

IDENTIFICATION WITH ACADEMICS: THE EARLY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF SIX
AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS

By

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To Thomas, Steven, Christopher, Gregg, Lance, and Samuel

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS

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As a group, African American males face some pervasive obstacles to school success. Collectively they are expelled, suspended, disciplined, retained, and referred to special education at disproportionately high percentages when compared to their peers. As a result of this persistent treatment, African American males have a tendency to disidentify from school and drop out at unacceptably high rates. Based in the idea that disidentification from school and academics begins at an early age, the purpose of this study was to examine the daily school experiences of elementary aged African American boys in order to analyze their emerging identification with academics.

Using Finn's (1989) notion that identification with school is connected to patterns of participation, attitudes, and opportunities for success, this research addressed one main question and three sub-questions. The overarching question was: How did the boys' daily school experiences connect to their emerging identification with academics? The sub-questions included: 1) What experiences during the school day were important to the boys and why? 2) What were the attitudes toward academics that each of these African American boys was developing? 3) What patterns of participation did each boy exhibit during daily lessons and activities?

Research methods included gathering observation and interview data on six, low socioeconomic status (SES) fourth-grade African American males during the final three months of the 2008-2009 school year. From the data sources, typological analysis was used to develop detailed case studies that focused on each boy's positive and negative attitudes toward school along with his patterns of engagement and disengagement. After this, a cross-case analysis was conducted to look for themes in attitudes and patterns of participation across all six boys.

Results reflected themes in positive attitudes that included an affinity for reading and math. In addition, the boys spoke in a positive manner about instructional strategies that included partner work, question and answer discussion sessions, and choral response activities. The boys also specified the importance of opportunities to successfully demonstrate their knowledge, to receive rewards and praise, to have fun during lessons, and to be challenged and use their imaginations while learning. Patterns of participation indicated that the highest levels of engagement occurred during times of teacher-led instruction where active exchanges took place during ongoing lessons.

Overall, the results suggested attitudes and patterns of participation that were motivated by the need for each boy to seek and receive affirmation for his efforts in the classroom. Additionally, this research supported tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy as a means for maintaining positive patterns of participation within daily lessons. The study concludes with a discussion of implications and areas for future research in an effort to support the educational needs of young African American males.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In an article on the early schooling experiences and academic achievement of African American males, Davis (2003) simply, yet poignantly, makes the statement that, “to be Black and male in American schools places one at risk for a variety of negative consequences” (p. 518). Indeed, the literature on African American boys and achievement demonstrates the profound depth of this problem. Collectively, it indicates that African American boys are at greater risk for school failure, placement in special education, grade retention, suspension, expulsion, dropping out, and violence (Davis, 2003; Garibaldi, 1992; Graybill, 1997; Griffin, 2002; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Levin, 2008; Monroe, 2005; Osborne, 1999). In terms of academic achievement, Howard (2003) cites statistics from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) that indicate over half of African American males fail to reach grade level proficiency in core subject areas such as reading, math, science, and history. In addition, Levin (2008) claims that, “At almost every grade level black males are about one standard deviation below the non-Hispanic, white student population in test measures of student achievement – about at the 16th percentile relative to the 50th percentile for the overall population” (p. 180).

The issues of how and why African American males are not successful in schools are multifaceted and have been the focus of extensive research within education. One key avenue research efforts have pursued is the connection between African American boys and their identification with academics (Davis, 2003; Finn, 1989; Griffin, 2002; Howard, 2003; Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder, 2001; Ogbu, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998;

Osborne, 1995, 1997; Steele, 1992, 1997; Tyson, 2002; Voelkl, 1997). To stress the importance of pursuing this research agenda, Finn (1989) and Griffin (2002) argue that a lack of identification with schooling can lead to disengagement and a subsequent increased risk of dropping out. Davis also (2003) claims that a persistent factor connected to the gap in achievement for African American males is that they have higher levels of school disengagement, a concept that is closely connected to identification with academics.

Defined in general terms, identification with academics is a psychological construct that denotes the perceptions of congruence a person holds between him or herself and academics (Finn, 1989; Steele, 1992, 1997). Examination of the literature reveals that the psychological state of being identified with academics, although complex and multifaceted, is manifested in key behavioral and outcome indicators. The first of these indicators is engagement or participation (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Voelkl, 1997). More specifically, identification is manifested behaviorally as evidenced by a student's engagement or participation patterns in class lessons and activities. The second indicator in a comprehensive picture of a student's identification with academics is the attitudes he/she displays toward school (Griffin, 2002; Madhere, 1991; Mickelson, 1990; Osborne, 1997). The third indicator is manifested in academic success (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Osborne, 1997; Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Voelkl, 1997). In order for students to maintain the desire to continue their participation in lessons and activities and develop positive attitudes, they must perceive they have a chance to be successful. Theoretically, there is a cycle that perpetuates itself – positive participation enhances the opportunity for positive attitudes to develop as well as positive academic

outcomes; this leads to further identification with academics and continued perpetuation of the cycle.

Likewise, the opposite can occur – negative or absent participation can lead to negative attitudes and negative academic outcomes, which leads to disidentification from school. Unfortunately, as is aptly demonstrated by the available statistical information, all indications are that the experiences many African American boys are currently having in school are more closely associated with the latter pattern. It only stands to reason that, over time, as a ripple effect of the failure many African American boys experience, they will come to view school as a place where they would rather not be; the end result of which only perpetuates continued patterns of disengagement, negative attitudes and outcomes, and a further lack of identification.

There is a substantial body of research that demonstrates how race and gender complicate the process of identification with academics even further (Eccles, Wong, & Peck, 2006; Finn, 1989; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Madhere, 1991; Majors & Billson, 1992; Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Osborne, 1995, 1997, 1999; Steele, 1992, 1997). Focused on understanding and explaining the poor school outcomes for African American boys, this research has yielded important theoretical and empirical outcomes. However, a synthesis of this literature reveals shortcomings in terms of a lack of research on elementary age African American boys and a failure to examine the day-to-day school experiences and perspectives of these boys.

A considerable proportion of the current literature on identification with academics is focused on African American boys who are in middle or high school

(Fordham, 1996; Griffin, 2002; Hebert, 1998; Howard, 2003; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Johnson et al., 2001; Mickelson, 1990; Rodriguez, Jones, Pang, & Park, 2004; Richardson & Gerlach, 1980; Sanders, 1997). Grounded in an assumption that the abstract reasoning necessary to foster a sense of identity is not fully developed until adolescence (Tatum, 1999), this research has added valuable knowledge about identification with academics for this specific population of boys. However, there are researchers (Finn, 1989; Steele, 1992, 1997; Voelkl, 1997) who advocate the importance of looking at identification with school as a gradual process that begins early and becomes more complex over time. Davis (2003) provides data to indicate the trend in Black male disengagement begins early and then intensifies as boys progress through their education. This is supported in research by Garibaldi (1992); he concluded there is a distinct trend toward decreased academic achievement around fourth grade for many African American boys. As a result much of the current research has been conducted with older children, yet there is good reason to focus further research efforts on younger children and their identification with academics.

Two other shortcomings of the research on identification with academics are a failure to examine the day-to-day experiences of African American children and a failure to add the perspectives of the students. Much of the literature base is either theoretical (Finn, 1989; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, Majors & Billson, 1992; Ogbu, 1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Steele, 1992, 1997), drawn from national data samples (Garibaldi, 1992; Griffin, 2002; Richardson & Gerlach, 1980; Osborne, 1995, 1997, 1999), or based on questionnaires or interviews only as the primary sources of data (Eccles et al., 2006; Howard, 2003; Johnson et al., 2001; Madhere, 1991;

Rodriguez et al., 2004; Sanders, 1997; Voelkl, 1997). Only one study by Tyson (2002) utilized interviews and observational data in elementary schools to examine attitudes toward school among Black students. Additionally, where a focus on the perspectives of students is found (Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hebert, 1998; Howard, 2003; Sanders, 1997), it is rare for that focus to be on the voices of elementary aged boys (Tyson, 2002). If understanding identification with academics is important to the study of school success for African American boys and it is a construct defined by participation and attitudes, then research efforts should be focused on both observing and listening to the voices of this particular group of students.

The current research project brings together the daily experiences and perspectives of elementary age African American boys to investigate how schooling connects with their emerging identification with academics. Giving African American boys a voice to express their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to their everyday experiences in school at a time when they are learning to make sense of who they are within our existing educational structure has the potential to increase our knowledge in ways that will enable educators to help this currently underserved group move in more positive directions.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to examine the daily school experiences of elementary aged African American boys in order to analyze their emerging identification with academics. One main question and three sub-questions will be addressed: How do the boys' daily school experiences connect to their emerging identification with academics? Sub-questions: 1) What experiences during the school day are important to the boys and why? 2) What attitudes toward academics is each of these African

American boys developing? 3) What patterns of participation does each boy exhibit during daily lessons and activities?

Significance

Noguera (2008) emphasizes the idea that, “efforts to improve the academic performance of African American males must begin by understanding the attitudes that influence how they perceive schooling and academic pursuits” (p. 27). He continues that “there is a pressing need for further research on how identities... are constructed within schools and how these identities affect students’ attitudes and dispositions toward school, learning, and life in general” (p. 40). Through observing and interviewing a small group of fourth grade African American boys, this study attempts to not only answer Noguera’s call but to add to the literature base in a way that few research efforts have in the past.

As mentioned earlier, researchers such as Finn (1989), Steele (1992, 1997), and Voelkl (1997) contend that identification with school develops gradually and is associated with an accumulation of the day-to-day experiences a student has in the classroom. Positive participation habits will develop if a student is successful when answering questions, gets good grades on tests, or is praised for his/her behavior. Over time, this reinforces the student’s efforts and leads to a greater identification with academics. Likewise, the opposite can be true, and as a result, Finn (1989) asserts that it is important to look at patterns of participation or non-participation so that when the latter occurs steps can be taken by educators to intervene. This makes examining day-to-day activities of the classroom essential to an overall picture of identification with academics and is one of the ways that this study differs from much of the research to date.

Another limitation previously mentioned in the current literature is that minimal attention has been given to the voices of students. At the elementary level, this shortcoming is particularly evident. Making the effort to listen to students is significant for two reasons. First, their thoughts and feelings will provide a more complete picture of their attitudes and dispositions toward school, an important consideration when looking at their overall identification with academics. Second, as Johnson et al. (2001) state, listening to the voices of students is vital because students' feelings can "serve as alternative entry points for efforts to improve learning" (pp. 320-321). For these reasons, this study focuses on the voices of the boys to honor the ways that they understand and make meaning of their day-to-day school experiences.

An additional point that adds to the significance of this research is that by focusing on the voices of African American boys as they interpret their day-to-day school experiences the current research aligns with a fundamental premise of critical race theory (CRT) that is concerned with legitimizing individual stories as a forum for analyzing and understanding those who are oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because we live in a "culture of domination, surrounded by institutions...which reinforce the values, beliefs, and underlying assumptions of white supremacy" (hooks, 1989, p. 63), CRT in education attempts to focus on how race is implicitly present within the structures of schooling. By legitimating the voices of Black Americans CRT also attempts to create the type of discourse that will lead to changes in both schooling and larger society in order to move toward greater racial justice. As a result, this research effort aligns with CRT by honoring the voices of African American boys as they narrate their perceptions of their school experiences, with the ultimate goal

of adding to a base of literature that attempts to move forward an essential conversation about how educators can better serve a group of children whose learning needs have, generally, not been met.

There is empirical literature that focuses on African American boys who identify with and have success in school; however, an overwhelming amount of the research provides a picture that should be alarming to educators. The negative statistical information suggests the important nature of this area of research. The current study has the potential to inform the work of educators and influence their efforts with African American boys in a way that helps to change some of the existing negative trends; therefore, it is imperative.

Definition of Terms

The terms defined below provide a foundation for the language used in this dissertation. The definitions indicate how each term has been used throughout the report of this research.

- **ACADEMIC IDENTITY:** Academic identity refers to the perceptions or definitions one holds of his/her abilities related to academics. More specifically, Howard (2003) cites Welch and Hodges (1991) to define academic identity as “a dimension of a larger, global self-concept that is central to academic performance and achievement motivation” (p. 7).
- **AGENCY:** In this research project, the definition of agency will align with Stinson’s (2006) idea that it involves a person’s “ability to accommodate, reconfigure, or resist the available sociocultural discourses that surround African American males for them to effectively negotiate these discourses in their pursuit of success” (p. 478).
- **ATTITUDE:** Mickelson (1990) alludes to defining attitudes as a set of beliefs. As a result, the definition of attitude toward academics that will be used in this dissertation is the set of beliefs each boy has about academics that is reflected in both his behaviors and words.
- **DISENGAGEMENT WITH ACADEMICS:** Throughout the report of this research, disengagement with academics will be the inverse of engagement with academics.

More specifically, this term will broadly represent a student's lack of participation in school as evidenced by his actions during lessons and activities (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Voelkl, 1997).

- **DISIDENTIFICATION WITH ACADEMICS:** Steele (1997) writes of disidentification that it involves a “reconceptualization of the self and of one’s values” (p. 614) so as to remove someone or something from being used as a basis for self-evaluation. This is important because it allows an individual to retreat from connecting that person or thing to his/her identity and protects self-concept (Griffin, 2002; Steele, 1997). In terms of academics, disidentification is a psychological state of removing school as a basis for self-evaluation that is manifested in a lack of engagement (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Voelkl, 1997) and motivation to succeed (Osborne, 1997).
- **ENGAGEMENT WITH ACADEMICS:** Finn (1989), Johnson et al. (2001), and Voelkl (1997) define engagement with academics as a construct represented by a student’s participation in school as evidenced by his/her actions during lessons and activities. As a result, in this research project engagement will be viewed as an indicator of identification and examined through observations of each boy’s day-to-day school experiences.
- **HIGH MINORITY/PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN AMERICAN:** In the context of this research, high minority or predominantly African American indicates a school setting where greater than 75% of the students attending are Black.
- **HIGH POVERTY:** In this case, the term high poverty refers to students who live in a family that qualifies under the National School Lunch Program for free or reduced price lunch.
- **IDENTIFICATION WITH ACADEMICS:** Finn (1989) writes about identification that it “denotes perceptions of congruence of the self with an external object (e.g., parents, a social group, or institution) in the form of shared values or sense of belonging” (p. 134). In accordance with this definition, identification with academics will be used throughout this research to indicate a boy’s perceptions of the connections between his identity and academics. Manifestations of identification with academics can be seen in a student’s attitudes and level of engagement (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Voelkl, 1997). Also important to a positive identification with school is the possibility for academic success (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Osborne, 1997; Steele, 1997; Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Voelkl, 1997).

Organization of the Study

What follows is a detailed description of how I came to understand the school experiences of six African American boys as they were related to each boy’s emerging identification with academics. Chapter 2 sets the stage for this endeavor by reviewing

the current literature on schools, race, gender, and identification with academics.

Chapter 3 describes in detail the theoretical perspective underlying this research along with providing an explanation of the context for the study and data collection and analysis methods that were utilized. Chapters 4 through 6 provide case study descriptions of the research findings for three of the boys. In these chapters, the focus is on providing detail regarding the boy, his attitudes toward his daily school experiences, and the patterns of participation he displayed during observations.

Chapter 7 provides a cross-case analysis examining themes in the attitudes across all six boys toward their daily school experiences as well as a discussion of themes across the boys' patterns of participation. Chapter 8 discusses the key findings of this research and provides an examination of the implications of this research for educators when looking at the overall picture of educating African American boys in poverty.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyze identification with academics as it is connected to the daily school experiences of six fourth-grade African American boys currently living in poverty. The intent is to examine each boy's perceptions of his experiences with a focus on what is important to him and why, his attitudes toward academics, and his patterns of engagement during daily lessons and activities. In order to build a foundation for understanding the larger context within which this research effort is situated, current literature in several key areas is reviewed. The chapter begins by synthesizing the literature on identification with academics. Borrowing from the educational psychology, anthropology, and sociology literature, the concepts of academic identity, identification with academics, and disidentification with academics will be examined. As a part of this synthesis, the general links between identification with academics, engagement or participation, attitudes, and school success will also be developed.

A second area of the literature that is examined connects African American boys to identification with academics and school success. More specifically, the focus will be on a body of written work that comprises what Stinson (2006) calls "the discourse of rejection" (p. 487). This includes works by Majors and Billson (1993), Steele (1997), Ogbu (2004), Ogbu and Simons (1998), Fordham (1996), and Fordham and Ogbu (1986), all of which attempt to explain the "systematic rejection of school and academics by African American students" (Stinson, 2006, p. 487). The goal in this section of the chapter is to explain each of the theories and how they are connected to a lack of

school success for many African American boys. Although much of this literature maintains a focus on African American students in general, there is ample discussion that specifically targets boys.

In conjunction with the theoretical viewpoints that posit this “discourse of rejection,” there is a growing body of empirical research that serves to either support or refute the basic assertions made by each perspective. For example, Ogbu (1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) put forth a cultural-ecological theory to explain the differences between minority and non-minority students’ school performance. The details of this theory will be examined in a subsequent section of this chapter; for now it is important to note that there is empirical literature that both supports (Cook, Church, Ajanaku, Kim, & Cohen, 1996; Eccles, et al., 2006; Fordham, 1996; Griffin, 2002; Mickelson, 1990; Richardson & Gerlach, 1980) and refutes (Johnson, et al., 2001; Noguera, 2008; O’Connor, 1997; Sanders, 1997; Tyson, 2002) the tenets of a cultural-ecological theory. Examining the details of these research efforts is important to creating a comprehensive picture of the literature on African American boys and identification with academics.

The third topic of focus for this literature review is individual agency. The concept of individual agency is important to add an element that moves beyond merely essentializing the school experiences of all African American boys. That is, it is important to examine literature that supports the notion that African American boys are more than just a product of the sociocultural world in which they live. Diverse backgrounds, experiences, perceptions, choices made, and actions taken with regard to school serve to influence the level of identification with academics that develop in

different individuals. For this reason the concept of individual agency is explored because it offers not only an element of hope, but it gives educators an entry point from which to work for the type of change that will help to reverse some of the current negative trends in the education of many African American boys.

Identification with Academics

In order to develop an understanding of the literature on identification with academics, it is necessary to begin with a more detailed look at the terms that will provide the foundation of this review. After this it is crucial to connect these terms to the realm of schooling by developing the concepts of identification and disidentification with academics. In order to do this, I will examine factors that influence identification such as engagement or participation, attitudes, and school success.

General Terminology

Throughout the course of this research, identity will be defined as the perceptions of self that a person holds (Steele, 1992, 1997). Sometimes used synonymously with the term self-concept, it is commonly thought that the formation of an individual's identity is influenced by a variety of important factors in her/his physical and social environment (Crain, 1992; Tatum, 2000). More specifically, Tatum (2000) claims that the foundations of one's identity can be found in such physical characteristics as appearance, body type, gender, and race along with various aspects of one's social environment such as class, culture, family, religion, and schooling. In a general sense, it is important to note that identity formation is rooted in one's childhood experiences and is influenced by the messages others implicitly and explicitly send to a person about who he/she is.

Also closely associated with the concept of identity is self-esteem, which refers to the self-perceptions one has about the value of his/her characteristics and abilities (Osborne, 1995). Self-esteem and its ensuing influence on identity can develop differently in different areas of life (Osborne, 1997, 1999; Steele, 1997). For example, a person could be talented at playing a musical instrument and based on positive feedback received through his/her environment develop a sense of self-esteem that includes music as a key domain of identification. Conversely, if this same person is talented within the domain of music but receives feedback that is critical or negative, he/she could develop a sense of self that is not connected to music and subsequently disidentify from it. Another person may not be talented in athletics but through positive feedback could develop a self-esteem that is strongly identified with sports. Again, the opposite could occur and this person could receive negative feedback and disidentify from athletics.

In a similar manner, through their engagement in the process of schooling, children develop what is referred to as an academic identity. Howard (2003) cites the work of Welch and Hodges (1991) to define academic identity as “a dimension of a larger, global self-concept that is central to academic performance and achievement motivation” (p. 7). It is also possible to break the domain of academics down even further so that a person may develop a positive self-esteem in one particular subject area such as science; however, this same person may struggle with writing and not develop positive regard with respect to his/her abilities in that realm of academics.

The relevance of different areas of life to the self forms the foundation for how a person develops identification with a specific area. Both Osborne (1995, 1997, 1999)

and Steele (1992, 1997) have written about this process, saying that as feedback is received about performance in a particular domain, a person either perceives that feedback as important or not. Sources of this feedback can take the form of reactions, comments, or responses from significant others, or they can be self-generated as when a student compares his/her performance with that of his/her peers. If the feedback is perceived as valid, sincere, and accurate then it is incorporated into a person's self-concept and becomes the basis for either identification or a lack of identification in that particular realm. Osborne (1999) also notes that success in a specific area usually leads to a greater value being placed on that domain. Likewise, if a person does not receive sincere, positive feedback or have success in a given area, it typically leads to a devaluing of that specific domain. If an area such as academics is considered important to an individual, then changes in the feedback received with regard to that domain, if it is perceived as sincere, will have an impact on a person's self-esteem. If, however, an area is not considered important or the feedback is disingenuous, then feedback in that domain will have little effect on an individual's self-esteem (Osborne, 1995; Steele, 1992, 1997).

Identifying with Academics

Finn (1989) presents a comprehensive picture of identification with academics in an article on the developmental process associated with dropping out of school. He calls identification with school a psychological condition that requires an internalized conception of belonging; that is, children must feel as if they are a "part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their own experience" (p. 123). Finn posits that in addition to this sense of belonging, an individual must come to "value success in school-related goals" (p. 123). He contends that the minimum

requirement for developing both of these – a sense of belonging and valuing school-related goals – is active participation in school activities along with a reasonable probability that a child will experience success. Moreover, Finn along with other researchers (Steele, 1997; Voelkl, 1997) claim that dropping out of school might be seen as a gradual process of disidentification or disengaging where, for either academic or social reasons, a child does not develop the sense of belonging and value for school-related outcomes that is characteristic of his/her more successful peers.

The research base on identification with academics supports the idea that it is integrally connected to engagement and achievement outcomes (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002; Griffin, 2002; Johnson et al., 2001; Osborne, 1995, 1997; Tyson, 2002; Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Voelkl, 1997). For example, a study by Valeski and Stipek (2001) that examined feelings about school in kindergarten and first-grade students empirically supported the arguments that Finn (1989) makes about classroom participation, school success, and identification with academics. Using a combination of measures such as academic achievement, questionnaires about students' feelings toward school, teacher questionnaires about student engagement and performance, and classroom observations with more than 350 kindergarten and first graders from low income families, the authors concluded that “by first grade, the more competent that children believed they were in math and literacy the more engaged and responsible their teachers claimed they were in classroom activities” (p. 1211). In another finding that supports Finn's contentions about academic success as a precursor for identification with schooling, the authors reported that as early as kindergarten, “poor school performance may have negative effects on motivation” (p. 1211). As a result of

these findings, Valeski and Stipek concluded that children's perceptions of their competence in academic areas is influenced by key factors in the school environment and that these reciprocally influence individual attitudes toward and levels of engagement in school.

In a second example, Voelkl (1997) specifically utilized a definition of identification that incorporated Finn's (1989) components of a sense of belonging and valuing school-related outcomes in a longitudinal study that followed over 1,300 African American and White students from fourth grade to eighth grade. The purpose of the study was to "understand the process by which students develop a sense of identification with or disidentification from school" (p. 295). Using student questionnaires that examined identification with school, achievement tests from fourth grade and the end of seventh grade, socioeconomic status (SES), and classroom participation ratings by students' eighth grade math and English teachers, Voelkl found that "identification with school was significantly related to patterns of achievement and participation" (p. 311). As a matter of fact, she found that for all students across race, gender, and socioeconomic status greater classroom participation was coupled with greater levels of identification. Not surprisingly, Voelkl found that students from lower SES backgrounds demonstrated significantly lower levels of participation and achievement than did students from high SES backgrounds.

In a final example, Tyson (2002) used interviews and observational data from third- and fourth-grade classrooms in predominantly African American schools to examine students' experiences and achievement outcomes as they were associated with the development of school-related attitudes. Tyson was specifically interested in

looking at the pervasive ideology that maintains many African American students are more likely to be disengaged from school. Connecting with Finn (1989) by claiming that students who are engaged in school care about how they do academically and are active participants in the classroom, Tyson spent eight months observing one day per week in four different classrooms. During this time she collected data that included recording conversations, classroom interactions, student actions, facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and demeanor. In addition, Tyson conducted in-depth interviews that focused on students' school experiences as well as their attitudes toward school, learning, and achievement. Her results contradicted the general notion that most African American students are not interested in school and doing well. More important to the idea of identification with academics, however, Tyson concluded that school experiences, principally achievement outcomes, were central to the attitudes students developed toward school. When speaking of the children who were struggling academically, Tyson stated that their negative attitudes were directly related to achievement outcomes. She further concluded, "the children's negative statements about school reflected their desire to avoid further experiences of failure" (p.1184).

Identification with Academics: Theory on Race and Gender

With statistical information that continues to reflect negative school outcomes for many poor African American children, especially boys, educational researchers have invested considerable effort to examine identification with school as it relates to the categories of race and gender. Borrowing from the literature in anthropology, social psychology, and sociology, Stinson (2006) provides details on a group of theoretical perspectives that he calls "the discourse of rejection" (p. 487). Focused on the school experiences of African American students in general and males specifically, this

discourse is organized around the systematic rejection of the goals and practices of schooling as a coping mechanism for the pervasive and institutionalized effects of racism and discrimination. Because the rejection of schooling is closely associated with disidentification from academics, several of the theoretical perspectives that make up this discourse are relevant to the current research. In this section of the literature review, the theoretical viewpoints of Steele (1997), Ogbu (1992, 1994, 2004), Ogbu and Simons (1998), Majors and Billson (1992), Fordham (1996), and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) are explored with the intent of explaining each along with making connections to identification with academics. The overall goal is to build an understanding of a prevailing ideology that attempts to explain sociocultural factors associated with a lack of identification toward school for African American boys.

Steele's Theory of Disidentification

Steele (1997) uses a theory of "domain identification" (p. 613) to explain barriers to academic achievement for African American students. He posits that "to sustain school success one must be identified with school achievement in the sense of its being a part of one's self-definition, a personal identity to which one is self-evaluatively accountable" (p. 613). Much like Finn's (1989) contention that identification is connected to a sense of belonging and valuing school-related outcomes, Steele reasons that in order for identification to occur, a person must have a sense of good prospects within that domain. That is, he/she must perceive there are opportunities and resources available. Steele further contends that a person must also feel a sense of being accepted, valued, and successful in a given domain. He goes on to say that "students tacitly assess their prospects in school and its subdomains, and...their

identifications follow these assessments: increasing when they are favorable and decreasing when they are unfavorable” (p. 616).

Steele also claims that societal structures that negatively label many African Americans in terms of school performance can produce a phenomenon he calls stereotype threat, a condition that can ultimately lead to disidentification from school. Steele (1997) claims that, “Where bad stereotypes about...groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype” (p. 614). As a result, Steele posits that some African American students have an inherent fear that poor academic performance will confirm negative racial stereotypes that exist. The outcome of this embedded threat can lead to disidentification from academics as a way to preserve a sense of self within the context of negative societal stereotypes.

An example of stereotype threat might also be seen in the performance of many boys in the area of reading. Pervasive gender stereotypes claim that girls are better in reading than boys whereas boys are better in math and science than girls. In this case, a boy who otherwise would be very good in school may struggle in reading because he has an inherent fear of being reduced to the stereotype that exists about boys not being good readers. As a result, he may disidentify with reading, choosing instead to identify more highly in academic areas where stereotypes do not exist for boys. The boy’s disidentification with reading serves as a way to reduce the threat of the stereotypes that exist for not doing well in reading along with maintaining his vision that otherwise says he is a good student.

According to Steele, stereotype threat explains not only disidentification from school but also the tendency of some African Americans to separate their academic

identities from the larger vision of their overall self-esteem. In Steele's estimation, the end result of disidentification is that many African Americans do not value doing well in school and thus unknowingly serve to play a role in perpetuating the existing negative stereotypes. Finally, it is also important to note that, like Finn (1989), Steele contends that the process of disidentifying with school occurs gradually and is, in part, a result of the explicit and implicit messages received by a child as he/she engages in the process of schooling over an extended period of time; an aspect which makes disidentification both malleable and not inevitable.

Majors and Billson's Cool Pose Theory

A second theoretical perspective associated with the rejection of schooling by some African Americans, specifically boys, is Majors and Billson's (1992) cool pose theory. This theory posits that Black males take on a ritualized form of masculinity that serves the function of allowing them to cope and survive in a racist and oppressive society (Osborne, 1999; Stinson, 2006). Cool pose is generally seen as a product of the pathology and hopelessness of the plight of African Americans, especially males who are growing up amid contradictory messages (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Fordham (1996) describes the irony of this contradiction when writing of African American boys that the "meaning of maleness in hierarchical and/or racialized patriarchies is embedded in notions of power and domination, yet...to raise children who are male but whose systematic denial of what is socially symptomatic of maleness...negates this biological designation" (p. 149). As a result, Majors and Billson (1992) claim, "being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated" (p. 1) and that cool pose is rooted in an attempt to reclaim a sense of power through the realm of masculinity. Fordham's (1996) work in Capital High, a public school in Washington, DC serves as an example of

this contradiction, as she found high-achieving African American males seemed to be more conflicted over their school success than any other group of students and that for them gender was more important than race in their efforts to define who they were.

Cool pose, then, can be seen as a coping mechanism which “entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 4). These ritualized expressions of masculinity are manifested in behaviors that include aloofness, fearlessness, lack of emotion, hyperaggressiveness, hypersexuality or promiscuity, thrill seeking, an emphasis on appearance, specific gestures, stances, walks, handshakes, and the absence of personal accountability (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Osborne, 1999; Stinson, 2006).

In terms of schooling, the attitudes and behaviors associated with cool pose are contradictory to those typically connected to both academic success and identification with school. Osborne (1999) notes that cool pose behaviors are not compatible with the usual idea that a good student is driven, motivated, disciplined, identified with academics, and engaged in school. Stinson (2006) also argues that cool pose behaviors often create a conflict between Black boys and their White teachers, claiming that because White teachers will frequently “misinterpret, overreact to, and become frightened by these Black male cultural-specific behaviors” (p. 488), that Black male students are subsequently punished, suspended, and recommended for remedial or special-education classes “more often than any other identifiable group of students” (p. 488).

Ogbu's Cultural-Ecological Theory and Acting White

Another theoretical perspective that attempts to understand and explain the systematic rejection of schooling by some African Americans is Ogbu's (1992, 1994, 2004; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) cultural-ecological theory. In a general sense, Ogbu claims that the purpose of this theory is to explain the differences between minority and non-minority students in terms of academic outcomes and school engagement. The basic premise of the theory rests on the idea that the United States is a racially stratified country which he defines as a "hierarchical organization of *socially defined "races" or groups...on the basis of assumed inborn differences in status honor or moral worth, symbolized...by skin color*" (Ogbu, 1994, p. 268). With this idea as a foundation, cultural-ecological theory attempts to explain how racial stratification has manifested certain tendencies in the way that Whites have treated Blacks and how some Blacks have responded to that treatment, especially in the realm of education.

In order to understand the complex relationship that exists for some African Americans between who they are as a general group of people and how they have been treated within the larger context of American society, Ogbu contends that it is first important to define their minority status. He posits "a population is a minority if it occupies some form of subordinate power position in relation to another population within the same country or society" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 162). As a result, he classifies minorities as autonomous, voluntary (immigrant) or involuntary (nonimmigrant). The basis for these classifications calls attention to different histories experienced by different minority groups and is determined by the nature of White Americans' involvement in a group becoming a minority as well as the reasons that a particular group of people came or were brought to this country. Ogbu defines African

Americans as an involuntary (nonimmigrant) minority because unlike voluntary minorities, they did not choose to become a part of the United States; instead they were forced to come here by being “conquered, colonized, or enslaved” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 165). Also important is the idea Ogbu posits that involuntary minorities themselves usually understand their presence in this country as having been imposed upon them by White people. Groups of people who fit into this category are African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Mexican Americans in the Southwest, Native Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans. Ogbu maintains that because these groups of people are different from the dominant culture in terms of race, ethnicity, and possibly religion and language they not only occupy a lower position in the racial hierarchy but they are “less economically successful than voluntary minorities, usually experience greater and more persistent cultural and language difficulties, and do less well in school” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 166).

Also critical to understanding Ogbu’s theoretical perspective are the concepts of primary and secondary cultural differences. Stinson (2006) provides a concise explanation of this when writing that Ogbu viewed primary cultural differences as being characteristic of voluntary minorities and secondary cultural differences as typifying involuntary minorities. He further writes that in terms of schooling both primary and secondary cultural differences are related to language and custom differences. However, Stinson explains that in Ogbu’s view school structures are set up to exacerbate secondary cultural differences making them more difficult to overcome along with sending the message that the language and custom differences are not a welcome part of the school environment. The end result of secondary cultural differences is that

they are seen as something to be changed, which sends a negative message about the home culture of involuntary minorities and is threatening to their underlying identity.

In response to the subordinate position that they have been relegated to and the economic, political, social, and psychological treatment that has resulted from this position, Ogbu (1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest two general responses by African Americans. The first of these is the development of a sense of collective social identity that is in opposition to the social identity of White Americans. Borrowing from anthropology, Ogbu and his associates use the concept of fictive kinship to elaborate on this collective social identity. More specifically, they define fictive kinship as a “kinshiplike relationship between persons not related by blood or marriage in a society, but who have some reciprocal social or economic relationship” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 183). It is further posited that the idea of fictive kinship conveys a mindset among African Americans that they are locked in a type of peoplehood that reflects a world view that is in opposition to that of Whites. This sense of “brotherhood” or “sisterhood” moves beyond skin color to denote a moral judgment that the larger collective places upon its members and is tied to behaviors and attitudes that maintain the boundaries between Blacks and Whites. Moreover, Fordham and Ogbu contend that some Blacks negatively sanction those whose behaviors and attitudes are at variance with the larger group. As will be discussed in greater detail below, in terms of schooling, examples of this mindset are reflected in derogatory comments toward African Americans who experience academic success.

As a part of their collective identity, Ogbu (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) suggest that involuntary minorities such as African

Americans have developed different cultural models or ways that they understand and interpret their world that guide their actions. Although acknowledging that not all members of a particular group believe the same things or behave in the same ways, Ogbu claims that there are key understandings, or cultural models, that guide the dominant beliefs and patterns of behavior that are exhibited by the collective members of an involuntary minority such as African Americans. The first of these cultural models is status frame of reference or the general way a group looks at its given situation as compared to that of dominant society. In terms of schooling, the status frame of reference for many African Americans who live in predominantly urban and poor neighborhoods is comparing their schools to those of White, middle-class, suburban neighborhoods. The results of this comparison are to view their schools as worse with no justifiable explanation as to why other than institutional discrimination. The second cultural model concerns a group's ideas of how to be successful or "make it" in larger society. Here Ogbu claims that involuntary minorities have an "ambivalent folk theory of making it" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 172). He contends that there is a prevailing ideology among some African Americans that hard work and getting an education will lead to success, but because of continued structures that perpetuate job and wage discrimination there is also an inherent sense that doing both of these will not make a tremendous difference. This leads some African Americans to believe that doing well in school is futile because it will not make a difference in the ultimate opportunities they will or will not have in life. The final cultural model of concern here is trust in White institutions. For involuntary minorities, Ogbu believes their long history of discrimination and racism leads to an intrinsic distrust of all societal institutions that are controlled by

Whites, of which school is one. As a consequence, many involuntary minorities treat school with suspicion believing that their children will not be educated in the same way as White children

The second response some African Americans have developed as a reaction to their subordinate position and poor treatment by Whites is an oppositional frame of reference. This frame of reference moves beyond the cultural models described above and is manifested in a type of cultural inversion that signifies “the rejection of certain forms of behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings...because they are characterized as White” (Stinson, 2006, p. 491). As a result, there is an emphasis on behaviors, events, activities, and symbols that are deemed as being a part of Black culture. Furthermore, because historical and structural forces in society have collectively served to discriminate against African Americans their rejection of White American culture and the subsequent development of a Black American culture is seen as an important marker of identity for some African Americans. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) posit that this collective oppositional frame of reference serves as a way to protect the identity of African Americans in the face of subordination along with maintaining the tacit boundaries that exist between them and White Americans. In keeping with the negative social consequences that can be experienced by African Americans who violate the collective oppositional identity, group members who do not honor the oppositional frame of reference are also negatively sanctioned.

In terms of schooling and identification with academics, Ogbu (1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that for African Americans to be successful they must “buy into” an ideology that is inherently White.

More specifically, being a successful student means accepting a curriculum and standard way of learning that has been defined by Whites. Because accepting this White cultural norm goes against both the collective identity and oppositional frame of reference that some Blacks have developed, doing well in school can be considered as a rejection of Black culture. Ogbu further suggests that this would be the equivalent of acquiescing to identity defeat for African Americans. Subsequently, behaving in school in a way that is defined as falling within the dominant White paradigm is to “act White” and is negatively sanctioned by both African American peer groups and the larger Black community. One result of these prevailing ideologies is that Black students do not want to be out of favor with their peers and therefore purposely behave in ways that are in conflict with academic success. Fordham & Ogbu (1986) claim that the outcome is many Black students experience “inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success” (p. 177) resulting in lower achievement levels and a disidentification from academics.

Conclusion

Even though Steele, Ogbu, Fordham, Majors, and Billson have attempted to articulate varying theoretical positions that explain poor academic outcomes and disidentification from school by some African American children, each admits to a double edged nature of the situation. That is because the very behaviors meant to socially and psychologically protect against mechanisms that produce anxiety, the threat of being stereotyped, the need to give up important identity markers, or peer group pressure to not value school also serve to produce negative school outcomes. The result is that some African American boys adapt in such a way as to perpetuate their own struggles in school. As a result, Steele (1997) claims that disidentification

from the domain of academics can offer a psychological retreat yet even as it serves as a protective mechanism it can also “undermine sustained motivation...an adaptation that can be costly when the domain is as important as academics” (p.614).

Identification with Academics: Empirical Literature on Race and Gender

The empirical literature on identification with schooling examines a wide array of issues. Various research efforts focus on investigating aspects of race, gender, self-esteem, attitudes toward school, characteristics of struggling or successful students, school engagement, and school drop out. This assorted collection of literature speaks to the intimate connections that exist between these important issues and identification with school. Attempting to disentangle the research into discrete categories that reflects this range makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of the literature.

Additionally, it is important to remember that, as discussed in chapter 1, the majority of this research examines children in middle and high school and does not focus on the voices of the students themselves. As a result of this dilemma and in combination with the importance of the theoretical base described above, this section of the review will synthesize the empirical literature in terms of the theories posited by Steele, Majors and Billson, and Ogbu.

Steele’s Theory of Disidentification and the Empirical Literature

To explain the general trend toward lower achievement, Steele’s (1992, 1997) theory of disidentification claims that due to the psychological threat of being reduced to the negative stereotypes that exist about their school performance, some African American students will devalue the importance of academics to protect their self-concept. Inherent in this claim is the reciprocal nature in which race influences identification with academics and subsequent patterns of participation, attitudes, and the

potential for school success. This section of the review of literature examines a small group of studies that used some iteration of Steele's premise as an avenue to investigate these connections. Within the studies reviewed here, two (Osborne, 1995; Griffin, 2002) provide support for Steele's contentions while two others (Osborne, 1997; Voelkl, 1997) produced mixed results with regard to the general claims Steele makes about academic disidentification and African American students. It is important to note that Voelkl's (1997) study was previously discussed for how it empirically connected to Finn's (1989) definition of identification with academics. It is included in this section because it also closely associated with Steele's theory and helps to provide an important view of how academic disidentification intersects with race and gender.

Steele's (1992, 1997) theoretical perspective posits that academic self-esteem is removed from a larger picture of overall self-esteem as a protective mechanism against being reduced to negative racial stereotypes. As a result of separating out academic self-esteem, Osborne (1995) contends that African American students should be less responsive to school failure, especially in terms of impact on overall self-esteem. Using data drawn from more than 1,200 students in eighth and then tenth grade from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Osborne examined variables of gender, race, SES status, self-reported grade point average (GPA), academic achievement scores, and a self-view inventory to test key theoretical concepts of Steele's theory. Specifically, he examined whether African American students had lower levels of academic achievement and higher levels of reported self-esteem as well as if the correlation between achievement and self-esteem weakened over time for African American students. Using various methods of statistical analysis, Osborne found that

African American students as a group scored lower on measures of achievement and that they reported higher levels of global self-esteem than Whites at both time periods. In terms of the relationship between achievement and self-esteem, Osborne found that for both White males and females the correlations remained constant or increased over the two-year period. For African American females the correlation decreased only slightly but for males it decreased significantly. As a result Osborne concluded that, in the population he studied, the basic tenets of Steele's theory held true, especially as they related to African American boys.

Griffin (2002) also used basic tenets of Steele's theory to examine the relationship between academic achievement, race, and school drop out rates. He claimed that if disidentification was occurring for groups who face negative stereotypes, then school outcomes would not be a salient factor in shaping individual self perceptions and consequently there would be less emphasis on academic achievement when considering whether to drop out or stay in school. Griffin used data on dropout status, GPA, and race provided by the Florida Department of Education for over 132,000 students across fourteen school districts. The main premise of his study was that the "relationship between GPA and school persistence would vary across racial groups" (p. 76). In other words, he hypothesized that a lower GPA would be associated with a higher rate of dropping out of school and that this pattern would hold true for groups of students who face negative stereotypes. For males, he found that the drop out rates for Black and Hispanic students were 7% and 6.1%, respectively, whereas the drop out rates for White and Asian male students were 3.6% and 2.7%, respectively, and that these drop out rates did correlate with lower or higher school GPA. He

concluded that Black and Hispanic students, who face greater social stigma in society, showed academic disidentification at greater rates than their White and Asian peers who do not face the same stigmas.

In a study that was similar to his 1995 work, Osborne (1997) again used data that were drawn from NELS on over 14,000 students to examine whether Hispanic students disidentified from school in a similar fashion to African Americans, whether African American girls disidentified at the same age as African American boys, and how these data compared with data from White students. In this study data were collected when students were in eighth grade and then again at two follow-up intervals that tracked them through high school. Using academic outcome variables such as self-reported grades and achievement test results as well as a self-view inventory, Osborne defined identification with school as “the extent to which academic outcomes affect self-esteem” (p. 731) and claimed that if students are disidentified they should have low correlations between self-esteem and academic outcomes. He further hypothesized that to assert disidentification had occurred, “a group must at some point show significant correlations between academics and self-esteem, and at some later time show non-significant correlations between the two constructs” (p. 731). Osborne found that these correlations did not change or increased for White female and male students, they increased for Hispanic females, and stayed the same or fluctuated depending on the subject area for Hispanic males. For African Americans the correlation decreased slightly in females but decreased significantly in males. Osborne concluded that although language issues may confound the picture there was no pervasive disidentification among Hispanic students and that African American females did not disidentify in the same way or time

frame as African American boys. He also concluded that out of all the groups of students studied; African American boys were the only ones to experience “serious and significant disidentification with academics” (p. 734). His results suggested that Steele’s theory was not equally true for different racial groups subjected to negative stereotypes.

Voelkl (1997) used the underpinnings of Steele’s theory in combination with Finn’s (1989) definition of identification to examine whether African American students were less identified with schools than their White peers. This longitudinal study used the results of achievement tests for over 1,300 African American and White students from fourth grade and seventh grade as well as classroom participation ratings by students’ eighth grade math and English teachers to look at achievement and participation as antecedents to academic identification. She also used questionnaires to determine students’ self-reported level of identification with school. Her results were intriguing in that she found White students had higher levels of achievement in both 4th and 7th grade and higher levels of participation in 8th grade than African American students and that both of these were associated with students’ reported levels of identification with school. However, she reported that even though African American students had lower levels of achievement and participation, they had self-reported higher levels of identification with school, seeing it as both useful and an important component of their overall self-definition. Voelkl concluded that in the case of the students in her study, African American did not have levels of disidentification from school that were higher than those of White students despite lower levels of achievement and participation.

Majors and Billson's Cool Pose Theory and the Empirical Literature

Stinson (2006) and Osborne (1999) both discuss the importance of Majors and Billson's (1992) cool pose theory as being an important sociocultural factor for some African American boys and their identification with school. Despite this, empirical literature that directly linked this theoretical perspective to identification with academics could not be located. There is, however, available literature (Davis, 2003; Oyserman, Brickman, Bybee, & Celious, 2006; Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2006) that approximates this connection as well as research (Fordham, 1996; Isom, 2007) that examines the perspectives of African American boys in terms of gender and schooling.

Although not empirical, Davis (2003) argues that masculine identity is one of four factors associated with African American boys' academic achievement and engagement in schooling. To make his case, he cites research that documents the feminine nature of early schooling experiences along with a lack of successful Black male role models in educational environments as both being instrumental in boys' perceptions and their subsequent connections or rejections of school.

Oyserman et al. (2006) examine markers of in-group belonging associated with physical characteristics and how these influence self-identity, peer relationships, academic success, and engagement. The authors hypothesized that for African American boys, the external marking of skin tone would serve as proof of their in-group status and provide protection from the pressure to act tough and reject school. Results from the study with just over 100 African American boys indicated that high school GPA was positively correlated with darker skin tone, which the authors posit allowed for the type of social acceptance that meant students did not have to spend time and energy enacting their racial identity in ways that coincide with cool pose behaviors.

Wood et al. (2007) examine gender differences in educational expectations claiming that the African American boys in their study – ages 6 to 16 – as well as their parents and teachers perceive boys as having characteristics that are not congruent with school success, such as acting lazy or violent or caring more about athletics than school. Using a sample that included approximately 750 students and their caregivers, the authors conclude that these negative views become internalized in the minds of the boys and the significant others in their lives and serve to decrease educational aspirations and expectations. The end result is that the thinking that pervades the cool pose theory serves as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy for African American boys in terms of academic success and identification with school.

Although not directly linked to identification with academics, Isom (2007) conducted a study on racialized gender identity to try to answer how “African American boys define ideas such as male, “Blackness,” African American male, and masculinity?” (p. 406) and what the implications of these definitions are for identity development, behavior, and schooling. In an effort to gain insights into children’s early conceptions of these constructs, she conducted participant observations and semi-structured interviews with 18 African American children in 5th, 6th, and 7th grade who attended an after-school program in a low-income community. In defining what it meant to be male, the majority of responses by boys centered on characteristics of physicality using such terms as “strong,” “rough,” “good in sports,” or “likes to fight” (p. 411). Isom also indicated that in terms of their peers, boys seemed to use relationships with other boys as an opportunity to demonstrate behaviors consistent with the cool pose such as humor, coolness, and physical strength. Interestingly, when the term Black was added

with boy and participants were asked to define this, Isom concluded that internalized negative constructions from dominant society such as ghetto and bad were revealed as prevalent responses. When asked what Black boys were like as students, descriptions included such terms as “bad,” “dumb,” “fooling around,” “don’t try hard” and “not paying attention” (p. 419). Isom also noted, however, that when describing themselves, boys tended not to use these same terms as often. She concluded that even at young ages African American boys seem to be caught up in images of themselves that are not of their own making.

The work of Fordham (1996) at Capital High, even though more closely associated with Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory and the idea of “acting White,” can also be used to examine the tenets of the cool pose theory. In reporting the ethnographic work that she conducted with 33 students at a high school in Washington, D.C., Fordham described in-depth interviews she had with high and low achieving African American boys. As was previously discussed, the high achieving boys rated gender as more significant to their definition of self than race and consistently talked of how they used stereotypical African American male gender behaviors to mask their school achievement. More specifically, because their academic success threatened their identity as Black males, the boys described engaging in behaviors that bolstered their masculinity such as talking about wealth, fame, power, athletics, and sexual conquests. Based on her work with lower achieving African American males, Fordham reported that this group of boys engaged in behaviors they considered as associated with being a “real man” such as drinking, doing drugs, participating in athletics, and having sex. She also noted that for these low achieving males, “their academic

underachievement appears to validate their identity as real men” (p. 299). Taken collectively, the descriptions Fordham provides of these African American males supports Majors and Billson’s (1992) general contention of the behavior scripts associated with their cool pose theory and how these function to create tensions and barriers for African American boys regarding academic success and identification with school.

Ogbu’s Cultural-Ecological Theory and the Empirical Literature

Ogbu’s (1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) cultural-ecological theory and Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) concept of “acting White” provide an explanation of the differences in school performance for Whites and African Americans that is based in historical and current structures of racial discrimination and the responses some Blacks have had to that discrimination. As with Steele’s (1992, 1997) theory of disidentification, cultural-ecological theory and acting White have been empirically examined by educational researchers with results that support and refute its basic tenets. This section of the literature review synthesizes various research efforts that endeavor to examine this issue as it relates to identification with school.

For the purposes of this review, eight studies will be used to examine how the educational literature supports Ogbu’s theory. Three of these studies look at how African Americans’ perceptions of the opportunity structure in society impact such issues as dropping out of school (Griffin, 2002; Richardson & Gerlach, 1980) and attitudes toward school (Mickelson, 1990). One study (Eccles et al., 2006) looks at day-to-day personal experiences of racial discrimination and how these are associated with changes in school motivation and engagement. It is important to note that this study by Eccles and her colleagues, although providing general support, also produces mixed

results regarding basic tenets of Ogbu's theory. In addition, four studies describe empirical literature that refutes claims represented by Ogbu's theory. One study by Johnson et al. (2001) specifically challenges the ideas that some African American students are less engaged in school because they perceive fewer opportunities for future success and act in ways that are resistant to schooling. Another study by Tyson (2002) that was previously discussed will be reconsidered here because it contests the pervasive notion that African American students are negatively disposed to school success. Two other studies (O'Connor, 1997; Sanders, 1997) that refute concepts of Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory will be examined in the final section of this review, which is on individual agency. They are mentioned here because they serve the dual purpose of questioning Ogbu's theory as well as providing important information on how some individuals respond to discrimination in a way that demonstrates positive agency. A detailed review of these two studies will be included in the final section of this review.

In a study that was previously discussed, Griffin (2002) used the theoretical underpinnings of both Steele and Ogbu to examine dropping out of high school. Griffin claimed that if disidentification were occurring not only would stereotype threat be a factor but so would Ogbu's concept of cultural inversion. Cultural inversion involves the tendency of some involuntary minorities to develop oppositional frames of reference with regard to valuing and acting in a manner that is considered the purview of the dominant culture. Griffin hypothesized that because of this tendency academics would not serve as an important aspect of self-definition and therefore would not be a critical factor when considering whether to drop out of school. Results of his research on over 132,000 students across fourteen school districts indicated that indeed the relationship

between GPA and staying in school did vary across race with Blacks and Hispanics having lower GPAs and higher drop out rates.

Richardson and Gerlach (1980) also examined high school drop out rates to determine factors that contributed to Black students' decisions to leave school. Using data from a comprehensive study of Black students' drop out behaviors in Waco, Texas from 1974-1976, the authors examined a variety of measures including school records, surveys, interviews, IQ scores, achievement tests, and demographics. Like Griffin (2002), they found that the drop out rates were disproportionately higher for African Americans than for Whites. Moreover, further analysis indicated that a key factor associated with African American students who dropped out of school was that they had a "lower value for achievement compared with those blacks that remain in school" (p. 491). In support of Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory, the authors concluded that for Black students, the decision to drop out of school was significantly associated with their failure to view education as a way to improve their future opportunity structure.

Using a related premise regarding the discriminatory nature of the economic opportunity structure in society, Mickelson (1990) empirically explored the paradox that exists between the value African Americans place on education and their general continued failure to achieve academic outcomes that support this value. The foundation of Mickelson's research rests on her distinction between abstract and concrete attitudes. She defines abstract attitudes as those that "embody the Protestant ethic's promise of schooling as a vehicle for success and upward mobility" (p. 45) and contrasts this with concrete attitudes which reflect the day-to-day experiences of people's lived realities and includes their perceptions and understandings of how the

existing economic opportunity structures influence significant others. Mickelson used questionnaire data that examined general locus of control as well as measures of abstract and concrete attitudes for approximately 1,200 high school seniors. Results demonstrated that Blacks embrace the dominant ideology of the benefits of education at greater levels than do Whites, a finding that is consistent with other literature (MacLeod, 1995). In contrast, Mickelson found that the concrete attitudes of Blacks were more pessimistic than those of their White peers. She concluded that abstract attitudes have less of an impact on school performance than do concrete attitudes because it is the day-to-day lived experiences that provide a stronger context for children's achievement behaviors in school. Moreover, her research substantiates Ogbu's theory in terms of providing support for the idea that a discriminatory economic structure influences the identification and subsequent school achievement of African American students.

A study by Eccles et al. (2006) examined the relationship between experiences and expectations of racial discrimination among a group of over 600 African American students as they went through 7th and 8th grade. The authors hypothesized that students' day-to-day experiences of racial discrimination would send an implicit value message that school was not a place they belonged resulting in lower academic self-concept and motivation to be engaged in school. A secondary purpose of this research was to look at the extent to which this particular group of African American students seemed to be developing identities that were in opposition to schooling as proposed in Ogbu's theory. Data were drawn from a larger longitudinal study that included measures such as students' views on daily face-to-face racial discrimination, perceptions of future educational and job related racial discrimination, academic self-

concept, beliefs in the utility of school, personal importance placed on doing well in school, GPA, and estimations of potential future self. In support of Ogbu's theory, this study found that daily experiences of racial discrimination, especially if the experiences involved teachers, had a profound effect on students' self-concept and their beliefs in the value of school. In contrast, the authors also found that the anticipation of future discrimination effected participants in one of two ways. For some students it leads to increased motivation to engage in school and do well whereas for others it had the opposite effect. Finally, the authors found that the African American students in this study attached greater levels of importance to school achievement than did White students and that there was little evidence of a trend toward oppositional attitudes toward school engagement.

In a study that refutes tenets of Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory, Johnson et al. (2001) used data from over 10,000 students in grades 7-12 from an ongoing national study of adolescents to examine empirically whether academic engagement and school attachment differed in White, Hispanic, and African American students. The purpose of the research was to examine Ogbu's claim that a majority of African American and Hispanic students are less engaged in school because they perceive fewer returns in the future and they are resistant to structures in society that they see as imposed upon them by Whites. Much like Finn (1989), the authors defined attachment as an affective component associated with a student's sense of belonging in his/her school environment. They also defined engagement as broadly represented by behavior patterns that included being present at school, paying attention, and getting homework completed and turned in. The authors utilized self-reported data designed to measure

attachment and engagement in accordance with these definitions along with individual level variables such as race, gender, age, parents' level of education, and parental expectations for the student's level of education. Results demonstrated that African American students were less attached to school than both Hispanic and White students but that difference between the Hispanic and White students were not statistically significant. Paradoxically, and in contrast to Ogbu's theory, the authors also found that African American students were more engaged in school as defined by the self-reported measures of skipping school, paying attention in class, and completing homework.

Cited earlier in this review for its connections to Finn's (1989) definition of identification with academics, Tyson's (2002) research is also significant for its connections to Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory. Tyson used interviews and observational data for 56 African American students in third- and fourth-grade classrooms to examine Ogbu's claim that some African American students are "negatively disposed to school and achievement" (p.1159) and therefore are more likely to be disengaged from school. The author spent eight months observing one day per week in four different classrooms that were located in two schools. One of the schools was public and one was a Black, independent, Christian school. During this time, fieldnotes were collected that included conversations, classroom interactions, student actions, facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and demeanor. In addition, Tyson conducted interviews focused on students' daily experiences, attitudes toward school, learning, and achievement. Results contradicted the general notion that most African American students are not interested in school and doing well. Specifically, she concluded that students in these schools were excited, enthusiastic, proud, and cared

deeply about doing well in school. Tyson also concluded that there was no indication in these schools that students teased each other for doing well, a result that she suggests contradicts Fordham and Ogbu's notion of acting White.

Identification with Academics, Culture, and Individual Agency

A high percentage of the literature on identification with academics and African American children invokes the theoretical perspectives of Steele (1997), Ogbu (1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu and Simons, 1998), Majors and Billson (1992), and Fordham and Ogbu (1986). The detail of these theories and the empirical literature that supports or refutes them has been the main focus of this review thus far. Some educational researchers (Eccles et al., 2006; Gayles, 2005; Hall, 2007; Hemmings, 1996; McMillian, 2003; O'Connor, 1997; Sanders, 1997; Shujaa, 1994, 1995), however, contend that these theories present an overly pessimistic view of African Americans, are overwhelmingly preoccupied with explaining failure, deny the positive aspects of African American culture especially as these are related to school, and negate the idea that individuals have the ability to make choices about how they will react to existing societal structures of discrimination. In fact, these authors, and others (Boykin, Tyler, Hurley, & Bailey, 2005; Hebert, 1998; Howard, 2003; Hurley, Allen, & Boykin, 2009; Murrell, 2007; Polite & Davis, 1999; Tyler, Boykin, Miller, & Hurley, 2006) maintain that many African Americans are successful in their academic pursuits and readily identify with school.

Educational researchers have pursued several paradigms of thought related to recognizing the positive aspects of African American culture and its connections to schooling. One such paradigm is the concept of funds of knowledge (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Street, 2005). Originally examined in terms of studying literacy practices in the homes of Mexican students, funds of knowledge is built on the premise

of honoring students' home cultures as a way to connect learning to everyday lived reality and subsequently improve achievement outcomes. The strategy of tapping into students' funds of knowledge has also been utilized in literacy (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007) and writing (Street, 2005) instruction with African American students. The ideology behind funds of knowledge is further supported by the work of Shujaa (1994, 1995) who contends that in order for schooling to be more effective for African American children, educators need to critically question the prevailing ideology that frames school success in terms of a White, middle-class paradigm of thought. He contends that this ideology inherently looks at children who are culturally different as deficient. Instead, Shujaa posits that African Americans in general as well as educators specifically, must advocate for schools and the curriculum to reflect the needs and interests of African American children.

In a similar manner, culturally responsive pedagogy (Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) incorporates teaching and classroom management strategies that focus on building strong relationships and infusing aspects of the students' culture into the curriculum. Culturally responsive pedagogy is also premised on the idea that schools must recognize and honor the home culture that students bring into the classroom. For example, Hale (2001) speaks to the importance of using aspects of African American culture such as movement, verve, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, and oral tradition within the curriculum. In addition, she posits that African American children "learn best when their learning is oriented toward people rather than toward objects" (p.118) and as a result classroom activities that involve small groups of children interacting with each other and the

teacher are more effective than whole group instruction. This preference toward communalism in the classroom for African American students is reiterated in the work of Boykin et al. (2005), Hurley et al. (2009), and Tyler et al. (2006). Specifically, Hurley et al. (2009) suggest that incorporating such strategies as cooperative learning, which connects to the idea of communalism in African American culture, is significant because it provides “opportunities for such children to exercise existing competencies in the service of attaining new ones” (p. 125). The authors go on to add, “learning contexts that include salient cultural themes would be more likely to sustain and enhance students’ motivation to engage in required tasks than context characterized by less familiar themes” (p. 125).

Theoretically, using the concepts behind funds of knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogy would foster positive school experiences for African American students, increase student engagement, and subsequently have the potential to increase their identification with academics. Honoring the culture that African American students bring to the classroom sends the critical message that children do not need to leave who they are outside the doors of the school. More importantly, it serves to reframe an implicit message of deficiency to one of acceptance and provides a type of validation that can lead to overall improved school outcomes for African American children.

In addition to funds of knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogy, educational researchers have examined the ideas of resilience and individual agency as they are related to students who achieve academic success despite sociocultural structures that currently disadvantage them (Gayles, 2005; Hall, 2007; Hemmings,

1996; O'Connor 1997; Sanders, 1997). Within the context of how it will be examined here, academic resilience is defined as "achievement when such achievement is rare for those facing similar circumstances or within a similar sociocultural context" (Gayles, 2005, p. 250). Likewise, agency can be defined as the "ability to accommodate, reconfigure, or resist the available sociocultural discourse that surrounds African American males for them to effectively negotiate these discourses in their pursuit of success" (Stinson, 2006, p. 468). As a result of these definitions, agency is a necessary component of resilience with both contributing to the ability of African American males to successfully identify with academics.

Using the concepts of agency and resilience as a foundation, this section of the review will examine four studies that focus on the academic identities of African American students paying particular attention to factors the researchers claim help the students to be successful in their school endeavors. The studies include one by Howard (2003) that focuses on the voices of African American high school students in terms of their perceptions of what has influenced their academic identities and subsequent school behaviors and outcomes. A second study by Hebert (1998) will be considered because it uses a case study methodology to look at the experiences of two gifted African American high school males and the factors that have supported or hindered their academic achievement. The section will conclude with a review of two studies (O'Connor, 1997; Sanders, 1997) that examine successful African American students and how their levels of racial awareness have prompted school behaviors and outcomes that support identification with academics and are in direct opposition to Ogbu's theory.

Howard (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample of ten female and ten male African American urban high school students to give voice to the factors that students deemed as important for the development of their academic identities. Claiming that issues of identity are salient to concerns about alienation and resistance, Howard contends that examining factors that influence the construction of students' academic identities is also central to questions of identification with academics. Using a range of participants in terms of academic ability and success, Howard found that parents, teachers, and school counselors were significant influences on students' perceptions of academic experiences, their identities, and their potential for success and that these significant others impacted their engagement in school. For successful students, these external influences appeared to help them develop confidence in their ability to do well, whereas for less successful students the influences of these external groups was not favorable for their construction of a positive academic identity. Howard concluded that it was particularly important for adults to be aware of the ways they may impact students' perceptions of their abilities and thus support or hinder their sense of self and the type of agency they develop toward their academic pursuits.

Similarly, Hebert (1998) used data that were drawn from a study of 12 high-ability African American high school males to conduct a case study analysis of how the urban life experiences of two participants influenced their academic achievement. One student, Wallace, was successful in school as well as the extracurricular activities he participated in. The second student, John, despite being gifted, struggled in school and did not participate in any extra activities. For both students it appeared as though the key influence on their academic identities was the support system that surrounded

them. Not surprising, Wallace's strong sense of self and subsequent positive agency was cultivated through the support of parents, extended family members, teachers, administrators, and coaches. John, on the other hand, did not have the same type of supportive home environment, and his school experiences were highlighted by inappropriate counseling for his ability level and a curriculum that did not match his learning style. As a result, he struggled to be successful in school, disliked being there, and turned to the negative environment around him for a sense of excitement and well-being. In Wallace's case, Hebert also found that a positive sense of racial identity fostered through his many multicultural experiences was important to his motivation for doing well in school. Hebert concluded that Wallace's support systems, along with his positive racial identity helped to foster an affirming academic identity and provided him with the tools to negotiate the structures in society that were stacked against him. In John's case, Hebert did not find the same development of a positive racial identity. Hebert concluded that because John was in an environment that did not value and support his academic endeavors, he was not able to develop the sense of self that fostered a positive academic identity or the ability to negotiate the structures in society that were working against him.

In a study that directly challenged Ogbu's contention that African Americans have responded to racial and economic discrimination by adopting behaviors that lead to disidentification from school, Sanders (1997) used interview data to explore factors that influenced the development of an achievement ethos among 28 eighth grade African American students in an urban school district in the Southeast. In her analysis, one salient theme that emerged was the students' awareness of racism and racial

discrimination. Sanders categorized the 28 students as being at one of three different levels of awareness but focused the majority of her discussion on ten students who fell into the high-awareness category. She explained that these students were mainly high achievers, they had positive personal efficacy, and that they were able to articulate a strong awareness of racism as well as the challenges it presented to their lives. Sanders further claimed that for these particular students the awareness served to increase their motivation and academic efforts. She also pointed out that a theme associated with these students was they predominantly came from families who socialized their children in a way that recognized the inherent racism in society and supported constructive ways to respond to it. For example, when quoting Patricia, a 12-year old student, Sanders used an example of how her parents had started an advertising agency and faced discrimination because they were Black. Through conversations with her mother, Patricia stated, "in order to reach your goals, you have to make decisions about how hard you are going to work and what you will and will not do. I have made my decision and it gives me confidence" (p. 90). Sanders found that the majority of these high-awareness students were also high achieving. Consequently, in contrast to the conclusions drawn by Ogbu, he concluded that an understanding of racism and discrimination, for some students, may lead to greater academic effort.

In a study about dispositions toward collective struggle and educational resilience, O'Connor (1997) highlights six students who were part of a larger research project that examined 46 low-income, African American high school students for their conceptions about the opportunity structure in America, their future aspirations, and their subsequent chances for making it. As a point for comparison, O'Connor used

Ogbu's theoretical contention regarding the discriminatory nature of the job and economic structures that exist in society and his claim that the resulting tendency is for African Americans to develop a collective oppositional identity that is manifested in resistance and disidentification from schooling. It was O'Connor's intention to study the dispositions of these six students because they exhibited a high awareness of the structural constraints that limited their social and economic mobility in society while also exhibiting success in school. Using structured open-ended interviews as the primary source of data, O'Connor found that these students had commonalities that allowed them to maintain a sense of agency, and subsequent resilience, in imagining that "the status attainment system, though not meritocratic, was permeable" (p. 616). Like the students in Sanders' (1997) study, these youth had significant others in their lives who served as both sources of support and role models to convey strategies for negotiating existing inequitable structures. The socialization process these students had been exposed to demonstrated the struggle against race, class, and gender discrimination could and should be resisted through individual and collective efforts. O'Connor provides numerous examples where the students talked about parents, teachers, siblings, or other people important in their lives who modeled the importance of having a voice or taking a stand. In contrast to Ogbu's claims that existing societal structures render Blacks as hopelessly stuck in a position of subordination, O'Connor found that these youth demonstrated attitudes and actions that showed discriminatory ideologies do not necessarily predispose them to think and act in ways determined by their skin color.

Conclusion

Statistical information currently available on the status of school success for African American boys presents a picture filled with negative outcomes. In an effort to focus on a key aspect of this problem, the review of literature presented here has demonstrated that issues connected to identification with academics such as engagement, attitudes, and academic identity are all associated with important school outcomes for African American boys. To further understand prevailing ideas regarding identification with school, the conceptual perspectives associated with Steele's theory of disidentification, Majors and Billson's cool pose theory, and Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory have been examined along with research that serves to support and refute the tenets of these theoretical perspectives. The goal of examining this body of literature has been to provide a detailed look at prevalent paradigms of thought on why and how African American boys have continued to face imminent failure in our current educational system. To present a comprehensive picture and provide a vision that is not wholly negative, literature is also examined that demonstrates the development of agency and resilience that leads to positive identification and success for African American students in school. This body of literature is significant because it supports the idea that not all African Americans engage the sociocultural limitations of discrimination in a way that leads to academic disidentification and school failure. Although some conflicting results presented throughout this review complicate an overall picture of identification with academics, in the end, they do not diminish the value of continuing to pursue a research agenda that adds to the knowledge base on how educators can use the concept of identification with academics as an important

avenue for understanding how to successfully work toward reversing the negative trends in school outcomes for African American boys.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Given the wealth of literature (Davis, 2003; Graybill, 1997; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Levin, 2008; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2008) that demonstrates the struggles many African American boys face in our current education system, the purpose of this study was to look at early school experiences of fourth-grade African American boys attending a low socioeconomic status (SES) elementary school and provide a snapshot of their emerging identification with academics. More specifically, this study investigated daily school experiences perceived as important by these African American boys, their attitudes toward academics, and their patterns of school participation. An understanding of how young African American boys construct personal meaning of their school experiences may suggest opportunities for restructuring those experiences with the potential of helping boys connect more positively to academics and school.

An important element of this research was to focus on the words of the boys. Davis (2003) writes, “schools are critical sites for young Black males as they make meaning of who they are, what they are supposed to do, and how others perceive them” (p. 520). He adds, however, that within educational research, “little attention is given to how young Black males construct personal meaning of education” (p.525). And although Davis provides data that indicates the trend in Black male disengagement begins to develop in the early years of schooling, the literature that focuses on the voices of African American boys (Fordham, 1996; Hebert, 1998; Howard, 2003; Johnson, et al. 2001; Sanders, 1997) almost exclusively highlights boys who are in

middle and high school. With this in mind, the current study honors the voices of younger African American boys and adds an important element that is missing in the literature.

In an effort to depict the perspectives of African American boys and understand how their lived experiences in school connect to their identification with academics, this project utilized qualitative methodology. Qualitative research methods such as observations and interviews provided the opportunity to better understand the meanings being constructed by the boys as they engaged in their day-to-day life in school (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Specifically, observations afforded the opportunity to examine the experiences of the boys within their natural school environment, and interviews provided information on each boy's unique perspective (Hatch, 2002). Together these methods supplied the rich data necessary to describe the experiences that were meaningful to the boys and contributed to a better understanding of how these experiences were connected to an emerging identification with academics for each boy.

The remainder of this chapter presents a detailed description of the research methods. An explanation of the theoretical framework that undergirds the research process follows the research questions. After that, I describe the setting for this research, provide details on the participants and their selection, and give an overview of the role of the researcher. Next, I provide details on the data collection and analysis methods that were used. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness and limitations inherent in this research.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to look into the early school experiences of six elementary aged African American boys in order to examine their emerging

identification with academics. With this goal in mind, one main question and three sub-questions were addressed: How did the boys' daily school experiences connect to their emerging identification with academics? Sub-questions: 1) What experiences during the school day were important to the boys and why? 2) What attitudes toward academics were each of these African American boys developing? 3) What patterns of participation did each boy exhibit during daily lessons and activities?

Theoretical Framework

A basic principle underlying this research project is the idea that there is value in working to understand the emerging identification with academics of younger African American boys and that this identification is connected to their day-to-day school experiences. This core premise is rooted in the idea that what the boys have to tell us is important to an overall understanding of the types of pedagogy that will be effective in meeting their learning needs. The desire to develop an understanding of the boys' perceptions provided the basis for the epistemology, theoretical perspective, data collection methods, and analysis that was utilized in the research. This section of the chapter provides a description of how these elements fit together to form a rationale behind the decisions that were made in this research project.

The epistemological framework that undergirds this research project is constructivism based in a constructionist position (Crotty, 1998). I say this because the underlying idea of constructivism, that people individually come to understand their lives through making meaning of their experiences and that those meanings are mediated by the lens through which they look at the world (Hatch, 2002), cannot be invoked without also acknowledging the fundamental premise of constructionism, that is "all reality, as meaningful reality, is socially constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 54).

Support in the literature for positioning this research as constructivist with an underlying constructionist position comes from both Hatch (2002) and Crotty (1998). Hatch (2002) writes that a constructivist epistemology “argues that multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (p. 15). Likewise, Crotty (1998) points out that the term constructivism is appropriate for “epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (p. 58). Because it was the intention of this research to focus on African American boys’ school experiences and develop an understanding of their individual thoughts and perceptions, it was imperative to honor the unique perspective and individual agency that each boy employed in both interpreting and then acting on his experiences. As an example, two boys in the same classroom may have completely different reactions to a math lesson – one may become excited and choose to fully engage in the lesson whereas the other may not be excited and choose to disengage from the lesson. In this case it is important to understand the unique reaction each boy had to the lesson and a constructivist epistemology honors that difference.

The limitation to classifying this research as constructivist without simultaneously recognizing the constructionist position is that individual agency is mediated by the social structures one has available to make his/her interpretations. Crotty (1998) elaborates on the fragile distinction between constructivism and constructionism when he writes:

Constructivism describes the individual human subject engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them. Constructionism, to the contrary, denies that this is what actually happens, at least in the first instance. Instead, each of us is introduced directly to a whole world of meaning....these meanings we are

taught and we learn in a complex and subtle process of enculturation. They establish a tight grip on us and, by and large, shape our thinking and behaviour throughout our lives. (p. 79)

Within the context of this research, recognizing the interpretations and meanings made by each of the African American boys without also recognizing the significance of the cultural lens through which the interpretations and meanings were made is a false separation. One cannot exist without the other, and thus the research was framed as constructivism that was based in a constructionist position.

Extending the epistemological foundation of this research provided a point of connection for other methodological considerations that formed the core of this study. Because the research purpose was to examine the school experiences of six African American boys and understand how those experiences were reflective of the boys' identification with academics, the theoretical perspective of this research can be described as interpretivist. As a philosophical stance, interpretivism provided a context for this study because it is primarily concerned with *Verstehen* or understanding (Crotty, 1998). Additionally, the effort to understand the boys' experiences was rooted in symbolic interactionism. As an offshoot of interpretivism, symbolic interactionism is concerned with exploring basic understanding within the context of culture. Crotty (1998) cites the work of Blumer (1969) in elaborating on the key ideas that underlie a symbolic interactionist position when he writes that its assumptions include:

- that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them;
- that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;
- that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 72)

This stance intimately links the individual to the socially constructed world within which he/she exists and not only connects to the epistemological foundation of this research project but also supports the intention of understanding the meaning each boy made of his school experiences.

With these epistemological and theoretical foundations underlying the study, an ethnographic inquiry methodology was the logical choice for data collection. As a form of qualitative inquiry, ethnography “seeks to describe culture or parts of culture from the point of view of cultural insiders” (Hatch, 2002, p. 21). It was particularly relevant in this study of the everyday school experiences of African American boys as told from their unique perspectives. Consequently, the data collection methods included participant observation and informant interviewing. Data were analyzed as comparative case studies using typological analysis for each individual case. Hatch (2002) defines case studies as a type of qualitative research that “investigates a contextualized contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomenon within specified boundaries” (p. 30). In this instance the unit of analysis that binds the study is each individual participant – his school experiences, his perceptions of those experiences, his ensuing attitudes toward academics, and his patterns of participation. Further detail regarding both data collection and analysis methods are provided in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Participant Selection

African American Boys Living in Poverty

As has been noted previously, numerous studies (Davis, 2003; Garibaldi, 1992; Graybill, 1997; Griffin, 2002; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Levin, 2008; Monroe, 2005; Osborne, 1999) document the statistics on African American boys and

schooling that reflect a dismal picture. Collectively and repeatedly, this literature shows that many African American boys achieve less, are referred for special education at higher rates, have higher rates of grade retention, are suspended and expelled more often, and drop out of school at rates higher than their peers. Additionally, in urban areas where the lives of many African American boys are also confounded by poverty, the statistical information suggests even greater struggles for school success (Garibaldi, 1992; Osborne, 1999). For example, in a large urban school district in the southern part of the U.S. Garibaldi (1992) found “African American males accounted for 58% of the non-promotions, 65% of the suspensions, 80% of the expulsions, and 45% of the drop outs – even though these young men represented only 43% of the school population” (p. 5). The literature on the poor academic outcomes for African American boys, particularly those living in poverty, formed the basis for the decision to examine more closely this group of children. As a future teacher educator, it is my hope that this research project will provide insight into ways practicing and future teachers might work to try to change these negative trends.

4th Grade African American Boys

As indicated earlier, much of the literature on African American boys' identification with academics has focused on students who are of middle and high school age (Fordham, 1996; Griffin, 2002; Hebert, 1998; Howard, 2003; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Johnson et al., 2001; Mickelson, 1990; Rodriguez, Jones, Pang, & Park, 2004; Richardson & Gerlach, 1980; Sanders, 1997). This trend, although essential for its own purpose, has not recognized the important contribution looking at the experiences of younger boys can offer. While the research base on younger children and identification with academics is not large (Davis, 2003; Garibaldi, 1992; Isom, 2007; Osborne, 1999;

Tyson, 2002; Valeski & Stipek, 2001), it provides support for further examining this phenomenon among younger children. For example, in a study on motivating African American males to succeed in schools, Garibaldi (1992) uses statistical information on the percentage of boys who are in top reading and math groups to demonstrate a dramatic drop in the representation of African American males in these groups between grades four and six. In a similar vein, Davis (2003) refers to research that demonstrates a decline in test scores for boys beginning in the fourth grade. He writes, “the percentage of Black males in the top reading group dropped from 23% in Grades 1 and 4 to 12% in Grade 6” (p. 526). With data such as this in mind, Garibaldi (1992) concluded that, “A national decline in performance...for African American students around grade four is clearly evident” (p. 6), and he further suggested that future research efforts were needed to identify critical factors connected to this trend. As a result, despite the fact that identification with academics has traditionally been looked at from the perspective of high school age youth, the drop in achievement by African American boys at younger ages indicates a need for research efforts to focus on this age group.

Rationale

The rationale behind selecting the participants for this research was based in the intent to focus on elementary aged African American boys living in poverty. Because these attributes define a very specific population, the strategy used for participant selection was homogenous sampling, which Glesne (1999) and Hatch (2002) define as utilizing participants who share common experiences and characteristics with the goal of studying the subgroup in depth. Moreover, the common experiences that the boys shared were further reinforced by the fact that they attended the same elementary

school. Finally, it is important to note that, typical of qualitative research, the principles behind selecting the participants were embedded in purposely selecting individuals who provided “information-rich cases” (Glesne, 1999, p. 29) and therefore a final consideration in selecting boys to participate was their willingness to engage in conversation with adults. This made the overall criteria for participation as follows:

- African American boy
- Elementary age – specifically, fourth grade
- Currently living in poverty as defined by qualifying for free lunch
- Attending this particular school
- Willing to engage in conversations with adults

Selecting this homogenous sample of boys provided the opportunity to examine and describe in depth their experiences, their perceptions of their experiences, and their attitudes toward academics.

In an effort to recruit specific boys for participation in the study, teachers from the fourth grade in a local elementary school that serves low socioeconomic (SES) students, Morrison Elementary, were consulted for recommendations. Participation was based on the criteria listed above – African American, boy, fourth grade, eligible for free lunch status attending this particular school – and the final criterion based on a teacher recommendation that a potential participant was likely to engage in conversations about his school experiences with an adult. After the teachers made recommendations, parents/guardians were contacted to seek consent for the participation of each boy. This process involved a full explanation of the purpose of the research, the procedures to be used in collecting data, and the commitment required of each boy. After parental permission was secured, each boy was invited to participate in the study. Upon agreement to participate, an informed consent was signed by the parents/guardians, the

boy, and the researcher. The family was then given a copy for their records and the researcher collected the signed copy.

Individual Participants

A short description of the six boys who participated in this research project is provided below. As was previously noted the boys were chosen to participate in this study because they were a homogeneous group of young, African American boys growing up in poverty. As a result, this research makes the assumption that the boys reflect attributes that are similar to the larger population of African American children in terms of their cultural characteristics and preferences, and that they necessarily bring these with them when they walk into the classroom. These specific characteristics were developed in Chapter 2 and include things such as a penchant for verve, communalism, affect, and learning activities that involve small group work (Hale, 2001). It should also be noted, however, that despite their homogeneous nature the boys were individuals who had their own unique life circumstances. One of the tensions in this research was the dynamic created by attempting to simultaneously depict the boys as reflective of a larger group while preserving their individual characteristics.

Thomas

Thomas was a ten year old with a quiet yet inquisitive personality. He had a slight build, was of average height, dressed in clothes that were much bigger than his small frame, and wore his hair in a short, cropped fashion. Even though he had a quiet and reserved demeanor when he was in school, in a one-on-one setting Thomas was especially talkative and engaged easily in conversation with adults. During interviews he was very curious and imaginative as he frequently asked questions, told stories, or gave long explanations of something he was thinking.

Steven

Steven was a ten year old with an easy smile and a personality that was high energy and fun loving. He was of average height and had short, cropped hair. He had a positive attitude, was vocal in school and social settings, and a leader among his peers. During interviews he liked to talk about his abilities in school and athletics. In both of these areas he displayed confidence in a way that coincided with his positive and fun loving personality. Steven's words and behaviors displayed a love of learning and demonstrated a strong sense of respect for school and his teachers.

Christopher

Christopher was a ten year old with a personality that was mostly quiet. He was of average height and build, dressed in shorts and logo tee shirts, and wore his hair in a medium length Afro style. While he had a quiet demeanor around his peers, Christopher happily engaged in conversation with adults, enjoyed one-on-one attention, and was quick to flash a smile that revealed big dimples. During interviews he gladly answered and asked questions, although many of his responses were brief and he did not go into a lot of detail or provide long explanations.

Gregg

Gregg was a ten year old who had a lot of confidence and enjoyed trying to get his fellow classmates to laugh. He had a stocky build, was of average height, dressed in shorts and tee shirts, and wore his hair in a very short, almost shaved fashion. Initially, in a one-on-one setting Gregg did not engage in long conversations or offer detailed answers to questions. However, as the data collection process moved along he became more talkative and shared answers that provided greater detail. Gregg was

typically impatient and wanted to do everything, including interviews, as fast as he possibly could.

Lance

Lance was a ten year old who was very excitable, inquisitive, and sensitive. He had a slender build, was of average height, dressed in attire such as shorts and tee shirts, and wore his hair in a short, cropped fashion. In a one-on-one setting, Lance easily engaged in conversation, yet struggled to find ways to talk about his daily experiences in a positive manner. Oftentimes, he had difficulty “fitting in” with his peers and as a result was left with negative perceptions about events that occurred during the school day.

Samuel

Samuel was a ten year old who was smart, athletic, popular, and a leader among the fourth grade boys. He had a slight build, was of average height, dressed in fashionable shorts and shirts, and wore his hair in a short, cropped fashion. In a one-on-one setting Samuel easily engaged in long conversations about school, sports, and his future plans that included college, professional football, owning a bank, working on a SWAT team, and opening a recreation center for kids. Many of the other students as well as the teachers looked to Samuel as a positive example.

School Setting

The school where this research took place, Morrison Elementary, was located in the Southeast part of the U.S. in a district with 25 elementary schools that serve approximately 13,300 students in grades K-5 (www.fldoe.org). In 2006-07 the percentage of students across the district in grades K-12 who were African American was approximately 37%. In that same year, 51% of the K-12 students in the district

received free or reduced price lunch. One other statistical point of note was that in 2006-2007 just over 50% of the K-12 schools in this district that participated in the statewide testing program received a score of an A.

In comparison, Morrison Elementary served approximately 450 students in grades PK-5 during the 2006-2007 academic year (www.schooldatairect.org). During that same year, just over 93% of the children attending this school were African American and 79% received free and reduced lunch, both numbers well above the district percentages. As a participant in the statewide testing program, in 2006-2007 Morrison received a grade of D with just fewer than 38% of its students achieving proficiency in reading and 33% achieving proficiency in math. After the 2006-2007 academic year, Morrison was labeled as being in its fifth year of needing improvement. It should be noted that during the 2007-2008 academic year the school grade on the statewide test improved to a C.

The demographic data for Morrison Elementary readily connected with the homogeneous sampling criteria to be used in this study; that is, the boys attending this school were predominantly African American and a large percentage of them came from poverty. In addition to connecting with the sampling strategies, the data from this school on statewide testing results linked with larger national trends in underachievement for African American boys. Although it was not the specific intention to focus only on boys who were struggling academically in this study, it is important to note that this trend of underachievement, at least statistically, provided a point of connection between this school and other schools that serve similar populations of students.

Role of the Researcher

Going into this project it was important to describe and reflect on my role as the principal investigator in this research. Central to understanding this role is acknowledging the existing relationship I have with the school, its teachers, and its students. I worked in this school as a doctoral research or teaching assistant for three years. At the level of the whole school, I conducted workshops and surveys, assisted teachers doing inquiry projects, and collected whole school data on instructional practices. I developed working relationships with the fourth-grade teachers through supervising student teaching interns in their classrooms and through guiding their efforts on teacher inquiry projects. Finally, I developed casual relationships with the children simply by being around the building and in classrooms. It is also important to acknowledge that one of the reasons this particular school site was chosen to conduct my research was that the students were use to seeing me around the building and in their classrooms. It was my hope that this would help my research efforts because the children did not see me as a distraction from their day-to-day routines. More important, I also hoped that my familiarity around the building would help the boys in the study feel comfortable developing the type of relationship with me that promoted their open and honest communication.

As the principal investigator it is imperative that I also understand my own positionality and how it influenced this research. I came into this project as a White, middle class, lesbian female understanding that these lenses, necessarily make my connection to African American, young boys living in poverty tenuous. Despite the fact that we seem to be worlds apart, it is important to articulate how my interests in pursuing this particular research are rooted in my personal points of connection to

difference as well as my experiences supervising student teaching interns in high poverty contexts during my doctoral studies.

Growing up in the Northeast in a large family with parents who divorced when I was relatively young gave me a context for understanding poverty. I lived with my mother, who worked in a factory and struggled to get from paycheck to paycheck to meet our financial needs. During this time, there were many instances where we had to make financial choices that meant going without something I might have wanted to buy or do when I was a teenager. Later, when I went on to college – a privilege in and of itself – I worked two or three jobs to be able to take care of my financial needs and not have to borrow money from my mother. I understand that my life circumstances are rooted more in situational poverty and looking at the generational poverty that many children face today may not be a fair comparison. However, I do think it gives me a context from which to understand the lives of the boys in my study that I would not have had if my life had been different.

Another important part of who I am that leads me to be interested in this research project is my sexual orientation. Inherently, as I was growing up I understood that there was something that made me different from other people. When I realized in my early twenties that I was a lesbian, I had a framework from which to understand that difference. And although it provided me with a way to understand, it did not make living as someone who was different any easier. What I mean by this is that our culture is not very accepting of those who are different and despite the fact that I am comfortable with my sexual orientation, there are those who look down on me for it. It puts me in a place of vulnerability to discrimination and the risk of not being accepted. I think, however,

that it also puts me in a place of understanding difference in a way that focuses my personal and professional life on issues of social justice and has helped to bring me to this particular research project. I am intensely committed to looking at issues where underlying structures of discrimination favor some while hindering others. I do not want to say that my sexual orientation gives me the knowledge of what it is like to live in our society as a person of color; that would minimize a reality that I cannot begin to fully understand. My point is that I do understand what it is like to be in a position of the other, it is part of my everyday, and it influences how I look at everything in life including this research project.

Finally, I believe the experiences I had supervising student teachers in high poverty contexts are an important piece to understanding the subjectivities I bring to this research. For four years I watched as various African American boys fell into a cycle of struggling academically and behaviorally. In some cases I saw this cycle lead only to greater and greater negative consequences and a subsequent checking out of school by the boys. It was my hope that despite the fact that my life is very different from the lives of these boys, I could give legitimacy to their voices and develop the type of understandings that would help me to work toward changing these negative outcomes.

Data Collection

This section of the chapter provides a more detailed description of the data collection methods used in this research project. Initially, a rationale and the procedures used for observations of the boys are outlined. After this, justification of the purpose and procedures used during interviews will be provided.

Observations

Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) define participant observation as a data collection method in which the “researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people” (p. 1). They say that the goal of observations is to move beyond a cognitive understanding of the participants to develop a better sense of the perspective of those being studied. Because one of the main goals of this research is to understand the school experiences of African American boys from their own perspectives, observations were used as one primary method of collecting data.

Each boy was observed for a total of three mornings, three afternoons, and one full Wednesday. This allowed me to observe each boy over a greater number of days and provided a large range of experiences. The observations for each boy occurred within the structure of a typical school day, which ran from 7:45am until 1:45pm. Morning observations included reading instruction and lasted from 9:15am until 10:45am, which was the designated time that the 4th grade class went to lunch. Afternoon observations included math and writing instruction and lasted from 11:15am until 1:45pm. Wednesday was an early release day and the students were in school from 7:45am to 12:30pm. Each boy was observed on one Wednesday from 9:15am to 12:30pm during which time reading and abbreviated versions of math and writing took place. Using this schedule to observe each boy on three mornings, three afternoons, and one Wednesday resulted in just over 15 hours of observation time.

During observations, each boy was shadowed in an unobtrusive way with the intent of capturing events that occurred naturally in his day-to-day school experiences (Hatch, 2002). Recognizing that the mere presence of a researcher can be intrusive, I maintained a moderate level of participation; meaning I was present and identifiable as

the researcher, but I did not actively participate in events or interact with the students and teachers, except occasionally, during the observation periods (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Instead, the goal was to take detailed notes on how each boy was participating and how he reacted to his experiences throughout the observation. When doing this, a descriptive account was written for what was happening, what the boy was saying, and what he was doing (Hatch, 2002). In addition, the affect displayed by each boy was focused on by taking notes of occurrences that lead to manifestations of positive affect, negative affect, or no affect. Of importance were experiences that appeared to lead to pride, frustration, increased attentiveness, or shutting down on the part of each boy. For example, I paid particular attention if an instance of praise from the teacher led to a smile and increased attentiveness by the boy during a lesson. This allowed me to focus on what appeared to matter to each boy and it provided me with a context for follow-up interview questions.

Logistically, handwritten, raw, field notes were taken with points of particular importance from each boy's specific experiences highlighted for follow-up in post-observation interviews. Prior to the interviews, the raw field notes were reread to target key points from the observations that were discussed in the post-observation interviews. Finally, after leaving each observation, as soon as possible, raw field notes were transcribed into research protocols that expanded in greater detail what was observed during a specific observation period (Hatch, 2002).

Interviews

Hatch (2002) calls interviews "special kinds of conversations" (p. 91) that are used for the purpose of further exploring participants' experiences and their interpretations of those experiences. Because a main objective of this research was to

examine the school experiences of African American boys and the resulting connections between those experiences and their attitudes toward schooling, the second source of data collection for this research was interviews.

Each boy was interviewed a total of nine times. Two of these interviews occurred prior to the start of observations with the purpose of building rapport and coming to better understand each boy's current perceptions of his life in and out of school. These initial interviews lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes each for a total of 30-40 minutes of interview time. The other seven interviews were conducted after each individual observation with the purpose of developing what Hatch (2002) calls "here and now constructions" (p. 91) or more detailed explanations of the events, activities, motivations, and feelings behind both typical and atypical incidents that occurred throughout the school day. Post-observation interviews lasted approximately 15-25 minutes. Over the course of the seven observation episodes this meant that each boy was interviewed for 105-175 minutes. Combining the initial interviews and the post-observation interviews resulted in two and a half to three and a half hours of total interview time for each boy.

In the initial phase of data collection, each boy took part in two interviews. The purpose of the first interview was to build rapport and get to know each individual boy. A complete list of the questions that were used can be found in Appendix A. The second interview was focused on developing a better understanding of each boy's attitudes toward school. Questions explored such issues as what he liked or disliked about school, his perceptions of his relationship with the teachers, how he learned best, how he defined school success, and how he viewed himself within that vision of

success. This interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. The questions used for this interview can be found in Appendix A. Both of these formal interviews were semi-structured, meaning that the questions were designed as a guide for the interview session but they were open-ended which allowed the boys to express their thoughts as well as give me the opportunity to probe their thinking further or explore specific areas in greater detail (Berg, 2004).

For the remaining interviews, information gathered during the observation process was used as a basis for developing a more detailed understanding of the events, activities, motivations, and feelings connected to each boy's daily school experiences. The general intent of these interviews was to clarify various experiences that were observed, to get the boy's reactions and feelings about those experiences, and to inquire about resulting behaviors. Because of concern over taking undue time away from the boys' participation in routinely scheduled activities, post-observation interviews were conducted either during lunch or after school and lasted approximately 15-25 minutes.

In an effort to elicit the type of rich data and understanding necessary to answer the research questions, interviews highlighted explicit aspects of an observation. Specifically, throughout the course of the seven interviews, questions centered on observed incidents of positive, negative, or no affect as well as incidents that stood out to the boy as being important to discuss. The reason behind this approach was to gain a detailed understanding of the boys' perceptions across experiences that prompted a range of reactions. Because the exact content for these questions depended on what was observed prior to the interviews, the examples provided were used as a guide with

the intent of probing the boys' responses for further detail. Post-observation interview questions can be found in Appendix A. It is important to note that all interviews occurred within the structure of the school day, in a way that was the least disruptive of the boy's daily schedule and in a place that was deemed appropriate and private by the classroom teachers.

Data Analysis

With the intent of focusing on the experiences of each individual boy, his attitudes, his patterns of participation, and how these connected to an emerging identification with academics, the data were analyzed as case studies using procedures aligned with Hatch's (2002) process of typological analysis. This section of the chapter outlines in further detail the rationale behind calling this research case studies and the use of Hatch's typological analysis. Also provided is a basic summary of the steps that were taken to complete an analysis of the data.

This research was categorized as case study because the aim was to examine the "contextualized contemporary...phenomenon" (Hatch, 2002, p. 30) of identification with academics from the perspective of young African American boys living in poverty. Defining the unit of analysis as each individual boy created a specific boundary of investigation, which is the qualifying characteristic of case studies (Hatch, 2002). The ultimate goal of data analysis was to be able to make connections between each boy's experiences, attitudes, patterns of participation, and his emerging identification with academics. To do this, the data had to be analyzed from the perspective of each individual boy. This is not to say that comparisons were not made across cases, but by virtue of the chosen data collection strategies along with the bounded unit of investigation, the research was categorized within the paradigm of case study.

The specific procedures for analyzing the data followed a process of typological analysis as outlined by Hatch (2002). This process was chosen because it provided a systematic way to handle the large amount of data that resulted from observations and interviews. Conducting the analysis in this systematic way provided assurance that the results were representative of each boy's experiences and perspectives. Specifically, this form of data analysis helped to answer the three sub research questions regarding important school experiences, attitudes toward academics, and patterns of participation for each boy. Using the process of typological analysis also allowed me to be confident that the theorizing that I needed to answer the overarching research question about the boys' emerging identification with academics was firmly rooted in and supported by the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The premise underlying typological analysis is to start by "dividing the overall data set into categories or groups based on predetermined typologies" (Hatch, 2002, p. 152). This type of data analysis was deemed appropriate because I was looking to specifically examine school experiences that were important to each boy, his attitudes toward academics, and his patterns of participation. As a result of this objective, interview and observation data were initially analyzed with the following typologies in mind: attitudes toward academics, important school experiences, displays of engaged behaviors, displays of disengaged behaviors, and a miscellaneous category that included evidence of tenuous engagement or times when a boy's patterns of participation vacillated between engagement and disengagement. As will be outlined below, after the initial identification of typologies, data analysis followed an inductive

process designed to “search for patterns of meaning...so that general statements about phenomena under investigation” (p. 161) could be made.

It is important to note that engaged behaviors were defined as actions during lessons and activities that were characterized by raising a hand to answer questions, answering questions, calling out answers, participating in some type of choral reply activity, actively watching or following the teacher during times of instruction or explanation of directions, engaging in some type of individual work such as reading or completing math problems, or participating in group or partner work. Disengaged behaviors were defined as times when a boy was engaged in actions that were not associated with the ongoing lesson such as talking, staring off for an extended period of time, misbehaving with other students, playing with items not connected to the lesson, or shutting down.

The next step in the analysis process was to read the data set for each boy and mark the places where there was evidence related to one typology. For example, I read the entire set of interview transcripts and observation notes for Samuel and highlighted data that represented talk associated with his attitudes toward school, whether positive or negative. After this, I read the data again and highlighted for another typology such as behaviors that reflected engagement. I continued the pattern of reading and highlighting the data for each typology mentioned above. Ultimately, I cut and pasted examples of evidence from the data set that reflected each typology into five new documents; however, I also made sure to maintain the integrity of the original document so I had a detailed account for the overall context of the data set.

In accordance with the steps outlined by Hatch (2002), the next phase of analysis involved reading each typology and coding data pieces for the main theme. For example, the following transcripts from an interview with Samuel reflect evidence that was included in the attitudes typology:

Vicki: What are your thoughts about “Drop in the Bucket”? About doing it everyday?

Samuel: You don’t, we don’t need to do drop in the bucket.

Vicki: Why not?

Samuel: It don’t do nothin’, all it do is take up time for her to get situated.

Vicki: So you don’t think you learn anything from “Drop in the Bucket”?

Samuel: No, no you don’t.

Vicki: So cuz you, have you been doing it all year?

Samuel: (In a drawn out tone) All year. Tired, same old stuff. (Post Observation Interview #3)

The main idea in this passage was coded as a negative attitude where Samuel felt as if “Drop in the Bucket” was boring and a waste of time. Each typology was read and coded in this manner.

Next, I made a series of summary sentences for each typology. The idea behind this step was to record and group the patterns, themes, and relationships that were becoming evident in the data. In Samuel’s data an example of a summary sentence was – at times throughout interviews, he expresses frustrations with Ms. King for various instructional activities she uses during lessons. Once I had the summary sentences, I again read the data set and made note of places where each sentence was supported within the transcripts and fieldnotes. After this, I looked through the data set

again to make note of non-examples or places that contradicted the general summary sentences I had developed. Next, I looked across the summary sentences to identify patterns related to each boy's experiences, attitudes, and participation. Finally, I wrote down generalizations from patterns that emerged when looking at summary sentences for each typology. In Samuel's case this yielded themes in positive attitudes related to strategies the teachers used in math and reading that he liked, opportunities to be recognized or rewarded, being looked at as a role model, and including fun in everyday lessons. The end result of the steps involved in this typological analysis allowed me to confidently and systematically manage a large amount of data in a way that started with specific categories of analysis, searched for patterns of meaning in those categories, and then permitted me to make general statements about the experiences, attitudes, and patterns of participation for each of the African American boys in this study.

Trustworthiness

Having detailed the data collection and analysis process, it is also important to provide a description of the steps that were built into these processes to help insure the trustworthiness of this research project. In accordance with the literature on qualitative research by Bogden and Biklen (2007), Glesne (1999), and Hatch (2002), this section of the chapter outlines strategies that have been built into the research methodology to bolster its trustworthiness. Within the data collection, two strategies that helped to build a level of trust in this research were data triangulation and prolonged engagement and persistent observation. One way that credibility was built into the research design was to triangulate or use more than one method to collect data; the current research project used both observations and interviews as data collection strategies. Another strategy for building trustworthiness into data collection was for the researcher to spend a

prolonged period of time at the research site engaging with the research process and participants. As has been outlined in the data collection section of this chapter, the amount of time spent observing each boy was approximately 15 hours and the total amount of interview time for each was approximately 3-1/2 hours.

In terms of data analysis, member checking and peer review and debriefing was employed to build trustworthiness into the research process. Member checking involved sharing with each boy observation notes, interview transcripts, and analytical thoughts that developed as part of ongoing data analysis. Eder and Fingerson (2003) claim that member checking with children is especially important because it allows them to “hear what the researchers think and to respond directly to researchers’ interpretations of their lives” (p. 37). As a result, I took the time during my work with the boys to make sure they had the opportunity to provide me with feedback by sharing parts of the interview transcripts, observation notes, and/or by asking them questions about themes that emerged from the data. As an example, during post-observation interviews I showed each boy raw fieldnotes I had taken from the lesson and I pointed out specific occurrences such as patterns of behavior or times of high/low affect. After this I asked the boy what he was thinking during this time or I commented with regard to my thoughts about the incident and asked if I was correct or not. Additionally, after the fourth or fifth observation of each boy I had a conversation with him about patterns I saw developing and again asked for his thoughts or concerns about my accuracy. In a specific example, during the fifth post-observation interview with Samuel, I told him I noticed that he liked to be a leader among his peers and asked him if that was correct (for detail on this example see Appendix B). Finally, I also used the strategy of peer

review and debriefing by seeking out people such as my faculty advisor to review and reflect on my work.

Two additional strategies that were used to develop trustworthiness were the use of rich, thick description and clarification of my own bias as the researcher. The idea behind rich, thick description was to provide the type of written detail necessary when collecting and analyzing data that would allow a reader to mentally enter the research context and provide him/her with a framework for understanding the research and determining its value for his/her specific situation. Finally, I made sure that data collection and analysis involved continually reflecting on my own bias and subjectivity. This process began earlier in the chapter when I detailed my role as a researcher and continued as I kept a journal to reflect on my subjective positions throughout the research process (for an excerpt of a journal entry see Appendix C).

Limitations

One limitation inherent in this research is the power differential that is created when an adult interviews a child (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Children, who typically seek adult approval, may try to respond to interview questions with answers they think the adult wants to hear. Also, because of the fact that adults have authority in our society and children do not, I needed to be concerned with ways to minimize the power differential that existed between the boys and myself. To do this I employed strategies suggested by Eder and Fingerson such as using unstructured questions that allowed the boys' concerns and modes of discourse to emerge. I also made sure to encourage the boys' comments and questions throughout our work together as this conveyed a context of creating knowledge that was co-constructed rather than imposed upon them. I attempted to develop reciprocity, or giving something back to the boys in return for the

information they gave me. This reciprocity was developed by spending time listening to the boys, allowing them to go off on tangents such as talking about girlfriends or collecting cards, and by bringing them small treats such as candy for taking their time during lunch or after school to talk with me in post-observation interviews. Finally, I attempted to reduce the power differential between the boys and myself by maintaining their language and terminology throughout the research process and the presentation of it. Doing this helped to preserve the boys' conceptions and meanings along with reducing the inherent difference in power that existed between them and myself.

The second limitation of this study was connected to my position as a White, middle-class female researching African American boys who live in poverty. These differences created a situation where I ran the risk of imposing my lens upon the experiences of the boys. To a degree this was inevitable, however, it was minimized by adhering to the research design and by continually reflecting on the biases I brought to the project. The journal I kept was a key strategy that I employed to try to limit imposing my lens upon the boys and maintain a focus on their experiences and voices. Rodriguez and Parker (2003) also suggest that getting to know and spending time with the research participants, which I did, can serve to reduce issues of race and subjectivity in the research process.

A final limitation of this study was associated with the Hawthorne effect, or the potential for the boys to have acted differently because they knew they were part of a research project. These six boys understood that they had been chosen out of a larger group of their peers, they were aware of being watched during a given observation period, and they knew that their interviews were being audiotaped. Theoretically, this

could have led to any of them acting more engaged during an observation period or giving an answer to an interview question based on what they thought I wanted to hear. My strategy to try to limit the Hawthorne effect was to spend extended periods of time in the class so I would be seen as just another adult in the room. An important part of this strategy was to be in the classroom prior to beginning data collection. For a three-week period before the start of my research I spent 2-4 days a week observing in both fourth-grade classrooms for extended periods of time. In addition, during the data collection process, I was in the classroom five days per week from 8:45am to 12:45 or 1:45pm depending on the daily schedule.

Presentation of the Findings

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present specific case studies for Thomas, Steven, and Christopher, respectively. As detailed earlier in this chapter, the six boys in this study were homogenous in key ways, yet represented a range of academic abilities. Thomas, Steven, and Christopher were randomly chosen to provide detailed case study findings for because they were typical of the larger collective of boys who participated. Each case study begins with a general introduction followed by a detailed description of who the boy is in terms of his life in and out of school. The purpose behind this extended introduction is to provide a context for the reader to develop a better understanding of each boy before moving into research findings that focus on his attitudes and patterns of participation. Following the introduction, each case moves into a discussion of attitudes toward academics. Rooted firmly in the words of the boy, this section presents themes in the ways each talked positively about daily school events, lessons, and activities. After this, themes are presented regarding experiences that each boy spoke of in a negative manner. The case studies then move into a discussion of the patterns

of participation that each boy exhibited. Framed in terms of a continuum that ranged from displays of active engagement to total disengagement, predominant patterns based on observation data are provided. The purpose behind organizing the case studies in this manner is connected to Finn's (1989) conception that identification with academics is associated with behavioral and outcome indicators that include attitudes toward school, patterns of participation, and the possibilities for success.

Following the presentation of three case studies, Chapter 7 looks across all six boys to offer a cross-case analysis. In an effort to learn from the voices of the boys yet move beyond their words to provide teacher educators with information that may impact their work with pre and inservice teachers, Chapter 7 initially focuses on themes in the positive attitudes displayed by the boys. Here the attention is centered on specific aspects of daily instruction that the boys talked of in a positive manner. This is followed by themes in how the boys talked about aspects of their daily school experiences that were negative. Next, themes in the boys' patterns of participation within the context of day-to-day lessons and instructional activities are presented. The chapter ends with a general discussion of the lessons learned through listening to the voices of the boys, focusing on their positive and negative attitudes, and examining their patterns of participation.

CHAPTER 4 THOMAS – CASE STUDY

Introduction

Thomas was a ten year old with a quiet, yet, inquisitive personality. He had a slight build, was of average height when compared to his classmates, dressed in clothes that were much bigger than his small frame, and wore his hair in a short, cropped fashion. Even though he had a quiet and reserved demeanor when he was in school, in a one-on-one setting Thomas was especially talkative and engaged easily in conversation with adults. During interviews he was very curious and imaginative as he frequently asked questions, told stories, or gave a long explanation of something he was thinking about. In school he mostly kept to himself and did not spend a lot of time talking with his classmates. He said this was, partly, because he did not want to get in an argument or do something that might get him in trouble. Thomas was a smart boy who quietly took everything in and did not forget. He was the only one in the study who, in conversation, purposely used vocabulary words that had been taught during reading lessons. For example, in one interview he talked of how he wished Mrs. Thompson would switch fluency passages more often because reading the same one for more than a week got “monotonous.”

This chapter provides a detailed account of Thomas’s learning based on themes and patterns that emerged from his observations and interviews. Initially, a picture will be given of who Thomas was in terms of how he talked about his life, school, and the things that were important to him. After this, the focus will turn to Thomas’s attitudes toward school. This section will examine themes that came to light as Thomas talked of the positive and negative aspects of his daily school experiences. The chapter will

conclude with a discussion of the patterns that became apparent when analyzing Thomas's engaged and disengaged behaviors during observations.

Who is Thomas?

Thomas lived in a three-bedroom apartment with his mother and five siblings. He was the oldest boy in his family and had two brothers ages eight and three, and three sisters, ages nine, seven, and five. His mother worked nights at a local Wal-Mart distribution center. When she was at work, extended family members such as her boyfriend, brother, or sister helped to take care of Thomas and his siblings. When he spent time with his family Thomas said, "Sometime we go somewhere, like on every weekend we might go do a little fun, like if we go to Disneyland or something....Or we go to Chucky Cheese's or something" (Interview #1). Thomas had a strong sense of responsibility for his younger siblings as he talked of helping his momma "take care of my three youngest ones" (Interview #1) when they went out as a family. This sense of responsibility to his family was also evident at times when he talked of giving his momma money he had gotten from returning aluminum cans or when he saved candy given to him so he could take it home to share with his siblings.

Although he enjoyed and talked about sports, when Thomas was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up instead of saying a professional athlete like many of the other boys in the study, he replied, "I really wanna be a chef"¹ (Interview #1). He said his favorite thing to cook was chicken or tacos and he often talked of how to prepare different foods. His further love of cooking was exemplified on the day of the school

¹ In all instances an effort was made to write in a manner that captured Thomas' language as it was spoken during observations and interviews. This typically included a mix of Standard English and African American Vernacular English.

wide “Chess Challenge” when he baked and brought in two cakes for his classmates to have with lunch. In addition, one morning, Ms. King took Thomas and his mother to visit a local high school where there was a culinary program so he could meet the head chef and talk with some of the students. The experience left a strong impression on him as he excitedly spoke about the smell of the bakery, the college scholarships that many of the students got, what the head chef said to him, and how much his momma loved the program and wanted him to try to go to high school there.

Along with cooking and baking, when asked what he was really good at Thomas said, “I am good at basketball, football, and math” (Interview #1). He added that in football he liked to be the quarterback or running back and in basketball he mostly liked to be the one to shoot the ball. His love of being active was reiterated when he talked about what he did on a typical day after getting home from school and said, “I play, I do my homework and then I start to play my game [X-box] and then I go outside for an hour or so” (Interview #1). He further said that sometimes he went to the park to play, but mostly he played around the area of his neighborhood.

When not with his momma or brothers and sisters, Thomas said he spent time with his cousin or his best friend Daniel, who was another fourth grader at Morrison Elementary. When he was with his friends they competed in various sports, went to the park to hang out, or played different video games. When Thomas talked about how his best friend, Daniel, might describe him he said, “He like, he might say I’m a little like, kind of, mean” (Interview #1). He continued to explain by telling the following story:

Because we playing, we be playing because sometimes I go to...where he lives....I go to visit him and we be playing around, we be jumping on each other’s backs and one time I just, I ran at him – I just started running at him and I tackled um hard, but, and he got real mad. (Interview #1)

He did conclude by saying that this did not happen all the time and, mostly, Daniel might say he was smart or a good basketball player.

At the time of the study, Thomas had attended Morrison Elementary for two years and said he did not remember the name of the school he went to before that. When talking about how he did as a student, Thomas simply said, “good.” When asked what made him say he was a good student, he used a behavioral indicator, explaining, “Because I try to ignore all the bad stuff that’s around me and, (2)² that’s really it” (Interview #2). Even though he did not mention it here, his teachers said that Thomas did well academically and in an end-of-the-year statewide math test, he got the highest score out of all of fourth graders at Morrison. Thomas also said that he learned best by acting things out or doing something that would help him to visualize what he was being taught. In addition, Thomas perceptively talked about his learning style when he said, “I do learn better when I am sitting by myself. Like, if people don’t distract me I’m okay, but if they start to distract me I don’t feel, like, comfortable” (Post Observation Interview #1).

When Thomas talked about what he thought his teachers might say about him he explained, “She might say I’m a great student” (Interview #2). He further added that his teachers might say this because he got good grades. And, when he was asked if there was something he wished he could tell his teachers about himself that they currently did not know he said no, that they already knew everything about him.

² () indicates a brief pause in the discussion during an interview. A number inside the parenthesis indicates a pause of approximately that length of time – for example (2) indicates a 2 second pause.

When he discussed the details of his experiences in school Thomas described something he learned that he really liked and got excited about by saying, “I really liked learning about *Solomon*,³ that book about *Solomon*.” He explained that he liked the book “because it’s real, it’s kinda real, I think, I think it’s me as Solomon and... and it sounds cool like when he was using the whip” (Interview #2). As it turned out, this excitement for reading stories and using his imagination was typical for Thomas because during subsequent interviews he frequently and persistently talked of books he was reading either at home or in school.

Conversely, Thomas described something he did not like learning about in school by saying, “When we was learning....well, las’ year, no two years ago, in the second grade when I had ta learn fractions” (Interview #2). He went on to say that he understood fractions better now but when he was younger they were difficult to learn because, “At first because they, they jus’ gave us piece of paper to see what we...what we could do and I ain’t get it that time” (Interview #2). Later, toward the end of the interview he went back to the topic of math and added, “Since fractions I knew, I knew more and more about math and then I started ta like it. Cuz las’ year we was doing fun things about math and everything” (Interview #2). He also added that math was one of his favorite subjects now because it was a good challenge. On the other hand, when Thomas talked about his least favorite subject he said it was science but explained his answer further by saying, “I do like science, but some things I don’t like about it – like reading, like reading a whole, like a big old page.... It gets kinda dull and borin” (Interview #2).

³ *Solomon* is a book by a local author that Ms. King was reading to the students during writing instruction. The students took notes while listening to her read and they wrote reactions to the book in a journal.

Thomas readily talked of fourth grade as his favorite year in school so far because he said, “I never saw, I never saw a fort before and it was really cool seeing it – and I was on the beach.” He was quick to add, however:

Thomas: And third grade too, like at the same time third grade because I went to the zoo, like in 21st Century I went to the zoo and we, we learned about bald eagles, we saw a close one, we saw snakes and animals, all kind, we went to Santa Fe – Santa Fe Zoo.

Vicki: And so, because you like to see things to learn um, you really liked that.

Thomas: Shakes his head yes and says, And I had, there was a dad and a mom and they had three eggs that hatched while we was there....Oh yeah we, and we saw hawks, we saw two – they was brown. (Interview #2)

In contrast to this, when asked what year in school has been his least favorite so far, he paused for quite a while and then replied, “I don’t remember....I don’t remember my first grade....Or kindergarten” (Interview #2).

Finally, in a response where Thomas was talking about two students in his class who were really good in school and what made them that way, he used both academic and behavior indicators to discuss his answer. He said one of the students was good, “Because they, one of them cuz they, ah, they, they do good on their report cards” (Interview #2). He went on to say that a different student was a good because, “he follows instructions and everything” (Interview #2). When talking about how he was similar to these two students he said, “How I think I’m alike cuz I, I do get good, um, good grades on my report card and everything” (Interview #2). And then when describing how he was different than these two students he replied:

Thomas: They’re, they’re a little talkative.

Vicki: They’re talkative and you’re not talkative?

Thomas: “NO, I am talkative but not all the time like them.

Vicki: So by like talkative do you mean they answer the teacher’s questions or they talk to other students?

Thomas: No, not like – they talk to other students. (Interview #2)

Prior to moving on to an examination of his attitudes it is important to elaborate on the general tendency Thomas had to keep to himself and not be too talkative. More than any of the other boys, Thomas was typically quiet during times when his peers were socially interacting with each other. When necessary, he actively participated in partner or group work, but in many instances when his classmates were talking with each other, he did not get involved in the conversations. In an example of this, when the students were gathered in a common area, known as the Centrum, waiting for Mrs. Thompson to get the overhead screen focused for a presentation on the *Black Stallion*, many of the students were talking with each other. Thomas, on the other hand, sat quietly and did not speak with anyone for the 4-5 minutes it took Mrs. Thompson to get ready. Then when the presentation was concluded and the students were going to their reading groups, Thomas again talked to no one as he waited in line and went into reading. Across observations, there were at least eight different times where he was observed quietly keeping to himself while others around him engaged in conversations.

Attitudes Toward Academics

As a rule Thomas enjoyed school and learning and, as previously mentioned, he said his teachers might declare he was a “great student.” When comparing himself against his fellow classmates academically he ranked his abilities as being in the top five among his peers in both reading and math. In explaining this ranking, he talked about indicators such as getting good grades and knowing answers to questions that

were asked by his teachers. Over the course of seven observations and nine interviews with Thomas there were many instances when his attitudes toward school became evident. This section of Thomas's case study will focus on those attitudes as they were reflected in how he talked about his experiences, what he liked or disliked, and what stood out as positive or negative for him during the course of his daily school experiences.

Experiences and Talk that Reflect Positive Attitudes

Several themes emerged as Thomas talked about the positive aspects of his day-to-day school experiences. The most prevalent of these themes was reflected in the persistent way he talked about reading stories, how exciting they were for him, the things he learned from them, and how much he liked to read even outside of school. A second theme that emerged from the ways that Thomas talked about his daily school experiences was how much he liked various instructional strategies his teachers used. A third theme indicated the importance of activities that gave him the chance to be successful and get recognition from his teachers. And, a final theme that emerged was not really reflected through Thomas's positive talk, rather it was his lack of saying much that was negative about school, even when given the opportunity that reflected an optimistic attitude toward school.

A love of reading stories

With an unwavering consistency, Thomas talked about reading stories, how exciting they were, and the parts that stood out to him. He mainly spoke of the two books his class was reading, *Solomon* and the *Black Stallion*, but he also frequently talked of books that he was reading on his own outside of school. The majority of times,

the part of Thomas's daily school experience that stood out to him was regularly related to something from a story the class had been reading that day.

From the first time that Mrs. Thompson introduced the *Black Stallion* until the day his class finished reading it, Thomas frequently talked about how exciting the book was, how he hated to stop reading it, and all the parts he especially liked. The day that the class was introduced to the book through a presentation by Mrs. Thompson, Thomas said that it was "kind of fun" (Post Observation Interview #1) to learn about the different parts of the ship that the main characters traveled on. As the class began reading the *Black Stallion* on a daily basis, more than once Thomas considered the book to be his most memorable part of the day making such statements as, "I remember when we was readin' stories and she stopped at the exciting part....I felt really bad cuz I really wanted to listen!" (Post Observation Interview #6) or "its exciting because when we stop at the chapter its going to the excitin' part, and like I get, I get all mad because I really want, I really want to know what's happening" (Post Observation Interview #2). He also talked about how he had never read a book about horses before and how much he liked parts where the main character got to ride or race the horse. During one interview, he also spoke of new things he was learning from the book when he said, "Oh yeah, [I remember] when they was ridin' through Chicago, like going to Chicago...I like, I ain't know a lot about it but I wanted ta ride a train, I didn't realize what it was like before" (Post Observation Interview #7). Finally, Thomas's love of this book was underscored when he made the statement that, "readin' the *Black Stallion*" (Post Observation Interview #6) was the most exciting thing about being at school.

Thomas also frequently talked about how much he enjoyed listening to Ms. King as she read *Solomon* to the students during writing instruction. Her strategy was to use the book as a vehicle to teach writing and the students were required to take notes while listening or to write journal responses to parts of the story they had finished reading. Here again, Thomas talked about how much he loved the story saying such things as, “My favorite part about, like writing is when we was readin’ the story and we were writin’ down...what we liked about it and things” (Post Observation Interview #5). On other occasions he talked about how he wished he could have been in writing instead of math so he could hear *Solomon* and how he liked hearing about when Solomon learned to use a whip or when the men in the story tied up the “scallywags” and got supplies (Post Observation Interview #3).

In addition to talking about the books his class was reading, Thomas also spoke of books he was reading outside of school. He talked at length about his two favorite series of books, *Goosebumps* and *Captain Underpants*, and how he liked them because one was funny and the other was scary. He even had one of the *Goosebumps* books in his backpack, pulled it out, and talked at length about how he started reading the series:

Cuz when, the month of Halloween last, last, like last year I was watching Goosebumps – they, they came on because it was next to Halloween. So, we was, I was watching these Goosebumps the whole time after I got off of school for the whole November....Un huh, () and then I read the book and then I took a test on it – AR [Accelerated Reader]. (Post Observation Interview #2)

During another interview, he pulled a *Captain Underpants* book out of his bag to demonstrate how he was reading two books outside of school. He said, “I LOVE them, I read them a lot, I go to the library and get, ah, these. I read, I read like ten of um already” (Post Observation Interview #4). He went on to add:

I read it last night, I read it this morning, like when I got dressed and everythin', I was done with all my chores, so while my Momma was layin' down, so I was just readin' and I read like three chapters. (Post Observation Interview #4)

This love of reading that Thomas had was something that his momma fostered as he talked about how she made sure he and his siblings went to the mobile library that came into their neighborhood every few weeks to get new books to read.

Classroom strategies

Another theme that came to light from the ways that Thomas talked about his daily school experiences was how much he liked various strategies his teachers used. Here he talked about daily instructional approaches such as getting rewards, participating in discussions, using his imagination, being challenged, and having the opportunity to take a private fieldtrip.

Although not as frequently as some of the other boys, Thomas did talk in a positive manner about extrinsic rewards that the teachers gave for answering questions correctly or behaving during class time. In an interview after reading class Thomas noted, "What I like is like when you...like sometimes...when you read the vocab and you and you get the answer right, sometimes she give you a treat like after school or at the end of the week" (Post Observation Interview #2). He also added here that there was nothing he did not like about the way Mrs. Thompson taught vocabulary. Another example of the importance of rewards came during a conversation about Thomas's tendency to stay quiet and not get involved in talking during class. He explained that one of the reasons he did this was because he liked to get all five points on his behavior sheet⁴ and if he "messed around" with other people that did not happen (Post

⁴ The behavior sheet was used for every lesson of the day and was set up on a 1 to 5 rating scale. At the end of each time period of the day – reading, lunch, writing, math, specials, and recess – Thomas took

Observation Interview #6). It is important to understand that Thomas was not required to be on a daily behavior sheet, it was something he and his momma wanted him to do so at the end of each week they could look at it together. Despite the fact that the sheet was about behavior not academics, it was important to Thomas to get the full five points and he spoke positively about how it motivated him to stay involved in his learning.

Thomas also spoke positively about partner and whole group discussions. In one specific instance, he noted, "I like discussin' it [vocabulary words]" (Post Observation Interview #2) and then he added this was because he liked being able to talk about the words and come up with the sentences. After a math class Thomas said that the part he liked the best about the daily warm-up problems was that he got to discuss the answers with his partner and the whole class sometimes. Thomas also talked about how he liked being in a large group while Mrs. Thompson read the *Black Stallion*.

Thomas's talk reflected excitement about learning opportunities that afforded him the chance to use his imagination or that challenged him. As was mentioned earlier, Thomas talked about how much he liked listening to *Solomon* because he often imagined himself in the story learning to do such things as use a whip or round up cattle. In another interview he talked about how he liked to come up with sentences for the vocabulary words, saying it was fun, "because I use my imagination sometimes" (Post Observation Interview #2) and then he added that it was also challenging to come up with good sentences. The fact that Thomas enjoyed a challenge was also evident

the sheet to the teacher and she/he gave him a number based on how he had behaved. At the end of the week the sheet went home and had to be signed by a parent to be returned the following week.

when he talked of what he liked about doing the daily “Drop in the Bucket”⁵ grammatical corrections:

What I like about is when we get the paper we gotta, its like a challenge cuz we gotta find all the words and things....[and] I find like, I miss like three of um because I can't find at least three but. (Post Observation Interview #4)

In a conversation about lesson difficulty Thomas also expressed his preference for when he liked to be challenged:

Thomas: Like sometimes, it depends if I know it, if I, if I did it before or I just never heard it.

Vicki: So if you did it before then you wish they would make it harder? (He nods yes.) And if you didn't do it before you wish, you like what they give ya? (He nods his head yes here.) (Post Observation Interview #6)

This type of thinking not only demonstrated Thomas's positive attitudes toward learning it also showed a type of self-assessment that was very insightful of his own learning style and level of comfort with being challenged.

As has been noted, Thomas wanted to be a chef when he grows up. As a result, Ms. King initiated a fieldtrip for Thomas, his momma, and herself to go to a local high school with a culinary magnet program. The positive impact this had on Thomas was reflected in the way he talked of the experience afterwards. He enthusiastically spoke about talking to the head chef, getting a tour, and seeing knives, chainsaws, and the ice sculpture the students made. He talked about seeing the big rooms where food was served, how the tables had vases with sand and shells in them, and how good the bakery smelled. Thomas was especially animated when he realized students from the program got scholarships to college, and he said:

⁵ Reading instruction started each day with the students doing “Drop in the Bucket” grammatical corrections, going over it as a class, and then answering comprehension questions about the given paragraph.

And then, I saw the pictures of people that had a scholarship and () there was a lot of people on the board, there was a lot of pictures of them. And like, they, they got million – no, thousands of dollars. They got, I think one of them had 200,000 dollars. (Post Observation Interview #7)

Overall, Thomas articulated that having the opportunity to go on this private fieldtrip was very positive for him and his momma and that it encouraged him to do well in school so, when the time came he would be able to apply to go to this school.

Having opportunities for success and being recognized

On several different occasions, Thomas articulated how important it was to have the opportunities to be successful during daily instruction and to get recognized by the teachers for his efforts. More specifically, he spoke of how he liked subject areas such as math and spelling because of his patterns of past success. He also talked about the importance of having the right answers or, at least, being in a situation where he could get the right answers from a teacher or classmate. Finally, Thomas talked about the positive reinforcement that was offered by his teachers when they openly praised or acknowledged the work he did during daily lessons.

In more than one instance, Thomas articulated positive regard for subject areas with which he had a history of success. He said the reason he liked math so much was because he always seemed to know the answers and do well on tests. On two different occasions he noted how he thought he had done well on spelling tests and in one case added, “I, I like spelling, I, like I always get A’s since like in second grade I got, I got all A’s” (Post Observation Interview #5). In a final example Thomas also talked about the successes he had in reading:

Thomas: In reading class we did, ah, the fluency and I read my fastest in the fluency....I got 209.

Vicki: You got 209 words in a minute....What was your best one before that?

Thomas: 192.

Vicki: So you got 17 more words than 192....That's really good, you rocked it today.

Thomas (smiling): But I tried ta, I tried to go to 300 but it stopped....I read, like I read the whole passage and then I read a few more [words]. (Post Observation Interview #7)

Thomas also articulated how it was important to him to get answers right or to have the opportunity to find out correct answers during instruction. After a reading lesson, he talked about answering questions the teachers called on him to answer:

Thomas: If I, if I, () it depends if I get the right answer or not.

Vicki: So, getting the right answer is the best part of getting called on, huh? (He nods yes.) And, how do you feel when you get the wrong answer?

Thomas: I be like, I'll think about what I, what I did wrong....So I know it, so if she asks it again I'll remember. (Post Observation Interview #6)

Along with this, after a class where he gave an incorrect answer he said, "I felt like, I felt like () nervous, kinda nervous" (Post Observation Interview #2). He added that the nervousness was because he had wanted to have the right answer to Mrs. Thompson's question. Finally, there were a few instances where Thomas talked about how he liked having the chance to get correct answers, whether it was from his peers or one of the teachers. After a reading lesson he indicated that he liked calling out vocabulary words "Because like you get ta...say the word out loud and if you mess up you gonna know because everybody else is saying it" (Post Observation Interview #4). Later, in the interview, he talked about having Mrs. Thompson as his "Shoulder Buddy"⁶ when there were no other students sitting at his group that day and he said, "What I liked about it, it

⁶ Both 4th grade classrooms were arranged so that the desks were in six groups of four. As a result a student's "shoulder buddy" was typically the person sitting next to him/her.

was like...it was (2) that she had all the answers and that was better for me because if I didn't know it she would tell me" (Post Observation Interview #4).

Throughout the course of daily lessons there were several times when Thomas was verbally recognized by his teachers for the work he was doing. It was evident that these episodes were positive for him because he either talked about them or he looked to the teacher and smiled after her comments. In a writing class when the students had turned in a letter to a guest speaker, Ms. King said, "Wow, this is a great sentence" and then she read aloud a sentence from Thomas's letter. As she did this, he put his hand on his chest, smiled, and said to his tablemates, "That's me" (Observation #3). Later, in the interview, he noted, "I felt good because I, I had ta think about that. It took me like 15 minutes to think about that sentence" (Post Observation Interview #3). There were four other instances where Thomas was recognized for his contributions to the class and each time the teacher's comments lead to Thomas's looking around the classroom and then smiling before going back to work. Although he did not talk about these episodes afterwards, his behaviors indicated they were a positive part of his daily experiences.

A lack of negativity

A final theme that emerged that reflected Thomas's positive attitudes was that he rarely talked in a negative manner about school. On five separate occasions Thomas was asked if there was anything he did not like or whether something was boring for him during a lesson. He replied no each time. This lack of negativity occurred across all subject areas and over a variety of different learning activities and aptly demonstrated a pervasive attitude that was positive. In addition, there was an instance where Mrs. Donald tried to tell Thomas he had an answer to a math problem wrong when in reality

he had it right. Afterwards, when he was asked if this upset him he said, “No she, she ain’t know that we could, we coulda turnt’ it counterclockwise, but it was really – we can do it both ways counterclockwise and, ah, clockwise” (Post Observation Interview #3).

During the same math lesson, Mrs. Thompson told Thomas that he was not paying attention and later he noted:

Thomas: Like, I was just like getting my notebook off the floor because it fell down and I got all my pencils up because the mechanical pencil and all the other pencils fell and I tried to pick it up, so, and so it wouldn’t be a big old mess. So I picked it up and then she said I whadnt paying attention.

Vicki: And was that frustrating for you?

Thomas: No, not really cuz she always says that. (Post Observation Interview #3)

When he was asked what he thought about her always saying this he replied, “I don’t think anything....I get use’ to it some” (Post Observation Interview #3).

Experiences and Talk that Reflect Negative Attitudes

During observations and interviews with Thomas he also talked about day-to-day school events and incidents that were negative for him. However, these occurrences were relatively infrequent when compared to his overall experiences. One theme that emerged from this data demonstrated how Thomas occasionally got frustrated or bored during the course of daily instruction. Another theme was how Thomas experienced and talked about strained relationships with some of his peers. In this case, there were times when he visibly argued with his fellow classmates or when he spoke of getting picked on by another student.

Day-to-day frustrations or boredom

There were times during daily lessons where things happened that frustrated Thomas, as was evidenced either by his reactions during an observation or his

comments during an interview. Although this did not occur frequently, it included such incidents as not getting called on to give an answer, not receiving his full behavior points, losing credit for incomplete homework, having an uncooperative partner, and getting a *Black Stallion* book that had been previously written in. These negative events did not have a strong impact on Thomas's overall perception of school or his levels of engagement, but at the time they occurred they were significant to him.

Across his observations there were five instances where Thomas demonstrated evidence of frustration. In one instance, Thomas reacted negatively to not getting called on by the teacher. This incident occurred during writing when Ms. King asked the students to share something they might be saving money for. She called on five or six students but this did not include Thomas, even though he had his hand raised the entire time. When she indicated that the class needed to move on, Thomas dropped his hand, clicked his tongue on the roof of his mouth, and said "dang" (Observation #3). Because this was an atypical reaction, afterwards Thomas was asked how he felt about the incident. He replied by saying that not getting called on made him, "Kinda like, kinda frustrated because I really wanted to answer" (Post Observation Interview #3).

Two additional examples of daily frustrations were evidenced more by Thomas's reactions during class than his comments afterwards. In the first one, when he approached Ms. King at the end of a writing class to get his behavior sheet signed she told him that he was not going to receive the full points because he had been talking with Daniel. When this happened he clicked the roof of his mouth with his tongue in apparent disappointment, turned away from Ms. King, hung his head down, and left the

classroom without talking to anyone. In the second example, Thomas showed disappointment after not getting credit for doing his homework:

Ms. King is over by Thomas's table group again and he says, "But, Ms. King I had it" as he holds up a piece of paper [that is his homework]. She does not acknowledge him when he says this though so he frowns a bit (makes a sad looking face) and puts the paper away in his binder without having shown it to Ms. King. (Observation #7)

This incident occurred because Thomas was not ready with his homework the first time Ms. King got to his desk and he had not gotten it signed by his momma as was required to get the total points for his work.

Another incidence of frustration occurred in math class when Mrs. Thompson instructed the students to work with their "Shoulder Buddy" to explain an answer to a warm-up problem they had just completed. On this particular day Lance was supposed to be Thomas's "Shoulder Buddy," however, he was not participating even though Thomas had requested they share answers. In the interview later Thomas said:

Yes, ah, it was the time when, ah, when ah we were doing our ma, our math work when I was, I, when I was like, when the other person like wouldn't cooperate with me.... Because I, I wanted to know the correct answer and I thought he knew it, but I ain't know it either so that's why I said that." (Post Observation Interview #3)

A final example of a frustration happened in reading when the students received their *Black Stallion* books. Thomas thought that his book was going to be new and was immediately alarmed when he realized it was not. As he first looked at it he called out to Mrs. Thompson, "they been writin' in my book" (Observation #1) and then he furrowed his forehead. After this, he was distracted from the lesson and afterwards said it had bothered him because he wanted his book to be new and he was disappointed when it was not. Thomas's resulting dissatisfaction and his disengagement from the

lesson lasted for a period of over five minutes and as was apparent during the interview, it was an experience that stood out to him in a negative way.

A second challenge for Thomas during daily instruction was boredom, though this did not occur frequently. There were only two occasions, once in math and once in reading, when Thomas spoke in a negative manner about daily instructional routines that got boring for him. The first example occurred when Thomas was reading a book while Mrs. Thompson was asking about problems on a math worksheet the students had completed. In the interview after class Thomas said, "It was like, () we do that everyday so that's why I got tired, like reviewing the, ah, math, she, so that's, that's why I started readin'" (Post Observation Interview #4). In a separate interview when Thomas was asked when he got bored in school he talked about math:

Thomas: Well, when, like sometimes because, like we do the same thing over in math times, sometimes and because at the beginning of the year she gave the same papers at the end of the year.

Vicki: So, you get a little bit bored when you're doing the same thing.

Thomas: And that, especially that math test, we did that three times. (Post Observation Interview #6)

Thomas also mentioned boredom during reading instruction when he was talking about fluency and indicated that it was a fun for him but then qualified his answer by saying:

Thomas: Like, like I do and don't on sometimes because I, we were suppose to get a new fluency thing but Mrs. Thompson ain't do it.

Vicki: So you read the same passage everyday.

Thomas: Yeah, I read it for, we read it for a whole week without, um but not really, like, for a whole week, for five, from last week and two days this week.

Vicki: So, does that get boring for you?

Thomas: (Nods) It's monotonous. (Post Observation Interview #4)

Although there were a very limited number of times when Thomas indicated that he was bored by school, these incidents were important to him because they reflected his frustration with the routine nature of daily instructional strategies used by the teachers.

Relationships with his classmates

Interestingly, the issue that Thomas spoke the most frequently about in a negative manner was his relationships and various experiences with fellow classmates. Altogether he spoke of six instances that were the result of a specific event or the product of strained long-term relationship with one of his classmates. These incidents and Thomas's perceptions of them were significant, not only because he spoke of them in a negative way, but some of them also impacted his participation in ongoing lessons.

Thomas's negative talk about a relationship with one of his classmates began during the first post observation interview when he commented that he did not know Samuel was one of the students participating in the research project and that he bothered Thomas a little. He said about Samuel that, "He's JEALOUS....cuz I play football better than him. And because I tackled him hard and I tackled real hard and...I said sorry and he got real mad at me" (Post Observation Interview #1). He continued by adding that Samuel still picked on him and said about his part in this ongoing dispute, "I ignore him, cuz the only thing he do is talk, he be like, he be like, you smell...and everything" (Post Observation Interview #1). Later in the interview Thomas also talked about how he liked to sit alone because he use to sit in a group with two other boys and a girl but indicated, "it whadnt working out there so I, I moved by myself" (Post Observation Interview #1). In addition, after a reading observation, when Thomas was talking about his "Shoulder Buddy," Jared, he said, "It's not really like the best choice

but its...it's like him, because sometimes we, we, we always argue a lot" (Post Observation Interview #4).

There were also instances where Thomas had negative exchanges with classmates that contained elements of physical altercation. In one example during a reading class Jimmy exclaimed, "Ouuuu, Thomas is bad, he kicked me" (Post Observation Interview #1). Thomas then replied that he did not kick Jimmy, the two exchanged more words, and Jimmy said something that ended in "hit you in your mouth" (Post Observation Interview #1). After this Thomas stared at him and put his index finger to his lips as if daring Jimmy to take a swing at him. As this was going on the boys were not effectively participating in the ongoing lesson. On a separate occasion, as a math class was starting Thomas and Lance seemed to be arguing over something because Thomas claimed that he was going to knock Lance out. When talking later about the altercation Thomas said, "When we was getting stuff out of our [homeroom] class, he, he, just punched me right there in my neck" (Post Observation Interview #4).

A final example of a strained relationship with his peers occurred in the reading lesson where Thomas was upset because the *Black Stallion* book he received had been previously written in. During the class, he was so distracted that he was not participating in the lesson and afterwards he talked about how the other boys in his group were teasing him because he was upset with the writing in his book. He lamented:

They were and they were like, all the three, the two people that was around me – one that was in front of me and the one that was across from me – they were bothering me. But, I tried to, I, I was ignoring them – they, cuz he was like, he's

like be careful, he was like, (makes an exaggerated sneezing noise) on my page.
(Post Observation Interview #1)

Toward the end of the interview Thomas brought up getting teased over the book again saying about his day, “No, [it was a] regular day except some people bothering me at reading” (Post Observation Interview #1).

Engaged and Disengaged Behaviors – A Continuum of Participation

Thomas’s patterns of engagement fall along a continuum of participation levels. During daily instructional lessons and activities his behaviors ranged from being actively engaged to being disengaged from ongoing instruction. In addition, there were times where Thomas’s actions reflected a more tenuous level of engagement, meaning his behavior would fluctuate between participation and non-participation within a given period of time. In general, Thomas demonstrated higher levels of engaged behavior and lower levels of disengaged behavior in reading lessons as compared to math and writing lessons. When he was engaged in non-academic conduct, Thomas displayed behaviors that were consistent with his general tendency to quietly keep to himself. Similarly, there were not discernable patterns in Thomas’s levels of participation across specific types of learning activities. On the whole, instances where Thomas was actively engaged and participating in daily lessons far outnumbered his displays of disengaged behaviors. This section of Thomas’s case study will examine more closely the behaviors that were reflective of his participation across the continuum from active engagement to disengagement.

Behaviors that Reflect Active Engagement

Displays of Thomas’s active engagement were evident through a range of actions he demonstrated during daily lessons; the most prevalent of which occurred

during times of teacher-led instruction. Behaviors that Thomas readily exhibited during this time included raising his hand to answer questions that were asked, answering questions, calling out answers, participating in call and response activities, and actively listening as exhibited by his level of attention to what was happening in a lesson. Collectively, the prevalence of these actions was recorded forty-eight times across the seven observations of Thomas. Other teacher directed activities that Thomas actively participated in included individually completing written work, following directions to complete a specific task, or taking a test. Finally, Thomas frequently displayed patterns of active participation when working with a partner or in a small group.

Participating in teacher-led instruction

During daily teacher led-instruction, Thomas frequently behaved in a manner that demonstrated active engagement. In fact, for two of the four observations that occurred during the time of reading instruction there were no recorded behaviors to indicate that Thomas was completely disengaged from the ongoing lesson. The most common displays of his active participation occurred at times when the class was involved in question and answer discussions during reading and math instruction. In these instances, engaged behaviors Thomas exhibited were associated with raising his hand, answering questions, showing a thumbs up or thumbs down to convey answers, and calling out responses.

As an example, during the vocabulary section of one reading lesson Thomas raised his hand to answer questions on seven different occasions. Of those seven times, he was called on to provide a definition or sentence four times. His typical behavior during this time was exemplified by the following:

When Mrs. Thompson says, “Who can tell me what monotonous means,” Thomas raises his hand, gets called on, and answers – “commonly used” – this is the wrong answer but when Mrs. Thompson tells him that he just smiles, says – “oh, yeah” – and continues to look at his vocabulary following along during the question and answer time. He watches as Jared gives a sentence with the word customary in it. He raises his hand when Mrs. Thompson asks for a definition of void – he does not get called on but also raises his hand to give a sentence with the word in it – he does not get called on for this one either. (Observation #2)

In addition to raising his hand and answering questions during this lesson, Thomas also gave a thumbs up twice when prompted by Mrs. Thompson to indicate Jared had given him a correct definition or sentence for one of the vocabulary words. Although not as prevalent as in reading, Thomas also displayed similar patterns of engagement in math, where over the course of two observations he raised his hand to answer questions or give a thumbs up on five occasions.

Another behavior that Thomas frequently engaged in that demonstrated active participation was calling out answers. This often happened when a general question was asked of the class and occurred more often in reading than in writing or math. Looking across Thomas’s seven observations, he called out answers to questions twenty-six times, with eleven of those occurring during two specific reading lessons. One example of this pattern of calling out answers happened in writing class, when Ms. King asked what motionless meant and he called out “without motion,” then when she later asked if the students knew what the expression “roughing him up” meant, Thomas called out “beat him up” (Observation #3).

As part of the daily routine of reading instruction Mrs. Thompson used strategies that frequently engaged the students in chorally calling out words. This occurred when she would stop reading in a story and expect the students to say the next word or when she would have them chorally call out vocabulary words to a rhythm she would snap on

her fingers. Additionally, in math class Mrs. Thompson occasionally had the students chorally call out answers or count numbers. Across observations Thomas was recorded as participating in choral responding and calling out twenty-four times.

A final example of a teacher-led activity where Thomas demonstrated high levels of engagement came through displays of active listening during ongoing instruction. His participation in actively listening was determined through behaviors such as maintaining a focus on the teacher as she presented information or looking at a book and tracking as Mrs. Thompson read from the *Black Stallion*. Over the seven observations, Thomas was recorded as actively listening on twelve different occasions with the majority of these occurring during reading and writing instruction.

Participating in individual work

Thomas's behaviors also demonstrated active participation during individual work. The majority of time Thomas diligently took on the job of following teacher directions to complete a task, work on a given assignment, or take an exam. In these instances his typical pattern of behavior was to quietly engage in the task at hand. Also apparent during these times was Thomas's tendency to keep to himself and not become distracted by other people or events that occurred around him.

Throughout the course of routine daily instruction there were times when the teachers engaged the students in individual work to complete tasks such as preparing fluency sections from the *Black Stallion* book, reviewing work on their daily "Drop in the Bucket" or getting important information ready to take home. Although in some cases these efforts were peripherally related to the task of learning, they were important to the larger picture of how the teachers prepared the students to engage in learning activities and Thomas's behavior during these times contributed to an overall representation of

his day-to-day participation. For example, fieldnotes from a reading lesson demonstrated his engagement when following directions to complete the task of preparing a passage for the week's fluency reading:

He writes #43, bites his fingers, writes #52...writes the next number given, then he says "110" and "148" before Mrs. Thompson announces them (he is going along and figuring out the numbers by counting the words in a line of the book). He puts his chin down on his arm...and continues to write the numbers down as Mrs. Thompson goes over them. Jimmy stands, leans toward Thomas's desk and says something to him [but] Thomas just continues to write numbers in his book. (Observation #1)

These notes also showed Thomas's tendency to quietly keep to himself and not get distracted by his fellow classmates. Fieldnotes taken in a separate reading observation as the class reviewed their daily "Drop in the Bucket" work showed that Thomas actively participated as evidenced by his pattern of looking at his paper, writing on it, and watching Mrs. Thompson while she was going over the corrections.

Thomas also displayed a pattern of actively engaging in the task of completing individual assignments that were given during the course of daily lessons. Typical examples of this occurred across subject areas and were exemplified in two separate writing lessons where Thomas worked continuously for an extended period of time to complete journal entries. Similar patterns of behavior occurred in a math lesson when Thomas was actively engaged in completing a worksheet:

He sits down and begins working on the daily math warm-up worksheet. Mrs. Donald is in the classroom to help out during math and she sits down in the empty desk near Thomas – she asks him something...he nods but does not talk with her instead he continues to work on his math warm-up. He works on the worksheet until 1:03pm when Mrs. Thompson stops them to go over it, approximately 7-8 minutes. (Observation #3)

In keeping with previous examples, this illustration of Thomas's behavior was also reflective of his tendency to keep to himself and not get involved in distracting conversations.

Completing tests provided a final example of how Thomas continuously engaged in individual work when it was required. His efforts were particularly evident during an observation in which a math test was given:

Mrs. Thompson has set a timer for 50 minutes and for most of that time Thomas works along steadily on the test – he is reading questions and writing and for over 40 minutes seems to be only briefly distracted now and then when he stops and looks around the classroom. (Observation #5)

Thomas exhibited a similar pattern of behavior on two additional occasions when taking spelling tests where he maintained focus on his work throughout the entire exam.

Participating in partner or group work

On the frequent occasions when the students were directed to complete work with a partner, Thomas typically displayed behaviors that reflected active participation in the task at hand. Across observations, he was recorded as engaging in partner or small group work ten times. Specific examples of this occurred in each of the three lessons where fluency reading was observed. The approach that Thomas used to engage in this activity with his "Shoulder Buddy," Jared, was typified in the following excerpt:

Thomas opens his Black Stallion book, turns to Jared, and says, "let's read, on page 95." Next, he listens to Jared as he reads the fluency passage then they talk briefly to determine how many words he got in the minute. After this, he looks to Mrs. Thompson who is at the front of the classroom and when she gives the OK for person B to start he begins reading the passage. When the minute is over he and Jared talk about how many words he read then they both sit quietly waiting and Mrs. Thompson rewards them with stars for their "good work" during fluency. (Observation #6)

Another example of Thomas's participation in partner work came in writing class when Ms. King had the students come up with a summary sentence from *Solomon* and Thomas worked with Lance to discuss and develop a sentence they read to the class.

Behaviors that Reflect a Tenuous Level of Engagement

At various times throughout each of the seven observations, Thomas displayed behaviors that wavered between active participation and non-participation. During these times Thomas's involvement in the ongoing lesson was tenuous and although he did not exhibit disruptive or completely disengaged behavior, he also did not appear to be actively participating. More specifically, he appeared to quietly participate at a level that was just enough to keep up with instruction but he was not focused on the teacher or he did not raise his hand to offer answers to questions. There were also several instances where Thomas's participation was interspersed with moments of disengagement as evidenced by his participation in such behaviors as talking to others or being alternately engaged in activities that were not part of the ongoing lesson. Finally, there were times that Thomas was behaving in a manner that reflected disengagement, yet he was quickly prompted back to being engaged by one of his teachers. These instances where Thomas was tenuously engaged with moments of disengagement or was prompted back to engagement were recorded on twenty-three occasions and were indicative of behaviors that would fall in the middle on the continuum of participation between engagement and disengagement.

Doing just enough

Across Thomas's observations there were numerous examples where his participation in the lesson seemed to be enough to keep him caught up with instruction, however, his engagement was tenuous as evidenced by his lack of attention or active

involvement. On the occasions when he did not appear to be focused, behaviors Thomas exhibited included watching other students, yawning, staring off to the side, biting on his fingers, looking around the classroom, or shuffling through papers in his binder. A typical example from the observations notes during these times was as follows:

She [Ms. King] begins by giving them directions for what they will be doing and as she does Thomas briefly watches her and then looks around the classroom. As she continues he yawns, looks through papers in his binder... and then looks at Ms. Dunn [a third grade teacher] as she comes into their classroom and talks with one of the table groups of students. (Observation #7)

Other examples of this occurred on five occasions when Thomas did not attempt to answer questions that were part of the ongoing lesson. During this time Thomas did not talk with others and appeared to stay caught up with ongoing tasks, it just did not appear that he was highly involved in the instruction and as a result his behavior was viewed as not being actively engaged.

Moments of disengagement

At some point of each lesson and across each subject area, Thomas exhibited a tenuous level of engagement by vacillating between academic and non-academic behaviors. These types of incidents were recorded on twelve different occasions and included behaviors where Thomas's attention to the ongoing lesson was interrupted by moments of talking to others, playing with the lead in his mechanical pencil, reading or practicing cursive writing during math class, or other general actions that were not related to the ongoing lesson. Fieldnotes from a math class demonstrate how Thomas went back and forth between answering questions and reading a book he had hidden in his lap so it was not visible to the teacher:

He [Thomas] does go back to reading the book but is still participating in the math work – he draws the shape that is on the Smartboard so he can figure out the lines of symmetry. After this he goes back to reading, which he continues to do as another student goes up to the Smartboard to show the lines of symmetry. When the student's answer is wrong and Mrs. Thompson is going over it he gives her a thumbs up to indicate he understands how to do the problem. For what seems like a fairly long period of time (7-10 minutes) he goes back and forth between looking up at the Smartboard as students go up to do problems and reading the book he has in his lap. When a question is asked about lines of symmetry in a circle, he raises his hand to volunteer to go up to the Smartboard...he does not get called on. He reads his book again. (Observation #4)

Another example of how Thomas behaved in a manner that fluctuated between being engaged and disengaged came during a group activity where the students were working to complete a drawing that represented various events from their year in fourth grade. Throughout the activity, Thomas went back and forth between helping with the drawing and working with his classmates to wandering around the class or sitting off by himself and drawing on his own:

They are all talking and [Thomas says], "He draw, he can draw"... and then he starts drawing something on his paper and continues talking to his group mates. He works with his group, talks, draws, gets up, watches others as they talk, sits back down, draws something on his piece of paper, stands back up, looks at a book on a nearby shelf, flips through the pages of the book, watches Ms. King as she talks about making sure to do a rough draft of the drawing like they do their writing, looks at Jimmy as he talks with Ms. King, and then he looks at his group mates and sits back down. (Observation #7)

As this lesson continued, Thomas periodically helped his group but also did things like go over to a different group to talk with some of the other boys, wander around the classroom, work on his own drawing, look at books, get water, play with the pant leg of his jeans, sit down to adjust his socks, and tie his sneakers twice. Throughout this activity his behavior appeared to border on total disengagement but he continued to go

back to his group mates to see what was going on and had brief periods of time where he contributed to the discussion or helped with the drawing.

Times of prompted engagement

In examining the continuum of behaviors that reflected Thomas's varying levels of academic participation, there were five instances where he was disengaged from the lesson yet was prompted by a teacher back to immediately being engaged in academic work. One example of this came during a previously mentioned math lesson where Thomas was back and forth between participating, reading a book, drawing, and talking. Mrs. Thompson noticed his behavior and said, "Thomas you need to get with the program buddy" (Observation #4). He replied to her by holding up the piece of paper he had taken out to do the math problems but she told him he needed to stop drawing, which he immediately did and then he began working more on the math problems. Although not highly prevalent, these examples of prompted engagement were important to the overall pattern of Thomas's participation in lessons.

Behaviors that Reflect Disengagement

There were times during observations when Thomas's behavior reflected disengagement from ongoing academic work as indicated by an extended period of time where he did not participate. The majority of his behaviors during this time fell into one of two categories. First, there were instances when he appeared to simply not be paying attention; instead he was engaged in his own non-academic behaviors such as playing with or looking at something that was not connected to the lesson at hand. Second, there were occasions when Thomas was disengaged because he was talking or engaging in non-academic actions with his classmates. As mentioned earlier, episodes of disengaged behavior occurred more frequently in math and writing than in

reading lessons and even though this type of behavior was not widespread, it was recorded on eighteen occasions.

Across four observations of reading, Thomas's behavior was coded as disengaged on four occasions, twice during observation one and twice during observation six. For example, during observation one, on the first recorded episode of disengaged behavior, Thomas was simply not paying attention for a period of several minutes as Mrs. Thompson was giving a presentation to introduce the *Black Stallion* book. Another example came when Thomas was preoccupied with erasing writing that was already in the *Black Stallion* book he had been given. During a different reading lesson, there were two occasions where Thomas was engaged in extended periods of talking that reflected a lack of participation. The first time he was supposed to be working on his daily "Drop in the Bucket" and the second time he was instructed to explain an answer to his group mates, yet in both cases he got sidetracked talking to his group mates about issues that were not connected to the lesson.

Over the course of three writing observations there were several examples of times that Thomas was disengaged from ongoing instruction. On three occasions he did not participate in choral response activities or group work and was instead engaged in alternate behaviors such as staring off to the side, playing with an eraser for his pencil, drawing, or tucking his pant leg into his socks. Additionally, there were two recorded episodes where Thomas talked to his classmates for periods of time that interfered with his participation in ongoing writing activities.

Thomas's most blatant episodes of disengagement came during math instruction where on two different occasions he displayed, at best, tenuous engagement and at the

worst, total disengagement for extended periods of time. One example occurred during a math lesson where Mrs. Thompson was leading the class in reviewing problems from a worksheet. Throughout this activity, which lasted the entire math lesson, Thomas did not effectively participate for any extended length of time; instead he was practicing his cursive writing, calling Mrs. Donald over to his desk to talk with her, shuffling papers and organizing them to put into his binder, playing with his mechanical pencils, and talking to his group mate, Daniel. At one point Mrs. Thompson reprimanded him, told him to put his binder away, and pay attention to going over the problems. Thomas put his binder away, yet being reprimanded did not prompt his participation in the lesson as he continued to sit staring off to the side and then started watching Daniel, who was also disengaged from the instruction.

A similar pattern of disengaged behavior occurred during the next observation of a math lesson when the class was reviewing daily warm-up problems. In this example, Mrs. Thompson instructed to the students to compare answers with their “Shoulder Buddy,” however, Thomas was occupied reading a book:

Daniel tries to talk with him [Thomas] about the math problem...but mostly he keeps reading the book – he looks up occasionally but does not pay much attention to Daniel. For the next problem when he is suppose to be telling Daniel his answer – Daniel asks him what he got and Thomas says, “Leave me alone.” (Observation #4)

Shortly after this, Mrs. Thompson instructed Thomas to pay more attention to the lesson, but his behavior shifted only slightly and he was never totally engaged.

Conclusion

As a result of the ways that Thomas talked about his school experiences and the things that stood out to him as important, his attitudes toward academics could be viewed as being positive. Thomas overwhelmingly talked about school in an affirmative

manner, was especially optimistic about reading, and even when given the opportunity did not make negative comments about his experiences. Despite his positive orientation, however, there were times when Thomas got bored by the slow pace of instruction or was troubled by strained relationships with his peers. Additionally, Thomas's overall patterns of behavior indicated that he frequently participated in ongoing daily lessons, which placed him predominantly in the engaged end on the continuum of participation.

CHAPTER 5 STEVEN – CASE STUDY

Introduction

Steven was a ten-year old boy with an easy smile and a personality that was high energy and fun loving. He was of average height and weight when compared to his classmates and had short, cropped hair. He had a positive attitude, was vocal in school and social settings, and a leader among his peers. During interviews he liked to talk about his abilities in school and athletics. In both of these areas he displayed confidence in a way that coincided with his positive and fun loving personality. For example, he continually talked of how he “knew” answers to questions that were asked in class and wished the teacher had called on him or, when he talked about football he would flex his muscles, say he was strong, and smile. Steven’s words and behaviors displayed a love of learning and demonstrated a strong sense of respect for school and his teachers. For instance, he frequently talked about his love of reading and was often excited to discuss parts of any story the class had read on a given day. In line with his personality and more than the other boys, Steven liked to make nonsense sounds, loudly draw out his words, and talk to the tape recorder to say hello and goodbye to it during interviews. At times it appeared as if the tape recorder gave him a platform on which to perform and he enjoyed it tremendously.

This chapter provides a detailed account of Steven’s learning based on themes and patterns that emerged from his observations and interviews. Initially, a picture will be given of who Steven was in terms of how he talked about his life, school, and things that were important to him. After this, the focus will turn to Steven’s attitudes toward school, with a focus on examining themes that came to light as he talked of the positive

and negative aspects of his daily school experiences. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the patterns that became apparent when analyzing Steven's engaged and disengaged behaviors during observations.

Who is Steven?

Steven lived near Morrison Elementary in an apartment with his dad, grandmother, and two brothers – one who was younger and one who was older. When he spent time with the adults in his life Steven said that, "Sometimes we go out to the movies, sometimes we go out to eat, or they'll take us out and play football with us" (Interview #1). As a follow up, he also said that his favorite movie was Alvin and the Chipmunks because it was funny. When he talked about spending time with his brothers, Steven said, "Oh, they, they really nice like... they'll he'p⁷ me with my homework anytime I need he'p with my homework. They'll he'p clean up the room... we like to play too, we like to play football a lot... really a lot" (Interview #1).

Appearance and image seemed to be important to Steven, as he wore studded diamond-type earrings and dressed in fashionable clothes. An example of how he attempted to portray a specific "image" occurred on a day when he wore new clothes and left the price tags on them for everyone to see. When asked why he did this, Steven's reply was that the clothes were new so people needed to know. In addition, on a regular basis throughout any given day, he took his hair pick out and used it, one time even ducking below the desk when combing his hair so the teacher would not see him. In conversation Steven talked about doing this because he did not want his hair to

⁷ In all instances an effort was made to write in a manner that captured Steven's language as it was spoken during observations and interviews. This typically included a mix of Standard English and African American Vernacular English.

look “nappy.” Money was also important to him, as he frequently talked about it such as when he asked a guest speaker, who was an author, if she was rich. Finally, Steven’s peer group was central in his life, and he regularly expressed how he liked to have fun along with talking about his friends and girlfriend.

Similar to a few of the other boys in the study, football was a sport that Steven played and loved. He frequently watched the local university team and said as he grows up he wants to play high school, college, and professional football like the players he saw on television each week. He claimed that he wanted to be just like one recent college player who turned pro and was “catching that ball like OUPPP”⁸ (Interview #1) on Sundays in the National Football League. Other than a football player, when he grows up Steven said that he would probably be a doctor or a lawyer.

When talking about the things he liked to do on a typical day after getting home from school, Steven said, “First I do my homework, I git that out the way and then I do, I do my chores... take out the trash and then I just watch TV or sometimes go to take a nap” (Interview #1). He also said he liked to go outside to play football and basketball with his friends after school and on the weekends. His best friend’s name was Jeremiah, who was a fifth grader, and when the two of them were together Steven indicated that, “We like to just hang out or play my video game, or we’ll just go outside and just hang out, play basketball sometimes” (Interview #1). Steven also said that if Jeremiah were asked to describe him, he would say that Steven was really fun to hang out with.

⁸ OUPPP is a typical example of a nonsense utterance or sound Steven frequently articulated during conversation.

In terms of school, Steven has attended Morrison Elementary for only the fourth grade. Prior to this he went to a local charter school for kindergarten through third grade. When asked how he did as a student he replied, “Ahhh, I think I do pretty good and I make good grades and stuff” (Interview #2). More specifically, he said that he got “two A’s, about three B’s, and a couple of C’s” (Interview #2) on his last report card. His favorite subject was reading and within that he really liked reading for fluency. When talking about it he said, “I love readin’, I love readin’, I love readin’” (Interview #2). He talked more about reading when asked to discuss something he was really good at – even though he was told it did not have to be school related Steven said:

Steven: Reading, I still like reading.

Vicki: You still like reading, what do you like to read?

Steven: I like to read long passages like that... like big long passages like paragraphs.

Vicki: You do... what is your favorite book?

Steven: Judy Blume. (Interview #2)

In school in general, Steven’s social nature quickly manifested as he liked to have fun and “mess” around with others, but he also showed respect for school, learning, and adults in authority. This was evidenced by how often he said “yes ma’am” to his teachers and the respect, through his good behavior that he demonstrated during two visits by guest speakers to the classroom. Steven also had a strong sense of right and wrong that was apparent when he talked about how he inappropriately handled two separate situations with other students. Cognitively, he knew the type of behavior that was suitable, however, he got caught up in the moment and his actions did not match what he later said would have been the appropriate behavior. As a result,

in both instances with his classmates he talked about how he should have behaved differently because it would have been the right thing to do.

Academically, Steven could be easily distracted as if it was hard for him to maintain focus on one thing. His behaviors when distracted included talking to others, “messaging” around – by himself or with classmates, - or taking out his pick and combing his hair. The enthusiasm he had for learning could also lead to inappropriate behaviors at times during daily instruction. He liked to have the right answers, share them, and then celebrate them. Frequently this led him to call out answers even when not called on by the teacher or to raise his hand, wave it back and forth, and say “ouu, ouu, ouu” to get try to get attention and have the opportunity to answer questions that were asked. As a result of these patterns of behavior both Ms. King and Mrs. Thompson would occasionally reprimand Steven for calling out.

In further discussing school, when Steven talked about something he had learned that he really liked and got excited about he mentioned multiplication. He claimed, “It’s fun – I go in order like when I do my fough’s, fough, eight, twelve, sixteen, and all that, and twenty, and then 24, and then 28, and then 32, ... 36, 40, 44, and 48” (Interview #2). He said that he liked figuring multiplication out because it was, “good for your brain” (Interview #2). In contrast to this, when asked if there had been anything he learned that he did not liked or thought was interesting Steven simply said no because, “everything is interesting” and “I like things pretty good” (Interview #2). Finally, he brought up reading again when he was talking about the way that he liked to learn things in school. In this case he said he liked, “Listening and readin’ and readin’ back

over again and then when the teacher ask me a question, it's right there (points to his head) in my head" (Interview #2).

Steven seemed to enjoy attending his former charter school, as was apparent when he talked about his favorite year in school so far. He noted that going to school there, in every grade, "was REAL fun!" When further questioned about what made his former school so much fun Steven said:

They jus, like we went on field trips and it was like a really nice school and then we did a lot of things – we read books, we, um, the teacher, every Friday we do our activities... and we use to do, OH A LOT of things – we jus had fun!
(Interview #2)

The fondness that he felt for his old school did not mean Steven disliked going to Morrison, because when he was asked what year so far has been his least favorite in school, he paused and then said he has liked all of them because he liked to learn.

When talking about how his teacher(s) might describe him Steven said, "She might say, he, he's a good student but sometimes I get off hand and that I can change – I could change my ways" (Interview #2). When questioned further, Steven said he was a smart student but when he got "off hand" he was doing things like, "laughing at other people when they do somethin'" (Interview #2). In discussing what he wished his teachers knew about him, Steven initially mentioned his ability as a football player but then changed topics to say, "I'm really, I think they – I LOVE, LOVE readin', I like readin' a lot." When asked if his teachers already knew that he added, "I think they don't – but she put, she put on my report card, Steven look at your fluency and she said keep it up" (Interview #2).

Finally, in a question where Steven was asked to think about two students in his class who were really good in school and what made them that way he said they were,

“Smart, they in gifted, and they jus always be on track; they never in trouble” (Interview #2). When talking about how he was similar to and different from these exemplary students Steven said, “I’m different from them cuz they always quiet, sometimes, they always quiet and we are alike probably because we listen to the teacher” (Interview #2).

Attitudes Toward Academics

As a general rule Steven enjoyed school and said that he was a “strong learner” and a “hard worker.” When comparing himself against his fellow classmates academically, in reading he rated his abilities as best in the fourth grade and in math he rated his ability as being average or in the middle among his peers. In explaining these rankings, he reported using his grades as the key indicator. He said about reading that he always got “good reports” but in math he said, “I ain’t very good at math, I gotta go to a tutor” (Post Observation Interview #5). During observations and interviews with Steven there were many instances where his attitudes toward school were evidenced. This section of Steven’s case study will focus on those attitudes as they were reflected in how he talked about his experiences, what he liked or disliked, and what stood out as positive or negative for him during the course of his daily school experiences.

Experiences and Talk that Reflect Positive Attitudes

Several themes emerged as Steven talked about the positive aspects of his day-to-day school experiences. The most prevalent of these themes was reflected in the persistent way he talked about liking school when he had the chance to demonstrate his knowledge and skills. Typically, he did this by calling out, raising his hand to offer answers, getting answers right when called on, and talking about tests he thought he did especially well on. A second theme that emerged was connected with his desire to learn and his love of reading. A third theme indicated the importance of activities that

allowed him to have fun, be social, or use his imagination while learning. And, a final theme that emerged was the value Steven placed on being acknowledged by his teachers as when they made a positive example of him or publicly apologized for some type of misunderstanding.

Demonstrating knowledge and skills

A simple example from a typical math class exemplified how important it was for Steven to demonstrate his knowledge during instruction. One day while the class was going over math problems, Mrs. Thompson told them that she would do the next one because a lot of them were struggling with that specific type of question. Immediately, Steven called out, “No, Mrs. Thompson, I can do it.” She asked him for his answer and when he got it right he said, “YEAAHHHH” and danced around in his chair celebrating (Observation #2).

On six occasions over the course of four different interviews, Steven talked about how his favorite part of doing academic work was when he had the opportunity to correctly answer the questions the teachers’ asked. In one example, when asked if math was something that he liked he replied, “Sometimes...when I get the answers right.” Then when further asked if he did not like math when he did not get the answers right he said, “Yezzzzz, ma’ am” (Post Observation Interview #2). Another example occurred after an activity the teachers called “Drop in the Bucket,”⁹ which involved doing basic grammatical corrections in a given paragraph. On two different occasions when Steven talked about doing “Drop in the Bucket,” he said that it was a lot of fun when, “I

⁹ Reading instruction started each day with the students doing “Drop in the Bucket” grammatical corrections, going over it as a class, and then answering comprehension questions about the given paragraph.

be having it right,” to which he also added, “and I want everybody to know [I got the answer]” (Post Observation Interview #4). His favorite thing about doing the vocabulary part of the daily reading lesson was that he got to give the definitions when Mrs. Thompson asked for them. And finally, when talking about what he enjoyed the most during reading lessons, Steven said, “When the teacher call on somebody and we got the, like she’ll give us a question and then I’ll raise my hand and get it right – and I’ll be HHAAAPPPPPYY, yeah” (Post Observation Interview #6).

Steven’s talk about how he performed on tests was routinely positive and essentially served as another way for him to demonstrate his school knowledge. Despite the fact that he admitted to struggling in math, when it came to taking tests he felt very confident and even indicated that taking tests was the most enjoyable part of math class for him. When pushed to further explain why he thought this he replied, “Cuz they short, they the most shortest test and sometimes they be EEEAAAASSSYYYY” (Post Observation Interview #6). In a specific example, when talking about a math test Steven said in a loud voice, “I think I did really, really, really, really, really, really, two times ten, thirty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, a hundred – really good” (Post Observation Interview #5). He also said about the test that, “everythin” was easy and then when asked what the hardest part had been he quickly answered, “whadnt none” (Post Observation Interview #5).

A final instance of how important it was for Steven to have the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge and skills came on the day prior to a school wide event called Chess Challenge. The entire group of fourth graders was out in their common area, known as the Centrum, listening to the event organizer, Mrs. J, talk about the

types of behaviors that would be appropriate during the event. When she asked the students if there were any questions, Steven raised his hand to ask her how long she had been playing chess and if she would play him during the event. Afterwards, Steven talked about the importance of that conversation when he said he remembered, “Asking her and then she said she was gonna play me, I wanna play her and winnnnn” (Post Observation Interview #6).

Learning and a love of reading

As Steven spoke about his daily school experiences, it became evident quickly that reading was important to him. Throughout the entire series of nine interviews and seven observations, he never once made a negative comment about reading or his instructional experiences during reading. Even when given the opportunity to talk about what he did not like in a lesson, he always said positive things about reading. In a series of examples, Steven first said that he liked everything about reading out loud in class and when talking about a specific reading class he indicated that it had not been boring for him because he said, “I like it now cuz the *Black Stallion* making it more interesting” (Post Observation Interview #6). On a separate occasion, he noted about the *Black Stallion* that, “I like it all, I like everything” (Post Observation Interview #4). Finally, toward the end of the interviews when he had the chance to talk about what he liked most and least in each major subject area he said, “I like everything in readin” (Post Observation Interview #6).

More than any of the other boys, Steven talked about the importance of learning, and his comments reflected an understanding of school and schoolwork as vehicles for doing that. One example of this occurred when Steven was talking about how he liked doing “Drop in the Bucket” because he liked getting the right answers. Before finishing

what he was saying he stopped and declared, “I still like it when I get it wrong” and then added, “Cuz it help me know better the next time” (Post Observation Interview #4). In another instance, Steven talked about how he liked doing a homework assignment called “Read and Respond.”¹⁰ He indicated that he liked this assignment because it got his brain working. Steven also talked about the importance of reading out loud in class because he said it “helps you to understand it better” (Post Observation Interview #4). Lastly, in an observation of Steven when a substitute teacher was in for Ms. King, many of the students behaved poorly and not much learning took place in writing that day. During the interview afterwards, Steven verbalized how he kept on getting mad and felt frustrated because, “the whole class just goofing around making...noises and they takin’ away everybody education” (Post Observation Interview #1).

Being social, having fun while learning, and using his imagination

On several different occasions Steven articulated how important it was to add a social element to learning, to have fun while learning, or to be able to use his imagination during instruction. These types of experiences gave Steven a positive outlook on a variety of activities that were included as part of the day-to-day curriculum. As an example, one strategy that the teachers routinely used during instruction was to have the students talk with their “Shoulder Buddy,”¹¹ who was the person sitting next to them, about a math problem, a story prediction, or a character in a book. During an interview Steven indicated that he liked doing this “a lot” (Post Observation Interview #6)

¹⁰ Read and Respond was a routine homework assignment in which the students read a book or book chapter at home and then wrote a response about the characters, setting, plot of the story, and whether or not they liked it.

¹¹ Both 4th grade classrooms were arranged so that the desks were in six groups of four. As a result a student’s “Shoulder Buddy” was typically the person sitting next to him/her.

because during reading his “Shoulder Buddy” was Lonnie, a good friend of his, and he got to talk and share with him during that time. In another instance when the students were out in the Centrum to listen to a presentation before beginning their reading of the *Black Stallion*, and Steven said, “It was kinda fun, it was social” (Post Observation Interview #1). A final example of how important the social aspect of learning was to Steven came when the class spent the final hour of a day listening to a guest speaker who was the author of a book they were reading. Steven indicated that he liked the guest speaker a lot and when asked why he said, “I liked how she told us about her life because sometime people don’t ever tell other people about they life” (Post Observation Interview #2). He went on to say that this had been important to him, “Because she show, she showed her life, her secret life” (Post Observation Interview #2), which made him like the book even more.

Two additional examples demonstrated how important it was for Steven to use his imagination and have fun while learning. A typical strategy used by the teachers to get the students to visualize a setting from a book was to tell them to make a ‘mind movie’ of a particular scene. Steven said he liked this strategy, “Cuz I can do magic stuff in my head” (Post Observation Interview #4). After saying this he went into a long animated comment about what he would have done if he had been the main character in *Solomon* when Ms. King told them to make their mind movie during instruction that day. In another example, Mrs. Thompson used a rhythmic call and response strategy during vocabulary instruction. Students chorally called out each word from their vocabulary list as Mrs. Thompson snapped her fingers and then she snapped her fingers a second time and repeated the word. For example, Mrs. Thompson said, “what

word” and the students reading from their list called out, “motionless” as Mrs. Thompson snapped her fingers then she said, “yes, motionless (snapping her fingers again), next word” and the students called out the next word in the list as she continued to snap her fingers every time she or the students called out a vocabulary word. This pattern continued until all of the vocabulary words from the story thus far had been read, with the list getting longer as new words were introduced in different chapters. When talking about this Steven said, “I be like, she be like – ‘what word, next word’ – I be repeating her” (Post Observation Interview #4). Mrs. Thompson caught onto what he was doing and told him to stop and as he continued to talk about this incident he said with a smile, “Then she tell me to stop and I be like (in a low whisper) what word, next word...it be fun” (Post Observation Interview #4).

Teacher apologies and being a good example

During interviews, another issue Steven talked about was any situation where the teachers either apologized for a misunderstanding or used him as a positive example for other students to emulate. One instance seemed particularly important to Steven because he brought it up as a topic of discussion twice in the course of one interview. During reading while the class was going over “Drop in the Bucket” Mrs. Thompson thought Steven was not paying attention and said to him, “You are not following where we are talking” (Observation #3). Next, she told him he needed to fix the mistake they had just gone over. He replied by telling her that he had already done it, after which they had a back and forth exchange that ended in him showing her his work and her apologizing to him. Afterwards, Steven brought this incident up initially talking about how it bothered him that she thought he was doing something wrong. However, when asked how Mrs. Thompson’s apology made him feel Steven said, “GOOD...cuz, sh, she

(4)¹² it just made me feel good” (Post Observation Interview #3). Although he was unable to articulate why this incident specifically made him feel good, he brought it up again later in the interview saying, “Like today when she made a mistake, like when, when she said that I just didn’t know.” After saying this he hesitated, smiled, and then added, “but I like apologies” (Post Observation Interview #3).

Two other instances that made a positive impression on Steven occurred when the teachers used him as an example for other students to emulate. One example of this came when Steven was reading a paragraph out loud and stuttered over a word. When this happened he stopped and asked if he could go back and read it again. The second time he read the word clearly and Mrs. Thompson pointed out that how he had stopped and tried again was a very good strategy to use. During the interview later, Steven said he felt bad about stuttering when he was reading. However, when he talked about Mrs. Thompson using him as an example for others he said, “I felt like I looked goood now...and that was good” (Post Observation Interview #4).

Experiences and Talk that Reflect Negative Attitudes

During observations and interviews Steven also talked about day-to-day school events and experiences that were negative for him. These experiences reflected themes in learning, behavior, and teaching. In terms of learning, issues that emerged as negative for Steven included incidents such as not having the opportunity to answer questions, making mistakes, not knowing something, taking long tests, and getting bored. With regard to behavior, issues that were negative for Steven included times where a teacher reprimanded him, he received checks for his behavior, or he did not

¹² () indicates a brief pause in the discussion during an interview. A number inside the parenthesis indicates a pause of approximately that length of time – for example (2) indicates a 2 second pause.

receive rewards for good behavior. A final theme that emerged as negative was related to specific interactions he had with his teachers. These negative episodes were connected to his perceptions that the teachers were not listening to him, that they demonstrated mistrust of him, or they yelled a lot. Additionally, Steven articulated instances where he believed the teachers were not invested in their teaching or the students' lives.

Learning issues

During day-to-day instruction one frustration articulated by Steven was associated with not having the opportunity to share his knowledge because he was not called on to answer questions that the teachers asked. Although this was framed by the numerous times he expressed how much he liked to get called on, he also communicated that it was negative for him not to have this opportunity. In one particular reading lesson, the students were being called on to provide definitions of vocabulary words as well as sentences that used specific words and Steven raised his hand for seven different words. In that time, only once did he get called on to share a sentence. For the other words, he called out but did not get acknowledged or he had his hand raised, was waving it, and was saying "ouu, ouu" and still did not get acknowledged. After not getting called on to give a sentence for the word 'murmur' he dropped his head down, lower his hand, and clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth in apparent disappointment. During one interview he expressed how much he liked getting called on to answer "Drop in the Bucket" corrections but also added, "I hate when the teacher don't call on me" (Post Observation Interview #3). When asked why, he replied that he always had the answer right and he wanted everyone to know it.

Getting answers wrong, not knowing, or making mistakes in front of his peers were other examples of issues that stood out in a negative way for Steven. As previously discussed he indicated he did not like math class when he struggled to get the answers right. He reiterated this in a later interview when he said about math, “Sometimes it get BOOORRRRIINNGG.” When asked what was happening in class at those times he said, “When she, when the problems I don’t be KNNOOWWIINNGG” (Post Observation Interview #6). In a separate interview as he was talking about the way Mrs. Thompson had them learn the vocabulary words he said, “What I don’t like is all them WORDS” (Post Observation Interview #3), to which he added that they were too hard to remember. In a final example, when Steven was talking about the reading lesson where he stuttered over a specific word, he said, “the words be too hard – attaattaattaba – I be stuttering” (Post Observation Interview #4). Even though Mrs. Thompson used him as a positive example in this case, he talked about how it made him feel bad because he was reading out loud and it embarrassed him to stutter.

Steven occasionally talked about getting bored during instruction and indicated this mostly happened when there was not a lot to do such as when he finished a long test or there was a substitute teacher. After a day when a substitute was there for Ms. King, Steven indicated that the afternoon had been boring because, “When the substitute around, they [classmates] like to show out. They all be saying, “oh we have a substitute today I finna to be bad and all that” (Post Observation Interview #1). On more than one occasion, when the students were taking timed tests that lasted 45-minutes or more, Steven talked about how bored he got. In a specific example, during a long math test, as the three-minute warning bell went off to indicate the end of the school day

Steven put his hands together as if praying, looked up toward the ceiling, and said “thank you so much.” After this he looked over and said, “Put that on there when I said, YESSSSS” (Post Observation Interview #5). Later, he said he “hated” taking timed tests because they were too long and he got tired and wanted to fall asleep. After finishing one long test he put his head down and closed his eyes, later saying, “It was a long test and when I was done I looked over it about three times so I just said, ‘I’m finna ta sleep’” (Post Observation Interview #6). In general, Steven did not talk about being bored often but when it did happen he said he typically was, “just dying for somethin’ to do” (Post Observation Interview #6).

Behavior issues

There were various times during the school day when Steven’s behavior became a point of contention and he was either reprimanded by the teachers, received a check mark on the behavior chart, or did not get a star for good behavior. These occurrences stood out to Steven and he invariably talked about them in interviews. In an example that was previously discussed because it ended with a teacher apology, Steven also talked about negative elements of the experience. This incident occurred reading while the class was correcting “Drop in the Bucket” and Mrs. Thompson reprimanded Steven because she thought he was not following along. During the interview Steven indicated this stood out to him saying, “Man, you remember when Mrs. Thompson made a mistake – she thought I had something capitalized” (Post Observation Interview #3). He went on to say that even though she had apologized it made him feel bad because she accused him of doing something he had not done and that was frustrating for him.

An example where Ms. King reprimanded Steven seemed particularly important to him as he talked about it at length during a post observation interview. In this

instance, as the students were getting ready to go to their reading classrooms, Steven said to Ms. King, "I can be patrol" and she responded by saying, "not with the disrespect you showed this morning." After this, as he was walking out of the classroom he, again, said to Ms. King, "I said I CAN be" (Observation #6), to which she replied all of them had the potential to get on fifth-grade safety patrol next year but many would not because they could not control their behavior. Later Steven indicated his displeasure with the conversation:

She gonna say my name and I whadnt even doing nothin', all I did was just looked at Stanley and then she was looking at me. Cuz she was talking to Stanley about his letters and then I looked at Stanley and then I looked at the teacher, () and then I looked at Stanley again...and then she said my name, then I said I ain't even doing nothin' and then she said see you just talking back right there. (Post Observation Interview #6)

As he was saying this he spoke in a loud voice and ended his comment almost in a pleading tone by asking, "Is that talking back if I said I ain't did nothin'" (Post Observation Interview #6).

Receiving check marks for bad behavior on the charts the teachers had posted was also negative for Steven. One example stood out because it was based on an incident that occurred before Steven's observation had started that day, yet he talked about it at length during his interview. When asked if there was anything from the day that he wanted to talk about he replied, "Yes, I got a check for, well I feel like I got a check for no reason" (Post Observation Interview #3). After this he immediately went into a long explanation of what had happened earlier that day in Ms. King's class:

It was this girl...she was talking, I say Julie be quiet, she was behind me and then that's when the teacher say Steven you have a check. I said I was just telling her – no, no butts about it – so that's when I just put my head down. I did like this, (he demonstrated by putting his head down on the desk) and then that when this boy...Jared, he was messing with this girl, or they both was messing

with each other. I told um all ta stop and she gave me another check. (Post Observation Interview #3)

He continued by saying he was really mad, “Because I didn’t do anything. I be trying to explain to the teacher that I didn’t do anything and she don’t be believing me” (Post Observation Interview #3). He even brought this incident up again before the end of the interview saying, “I’m probably in trouble...cuz, of the two checks” (Post Observation Interview #3). When asked what typically happened after two checks in one day he said in a disappointed voice that he would have to stay in from recess the next day.

One other behavioral issue that stood out for Steven was when he was not recognized or given stars by the teachers for good conduct. One instance of this that was previously mentioned happened when he was in reading and Mrs. Thompson gave stars to students who were ready to begin the next activity. He did not get one, however, and as a result called out, “Mrs. Thompson how am I not ready” (Observation #6). In his interview after, he said he remembered the teacher told him he wasn’t ready during reading. In a second example, as Steven spoke about what he liked and disliked in each subject area, he talked about writing and Ms. King saying, “She be giving out stars but she don’t be lookin’, um, at our group, she won’t be lookin’ at our group and see what we be doin’ but she look at others... and I be like, MAN” (Post Observation Interview #6).

Teacher issues

As Steven talked about his daily school experiences, issues with his teachers inevitably surfaced. The first of these was the perception Steven had about how invested his teachers were in their own teaching or in the lives of the students. The

second issue was associated with times that Steven felt his teachers were not listening to him, they mistrusted him, or they yelled a lot.

In a manner that was different from the other boys, Steven talked about his perceptions of how a teacher should be teaching. He was not always able to clearly articulate his ideas, but he definitely had a vision for how a teacher should teach. During one interview, Steven was talking about what had not been fun for him in reading that day when he said, “It was just how, a lot of expression – a lot of expressions – like you know when teachers teach I thought they poseta be like happy, now that the interns are gone it gettin’ borin’” (Post Observation Interview #3). After a separate observation from a math lesson Steven noted, “It was kind of borin’ cuz, [then he asked] you ain’t gonna tell” and when he was reassured that the conversation was confidential he said, “Um, because...she, she kinda, she really looked like she was tired” (Post Observation Interview #1).

In another example, Steven was asked what the teacher might typically be doing in class at the times when he got bored or distracted and he replied, “When they be jus, um, they don’t use that much experience, like you know how teachers have gotta have... like my teacher, Miss Smith, last year she taught me, she said a teacher is sometimes gotta be active a lot” (Post Observation Interview #6). He went on to say, “They active but they ain’t that active....She should be like, (loudly clears his throat) UT, UT, UT – hey guys how you doing this mornin’, you look like... she ain’t never say that, she ain’t never say HEEEEYYY” (Post Observation Interview #6).

At various times throughout interviews Steven expressed thoughts that his teachers were either not listening, mistrusted him, or yelled a lot. One instance of this

occurred in a previously discussed example where Ms. King told Steven that his lack of respect was not acceptable if he wanted to be on the fifth-grade safety patrol next year. Afterwards, Steven discussed the incident in an animated manner implying that Ms. King had accused him of talking back when he, “whadnt even doing nothin” (Post Observation Interview #6). In a second example, when Steven was talking about how he thought reading was getting more fun and he was starting to like everything they were doing he indicated that it was different than before when Mrs. Thompson, “Kept on hollering at me” (Post Observation Interview #4). He also said that because she had stopped hollering at him it made reading class more fun.

Another example where Steven had an altercation with both of his teachers in one day and then talked at length about his frustrations demonstrated his underlying feelings of mistrust and not being listened to. The first incident that day occurred during a previously discussed reading lesson where Steven had been reprimanded when Mrs. Thompson thought he was not following along during “Drop in the Bucket” grammatical corrections. In the interview afterwards, Steven said, pointedly, that it made him feel bad because, “she always accusing me of somethin” (Post Observation Interview #3). He went on to add that it felt especially bad because he had the right answer for the correction she was yelling at him about. Also in that interview, Steven mentioned a second incident that occurred that day with Ms. King. This was also previously mentioned because it resulted in Steven getting two checks on the behavior chart. However, what was important here was when talking about it Steven said, “I be tryin’ to explain to the teacher that I didn’t do anything and she don’t be believing me” (Post Observation Interview #3). He went on to say that it was frustrating because he felt he

did the right thing but still got in trouble and he concluded of Ms. King, “Yeah, it like she hate me or somethin” (Post Observation Interview #3).

The combination of these two incidents occurring in one day led Steven to be reflective in two key ways. First, he became nostalgic for a time when he felt school was more fun and the teacher liked him. Without being prompted by a specific question and after talking about the two episodes above he said:

Sometimes, I miss my old school. My teacher name is Ms. Smith, she was real nice – we did all, we did all activities on Friday’s – it was fun...we did art – like we’ll make paper airplanes, we’ll make real drawing cups, like we do A LOT of stuff. We’ll go outside, more than this school...I miss my old teacher. (Post Observation Interview #3)

Second, and perhaps more troubling, later in the interview when he was talking about looking forward to summer, he started to wonder if he would pass the fourth grade.

When asked why he worried about it he replied, “The teacher make the choice...[and] that’s what I’m really scared of” (Post Observation Interview #3).

Engaged and Disengaged Behaviors – A Continuum of Participation

Examining Steven’s patterns of engagement produced results that fell along a continuum of participation levels. During daily instructional lessons and activities his behaviors ranged from being actively engaged to being totally disengaged. In addition, there were times where Steven’s actions reflected a more tenuous level of engagement, meaning his behavior would vacillate between participation and non-participation within a short period of time. In general, there were not discernible patterns in Steven’s levels of participation across subject areas, times of the day, or specific learning activities. On the whole, instances where Steven was actively engaged and participating in daily lessons outnumbered his displays of disengaged behaviors. This section of Steven’s

case study will examine more closely the behaviors that were reflective of his participation across this continuum of engagement.

Behaviors that Reflect Active Engagement

Displays of Steven's active engagement were evident through a range of actions he demonstrated during daily lessons; the most prevalent of which occurred during times of teacher led instruction. Behaviors that Steven exhibited during this time included raising his hand to answer questions that were asked, answering questions, calling out answers, participating in call and response activities, actively listening, and reading out loud. Collectively, the prevalence of these actions was recorded over fifty times across the seven observations of Steven. Other teacher-directed activities that Steven actively participated in included working with a partner or in a small group, completing some type of written assignment, or taking a test. He also was engaged at times when he sought and received help from a teacher. Finally, in two observations when there were guest speakers present, Steven displayed engaged behaviors that included attentive listening, watching, and questioning.

Participating in teacher-led instruction

During daily teacher-led instruction, Steven frequently behaved in a manner that demonstrated active engagement. The most common displays of this type of participation occurred when the class was involved in question and answer discussions, primarily during reading instruction. In these instances, behaviors Steven exhibited that showed his active participation were associated with raising his hand, answering questions, and calling out responses. For example, during one reading observation when Mrs. Thompson was leading the class in questions and answers about vocabulary, Steven raised his hand to offer answers six times. Likewise, during an

observation when the class was working on “Drop in the Bucket” corrections, he raised his hand to offer answers seven different times. Across these two examples there were at least four times that Steven not only raised his hand to offer answers but he also waved his hand or called out “ouu, ouu,” to try to get Mrs. Thompson’s to call on him.

When given the opportunity, Steven typically answered questions correctly or engaged in dialogue with Mrs. Thompson until she was satisfied with his response. A specific instance of this occurred during the aforementioned vocabulary lesson when Steven was giving a sentence with the word “bureau” in it. His sentence was, “I accidentally spilled water on my bureau.” Mrs. Thompson wanted him to elaborate and provide more detail so he expanded his answer by saying, “and water got on my clothes” (Observation #5).

There were also numerous instances where Steven called out answers despite not being acknowledged by a teacher. For example, during a vocabulary lesson, Mrs. Thompson asked for a definition by saying, “If I am mumbling something, what am I doing” (Observation #3)? In reply Steven called out “murmuring” twice, even though Mrs. Thompson never recognized his answer. Across seven observations, Steven called out answers, questions, or statements on forty-nine occasions.

During the course of reading instruction Mrs. Thompson frequently used strategies that engaged the students in chorally calling out words such as when she would stop reading a story and expect the students to say the next word or when she would have them chorally call out vocabulary words. During these times, Steven demonstrated engagement in lessons by actively participating in chorally calling out on thirteen occasions.

A final teacher-led activity where Steven demonstrated high levels of engagement came when he behaved in a manner that indicated he was actively listening during ongoing reading instruction. Many of the examples used thus far indicate Steven's patterns of following along and engaging in lessons. The difference here, however, is that this type of participation involved examples of Steven actively listening without any sort of verbal response. The best illustrations of this occurred during three separate observations when Mrs. Thompson was reading aloud and Steven turned his bookmarker sideways, tracked down the page as she read, and maintained his focus on the book.

Participating in individual or partner work

The other predominant examples where Steven's behaviors reflected active participation occurred during times of individual or partner work. In the majority of instances when prompted to do so by his teachers, Steven quickly took on the task of completing his own assignments. An example of this occurred as he individually read a chapter in *The Black Stallion*. During the entire time it took him to read he rested his chin on his desk, held his book in his outstretched hands, and simply read. Other examples occurred at times when he completed individual assignments such as "Drop in the Bucket," writing out answers to chapter questions, or completing prompts in writing class.

In addition, there were three times during observations of Steven where the students took timed tests. In each of these instances the tests were at least 45-minutes long and, oftentimes it was evident that Steven was not always focused on the task. In one example of a writing test, however, he displayed continuous and focused effort that

lasted for approximately 40 of the 45 minutes the students were given to complete the exam. Fieldnotes demonstrated how focused Steven's efforts were:

[He] is looking down at his paper and writing before she even finishes giving the directions....At minute 38 left on the timer, he is still writing...after looking at his paper for a brief time he goes back to writing – 5 minutes later at 33 left on the clock he is still writing. At 31 minutes remaining he stops writing, rubs his hand that he writes with, stretches it out, shakes it, and then goes back to writing....At minute 27 remaining he is still writing....Between minutes 23 and 22 he is distracted by something...he watches Hailey and Samuel for a brief time and then goes back to writing....At 14:14 left on the timer Steven stops writing...raises his hand, Ms. King comes over and he says, "what are you suppose to do," she says something to him...he goes back to writing....At 9:30 remaining on the clock he is still writing; at 7:50 left she tells them to start closing it out. (Observation #7)

After this directive from Ms. King, Steven worked another 2-3 minutes to finish his exam and then proudly displayed to his group mates the writing he had been so intently engaged in throughout the test.

On most occasions when the students were directed to complete work with a partner, Steven displayed behaviors that reflected active participation in the task at hand. In reading and math, Mrs. Thompson frequently used the strategy of having students work with a "Shoulder Buddy" to complete their fluency reading, share corrections on "Drop in the Bucket," make a prediction in the story, review details from a previous lesson, or share answers they got to math warm-up and worksheet problems. During these times Steven typically participated with enthusiasm. Across four observations of reading, when the students were instructed to work with a partner for fluency practice, Steven readily worked with his "Shoulder Buddy," Lonnie, to take turns reading for one minute and then discuss how many words each of them had read. In other examples, when the students were instructed to share how many corrections they found in their "Drop in the Bucket" paragraph, Steven worked with Lonnie to complete

this task and when they were told to share how they had gotten answers to a math problem, Steven worked with Christopher so they could each talk about their answers.

Seeking help and guest speakers

There were occasions where Steven displayed active engagement in lessons through asking for and receiving help from his teachers. This pattern was more prevalent during math lessons than reading and overall did not occur on a frequent basis. Nonetheless, his efforts to receive assistance demonstrated a strong level of participation. During one particular math class, Steven asked for and received help twice while working on his daily math warm up. Fieldnotes show how engaged Steven was when working with his teacher to get the necessary help to complete his assignment:

He is working on the math warm up when Mrs. Donald walks by and he asks her for help with one of the problems – she stands over him helping and he says at one point, “I don’t get this.” She has him read the problem again then continues to help him – after about a minute she starts to step away from his desk saying, “You know how to do this, you just like the help.” As she walks away, Steven is working on the problem and says, “Mrs. Donald, Mrs. Donald” – she stays by his side helping him further. (Observation #2)

A final illustration of Steven’s active engagement in academic work occurred on two occasions when there were guest speakers visiting the fourth grade. In both cases Steven exhibited a high level of engagement by displaying behaviors consistent with active listening, watching the guest speakers, and asking questions.

Behaviors that Reflect a Tenuous Level of Engagement

At various times throughout each observation Steven displayed behaviors that wavered between active participation and non-participation. During these times Steven’s involvement in the ongoing lesson was tenuous and interspersed with moments of disengagement that were evident by his participation in an assortment of

non-academic behaviors. There were also times that Steven was behaving in a manner that reflected disengagement, yet was quickly prompted into being engaged by one of his teachers. These moments of disengagement and times of prompted engagement were recorded on twenty-six occasions and were indicative of behaviors that would fall somewhere in the middle on the continuum of participation between engagement and disengagement.

Moments of disengagement

At some point of each lesson and across each subject area, Steven exhibited a tenuous level of engagement by vacillating between academic and non-academic behaviors. One instance of this occurred in math as Mrs. Thompson was going over warm-up problems with the entire class. During this time, Steven initially sat looking at his worksheet and watching another student explain an answer. In the middle of the explanation, however, Steven whispered something to Jared and then started “messing around” with Christopher so he essentially stopped participating in an academic manner. Later in that same lesson, he demonstrated a similar pattern of behavior:

Mrs. Thompson continues to try to explain the problem; Steven sits, watches her, and plays with his hair – running his [hair] pick through it. Next, Christopher is supposed to explain to Steven how he did the next problem but Steven calls out, “He didn’t do it.” Mrs. Thompson responds, “Then work together to figure it out.” Steven leans back in his chair, stretches, sits up, and pulls his chair up to his desk to work with Christopher on the problem. His attention to the problem does not last very long as he takes out his hair pick again, plays with his hair, drops the [hair] pick down the back of his shirt, picks it up, and then puts it back in his pocket. (Observation #2)

A second example of how Steven’s participation was interspersed with moments of disengagement came during a lesson when the students were instructed to journal write about their reactions to a part of *Solomon* the teacher had read to them:

Steven starts writing but does so for only a brief time – not more than one minute. He looks up and says, “excuse me Mrs. Donald” she calls him Lance, he says, “it is Steven.” Mrs. Donald apologizes and he asks if he can go get some water. When she says no he frowns and then begins writing. He writes for a brief time, stops and talks with his group mates, writes some more, looks around the room, corrects Mrs. Donald on another student’s name, writes some more, plays with his hair...writes some more, and then tries to get Christopher to write after Mrs. Donald says that group 1 is doing a good job except for Christopher. He goes back to writing for a brief time then stops and looks over to say, “Miss Vicki my neck hurts, I slept on it wrong.” (Observation #1)

These moments of disengagement also occurred when Steven was involved in completing other individual assignments such as worksheets and tests.

Prompted engagement

In further explaining the continuum of behaviors that reflected Steven’s varying levels of participation, on six different occasions there were incidents when he was not engaged in academic work and then suddenly with a word or glance from a teacher he started working. In one class when the students had been instructed to read on their own, Steven sat fidgeting in his chair, looking around the classroom, and staring off at the floor until he noticed that Mrs. Thompson was watching him. Immediately after this he began to do his reading. In another class, the students were told to work with their shoulder buddy to compare their “Drop in the Bucket” corrections. Despite this directive Steven and his group mates were off task, talking and laughing instead of doing their work. Mrs. Thompson simply called out, “Group 1” and the boys began to do the work she had requested of them.

Behaviors that Reflect Disengagement

There were times during each of the seven observations when Steven’s behavior reflected total disengagement from academic work. The majority of his behaviors during this time fell into one of two categories. First, there were instances when he was

simply not paying attention; instead he was engaged in non-academic behaviors such as playing with something that was not connected to the lesson at hand. Second, there were numerous occasions when Steven was disengaged because he was talking or “messing around” with his classmates. Over the course of observations, disengaged episodes were recorded for Steven on twenty-six occasions and reflected behavior that fell at the far end of the continuum of participation.

Off in his own world

At times when Steven was disengaged from academic work, one of his patterns of behavior was to engage in individual alternative actions. This type of behavior occurred on eleven different occasions and included actions such as putting his head down, using his pick to play with his hair, fooling around with something at his desk, or simply behaving silly. One specific instance of this occurred during math class when Steven spent several minutes stacking pencil erasers he had in his desk instead of paying attention to the lesson. Another example came during a reading class:

He picks his hair then tosses the pick across the desks, he gets it back from Jared, picks at his hair a few more times, stops, puts the pick away, and puts his head down on the desk over his crossed arms. Next he lifts his head up, looks down at the floor, bends down and ties his shoelaces, sits playing with his shoes – pulling on the tongue of each, he then stares off again before putting his head down on his desk. He is doing all of this when he is supposed to be writing in a journal. (Observation #1)

On other occasions Steven behaved in ways that were silly and it appeared as if he was trying to entertain himself. In one case of this during a writing class, Steven was doing such things as putting his head down, fidgeting in his chair, biting on the corner of a folder that was on his desk, moving his shoulders in a circular motion, pulling the hood on his jacket up and down, sticking his tongue out at his group mates, and making faces.

Talking or “messaging around” with classmates

On fifteen occasions across his observations Steven was disengaged from academic work because he was either talking or “messaging around” with one or more of his fellow classmates. One instance of this happened during a reading class when the students were instructed to complete their “Drop in the Bucket” corrections while Mrs. Thompson checked homework:

Once she is finished [checking his group] and has moved on to another table group, he [Steven] and the other boys at his table begin spending more time talking than working on drop in the bucket – the topic of their conversation...is monkeys and orangutans. (Observation #4)

During a different reading class, while Mrs. Thompson was giving directions for what the students should be doing next, Steven sat talking to his group mates, running his hand over Lonnie’s head, and then he began flapping his arms up and down. A final example occurred during a writing class, when Steven became disengaged from the lesson because he and Samuel were trying to communicate with each other from across the room. All through this time, which lasted for 2-3 minutes, they were mouthing words to each other, making faces, laughing, and generally not paying attention to Ms. King.

Conclusion

As a result of the ways that Steven talked about his school experiences and the things that stood out to him as important, his attitudes and dispositions toward academics were viewed as mostly positive. Steven frequently talked about school in an affirmative manner and was especially optimistic about reading. Despite his positive orientation, however, there were times of frustration for Steven that ranged from minor instances such as not getting called on to larger issues of feeling that his teachers sometimes mistrusted or did not like him. Additionally, Steven’s overall patterns of

behavior indicated that he frequently participated in ongoing daily lessons, which placed him squarely in the engaged end on the continuum of participation.

CHAPTER 6 CHRISTOPHER – CASE STUDY

Introduction

Christopher was a ten year old with a personality that was mostly quiet. He was of average height and build when compared to his classmates, dressed in clothes that were similar to the other boys such as denim shorts and logo tee shirts, and wore his hair in a medium length Afro style. While he had a mostly quiet demeanor around his peers, Christopher happily engaged in conversation with adults, enjoyed one-on-one attention, and was quick to flash a smile that revealed big dimples. During interviews he gladly answered and asked questions, although many of his responses were brief and he did not go into a lot of detail or provide long explanations. In social settings that were evident during large group events, recess, or transitions, Christopher's tendency was to keep to himself or to follow the lead of some of the more vocal boys in class. These dispositions were apparent when he was off by himself as many of the other students were sitting in small groups or when he made sure to act or talk in a way that aligned with someone who had taken the lead in a situation. In school, Christopher was an average student who, sometimes, struggled to stay engaged and focused during daily lessons. He could quickly become frustrated in situations where he felt others were "messaging" with him or he did not earn a reward because of his behavior or failure to complete homework assignments. Despite this, he often turned things around and became focused on a lesson again for reasons that he was not able to articulate.

This chapter provides a detailed account of Christopher' learning based on themes and patterns that emerged from his observations and interviews. Initially, a picture will be given of who Christopher was in terms of how he talked about his life,

school, and the things that were important to him. After this, the focus will turn to Christopher' attitudes toward school. This section will examine themes that came to light as Christopher talked of the positive and negative aspects of his daily school experiences. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the patterns that became apparent when analyzing Christopher' engaged and disengaged behaviors during observations.

Who is Christopher?

Christopher lived with his grandmother, his grand dad, and his dad. Christopher had four siblings; two older brothers, one who was in high school and one in middle school, an older sister in middle school, and a younger sister who also attended Morrison Elementary. When Christopher spent time with his family he said they went to the movies or the arcade in the mall. His favorite movie was Kung Fu Panda, the first one, and when he was at the arcade he liked to play "the fighting game" (Interview #1). Christopher's mother lived in a different city that was several hours away by car. He occasionally visited her and spoke during one interview of how excited he was to be going to see her for an upcoming weekend.

When he grows up Christopher said he wants to be a professional baseball player. He elaborated by adding that he wanted to play first base and that his love of baseball was fostered by learning about his two favorite players, Babe Ruth and Jackie Robinson. Unlike some of the other boys in the study, Christopher did not talk of having aspirations to be something other than a professional athlete when he gets older. Additionally, when asked what he was good at outside of school, he replied, "I am really good at playing a sport, like a sport game" (Interview #1). He added that, besides baseball, the sports he liked to play were soccer, basketball, and football.

Christopher said that on a typical day when he got home from the after-school program he attended, he liked to make sure his homework was finished. In contrast to his words, however, during the time of data collection Christopher struggled to get his homework completed and there were frequent instances where he did not get to participate in “Cookie Club,” which was the teachers’ way of rewarding students who fulfilled their reading homework requirements throughout a weeks’ time. His teachers also indicated that Christopher had recently made some inappropriate comments and was no longer allowed to attend the after school program, which may have contributed to his struggles to get his homework done.

When he was not with his family or in school, Christopher said, “I spend time with my friends” (Interview #1) and together they liked to ride bikes or play sports. His best friend was another student in the fourth grade at Morrison named Samuel. When asked how Samuel might describe him, Christopher replied, “He would say that [I am a] nice and friendly friend sometimes... but sometimes he might not say sometimes” (Interview #1). Christopher also added that Samuel might say he was good at sport games they play together.

Christopher had attended Morrison Elementary for the third and fourth grade and before that he went to another local elementary school. He said that he liked school and when asked how he did as a student he replied, “Ah, ah (2)¹³ I do pretty good.” He then qualified this by saying, “Ah...like sometimes good and sometimes bad” (Interview #2). When he was asked how he knew when he had done good or bad, he initially said, “that’s a hard one” (Interview #2) and then after a long pause he talked about the

¹³ () indicates a brief pause in the discussion during an interview. A number inside the parenthesis indicates a pause of approximately that length of time – for example (2) indicates a 2 second pause.

grades he got as being the key indicator of his success or failure. Christopher also indicated that he learned best in school when he had the chance to read about something that the class was studying.

In talking about what he believed his teachers might say about him as a student Christopher said, “Ah, ah, that sometimes he’s good but sometimes he’s bad”(Interview #2). To further explain what it was that he would be doing when the teachers thought he was bad he used a behavioral indicator and replied said, “not paying attention” (Interview #2). Also, when Christopher was asked what he wished his teachers knew about him hesitated for a few moments and then said, “That I am smart” and “that I am nice and stuff like that” (Interview #2).

He talked about reading as a school subject that he was good at yet when talking about something he had learned that he really liked and got excited about he said, “I like to do geometry” (Interview #2). He explained further by saying that geometry was a challenge for him and that was why he liked it. In comparison, science was something he did not like and said it was his least favorite school subject. More specifically, he said, “I don’t be getting¹⁴ science a lot” (Interview #2) and as a result he said he did not enjoy it because it was too hard.

Christopher said that his favorite grade so far had been fourth because he really liked the field trips that his class went on to places such as the local skate park and St. Augustine. He also talked about how much he liked the lunch bunch that he had the opportunity to be a part of throughout the year. He added that this was “because we get

¹⁴ In all instances an effort was made to write in a manner that captured Thomas’ language as it was spoken during observations and interviews. This typically included a mix of Standard English and African American Vernacular English.

to make things” (Interview #2) like necklaces. Conversely, when Christopher talked about the year in school that has been his least favorite so far he said it was third grade. When prompted to explain why this was the case, he stuttered but said it was because the teacher got, “mad at me if I didn’t...a, a, a, a, answer a simple question” (Interview #2).

Finally, in a question where Christopher talked about two students in his class who were really good in school and what made them that way he used both academic and behavior indicators to discuss his answer. He explained by saying that these two students had characteristics that made them good because they were quiet, good listeners, and got A’s and B’s for grades on their report cards. When Christopher was prompted to reflect on how he was similar to and different from these students he said, “I am good but get A’s and B’s sometimes a, a, a, an, an, and I am kind of smart, like that” (Interview #2).

Prior to moving on to an examination of Christopher’s attitudes it is important to elaborate on the struggles he had when trying to articulate responses to questions he was asked throughout interviews. This difficulty may have been, in part, due to his tendency to stutter. During interviews there were pauses that lasted anywhere from a few seconds up to twenty seconds of elapsed time before Christopher was able to verbalize something he wanted to say. In the first post observation interview, he said that the stuttering made him nervous when he was trying to give his answers. Additionally, when he talked about reading out loud in class he indicated that he only “sometimes” liked it and then added:

Christopher: Hmm, because, ah, ah, sometimes I get real mad, like for no reason I think.

Vicki: So you think maybe the mad is that you're frustrated a little or a little bit nervous to read out loud in front of people?"

Christopher: Both.

Vicki: Both of those things.

Christopher: Nods his head yes. (Post Observation Interview #2)

In some instances, Christopher's stuttering influenced his ability to articulate answers to questions because he shut down after attempting to answer and struggling to verbalize the words. An example of this occurred in an interview where he indicated he had difficulty answering two of the math problems the students had to complete during class. As Christopher tried to say why these problems were hard for him he stuttered and struggled for ten seconds before saying, "I can't say it" (Post Observation Interview #3). A second example occurred after a reading lesson when Ms. King reprimanded Christopher, he appeared to sulk for an extended period of time and then he suddenly started participating again. Afterwards when talking about what led to his shift from being disengaged to engaged, it took him seventeen seconds of trying to verbalize a response before saying, "E,e,e,e,e,e, (6) ah,h,h,h,h,h, (4) I don't know" (Post Observation Interview #6).

In other instances, Christopher's struggles to verbalize answers led to short, sometimes one-word responses to questions. After an observation where Mrs. Thompson had taken the students outside to pick vegetables from the class garden, Christopher talked about what happened during the day that made him want to participate in lessons by simply replying, "garden" (Post Observation Interview #5). In another interview, Christopher articulated what stood out for him in reading by saying,

“Rennata,” who was a frog and the lead character in a play the class was reading. When talking about why this stood out Christopher said, “funny” (Post Observation Interview #7). These short verbalizations of answers were typical of the conversations Christopher engaged in throughout the entirety of data collection and there were no examples of instances where he spoke for extended periods of time when replying to questions.

Even though stuttering was a concern for Christopher, there were also instances where his inability to articulate responses did not appear to be connected to this issue. Rather, it seemed that he either did not want to answer or he did not want to think through the reasons why he liked something, disliked something, or behaved in a certain manner. Across the interviews there were a total of fourteen times when Christopher was asked a question and could not give an answer. One example of this occurred as he talked about why he liked being able to explain his math answers to a partner and Christopher said, “Ah, I don’t know, these questions are hard too answer” (Post Observation Interview #3). As Christopher talked about his homework inconsistencies and his resulting swings in participation, the following conversation ensued:

Vicki: I noticed sometimes when you don’t have your homework done you don’t want to participate, is that right?

Christopher: Sometimes.

Vicki: Sometimes, but sometimes when you don’t have your homework done you still like to participate?

Christopher: Nods his head yes.

Vicki: What do you think the difference is?

Christopher: After 4 seconds – shrugs his shoulders and does not answer. (Post Observation Interview #5)

Finally, when Christopher attempted to talk about the types of comments from his teachers that made him happy or sad he struggled for a brief time before saying, “I don’t know” (Post Observation Interview #5). After he made this comment the following conversation occurred to try to get Christopher to think through his response:

Vicki: Are there times that Ms. King or Mrs. Thompson make comments at ya that make you really happy?

Christopher: He shakes his head yes.

Vicki: Yeah, but you can’t remember one that has made you happy?

Christopher: He shakes his head no.

Vicki: Ok, can you remember one that made you sad?

Christopher: He shakes his head no. (Post Observation Interview #5)

Attitudes and Dispositions Toward Academics

As a general rule Christopher enjoyed school and learning and as previously mentioned he said his teachers might declare, “sometimes” he was a “good student” (Interview #2). When he compared himself against his fellow classmates academically, in both math and writing, he used behavioral and achievement indicators to rank his abilities as being in the middle among his peers with math being slightly higher than writing. In talking about why he rated himself this way, he said about math, “Because, because, (he begins to stutter again) ah, ah, because, ea, ea, ea, ea, (6) sometimes I play a lot, an, and sometimes I take it seriously” (Post Observation Interview #3). Conversely, he rated himself slightly lower in writing because he said that the grades he got were not quite as good as his math grades (Post Observation Interview #3). Over the course of seven observations and nine interviews with Christopher there were many

instances when his attitudes toward school became evident. This section of Christopher' case study will focus on those attitudes as they were reflected in how he talked about his experiences, what he liked or disliked, and what stood out as positive or negative for him during the course of his daily school experiences.

Experiences and Talk that Reflect Positive Attitudes

Several themes emerged as Christopher talked in a positive manner about various aspects of his day-to-day school experiences. The most prevalent theme was how important extrinsic rewards were to his continued efforts in the classroom. Christopher persistently talked about rewards along with exhibiting frequent behaviors that acted as a search for external affirmations of his work. The second theme that became apparent from Christopher's talk was how important it was for him to have opportunities to successfully demonstrate his knowledge. A third theme that emerged was how he liked various strategies his teachers used in teaching lessons. A fourth theme indicated the importance of activities that gave him the chance to use his imagination, draw, and express his feelings. And, a final theme for Christopher's was how important the non-academic parts of his school experiences were for him.

Extrinsic motivation – rewards and affirmation

On numerous occasions Christopher talked in a positive manner about having the opportunity to be extrinsically rewarded for his academic efforts. Specifically, he spoke of remembering and enjoying daily experiences that led to the possibility of being given treats, stars, or points. In addition, unlike the other boys in the study, Christopher's day-to-day behavior routinely included numerous episodes of showing his work to the adults in the classroom. This typically involved repeated incidents of Christopher bringing items he had written, drawings he was doing, or books he was

reading to show someone else in an apparent attempt to receive affirmation for the work he was doing. He did not explicitly speak of these incidents as being a positive part of his daily experiences, yet he engaged in them on such a frequent basis that the affirmation he received perpetuated a continuation of the behavior and therefore was viewed as being positive for him.

One issue that was constant for Christopher across his observations was whether or not he had completed his daily “Read and Respond”¹⁵ homework. This was important because it made him eligible to participate in “Cookie Club,” which was the teachers’ way of rewarding students who had done their reading homework all week. Often times, positive experiences and participation during a reading lesson hinged on whether or not Christopher had completed this homework and remained eligible for “Cookie Club” at the end of the week. In interviews after two reading observations, what Christopher remembered from the day that was important to him was his “Read and Respond” homework (Post Observation Interviews #2 and #6). In one instance he talked about why this was so important when he said, “Ahh, e, e, e, because on Friday, I might, ge, ge, get “Cookie Club” this time” (Post Observation Interview #2).

Christopher also spoke of liking such daily tasks as group work and taking Accelerated Reader (AR) tests because of the rewards that were connected to them. After a reading class where the students worked together to come up with a summary sentence from the *Black Stallion*, Christopher said he had enjoyed this “because we earn points and stars sometimes if we do a good job” (Post Observation Interview #2)

¹⁵ Read and Respond was a routine homework assignment in which the students read a book or book chapter at home and then wrote a response about the characters, setting, plot of the story, and whether or not they liked it.

and then he added that getting the points and stars meant getting treats or trips to the treasure box. In another interview, when talking about how the students read stories and took AR tests as part of their Social Studies instruction Christopher said he liked doing AR tests “when I get the points” (Post Observation Interview #4) and added that this was because when he got a certain number of points he would get a prize at the monthly AR awards ceremony.

There were several instances where Christopher did not verbalize his desire for an available reward, however, his behaviors directly indicated this was his goal. An example of this occurred during a writing class when Ms. King told the students that cookies were “up for grabs” (Observation #4) for those students who were engaged during the lesson. As a direct result of this comment, Christopher sat up in his chair, smiled, watched Ms. King as she read, and then wrote down words and definitions that she gave to the class from the book. In the interview afterwards, Christopher said, “I tried to be good today” (Post Observation Interview #4) and when asked if this was connected to the cookies Ms. King was giving out, he smiled and affirmatively shook his head. During a different observation, fieldnotes demonstrated typical behaviors Christopher exhibited when there was an extrinsic reward at stake:

She [Ms. King] has points for groups that quickly and quietly get ready for the transition to reading...the *Black Stallion* book. Christopher has a look of urgency on his face as he scurries to get his “Drop in the Bucket”¹⁶ put away and open his *Black Stallion* book to the appropriate chapter. (Observation #2)

Closely associated with his strong desire to receive available rewards for his academic and behavioral efforts, Christopher was also positively motivated by the

¹⁶ Reading instruction started each day with the students doing “Drop in the Bucket” grammatical corrections, going over it as a class, and then answering comprehension questions about the given paragraph.

opportunity to show his work to adults in the classroom. The frequency with which he brought his work to either one of the teachers or another adult in the classroom meant it was a positive experience for him as well as fulfilling the need for a type of extrinsic affirmation or attention. Across his observations, there were twenty times when Christopher brought whatever it was he was working on to show an adult in the classroom. On six occasions he brought work he was writing to show to Mrs. Thompson or Ms. King. Likewise, there were fourteen examples of Christopher bringing work to show to another adult working with him in the classroom. Examples of the work he showed included a paper with his name written in cursive, math problems he had completed, writing he had done, a book he was reading, and a drawing he was working on. In the showing episode with the drawing, he went to an adult five times in the span of 7-10 minutes to continually demonstrate what he was adding to the picture he was creating (Observation #6). As a result of the frequency of this behavior, it appeared that episodes of showing his work served a similar function to treats, stars, or points giving Christopher positive affirmation for his efforts in the classroom.

The possibility for success – demonstrating his knowledge

In a similar vein to receiving rewards or affirmation for his efforts, Christopher spoke in a positive manner about opportunities he had to successfully demonstrate his knowledge. Here he talked of taking tests and quizzes he thought he had done well on, raising his hand to answer questions, and liking certain areas of math that he was particularly good at. Whether it was being rewarded, obtaining affirmation, or having opportunities to successfully demonstrate his knowledge, the concept of receiving external validation was important to Christopher and he spoke of occasions to attain it in a positive manner across all of his interviews.

In three different instances, Christopher excitedly spoke of taking tests or quizzes because he was confident he had done well. After a chapter quiz on the *Black Stallion* Christopher said, “I, I, I was thinking, I thought th, th, that the questions...were not hard” (Post Observation Interview #1) and he added that he knew all the answers, which made him feel good about taking the quiz. On two other occasions, Christopher indicated that he generally liked taking tests. As an example, after one lesson he said the reading test that day was what stood out to him. During this test, which lasted 60 minutes, Christopher was highly focused and reviewed his exam at least three times before turning it in. In the interview he indicated that he worked hard on it and was motivated by the thought of getting, “a good score” (Post Observation Interview #5).

Another opportunity for Christopher to demonstrate his knowledge came when the teachers asked questions during lessons. When this happened, and he was actively engaged in the lesson, he frequently raised his hand to respond, sometimes before the questions were even asked. When talking about why he did this so often he replied it was because, “I get answers” (Post Observation Interview #5). He also said that he liked it when the teacher told him he was right after giving an answer. An example of this was evident during a reading observation where he raised his hand six times, yet answered one question wrong and then did not know the answer to another question when he was called on. In talking about it afterwards, Christopher articulated his feelings after giving the incorrect answer to Ms. King’s question by saying, “Ah, I, I, I was still feeling good at that moment....because, e,e,e,e ahhhh, it was just a question....it didn’t matter” (Post Observation Interview #2). As the conversation continued, Christopher also talked about why he persisted in raising his hand to

respond to questions he did not know the answers to. In his reply, Christopher stuttered briefly but then was able to exclaim, “Ahhhhhh, ahh, ah, I, I, I, I, be thinking that I, I, I, I, know the answers sometimes” (Post Observation Interview #2).

A final example where Christopher spoke positively about having the chance to demonstrate his knowledge came when he talked about various aspects of math instruction that he particularly liked. Here he spoke of solving problems where numbers had to be re-grouped and how he liked those because he frequently got them correct and they seemed easy to him. He also talked of how he loved doing problems about lines of symmetry because he was good at those. As mentioned previously, Christopher did not always feel that he was successful in math so he spoke excitedly about these areas where he was triumphant and able to demonstrate his knowledge.

Daily instruction and classroom strategies

A third theme that emerged for Christopher was how he liked various strategies his teachers used during lessons. Here he talked about a range of daily teaching tactics Ms. King and Mrs. Thompson used in reading, math, and writing that he enjoyed and had a positive attitude toward. As was typical of Christopher though he was unable to articulate in much depth the reasons why he liked specific strategies and for the most part his responses, although positive, were brief and simple.

In terms of math instruction, Christopher spoke favorably of strategies and content such as partner work, worksheets, re-grouping, and lines of symmetry. When talking about his thoughts on Mrs. Thompson’s strategy to have the students work with a “Shoulder Buddy”¹⁷ he indicated that he liked it. However, when asked why, he said

¹⁷ Both 4th grade classrooms were arranged so that the desks were in six groups of four. As a result a student’s “Shoulder Buddy” was typically the person sitting next to him/her.

he did not know and that the question was too hard to answer (Post Observation Interview #3). In addition he revealed that he liked the way Mrs. Thompson had them frequently complete worksheets in math class. In this case he articulated that his reason was, “Ah, because, ah, w, w, we get to work with the class after we’ve done the worksheet” (Post Observation Interview #2).

In terms of reading, there were numerous aspects of day-to-day instruction that Christopher spoke of in a positive manner. On many occasions he talked favorably about various parts of the *Black Stallion* that were interesting and exciting to him. In two different instances, Christopher said the reason he liked the *Black Stallion* was because he enjoyed reading about the horse and he especially enjoyed it when “the Black” beat two other horses to win a race. During a reading observation when Christopher had been previously disengaged but then started paying attention, he said the reason was that “exciting things got happening in the story” (Post Observation Interview #6). In addition, Christopher spoke of specific strategies that Ms. King used such as telling stories to clarify words and concepts, having the students read words she stopped at in the story, highlighting words, and making mind movies. Again, however, he never elaborated in detail on the reasons why he enjoyed these instructional strategies, even when attempts were made to get him to explain his answers. For example, he said he liked it when Ms. King stopped while reading and expected the students to chorally call out the next word in the story. When asked why he liked doing this, though, he simply replied, “she stops and let’s us say the word after it” (Post Observation Interview #1).

In writing instruction, strategies Ms. King’s used included reading a story to the students as they wrote notes or jotted down key words. She also had them

summarize specific sections of the story or write reflections in their individual journals. Christopher did not talk in significant detail about these strategies other than to say he liked parts of the story such as when Solomon's family met a character named Pete Harker, he liked being able to write in his journal, and that there were no parts of writing class that he disliked (Post Observation Interview #3).

Imagination, drawing, and expressing his feelings

A fourth theme in how Christopher positively talked about his school experiences revealed the importance of activities that gave him the chance to use his imagination, draw, and express his feelings. In one example of this, Christopher talked about how he liked the way Ms. King had the students visualize parts of a story by telling them to make a mind movie and said his reason was, "Ah, ah, I, I, I, can look at my own mind movies, like my own version" (Post Observation Interview #2). After this he added that it was fun because it allowed him to use his imagination. In two separate observations, Christopher talked about how much fun class was when the students had the opportunity to draw pictures. In one of these examples, Christopher had been animated and engaged for an extended period of time and afterwards said what stood out to him from being able to draw was, "It was fun....we got to create things" (Post Observation Interview #6). He also said that his favorite things to draw were castles and cannons. In a final example, when Christopher spoke of the journal writing Ms. King had the students do he talked about how he liked it because it gave him the opportunity to express the thoughts and feeling he was having (Post Observation Interview #3). These chances to be creative or express his thoughts did not occur on a frequent basis but when they did they stood out to Christopher in such a way that he spoke of them in a positive manner.

Non-academic parts of the day

A final theme that emerged during interviews with Christopher's was how important the non-academic parts of his daily school experiences were for him. On eight different occasions when he talked about what stood out to him from the day, he mentioned items that were not related to academics. Sometimes Christopher spoke of these non-academic incidents in a negative manner; however, his talk reflected how important these parts of his day were for him and are therefore included here. For example, in two of these instances the issue that stood out to Christopher was related to one of his favorite parts of the day, which was recess. In one case he talked negatively about having to stay in from recess because he had gotten two behavior checks and in the other instance, he was excited because the class had "earned" recess by behaving during morning instruction. In another interview he said what stood out to him from the day was, "Um, ah, that I got the most pull-ups in my [physical education] class" (Post Observation Interview #4). In other examples he remembered such things as getting to face paint, going to art class, listening to music, and not having cookie club on the Friday of the school wide Chess Challenge. This tendency to remember non-academic parts of the day was atypical of the other boys in the study; yet, these incidents were key to Christopher because he frequently mentioned them and they reflected an emphasis on issues that were important to him in school.

Experiences and Talk that Reflect Negative Attitudes

During observations and interviews with Christopher he also talked about day-to-day school events and experiences that were negative for him. Data from these experiences reflected themes related to instruction and learning, homework, peers, and behavior. In some instances, Christopher did not explicitly verbalize that an event was

negative for him; rather his in class behavior that was evidenced by his body language, his talk at the time, or his subsequent disengagement from the lesson were key indicators as to the negative impact of a specific incident. It is also important to note that in many cases Christopher's issues with homework, peers, and behavior were combined in a given negative episode. However, an attempt has been made to separate these entities in order to thematically group them.

Instruction and learning

There were times during interviews with Christopher that he expressed frustration or negative attitudes toward specific instructional strategies or his own learning struggles. For example, Christopher expressed anxiety over instructional strategies that included the possibility of being wrong in front of his peers. He also talked about times in math and reading that were boring for him. In terms of learning, Christopher spoke of his frustration over difficulties with certain types of math problems. In addition, he expressed disappointment over a progress report where he got unsatisfactory feedback on his academic performance.

Despite the fact that Christopher had already expressed how he enjoyed it when his teachers asked the students to work with a "Shoulder Buddy," during one interview, he contradicted himself and expressed anxiety over this instructional strategy. After a math class, when talking about whether he liked explaining his answers to a partner he said, "Sometimes it, I, I, I, feel pretty nervous sometimes." He went on to add, "Because sometimes I don't want to get the wrong answer" (Post Observation Interview #2) and then noted that if he did get it wrong he might get teased.

Additionally, although he did not elaborate in any detail, Christopher talked of how he sometimes got bored in math class, which led to disengagement and often

times negative behavior or instances of “messing around” with his group mates. In reading instruction Christopher indicated that he got bored during “the reading part,” (Post Observation Interview #5) which for him meant the specific times when Ms. King was reading and the students were sitting following along in their own books.

On a few occasions, Christopher talked about his frustrations associated with a lack of success on specific types of math problems. An example of this occurred when he mentioned twice that he was not able to figure out word problems even though Mrs. Thompson had given the students strategies to follow. In one case he claimed that the problems were hard and the strategies did not help and in another instance he said, “that [word problems] be too hard for me to figure out” (Post Observation Interview #4). Christopher also expressed frustration after a math class where Mrs. Donald was working with him claiming that, “the kilograms and milligrams were hard to figure out” (Post Observation Interview #4) and it discouraged him.

A final learning issue that Christopher talked about negatively was when he received a rating of “N” in reading and social studies on his progress report. The “N” rating was the equivalent of saying that his academic progress in those areas was not sufficient and that he needed to improve. He said about reading, “I felt, ah...really mad” because “I got an “N” and I need to improve” (Post Observation Interview #5). He went on to say that he did not know if the “N” was based on his grades or his behavior and that the frustration was greater because he also got an “N” in social studies and he was not certain why.

Homework issues

Another theme that emerged as a constant source of concern for Christopher was his homework. At times it appeared as if his entire day and whether or not it was

positive or negative was based on his homework being completed. As was previously discussed, rewards such as “Cookie Club” were predicated on homework and the times when Christopher completed the work and stayed eligible for this prize, he was happy and engaged more frequently in daily lessons. However, on four occasions, Christopher did not have his homework done. Furthermore, two of the four times it was “Read and Respond” that he did not complete, which meant he was not eligible to receive “Cookie Club.” This repeated failure and the disappointment it created for him led to verbalizations of sadness along with negative and disengaged behaviors during lessons.

Christopher often verbalized feelings of sadness over not having his homework completed especially when it meant he missed out on “Cookie Club.” For example, after one Friday morning reading observation without being prompted Christopher said, “I am sad” and when asked why he responded simply, “homework” (Post Observation Interview #1). Later, as he discussed how he felt when he was going into reading class and knew that he did not have his homework finished he said, “I, I, I felt a, a lot sad and mad at the same time” over “my homework and my read and respond and not getting cookie club” (Post Observation Interview #1). To make it more difficult for Christopher, on this particular day Ms. King gave out a second cookie for an extra sentence the students were asked to write for homework and when he missed out on that reward also he said it made him feel, “worse” (Post Observation Interview #1).

Oftentimes during lessons, Christopher did not expressly verbalize his negative feelings about not completing homework and missing rewards, rather fieldnotes that described his body language and actions at the time provided a picture of his sadness

and disappointment. For the reading observation discussed above, when the first cookie was handed out and he was passed by Christopher slouched down in his seat, rested his face in his hands, and stayed that way while the other students ate their cookies. Then when a second cookie was handed out he made a sad face by sticking out his lower lip, wrinkled his brow, and put his head down on the desk (Observation #1). On two other occasions during math and writing where Christopher did not have homework done he acted dejected as evidenced by his staring down at the ground, hanging his head, and not engaging in ongoing instruction.

Issues with his peers

With regard to his peers, the main issue that stood out as negative for Christopher was being teased. On several occasions he talked about being picked on by someone or how, when this happened, it made him not want to participate in the lesson. There were also several instances when Christopher was being reprimanded by a teacher and tried to project the blame for his behaviors onto one of his peers. In doing this he claimed that his peers were either part of the problem too or that it was because one of them was picking on him and that was why he was misbehaving. Finally, during observations there were several examples of how Christopher would call out in a sharp voice when a peer was doing something to bother him.

In talking about one of the instances where he did not get “Cookie Club” and subsequently disengaged from the lesson Christopher indicated it was because Andrew was teasing him about the cookie that he did not want to participate in the reading lesson. More specifically, he said “because a, a, a, a, at the first time, Andrew was like teasing me and stuff like that...[about] the cookie” (Post Observation Interview #1). In another interview when talking about what typically happened during class that got him

distracted or made him not want to participate, Christopher simply said, “messaging with me” (Post Observation Interview #5). For him this meant when others teased him it was such a negative experience that he got distracted or angry and no longer wanted to focus on the lesson. Instead in these instances, he engaged in behaviors that continued to get him in trouble with the teachers or he exhibited behavior that reflected his withdrawal from ongoing instruction.

There were also several examples of occasions where Christopher talked in a negative manner about how he felt one of his peers had contributed to him getting in trouble. An example of this occurred when Christopher talked of how he had to stay in from recess one day. In this case he indicated it was because he had gotten two behavior checks in one lesson and then he elaborated by saying it was because “Steven wasn’t, ah, ah, cooperating with me wh, wh, when we were doing our math” (Post Observation Interview #2). Another example took place during a reading observation when Ms. King told Andrew that the best way to deal with Christopher’s off task behavior was to not pay attention to him. As she said this, Christopher tried to implicate Julie by declaring, “and her too.” When Ms. King did not acknowledge that Julie was part of the problem, Christopher exclaimed a second time, “MAN, it was her too” (Post Observation Interview #7). Later in the interview, Christopher said the problem started when Julie, “messed with me cuz I didn’t have a red pen” (Post Observation Interview #7).

The negativity of situations where Christopher felt his peers were either teasing or “messaging” with him was also evident at times when he sharply spoke to someone who he felt was bothering him. Across his observations, there were four examples of

times when he verbally snapped at one of his peers. A specific example of this happened during a math lesson where Christopher had asked Steven if he could “please” borrow a piece of paper. After this, Steven said something to Christopher and then Christopher retorted loudly, “MAN, give me some paper” (Post Observation Interview #3). During a reading lesson as Ms. King gave points to groups of students who were engaged in what she had instructed them to do, Andrew told Christopher to sit-up so their group could get points and Christopher sharply replied, “I did sit-up” (Post Observation Interview #1). In other examples, Christopher yelled at Julie when he thought she was trying to trip him and he snapped at Daniel during a reading class when Daniel poked him in the side.

Behavior issues

A final theme that emerged as negative for Christopher was related to various behavior issues he had within his day-to-day school experiences. On numerous occasions, Christopher was publicly reprimanded for off task behaviors such as talking, not paying attention, or not being on task. The highly negative nature of these experiences was readily apparent from fieldnotes taken during observations as well as from what Christopher said during interviews. Immediately following many of these instances Christopher displayed behaviors that reflected negative affect and disengagement as evidenced by his withdrawal or sulking. Additionally, in ensuing interviews Christopher verbalized negative feelings regarding these experiences. In a few instances, as these negative episodes were occurring during a class, Christopher appeared to escalate them by talking back to a teacher as he was being chastised.

On several occasions when Christopher was reprimanded by one of his teachers, he immediately behaved in a manner that reflected further withdrawal from the

ongoing lesson. One such example occurred during the already discussed reading observation when Christopher did not get a cookie. As a result of not receiving this reward, Christopher was not doing his reading and instead chose to put his head down on the desk. Fieldnotes provide a picture of what happened as Ms. King noticed his disengaged behavior and walked by his desk:

She lifts on the back of his chair and says, "Let's go Christopher, sit up. You need to make some better choices, I am not happy with you today, you have just shut down." She continues talking about not putting a smiley face in his notebook – this refers to the behavior sheet he is on where a teacher rates him on a scale of 1-5 with regard to his behavior during a specific time period. Immediately after she tells him this he slouches back down in his chair with his head resting on the top of the chair back – he continues to not pay attention as she goes back to reading. (Observation #1)

His tendency to withdraw after being reprimanded was also evident in a math lesson when he was talking and fooling around with someone who was not his "Shoulder Buddy" and Mrs. Thompson said, "Christopher you are person A, why are you looking at Ian" (Observation #3). After this he seemed to be deflated as he sat back in his chair, stared off to the side for a while, and did not participate in going over the math problems. Later, he noted about this incident, "I felt kinda bad when she like called out my name" (Post Observation Interview #3).

Other examples of negative behavior episodes for Christopher included four times when he actually talked back to a teacher while he was being reprimanded. A specific instance when this type of behavior occurred demonstrates how negative the situation was:

[Christopher is] going between watching Ms. King, looking through his book, and talking to Julie. Ms. King is calling on students in other groups to see what they want to read and then she stops and "calls out" group 1 for the talking they are doing. Christopher clicks the roof of his mouth and says something to the effect of, "Man, why you gotta..." When he says this Ms. King responds by saying

something like, “excuse me, I didn’t call you out, I said group 1 and you are being rude and disrespectful right now.” As she says this to him, he sits there, stares down, and continues to look through the pages of his reading book. (Post Observation Interview #7)

A second example occurred during a lesson when the students had been prompted to write about differences between the *Black Stallion* book and the movie they had watched the day before. Instead of writing Christopher and his fellow group mates were talking when Ms. King reprimanded them. When she did this Christopher sharply said, “Mannnn,” (Observation #7) and then he just kept on talking with Julie until Ms. King looked over again. After this, he stopped talking, looked around the classroom, looked up front at Ms. King, and then began playing with his pencil instead of writing as he had been prompted to do.

Finally, there were several instances when Christopher verbalized feeling sad or upset over being reprimanded by one of his teachers. After one reading lesson when Christopher was not paying attention and Ms. King asked him twice if he knew where the class was in the book, he indicated that he felt sad when she called his name out. During a different reading lesson, Christopher was told to move his desk into the door and away from his group mates because he was continually misbehaving. Afterwards he declared that it had been both good and bad for him to move. The good part was that it allowed him to get away from one of his group mates who he said was “messing” with him. Christopher then claimed that the bad part was that he got in trouble and added that it bothered him because he said, “I, I don’t like getting in trouble a lot” (Post Observation Interview #7).

Engaged and Disengaged Behaviors – A Continuum of Participation

Examining Christopher' patterns of engagement generated results that fell along a continuum of participation levels. During daily instructional lessons and activities his behaviors ranged from being actively engaged to being completely disengaged. In addition, there were times where Christopher' actions reflected a more tenuous level of engagement, meaning his behavior fluctuated between participation and non-participation within a given period of time. In general, Christopher demonstrated slightly higher levels of engagement than disengagement across reading, math, and writing. There were no discernable patterns in Christopher' levels of participation across specific types of learning activities. It should also be noted that when Christopher's episodes of disengaged behavior were combined with instances where his engagement appeared tenuous, that total was greater than the overall number of engaged episodes that he displayed. This section of Christopher' case study will examine more closely the behaviors that were reflective of his participation across the continuum from engagement to disengagement.

Behaviors that Reflect Active Engagement

Christopher' active engagement was displayed through a range of actions he exhibited during daily lessons; the most prevalent of which occurred during times of teacher-led instruction. Behaviors that Christopher readily demonstrated during this time included raising his hand to answer questions that were asked, answering questions, participating in choral response activities, and actively listening as evidenced by such actions as following along in his *Black Stallion* book during reading or watching the teacher complete math problems up in front of the class. Collectively, the prevalence of these actions was recorded forty eight times across the seven

observations of Christopher. Other displays of active engagement came at times when Christopher was involved in completing some type of individual work like reading, writing, working on math worksheets, or taking a test. Finally, Christopher displayed patterns of active participation when working with a partner or in a small group.

Participating in teacher-led instruction

During daily teacher-led instruction, Christopher often behaved in a manner that demonstrated active engagement. One prevalent display of this type of participation occurred at times when the class was involved in question and answer discussions, primarily during reading or math instruction. In these instances, behaviors Christopher exhibited that showed his active participation were associated with raising his hand and answering questions when he was called on. Collectively, the prevalence of these behaviors was recorded fifteen times with half of them occurring during two observations. Fieldnotes from a reading class demonstrated a typical behavior pattern for Christopher during these engaged episodes:

Christopher raises his hand to try to identify the mistake in the sentence that Ms. King has just read – he does not get called on. He is attentive to his sheet as evidenced by his looking at it and writing on it as they go through it...When Ms. King reads another sentence and asks the students for the correction he raises his hand – Ms. King says, “Christopher your hand went up first,” – he tries to give the correction to the part of the sentence that has a city and state listed but he gets it wrong even with two guesses. This does not seem to deter him though as he raises his hand to give an answer to what needs to be corrected in the next sentence. (Observation #2)

As part of routine daily instruction Ms. King and Mrs. Thompson used strategies that frequently engaged the students in chorally calling out words or numbers. In reading this occurred when Ms. King would stop at certain points in a story and expect the students to say the next word. Christopher was recorded as engaging in calling out these words on seven different occasions. In writing Ms. King had the students chorally

call out lists of spelling words and in math Mrs. Thompson had them chorally call out groups of numbers. Across writing and math observations Christopher was recorded as participating in these choral response activities on four different occasions.

A final example where Christopher demonstrated high levels of engagement came through displays of active listening during teacher-led instruction. In these instances Christopher's participation was determined through behaviors such as maintaining a focus on the teacher as she presented information or looking at a book and tracking or highlighting words as Ms. King read the *Black Stallion*. During math observations, on eight occasions Christopher was recorded as watching or writing on his worksheet as Mrs. Thompson was in front of the class reviewing problems the students had worked on. Likewise, in reading instruction Christopher was observed as following along in his book or highlighting words ten different times as Ms. King read to the class from the *Black Stallion*.

Participating in individual work

Other examples where Christopher's behaviors reflected active participation occurred during times of individual work. In the majority of these instances, Christopher dutifully took on assignments that involved completing such tasks as reading from a book, writing a letter, studying spelling words, working on math warm-up and worksheet problems, or taking a test or quiz. Christopher was observed as engaging in these types of learning activities on approximately twenty occasions.

During math instruction, Christopher was recorded as being actively engaged in completing math warm-up or worksheet problems six times. The fieldnotes from a specific lesson demonstrated his focus while working to complete the day's warm-up problems:

He is working on the math warm up sheet that has been given out – he works continuously and does not seem to be distracted by Mrs. Thompson who is talking loudly to a few of the students....[he] does not stop until Mrs. Thompson tells the class it is time to go over their work as a whole group and then he says, “wait,” as he looks hurried to finish (he is writing on his sheet in a frantic pace). The work has taken approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. (Observation #2)

Likewise, on seven different occasions Christopher was recorded as being actively engaged during reading class to complete individual work such as “Drop in the Bucket” or reading and highlighting words from the *Black Stallion*.

A final example of Christopher’s active participation in individual work occurred four times when the students were engaged in taking tests or quizzes. In two of these cases, the amount of focused attention that Christopher displayed exceeded his typical behavior patterns relative to the length of time he usually stayed engaged during class activities. One specific example of this occurred during a 60-minute timed reading test where Christopher was engaged nearly the entire time. Fieldnotes from the observation demonstrated how engaged Christopher was on this particular exam:

He maintains a seated position that is up close to his desk and continuously works on the test for approximately 25 minutes. During this time he is not distracted by anything and seems to be really focused on the test as evidenced by how he continuously reads and writes (or fills in bubbles). He seems to be going over the test a second time because he has flipped back the test booklet, is reading, tracking with his finger, and occasionally writing – he does this for another 10 minutes or so. Now, he is erasing something in his test booklet, turning the pages, and reading. (Observation #5)

For Christopher to maintain a focused effort for that length of time was highly unusual but afterwards he indicated that his motivation to stay engaged was a result of wanting to get a good score on the exam.

Participating in partner or group work

On occasions when the students were directed to complete work with a partner or in a small group, Christopher typically displayed behaviors that reflected active

participation in the task at hand. Across his observations, he was engaged in partner or small group work eleven times. More specifically, he was recorded as actively working with a “Shoulder Buddy” on five different occasions in math and writing with the most typical behavior being to share or explain an answer he had gotten to a math problem or to make a story prediction.

In addition, Christopher was observed as actively participating in small group work six different times. The majority of these instances occurred as Christopher worked with his classmates to discuss specific reading sections or develop summary sentences from the *Black Stallion* during reading class. An example came when Christopher actively engaged in working with a small group as the students were drawing pictures that would eventually go on a class shield that was used to represent the fourth grade as they marched into the “Chess Challenge.” The students worked in groups to decorate the shield with drawings from important events that had occurred throughout the year and Christopher worked with a group of three girls to draw a fort that represented St. Augustine. His level of engagement and ability to work with the girls was demonstrated in the following fieldnotes:

As a group they work together on the drawing for approximately 5-10 minutes – each student takes a turn drawing her/his part of the fort. They are talking, laughing, and supporting each other as they draw. When it is Christopher’s turn to draw he works continuously despite the noise and commotion of other students around him. When he is finished he looks up and smiles and then gives the drawing to Deborah so she can do her part. (Observation #6)

Behaviors that Reflect a Tenuous Level of Engagement

At various times throughout each observation Christopher displayed behaviors that wavered between participation and non-participation. During these times Christopher’s involvement in the ongoing lesson was tenuous and it appeared as if

minor distractions easily pulled his attention away from the task of learning. In these instances, Christopher's focus and his subsequent engagement were interspersed with moments of disengagement as evidenced by his participation in such behaviors as talking to others or being alternately engaged in activities that were not part of the ongoing lesson. There were also instances when Christopher was behaving in a manner that reflected disengagement, yet an attempt was made by one of his teachers to prompt him back to engagement. These times where Christopher was tenuously engaged with moments of disengagement or when he had to be prompted back to engagement were recorded thirty-nine times and were indicative of behaviors that would fall along the middle on the continuum of participation between engagement and disengagement.

Moments of disengagement

At some point of each lesson and across each subject area, Christopher exhibited a tenuous level of engagement by vacillating between academic and non-academic behaviors. These types of incidents were recorded on thirty-three occasions and included behaviors where Christopher's attention to the ongoing lesson was interrupted by moments of talking to others, playing with paper or a highlighter, or other general actions that were not related to the ongoing lesson. One instance of this occurred during a math lesson where Mrs. Thompson was having the students share answers in small groups. Christopher was sitting with three other boys – Steven, Ian, and Jared – and they struggled to stay focused on the lesson:

As the class continues working on the Smartboard problems he and the other boys at his table group are in and out of paying attention and messing around with each other. They are laughing, smiling, and talking with each other...Christopher turns to look at the problem on the Smartboard and then stands up and over Steven to explain how he got his answer – he is smiling,

messing with Steven, laughing, and not really paying attention to Mrs. Thompson as she is going over the problem. (Observation #4)

In other instances Christopher's moments of disengagement were not the result of talking with other students rather he was off in his own world or playing with something that was not related to the lesson. On these occasions, Christopher was intermittently distracted, which resulted in tenuous levels of engagement. An example from reading demonstrated his behavior patterns during these times:

[Christopher] looks at it while Ms. King reads. She stops to talk about something in the book and when she does Christopher puts his book down and looks around the classroom then when she starts reading again he looks back at his book...he does not highlight the words that Ms. King tells them they should. He does, however, call out the words 'Napoleon,' and 'driveway' when she stops reading. After this he begins playing with a piece of paper again and does not call out the next few words that she stops at ('blew' and 'come'), he also does not watch his book as she reads. (Observation #7)

Times of prompted engagement

In further examining Christopher's varying levels of academic participation, there were six instances where he was behaving in a disengaged manner yet was prompted by a teacher back to being engaged in academic work. Examples of this occurred twice during math class, once Christopher was not paying attention and the second time he was talking. In both instances, Mrs. Thompson re-engaged Christopher in the lesson by asking him questions about the problem the class was reviewing at the time. In another instance, Christopher was not engaged in a journal writing assignment; instead he was trying to communicate with Samuel who was sitting across the room. Ms. King noticed he was not engaged and simply walked by his desk. When she did this Christopher began writing and worked continuously for approximately six minutes. Finally, in two examples that occurred in separate reading classes Christopher was prompted to begin working after Ms. King spoke with him for talking. The one difference in these two

examples was that Christopher's re-engagement in the lesson only lasted for approximately 1-2 minutes and therefore was viewed as being minimally successful at prompting him to participate.

Behaviors that Reflect Disengagement

There were numerous times during observations when Christopher's behavior reflected disengagement from ongoing academic work as was exemplified by an extended period of time where he did not participate. The majority of his behaviors during these times fell into one of two categories. First, there were instances when he was not paying attention; instead he was engaged in his own non-academic behaviors such as playing with something, not following along, or shutting down. Second, there were many occasions when Christopher was disengaged because he was talking or "messing around" with his classmates. It should also be noted that several of the incidents that were previously discussed for having a negative impact on Christopher's attitudes also led to a reduction of his participation in lessons. Over the course of observations, disengaged episodes were recorded for Christopher on thirty occasions and reflected behavior that fell at the far end of the continuum of participation.

Off in his own world

At times when Christopher was disengaged from lessons, one of his patterns of behavior was to engage in individual alternative actions such as writing his name in cursive during math instruction and playing with items like paper, a pen, a highlighter, or his own clothing. Across Christopher's observations he was recorded as engaging in these types of actions for periods of time that lasted longer than 2-3 minutes on ten different occasions. In one example, he spent an extended period of time in math practicing writing his name in cursive instead of checking his answers to the questions

the class was going over. Another example when he was more involved in alternative actions than the ongoing lesson came from a math class:

[Christopher] begins playing with his pen – sticking it in between his desk and Ian’s desk at an angle because the desks are at different heights. As the class is going over a problem, he...puts his hands over his eyes and just sits there for a brief time. When he takes his hands away from his face he turns his sweatshirt around so that it is on backwards, he stands up, straightens the sweatshirt out from turning it around, and then he puts the hood up over his face. He seems really distracted now because he sits putting the hood up and pulling it down and then he moves his pen to the edge of the desk and hits the part hanging over so that it flips up in the air. (Observation #3)

There were also ten examples of times when Christopher was simply not paying attention during instruction. In these instances he may have briefly engaged in behaviors like playing with a pen or piece of paper but the bulk of time he was disengaged was spent with his head down on the desk or staring off to the side and not paying attention to the ongoing instruction for an extended period of time. Occasionally this behavior was associated with times where Christopher had “shut down” after not completing his homework and instead did such things as stare off to the side, not open or look at his book, play with the book cover, or put his head down on the desk. A second example of this type of disengaged behavior came during a math class when the following fieldnotes were taken:

He [Christopher] puts his head down on his arm that is extended along the desk and is not really paying attention. Mrs. Thompson is going over the next problem and asks him the meaning of a word – it is as if he does not hear her though because when she says, “Christopher,” he looks up startled and says, “What?” (Observation #5)

Talking or “messing around” with classmates

Across his seven observations there were many instances when Christopher was disengaged from academic work because he was either talking or “messing around” with one or more of his fellow classmates. Behaviors that typified his actions during

these times were displayed in a math class when he and the other three boys he was sitting with spent an extended period of time making faces and laughing at each other. On other occasions he was disengaged from instruction because he was attempting to talk with someone who was sitting across the room. In the majority of these examples, however, Christopher engaged in behaviors that were represented by the following notes taken during a math class:

The boys [Christopher and his group mates] do not pay attention for very long and as Mrs. Thompson goes over the problem they are mostly messing around. Christopher is fidgeting by rocking his upper body back and forth, he is looking around, sometimes watching Mrs. Thompson, sometimes looking at other students, he is laughing, talking, and puts the hole in his notebook paper on his pencil and spins the paper in circles... Around this time Steven comes back from the nurse's office – Christopher gives him his math sheet and then tries to grab the package of tissues that Steven has brought back with him. (Observation #4)

These episodes of talking, “messing around,” and generally getting caught up in disengaged behaviors with his classmates routinely occurred for Christopher across subject areas and instructional activities and led to extended periods of time where he was not paying attention.

Conclusion

As a result of the ways that Christopher talked about his school experiences and the things that stood out to him as important, his attitudes and dispositions toward academics could be viewed as teetering between negative and positive. Christopher did talk about certain aspects of school in an affirmative manner, but his articulations were shallow and mainly connected to receiving extrinsic rewards. He also frequently spoke of the negative aspects of his daily school experiences especially as they were connected to not getting rewards or being teased by classmates. Additionally, Christopher's overall patterns of participation in daily lessons indicated that he was

often tenuously engaged or completely disengaged for extended periods of time, which placed him more toward the disengaged end on the continuum of participation.

CHAPTER 7 CROSS-CASE FINDINGS

Introduction

The stories presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provided a detailed picture of the attitudes toward academics for three low SES African American fourth-grade boys. The focus was to examine how each boy talked about his day-to-day school experiences, what was important to him, and why. In addition, as a part of the larger picture of identification with academics, each boy's patterns of engagement were explored. Although detailed case studies were not included for Samuel, Gregg, and Lance, analysis of their observations and interviews revealed similarities to the stories presented for Thomas, Steven, and Christopher. This chapter integrates the findings across all six boys in order to examine common themes that emerged. Initially, similarities related to their positive and negative attitudes toward academics will be examined. After this, the focus will shift to looking at commonalities related to the boys' patterns of engagement. The chapter will conclude by highlighting episodes of disengagement in an effort to examine themes in the types of behaviors that occurred as well as instructional activities that fostered non-participation across the boys. Although differences between the boys were important, throughout this chapter a focus will be maintained on similarities across the boys. The goal of using this approach is to listen to the collective voices of the boys and examine their experiences in a manner that reinforces the attempts of educators to better serve the needs of African American boys.

Themes in Positive Attitudes Across the Boys

When the boys talked positively about their school experiences, a variety of commonalities emerged. One of these was the way that the boys spoke about reading and math. They talked not only about their thoughts on these subject areas but also spoke of teaching strategies they liked during reading and math lessons. They liked activity structures such as partner work, question and answer sessions, choral responding, and being encouraged to make “mind movies.” In addition, many of the boys spoke in a positive manner about fieldtrips and guest speakers. There were also themes in the ways that the boys talked about the process of learning. More specifically, they spoke of the importance of such things as having the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, being challenged, engaging in the process of learning, using their imaginations, having fun, and being rewarded, praised or recognized for their efforts. Finally, it is essential to note that several of the boys frequently talked about non-academic parts of their day that were significant for them. A summary of themes in the boys’ positive attitudes is provided in Table 7-1.

Reading and Math

Reading was the favorite subject for Thomas, Christopher, Steven, and Lance and each frequently talked about reading and aspects of reading instruction that stood out for them. Samuel and Gregg both said that their favorite subject was math but also claimed they liked and did well in reading. One theme that came to light as the boys talked about reading was how much they enjoyed the stories their class read. All of the boys talked about specific parts of the *Black Stallion* and *Solomon* with Thomas, Steven, and Lance being the most vocal about how these books were a positive part of their daily experiences. Specific examples of the importance of stories and reading for

Thomas and Steven were discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, yet it is worth reiterating here that each of them indicated the best part of school was associated with reading either the *Black Stallion* or *Solomon*. In addition, Lance talked specifically about enjoying parts of *Solomon* and then with regard to reading in general he also said, "I'll grab a book, I really don't care what kind of book it is, I'll just look through it...even if I read it yesterday, same chapter, I'll just open it" (Post Observation Interview #1).

Samuel and Gregg frequently noted that math was their favorite subject and although the other four boys liked reading better, they spoke favorably of math as well. It was interesting that Lance, Steven, and Christopher said that math was difficult for them, yet they each indicated at some point how much they liked math. For instance, Steven initially said that he needed a tutor because he struggled but he also talked about how much he liked to figure out multiplication. Moreover, despite their struggles to feel successful in math both Lance and Christopher indicated that they "love" math. Even though Thomas frequently said the best part of his day was connected to stories and reading he also said he liked math because he had been successful in terms of getting good grades and knowing the right answers to questions the teachers asked.

When talking about the daily experiences that stood out for them Steven, Lance, Christopher, and Thomas did not mention math on a regular basis. In contrast, Gregg and Samuel typically talked about math lessons as being the part of their day that they liked the most. In one interview Samuel compared math to writing saying they were, "WAY far apart" (Post Observation Interview #1) in terms of how much he liked them. During a subsequent interview when he was again comparing math to writing he said,

“Math’s my favorite subject, I just do good in writin’ – I don’t know...the whole school year but I always get, I get better grades on writin’ than I get on math, but math’s my favorite subject – crazy” (Post Observation Interview #5). When talking about daily experiences that stood out for him, Gregg regularly mentioned math and talked about liking adding money, multiplying, and trying to find the correct order for a group of numbers.

Teaching Strategies Used in Math and Reading

At various times during interviews, each of the boys described different classroom strategies they liked. In general, the boys liked doing partner or small group work, participating in discussion sessions that consisted mainly of questions and answers, having opportunities to take part in choral response activities, and making mind movies to visualize an event in a story. It is important to note that not all of the boys spoke favorably of these strategies at all times; however, they are included here because at least four of the boys spoke in a positive manner about a given strategy.

One instructional strategy that emerged as positive for five of the boys was doing partner or small group work. As was discussed in Chapter 5, Steven mentioned that he liked working with his “Shoulder Buddy” during reading class because Lonnie was a friend of his and they got along well. Likewise, Christopher enjoyed explaining his answers to his “Shoulder Buddy” in math class and Thomas liked discussing vocabulary words with a partner during reading lessons. When Gregg talked about what he liked regarding partner work in math class he said, “I like when my partner gets the wrong answer, and I can laugh, and then I can help him get it right” (Post Observation Interview #2).

A second aspect of instruction that five of the boys talked about positively was class discussions or question and answer sessions. Thomas indicated that he liked doing worksheets in math because they got to discuss them as a class once they finished their individual work. On more than one occasion Steven said the most fun part of reading was when Mrs. Thompson asked questions and called on people to answer. After one particular reading lesson, Gregg talked about remembering how the class had played a question and answer vocabulary game that was fun for him because he liked to try to remember the words and answer the questions Mrs. Thompson asked. Christopher and Samuel also noted class discussions as a positive part of daily lessons.

Participating in choral response activities was a third strategy that emerged as a positive part of daily instruction for four of the boys. Steven said calling out vocabulary words after Mrs. Thompson said them was fun for him. Christopher talked of how he liked to say the words that Ms. King stopped at when she was reading a story to the students. He also enjoyed chorally calling out spelling words because Ms. King played music and he thought saying the words to the beat was fun. Lance also liked to call out spelling words to the beat of the music and said that it was particularly good when Ms. King played music that the students liked. Finally, Thomas liked to call out words during vocabulary lessons because it helped him to know if he was pronouncing them correctly.

A final strategy that four of the boys discussed in a positive manner was what Ms. King called making mind movies. This was an approach she used in both writing and reading lessons where she asked the students to close their eyes and imagine a scene or event that was occurring in the story. When talking about this strategy,

Steven, Christopher, Lance, and Thomas all indicated that it was something they liked because they enjoyed putting themselves in the place of the main character, and it helped them to better understand the story.

Fieldtrips and Guest Speakers

Taking fieldtrips and having guest speakers were positive experiences for all of the boys. Christopher, Gregg, and Thomas all indicated that fourth grade was their favorite year in school because of the fieldtrips they had taken. Each of them talked about how much fun they had when going on a field trip to a skate park and how the opportunity to go to a fort in St. Augustine stood out as a good way to learn something new. Additionally, all of the boys talked positively about a field trip to a horse show, with Gregg and Samuel providing detailed descriptions of the parts that stood out for them the most. Samuel said, "People were standing on top of the horses, jumping through fire on the horses...everybody went 'WHOAAA,' it was fun" (Post Observation Interview #5). After this he excitedly talked for several more minutes about different parts of the horse show and how he had never seen anything like it. Gregg noted how exciting this particular field trip was because he saw people doing back flips on moving horses. Finally, the importance of Thomas's individual field trip to the high school culinary program and the significance of specific guest speakers to Steven were discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

The Process of Learning

Each of the boys also talked in a positive manner about various aspects of the process of learning. With regard to this, several themes emerged such as the significance of having opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, being challenged in their classroom endeavors, the importance of thinking and learning, and the chance to

use their imaginations as they were engaged in daily lessons. A final theme that was important to all of the boys was having times where they were rewarded, praised or recognized for their academic and behavioral efforts.

Having the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge through answering questions during class or when taking tests and quizzes emerged as an important part of each boy's school day. As was discussed in Chapter 5, Steven frequently mentioned how he liked any opportunity to be able to give answers during lessons. Samuel and Gregg were similar in this regard as they both spoke of the importance of getting called on to provide correct answers. Samuel even talked about wishing he could sit closer to the front of the classroom so he would get noticed and called on more often.

Christopher said he liked to raise his hand before the teachers even finished asking a question because he thought he could get the right answer. After a writing lesson Lance talked about feeling happy and proud when he had been called on to make a prediction about *Solomon* that ended up being correct. Finally, Thomas, Steven, and Samuel spoke affirmatively about taking tests and quizzes because they usually knew answers and each had a history of doing well academically.

Four of the boys said they liked to be challenged during daily lessons. Samuel provided a good example of this when he said, "I like math cuz half the time it's a challenge, sometimes it's fun, and sometimes you do the same old stuff, but sometimes they teach it different, ways and it be fun" (Post Observation Interview #1). When talking about a vocabulary question and answer game that was previously mentioned, Gregg said he liked it "because I like a challenge" (Post Observation Interview #1). Likewise, Thomas indicated he liked "Drop in the Bucket" because it was a challenge to

find the places where there were mistakes and Steven said he liked doing “Read and Respond” homework because it made his brain work hard.

At some point during interviews Steven, Thomas, Samuel, and Lance all noted how important it was for them to learn new things. For example, during his preliminary interviews Lance said he liked fourth-grade the best because the teachers “do more testable stuff,” (Interview #2) which he further explained as having the opportunity to do more thinking and learning than when he was in third grade. In a later interview Lance also said he raised his hand a lot in reading class because, “it’s good to learn...like Ms. King said, it never, it not gonna hurt you to learn readin’ wise...it’s not gonna hurt you to ask questions” (Post Observation Interview #6). Thomas also indicated that the reason he liked reading so much was it taught him new things that were interesting. More specifically, he talked about how reading the *Black Stallion* taught him what it would be like to travel on a train. As was detailed in Chapter 5, Steven frequently talked of how important learning was and expressed frustration one day when the class had a substitute teacher because he thought his opportunity to learn had been taken away for the afternoon. A final example came when Samuel noted how important it was for him to continue to learn and do well throughout his K-12 schooling because he had plans to try to enter college having already earned credit hours toward graduation.

Four of the boys talked about the importance of having the opportunity to use their imagination during lessons. As was discussed above, Steven, Christopher, Lance, and Thomas all talked about mind movies and suggested they enjoyed this strategy because it allowed them to use their imaginations. For example, Thomas said he liked to imagine he was Solomon going through some of the events in the book, and Steven

indicated that he could do fun things in his imagination when making mind movies.

After one observation when Lance animatedly read the lead part from a play, he said the times he had the chance to play and act were so much fun for him because he could really be imaginative.

A final theme that emerged as positive for the boys with regard to learning was being rewarded, praised, or positively recognized for their academic and behavioral efforts in the classroom. Although these instances served as a stronger influence for some of the boys, all six talked about feeling motivated by being rewarded, praised, or recognized. The reactions and feelings that were elicited by Steven and Christopher as a result of receiving rewards or being recognized by the teachers were discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. Additionally, Gregg noted one day, "In reading when Mrs. Thompson said me and Nathan might get a trophy for the best trackers in the class, ah, I liked that part, too" (Post Observation Interview #5). Finally, Samuel talked with pride about receiving the highest score in the class for the second year in a row on the state writing test. Subsequently, when he spoke of his grade and high expectations the teachers had for him he said, "It makes me feel like I should stay this way....so all the teachers that I go to should like me like they do" (Post Observation Interview #5). Lance and Thomas made similar statements about opportunities they had to be positively recognized during lessons.

Non-Academic Parts of the Day

Several of the boys frequently spoke of the importance of the non-academic parts of their day such as recess, lunch, and physical activity. As was discussed in Chapter 6, non-academic parts of the day were an important and positive aspect of Christopher's experiences. When given the opportunity, he frequently mentioned

activities such as recess, getting the most pull ups in physical education class, and drawing in art class as significant. Gregg and Samuel also indicated that recess stood out because they got to play football and interact with their friends. On other occasions Samuel also talked of how physical activity was an important part of the day for him. Physical activity was not physical education, rather it was a time that the teachers took the students out to the school playground and allowed them time to play structured and unstructured games.

Themes in Negative Attitudes Across the Boys

As the boys talked about negative events and frustrations, several themes emerged. In general these themes clustered into three categories. First, the boys talked about issues they had with certain aspects of daily classroom instruction. Next, with the exception of Thomas, each boy discussed concerns or incidents he had with a teacher that resulted in a negative outcome, frustration, or hurt feelings. Third, the boys each experienced and talked of negative situations and events that occurred with their peers. A summary of themes in the boys' negative attitudes is provided in Table 7-2.

Negative Aspects of Daily Instruction

In terms of daily instruction several commonalities arose as the boys talked about specific events or general frustrations. First, each of the boys got frustrated during instructional activities when he did not get called on to answer questions, missed out on receiving rewards, or when he felt bored. A second shared frustration was related to a lack of success in academics. The third was connected to feeling frustrated or bored during class. A final commonality was related to homework and included either not getting it done or not getting it signed by a parent or guardian.

With the exception of Lance, each of the boys communicated negative feelings when he did not get called on to answer questions or when he failed to receive a reward such as points, stars, or treats. At one point during an ongoing lesson, Samuel, Steven, Thomas, and Gregg all expressed frustration over not getting called on by doing things such as slapping their hand down on the desk, sighing heavily, or clicking their tongue to the roof of their mouth. After one lesson Samuel said he was mad, "She seen me...I knew the answer" (Post Observation Interview #2). Additionally, each of these four boys plus Christopher spoke negatively when they failed to receive a reward. Christopher's tendency to shut down during reading lessons when he did not receive "Cookie Club" is a good example. Not getting "Cookie Club" was also something that stood out as negative for Gregg after a reading lesson. Additionally, Samuel, Gregg, Christopher, and Steven all spoke of their frustrations over not getting individual stars or group points during instruction.

Several of the boys spoke of frustration or boredom over such issues as the pace of instruction or having to do work that they thought was repetitive. Gregg did not like it when people went slowly in reading; he liked the pace to be fast and got irritated, bored, and subsequently engaged in off task behavior when reading moved too slowly for him. Samuel was also a vocal opponent of slow instruction and expressed his frustration on numerous occasions when there was a lot of stopping in reading class. Furthermore, Thomas and Samuel verbalized frustrations over doing class work that seemed repetitive to them. For example, Samuel was very critical of how Ms. King had the reading class continue to work on "Drop in the Bucket" grammatical corrections at the end of the school year. When talking about this he said, "We don't need to do "Drop in

the Bucket.” It don’t do nothing no more...all year...tired same old stuff” (Post Observation Interview #3).

Five of the boys experienced and spoke negatively of times where they were not successful academically. Additionally, three of the boys made negative comments about specific subject areas that they found difficult. As a result of getting an incorrect answer or mispronouncing a word during reading lessons, Thomas and Steven respectively expressed a sense of anxiety. As discussed in Chapter 6, Christopher spoke of the frustrations when he got a progress report with unsatisfactory grades in reading and social studies. In addition, Gregg, Steven, and Christopher expressed frustration at some point over struggling with such academic tasks as writing worksheets, vocabulary words, fractions, math word problems, and milligram to kilogram conversions. Perhaps the most negative reactions to having a lack of success and academic struggles came from Lance. His lower than expected grade on a state writing test triggered his total withdrawal from a reading lesson. Afterwards, he began to cry as he expressed anger and frustration at his writing grade, his fellow classmates, and his teachers. Lance also frequently talked of struggling in math claiming on one occasion, “Everything, every time I go there she’s always on my back, I don’t get math, it is hard” (Post Observation #7).

A final negative theme for five of the boys was homework. Here the boys’ frustrations were the result of either not getting their homework done or not getting it signed by a parent or guardian and therefore not getting credit toward end of the week treats such as “Cookie Club.” Samuel and Lance indicated specific instances where they were upset by getting a stamp for not completing a homework assignment. In

addition, Christopher, Lance, Gregg, and Thomas all talked of frustrations over instances of not getting their homework signed by a parent or guardian and subsequently not being eligible to receive “Cookie Club.”

Concerns and Problems with Teachers

Themes related to concerns and problems with the teachers were more difficult to group because of the differences among the boys and the subsequent relationships they each developed with Ms. King and Mrs. Thompson. With the exception of Thomas, a negative theme for the boys involved being reprimanded by a teacher. A second theme included incidents or exchanges with a teacher that included acts of defiance or talking back. A final theme was associated with individual frustrations over feeling mistrusted or being discouraged over the way a particular subject was being taught.

With the exception of Thomas, each of the boys spoke negatively about being publicly reprimanded by a teacher. For example, Samuel expressed frustration and anger after being given a lecture by Ms. King when he was caught being untruthful about having the appropriate materials for a reading lesson. Christopher, Lance, and Steven all expressed feelings of sadness or being upset after instances of having been reprimanded by a teacher. Finally, Gregg indicted how much it had bothered him during a class where Ms. King reprimanded him for being impatient and then refused to let him ask a question that he felt was important.

Samuel, Lance, Gregg, and Christopher were each involved in incidents where they were defiant of a teacher’s request or talked back. Although the boys did not explicitly discuss their acts of defiance or talking back, the incidents are included here because the boys clearly manifested negative affect. As was discussed in Chapter 6, Christopher had one reading class where he made a cynical comment to Ms. King when

she reprimanded him. This incident escalated when Ms. King reprimanded him a second time and Christopher defiantly disengaged throughout most of the reading lesson that day. In addition, Samuel, Lance, and Gregg all had instances where they defiantly disregarded requests by Ms. King. During these incidents each boy had been involved in a negative situation that was the result of an altercation with a peer or having been reprimanded for misbehavior. As part of their reactions they disengaged from the lesson and defiantly resisted Ms. King's attempts to get them re-engaged.

Finally, three of the boys talked about individual frustrations they had with a teacher. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, Steven felt there were times when Mrs. Thompson mistrusted him and did not listen when he tried to explain something. He also articulated frustration for what he thought was a lack of caring by Mrs. Thompson for trying to understand situations from the students' perspectives. Lance occasionally expressed frustrations with how Mrs. Thompson taught math and lamented, "I think that she don't be puttin' no effort in teaching more, like to understand it" (Post Observation Interview #2). In another interview Lance said with a sense of exasperation, "If I had a different teacher....I really love math it's just her" (Post Observation Interview #7). Finally, Samuel noted frustrations he experienced with how Ms. King taught reading saying after one class, "I was bored and did not wanna be in readin.' Readin' when she teaches me it's not learnin'" (Post Observation Interview #3). These individual frustrations expressed by the boys were not frequent in occurrence; however, when they happened they were significant as was evident in how the boys talked about them.

Issues with Peers

At some point, each boy had a negative experience with one or more of his peers. These situations typically arose because of ongoing strained relationships or specific instances of being teased or “messed” with by another student. For example, Gregg, Lance, and Thomas mentioned ongoing struggles to get along with the other students claiming that this led to distractions, arguments, and misbehavior. In addition, Lance and Thomas claimed an ongoing strained relationship with Samuel. Specifically, they both expressed frustration or anger because Samuel got more attention from their fellow classmates and the teachers. After he got a lower score than Samuel on the state writing test, Lance said, “It’s annoying....everything that he does, he good at....everybody likes him even the whole class wants to be like him” (Post Observation Interview #3). Conversely, Samuel talked of frustrations related to not getting along with Lance.

Another experience that all of the boys, except Samuel, found to be frustrating was when they thought they were being teased or “messed” with by someone. Christopher, Lance, and Thomas noted events that were negative because another student was either bullying or teasing them. Steven spoke of regrets for how he handled two situations where he had an altercation with a classmate. And, Gregg mentioned an incident where he thought Christopher was “messing” with him just to make him mad and get him in trouble.

Patterns in Engagement

Examining patterns of engagement across the six boys generated a continuum of participation levels. During daily instructional lessons and activities each boy displayed behaviors that ranged from being actively engaged to being completely disengaged.

For all of the boys the most prevalent displays of engagement occurred during times when they were participating in teacher led instruction. Other displays of active engagement came at times when they were involved in completing individual tasks or they were working with a partner or in a small group. In addition, there were times when each of the boys exhibited behaviors that reflected a more tenuous level of engagement, meaning their behaviors fluctuated between participation and non-participation within a given period of time. This section of the cross-case analysis examines more closely the behaviors that reflected the boys' engagement, instructional activities that fostered their participation, and episodes of tenuous engagement.

Prior to beginning a more detailed examination, a few general statements are provided to give a broad overview regarding the boys' patterns of engagement. Gregg, Samuel, Steven, and Christopher all displayed consistent levels of engagement across reading, math, and writing lessons. This was not the case for Thomas and Lance. Thomas displayed greater levels of engagement in reading lessons when compared to math and writing, and Lance displayed greater levels of engagement in reading and writing than in math lessons. All of the boys displayed a greater number of behaviors that were indicative of engagement than disengagement. However, for Lance and Christopher combining episodes of disengaged behavior with times where each displayed actions that vacillated between engaged and disengaged yielded a number that was greater than the observed number of engaged episodes suggesting their overall engagement was tenuous.

Teacher-led Instruction

Times of teacher-led instruction throughout the course of lessons and activities resulted in frequent displays of active engagement across all six boys. Behaviors that

demonstrated the boys' participation during this time included raising their hands to answer questions, answering questions, participating in choral response activities, calling out answers or questions related to ongoing instruction, and actively listening as evidenced by such actions as following along in a book during reading, watching the teacher as she did something like complete a math problem in front of the class, and making corrections on math worksheets or "Drop in the Bucket" as the class was reviewing answers.

The most frequently displays of engagement across all six of the boys occurred during times when active exchanges took place between the teachers and students. This typically occurred as a result of instructional activities such as vocabulary question and answer sessions or group discussions. During these instructional activities, each boy had numerous opportunities to answer questions by raising his hand or calling out. Overall, the number of times the boys raised their hands to try to answer a question ranged from a low of fifteen times for Christopher to a high of fifty-one times for Gregg. This pattern of participation was solidified by the fact that the number of times each boy had the opportunity to raise his hand but did not was relatively low. The reasons behind not raising a hand to offer answers vary and are not necessarily indicative of disengagement, yet this number ranged from a low of four times for Christopher to a high of twenty times for Samuel. In Samuel's case this number was compared to raising his hand forty-eight times. Likewise, five of the boys displayed patterns of calling out responses to questions or statements their teachers made during instructional activities. Christopher was the only one who did not call out answers or questions during instruction. For the other boys, calling out indicated active participation in the

lesson with numbers that ranged from a low of twenty-six times for Thomas to a high of forty-nine times for Steven.

Another behavior that was indicative of active engagement during instructional activities was participation in choral responses. When employing this approach during lessons the teachers used several different strategies. Typically, they had the students chorally call out spelling and vocabulary words, numbers, or general answers. In reading, Ms. King and Mrs. Thompson also used the strategy of reading aloud and having the students chorally call out the next word in a sentence when they stopped. Ms. King often had the students chorally practice gestures such as making a face that reflected how a character in a story might look if he/she was surprised. Finally, both teachers had the students chorally gesture with a thumb up or down depending on whether or not they agreed with an answer or statement. Across these choral response strategies the boys participation ranged from a low of ten times for Christopher to a high of twenty-four times for Thomas with the other four boys participating in anywhere from thirteen to seventeen instances. With everyone except Christopher, this pattern was reinforced by the fact that they each participated in the choral activities at a much higher rate than not participating. For example, Gregg participated sixteen times as opposed to not participating on five occasions. For Christopher, as mentioned above, he participated ten times yet failed to participate on twelve occasions.

Finally, each of the boy's demonstrated participation in ongoing teacher-led instruction as exhibited through a variety of different behaviors. Although quantifying this conduct within the moment-to-moment context of a specific lesson was not feasible, a list of the types of actions that were representative of this behavior was wide ranging.

When actively engaged in teacher-led instruction the boys' behaviors included: looking at a book and following along or tracking as a teacher or another student read, watching the teacher as she performed various tasks in front of the classroom, making corrections on math worksheets or "Drop in the Bucket" as the class reviewed answers, taking notes as Ms. King read *Solomon* during writing class, highlighting words in the book, going up to the Smartboard to do math problems, and participating in back and forth exchanges with the teacher about an instructional topic.

Individual, Partner, and Group Work

Another example of times when the boys' behaviors reflected active participation occurred during individual work. In the majority of instances, when given an individual assignment each boy worked dutifully to complete the task. In this case, engagement typically involved such activities as completing a writing assignment based on a prompt, working on math worksheets or "Drop in the Bucket" grammatical corrections, taking an exam, and working to complete a task such as drawing a map or looking up vocabulary definitions.

On occasions when the students were directed to complete work with a partner or in a small group, all of the boys typically displayed behaviors that reflected active participation toward completing the task at hand. Standard examples of working with a partner occurred during reading lessons when students paired with a "Shoulder Buddy" to complete fluency reading for a timed minute. In both reading and math lessons the teachers also had the students work with a "Shoulder Buddy" to discuss parts of a book or answers to math problems. During reading and writing lessons, Ms. King also had the students work in small groups to discuss a book or develop written summaries.

Times of Tenuous Engagement

At various times all of the boys displayed behaviors that wavered between participation and non-participation. During these times involvement in the ongoing lesson was tenuous, and distractions appeared to pull their attention away from the task of learning. In these instances, a boy's engagement was interspersed with moments of disengagement as evidenced by his participation in behaviors that were not part of the lesson. For all of the boys there were also instances when they behaved in a manner that reflected disengagement, yet an attempt was made by a teacher to prompt them back to engagement. These times of tenuous engagement as defined by moments of disengagement or times of prompted engagement indicated behaviors that fell along the middle on the continuum of participation between being engaged and disengaged.

All of the boys at some point in every lesson and across each subject area, exhibited moments of disengagement by vacillating between academic and non-academic behaviors. These moments included times where focused attention to the ongoing lesson was mixed with moments of talking or "messaging" with others, playing with something such as a pencil or highlighter, not following along or completing work, or engaging in other general actions that were not related to the ongoing lesson. The number of instances that included moments of disengagement ranged from a low of eighteen for Thomas to a high of forty-six for Lance with the four other boys ranging between twenty and thirty-six incidents.

When further examining the boys' varying levels of academic participation, there were instances where each of them behaved in a disengaged manner yet was prompted by a teacher back to being engaged in academic work. Re-engaging a boy included such strategies as asking him a question, using proximity, simply looking at

him, or reprimanding him. In the majority of instances these strategies successfully re-engaged a boy in academic work, however, there were occasions where the strategies failed and within a short time, disengagement occurred again. The number of instances that included prompted engagement ranged from a low of one for Samuel to a high of sixteen for Lance, with the other four boys ranging between two and six incidents.

Patterns in Disengagement

There were a variety of times where each of the boys displayed behaviors that reflected disengagement from ongoing academic work. These instances of disengagement were exemplified by an extended period of time where a boy did not participate in a lesson. The majority of times that this occurred, a boy's behaviors fell into one of two categories. First, there were instances when he was not paying attention; instead he was engaged in his own non-academic behaviors such as playing with something, shutting down and not participating in the lesson, watching other students instead of the teacher, staring off for extended periods of time, or getting up from his seat to walk around the classroom. Second, there were numerous instances when each boy was disengaged from the ongoing lesson because he was talking or "messing around" with his classmates. The number of instances that were coded as disengaged ranged from a low of sixteen for Thomas to a high of thirty-nine for Lance with the other four boys ranging between twenty-six and thirty-one.

Conclusion

Using Finn's (1989) argument that identification with academics is intimately connected to attitudes, patterns of participation, and opportunities for success this research has attempted to focus on the daily school experiences of six fourth-grade African American boys growing up in poverty. More specifically, this chapter has

concentrated on examining the themes that became apparent as each boy talked in positive and negative ways about his day-to-day experiences as well as looking at the patterns of participation that each displayed during lessons. Prior to moving on to a discussion of the significance of the findings that emerged from this research, it is imperative to ask how did the boys' attitudes connect to their patterns of participation and what does this indicate about this small group of African American boys in terms of what engages them in school.

All six of the boys who participated in this study displayed patterns of engagement where their episodes of participation outnumbered their episodes of non-participation. For Lance and Christopher this picture changed somewhat when episodes of tenuous engagement were considered. The significant point here is that, for the most part, the boys behaved in ways during daily lessons that reflected active engagement in the curriculum. It can also be noted that during the time of data collection, only one of the boys missed a single day of school due to a suspension for an altercation that occurred with a peer. Their parents or guardians sent them off to school each day demonstrating a commitment to the hope that education brings (Murrell, 2007; Shujaa, 1994) and the boys engaged in the curriculum in a way that generally reflected an enjoyment of school.

When looking more closely at how patterns of participation connected to the boys' attitudes toward academics, Finn's (1989) idea regarding the opportunity for success tied the two together in a fundamental way. In particular, all six of the boys indicated that positive parts of daily lessons included giving the right answers, getting praised, receiving rewards, or being recognized for their efforts. Subsequently, the

motivation to seek what was positive led to participation levels that collectively involved the boys raising their hands 207 times and calling out answers or questions 162 times across all observations. Furthermore, five of the boys indicated that they liked daily instruction that involved question and answer discussions led by a teacher because this instructional strategy gave them the opportunity for that success they were seeking. This underscores the significance of how having the opportunity for success was intimately connected to both positive attitudes and patterns of participation among the boys.

Another way that the boys' attitudes were linked to participation was reflected in how they talked about participating in choral response activities, being challenged, using their imaginations, making mind movies, and participating in partner or small group work. All of these activities occurred during times of active exchanges between a teacher and the students and resulted in positive patterns of participation. For example, across all six boys there were 96 times that they were recorded as actively participating in choral response activities. Moreover, four of the boys talked about how they liked to be challenged, four talked of the specific strategy of making mind movies, and four talked about the importance of being able to use their imaginations. All of the strategies that supported these activities were included in parts of teacher-led instruction and resulted in a higher number of episodes of engaged behavior. Finally, four of the boys talked positively about the opportunity to work with a "Shoulder Buddy" or in a small group, a strategy that also promoted positive levels of participation.

One last example of a connection between the boys' attitudes and their participation patterns was demonstrated when the students were asked to engage in

individual work. Five of the boys talked about tests and how they either liked to take them or how they had success when taking them. This positive attitude connected to a high number of recorded episodes of engagement during observations where a test was given. As was discussed in Chapter 6, even Christopher, who sometimes struggled to stay focused, displayed high levels of engagement during tests. In some cases, as with Steven, Samuel, and Thomas, the boys directly linked test taking with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, receive recognition, or be successful, all of which connect back to Finn's ideas about attitudes, participation, and success as being integral to identification with academics.

In terms of the boys' negative attitudes and patterns of participation, two themes that translated into higher levels of disengagement were being reprimanded by a teacher or having a negative incident with a peer. Five of the boys talked of being reprimanded by a teacher as negative and in several instances these incidents directly led to either displays of negative affect or shutting down and disengaging from a lesson. Three examples of this that were previously discussed involved separate occasions where Christopher and Lance defiantly talked back to Ms. King after being reprimanded and one instance where Samuel shut down after being reprimanded for not having the appropriate materials for a reading lesson. In addition, all six of the boys talked of negative episodes with peers and for Gregg, Lance, and Christopher specific incidents of being teased or "messed" with led to times of shutting down and a lack of participation during a specific lesson.

Although not highly prevalent, another connection between the boys' attitudes and patterns of disengagement was apparent in how several of them talked negatively

about not receiving rewards. For example, Samuel indicated after a reading lesson that he was disengaged more than usual because he knew Ms. King was not going to give out treats to the team that got the most points for being on task during class. In another example that was discussed in Chapter 6, the most obvious display of not getting rewarded and subsequent disengagement came from Christopher when he did not receive “Cookie Club” and as a result he totally shut down and failed to effectively participate in a reading lesson.

Other than these limited examples, the connections between negative attitudes and patterns of disengagement were individual in nature as each boy had temporary frustrations that occasionally led to times of disengagement from an ongoing lesson. For example, Lance got frustrated with math, and often participated less as a result, or Thomas got bored in math and chose to read a book, or Gregg got frustrated by the slow pace of reading and spent time talking instead of following along. As was evidenced by the boys overall trend toward being engaged, these types of incidents did not occur on a regular basis.

Table 7-1. Themes in positive attitudes toward school

Participant	Themes
Thomas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His favorite subject was reading • He loved the story-books his class was reading • He liked opportunities to give answers to the teacher's questions • He liked praise, recognition, and rewards • He liked being challenged academically • He enjoyed opportunities to use his imagination • He enjoyed participating in choral response activities
Steven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His favorite subject was reading, especially fluency • He liked opportunities to demonstrate his knowledge • He liked praise, recognition, and rewards • He liked being made a positive example by teachers • He liked having fun and being social while learning • He enjoyed opportunities to use his imagination • He enjoyed partner work and choral response activities
Christopher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His favorite subject was reading • He liked opportunities to demonstrate his knowledge • He like praise and extrinsic rewards • He enjoyed partner work and choral response activities • He enjoyed opportunities to use his imagination and draw • He liked the non-academic parts of the day
Gregg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His favorite subject was math • He liked opportunities to demonstrate his knowledge • He liked praise, recognition, and rewards • He liked to be challenged and given choices academically • He enjoyed activities that allowed him to laugh and have fun
Lance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His favorite subjects were writing and reading • He liked being recognized by the teachers • He enjoyed opportunities to use his imagination • He liked listening to stories, writing, and role-playing
Samuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His favorite subject was math • He liked opportunities to demonstrate his knowledge • He liked praise, recognition, and rewards • He enjoyed partner work and non-academic parts of the day • He liked being held up as a role model by the teachers

Table 7-2. Themes in negative attitudes toward school

Participant	Themes
Thomas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disliked lessons and activities that were repetitive • He disliked not getting called on to answer a question • He disliked not receiving his full behavior points for a lesson • He disliked being teased or “messed” with by a peer • He disliked when a partner was uncooperative
Steven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disliked activities or work when he did not know the answers • He disliked not getting called on • He disliked not getting extrinsic rewards • He disliked being publically reprimanded • He disliked getting checks for bad behavior • He disliked when teachers did not listen or mistrusted him
Christopher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disliked not getting extrinsic rewards • He disliked activities or work where he did not know the answers • He disliked being wrong in front of his peers • He disliked being publically reprimanded • He disliked being teased or “messed” with by a peer
Gregg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disliked not getting extrinsic rewards • He disliked activities or work that was difficult for him • He disliked lessons and activities that were slow paced • He disliked not having a choice in where he sat
Lance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disliked activities or work that was difficult for him • He disliked receiving a low score on a writing exam • He disliked the way Mrs. Thompson taught math • He disliked being teased, bullied, or “messed” with by a peer
Samuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disliked not getting called on • He disliked not getting extrinsic rewards • He disliked lessons and activities that were slow paced • He disliked activities that were repetitive • He disliked when teachers wasted time or got off track • He disliked it when teachers went back on their word

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to analyze identification with academics as it is connected to the daily school experiences of six fourth-grade African American boys currently living in poverty. As an avenue for investigating the negative school outcomes that pervade the lives of a significant number of African American boys, current literature on identification with academics has produced a variety of conflicting results (Davis, 2003; Finn, 1989; Griffin, 2002; Howard, 2003; Johnson et al., 2001; Ogbu, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Osborne, 1995, 1997; Steele, 1992, 1997; Tyson, 2002; Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Voelkl, 1997). Shortcomings associated with this literature were discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 and include a lack of focus on boys who are younger as well as a failure to concentrate on the voices of the boys as they interpret their daily experiences in school. With the belief that there is value in developing a research effort that addresses these shortcomings, this project utilized qualitative methodology to examine the day-to-day school experiences of younger African American boys from their perspectives and in their words.

The current research was framed with the following overarching question: How do the daily school experiences of a small group of fourth-grade African American boys connect to their emerging identification with academics? As supported in the literature, (Finn, 1989; Steele, 1992, 1997) the concept of identification with academics was defined as the perceptions of congruence a person holds between himself and academics. Furthermore, identification with academics was characterized as using indicators that included attitudes the boys displayed toward school (Griffin, 2002;

Madhere, 1991; Mickelson, 1990; Osborne, 1997), levels of engagement (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Voelkl, 1997) and opportunities for success in the classroom (Finn, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Osborne, 1997; Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Voelkl, 1997). In order to approximate this conception of identification with academics and answer the overarching research question, I utilized three sub-questions. These questions were: 1) What experiences during the school day were important to the boys and why? 2) What attitudes toward academics was each of these boys developing? 3) What patterns of participation did each boy exhibit during daily lessons and activities?

This chapter aims to bring closure to my efforts with the boys by connecting the research findings back to the prevailing literature on identification with academics. To do this, I will initially look at each boy to make comparisons between his story and Finn's (1989) idea that attitudes, patterns of participation, and opportunities for success are integral to developing a positive identification with school. I have chosen to do this because it helps to answer the research questions and reinforces the goal I have had throughout this study to honor the boys' voices and experiences. After this, I will theorize the connections that exist between the boys as a collective and the literature I previously labeled as the "discourse of rejection" (Stinson, 2006, p. 487). Next, I will examine how the findings of this research connect to current literature on agency and resilience. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of implications and suggestions for future research.

Identification With Academics and the Boys

The underpinnings of Finn's (1989) theoretical claim that identification with academics is closely associated with a person's attitudes toward school, his/her patterns of participation, and his/her opportunities for success provided me with an

avenue to answer the questions that formed the basis of this research. In this section of the discussion I will briefly re-visit each of the boys to make conclusions about the status of their emerging identification with academics.

Thomas

Thomas exhibited attitudes toward school that were overwhelmingly positive along with patterns of participation where displays of active engagement far outnumbered episodes of tenuous engagement and disengagement. In addition, from the way that Thomas spoke about his successes in school, it was apparent that he was motivated by the achievements he had garnered. Thomas talked of daily frustrations, but these were limited, and he did not dwell on them for any length of time. More importantly, Thomas did not let his daily frustrations interfere with his participation in ongoing lessons. Overall, it was apparent that Thomas had strong perceptions of congruence between himself and academics and therefore had an emerging identification with academics that was positive (Finn, 1989).

One area of concern moving forward for Thomas might be the strained relationships he exhibited with his peers. I say this because Finn (1989) indicates that social alienation can be a contributing factor to withdrawal and eventual disengagement from school. As a result, efforts should be made with Thomas to foster positive relationships with his peers. It was ironic because Thomas had a strong sense of care and support for his mother and five siblings so his struggles to get along with his peers suggested a divide between his vision of home and school. Creating an environment in the classroom that is more reflective of family may help Thomas to feel more of a sense of communalism with his peers (Boykin, et al., 2005). This can be created through the use of a social curriculum that includes such activities as regular morning meetings

(Charney, 2002) and the use of truly cooperative structures and learning activities throughout the day (Hurley, et al., 2009). Mrs. Thompson and Ms. King frequently used strategies that included a “Shoulder Buddy” or small group work, however, the perfunctory nature of simply sharing answers to a math problem or predictions in a story did not seem sufficient for Thomas to develop the sense of communalism necessary to successfully support his development of positive relationships with his peers.

Steven

Steven exhibited attitudes toward school that were mainly positive as well as patterns of participation that predominantly reflected active engagement. Like Thomas, affirmation of his success through opportunities to demonstrate what he knew was at the heart of Steven’s efforts in the classroom. Steven did experience daily frustrations but, for the most part, did not dwell on them or let them interfere with his participation in lessons. It was obvious that he had a strong perception of a connection between himself and school and therefore he had an overall emerging identification with academics that was positive (Finn, 1989).

One area of concern for Steven was his claim that teachers singled him out to be reprimanded, they mistrusted him, or they did not take a strong enough interest in the students’ lives. If instances such as this persist or become more frequent, they might prove to negatively impact his attitudes toward school and result in decreased levels of participation (Finn, 1989; Steele, 1992, 1997). One effective strategy that may help Steven is in line with recommendations made by Hale (2001) that suggest African American children respond best when they are taught in smaller groups with teachers who provide continual nurturing and support. The potential effectiveness of this strategy is supported in research by Foster and Peele (1999) who provide data that show African

American male students prefer teachers who are firm and demanding, yet compassionate and caring. As a result, Steven would benefit from instructional strategies that employ a greater use of small group work that is rigorous but also supported in a caring and nurturing way by his teachers.

Christopher

At best, Christopher exhibited attitudes toward school that were fragile along with displaying patterns of participation where episodes of active engagement were outnumbered by the combined episodes of tenuous engagement and disengagement. Like the other boys, success and the ability to demonstrate what he knew was important to Christopher's efforts in school. However, it was evident that the success he sought was delivered on an infrequent basis and resulted in confidence that was delicate. Christopher spoke of frustrations that pervaded his daily experiences, yet it did not appear as if he had the skills to successfully resolve these frustrations, and this resulted in regular displays of negative affect and disengaged behaviors. It was apparent that Christopher's perceptions of congruence between himself and school were precarious, and this led to an emerging identification with academics that was tenuous (Finn, 1989).

In Christopher's case, steps need to be taken to reverse his negative attitudes and patterns of participation so that he does not further disengage from school. More specifically, like Steven, Christopher would benefit from additional small group work that is positive and nurturing, yet demanding (Foster & Peele, 1999). Christopher also enjoyed using his imagination and drawing. As a result his engagement might benefit from activities that incorporate these elements in a way that allows him to genuinely and spontaneously express his individualism (Hale, 2001). Finally, like Thomas, Christopher would do well in a classroom environment that supported communalism as opposed to

competition. Foster and Peele (1999) write, “research has shown that tremendous gains have been achieved in schools and classrooms for Black students where learning is organized as a social event, not as a competitive or individual endeavor” (p. 14). Because Christopher was always comparing himself to his peers this communal environment must have an additional element of support and nurturing created through a social curriculum that includes morning meetings and the type of cooperative learning that moves beyond the perfunctory comparing of answers.

Gregg

Gregg exhibited attitudes toward school that were positive as well as patterns of participation that predominantly reflected active engagement. Like the other boys, success and the ability to demonstrate what he knew were essential to Gregg’s efforts in the classroom. He did have daily frustrations and during one lesson, effectively shut down from participating when he thought a classmate was “messing” with him. With this exception though, Gregg did not typically let his frustrations interfere with his participation in ongoing lessons and it was evident that he had a perception of congruence between himself and academics. As a result, his emerging identification with academics that was largely positive (Finn, 1989).

One issue that Gregg struggled with in the classroom was the slow pace of some instructional activities. When the pace was slow he had a tendency to disengage from the lesson and put himself in situations where he ended up being publically reprimanded by a teacher. Literature by Hale (2001) and Boykin et al. (2005) suggests teachers should include lessons and activities that take into consideration dimensions of African American culture such as movement and verve, or “a propensity for relatively high levels of stimulation” (Hale, 2001, p. 116). Specifically, this involves intentionally

planning lessons that are energetic and lively, and might include activities with choral responses that are verbal or physical such as spelling aerobics. An increase in the use of activities such as these may help Gregg to feel as if the pace of instruction is not too slow and result in greater levels of engagement.

Lance

Lance demonstrated attitudes toward school that were fragile and displayed patterns of participation where displays of active engagement were outnumbered by the combined episodes of tenuous engagement and disengagement. Being successful and having the ability to demonstrate what he knew were important to Lance in writing and reading. However, Lance struggled in math, where he exhibited more frequent episodes of negative affect and disengaged behavior. This led to overall confidence in his academic abilities that was split along subject areas. Lance also struggled to get along with his peers and as a result exhibited some anger and self-doubt. If these patterns persist or become more frequent for Lance, it might prove to pervade the areas where he currently has a positive attitude and impact his levels of participation even further. For Lance it was apparent that the connections he felt between himself and school were precarious, and this led to an emerging identification with academics that was tenuous (Finn, 1989).

Lance might be at risk for disidentification from school unless steps are taken to provide him with the support he needs to move in a sustained positive direction. Earlier suggestions made for the other boys in terms of creating a classroom environment focused on communalism through the use of morning meetings and cooperative structures would also help Lance. Moreover, Lance was particularly emotional and maintained a need to express his individualism through oral and auditory modes (Hale,

2001). This was prevalent when Lance talked of how much he liked to listen to stories as well as how much he liked to use his imagination and write narrative essays. Additional activities that foster his love of performing and using his imagination would help to keep him engaged. However, these activities must be implemented in combination with those suggested above that help promote his ability to get along with his peers. Finally, strategies that encourage the use of movement and verve such as rhythmic counting and the use of manipulatives (Hale, 2001) may help Lance to better understand and engage more fully in math instruction.

Samuel

Samuel displayed attitudes toward school that were generally positive and exhibited patterns of participation that typically reflected active engagement. Like all of the others, Samuel regularly spoke of successes in school, and it was apparent that he was motivated by the achievements he had earned. Samuel experienced daily frustrations and often spoke of them at length, yet for the most part he did not let them interfere with his participation in daily lessons. Overall, it was obvious that Samuel had a strong sense of congruence between him and school, and as a result also had an emerging identification with academics that was positive (Finn, 1989).

Like some of the other boys, Samuel got frustrated and became disengaged from instruction that seemed repetitive or slow paced to him. In contrast, he frequently reported that math was his favorite subject because of how it challenged him. With this in mind, it would be beneficial for his teachers to push him further in all subject areas by providing activities that are more demanding of his intellect (Hale, 2001). In addition, Samuel would benefit from the strategies discussed above for Gregg in terms of using movement and verve in daily lessons.

Identification with Academics Across the Boys

Thomas, Steven, Gregg, and Samuel had an emerging identification with academics that was positive, with apparent internalized conceptions of belonging and a sense of value for school related success (Finn, 1989). Lance and Christopher also valued success, but for social and academic reasons they appeared to struggle with their conceptions of belonging and as a result had a more tenuous identification with academics. From the ways that the boys talked, it was clear that the opportunity for success was a unifying connection between their attitudes, patterns of participation, and identification with academics. Having this opportunity was an integral part of the affirmation each boy sought to validate his place in school. The success each achieved, or did not achieve, served as an affirmation of his efforts that then impacted his attitudes and patterns of participation in a cyclical manner.

The results of this research demonstrate the importance of the connections between experiences, attitudes, patterns of participation, success, and identification with school (Finn, 1989; Steele, 1992, 1997). Not unlike other areas of life, in school these concepts form relationships that are interdependent, reinforcing, and self-perpetuating with the opportunity for success being the entity that binds them together. It makes sense that attitudes come directly from one's perceptions of experiences and if experiences are positive because of successes then attitudes will be also. In this regard, findings from this research support the work of Valeski and Stipek (2001), Voelkl (1997), and Tyson (2002) who all reasoned that achievement outcomes directly impact self-concept, attitudes, participation, and identification with academics. These findings underscore the significance of supporting the school efforts of young African American

boys in ways that ensure their academic and social success as an avenue for fostering their identification with school.

Race, Gender, and Identification with Academics

Steele's (1992, 1997) theory of domain identification or the idea that a person must identify with school achievement and experience success to develop an internalized sense of being accepted and valued is closely associated with the ideas of Finn (1989) and therefore, as explained above, held true for the boys in this study. Where the boys differed from Steele's theoretical perspective was in terms of stereotype threat. Specifically, Steele's theory posits that because of their race and the negative labels placed on African Americans and school success, the boys might have a tendency to separate their academic identities from their overall self-esteem. There were no indications that this was the case for the majority of the boys, and they typically held a high value for school success. Christopher was the possible exception to this because he sent contradictory messages regarding his investment in school success; at times it was very important to him, and other times he disassociated himself from it. For example, he indicated he was not concerned when he got a wrong answer or did not know answers to questions he raised his hand for. His inability or unwillingness to articulate answers to questions may have been a subconscious way to disassociate his sense of self from the struggles he experienced in the classroom. In addition, Steele's ideas of stereotype threat with regard to gender and reading did not hold true for this group of boys. Four of the boys indicated that reading was their favorite subject, and the other two said they liked reading. As the boys go forward in school, it is important that this affinity for reading be nurtured through the selection of texts that are gender and culture appropriate (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Tatum, 2006).

Ideas put forth by Majors and Billson (1992) regarding cool pose and ritualized forms of masculinity among African American males partially held true for three of the boys in this study. Steven, Samuel, and Gregg frequently talked about football and their athletic abilities. Furthermore, Steven and Samuel often spoke of girlfriends and had a ritualized handshake they used with each other. As discussed in Chapter 5, Steven had constant concerns over his appearance especially when it came to his hair; Samuel had a distinctive walk that he often used; and Gregg exhibited a type of aloofness regarding instances of being reprimanded. Taken by itself, the fact that three of the boys were preoccupied with athletics might be viewed as a reflection of a larger male sports culture that is not associated with race. However, when combined with other characteristics of cool pose, it can be suggested that these boys did exhibit some behaviors that were reflective of this theory on African American male behavior. It is unclear whether this conduct will ultimately impact the boys' identification with academics, yet it is important to make sure teachers understand cool pose theory and do not marginalize the boys' behaviors as an important step to making sure schools are welcoming and supportive spaces for African American boys as they transition into adolescents.

The findings from this study have limited connection to Cultural-Ecological Theory (Ogbu 1992, 1994, 2004; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). In particular, there was no evidence that the boys exhibited behaviors associated with Ogbu and Fordham's (1996) theory on acting White. The boys did not typically behave in ways that conflicted with academic success as was evident by the constant attempts to demonstrate their knowledge through raising their hands or calling out answers. Even Lance and Christopher, who struggled with their level of identification with school, wanted to be

successful and expressed anguish over their academic struggles. Moreover, the results indicate that the boys' attitudes were in direct contrast with Ogbu's idea of an ambivalent folk theory of making. This cultural model posits that some African Americans believe that hard work and success in school is futile because of the larger societal structures of job and wage discrimination. As a collective, this group of young African American boys had ambitions and thoughts of becoming successful adults. For example, Thomas wanted to be a chef, Lance wanted to be an FBI agent, Steven wanted to be a doctor or lawyer, Samuel wanted to be many things from a football player to the owner of his own bank, Gregg wanted to be a football player, and Christopher wanted to be a baseball player. More important, the boys behaved and talked in ways that indicated they understood the connection between school success and their future career goals. As the boys continue their education, it remains to be seen if their abstract attitudes about success and the value of education will continue to match the concrete attitudes created by the reality of their everyday lives in school (Mickelson, 1990).

Individual Agency and Resilience

As discussed in Chapter 2, academic resilience is characterized by achievement and success when those are uncommon for individuals in a similar sociocultural context (Gayles, 2005). Likewise, agency is defined by an individual's ability to adapt and reconstruct the available sociocultural discourses in order to effectively navigate these discourses in his/her pursuit of achievement and success (Stinson, 2006). Viewed within the larger context of statistics that reflect the continued struggles of many African American boys in school, agency and resilience are important concepts to consider in terms of developing a positive identification with academics. Available literature

(Hebert, 1998; Howard, 2003; O'Connor, 1997; Sanders, 1997) that examines school success in African American students suggests that the development of agency and resilience are influenced by the messages received from significant others in a student's life. This literature further indicates that teachers are important significant others in the lives of students and therefore must carefully and purposely create an environment that is supportive, nurturing, and culturally responsive. The purpose of this research was not to examine the teachers; yet the boys' daily experiences occurred within a context that was principally the making of the teachers. As was evident from the generally positive attitudes and patterns of participation that the boys displayed, the environment within both fourth-grade classrooms was supportive, nurturing, and culturally responsive.

Beyond the overall classroom environment, there were individual examples where various boys could have been viewed as demonstrating agency or resilience. Thomas, Steven, Gregg, and Samuel exhibited resilience by not letting their frustrations interfere with their participation in lessons. In contrast, Christopher and Lance got frustrated more often and as a result displayed less resilience and more frequent disengagement. Additionally, it can be said that Thomas and Gregg displayed a type of agency by typically re-framing situations where they were reprimanded. In a number of instances, each boy had the opportunity to view himself as being stereotypically bad or to re-configure his thinking so this was not part of the vision he had of himself. Ultimately, both Thomas and Gregg consistently talked in ways that indicated they chose the latter option.

Of concern is the fact that there were two instances where a boy expressed thoughts that a teacher mistrusted him or yelled at him too much. The first of these was

discussed in Chapter 5 and occurred when Steven felt as if Mrs. Thompson did not believe or trust him. The second instance occurred with Lance when he expressed feelings that Mrs. Thompson was always yelling at him in math class. Although these incidents were rare, they have the potential to impact the boys' perceptions of the support they are receiving from their teachers. The underlying effect of this could lead to a negative impact on the boys' self-concept, removal of the teacher as an important significant other from their support system, or a decreased identification with academics.

Implications

The purpose of this research was to examine identification with academics in younger African American boys who are growing up in poverty. As a researcher, I wanted to focus on listening to the boys' interpretations of their daily school experiences to hear in their words what was important to them about school. The goal was to find out what happened in the classroom on a daily basis that engaged them and what led them to be disengaged. What I learned from the boys supported the literature (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and reinforced basic tenants of culturally relevant pedagogy as a foundation for educators to support African American boys' success and subsequent identification with school.

The most prevalent theme in terms of what motivated the boys' participation was the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and be successful. This manifested itself in how the boys talked as well as how they behaved; with every chance they had to answer a question or take a test came the prospect of being right. They were clearly searching for validation of their knowledge, but beyond this, being right was an affirmation of who they were; added value to their sense of self, gave them a positive

outlook, and reinforced their efforts to participate in class. Adding to the importance of this were instances where the boys negatively talked about times when they felt nervous or upset because they gave incorrect answers and their knowledge was not validated. An underlying component of the safety the boys felt in offering answers on a frequent basis supports a basic premise of culturally relevant pedagogy that suggests the importance of educators creating a classroom environment that is caring and psychologically supportive (Charney, 2002; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Instructional strategies that the boys spoke of as motivating their participation included teacher-led question and answer discussion sessions, choral response activities, partner work, listening to the teachers read stories, and activities that included music. These are the very types of activities suggested in the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy (Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Foster & Peele, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The significance of these instructional strategies is that they also connect with sending a message of affirmation to the boys. I say this because African American culture is associated with communalism, music, verve, and oral communication (Hale, 2001), and when teachers use these strategies, it serves to affirm to the boys that their home culture is important in school. The net effect of the use of these strategies was to increase the boys' participation in daily lessons. This also connects to Finn's (1989) idea that, "The ability to manipulate participation in school activities may provide a handle through which increased levels of identification may become accessible" (p. 127). The end result is that it is incumbent on teachers to utilize instructional strategies as tools to affirm African American boys and potentially increase their identification with school.

It is important to point out that the boys need to continually demonstrate their knowledge can be viewed as connecting to larger cultural themes that reflected traditional mainstream values such as autonomy, individual recognition, and competition (Hale, 2001). In contrast the boys' positive attitudes toward teacher-led question and answer discussion sessions, choral response activities, partner work, listening to stories, and activities that included music, reflected themes associated with African American culture such as verve, communalism, oral tradition, and movement (Boykin et al., 2005; Hale, 2001; Foster & Peele, 1999). This dichotomy was indicative of competing ideologies that the boys were learning to negotiate. Specifically, this was a struggle between their home culture and a larger societal structure, namely school, which values traditionally White principles of thought. Ultimately, the boys' abilities to resolve these tensions will influence their emerging identification with academics.

The difficulty that the boys face in coming to terms with how to exist in these competing worlds makes it incumbent upon teachers to understand African American culture and make every effort to faithfully bring the students' culture into the classroom. For example, the perfunctory way that the teachers used group work sent a conflicting message to the boys because the idea was to share the right answer instead of fostering a truly communal concept (Tyler et al., 2006). If these cooperative activities had been set up in a way that reflected interdependence, sharing, and performing tasks for the good of the entire group, the teachers would have sent a message that validated the boys' home culture and, potentially, served to increase overall engagement.

Four of the boys also indicated the importance of being challenged in their learning. In addition to sending a message of high expectations, when teachers

challenge their students to move beyond the boundaries of their current thinking, it communicates the idea that the teacher believes the students are capable (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In their work on strategies for teaching African American males, Foster and Peele (1999) also reported that boys most respected teachers who challenged and inspired them to work hard. As an example, when Samuel talked of how the teachers expected a lot from him, he indicated it motivated him to continually do well and made him feel like a positive role model for his fellow classmates. These attitudes on the part of the teachers were another way to send messages of affirmation and support to students in a way that impacts their identification with academics.

Each of the boys experienced frustrations that were an inevitable part of their day-to-day interactions with teachers and peers. The boys' frustrations ranged in intensity from simple examples of being "messed" with to more complex situations such as struggling with academic subjects or conflicting with teachers. The boys' responses to these situations also varied with some being better able than others to demonstrate the resiliency to move past their frustrations. Whether the frustration was with another peer or a teacher, it was apparent that each boy wanted to be seen and heard in his efforts to explain or resolve the situation. In retrospect, the boys' frustrations can be viewed as a result of their being in situations where they did not feel affirmed, and efforts to be heard were another way to seek that affirmation. Also important in this case is the message this sends to educators. The boys were not looking to be treated differently from their peers, but they were looking to be heard. This idea supports the importance of teachers adopting a warm demander stance (Irvine, 2003) as well as work by Foster and Peele (1999) that indicates boys respected teachers who were firm

yet fair. Listening to boys, being firm and fair, and maintaining a high standard were important teacher behaviors that the boys mentioned in their attempts to talk through some of their frustrating experiences.

In the end, the message that was collectively sent by the ways that the boys talked about their daily school experiences was one of a search for affirmation. If they felt affirmed, their attitudes, patterns of participation, and emerging identification with academics was positive. If they felt less of a sense of affirmation, their attitudes, participation, and identification with academics was more tenuous. More important, their words indicated that they were looking to their teachers to build structures into the academic and social context of the classroom that supported this affirmation. These structures aligned with current principles that parallel effective strategies espoused in the culturally relevant pedagogy literature. Validating these strategies through focusing on the words of the boys is a significant contribution of this research and adds credence to a teacher's use of culturally relevant pedagogy to support identification with academics in young African American boys.

Future Research Efforts

As this research effort draws to a close, it is important to consider avenues for future areas of study that will continue to provide insights to improve the school experiences of African American boys. One such area that was beyond the scope of this research would be to design a study that follows a group of boys over an extended period of time. By this, I mean designing a study that follows the boys across an entire academic year or over more than one school year. Collectively, this group of boys had a mainly positive identification with academics at the point in time when data were collected. It remains to be seen how the boys' attitudes and patterns of participation will

change as they grow through their next few years of school and develop into young adolescents. Designing a research effort that follows the boys through an extended period of time would be beneficial in key ways. First, connections to theories that assert disidentification from school can more effectively be examined. For example, following Steven, Samuel, and Gregg over a longer period of time or across multiple years might provide a better indication as to whether or not they develop additional behaviors and attitudes associated with Majors and Billson's (1992) Cool Pose Theory. Furthermore, connections that exist between cool pose and identification with academics could be examined in detail by chronicling the boys' attitudes and patterns of participation over a more extended period of time. Second, following the boys across more than one academic year would provide important information on teaching and instruction. The boys in this study freely offered their thoughts on instructional strategies and being able to see how their attitudes as well as patterns of participation change with different teachers might provide valuable insights into structuring daily lessons and activities in a manner that improves identification with academics.

When boys such as Christopher and Lance are identified as being at risk for disidentifying from school, it is incumbent upon educators to not only take steps to rectify their emerging identification with school but it is also imperative to study that process. This would require extended research where the boys' attitudes and patterns of participation could be examined as efforts are made to move them in a more positive direction. Conversely, longitudinally studying boys such as Thomas, Steven, Samuel, and Gregg who are currently developing a positive identification with school might serve to reinforce current teaching strategies, suggest new strategies, and provide further

insights into the concepts of agency and resilience. Although the ability to generalize results to a larger group of boys might be limited by studying such a small number of participants, the information generated could suggest valuable insights into strategies for more effectively engaging the boys.

The design of this study did not utilize focus group interviews as a form of data collection. Future research that includes this strategy may be of benefit for adding the collective voice of young African American boys to the conversation on their identification with academics. A small group of boys talking together with a focus on their attitudes, what they like and dislike about school, their motivations to participate, and reasons for not participating might provide important insights into the effectiveness of current teaching practices. In addition, new strategies might be suggested from the ways that the boys talk together.

In addition to future efforts aimed at examining African American males and their identification with school, this research suggests additional areas for further study. One such area came to light as a result of the language used by the boys throughout our work together. Specifically, the boys used the term “messed with” or “messaging” to indicate events that were both positive and negative. For example, Samuel talked of “messaging” with another student as they were laughing and having fun during a reading lesson. On the other hand, Christopher talked of how he stopped wanting to participate in lessons and activities when he was being “messed with” by his peers. Developing a better understanding of the meanings behind such cultural expressions through careful research efforts may yield important insights into engaging African American children in the day-to-day curriculum. The key question here would be, how can culturally based

terms such as “messed with” be understood in a way that helps teachers use them to more effectively engage and educate African American children.

Another area of potential study includes examining ways that cooperative learning is conceptualized and enacted. Current strategies for activities that espouse cooperative learning must be scrutinized for their Eurocentric ideologies and the potential conflicting messages they send to African American children as a result. Additionally, efforts must be made to study teachers who effectively use communal strategies with African American children. This will provide insights into ways that future and current teachers might be able to successfully use similar strategies to validate students' home cultures as well as improve their engagement in lessons and activities. In the end, the key is to develop future research efforts that take into consideration the culture, voices, and experiences of the boys while expanding our knowledge on how to successfully engage them and positively impact their identification with school.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Interview

1. How old are you?
2. Who do you live with?
3. Are there grown ups that you spend time with outside of school? What types of things do you do when you are together?
4. Do you have brothers and sisters? Tell me about them?
5. When you are not in school or spending time with grown ups or your brothers and sisters, who do you spend time with? What types of things do you do together?
6. What is something that you are really good at? Tell me about it?
7. On a typical day, what are one or two things you do when you leave school?
8. Are there other things that you really like to do when you are not in school?
9. If I asked your friends to describe you, what would do you think they would say?
10. When you grow up what do you want to be?

Second Interview

11. How long have you been attending this school?
12. How do you think you do as a student? Tell me why you say that?
13. If I asked your teacher about you what do you think she would say?
14. What do you wish your teachers knew about you?
15. Can you think of something you have learned in school that you got really excited about? What was it and why was it exciting for you to learn about?
16. Can you think of something you learned about or worked on in school that you thought was not interesting? What was it and why was it not interesting to you?
17. Describe the way that you learn things the best?

18. What year (K, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or this year) has been your favorite in school? What was it that made it your favorite year?
19. What year was your least favorite in school? What was it that made it your least favorite?
20. Think of 2 kids who are really good in school – what do you think makes them good? How are you like them? How are you different from them?

Post Observation Interviews (to be used after each observation – 6-10 times)

21. What is something that happened today that you remember? Why did this stand out for you?
22. Is there anything else that stood out for you today? What was it and why did it stand out?
23. How did you feel when (blank) happened?
24. I noticed (blank), what were you thinking about when that happened?
25. I noticed (blank), how did you feel when that happened?
26. Can you tell me about (blank)?
27. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that happened today that you think is important or want to talk about?

APPENDIX B
NOTES FROM INTERVIEW #5 WITH SAMUEL

Vicki – “Ok so, I, and when I watch you I think that you seem to like to be the leader, is that right or wrong?” Samuel – “For my group I do.” Samuel – “For your group, so why do you like to be the leader?” Samuel – “Cuz like, shh, (2) they like look up to me.”

Vicki – “They like to look up to you, so you feel like you have to be the leader?” Samuel – “To make them...one day probably be like me.” Vicki – “Yeah, () and that’s a good thing you think?” Samuel – “Umhm.” Vicki – “Yeah, I think it is, you’re a pretty good student.” He changes the subject here, talking about the snack he has finished from 21st Century

Vicki – “So now, and the other thing that I’ve noticed is that you’re really good in writing, I know you’re really good in writing because of your FCAT score, but you seem to get more bored in there than in math – why do you think that is?” Samuel – “Cuz math’s my favorite subject, I just do good in writin’ – I don’t know – math is my favorite subject... the whole school but I always get, I get better grades on writin’ than I get on math, but math’s my favorite subject – crazy!” Vicki – “Yeah, it does seem a little crazy, () maybe cuz math is more of a challenge for ya, maybe writing is, comes natural to ya.” Samuel – In a loud tone – “All ya do is write, to what the topic is but math – sometimes – you know you get stuff like, like, variables and all that stuff that you don’t really know, and then they give it to ya and then they explain to ya, that’s the good part – it’s the, () thinking!!” Vicki – “So math is more challenging, it makes you think more.” Samuel – “Yeah, and in writin’ all you do is think about what you gonna write.” Vicki – “And then you write it.” Samuel – Shaking his head yes, “And then you write it.” ()

Vicki – “Ok, now the other thing that I was wondering is, um, do you think that the teachers expect a lot out of ya?” Samuel – “Yes.” Vicki – “And why do you think that is?” Samuel – “Because I made 5.5 last year [on the state writing test], I made 5, 5.5 this year, smart.” (2) Vicki – “How does it make you feel when they expect a lot out of ya?” Samuel – “Good.” Vicki – “It does?” Samuel – “It make me feel like I should stay this way.” () Vicki – “You should stay this way?” Samuel – “So, all the teachers that I go to should like me like they do.” Vicki – “Yeah, and then also that means like you know too, if you stay like this then I think you’re gonna be able to go” (1). Samuel – “Anywhere.” Vicki – “Like when you get in high school you be able to go.” He interrupts me here to say, “College credits.” Vicki – “Go to college, yeah. () You gonna be the president someday.” Samuel – “Yep.” He smiles and I say, “And I’m gonna say, ‘I knew you when.

APPENDIX C
EXCERPT OF TYPICAL JOURNAL ENTRIES

Round #1 of Observations and Post-Observation Interviews – My Process and Concerns

Observations occurred between Friday 4/17/09 and Thursday 4/23/09

- One of my biggest concerns during this first round of observations has been how to take notes. This has been a concern on two levels – first, what is important and second how do I take notes that will allow me to transition into the interview process. With regard to what's important – I really tried to focus on writing everything that I saw the boys doing and saying as best as I could when I was observing them. I wondered if this was too much though and I kept trying to remind myself that this is about their engagement in the day-to-day curriculum that is presented to them. As a result, I decided that it is important to write down as much as I can during instructional time but that non-instructional time like recess, lunch, and transitions did not matter as much.
- I struggled to determine the time frames of the observations. I had planned on morning observations that went from 7:45am to lunch which starts at 10:45am. However, the morning schedule is divided into AR/Social Studies time, Science, Art, Physical Education, and physical activity – from 7:45am to 8:30am the students are either in Social Studies or Science. Social Studies time is really just AR time where they read books and take tests on the computer to accumulate AR points. Science was also mostly reading AR science books and then taking tests. After this, from 8:30am until 9:15am the students were varying places – art, PE, physical activity, or electives. Since the bulk of this time was really non-instructional with the occasional exceptions of some instruction in art and PE, I decided that my morning observation periods would focus on the reading block, which occurs from 9:15am until 10:45am –this will give me

enough data to provide a picture of each boy's engagement. During this first round of observations I took an average of 2-1/2 to 3 pages of notes during this time frame – this ended up translating into anywhere from 6 to 11 pages of typed field notes. The afternoon observation time frame went from 11:15 or 11:30am (depending on when they got back from lunch/recess) until the end of the day at 1:45pm.

- I also think about issues of power as I am both observing and interviewing – I hope that my presence as an observer is not changing the behaviors of my boys, the other students, or the teachers. I think it probably does in some way – although this may change over time. I feel as if I am integrating into the classroom and they are all comfortable with my presence but there is no way for me to be certain – both teachers tell me they were nervous that my being there would influence them at first but that I am there so much that they do not even notice me much anymore. The students all talk to me, say good morning, give me hugs, and even ask me questions like can they go to the bathroom or get a new pencil. For my part I have tried to be a part of what is happening in a quiet, background way!!! In interviews I have tried to build relationships with the boys by talking to them about their lives as they are eating lunch before we discuss the day's observation and by giving them options as to which questions to answer or how to answer them.

- My work with Gregg seems to be a little more strained than my work with the other boys – I am having a more difficult time developing a connection with him. I do not know why but think I might need to seek out suggestions from Ms. King and Mrs. Thompson for ways to better do this. He seems a bit distracted and like he does not really want to talk to me – of course, I think it could be me but Mrs. Thompson tells me

he is struggling right now because his daddy, who is black, is dating a white woman and Gregg does not like it. Maybe this has something to do with it – I am uncertain but will have to keep working at this relationship.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vicki Vescio completed her undergraduate degree at Virginia Tech in health and physical education in 1986. She taught high school for four years in Merrimack, New Hampshire along with coaching field hockey, basketball, and softball. After this, she worked in the field of campus fitness and wellness at Syracuse University and then at Sonoma State University in northern California. While in California she completed a master's degree in curriculum, teaching, and learning. With a desire to get back into teaching, Vicki received her doctorate in 2010 with a focus on curriculum, teaching, and teacher education. Vicki's research interests include high poverty education, multicultural education, equity-oriented pedagogy, and teacher's professional development in urban settings. Vicki and her life partner, Jill, enjoy spending their time with family and friends, going to the beach, and riding their bikes.