaking up, I am letting students know that this speech is more than just about women’s’ rights. I help them to see what we all have in common and what is different about us.

Ms. Davis became very emotional during the interview and was bought to tears as she shared her experiences teaching African American males. She confessed the reason for the tears is because she understands how difficult it is to be a Black male in America.

In her fifth year of teaching Ms. Davis prides herself on the relationships she maintains with her students in and out of school. “I don’t have kids. These are my kids.”

Coded data revealed that Ms. Davis believes CRT is about being aware of the diverse needs of students by being inclusive, not offensive. These data also indicated that Ms. Davis believes culturally responsive teachers speak up for the needs of their students and they see their students as family.

**Summary of Research Question 1 findings.** Coding and analysis of data
resulted in the following findings for Research Question 1. Participants defined CRT in many different ways. Overall, participants demonstrated a general understanding of CRT as outlined by the research of Ladson-Billings (1995a) or Gay (2010). Some examples of culturally responsive perceptions gathered from this analysis include maintaining cultural competence, welcoming different perspectives, maintaining trusting relationships, teaching the whole child, aligning curricular with cultural experiences, developing a sense of community relationships with parents and the community, and collaborating with colleagues to design engaging learning experiences.

**Differentiated instruction.** Research Question 2, “How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males,” was answered using data from observations, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. First, the researcher organized fieldnotes and memos from observations according to the colors assigned to each participant. Data were then organized in a priori categories that align with differentiated instruction: safety, setting, scaffolds, and support. Next, the researcher circled evidence of differentiated instructional strategies for African American males that appeared in the data.

Last, transcribed interview text and memo notes were reviewed for evidence of differentiated instructional strategies used while teaching African American males. Responses to these interview questions were examined a second time for evidence of differentiated instructional strategies.

1. Do you incorporate the culture of African American males into your curriculum? If so, how?
2. Do you differentiate instruction for African American males? If so, how?
3. What formative assessment measures do you employ to assess learning for African American males?

4. What interventions do you employ for African American males who consistently score below standards or demonstrate resistant behaviors toward instruction?

5. How do you engage the parents and families of your African American male students?

The researcher then used the coded data to create thick, rich descriptive narratives for each participant. After individual descriptions, the results of the coding of these data using a priori categories are presented.

**Ms. Knight.** Upon entering Ms. Knight’s classroom, it was evident that differentiated reading routines were in place. Students silently worked on warm-up activities aligned with reading passages that corresponded to their reading Lexile levels. The warm-up is hosted by an online platform. Literacy-based reading activities offer students a choice of reading activities based on their readiness. A countdown timer was displayed on the whiteboard indicating how much time students had left to complete the task. Meanwhile, Ms. Knight, seated at her desk, monitored student progress using a tracker linked to each student’s account. She acknowledged and praised those who finished ahead of time and instructed them to work on another personalized learning website until the time was up.

The physical space was organized in rows during the first observation and groups of four and six during the second observation. The class consisted of 25 students, six of whom were African American males. Three sat in the back of the classroom, and
the other three were spread across the classroom. One student, in particular, was reminded of his seat next to the teacher’s desk when he arrived late to class.

Teacher-created anchor charts made learning visible and included literacy topics such as annotation, how to chunk texts, RACE writing, and characterization. The back of the classroom was decorated with pictures and biographies of multicultural historical and literary figures. Also, a neatly organized classroom library sat on the right side of the room. The top row of the bookshelf was organized by class period. The leveled library made it easier for students to select texts based upon their reading levels. Many of the books in the library were fiction and considered high interest for middle grade readers.

Ms. Knight verbally communicated the learning objective by reading it aloud from the whiteboard. She was enthusiastic when she told students why she enjoys reading the suspense genre. Ms. Knight asked students to engage in accountable talk about the suspense genre. Next, she activated prior knowledge by assigning a 5-minute journal writing activity that asked students to describe a time when they felt brave. During her interview, Ms. Knight said, “Journal writing is an important part of my class where the children practice reflecting on what they know by writing it down and discussing it with others.” Students had another chance to collaborate with their peers when they were instructed to share their responses with two other people. Next, Ms. Knight invited three students to volunteer to read their responses to the class as a way to earn participation points.

One African American male shared his experience about being brave when he recently cooked using a sizzling pot of grease (oil). At first, his classmates laughed at his
title, but they listened attentively; some even shaking their heads in agreement when the young man carefully narrated the first time, he fried chicken in hot grease. He recounted watching his mother do it with a skill that did not result in grease splatter or second-degree burns. The young man shared that he had to be brave if he wanted to eat because his mother refused to cook his favorite food after her long day at work. Ms. Knight chuckled at the student’s narrative and gave him full participation points. Ms. Knight later expressed in her interview that this student is not very organized and tends to lose his work or not finish on time. She stressed the importance of why she structures her class in a way that gives students multiple ways to earn credit while working on important speaking and listening standards. “It also gives students the opportunity to learn more about one another,” said Mrs. Knight.

Ms. Knight used a video to convey themes related to the anchor text. The video explained the nature of a mongoose and a cobra. The African American males in the class watched the video attentively. At one point in the video, the mongoose encountered a black mamba snake. Ms. Knight stopped the video and asked, “What basketball player is nicknamed Black Mamba? Two African American males shouted out “Kobe.” Ms. Knight probed and asked if the nickname is appropriate based on what they viewed in the video. Most of the girls in the class looked disinterested, whereas the boys appeared to do all of the talking. At the end of the discussion, one African American male student said, “Now I know why they call him that. I thought it was just the name of his sneakers.” Another student said “Yeah, he got a book too. Called Mamba Mentality.”

As the lesson continued, flexible groupings allowed students to choose with whom they worked. The three African American males seated in the back of the room
gravitated to each other. Two students seated in the front of the class also gravitated to each other. Groups were given control to make decisions about how they would read the text and respond to the guiding reading prompts. As students moved into independent practice, Ms. Knight remained proximal and monitored students as they worked. She conferenced with them and provided feedback for improvement. She asked one African American male student, “What do you need help with so I can pull some work for you at lunch?” During the interview, Ms. Knight shared the young man was having a hard time in her class. Without going into detail, she shared the student was “having a hard time in general” so she offers extended learning opportunities to support struggling students.

Ms. Knight’s inclusion class had 25 students, nine of whom were African American males. This class had a co-teacher who spent the majority of her time working with a small English Learner (EL) group. The atmosphere during the inclusion class was serious, as Ms. Knight reminded her inclusion class to stay focused because failure is not an option in her class. “You CAN do this,” she stated boldly. “Even if it means it takes us longer to or we have to go at it boot-camp style, you, WILL, see what I see in you.” Ms. Knight and her co-teacher chunked a text for the inclusion class and modeled how to use textual evidence to write an objective summary.

Ms. Knight shared her frustration about the challenges of teaching students on many different readiness levels. At one point, the inclusion class had 17 African American males. “It was too many with IEPs in one class. I was not equipped to meet their needs.” During the interview, Ms. Knight said she worked with the counselor and the grade-level administrator to make the class more diverse. Now with a bilingual co-teacher, the inclusion class consists of standard, English Learner (EL), and Exceptional
Child (EC) students. Ms. Knight uses tiered activities and flexible groups to make learning more student centered:

You have to do some type of differentiation because their comprehension is all over the place. It is hard enough to differentiate for the skill level let alone their interest and if they are Black males. It is a constant juggling act.

Coded data indicated that Ms. Knight’s attention to safety factors promote a culture of respectful peer interactions and high expectations. Table 23 illustrates examples of how Ms. Knight employed differentiated instructional strategies related to a priori categories.

Table 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Scaffolds</th>
<th>Supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respectful peer interactions</td>
<td>Flexible groups</td>
<td>Personalized learning</td>
<td>Varied assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Seating plan</td>
<td>Real-world connections</td>
<td>Guided and independent practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>High-interest texts</td>
<td>Extended learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Respectful tasks</td>
<td>Progress monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accountable talk</td>
<td>Tiered activities</td>
<td>Conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning styles</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective journals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voice and choice</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis revealed differentiated setting factors such as establishing flexible groups, varied seating plans, and catering to learning styles. Analysis of scaffolds revealed the use of a personalized learning framework, high-interest texts, and tiered activities. Analysis of supports revealed the use of guided and independent practice, conferencing, and progress monitoring.

**Mr. Goodman.** Mr. Goodman teaches across the hall from Ms. Knight. The two plan lessons together as part of a PLC. Mr. Goodman teaches a standard and an honors class. The two classes are different regarding pacing; however, they complete the same
objectives. Students in the standard class of 22 immediately logged on to the online platform for the warm-up. The five African American males in the class were seated together in the back of the classroom. Mr. Goodman reminded each student to set their reading goal as he started the 15-minute timer.

Mr. Goodman sat at his desk located at the left front corner of the classroom. Old newspaper covers of former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama decorated his wall space. College memorabilia from Mr. Goodman’s alma mater were also prominently displayed. A classroom library bookshelf sat in the back of the room and consisted of randomly organized books. Several copies of graffiti clad textbooks sat on top of the bookshelves. Additionally, displays of student work ranging from large portraits, graphic organizers, foldables, and mini-books covered the back wall.

Mr. Goodman reminded students that they had 2 minutes remaining to complete the warm-up. Students earn knowledge points when they complete the warm-up activities and meet their reading goals. The warm-up “generates friendly competition, but the real reason we (PLC) assign it is to motivate them and give them a concrete indicator of how well they comprehend what they read.” During the interview, Mr. Goodman said his PLC requested for the principal to purchase the platform used for daily warm-up. The warm-up activity serves multiple purposes such as offering texts from multiple genres and promoting goal setting. Moreover, students receive immediate feedback about their reading comprehension ability in the personalized progress reports. Mr. Goodman is a fan of the program and dedicated a section of wall space for students who make it into the “1000 Knowledge Points Club.”

It was evident that Mr. Goodman plans with Ms. Knight; their pacing is almost
identical and included the same text, standards, skills, and resources. On this day, students read “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl. The focus of the lesson was citing textual evidence from a story to support or refute claims. Mr. Goodman used flexible groups and allowed students to select with whom they read the text and completed the tasks. Three of the five African American males seated in the back of the room worked together. “I let the boys (African American) work together,” said Mr. Smith during his interview. “They get split up in a lot of classes, but I let them work together as long as they are learning.”

During observation two, the honors class worked on a Greek and Latin roots activity. The honors class was racially diverse and consisted of 29 students, nine of whom were African American males. The class used Google Slides to create a presentation inclusive of text, images, or video to help them remember the meaning of 20 roots which they would be tested on the next week. The word equanimity sparked a serious discussion during the class. “I walk these halls all the time and haven’t heard a soul use the word ‘equanimity.’” Together the class discussed the origins of the Latin root, and Mr. Goodman challenged students to use it correctly in a sentence. One African American male asked, “So in other words, it means to be chill?” The honors class completed the activity with confidence and ease. The personalized learning activity and discussion gave students the support they needed to prepare for the upcoming exam. Though the test would consist of rote memorization, the personalized slides gave students the ability to make choices about how to make their learning visual.

It was evident that students in the honors class have various readiness levels. Mr. Goodman said he organizes tasks based on data collected from common assessments and
daily monitoring. He said his lessons and activities are tiered based on the student's readiness level and require constant monitoring and lesson adjustments.

Mr. Goodman gave students verbal and written feedback during the lesson. He wrote specific feedback on each paper and made verbal comments like, “I like what you were doing here,” or “You didn’t quite get it. Go back and restructure this sentence.” Students made adjustments to their work based on Mr. Goodman’s feedback and were allowed to resubmit their work for evaluation.

Mr. Goodman shared he has a limited understanding of CRT, but he is respectful about how he interacts with students and families. Mr. Goodman held two parent-teacher conferences in the hour before observation two. “You have to work with the parents, cause at the end of the day, they will support you if you are trying to do right by their kids.”

As seen in Table 24, coded data indicated that Mr. Goodman’s attention to safety factors promotes a culture of respect and high expectations. Coded data also revealed how Mr. Goodman employed differentiated instructional strategies related to a priori categories.

Table 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mr. Goodman’s Differentiated Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respectful interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent engagement</td>
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Data analysis revealed differentiated setting factors such as establishing flexible groups, catering to learning styles, and welcoming student voice and choice. Analysis of
scaffolds revealed the use of a personalized learning framework and respectful tiered tasks. Analysis of supports revealed the use of guided and independent practice, goal setting, conferencing, and progress monitoring.

Mrs. Givens. Mrs. Givens is a well-known fixture at MS2. In her early 40s and member of a Black Greek letter organization, Mrs. Givens said she stands in service to her community. She has taught seventh- and eighth-grade literacy at MS2 for the last 8 years. Much shorter than most of her students, Mrs. Givens is confident and unapologetic in her delivery.

The classroom was neat and decorated with stacks of books organized by genre, a word wall, and classroom rules. College paraphernalia from HBCUs were prominently displayed on the back walls. Mrs. Givens is affectionate. Students called out to her from the hallway; and during passing, she gave students hugs. “What’s the phrase for this quarter,” she asked when she closed the door as the late bell rang. “Level-up” called out a young lady seated in the front of the room. Mrs. Givens shared personal anecdotes about her daughter and encouraged her students that they can become honors students if they put their mind to it. The nine African American males in the standard class listened attentively as Mrs. Given shared the vision she has for her students for the second quarter.

Ms. Givens went into a speech encouraging her students to “represent” and have a better second quarter. “You got to level up,” she demanded. It was evident Mrs. Givens has very high expectations for her students and expects them to do their best work. During her interview, she said her expectations are the same for her students as they are for her own children. She is honest and direct about her expectations.
“Sometimes I get in trouble because I do my own thing,” she confessed.

The standard class had 26 students. Males were all seated on the periphery of the room and females sat in the middle of the rectangular seating arrangement. Mrs. Givens said the new seating structure was an attempt to separate males and females because they are a great distraction to each other.

Eight weeks into the school year, the standard class struggled to complete basic reading response journals. Mr. Givens expects each student to read and respond to 10 independent books by the end of the school year. Every student in the class had a journal, but not everyone completed the three required responses for the week. Only four students completed the required number of responses and are allowed to go to the media center to work on extended lessons. Mrs. Givens explained she lets responsible students go to the media center to complete the extended lessons that are directly aligned to MAP assessment results. The 22 remaining students spent the rest of the class period completing journal responses under Mrs. Givens’s supervision.

Mrs. Givens said, “There is not enough conversation about how to be successful. They (administrators) keep telling them, to achieve 4’s and 5’s but they don’t give them directions for achieving 4s and 5s.” Mrs. Givens is a risk-taker and unapologetic about deviating from the pacing calendar to teach what she thinks her students need. “That is why I showed the video because as a school we are not having real honest conversations about how to support them,” said Mrs. Givens; “Teachers at low performing schools are micromanaged and cannot make decisions they want about curriculum.” Now that MS2’s state report card grade dropped from a “D” to an “F,” teachers will be required to write more comprehensive lesson plans that script out
activities and interventions.

During observation two, 21 students worked to examine key individuals, events, and ideas in a text. The essential question asked students to consider what specific interactions characterize a defining moment in a text. Five African American males in the honor’s class sat in various sections of the rectangular seating plan. Mrs. Givens shared a video clip presenting two perspectives of the national anthem protests taking place in the NFL. Next, students were instructed to jot down their own thoughts regarding the protests. The reflective writing prompts and accountable talk ensured all students had opportunities to contribute to the conversation. “My class is a place where we talk about the real world. They (African American males) come alive when they learn about things that interest them.” Next, students quietly read an article and answered guided reading questions to expand their knowledge of the reasons why some NFL players take a knee in protest of the national anthem. The lesson offered respectful tasks and encouraged students to show what they have learned as a part of the curriculum while still appealing to their interest. The use of multiple resources exposed students to both sides of the argument, thus adding an additional layer of complexity to the lesson.

Mrs. Givens spent the majority of the independent work time conferencing and monitoring student progress. She used the aggressive monitoring technique to assess mastery and provide feedback. Aggressive monitoring of student work is an intervention teachers used to gather data and make quick adjustments to instruction when necessary. Mrs. Givens used a smiley face to indicate proficiency, a partial smiley face indicated the work is in progress and an unhappy face indicated unacceptable work.

During both observations, a behavior management technician (BMT) who
supports school safety visited the classroom. He is a young African American man in his late 20s. The BMT is also the football coach, and he uses his visits to check up on his athletes and ensure their behaviors are acceptable. Mrs. Givens said, “I am grateful to Coach because he keeps the boys on point. When he comes by, he reminds them they are students first and athletes second.”

As seen in Table 25, coded data indicated that Mrs. Given’s attention to safety factors promote a culture of high expectations and access to male role models. Coded data also revealed how Mrs. Givens employed differentiated instructional strategies related to a priori categories.

Table 25

Mrs. Given’s Differentiated Strategies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Scaffolds</th>
<th>Supports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Seating plan</td>
<td>Personalized learning</td>
<td>Guided and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male role model</td>
<td>Learning styles</td>
<td>Tiered tasks</td>
<td>independent practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Respectful tasks</td>
<td>Progress monitoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accountable talk</td>
<td>High-interest text</td>
<td>Conferencing</td>
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<td>Feedback for</td>
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<td>Journaling</td>
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</table>

Data analysis revealed differentiated setting factors such as catering to learning styles, use of a strategic seating plan, and student accountable talk. Analysis of scaffolds revealed the use of a personalized learning framework, high-interest texts, and tiered activities. Analysis of supports revealed the use of progress monitoring, reflective journaling, and conferencing.

**Mr. Smith.** Smith is a seventh-grade literacy teacher at MS3. Mr. Smith has spent all 5 years of his teaching career at MS3. Dressed in dark jeans, Timberland boots, and a baseball jacket, Mr. Smith could easily blend in with his male students. Mr. Smith is a graduate of an HBCU and a proud member of a Black Greek letter organization.
Football memorabilia, a word wall, and expectations for student behavior decorated the classroom. A Tye Tribbett song played as students entered the room. Mr. Smith greeted each student as they entered the classroom. Once inside the classroom, no words were exchanged between the teacher and students. It was evident routines are in place, and Mr. Smith has set high expectations for student conduct. Students silently placed their backpacks on a table at the right-hand side of the classroom then proceeded to check out Chromebooks from the charging cart. Next, students took a 15-minute Greek and Latin roots assessment on Google Classroom.

The honors class consisted of 30 students, three of whom were African American males. Midway through the class period, an African American boy was sent to Mr. Smith or bounced due to poor behavior in his assigned class. The young man quickly became a part of the lesson, seemingly forgetting he was sent to Mrs. Smith’s class for a timeout. African American males are bounced to Mr. Smith’s classroom on a daily basis. He confessed that it is sometimes overwhelming to have the extra students, but he uses it as an opportunity to connect with them and be a positive male role model in their lives. Mr. Smith is also the football coach, and his colleagues send him student athletes who choose to misbehave.

Coaching is an avenue in which I reached a lot of African American males. Sports help me to reach them where they are. I promote the concept of family with my athletes. They are a brotherhood that must exhibit traits of brotherhood like caring for one another, remaining focused, healthy, and looking out for each other.

The objective of the lesson was to analyze how an author develops and constructs a character’s perspective. Mr. Smith introduced academic vocabulary and
modeled the daily task using a piece of text from a previous lesson. As Mr. Smith modeled the task, he elicited responses from his students. None of the three African American males raised their hands, but Mr. Smith called on each of them during the lesson. During his interview, he said one of the three African American males in the group has the highest MAP assessment score in the school but does not like to participate in class.

Next, students were instructed to work in pairs to complete the same task modeled by Mr. Smith using a different piece of text. Mr. Smith assessed students once they moved on to independent practice. He checked every graphic organizer; and, in some cases, he assessed the work more than once. Mr. Smith employed aggressive monitoring strategies as he conferenced with students. He used a check mark to indicate a correct answer, a dash to indicate the need for revisions, and an X indicated an incorrect answer. The ongoing use of formative assessment helps Mr. Smith understand what students know and how to plan for the phase of the lesson.

Mr. Smith’s tone appeared to soften with his standard class. The class had 24 students, eight of whom were African American males. With a tone similar to a church pastor, Mr. Smith code-switched several times while communicating with students in this class. “They easily shut down, so you have to reason with them at their level,” said Mr. Smith; “I show them the same respect I want as a man.”

During the interview, Mr. Smith explained how he tiered activities for the standard class. His goal is to expose them to the same information taught in the honors class but at a pace more suitable for them. The lesson for the standard class included chunked text, sentence starters, and frequent summation, whereas honors students read
and responded to the same texts minus the aforementioned scaffolds. Two African American males were bounced to Mr. Smith’s class during observation two. He provided them with pencil and paper, and they quickly became a part of the lesson.

As seen in Table 26, coded data indicated that Mr. Smith’s attention to safety factors promote a culture of high expectations and access to male role models. Coded data also revealed how Mr. Smith employed differentiated instructional strategies related to a priori categories.

Table 26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mr. Smith’s Differentiated Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male role model and coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
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Data analysis revealed differentiated setting factors such as the responsible use of technology and the presence of a visually stimulating learning environment. Analysis of scaffolds revealed the use of graphic organizers, chunked text, and sentence starters. Analysis of supports revealed the use of aggressive monitoring, modeling, and varied assessment types.

Ms. Davis. Ms. Davis is a young, millennial in her fourth year of teaching. Soft-spoken with a pleasant smile, Ms. Davis never raised her voice during the observations. Her interactions with students were respectful, and students appeared to feel safe enough to converse with her and ask for support. Ms. Davis is the cheerleading coach and a member of a Black Greek organization. She spends time during and after school
mentoring and tutoring the student athletes. Ms. Davis credits her success with African American males to her ability to listen to them. She gives them license to share their voices and stories so they can see how they fit into the world.

The learning environment was simple. Personal pictures of Ms. Davis and her family adorned the walls in the corner beside her desk. Anchor charts with reminders for the quick write criteria, annotation, and grammar hints covered the back and side walls. A new interactive smartboard was being installed at the time of observation one and provided crystal clear imaging as students watched the local news and wrote a short summary.

The inclusion class had 26 students, 10 of whom were African American males. Four African American males proudly wore football team jerseys in preparation for their afternoon away game. An African American male teaching assistant (TA) played a significant role in managing student behaviors and supporting instruction. He worked closely with a group of four African American males in the back of the room. The TA shared, “Ms. Davis does a great job by including things they want to talk about which makes my job in this class easier.” The TA also said,

She (Ms. Davis) gives them a place to discuss what’s important to them. For example, the other day they had a hot discussion about female athletes and if they should be paid the same as males (athletes). Ms. Davis let them duke it out, groups. Then she helped them organize their feelings and put them on paper. Just like that, they wrote an essay, no fuss, no fight. I don’t see that in other classes.

Ms. Davis activated prior knowledge and supported students as they cited evidence from the text to answer inference questions. Ms. Davis is intentional about the
content and resources used in her lessons. She tries to select texts and resources that cover the curriculum but also interest her students.

Ms. Davis shared the inclusion class in particular needs more support with technology. “People assume this generation is computer literate and that’s just not true of every student.” She went on to explain that many students have high rates of screen time; however, they are spending it on social media, streaming, and gaming. Furthermore, she mentioned many of her students do not have access to broadband services at home, which is another reason why they not proficient with the technology. Several students in the class were observed struggling to copy and paste text, find credible online sources, and navigating Google Classroom. As a result, Ms. Davis made paper copies of the text available for any student with that preference.

The standard class had 23 students and consisted of six African American males. The students in the standard class appeared to be in control of their learning and required little direction from Ms. Davis. Students worked on an interdisciplinary performance task. This assignment required students to connect a text they recently read about a Vietnamese refugee with social studies research on migration patterns. The authentic assessment gave students opportunities to make decisions about the content and presentation of their learning. This type of project-based approach to learning aligned to the school district’s personalized learning expectations and promotes teaching the whole child by advocating for student ownership and creating pathways for mastery learning.

Students monitored their progress using rubrics and exemplars. This gave Ms. Davis time to conference with each student, assess their progress, and provide feedback for improvement.
As seen in Table 27, coded data indicated that Ms. Davis’s attention to safety factors promote a culture of mutual respect and respectful peer interactions. Coded data also revealed how Ms. Davis employed differentiated instructional strategies related to a priori categories.

Table 27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. Davis’s Differentiated Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to male role models</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mutual respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respectful peer interactions</td>
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Data analysis revealed differentiated setting factors such as the responsible use of technology and using video and music to create a context for learning. Analysis of scaffolds revealed the use of carefully selected text and project-based learning. Analysis of supports revealed the use of conferencing, guided and independent practice, and the use of authentic assessment.

In addition to observing and interviewing participants about specific differentiation strategies, the researcher examined the lesson plans for evidence of subgroup differentiation. Unit plans, lesson plans, and material used during the observed lessons were reviewed for evidence of differentiation for African American males. Examples of differentiated instructional strategies were identified and grouped together. None of the unit plans, lesson plans, or materials indicated specific differentiation for African American males based on race; however, interview data provided deeper understanding of how teachers plan for this differentiation in their instructional planning.

Ms. Knight revealed she does not differentiate instruction specifically for African
American males but considers their interest during planning and preparation. She shared that she incorporates different texts and jigsaw activities to make sure her students’ interests and readiness levels are addressed.

Mr. Goodman said he does not differentiate instruction for any one group of students based on race or ethnicity. He said he gives plenty of options for students to demonstrate what they have learned.

Mrs. Givens shared she differentiates instruction based on reading level. She uses texts on different levels, graphic organizers, group investigations, and varied journal prompts to differentiate content.

Mr. Smith said he differentiates instruction based on reading level. He locates high interest supplementary materials for small group instruction to support anchor texts. Mr. Smith shared,

As a teacher, I have to figure out and develop ways to bring in culturally responsive resources and materials. Lesson plans come from the curriculum guides which are not culturally aligned to the demographic or differentiated to appeal to African American males. I use creative methods to reach my kids like finding supplemental materials to go along with the anchor texts. The anchor texts are the foundational core of our units, but I use supplemental resources to help my students understand the core content skills.

Finally, Ms. Davis differentiates instruction by including texts and tasks about different cultures. She relies on a learner profile differentiation tool to design project-based tasks.

**Summary of document analysis.** Though no explicit evidence of differentiated
instruction based on race or ethnicity was indicated on documents, African American males benefited from the following general differentiated instructional strategies listed in unit plans, lesson plans, and lesson materials: guided and independent practice, teacher modeling, alternative assessments, extended learning opportunities, exemplars, and engaging instructional content.

**Summary of Research Question 2 findings.** Coding of observation, document, and interview data resulted in the following findings for Research Question 2.

Participants in this study used a wide variety of differentiated instructional strategies in the classrooms. Table 28 illustrates recurring differentiated instructional strategies.

Table 28

*Common Differentiation Strategies*

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<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Scaffolds</th>
<th>Supports</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Relatable references</td>
<td>Guided and independent practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Engaging content</td>
<td>Teacher modeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>communication styles</td>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>Tiered tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>College pride</td>
<td>Hip-hop culture</td>
<td>Trackers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Read alouds</td>
<td>Making connections</td>
<td>Data walls</td>
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<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Project-based learning</td>
<td>Carefully selected texts</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Praise and affirmation</td>
<td>Routines</td>
<td>High-interest texts</td>
<td>Aggressive monitoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response to microaggressions</td>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>Probing questioning</td>
<td>Journaling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive peer interactions</td>
<td>Responsible use of technology</td>
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<td>Student conferencing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent and family engagement</td>
<td>Displays of student work</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent conferencing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Peer collaboration</td>
<td>High-interest texts</td>
<td>Progress monitoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>RACE writing</td>
<td>RACE libraries</td>
<td>Performance tasks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classroom libraries</td>
<td>Cleanliness</td>
<td>Alternative assessments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rubrics</td>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Extended learning opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Graphic organizers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Annotation</td>
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<td>Cornell notes</td>
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<td>Anchor charts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foldables</td>
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<td>Exemplars</td>
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<td>Choice and voice</td>
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Table 28 suggests participants created safe environments where students felt cared
for and respected. This stands out as a strength in that teachers created the safe conditions needed to effectively implement differentiated instruction. Correspondingly, participants were able to differ the classroom setting, instructional scaffolds, and supports in ways that potentially benefitted African American male students.

**Professional learning needs.** Research Question 3, “What supports, if any, do literacy teachers need to facilitate culturally responsive instruction for African American males?” Data for this research question was solely collected from the interview process with no parallel quantitative component. Transcribed responses to the following two interview questions were organized in relation to a priori categories to respond to Research Question 3.

1. Does your school and or district promote the use of culturally responsive instruction?

2. What school and or districts supports do you need to facilitate CRT for African American males?

First, the researcher printed interview responses to correspond with the assigned participant color. Memo notes were recorded in the margins of the transcribed texts. Next, keywords and phrases were highlighted and organized into corresponding a priori categories. Keywords and phrases were then grouped together, reviewed, and reduced to reveal areas of culturally responsive professional learning and support needs. After individual descriptions regarding professional learning needs, the results of the coding of these data are presented.

**Ms. Knight.** When asked, “What school and or district supports do you need to facilitate CRT for African American males,” Ms. Knight shared that she would like the
district and/or her school to purchase more diverse class sets of literature. She is not a fan of the district-adopted literature anthology, because the texts are dated and do not appeal to diverse students, in particular, her African-American male population.

Our classroom libraries have great titles, but we only have one or two copies. If I want to teach a book to my boys, for example, I have to run around and pray my colleagues have that book or I have to come out of my pocket and buy the books. The textbook has some good titles, but few really engage my (African American) boys. They like the Sharon Draper books or books by Nikki Grimes and Jacqueline Woodson.

When asked, “Does your school and or district promote the use of culturally responsive instruction,” Ms. Knight recommended the creation of district-sponsored diversity training for administrators, teachers, and staff so they can all be on the same page about CRT expectations.

There has to be robust professional development that allows a cultural shift in the way we think, not just a one and done. Sometimes we have training that we never revisit. There has to be an ongoing revisiting of cultural norms so we can meet the needs of our students. There’re a lot of things that we don’t know about each other for whatever reason.

She also added her colleagues could benefit from training about how to effectively interpret student behaviors: “If you don’t understand something doesn’t make it wrong.” She went on to explain how African American males dress and speak are a part their identity.

A perfect example is hoodies. Some kids wear the hoodies to hide their
appearance (hair, acne) from others. Some kids wear the hoodies like a security blanket because they are insecure or don’t want their friends to see their clothes or their bodies.

Ms. Knight believes African American males have problems with authority figures who tell them to remove articles of clothing that make them feel safe: “It’s bigger than the hoodie.” She blamed misinterpretations of “so-called aggressive behaviors” as the reason for high suspension rates among African American males. Ms. Knight encouraged the district to facilitate diversity training, so teachers and students can learn more about each other. This would, in turn, decrease the number of suspensions among African American males.

Coding of Ms. Knight’s interview responses revealed the need for culturally responsive staff training regarding establishing clear expectations for CRT, helping staff to interpret student behaviors, and diversity training. These data also indicated the need for the school district to fund the supply of culturally responsive materials that will appeal to African American male readers.

**Mr. Goodman.** When asked, “Does your school and/or district promote the use of culturally responsive instruction,” Mr. Goodman said, “I think we promote CRT in a superficial way since it’s the thing to do.” He claimed CRT is the new fad in education, but the district does not support authentic CRT. “CRT is popular now, but it doesn’t mean a thing if they (teachers) don’t respect these kids. It’s more than having multicultural books. It’s about do you respect these kids and see them as human?”

When asked, “What school and/or district supports do you need to facilitate CRT for African American males,” Mr. Goodman shared that CRT professional
development could help staff to understand and manage their personal bias. He recommended that schools identify culturally responsive staff to participate in district-sponsored CRT training. Mr. Goodman said schools could then use a train-the-trainer model to train all staff members.

Anything that you do school-based works better than having to go outside. It’s really about having a professional development and having a follow-up on that professional development to gauge issues. I feel people will be more apt to share in the safe environment of the school.

Mr. Goodman thinks cultural competence and CRT have to be a district priority. He also thinks the message of CRT is overshadowed by testing. Mr. Goodman recommended more training for teachers and staff that will help them relate to the students and the community. “I did a poverty simulation eight or nine years ago. It had an enormous impact on me because it helped me see some of the struggles my students’ families have to deal with just to get by.”

Coding of Mr. Goodman’s interview responses revealed the need for culturally responsive staff training on how to negotiate personal bias and a continuation of poverty simulation training. These data revealed the need for the school district to make CRT a priority by funding such training and providing the resources to implement the training on the school level.

_Mrs. Givens._ When asked, “What school and/or district supports do you need to facilitate CRT for African American males,” Mrs. Givens said she would like to see professional development related to family and community engagement. “The parents come out when they are younger but not so much when they are older. I try to make sure
the only time they hear from me is not when their kid does something wrong.” She makes weekly phone calls to parents as a method of keeping the lines of communication open and celebrating her students. As a result, Mrs. Givens would like to see teachers help parents to support literacy at home.

When asked, “Does your school and or district promote the use of culturally responsive instruction,” Mrs. Givens said she would also like to see less training on testing and more on supporting the social and emotional needs of her students. “Coming up, we had clubs and advisory periods, where we met in small groups and talked things out.” She said African American males in particular need help with their identity and what it means to be a man. Mrs. Givens gave credit to her African American male BMT for being a positive role model and support system for African American male students.

Some (African American males) are afraid to be wrong in front of their peers. We (teachers) need to find ways to reach them and find out what they know. This group used to be afraid to ask questions, but they have built up trust in me and each other. They really have to trust you, so they will open up and ask for help. Mrs. Givens also supports dedicating class periods for teaching students how to treat each other and be kind and empathic to one another rather than putting all of the focus on testing. She believes instruction would get better if students worked on trusting their teachers and their peers. In sum, Mrs. Givens is in support of school-sponsored programs that address the social and emotional needs of students. Such training will help teachers to facilitate positive communication and interactions in the classroom.

Coding of Mrs. Givens’s interview responses revealed the need for culturally responsive staff training regarding how to support parents and families with the tools they
need to support literacy at home and how to help students negotiate their social and emotional needs. These data also indicated the need to create advisory clubs or class periods to support African American males with communication and peer interaction skills.

**Mr. Smith.** When asked “What school and/or district supports do you need to facilitate CRT for African American males,” Mr. Smith said he would like to see professional development aimed at integrating culturally responsive materials into the curriculum: “I feel like teachers want to (use CRT) they just don’t know how to.”

When asked, “Does your school and or district promote the use of culturally responsive instruction,” Mr. Smith believes teachers are stuck in a cycle of following irrelevant curriculum guides and pacing calendars.

The district is primarily focused on the use of assessments. These assessments are not culturally responsive to the kids. As a result, other cultures are pushed to the forefront because the curriculum and instruction align with their background, ideology, history, interests, and agenda, and ours is put on the back burner.

Mr. Smith believes the foundation of the problem lies in the way instruction is developed and implemented. “We need to make sure the test is more culturally responsive. If the test isn’t culturally responsive the instruction, strategies and resources are not going to be culturally responsive.”

Coding of Mr. Smith’s interview responses revealed the need for culturally responsive staff training regarding how to effectively integrate culturally responsive materials into the literacy curriculum. These data indicated the need to support literacy teachers in building culturally responsive curricula and assessments that accurately
measure what students of color know.

Ms. Davis. When asked “What school and or districts supports do you need to facilitate CRT for African American males,” Ms. Davis expressed her concerns about how adults speak to children: “I think we should have some professional development to discuss perceptions. Just because a student looks a certain way doesn’t mean they are a certain way.” She would like to see diversity and relationship training for staff: “If you respect them, they will respect you. We (adults) cannot just talk to them in any old gruff way just because they are kids.” Ms. Davis believes how adults interact with children will determine if they will trust or respect your instructions. Finally, Ms. Davis shared that she would like to see a reinstatement of a school-based mentoring program.

Our principal has a great impact on African American males. He’s always advocating for them. My first two years at the school we had a mentor program for African-American male students. They would dress up on certain days and go on trips or do things for the female teachers. Last year he bought in a barber for the male students. He shows that he cares by making sure all of the boys had something besides jeans to wear to the eighth grade social. He makes sure when someone is in need, we (staff) rally together to help them.

When asked “What school and or districts supports do you need to facilitate CRT for African American males,” Ms. Davis suggested for the school district to capitalize on the fact that it is located in a well-established sports market. Many of her African American male students are motivated by sports. She believes partnering with sports teams to create mentoring programs will help schools with high populations of low-performing African American male students.
Coding of Ms. Davis’s interview responses revealed the need for culturally responsive staff training regarding how to communicate with students, negotiating perceptions and bias, and maintaining respectful and trustworthy relationships. These data also suggested the development of mentoring programs, student access to male role models, and community partnerships with local sports institutions.

*Summary of question three findings.* Data analysis resulted in the following findings regarding professional learning and supports that will facilitate CRT. Some examples of training and support indicated in coded data include mandated cultural competence training, leveraging parent and family engagement, maintaining trusting relationships, addressing social and emotional needs, and culturally responsive curriculum and assessment development.

**Merged Results**

Once data were consolidated and separately analyzed, triangulation procedures were employed to assess strengths, weaknesses, and patterns of consistency in the data. First, the researcher reviewed MTCS findings and direct quotes from transcribed interview text for strengths, weaknesses, and patterns of consistency. Next, MTCS findings, observation fieldnotes, lesson plans, and transcribed texts were combined and reduced to develop categories of common differentiated instructional strategies used by teachers of African American males. Finally, transcribed interview texts were further examined using a priori categories to reveal themes for professional learning and supports for literacy teachers of African American males. Broad themes are presented in response to each research question.

**Perceptions of culturally responsive instruction.** Triangulation of MTCS and
interview results resulted in the following merged findings for Research Question 1.

Merged results indicated several significant perceptions of culturally responsive instruction. Interview data supported the high number of MCTS scores. In this study, n=46 respondents had multicultural teaching knowledge scores equal to or greater than 4.39. Furthermore, n=43 respondents had multicultural teaching skill scores equal to or greater than 4.23. Correspondingly, respondents in the qualitative strand demonstrated strengths in the areas of integrating topics and events from racial and ethnic minorities, establishing strong supportive relationships with parents and families, and changing their instructional environment so racial and ethnic minority students have equal opportunities for success. Findings from this study also indicated culturally responsive teachers hold high expectations for their students, they engage in out-of-classroom activities such as coaching and tutoring, and they see students as family. Teachers in the qualitative strand also expressed genuine care and compassion for the literacy needs of their students.

Two significant culturally responsive perception weaknesses were revealed in this study. First, MCTS item 4, “I have a clear understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy,” had a wide distribution of responses; 70% of respondents were in strong or moderate agreement, whereas 22% slightly agreed with this statement. Correspondingly, interview data revealed misconceptions and incomplete understanding of the tenants of CRT as defined by the CRTF.

A second significant culturally responsive weakness relates to MTCS item 14, “I am knowledgeable about the various community resources in the city that I teach.” This item also had a wide distribution of responses: 56% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed, whereas 14% slightly agreed; 20% of respondents slightly disagreed,
whereas 10% strongly or moderately disagreed. Correspondingly, interview data revealed limited knowledge of community-based resources in the community in which they teach.

Two additional themes related to CRT emerged from interview findings. Four of the five qualitative participants are members of service-oriented, Black Greek letter organizations. They participate in academic and extracurricular activities such as coaching and after-school tutoring. Furthermore, data revealed three of the five qualitative participants attended HBCUs where they were exposed to significant ethnic studies content.

**Summary of Research Question 1 merged results.** Merged results suggested that despite scoring high on MTCS items, participants had varied understanding of the tenants of CRT. Results also suggest that participants do not have a strong understanding of community resources in the city in which they teach.

**Differentiated instruction.** Coding of data resulted in the following findings for Research Question 2, “How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?” Data from the MTCS, observations in the natural setting, document analysis of lesson plans, and transcribed interviews were used to answer Research Question 2.

A collective examination of the data indicated strengths in how literacy teachers differentiate instruction. Merged results suggest participants in this study differentiated literacy instruction for student readiness, interest, learning profile, and learning environment. Moreover, merged results suggest participants employ differentiated instructional strategies that align to CRTF indices: safety, setting, scaffolds, and support.
Ninety-two percent of respondents strongly or moderately agreed with item 15 regarding promoting diversity by the behaviors they exhibit. These data support safety factors of behaviors that promote a culture of trust and mutual respect among institutions, students, and the community. Qualitative findings revealed respectful teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions and a sense of community in the learning environment.

Eighty-four percent of respondents reported integrating topics and events from racial and ethnic minorities in item 8. These data support setting factors that promote the use of flexible and differentiated learning environments that consider the need to address learning styles. Participants in the qualitative strand demonstrated strengths in the areas of differentiating instruction through interest and learning environment. Correspondingly, 82% of respondents reported making changes to the physical environment, so racial and ethnic minority students had an equal opportunity to be successful. Observations supported these data.

Some areas of weakness emerged from the collective examination of the data. Fifty-four percent of respondents moderately or strongly agreed with item 3 regarding consulting with administrators and teachers to help their understanding of multicultural issues. Furthermore, 66% of respondents moderately or strongly agreed to examining instructional materials for racial and ethnic bias. These data present a contradiction with qualitative findings that indicated the opposite. Participants in the qualitative strand reported meeting regularly with PLCs to support their understanding of multicultural issues and to review instructional materials for bias. Moreover, the fact that all of the participants in the qualitative strand were Black and not representative of the teaching
population as a whole should be considered in interpretation of this anomaly.

Document analysis also revealed some weaknesses in the area of differentiated instruction. Observations and interview findings suggested teachers in the qualitative strand differentiated instruction for African American males by incorporating topics and texts of choice and making changes to the learning environment. Conversely, unit plans, lesson plans, and lesson artifacts did not indicate explicit differentiation for African American males. However, African American males benefited from the differentiated instructional strategies used by teachers.

Finally, merged results suggest qualitative participants have limited understanding of how to differentiate literacy instruction for student readiness. The majority of differentiation observed in this study related to making changes to the learning environment and incorporating texts and topics that align with student interests.

**Summary of Research Question 2 merged results.** Merged results suggested literacy teachers of African American males differentiated instruction primarily for interest and learning environment. Limited evidence of differentiation for academic readiness was presented in this study. Misconceptions about what CRT entails have resulted in a lack of culturally responsive differentiated instruction.

**Professional learning needs and supports.** Suggestions for professional learning and supports for facilitating CRT developed after an extensive review of the coded data. Theme development was guided by the CRTF. Coded data were organized in relation to a priori categories to reveal the following culturally responsive professional learning and support themes.

**Cultural competence and advocacy.** The first theme to emerge related to the soul
factor of the CRTF which maintains CRT starts with an in-depth and personal evaluation of one’s perceptions and beliefs toward bias and privilege.

Findings from this study suggested the MTCS is a good starting point for PLCs to initiate discussions around cultural competence. Even though teachers in this study self-reported high levels of multicultural knowledge and skills, merged results revealed their desire for exposure to additional research, training, and support around issues of cultural competence and advocacy. MTCS items 3, 4, 7, and 15 which are aligned to the soul factor of the CRTF framework and are displayed in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Soul Factors.

Figure 13 shows evidence of how teachers responded to items about planning diverse activities and making changes to the instructional environment so students of color have an equal opportunity for success. Responses to items 3, 4, and 7 were much lower than item 15. These data indicate the need for training and consulting with others
regarding multicultural issues, understanding culturally responsive pedagogy, and knowledge of racial and ethnic identity theories.

The theme of advocacy emerged from the qualitative data. Mr. Smith shared, “My father is a teacher, and he inspired me to take on the profession. I’ve always worked with kids. I have always worked with youth. Every job I have ever had, had something to do with youth or child development.” In addition, Ms. Knight said, “I love on my (African American) boys, but I do not baby them. I just want them to be ok, and sometimes that means, loving them (through it).” During her interview, Ms. Davis shared,

My PLC consists of all women, three African-American, and one Caucasian. We are all aware that we teach at a school that is predominantly African-American and Hispanic, brown students, so we speak up for them and advocate for them until they can do it for themselves.

Merged results suggest participants are empathetic of the plight of young African American males, so they advocate on their behalf and participate in activities that support their development. These data support the recommendations for professional learning and support related to advocacy for vulnerable populations.

**Wraparound support.** The second professional learning and support theme to emerge aligns to safety factors in the CRTF. Wraparound support is defined by the researcher as structures that provide academic, social, and emotional supports for students. Figure 14 displays MTCS items 9, 14, and 16 that are closely aligned to safety factors of the CRTF.
Figure 14 shows a slightly lower mean score for item 9, being knowledgeable about how historical experiences of minority groups impact learning. Item 14 related knowledge of community resources had the lowest mean in this cluster. Along the same line, Mrs. Givens shared,

They really have to trust you teachers have to build trust and relationships so they will open up so they will ask for help. They want to be respected, and you have to come at them the right way. These boys need to see men who look like them in the classroom in. Nothing against us sisters that do a fabulous job, they just need more male role models, period.

Teachers also reported fewer instances of student behaviors that resulted in suspensions. Fewer suspensions resulted in more time in school learning. Results show teachers maintained respectful relationships with parents and families and set high expectations.
Participants also reported their involvement in extracurricular activities helped build relationships with students and parents. They also showed that participation in extracurricular activities gives them time to bond with students and families. Two teachers from the qualitative strand used their role as athletic coaches to leverage parent and family communication. Ms. Davis shared why she supports students inside and outside of the classroom.

I taught my seventh graders and then moved up to eighth grade with them last year. I had some of those students for two years in a row. I still talk to most of those students today. They came to the football game last week; we took pictures. One African American male student, in particular, his father was in jail at the time I had him, yet he managed to become valedictorian last year. To see these kids, they’re prospering in high school; they are in honors classes and AP classes. That lets me know what I’m doing is making a difference in their lives.

Merged results about relational trust and the management of student microaggressions corroborate the need for training and support related to wraparound supports for African American males.

**Contextual learning.** A third professional learning theme related to the setting factor of the CRTF emerged from the data. MTCS items 1, 2, and 10 relate to how teachers build a context for learning. Figure 15 shows that teachers place high value on creating learning environments where diverse students can be successful.
Figure 15 also shows that respondents scored relatively high for item 2 regarding knowledge of communication styles. Correspondingly, Mrs. Givens explained how she uses her understanding of African American male communication styles.

We should not disregard the culture of students. Sometimes I also speak to them in their language as far as using slang because that is what they understand. This is one way I relate to them, but I also flip that and show them the correct way to communicate.

Figure 15 also revealed that item 10 regarding making changes to the learning environment so all students can be successful was strongly and moderately responded to. Ms. Davis shared that she incorporates the music and sports interests of African American males into her lessons to facilitate and support their understanding.

My classes are predominately African American and male. Playing music is one
way I incorporate African American males’ culture into my classroom. I let the kids know that I know what they’re listening to and I am aware of their culture. I also use basketball and football to help students understand concepts. For example, some students did not know the meaning of the word statistics. I asked them to think about how they could compare two athletes, and through that discussion, they were able to break the concept apart and define the word.

Conversely, item 1 regarding the planning of activities that celebrate diverse cultural practices had the lowest mean score in the cluster. These data suggest the need for training and support on methods for setting a context for learning that celebrates difference.

**Rigor and relevance.** A fourth professional learning and support theme aligned to CRTF scaffolds. Scaffolds require constant exposure to rigorous and relevant curricula. MTCS items related to instructional rigor and relevance are presented in Figure 16.
As seen in Figure 16, respondents scored relatively high in the areas related to presenting diverse topics, experiences, and perspectives, using strategies that affirm identity. Item 12 was reverse scored and reported relatively strong or moderate agreement about the examination of instructional materials for bias. During his interview, Mr. Goodman shared how he used writing exercises to find out more about his students’ interests and perspectives.

I was very shocked and pleased to see my boys that normally don’t enjoy writing. They wrote and wrote their best with the exercise because they were able to share their experiences which actually gave me a window to go into their world. This strategy gave me a controlled way to bring their opinions and experiences into the classroom environment.

Along the same lines, Mrs. Givens said,
I make things relatable. Twenty-first-century kids need something that they can relate to, or they won’t retain the information. I am always going back to something they can relate to as a reference point. I often use the names of African American staff or even our principal to make the learning relevant and to help it stick. That’s when they get it.

Mr. Smith said,

My PLC has had heated debates about high-interest texts versus low-interest texts and teaching good meaningful young adult content (Walter Dean Myers, Sharon Draper, Barack Obama). Teaching using those materials will definitely help students to retain the information, but the antithesis of that is that those authors are not going to appear on an EOG. Texts on Mount Everest or the importance of harvesting sedimentary rocks and stuff that is not of interest to them will appear on the test. Because these texts do not have an interest to them, they’re not going to read it or comprehend it because they think it’s boring. We hear boring like it’s someone’s name.

Item 6, “I plan school events to increase students’ knowledge about cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups,” had the lowest mean score in the cluster. Coupled with qualitative findings, these data indicate a need for training and support regarding the development of rigorous and relevant literacy curricula that connect to African American males.

**Formative assessment and feedback.** The final theme to emerge from Research Question 3 connects to support factors in the CRTF. The support factor of the CRTF maintains that frequent formative assessment and feedback for improvement plays a
significant role in learning. Although the MTCS did not gather data aligned with support factors, qualitative data provided evidence of how literacy teachers of African American males employ the use of formative assessment and feedback to support literacy development.

Merged results revealed usage of progress monitoring such as warm-ups, exit tickets, and quizzes to gather student readiness data. Additionally, data walls, progress reports, conferencing, and aggressive monitoring techniques were used to communicate student progress. This type of formative assessment and feedback provide a clear picture of student progress. For example, Mr. Smith shared how he assesses learning using aggressive monitoring.

I have “look-fors,” and I make indicating marks: A circle means you need to go back and fix it. A dash means you’re on the right track but need more, whereas a check means you’re right. That allows me to check and assess students’ understanding in real-time and check if they’re getting it, so I do not have to collect a whole bunch of papers, read them over and give them back. It is beneficial because if I need to do small group instruction, I can go back and assess those data as I’m walking around and assign the intervention immediately.

Merged results indicated the use of a wide range of assessment types such as performance tasks, slide presentations, research projects, writing prompts, oral presentations, journals, and reading comprehension assessments. These data support the need for continued training and support focused on the importance of frequent formative assessment and feedback.

**Summary of Research Question 3 merged results.** Professional learning needs
and support themes were used to develop recommendations in the following areas: cultural competence and advocacy, wraparound supports, developing an effective context for learning, rigorous and relevant curricula design, and providing frequent formative assessment and feedback for improvement.

**Summary**

Quantitative and qualitative results were reported in Chapter 4. Coding and triangulation activities revealed patterns among data sets. Merged results for Research Question 1 established teachers in the study held positive yet inconsistent perceptions of CRT. Merged results for Research Question 2 identified common differentiated instructional strategies used by literacy teachers of African American males. Merged results for Research Question 3 revealed themes related to professional learning needs and support of literacy teachers of African American males. Emergent themes were used to make the broad inferences and recommendations presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

Chapter 5 summarizes the study, interprets findings, and provides recommendations for the district in which the study took place. This chapter also contains recommendations for practitioner use and future research related to CRT and literacy among African American males.

Summary of Research

In keeping with the most noted literature on CRT, this study used a strengths-based perspective to investigate CRT perspectives and practices. This study examined how CRT is used to support literacy development among African American males in the middle grades. Theoretical foundations were deeply rooted in (a) critical theory which calls for empowering and challenging the status quo, (b) social constructivism and the connection between culture and learning, and (c) culturally responsive pedagogy theory that focuses on using culture and language to support academic achievement among ethnic and linguistically diverse students. Three questions were used to guide the study.

1. What perceptions do literacy teachers have about culturally responsive instruction?
2. How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males?
3. What supports, if any, do literacy teachers need to facilitate culturally responsive instruction for African American males?

Findings from this study can be used to develop CRT standards and to identify common instructional practices to support literacy development among African American
males. After a thorough examination of the research literature about CRT and literacy among African American males, the researcher designed the CRTF conceptual framework to organize the study.

The study fits Creswell’s (2014) definition of convergent parallel mixed methods design. The researcher collected different but complementary data in one phase. Each data strand was analyzed separately using theme development procedures to furnish a complete understanding of the problem and assigned equal weight or priority to quantitative and qualitative data strands (Creswell, 2014). By focusing on the specific context of the literacy classroom, the researcher was able to inductively develop patterns of meaning related to CRT, differentiation, and professional development.

The MTCS was used to collect literacy teachers’ self-reported perceptions of multicultural teaching knowledge and skills. This study defined multicultural teaching knowledge as knowledge and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy theory and instructional strategies. Multicultural teaching skill was defined as the ability to select, implement, and evaluate CRT strategies and techniques. Fifty literacy teachers at moderate- to high-poverty middle schools responded to the 16-item Likert psychometric.

Next, four seventh-grade literacy teachers and one eighth-grade literacy teacher participated in the qualitative strand of the study. All five teachers served at schools with extremely low CCR reading scores. Furthermore, African American males at these schools were outperformed by every other subgroup in reading. Additionally, all five schools had student suspension and teacher turnover rates higher than district and state averages. Observations in the natural setting, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews captured teacher perceptions of CRT, differentiated instruction, and
professional learning needs for supporting literacy among African American males.

**Limitations**

This research study had several limitations. Mixed methods design limited the scope of this study because the use of unequal quantitative and qualitative data only represented a small part of the population (Creswell, 2014). The sample was limited to 50 participants per research guidelines from the district. The limited access to a large sample presented another limitation. The abbreviated timeline for the study and site access provided additional limitations. Given this limitation, data were collected and analyzed within a 6-week time frame. Furthermore, research questions would have included achievement data if the study were able to cover a longer period. Findings would differ in a longitudinal study. Also, the district’s urban setting may not account for how this phenomenon occurs in other contexts and with different male subgroups.

Unfortunately, there is a limited body of research to validate the connections between CRT and literacy achievement among African American males. For example, the studies discussed in Chapter 2 by Roden (2017), Bell (2015), Boykin and Bailey (2000), and Tatum (2000) were small-scale case studies and failed to address the long-term impacts of CRT on student achievement and the narrowing of achievement gaps.

Finally, race is a sensitive issue and could impact truthfulness because participants may not want to be perceived as lacking cultural competence. The delicate nature of the research problem required the researcher to gain trust from the participants. People do not want to be perceived as lacking cultural competence, which may ultimately impact validity. Issues about race and equity are sensitive issues. As a result, participants may have been less than truthful in their responses. Correspondingly, triangulation was
employed to limit responder bias (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

**Interpretations of Findings**

Merged results for Research Question 1 established teachers in the study held varied perceptions of CRT. Merged results for Research Question 2 demonstrated training and support about the use of effective differentiated instruction strategies for supporting African American male literacy development. Last, merged results for Research Question 3 uncovered common themes related to CRT professional learning and supports for literacy teachers. Evidence from this study suggests the school district in which the study took place must assess two critical areas related to CRT: (a) What are the districts shared beliefs and expectations for CRT, and (b) What support structures do teachers and those who support teachers need to effectively implement CRT? Merged results and theme development suggests PLC practices play a significant role in clarifying CRT expectations and designing culturally responsive differentiated instruction to support African American male literacy development.

**PLCs**

Findings from this study suggest effective PLC structures have the potential to strengthen CRT practices. Scholars such as Bailey and Jakicic (2012), DuFour (2004), and Graham and Ferriter (2010) maintain effective PLCs engage in ongoing, results-oriented inquiry focused on results. According to Hall and Hord (2015), successful PLCs consist of six dimensions:

1. Shared vision and values ensure teams work toward the same focus (student achievement).
2. Intentional and collective learning and application prompts staff to utilize data
and research to solve problems.

3. Supportive and shared leadership offer a context for shared and democratic decision-making.

4. Structural conditions reduce isolation and provide time for staff to experience regular interactions.

5. Relational conditions establish trust and openness to feedback.

6. Shared personal practices invite supportive collaboration and build collective capacity.

Effective PLC teams establish structures for continued improvement by defining a common purpose, identifying a vision, and developing core values to drive their work (Graham & Ferriter, 2010). PLCs engage in frequent dialogue and reflection which in turn strengthen group competencies (Graham & Ferriter, 2010). For example, teaming activities provide a context for acquiring new knowledge and broadening one’s perspective (Drago-Severson, 2009). As effective PLCs practice supportive dialogue, active listening, reflection, mutual respect, and trust, they develop shared understanding about the needs of the school (Drago-Severson, 2009; Hall & Hord, 2015).

Findings from this study illustrate how PLCs can use the CRTF as a guide for providing high quality culturally responsive instruction aimed at narrowing subgroup gaps. African American males, in particular, will benefit from instruction that values their unique lived experiences. Moreover, the CRTF coupled with job-embedded professional development for teachers has the potential to drastically reduce literacy skill gaps among African American males and ethnically and linguistically diverse subgroups.
Soul Factors

PLCs must become epicenters for reflection and dialogue about cultural competence and advocacy. However, the field of education cannot wait for every teacher to adopt a culturally responsive mindset; doing so will widen achievement gaps and further marginalize children of color (Delpit, 1988). To this point, is the duty of PLCs to develop protocols for members to regularly reflect, examine, and potentially alter their cultural values and assumptions. Drago-Severson (2009) maintained effective teams create conditions for members to reconceptualize longstanding assumptions and behaviors. Correspondingly, members share, evaluate, and explore new ideas due to the interactions with their colleagues. As PLCs negotiate culturally responsive assumptions, they will develop a collective understanding of curricula, materials, and strategies best suited for improving literacy achievement among ethnic and linguistically diverse students. More importantly, evaluating curricula materials for bias and hidden curricula will become a priority as the team grows together.

When PLCs work together to examine curricula materials for bias, they in turn become advocates for their students. An advocacy mindset, as defined by the researcher, is the act of empathizing, prioritizing, and supporting marginalized groups. For example, participants in this study acknowledged the role their respective PLCs played in helping them to negotiate personal and instructional bias and how their assumptions may impact the educational experiences of students of color, specifically African American males.

Safety Factors

A continuous presence of caring and committed adults is essential to the relational trust needed to build meaningful relationships and wraparound supports for African
American males that reach beyond the walls of the schoolhouse. Wraparound supports that involve families and community partnerships can result in programs and services to support African American males with academics, identity, and post-high school planning. Henderson and Mapp (2002) maintained programs and interventions that engage families and the surrounding community result in higher student achievement. Moreover, empowering families with the skills they need to support children at home can result in improved behavior at home and at school, better attendance, and better social skills. Culturally responsive teachers leverage support from families and community engagement.

The PLC must strategize ways to involve families in academics and leverage community support. Teachers who participate in extracurricular and mentoring activities reported strong relationships with the African American males in their classes. In addition, all of the participants in the qualitative strand of this study identified as Black. Also, three of the five participants in the qualitative strand attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) during their undergraduate study. Additionally, four of the five qualitative participants are members of Black Greek organizations. HBCUs and Black Greek organizations have a well-documented history of domestic and international service. More study is needed regarding HBCU attendance and Black Greek membership as they relate to CRT.

In the meantime, schools should collaborate with local churches, nonprofit organizations, and local industry to extend wraparound support. Strong partnerships have the potential to provide financial and academic supports to schools with high numbers of low and underachieving African American males. Furthermore, such relationships also
open the door for the creation of mentoring, internship, scholarship, and future job opportunities.

Another way schools can provide role models and mentorship is through recruiting and retaining Black male teachers. Studies by Milner (2018) maintained Black male teachers are more intentional about discipline referrals and often serve as positive role models and mentors for African American male students. Milner's (2018) study also suggested Black male teachers unconsciously socialize Black male students to consider teaching as a field of study. Though the presence of a few Black male teachers will not solve the problems in a system that is deeply flawed, Milner (2016) suggested their presence can help reverse stereotypes of Black men in education. As a result, he recommended offering Black male teachers recruitment and retention bonuses or extended professional learning opportunities as a way to attract and retain Black male teachers. In the absence of Black male teachers, PLCs should seek guidance from other faculty groups about materials and strategies that may be of interest to African American males.

Setting Factors

Unfortunately, most urban education experts do not live in the communities they write about, and “thus have little understanding of the deep connections that exist between the urban experience and school performance” (Edmin, 2016, p. 20). If PLCs want to see better results, they must change how they present instruction to African American males. Hale (2003) said CRT learning environments remove the psycho-emotional stress students of color feel and allow them to re-channel the energy into learning tasks as they reconcile the duality of the public school settings.
Correspondingly, PLCs must engage in collective inquiry about the conditions that produce increased motivation and engagement of African American males.

Teachers in this study spent a great deal of time organizing flexible, differentiated, learning-style appropriate environments for African American males. Interviews and observations suggested teachers in the study differentiated instruction based on student learning profile more than academic readiness. A learning profile is a popular method for identifying how students learn best (Tomlinson, 2017). Closely aligned to the tenants of CRT, “Learning profile is an umbrella term for four factors that influence how individuals approach learning or process ideas: (1) learning style, (2) intelligence preference, (3) gender, and (4) culture” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 110).

While the researcher observed consistent use of differentiated instruction, reading proficiency among African American males at the focus sites remains relatively lower than district and state averages. Playing music, displaying student work, and allowing students to work in flexible groups are not enough. Findings from this study suggest there is an overlap of understanding about how to effectively use culturally responsive differentiated instruction. PLCs must strengthen differentiated instruction capacities to ensure students with different degrees of understanding have access to instruction based on their academic level of readiness.

**Scaffolds Factors**

Culturally responsive PLCs must also consider ways to introduce topics and materials that will help African American males develop a healthy sociopolitical consciousness. Absent from this study was the presence of empowering, liberating curriculum and instruction. Observed lessons were mainstream and offered limited
opportunities for students to interact with materials that supported the development of a sociopolitical consciousness. Culturally responsive differentiated instruction is deeply rooted in the everyday lives and experiences of students. Differentiation without a connection to CRT is in essence neoliberal education. Qualitative findings in this study confirmed teachers are knowledgeable about CRT strategies; but contextual barriers such as pacing calendars, lack of resources and materials, and dated curricula have contributed to the limited implementation of CRT.

Power and politics are brokered every day in schools through maintained curricula, worldviews, and definitions of intelligence and normalcy (Delpit, 1988). Tatum (2012) argued that the literacy classroom must become a place where African American males encounter meaningful texts and tasks that inform their understanding of standards but also promote character development. In doing so, the literacy setting can become a place where African American males can challenge structural inequality and the presence of hidden curricula and enhance their understanding of how politics and policies impact their lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Tatum (2014) defined meaningful literacy exchanges as content in which African American males can make real-world connections with materials that are compatible with their interests and readiness. It is important to mention that PLCs must continue to have high standards for developing culturally responsive curricula. Development of rigorous and high-interest curricula challenge students’ depth of knowledge and permit them to integrate their culture, language, and voice into the learning process. PLCs must work together to select resources, materials, and technology that will help students become independent thinkers who see value in their experiences and are supported in navigation
of the world, college, and career; therefore, PLCs must regularly evaluate resources and materials to ensure they will provide an adequate level of interest and challenge African American males.

**Support Factors**

Finally, it is the responsibility of the PLC to reconceptualize how to use feedback and assessment for improvement. Literacy proficiency among African American males in the district in which the study took place has remained low on high stakes summative assessments. Scholars such as Earl (2013), Black et al. (2003), and Lemov (2010) suggested shifting focus on formative assessment and feedback could improve achievement among low-level learners. In other words, PLCs must focus on effective learning leading up to assessments and varying the assessment cycle to assess personal growth.

Teachers in this study gathered data through aggressive monitoring and gave students feedback for improvement. Lemov (2010) claimed aggressive monitoring is necessary just like a good driver checks their mirrors frequently. Aggressive monitoring, for example, allows for in-the-moment adjustments to instruction. This type of feedback for improvement is essential and provides real-time data, allows for adjustments, and shortens data cycles.

Finally, PLCs must redesign assessments so they are rooted in differentiation so teachers can accurately assess what students know. Teachers in this study offered students a variety of ways to demonstrate mastery. Assessment deeply rooted in personalized learning theory supports independent learning attributes such as setting goals, seeking feedback, and using that feedback to track and monitor progress. In
addition, project-based learning provides students with choice and ownership through the completion of standards aligned, interdisciplinary and higher order thinking performance tasks.

In short, PLC practices have the potential to strengthen teachers’ CRT capacities. Effective PLCs reduce isolation; foster collegial inquiry; and give teachers the opportunity to reflect, plan, implement, and evaluate culturally responsive instruction. Correspondingly, the effectiveness of a PLC will determine how effective CRT practices are executed on the school level. Based on the data, the school district in which the study took place must adopt a comprehensive framework such as the CRTF, so teachers and those who support teachers have a shared understanding of how to effectively use CRT to support ethnically and linguistically diverse students. Data from this study also revealed the role PLCs play in building structures for teachers to negotiate cultural competence and CRT. This study posits continuous job-embedded PLCs will improve the understanding and quality of CRT.

Recommendations

Findings from this study aligned with the research literature about CRT, literacy gaps, and African American males (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Sleeter, 2011); however, where should literacy practitioners go from here? To begin, teacher preparation programs must make a concerted effort to move CRT discourse from theory to practice. Many preservice teachers graduate without an understanding of how societal and contextual factors impact learning for diverse student populations. Gay (2010) maintained that the content of teacher preparation programs must become inherently culturally responsive, so graduates leave with a stronger
understanding of the knowledge and skills needed for teaching racially and ethnically diverse students. Once institutions recognize CRT as a viable approach for narrowing achievement gaps, preservice teachers will be granted agency to define competencies, model effective practices, and engage in supportive dialogue regarding issues of race, culture, language, and class.

The second recommendation is for the district in which the study took place to make literacy development among African American males an educational priority. The CRTF or a framework similar in nature will provide teachers with the guidance they need to practice CRT. This study identified CRT as a viable tool for supporting literacy development among African American males. Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations were formed.

**District level.** According to Griner and Stewart (2012), teachers have a lack of clear examples and tools to aid CRT aimed at addressing students on the low end of achievement gaps. Teachers need strategies and tools that go beyond the rhetoric of the research literature and provide precise alignment between research, policy, and practice (Griner & Stewart, 2012). The school district in which the study took place must prioritize literacy development among African American males by funding training and support to develop CRT capacity among literacy teachers. The literacy setting is an ideal place for employing CRT that focuses on achievement, maintaining cultural competence, and developing a sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Clear expectations for CRT, cultural competence training, and building PLC capacities around CRT and differentiated instruction have the potential to strengthen literacy among African American males. Adoption of a framework similar to the CRTF
will ensure teachers of ethnic and linguistically diverse students have a shared understanding of the district’s expectations for CRT. Adoption of a district CRT framework must be integrated into all areas; therefore, teachers and those who support teachers must have access to research, training, and support related to cultural competence. Ongoing training on the school level will result in a continuous dialogue and awareness of issues of cultural competence. Finally, the district’s curriculum and instruction leaders must prioritize the needs of African American males by investing in the purchase of meaningful texts and materials aimed at improving literacy achievement.

**School level.** Since teacher knowledge and skills are the most important determinants of student success, developing and supporting effective teaching practices must become a priority before achievement gaps can reduce (Schmoker, 2011). The CRTF provides transactional indicators for effective CRT. PLCs must spend time engaged in reflection and dialogue around cultural competence. In doing so, members will employ higher expectations for lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and CRT strategies. Correspondingly, the PLCs will design curriculum and assessments that align with the school district's expectations for CRT.

**Future research.** Demographic information should be used to further study culturally responsive perceptions and differentiation strategies of literacy teachers of African American males. An analysis would reveal common CRT perceptions and behaviors of teachers based on race. Future research should also target teachers who demonstrate a track record of effective CRT using student performance data and a principal nomination process. This work will glean insight into the literacy achievement of African American male students and compare summative assessment scores to other
schools in the district. Moreover, such study will fill a void in the research literature by providing in-depth analysis of how CRT impacts student achievement.

A comparison study at low-poverty schools would provide a different perspective on CRT perceptions and behaviors. Survey, observation, document, and interview data analysis from literacy teachers at low-poverty schools could be examined to identify similarities and differences in perceptions, differentiated instruction strategies, and professional learning needs and supports. Further analysis could also be used to compare and contrast African American male literacy achievement on summative assessments in low- and high-poverty schools.

Finally, study of a school district’s use of the CRTF could be used to measure PLC and individual teacher practices. A longitudinal study would track the adoption and implementation of the CRTF. PLC practices would be studied to uncover how teachers interact with the CRTF and what changes occur in culturally responsive perceptions, differentiated instruction strategies, and student achievement. A subsequent program evaluation inclusive of students’ voices would determine the overall merits of the framework and result in further changes to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the framework related to CRT capacity and to narrow achievement gaps.

Summary

Chapter 5 summarized the research study and offered limitations to the study. Interpretations of the findings and implications for the field support the original research questions. Recommendations for practice and future research study will be presented to the school district and made available for participants to view on the original website.
Conclusion

The Black and White literacy skills can be reduced if educators take action in the same manner in which Dr. Martin Luther King (2002) asked his constituents to take when he gave his “Where Do We Go from Here” speech. In the same vein as King's recommendations, educators must trace the past, acknowledge the challenges ahead, and unite to devise a tactical plan to reconceptualize the literacy lives of African American males. Redefining the academic experiences of African American males in the literacy setting and beyond must become a national priority, because very little has changed in the last 20 years despite the many innovations in the teaching and learning field.

The CRTF framework used in this study is the tactical plan educators need for (a) negotiating bias and promoting advocacy, (b) developing wraparound supports, (c) fostering an environment conducive to academic achievement, (d) presenting a rigorous and empowering curricular, and (e) providing ethnic and linguistically diverse children with the supports they need to be successful. PLCs have the potential to change how ethnic and linguistically diverse children see their value in a world that has often been unforgiving of difference. In turn, PLCs must become the vessels of change for promoting equitable and empowering academic exchanges that help students to leave their veil of double consciousness at the schoolhouse door.


**References**


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Jensen, F., & Nutt, A. (2015, January 3). Teen girls have different brains: Gender, and the teenage brain. Retrieved from https://www.salon.com/2015/01/03/teen_girls_have_different_brains_gender_neuroscience_and_the_truth_about_adolescence/


Appendix A

Multicultural Teaching Competence Scale
### 1. Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS)

Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS) is used to (a) self-report skills or behaviors in implementing culturally sensitive teaching practices and (b) self-report knowledge of culturally responsive theories, resources, and classroom strategies.

Please answer each question by selecting one answer. Incomplete surveys will not be recorded.

Thank you in advance for completing the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* 1. I plan many activities to celebrate diverse cultural practices in my classroom.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2=Moderately Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3=Slightly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* 2. I understand the various communication styles among different racial and ethnic minority students in my classroom.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2=Moderately Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3=Slightly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* 3. I consult regularly with other teachers or administrators to help me understand multicultural issues related to instruction.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2=Moderately Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3=Slightly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* 4. I have a clear understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2=Moderately Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3=Slightly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* 5. I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups during my classroom lessons.
   ○ 1=Strongly Disagree
   ○ 2=Moderately Disagree
   ○ 3=Slightly Disagree
   ○ 4=Slightly Agree
   ○ 5=Moderately Agree
   ○ 6=Strongly Agree

* 6. I plan school events to increase students’ knowledge about cultural experiences of various racial and ethnic groups.
   ○ 1=Strongly Disagree
   ○ 2=Moderately Disagree
   ○ 3=Slightly Disagree
   ○ 4=Slightly Agree
   ○ 5=Moderately Agree
   ○ 6=Strongly Agree

* 7. I am knowledgeable about racial and ethnic identity theories.
   ○ 1=Strongly Disagree
   ○ 2=Moderately Disagree
   ○ 3=Slightly Disagree
   ○ 4=Slightly Agree
   ○ 5=Moderately Agree
   ○ 6=Strongly Agree

* 8. My curricula integrate topics and events from racial and ethnic minority populations.
   ○ 1=Strongly Disagree
   ○ 2=Moderately Disagree
   ○ 3=Slightly Disagree
   ○ 4=Slightly Agree
   ○ 5=Moderately Agree
   ○ 6=Strongly Agree

* 9. I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of various racial and ethnic minority groups may affect students’ learning.
   ○ 1=Strongly Disagree
   ○ 2=Moderately Disagree
   ○ 3=Slightly Disagree
   ○ 4=Slightly Agree
   ○ 5=Moderately Agree
   ○ 6=Strongly Agree

* 10. I make changes within the general school environment, so racial and ethnic minority students will have an equal opportunity for success.
    ○ 1=Strongly Disagree
    ○ 2=Moderately Disagree
    ○ 3=Slightly Disagree
    ○ 4=Slightly Agree
    ○ 5=Moderately Agree
    ○ 6=Strongly Agree
* 11. I am knowledgeable about the particular teaching strategies that affirm the racial and ethnic identities of all students.
   - $1 = $Strongly Disagree
   - $2 = $Moderately Disagree
   - $3 = $Slightly Disagree
   - $4 = $Slightly Agree
   - $5 = $Moderately Agree
   - $6 = $Strongly Agree

* 12. I rarely examine the instructional materials I use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias.
   - $1 = $Strongly Disagree
   - $2 = $Moderately Disagree
   - $3 = $Slightly Disagree
   - $4 = $Slightly Agree
   - $5 = $Moderately Agree
   - $6 = $Strongly Agree

* 13. I integrate the cultural values and lifestyles of racial and ethnic minority groups into my teaching.
   - $1 = $Strongly Disagree
   - $2 = $Moderately Disagree
   - $3 = $Slightly Disagree
   - $4 = $Slightly Agree
   - $5 = $Moderately Agree
   - $6 = $Strongly Agree

* 14. I am knowledgeable about the various community resources within the city that I teach.
   - $1 = $Strongly Disagree
   - $2 = $Moderately Disagree
   - $3 = $Slightly Disagree
   - $4 = $Slightly Agree
   - $5 = $Moderately Agree
   - $6 = $Strongly Agree

* 15. I often promote diversity by the behaviors I exhibit.
   - $1 = $Strongly Disagree
   - $2 = $Moderately Disagree
   - $3 = $Slightly Disagree
   - $4 = $Slightly Agree
   - $5 = $Moderately Agree
   - $6 = $Strongly Agree

* 16. I establish strong, supportive relationships with racial and ethnic minority parents.
   - $1 = $Strongly Disagree
   - $2 = $Moderately Disagree
   - $3 = $Slightly Disagree
   - $4 = $Slightly Agree
   - $5 = $Moderately Agree
   - $6 = $Strongly Agree

**Item #12**, which is bolded above, is reverse scored such that $6 = 1, 5 = 2, 4 = 3, 3 = 4, 2 = 5, 1 = 6$. Higher scores indicate greater levels of multicultural teaching competency.

**Factor 1**: Multicultural Teaching Skill consists of the following 10 items: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16

**Factor 2**: Multicultural Teaching Knowledge consists of the following 6 items: 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, and 14
Appendix B

Quantitative Informed Consent
Quantitative Informed Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Where do we go from Here? Culturally Responsive Teaching and Literacy among African American Males

**Purpose**
The purpose of the research study is to investigate how literacy teachers’ perceptions and instructional approaches align to research about culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Moreover, the study will investigate if and how literacy teachers differentiate instruction for African American males. Findings from this study can be used to change curriculum, instruction and policy decisions that may have the ability to closing the Black-White literacy achievement gap once and for all.

**Procedures**
It is anticipated that the questionnaire will require about five (5) minutes of your time and includes 16 questions.

**Voluntary Participation**
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty by exiting the questionnaire.

**Confidentiality**
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be confidential which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data.

**Risks**
Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There are no anticipated risks in this study. If, as a result of the study, you experience discomfort and would like to discuss your thoughts or feelings, please contact the researcher.

**Benefits**
There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand teachers’ perceptions of cultural responsiveness and how they differentiate instruction for African American males in the literacy setting.

**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 by exiting out of the questionnaire.

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

Department: School of Education
Gardner-Webb University

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 the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Gardner-Webb University

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.

You may download a copy of this form for your records.
Appendix C

Principal Letter
Date:
Address:

Dear_________________________,

I am conducting research on culturally responsiveness and literacy among African American males. I am an employee and this research is research is separate from your role as a Title I specialist, and participation is entirely voluntary.

I would like to observe and interview at teacher at your school. this research project is a part of my doctoral program at Gardner-Webb University. Participants must be the teacher of record of at least one language arts class in grades 6-8. Findings from this study can be used to inform curricula, instruction, and policies regarding culturally and linguistically diverse students.

I would like to observe the teacher/s in his/her classroom for two, 90-minute intervals over the course of four weeks. I will also conduct one 45-minute audio-recorded interview with the teacher/s. This interview will take place after school hours and will not interfere with the teacher’s instruction or professional responsibilities.

This study will protect the identity of the district, school, and all participants. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of participants. The researcher will store all data in a password-protected account and destroy data one year after the completion of the study. If your teacher/s consents to participation, they may withdraw at any time, and their data will be omitted from the study and destroyed. Finally, results will be shared with participants at the conclusion of the study.

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Gardner Webb University and the school district. If you want to know more about this research project, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
The Researcher

_____ I give the researcher consent to observe ___________________________ for her study involving culturally responsive teaching and literacy among African American males. I understand teacher/s participation in the study it will involve, two 90-minute classroom observations along with one audio-recorded interview (lasting no more than 45 minutes).

_____ I decline to have teachers at my school participate in the study.

Principal's Signature _________________________________________
Appendix D

Recruitment Letter and Qualitative Consent
You are invited to participate in a research study regarding culturally responsive perceptions of teachers and literacy among African American males. Findings from this study can be used to inform curricula, instruction, and policies regarding culturally and linguistically diverse students.

You may choose to participate or not participate in this study. If you consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time, and your data will be omitted from the study and destroyed. Should you choose to participate in the study it will involve, two 90-minute classroom observations along with one audio-recorded interview (lasting no more than 45 minutes) and lesson plans from the two observed lessons.

This study will protect the identity of the district, school, and all participants. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. Also, the researcher will store all data in a password-protected account and destroy data one year after the completion of the study.

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Gardner Webb University and the school district. Agreement to be contacted does not obligate you to participate in this study. The informed consent agreement on the following pages provides a summary of the purpose of the study, expectations for participants and how to withdraw from the study. If you want to know more about this research project, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
The Researcher
Qualitative Informed Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Where do we go from Here? Culturally Responsive Teaching and Literacy among African American Males

Purpose
The purpose of the research study is to investigate how literacy teachers’ perceptions and instructional approaches align to research about culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Moreover, the study will investigate if and how literacy teachers differentiate instruction for African American males. Findings from this study can be used to change curriculum, instruction and policy decisions that may have the ability to close the Black-White literacy achievement gap once and for all.

Procedure
I am conducting research on CRT and literacy among African American males in the middle school setting as part of my doctoral program at Gardner-Webb University If you are selected to participate in the qualitative phase of this study, two ninety-minute observations are requested. The researcher will observe and take notes on: Teacher and student interactions, classroom environment, curriculum, and assessment. Plans for the two observed lessons will also be requested.

One post-observation interview will be audio recorded and will not last more than 45 minutes. You may refuse to answer questions or stop the interview at any time without penalty. Please note, I am a current employee and this research is separate from my role as a Title I specialist, and participation is entirely voluntary.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty by notifying the researcher. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty by notifying the researcher. 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
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. The post-observation interview will be recorded, and responses will be transcribed using Google transcribe. You will have the opportunity to review and revise your responses. Recordings and transcripts will be stored in a password-protected account accessible solely by the researcher. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a password protected file. When the study is completed, and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. All transcripts, recordings, and documents will be destroyed one year after the conclusion of this study.
Confidential Data
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous and confidential which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data.

Risks
Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There are no anticipated risks in this study. If, as a result of the study, you experience discomfort and would like to discuss your thoughts or feelings, please contact the researcher.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand teacher perceptions of cultural responsiveness and how they differentiate instruction for African American males in the literacy setting.

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 and any related transcripts will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw from the Study
• If you want to withdraw from the study, tell the researcher to stop the interview. There is no penalty for withdrawing.
• If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact the researcher and your information will be destroyed without penalty.

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.
Department: Education
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017

Department: School of Education
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017

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 the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Gardner-Webb University
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. Please initial and sign below:

I agree to participate in the classroom observation(s).
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

I agree to participate in the interview session(s).
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

I agree to the audio recording of this interview.
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

________________________________________________ Date:
Participant Printed Name
________________________________________________ Date:
Participant Signature

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

Field Notes Template
Field Notes Template

Date: _____________

Teacher Number _______________
School Number _______________
Start Time: ________________
End Time: _________________

Student enrollment: __________ AAM: _______
# of students present: __________ # of AAM present: ______

1- Description of the classroom environment:

2- Summary of classroom objectives:

3- Observed teacher behaviors and interactions:

4- Observed student behaviors and interactions:
5- Description of activities aligned to CFTF.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRTF</th>
<th>Description of Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety</strong>&lt;br&gt;Trust&lt;br&gt;Mutual respect&lt;br&gt;Parent &amp; family engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong>&lt;br&gt;Flexibility&lt;br&gt;Collaboration&lt;br&gt;Differentiation&lt;br&gt;Learning styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaffolds</strong>&lt;br&gt;Stimulating learning experiences&lt;br&gt;Sociocultural curriculum&lt;br&gt;Empowering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supports</strong>&lt;br&gt;Formative assessment&lt;br&gt;Feedback&lt;br&gt;Authentic assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6- Details of student interactions with teacher during instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African American Males</th>
<th>Interactions with Teacher</th>
<th>Interactions with Materials</th>
<th>Other Observations</th>
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Reflections:

Questions:

Emerging Themes:
Appendix F

Interview Protocol
Post-Observation Interview Protocol

Date:
Time:
Location:
Participant Number:
Member Checking Date:

Introduction:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this confidential interview. The purpose of this interview is to collect data about the instructional strategies used in your classroom that support the literacy success of African American males. This interview will be recorded, transcribed and stored in a password-protected database. I will provide you with the opportunity to review your response and confirm its accuracy. At this time, you may add to or change your responses. Please note, you may refuse to answer questions or end the interview at any time during the semi-structured interview. What questions do you have before we get started?

1. Tell me a little bit about your teaching background.
2. How would you define culturally responsive teaching?
3. How would you rate yourself in this area?
4. How does understanding your own biases help you to be a better teacher?
5. What steps do you take to combat bias when it appears in your curriculum and instruction?
6. Do you incorporate the culture of African American males into your curriculum? If so, how?
7. Do you differentiate instruction for African American males? If so, how?
8. What formative assessment measures do you employ to assess learning for African American males?
9. What interventions do you employ for African American males who consistently score below standards or demonstrate resistant behaviors toward instruction?
10. How do you engage the parents and families of your African American male students?
11. Does your school and or district promote the use of culturally responsive instruction?
12. What school and or districts supports do you need to facilitate culturally responsive teaching for African American males?
13. Looking at your lesson plans, how were the lessons differentiated for African American males?
14. Is there anything else important for me to know about how you support African American males in your classroom?

Conclusion:

This concludes our interview. Thank you again for consenting to participate. I will contact you in the coming weeks with a transcript of our discussion for your review. I will set up a date and time for you to review the transcript to ensure I accurately captured your responses.
As a reminder, your responses will remain confidential, and no identifying information will appear in the published report. At this time, please feel free you ask any questions or voice any concerns you may have about the interview or the study. Thank you.